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TWO RECENT ANALYSES OF  
KANT'S REFUTATION OF IDEALISM

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In five short sentences, within a small section of the *Critique of Pure Reason*,<sup>1</sup> Immanuel Kant delivers an argument directed against what he calls “problematic idealism,” the skepticism of Descartes regarding the world outside the mind. The argument itself is given in compact form, though the true extent of the argument is a matter of debate. The argument itself appears to present a fairly straightforward logic:

(1) I am conscious of my existence as determined in time. (2) All time-determination presupposes something **persistent** in perception. (3) This persisting thing, however, cannot be something in me, since my own existence in time can first be determined only through this persisting thing. (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. (5) Consequently, the determination of my existence in time is possible only by means of the existence of actual things that I perceive outside myself.<sup>2</sup> (B275)

The success as well as the importance of this argument depends largely upon how it is understood. Many interpretations of the Refutation, including the most widely accepted, have not been charitable to Kant.

Two recent analyses of the Refutation and of the *Critique*, however, have sought to rescue the argument and to shape our understanding of it so that it may be integrated harmoniously with the whole of Kant’s argument for transcendental idealism.<sup>3</sup> What follows is an attempt to examine and compare these two analyses of the Refutation. Additionally, on the basis of these two analyses, a way to deepen our access to Kant’s arguments will be proposed.

### **Dina Emundts’ Analysis of the Refutation**

Dina Emundts, professor of philosophy at the University of Konstanz in Germany, has recently published an article that encapsulates the contemporary discussion about the Refutation

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<sup>1</sup> Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. and ed. Paul Guyer and Allen W. Wood (New York: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1998), 326-329 / B274-279.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 327. Premise numbers added for later reference.

<sup>3</sup> The two analyses are as follows: Dina Emundts, “The Refutation of Idealism and the Distinction between Phenomena and Noumena,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Kant’s Critique of Pure Reason*, ed. Paul Guyer (New

and that ably reaches beyond the strictures of the views that currently hold dominance. Her overall goal is to rescue Kant from the majority who view Kant's argument as a failure.

To paraphrase Emundts,<sup>4</sup> Kant's goal is to refute "problematic idealism," the claim that the existence of objects outside the mind cannot be demonstrated with any certainty. Kant summarizes this view briefly when he writes, "Idealism . . . is the theory that declares the existence of objects in space outside us to be . . . merely doubtful and indemonstrable."<sup>5</sup> (B274) Kant intends to refute this form of material idealism in the following way. He will first presume the reality of inner experience, a proposition shared with the problematic idealist, and then show that this presupposition already implies the existence of objects outside the mind. Kant writes, "even our inner experience, undoubted by Descartes, is possible only under the presupposition of outer experience."<sup>6</sup> (B275)

Emundts then proceeds to tackle the five premises of the Refutation together with the discussions that surround them.<sup>7</sup> Summing these issues preliminarily, regarding premises (2) and (3), the issue has been whether and how the Refutation connects to the Analogies of Experience.<sup>8</sup> As will be shown, her investigation of the five premises leads Emundts to find a basis for (2) and (3) in the Analogies, and her subsequent discussion of "outside me" and "reality," in (4) and (5) will ultimately lead her to connect the Refutation to the *Phenomena and Noumena* chapter.<sup>9</sup> In this way, Emundts will effectively distribute the Refutation more widely into other parts of the Critique unlike many in the contemporary discussion who restrict their analysis of the

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York: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2010), 168-189; and Michael Rohlf, "Analytic of Principles Through Phenomena/Noumena," a class lecture, Catholic University of America, April 11, 2013, Washington, D.C.

<sup>4</sup> Emundts, 168.

<sup>5</sup> Kant, 326.

<sup>6</sup> Kant, 327.

<sup>7</sup> Emundts, 168-169.

<sup>8</sup> Kant, 295-321, A176/B218-A218/B265.

<sup>9</sup> Kant, 338-365., A235/B294-A260/B315. Full chapter title: "On The Ground of The Distinction of All Objects In General Into Phenomena and Noumena."

Refutation. This enlarged scope of analysis is the means by which Emundts seeks to defend Kant's argument.

