

The Fourth Paralogism and the Refutation of Idealism

The Fourth Paralogism is quite different from the three that preceded it because, although it is treated as a part of rational psychology, its main point is less some claimed knowledge of the mind than a contrast between mind and body. As stated in the first edition Kant presents the Fourth Paralogism as being concerned with the ideality of outer relations on the ground that our relation to outer perceptions is not direct but can only be inferred from an apparent cause. On this basis it is declared that the existence of outer objects is doubtful and in the statement of the Fourth Paralogism Kant presents this doubt as leading to viewing the objects of outer perception as ideal and hence as producing a form of idealism based on the difference between such perceptions and something apparently certainly given to inner sense. When presented in this light it is fairly clear that the doctrine being presented in the Fourth Paralogism is Descartes' argument that the *cogito* is certainly known whilst outer objects are only inferred and Kant does refer to this at A367-8.

The consequence of the Cartesian position, as Kant makes clear immediately, is that we don't really perceive external things at all but just infer them on the basis of our perception of the *cogito*. Since such inference is always uncertain it follows that the objects involved in such inference are likewise things that remain doubtful. The dualism involved in the picture in

question is hence one founded on an apparent certainty of reference to the mind by contrast to only doubtful access to bodies. The idealist in this view concerns the consequent claim that outer objects are uncertain whilst the mind is certain. Before he turns to analysing the problem with the view presented in the Fourth Paralogism Kant first explains the difference between the idealism expressed in it and the idealism he is defending in the *Critique*.

The position defended in the *Critique* is described by Kant as transcendental idealism and it is defined at this point as indicating that “appearances are to be regarded as being, one and all, representations only, not things in themselves, and that time and space are therefore only sensible forms of our intuition, not determinations given as existing by themselves, nor conditions of objects viewed as things in themselves” (A369). The characterisation of transcendental idealism at this point interestingly connects the claim about appearances to that concerning the intuitive status of space and time. Kant subsequently contrasts this view with that of transcendental realism with this view being one that takes space and time as being given in themselves independently of our senses. In presenting transcendental realism as involving this belief in the absolute status of space and time Kant effectively identifies it with the view of Newton. The transcendental realist, on his picture, identifies the objects of experience with things-in-themselves taking the existence of them external to us in a

sense that uses the pure categories without bringing in intuitive conditions of them. However he goes on to claim that it is because of this transcendental realist starting-point that many are led to a position that he terms “empirical idealism”. Basically the move is from assuming that external objects, to meet the condition of being truly external to us, must have an absolute status to examination of the objects we in fact encounter in experience and finding such objects wanting that leads to the assumption of empirical idealism.

By contrast to the transcendental realist, the transcendental idealist is an empirical realist. The basis of the connection between transcendental idealism and empirical realism is now stated however to be that it is possible, consistently with the view of transcendental idealism, to admit the existence of matter without “going outside” mere self-consciousness which means, I take it, on the grounds of the transcendental psychology developed in the *Transcendental Analytic*. Matter is a form of representation in the sense that it relates to our intuitions through the outer intuition that is space. Consciousness of representations is dependent on certain conditions that have been expounded in the *Analytic* and which provides us with a sense that there are objects. Kant here refers also to the “immediate witness” of self-consciousness but this is surely another way of remarking that he is speaking of intuitions since the first reference to intuitions in the *Critique* was in terms of immediacy (A19/B33). If we take the intuitions to provide

us with an immediate relation to something, including the sense that there are things that “outer” then it follows that the relation we have to outer objects is no less immediate than the relation to thoughts. “For in both cases alike the objects are nothing but representations, the immediate perception (consciousness) of which is at the same time a sufficient proof of their reality.” (A371)

It is due to this immediacy of relation to matter that Kant now declares that transcendental idealism is also an empirical realism as matter is not now inferred but immediately given. The point of making this point is that transcendental realism cannot take the objects of outer sense as immediate precisely because it assumes that they have a reality that is independent of our senses and hence has to find a proof of them that does not relate to these senses. Given this assumption it is always possible that the object thought to correspond to our senses does not exist. Hence it is clearly the case that if we begin from the assumption of transcendental realism that we are sure to have the difficulty that is given the name of empirical idealism. “For if we regard outer appearances as representations produced in us by their objects, and if these objects be things existing in themselves outside us, it is indeed impossible to see how we can come to know the existence of the objects otherwise than by inference from the effect to the cause; and this being so, it must always remain doubtful whether the cause in question be in us or outside us.” (A372)

The question that is really at issue in the Fourth Paralogism thus concerns what is meant by describing things as being “outside us”. The notion that there is something that in general causes us to have outer intuitions at all would be a notion that went beyond appearances as such and would be what Kant terms a “transcendental object”. This type of object is not, on Kant’s view, what we are thinking of when we refer to matter and bodies. Matter and bodies can entirely be described as appearances whilst the transcendental object is “equally unknown in respect to inner and to outer intuition” (A372-3). When we are dealing with appearances we are dealing with things given by means of time and space and time and space are *a priori* intuitions. On this ground external objects of appearance are objects that are in space and space is a form of intuition that has to be given to us prior to our being able to represent anything as external to us. For us to have something material given to us presupposes space and the way in which something is given to us in space is in terms of sensation, as Kant argued in the Anticipations of Perception. Space is the ground of the possibility of anything being given at all and sensation is what is required for such a possibility to be given reality, a reality that is represented for us in outer sense, that is, in space. Outer perception is the means by which we determine reality in general so there can be no question of a transcendently real object being at issue. “The real of outer appearances is therefore real in perception only, and can be real in no other way.” (A376)

