

Give a careful account of the argument of Kant's second 'Refutation of Idealism'

The two main opponents of Kant referenced in the refutation are Berkeley and Descartes (the rational psychologist) and *viz* against the thesis that all that exists is mental or spiritual.

The immaterialist Berkeley did not deny the existence of the external world, but he did the philosophical substance of matter (the supporter of accidents) or qualities without the mind. Substance in the vulgar sense i.e. sensible qualities or ideas are what exist because *essi is percipi*, whatever is experienced or whatever is mental. Kant believed he had undermined Berkeley by proof of the ideality of space and what we have is experience of real outer things not mere self-subsistent entities of the imagination. Of course Berkeley could have argued that things in themselves and God both act as reference to things in experience and neither can equally be known, however for the purposes of this essay I will focus on his other opponent.

His main target was the problematic idealism of Descartes who had said the real source of knowledge lay in the mind as there is a real doubt as to what it is that comes via the senses. So knowledge of the external world is doubtful, we could be deceived, dreaming or under illusion. This scepticism was contrasted to the certainty of the 'I' that exists as a thinking thing, this unseen simple soul substance (using the characterisation of the ancient philosophers) that cannot begin or end or change that is distinct from the seen, complex, temporal corporeal substance.

To set the scene, there are some important principles (premises in Kant's argument) that are vital to the refutation;

His Copernican turn has it that objects conform to the nature of our faculty of intuition; we experience the world of phenomena not the actual world of things in themselves which are forever beyond our reach.

The rule or presupposition (which I must have recourse to in every particular case) that experience as distinguished from mere imagination is an external experience that refers to something permanent (distinct from my internal representations) that being a thing in itself which possesses a real existence.

Thoughts without content are void, intuitions without concepts are blind (Critique pg 64), intuitions are essential to knowledge but the mind's rational structure make our understanding possible (by imposing pure intuitions of the form of space, time and the categories). To bring intuitions (objects) under concepts is what makes them intelligible and it is different objects I experience at different times and places.

The Kantian logical subject (and aligned with the Humean view in respect to the elusiveness of the self) 'I am' or 'I think' that accompanies all thoughts, is unlike the Cartesian 'I'. There is a necessary connection between the inner and external sense, the external in a way validates the consciously experiencing person and cannot be separate from it.

The refutation (of problematic idealism) can be interpreted as such;

There is a temporal order to *my* experiences that I am conscious of.

This is because 'I' stand in relations to things ('not just states of the inner I') within time.

My experience *in* time as the order of succession has reference to permanent things within that continuum.

Those things that I am conscious of and stand in relation to are persisting objects (even though they are objects of non-persistent representations) that exist outside of me (by occupying a different part of space to me).

The reality of the external sense is necessarily connected to my *internal* sense, to enable the possibility of experience in general. (Critique pg 24) This is essential so that I can describe and differentiate the 'I' (which is present in every judgement) from the content of the experience i.e. the objects that I characterise (by bringing these external objects under concepts).

So what Kant (with his transcendental idealism) has done is created a theory of an external world to support the subjectively *given*. This by resurrecting Berkeley's matter (things in themselves) as phenomena (as to what is experienced), a reality which is immediately perceived and although space is ideal the endurance of these sensible things in it is given objectively.

Against Descartes he showed the inseparability of the 'I' from the other things outside of me and that they are both an integral part of the consciousness of experience and in that sense the 'I' is complex (Kant calls it simple to show that nothing more is represented than a changing transcendental subject of thought v's Descartes simple soul substance that is unified through time). So if Kant is right (which I think he is) for Descartes to doubt the content or reliability of external experience is to doubt the certainty and indubitability of the self. If Descartes was around today he might say metaphorically It's as though I have a mobile phone with the capability of voice, my service provider has offered me data as a bolt on (i.e. access to the internet as analogous with Kant's space) but can't give me a browser to use that data with, I've just got to be grateful or believe I have that capability.

The reason I think Kant is right is due to the diaphanous nature of the subject. It is like a control channel (a *single* channel in a radio network) it is always there (when conscious or awake) the incoming sensory data is experienced in the first person as a succession of *here, now, this* and *that* all in relation to the position of the unique logical 'I'. When I access the past, I access that recollection of what is past, now, 'I was here before, but it has changed quite a lot this building wasn't here back then'.

To criticise the refutation, there is no mention of an embodied person, or an agent acting and tracing a path embedded out in the world (just a passive subject or experiencer), there is no real explanation how we make correct judgements hence we could be said to have Cartesian certainty about our beliefs or maybe Russellian mastery by direct acquaintance to knowledge (i.e. access to universals). So what seems right is going to be right, which of course is addressed by the later Wittgenstein in what is taken as the private language argument and rules for use.

If we carry out our own Copernican turn and place me out into the world. I can have experiences at certain locations and that experience is a certain way for me as a consequence of the features at that particular location, which I can compare and sanity check with others. As an agent I act intentionally as I move about as determined by the interrelated set of my beliefs and desires, I remember previous experiences (by location and what it was like for me) as ordered in time. There is regularity about the world which is explained as an experience of an objective spatial world that is not of my making.

To conclude on Kant, all we can have is a common sense theory or 'mere belief in the existence of things external to ourselves' (Critique pg23) a construction to sit alongside and support the subjective world we inhabit and experience. We just have to take this for granted by holding both of these aforementioned contradictory propositions simultaneously and this is what so troubled Hume.