### Connecting the Refutation to the Analogies

The Analogies come just before the Refutation in the B-edition. By this juxtaposition and sequence, Emundts thinks that Kant intended to show that the Analogies had already established that time determinations require a logically prior thing that can be determined as being in space and time, that is, a persistent thing. Thus, premise (2) needs no further justification in its immediate context since the justification is already given in the previous section.<sup>10</sup> The persisting thing, however, cannot be something "in me" because Descartes' argument could not be refuted if the persisting thing were within the thinking subject. For, in that case, time determinations could be had internally with no need to reference objects "outside me." Premise (3) therefore works by eliminating alternatives that could undermine his argument. However, premise (3) is given without any obvious justification in B275. It seems that Kant is simply presupposing that the empirical self is "nothing other than the product of synthesized states."<sup>11</sup> Apparently, Kant was aware of this weakness and this was the motivation for him to emend premise (3) when he later wrote the preface to the B-edition.<sup>12</sup> Emundts suggests that Kant intended to justify (3) merely by referring to the requirement for externality in all time determinations.<sup>13</sup> Emundts points out that the emended premise (3') is explicitly about the need for externality. In order to judge the order of inner states and to determine the order in which they "really" occurred, inner states must be related to the features of an independent, external world. Thus, "only outer objects

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<sup>10</sup> Emundts, 170.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 171.

<sup>12</sup> Henry E. Allison, *Kant's Transcendental Idealism* (New Haven, CT: Yale Univ. Press, 2004), 292-296. Allison has focused on Kant's theory of the self to aid Kant in supporting premise (3). Emundts thinks that this is done more successfully by looking to the Analogies, as will be shown.

<sup>13</sup> Emundts, 171.

give a criterion for the objective time order of inner states.”<sup>14</sup>

However, this need for external objects seems to require that objects “outside me” be ontologically independent. Emundts believes, contra Guyer, that this is not necessarily so. If it were so, then it would threaten Kant’s wider project, transcendental idealism. Emundts thinks that there is another way to understand Kant on this point that does not render his argument moot and that does not contradict transcendental idealism. This alternative understanding allows us to view the Refutation as successful and also to see the *Critique* as complete.<sup>15</sup>

There is a different reason to think that something persistent is required for inner representations. This different reason also comes from the Analogies. That is, the Analogies already contain the thesis of premise (3).<sup>16</sup> According to the Analogies, it is the unity of experience that requires the determination of experience in time. This means that a substance that is absolutely persistent must be presupposed, a permanent and universal background on which to base all time determinations.<sup>17</sup> It must be absolute for two reasons, argues Emundts: first, because time determination implies both the possibility of change and persistence; and second, because all experience must be determinable in only *one* time.<sup>18</sup> This means that all experiences must be linked together, causally, lawfully. Objectivity requires that everything that is

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid. Emundts points out that this is the kind of reconstruction that Guyer pursues; she points to, Paul Guyer, *Kant and the Claims of Knowledge* (New York: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1987), 305-316. A more recent version of this argument can be seen in, Paul Guyer, *Kant* (New York: Routledge, 2006), 116-122. Emundts also points to Georges Dicker, “Kant’s Refutation of Idealism,” *Nous* 42:1 (2008): 80-108, esp. 93. Dicker writes, “Guyer’s claim is that the thought that successive experiences correlate with successive states of enduring objects already includes (“entails”) the thought that they are caused by those objects. Thus, although Kant does not explicitly mention causation in his statements of the Refutation, Guyer claims that it covertly contains an appeal to causation.” (p. 94) Dicker attempts to give further reasons to think that Kant is implicitly including causation in this way. In contrast to Guyer and Dicker, Emundts will give a completely different reason why Kant requires the persisting thing for the determination of inner representations of time.

<sup>15</sup> Emundts, 172.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid. Emundts admits that most scholars doubt that this is so. She names Paul Guyer and Christian Klotz and points to another article for more information, Dina Emundts, “Kant über die innere Erfahrung” in *Was ist und was sein soll: Natur und Freiheit bei Immanuel Kant*, ed. U. Kern (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2007), 189-205.