Having got this far Kant now refines his treatment of the types of idealism he has been opposing distinguishing for the first time between *dogmatic* idealism and *sceptical* idealism (this latter is often portrayed, on the basis of the second edition, as problematic idealism). The *dogmatic* idealist denies that matter exists and could be identified (again on the basis of the second edition) with Berkeley whilst the *sceptical* idealist is clearly Descartes. In the first edition Kant argues that the view of the *dogmatic* idealist will be dealt with in the next section of the *Critique* the section concerned with the Antinomies. The sceptical idealist is the one who helps us to clarify our understanding however and in response to the problems raised by this position we have to admit the ideality of all appearances which leads us to the view that there is an empirical dualism in the sense that inner sense and outer sense are quite different but not a transcendental dualism in the sense that there is no basis for assuming that things-in-themselves are of more than one sort.

The argument of the Fourth Paralogism is completed at this point but in his summary overview of the results of the paralogisms as a whole Kant makes some statements concerning the implications of it that have been controversial. I would just like to mention these prior to turning to the way in which he re-treats the problems in the second edition. In this overview Kant argues that the result of his treatment of the paralogisms is that there is no *a priori* science of the mind that can parallel that of the body due to the

fact that when dealing with the mind we have only inner sense to deal with so that there is nothing fixed and abiding in it. However the reason why philosophers have attempted to develop a notion of rational psychology is to avoid falling into a materialist account of the mind. In response to this point Kant states that this goal can be achieved by holding on to the pure concept of the thinking self as he has, he says, completely shown the following: “if I remove the thinking subject the whole corporeal world must at once vanish: it is nothing save an appearance in the sensibility of our subject and a mode of its representations” (A383). This statement must really mean that there could be no object given without the combination of intuitions and concepts in our constitution that enables them to be given but it has been thought that Kant here reveals himself not to have overcome the idealist positions he has been apparently criticizing. A parallel passage to this is given shortly afterwards when Kant writes: “Matter, therefore, does not mean a kind of substance quite distinct and heterogeneous from the object of inner sense (the soul), but only the distinctive nature of those appearances of objects—in themselves unknown to us—the representations of which we call outer as compared with those we count as belonging to inner sense, although like all other thoughts these outer representations belong only to the thinking subject.” (A385) Here Kant makes clear again the point that it is the combination of outer and inner intuitions that give us a sense of objects of experience and that this is what is meant by the Copernican revolution

referred to in the “preface” to the second edition (Bxvi-Bxvii). The result of the treatment of the paralogisms is also stated to involve the point that we can no more show that there is an immortal soul than that there is not.

In the second edition Kant substantially re-treats the topic of the Fourth Paralogism under a different heading and placing it in a different part of the *Critique*. The new heading is the “Refutation of Idealism” which is now added to the Postulates of Empirical Thought. Here Kant distinguishes again between two types of idealism that he is opposed to and gives both the generic name of *material* idealism (as opposed to his own formal idealism). The idealism of Descartes, which he now terms problematic idealism, holds that the statement that “I am” is the only empirical assertion that is certain whilst the *dogmatic* idealism of Berkeley holds that space and what is contained in it are impossible entities such that he takes them to be impossible (an odd characterization of Berkeley). The main point of his account of dogmatic idealism is that it depends on taking space to be absolute, just as was suggested in the A-Paralogisms to be the root basis of transcendental realism. Unlike in the A-edition where Kant indicates that this position will be dealt with fully in the Antinomies he claims in the B-edition that it has already been dealt with in the Transcendental Aesthetic.

Having made these points Kant presents a short statement of the refutation of idealism which takes as its thesis that empirically determined consciousness of my own existence is sufficient to prove the existence of

objects in space outside me. The proof can be broken down in the following way:

The Argument of the Refutation of Idealism

1. To be conscious of my existence is to relate to a set of experiences given as determined in relation to time.
2. Determination in time has an indispensable condition: that there is something in perception that endures.
3. The notion that there is something that constantly endures cannot be derived from self-consciousness as it is only through this notion of permanent endurance that self-consciousness has any hold on anything.
4. Hence this notion of endurance of something permanent must point to something *beyond* the self, something that the self does not merely *present* to itself (as in imagination) but rather perceives.
5. This notion of perception hence requires that there are things that exist beyond me.
6. Consciousness of my existence is hence bound up with consciousness of something beyond me as this latter is the condition of time determination.
7. So if I have immediate self-consciousness then this points also to immediate awareness of what supplies me with it, that is, relation to

an object that is separate and distinct from me and must exist beyond me.

Finally, Kant also returns to the topic of the Refutation in the preface to the second edition where he famously declares it is a scandal of philosophy to assume that the existence of outer objects needs to be taken on faith. He here also alters the proof of the refutation slightly in order to point out that what is permanent cannot be an intuition in myself as all grounds of determination of my existence which are to be met with in me are representations which require something that is distinct from them in relation to which their change may be determined. (Bxxxix-Bxli_n).