<sup>17</sup> Emundts, 172.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 172-173.

represented be linked into the same system of causes and effects. Therefore, it is not enough to have persistent substances (plural); Kant's larger theory tells us that we need a unified background for *all* change; we require a world, a universe (a united manifold). If it were otherwise, then there might be multiple experiences that could not be related together. This, in turn, rules out the empirical self from consideration as the persistent thing. To this conclusion, Emundts argues succinctly:

If we need something absolutely persistent for the unity of experience, and if the determination of inner states is possible only within the unity of experience, then the first Analogy states that we need something absolutely persistent for time-determination. [Therefore] Since neither the inner representation nor the empirical self can be thought of as absolutely persistent, they are excluded by the Analogies as possible candidates for the persistent thing.<sup>19</sup>

Emundts defends this conclusion against those who would say that it is attributing too much to Kant, that Kant never made this argument. She points out that Kant does not think that we can perceive time directly, implying that time must be represented some other way. And, it follows from other parts of the *Critique* that only an *absolute* persisting thing can represent the ultimate time-line for all experiences.<sup>20</sup> This links absolute persistence to objectivity, and through this link, it establishes the third premise within the Refutation as relevant for addressing Descartes' doubt.

One might still think that the empirical self, or even the transcendental self, can be the persistent thing. To address this possibility, Emundts does not delve into Kant's theory of the self.<sup>21</sup> Instead, she offers the following evidences: first, Kant moved the Refutation away from the Paralogisms indicating that he did not require any reference to his theory of the self to make his point; second, the first analogy had indicated that something that lasts through time is needed, yet one condition of "lasting" is that it be a thing in space and time. A thing must be temporal in

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 173-174.

order to persist.<sup>22</sup> Kant states, in the first analogy that, “In all change of appearances substance persists, and its quantum is neither increased nor diminished in nature.”<sup>23</sup> According to Emundts, this means that objective time-determination presupposes something spatio-temporal. This means that a condition of time-determination is an object of outer sense. Emundts therefore concludes that premise (2) and (3)/(3′) of the Refutation are already contained in the Analogies. Thus, whether we are talking about perceptions or things in themselves, a thing of any sort can only be determined in time on the conditions given by the Analogies.<sup>24</sup> If this is so, then there is no need to turn to the theory of the self to justify the third premise. Therefore, the only possible candidate for the persistent thing is something “outer.”

#### How To Understand “Outside Me”

The remaining difficulty concerns how Kant intends us to understand the ambiguous phrase “outside me/myself” in premises (4) and (5). If we were to understand “outside” to mean outside in space, then this would mean that it is not ontologically distinct and thus it would not satisfy the problematic idealist.<sup>25</sup> Yet, although the problematic idealist may staunchly oppose any definition of “real” that excludes the ontologically distinct, Kant is going to turn things against his opponent at this point and argue that something is real enough if it is not imaginary. In B275, Kant states his aim to argue “that we have experience and not merely imagination of outer things.” This, instead of the demands of the problematic idealist, is “the proof that is demanded.”<sup>26</sup> In this way, Kant is redirecting the problematic idealist to a new goal, one that is sufficiently “real” but that is also accessible and capable of grounding the sciences.

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 174.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 175. Emundts here distinguishes her analysis from that of Allison. See Allison, 275-276.

<sup>22</sup> Emundts, 175.

<sup>23</sup> Kant, 299, (A182/B224).

<sup>24</sup> Emundts, 176.

To pursue this line of argument further, Emundts next seeks to understand the ways in which Kant understands the “real.” The candidates for this honor are the transcendent thing in itself, and the object that is spatio-temporal, empirical, and external. The persistent thing is either real in the transcendent sense that Descartes presumed, or it is objective in the new Kantian sense. Emundts summarizes Kant’s new version of objectivity by saying that an object is “something about which we can judge objectively and that is in this sense not dependent on our subjective perspective.”<sup>27</sup> This is the point at which Descartes is redirected so that objectivity concerns independence of the subject, being not merely subjective, not imaginary. Emundts concludes that Kant has dropped the presupposition of the problematic idealist, that something can only be objective if it is ontologically distinct.

Many contemporary scholars would object with this interpretation. As previously noted, Guyer, among others, has concluded that Kant is joining Descartes in presuming a need for things in themselves to account for appearances.<sup>28</sup> Yet, if the Refutation relies on things in themselves to make its point, then this would mean that these ontologically distinct things could be known—they could be intuited as spatio-temporal—and of course, this is at odds with transcendental idealism. To directly address this issue, Emundts attempts to define objectivity in such a way that it harmonizes both with the Refutation and transcendental idealism.

### The Case for a Sufficient Objectivity

What is needed at this point, from within the text of the *Critique*, is a persisting “thing”

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 177.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 177-178.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 178.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid. See also Guyer, *Claims of Knowledge*, 290-292. Emundts points, additionally, to Béatrice Longuenesse, “Kant’s I Think versus Descartes’ I am a Thing That Thinks,” in *Kant and the Early Moderns*, ed. D. Garber and B. Longuenesse (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 2008), 9-31. In contrast, Emundts names Jonathan Vogel as a prominent philosopher who does not think that Guyer’s argument is successful. See, Jonathan Vogel,

that can be objective in some sense, spatial, and can determine inner states temporally, while not being ontologically distinct, imaginary, or dependent on inner states.<sup>29</sup> What Emundts is looking for is some limited sense of objectivity that can be the “ground for the objectivity of representations.”<sup>30</sup> Yet, this ground for objectivity has already been located in the Analogies, which defines objectivity in a way that is in harmony with transcendental idealism.<sup>31</sup>

This non-fallacious equivocation concerning “objectivity” is the key distinction, not only in the Refutation, but in the *Critique* itself. This is what allows the Refutation to move forward toward its conclusion while also calling on the Analogies. It therefore connects the Analogies not only to the second and third premises of the Refutation, but it also connects them to the conclusion. Any reference to an absolute persistent thing that is spatial must be determined spatio-temporally by “thoroughgoing causal laws,” but this just is Kant’s criterion for objectivity. In this way, the absolute persistent is independent of subjective inner states and so cannot be merely imagined.<sup>32</sup>

Moreover, in the second postulate of empirical thinking, Kant limits actuality to that which is connected to the senses. The actual is defined as “that which is [lawfully] connected with the material conditions of experience (of sensation) . . .”<sup>33</sup> (A218/B266) Emundts claims that Kant leaves us no other meaningful sense of existence, of objectivity, than that which is connected to sensation. Thus, a mere eight pages before the Refutation, outer objects are defined to be objects of possible experience.<sup>34</sup> This means that the Analogies, if correct, is sufficient to refute the problematic idealist. The Refutation contains nothing new, argues Emundts; the work

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“The Problem of Self-Knowledge in Kant’s ‘Refutation of Idealism’: Two Recent Views” *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 53:4 (1993): 885.

<sup>29</sup> Emundts, 181.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 181-183.

<sup>33</sup> Kant, 321.

was all done in the Analogies. But, it is now becoming quite clear that the argument relies on this new highly theoretical understanding of objectivity, and this has not yet been fully explained. Emundts next investigates how Kant accomplishes this explanation in the *Phenomena and Noumena* chapter.

#### Emundts' Use of the *Phenomena and Noumena* Chapter

Emundts does not think the placement of the Refutation in the B-edition is insignificant. Not only is it meaningful that it comes after the Analogies, but it is also telling that it comes just before the *Phenomena and Noumena* chapter. This means that the Refutation is in the middle of three sections that hold together to form a presentation. And, Emundts also finds it suggestive that this triad comes just before the Transcendental Dialectic, a major transition in the *Critique*.<sup>35</sup> If the core concept being taught in the Analytic is that the understanding has limits and that these limits may never properly be transgressed, then it is fitting that the Dialectic should give us the results of making this mistake. This overarching strategy leaves Kant the task of setting the limits precisely before he leaves the Analytic behind. This is exactly what the *Phenomena and Noumena* chapter seeks to accomplish.

If the Analytic has been limited to a discussion of the conditions of knowledge, as Emundts thinks,<sup>36</sup> then the Refutation fits nicely into Kant's overarching strategy. Even though Descartes is concerned about accessing the ontologically distinct world, Kant has redirected the problematic idealist by providing knowledge of objects in a specific, non-ontological sense. Now, something that is "real" is merely what is given in sensation, determined according to the categories as an object of experience.<sup>37</sup> There is a limit to this reality, therefore, that occurs at the

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<sup>34</sup> Emundts, 183-184.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 187.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*

point where the categories may no longer be meaningfully employed. Clearly, no category can be employed apart from the intuitions of space and time for these ground the use of the categories. Therefore, from both the Aesthetic and the Analytic comes a strong implication of the concept of noumenon, the transcendental thing in itself. This, however, opens up the danger that what Kant has supplied implicitly might be pursued explicitly. Kant thus argues in the *Phenomena and Noumena* chapter that there are two different ways to think about noumena. Emundts reduces the argument to the following two simple ideas: “it is one thing to claim with regard to the objects of experience that they entail something given that we did not produce [following from the receptivity of sensibility]. But it is another thing to claim that there is indeed an object that is in principle cognizable as it is and that causes the given sensation.”<sup>38</sup> In this way, Kant distinguishes between a negative and a positive sense of noumenon. But, this only means, for Kant, that we can know something about our mode of cognition, that it depends on our particular form of intuition.<sup>39</sup> It is not possible for us to know anything about the noumenon positively.<sup>40</sup> Kant, here, seems to have been open to the possibility of alternative forms of intuition, and this, argues Emundts, strongly suggests that he never changed his mind with regard to the nature of things in themselves as others have suggested.<sup>41</sup>

Emundts, however, avoids a deeper analysis of this section, saying only that it is supportive of her interpretation of the Refutation. She falls short of stating directly that the *Phenomena and Noumena* chapter is part of the Refutation or that it completes the Refutation, but she does say that the argument of the Refutation, when combined properly to the Analogies, is very difficult to improve upon. In fact, she claims that the only way Kant could have improved

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<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 188. See also footnote 29 same page; Emundts thinks that there is something we can “call” a thing in itself based solely on the receptivity of our sensibility.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 189.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid. See also Kant, 360-362 (B307 and B309).

upon it would be to clarify his conception of objectivity; she hints that this is precisely what the *Phenomena and Noumena* chapter does.

### **Michael Rohlf's View**

Michael Rohlf has given an analysis of the Refutation that is quite similar to Emundts'.<sup>42</sup> Yet, Rohlf's account is distinguished from Emundts' by the way in which it focuses both upon the argument against Descartes and the way in which the *Phenomena and Noumena* chapter actually serves to complete the argument (rather than merely augment it). Regarding the first distinction, Rohlf clarifies Kant's goal and method in refuting the Cartesian argument, giving us an analysis that begins with the Analogies and ends with the *Phenomena and Noumena* chapter. Not only is Kant attempting to rule out an alternative to transcendental idealism in a wider argument beyond B274-279, but he does so by showing that the Cartesian argument is caught in a contradiction that is only exposed by the wider context.

Regarding the second distinction, Rohlf identifies three reasons from the *Phenomena and Noumena* chapter that reveal exactly why we are forced to distinguish appearances from things in themselves. He then uses these to show exactly how Descartes is being refuted. In this way the argument of the refutation actually extends into the next chapter and it is up to the astute reader to put the pieces together. According to Rohlf, this is typical of what Kant expects from his readers since the entire book is constructed in such a way that the larger argument for transcendental idealism is scattered throughout the work.

Unlike Emundts, who seems to lose sight of Kant's immediate target from time to time, Rohlf's defense of Kant's refutation of idealism focuses on its relation to Descartes throughout.

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<sup>41</sup> Emundts, 189.

<sup>42</sup> As cited earlier in footnote 3, the information in this section is taken from a lecture given by Michael Rohlf at the Catholic University of America in April, 2013.

Beginning with the Analogies and the Postulate of Actuality together, Rohlf notes the way that Kant links actuality to sensation in accordance with the Analogies. That is, Kant defines actuality in terms of a connection with sensations, which sensations are received according to the material conditions of experience.<sup>43</sup> (A225/B272) Descartes contradicts himself, therefore, when he attempts to accept appearances without also accepting actuality. He both accepts and denies the postulate of actuality. Rohlf is aware that this argument, in this isolated form, remains somewhat weak philosophically. So, he proceeds to strengthen the argument by connecting it to its wider context.

#### Strengthening the Case For Contradiction in Descartes

Kant and Descartes both agree that we must think about certain appearances as if they were spatio-temporal objects outside of us in some sense. Descartes, however, adds to this by presuming that we must also think of these objects as if they were things in themselves, that is, as ontologically distinct objects. In other words, for Descartes, these objects are not only outside us but they are also completely mind independent. If these features can be doubted, then their reality must also be doubted. Objectivity requires both mind independence as well as externality for Descartes. According to Kant, this is a mistake; Descartes is falling prey to an illusion grounded in reason itself.<sup>44</sup> Kant knows that he cannot avoid the illusion, but he can avoid the trap. Moreover, Kant is also attempting to avoid Cartesian skepticism about the outside world. To do all these things, Kant takes up a position between the outright denial and the complete acceptance of things in themselves. To see exactly how he does this, Rohlf takes us into the *Phenomena and Noumena* chapter where he calls out three reasons we must distinguish appearances from things in themselves:

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<sup>43</sup> Kant, 325.

- 1) The contrast between appearances and things in themselves allows us to trace the boundaries of possible experience. We can think but not cognize beyond this boundary. We can thus see where we can no longer cognize.<sup>45</sup> (B297, 312)
- 2) We need to make this distinction in order to philosophize correctly. And, in actuality, it is also unavoidable to stop philosophizing at this boundary (though we can be ignorant of it and proceed blindly).<sup>46</sup> (B305)
- 3) The concept of appearance entails the concept of a thing in itself.<sup>47</sup>

These three reasons show that the phenomena/noumena distinction is conceptual. This does not imply that space and time do not apply to things in themselves as they are, nor does it imply anything about existence, it does not imply anything positively or negatively at all. Kant is saying that the negative sense of noumenon is how we have to think about things in themselves, as underlying appearances. We need this conceptual contrast between things as they appear and things in themselves, but the only way to have it is to think of things in themselves as non-spatio-temporal. Given transcendental idealism, appearances can be known in a positive sense only if we objectify them. Due to their universality and necessity, we can use these objects as a basis for knowledge. Yet, when we think about core receptivity we must negatively postulate noumena; they must be hypothesized but can never be cognized because they cannot be brought under the categories.

### Summarizing the Argument Against Descartes

Descartes is presupposing the same distinction that Kant invokes between appearances and things in themselves. But, in contrast to Descartes, Kant provides a way to conceptualize this

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<sup>44</sup> Rohlf, "The Ideas of Pure Reason," in *The Cambridge Companion to Kant's Critique of Pure Reason*, ed. Paul Guyer (New York: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2010), 209.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 355, 363.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 359. It seems that we can use the categories apart from sensibility since they have an a priori origin, but this is wrong. This is a psychological mistake. See also the Amphibole section, p. 381-382 (A289/B345-6).

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 348: "'appearance' must already indicate a relation to . . . an object independent of sensibility." See also p. 360: "If we call certain objects, as appearances, beings of sense (phaenomena), because we distinguish the way in which we intuit them from their constitution in itself, then it already follows from our concept that to these we as it were oppose, as objects thought merely through the understanding, either other objects conceived in

difference that makes it a contradiction to both accept appearances and to deny cognizable objectivity.<sup>48</sup> Regarding this new way of conceptualizing this difference, transcendental idealism, Kant gives the three reasons that explain why we are limited to thinking about objects spatio-temporally. This limitation means that appearances must be determined in time. The Analogies reveal how this can be done, but they also reveal that determining appearances in time requires that we attribute mind-independent objectivity to some appearances even though the three reasons have ruled out any positive way of doing this conceptually. The third of the three reasons also show that the very concept of appearance contains the notion of a thing-in-itself implicitly. Transcendental idealism, however, shows that objectivity does not necessarily entail complete mind independence. We therefore find ourselves necessarily presuming what we cannot know, that objects of some sort are the ultimate cause of our perceptions. That is, according to Kant, spatio-temporal, mind-dependent objectivity is the only positive sense of objectivity that we can have access to. While it is sufficient to ground science, it is not what we presume it to be. So, Descartes cannot deny access to objective reality based solely on our inability to possess objective knowledge. The “real” world is accessible in some sense even if that sense is less than we presume it to be. While Kant has not technically ruled out Descartes’ evil genius in every possible way, he has found a way to help us to move past Cartesian skepticism and to ground objective knowledge.

Rohlf’s analysis therefore has moved beyond Emundts’ own analysis by allowing us to see specifically how the *Phenomena and Noumena* chapter connects to and completes the argument of the Refutation. Yet, both analyses have argued convincingly that Kant is not dealing with things in themselves in the Refutation, contra Guyer and many others. Instead, he is dealing with

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accordance with the latter constitution, even though we do not intuit it in them, or else other possible things, which are not objects of our senses at all, and call these beings of understanding (noumena).”

a subtle distinction between things in themselves and appearances, between a positive objectivity that would be proper to things in themselves (if we could intuit them) and the more useful objective character of appearances.

### **Comparison: Emundts and Rohlf**

It is apparent that these two analyses of Kant's Refutation overlap considerably. Each has labored to rescue Kant from contemporary trends and to vindicate the Refutation as both valid and as harmonious with the rest of Kant's project. Not only this, but they both view the Refutation to be well-integrated with the rest of the *Critique*. I have also shown that both have connected the Refutation to the Postulates of Modality and to the Analogies. Most importantly, as will be shown a little later, both Emundts and Rohlf have also seen a strong connection between the Refutation and the following *Phenomena and Noumena* chapter.

Despite this very close similarity, Rohlf's analysis moves beyond Emundts in two important ways. First, it recognizes the wider scope of the Refutation, itself, as typical of Kant's overall argument for transcendental idealism in the *Critique*. That is, not only is it improper to isolate the Refutation to a small section, but it is also improper to do this with any other aspect of the *Critique*. Rohlf has argued that Kant has spread his argument for transcendental idealism across the entire work, even though, at points, he may appear to be working in isolation on one problem or another. Thus, Kant's critics err when they view each aspect of the *Critique* in isolation; various uncharitable understandings of the Refutation are, in part, instances of this kind of error.

Second, Rohlf goes into greater depth than Emundts in his explanation of how Kant is arguing in the *Phenomena and Noumena* chapter itself and also in the connection between the

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<sup>48</sup> Ibid., 327, footnote (B276).

two sections. With regard to the *Phenomena and Noumena* chapter, both scholars overlap to a significant degree. Both see an implicit reference to noumena in the Aesthetic and Analytic. However, Emundts' presentation of Kant's argument is quite brief. She reduces it to the distinction between two ways of thinking about Noumena: "with regard to the objects of experience . . . [first] they entail something given that we did not produce . . . [second] there is indeed an object that is in principle cognizable as it is and that causes the given sensation."<sup>49</sup> In the second edition, this same distinction is simply recast as the negative and positive sense of noumenon.<sup>50</sup> Rohlf does not contradict this simple distinction, of course, but he does add considerably to it, reproducing from the text both an argument and a connection back into the Refutation, showing exactly how it helps to address the problematic idealism of Descartes.

Rohlf focuses on the epistemological subtleties that Kant is preparing and invoking throughout the various sections of the *Critique*. There are two different ways to refer to noumena and there is also, completely distinct from both senses of noumena, a way to refer to the objects of sense. Yet all three lay claim to the words "object," "thing," and "actual." It is for this reason that Berkeley, Descartes, and Kant are at odds. Only with this three-fold distinction can we make sense of what Kant is attempting to argue in the Refutation.

### **Identifying and Solving a Problem**

If we make the bold presumption that Kant's actual intentions have at last been unearthed by these two contemporary analyses, then it becomes painfully apparent that Kant's pedagogical method is woefully inadequate. How long has it taken us to get his point? Far too long. I propose that this problem can be rectified if the sources of confusion can be identified and repaired. Moreover, in my opinion, terminology is probably chief among the problems of this sort. With

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<sup>49</sup> Emundts, 188.

regard to the Refutation and all of its related texts, it seems that “objectivity” is the locus at which terminological clarity is most needed. In the Critique, it seems that Kant is in the midst of presenting the distinction between two kinds of objectivity even as he rules out the legitimacy of the one that is most commonly presumed.

### Types of objectivity

Unfortunately for us, Kant is difficult to understand as he presents his case. If we can find a way to clarify his presentation, however, then it will be possible, at minimum, to strengthen the case for the present interpretation of the Refutation.<sup>51</sup> If we use just one term for all forms of objectivity and explicitly define its multiple uses as subsets under this general category, then we can better clarify what is going on between Kant and Descartes. We can more readily identify where the disagreement lies. Toward this end, I suggest the following terms and usages:

Object (1): Kant’s noumena

- **positive** sense (+): Kant’s thing-in-itself conceived as being mind-independent and spatio-temporal. Kant rules out this usage.
- **negative** sense (-): Kant’s thing-in-itself, that which must be presumed, as psychologically necessary, but which cannot be cognized.

Object (2): Kant’s phenomena, which is mind-dependent but which is capable of grounding science.

This produces three ways to think about objects:<sup>52</sup> object (1+), object (1-), and object (2). If we restrict our terms to “phenomena” and “noumena” it is easy to overlook the positive and negative senses of noumena and to forget that Kant has opened up three distinct categories for objectivity.

### Types of Objectivity in the Aesthetic, the Analogies, and the Phenomena and Noumena Chapter

This three-part distinction develops throughout the *Critique*. As Emundts’ and Rohlf

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<sup>50</sup> Ibid., 188-189.

<sup>51</sup> I am referring here to the case being made by Emundts and Rohlf considered collectively.

<sup>52</sup> Rather than the typical two-way distinction, attributed to Kant, between phenomena and noumena.

suggest, the concept of noumena is found implicitly within the Aesthetic and the Analogies. Then, at a climax point in Kant's argument (the *Phenomena and Noumena* chapter) the noumena is discussed explicitly. In the earlier sections, where the noumena is dealt with implicitly, there is a two-way distinction. In the new terminology, this is a distinction between object (1) and object (2). In the later section, where the noumena is dealt with explicitly, a new distinction within object (1) is revealed by Kant, producing the full, three-way distinction: object (1+), object (1-), and object (2).

To be clear, this is not a proposal concerning how to understand or interpret Kant. Presuming that Emundts and Rohlf are correct, this is only an attempt to produce a better semantic access point. It is a new way to understand what others have already proposed about Kant's argument. This is just a new way of talking about what some of the latest research has uncovered, a clarification through a simple terminological trick. I think that the usage of such a trick can reap great benefits by making what Kant is doing far more apparent.

### Three Objectivities and Descartes' Contradiction

With this terminological clarification in place and associated briefly with the elements of the Refutation's wider context, the first proposition of the Refutation can now be recast as

Descartes would have accepted it (1<sub>D</sub>) and as Kant intended it (1<sub>K</sub>):

(1<sub>K</sub>) I am conscious of an object (2) as determined in time,  
but I take it to be my own objectivity (1-).

(1<sub>D</sub>) I am conscious of an object (2) as determined in time,  
but I take it to be my own objectivity (1+).<sup>53</sup>

Descartes' version of the premise (1<sub>D</sub>) begins with objectivity (1+) for the self and is dubious

about the objectivity (1+) of the world. Kant's version (1<sub>K</sub>) rejects that we can have objectivity (1+) for anything, yet even though he is substituting objectivity (1-) in the first premise, he shares the same distinction between the self and the world that Descartes presumes. Put simply, Kant distinguishes self (1-) and world (1-), and Descartes distinguishes self (1+) and world (1+), and even though the nature of the objects being distinguished is changed, the distinction itself remains similar enough to allow both philosophers to agree on the first premise.<sup>54</sup>

In other words, Kant is telling Descartes that he cannot think of the self or objects in the world as if they were ontologically distinct [objectivity (1+)]. But, even if we presume that they are ontologically distinct, conceding objectivity (1-), we can still catch the problematic idealist in a contradiction. So, it is not the case that Descartes is simply conflating two different senses of object. He is, instead, consistently using a conception of objectivity that contradicts itself. While this was certainly discoverable using the original terminology, the new terms highlight the actual point of contention.

This example shows how such a terminological modification can be used to uncover otherwise hidden issues within the *Critique*. Moreover, if Kant had used this kind of terminology consistently throughout the Aesthetic, the Analogies, and the *Phenomena and Noumena* chapter, then we would have been able to see the connections that Kant was making despite the way that they are scattered through the Critique.

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<sup>53</sup> Use of the new terms requires more than mere substitution of single words. Thus, "my existence" becomes "an object" of sub-type (2). The second part of the premise, however, is added so that the original meaning of "my" is not lost.

<sup>54</sup> Emundts ably tackles this issue and the need for Kant and Descartes to understand and accept the first premise in the same sense. My use of new terms highlights this need because it does not allow the same term to be used equivocally in the first premise. Emundts' solution to the problem, that Kant and Descartes need only agree that we be able to order representations in time so that the order can be judged right or wrong, seems correct. See Emundts, 184-185.

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