

On the Semantics of Kant's Concept of Substance

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Abstract

This paper examines the debate about the referential meaning of Kant's concept of substance. In the *Critique of Pure Reason* and other works such as the *Metaphysical Foundations of Natural Science*, the category or concept of substance appears quite uncontroversially to have both a logical meaning (by which it means roughly 'a thing that is the ultimate subject of predication') and an objective meaning (by which it means roughly 'a thing that is permanent', or, equivalently, 'a thing existing at all times'). However, it is highly contested what kind of object, or objects, are supposed to meet, in experience, the criteria imposed by the conjunction of these two distinct meanings. I discuss two examples of the main interpretations to be found in the literature: Peter Strawson (2000), who contends that the reference of substance is only matter, and Claudia Jáuregui (2021), who also includes ordinary particular objects as substances. I scrutinize their fit with some of the textual evidence, primarily from the First Analogy of Experience, and finally reject Jáuregui's interpretation as implying a kind of mereological essentialism about particular objects.

Keywords: substance, meaning, matter, ordinary objects, First Analogy of Experience.

Sobre la semántica del concepto kantiano de sustancia

Resumen

Este artículo examina el debate sobre el significado referencial del concepto de sustancia en Kant. En la *Crítica de la razón pura* y en otras obras como los *Principios metafísicos de la ciencia natural*, hay consenso en que la categoría o concepto de sustancia posee tanto un significado lógico (por el que significa aproximadamente 'algo que es el sujeto último de la predicación') como un significado objetivo (por el que significa aproximadamente 'algo que es permanente' o, en términos equivalentes, 'algo que existe en todo tiempo'). Sin embargo, hay un debate acerca de qué clase de objeto, u objetos, se supone que deben satisfacer, en la experiencia, las condiciones exigidas por la conjunción de estos dos distintos significados. En el *paper*, discuto dos ejemplos de las principales interpretaciones ofrecidas en la literatura: la de Peter Strawson, 2000, quien sostiene

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que únicamente la materia es la referencia de la sustancia, y la de Claudia Jáuregui, 2021, quien considera que los objetos ordinarios particulares son también sustancias. Examino los argumentos de ambos autores a la luz de una parte de la evidencia textual, sobre todo de la Primera Analogía de la Experiencia, y concluyo rechazando la interpretación de Jáuregui por implicar una especie de esencialismo mereológico sobre los objetos particulares.

Palabras clave: sustancia, significado, materia, objetos ordinarios, Primera Analogía de la Experiencia.

1. Introduction

In the literature on Kant's concept of substance, one sooner or later encounters a distinction between two different meanings of substance (Hahmann, 2010; Hall, 2011; van Cleve, 1999). According to the first, substance is simply a thing that possesses qualities, more technically, a subject of (different) predicates. Using Kant's terminology, we may refer to this as the *logical* meaning of substance. According to the second meaning, however, substance is defined with the help of a purely temporal notion, namely *permanence*. By this word (also, *persistence*; in German, *Beharrlichkeit*), Kant denotes existence at all times ("ein Dasein zu aller Zeit", A242/B300; cf. also A185/B228–229), including hence time past, time present, and time future. In this very robust sense, substance is something that can be neither created nor destroyed. Again using Kant's terminology, we may call this second meaning the *objective* meaning of substance.²

Jonathan Bennet (2006), the first to distinguish between these two meanings of substance, found the distinction not only in Kant's work but in the whole philosophical tradition from Aristotle downwards (see also the references in van Cleve, 1999). To name but one example, Spinoza combined the two meanings straightforwardly: he conceived God, or Nature, first, as a subject of infinite attributes, and second, as an eternal and indestructible being. However, even if philosophers may choose to fuse the logical and objective meanings of substance, they should be under no illusion that the two meanings are wholly distinct and must therefore be kept separate. Kant

² See Oroño (2022) for a helpful discussion about the differences between the logical and objective meanings of categories in general.

himself, as Bennet observes, was well aware of it, as is made clear by various passages of the *Critique of Pure Reason*.

Let us take a look at a couple of them. The first comes from the Schematism chapter: “if one leaves out the sensible determination of permanence, substance would signify nothing more than a something [*ein Etwas*] that can be thought as a subject (without being a predicate of something else)” (*KrV*, A147/B186).³ The second comes from the chapter on Phenomena and Noumena:

If I leave out permanence (which is existence at all times), then nothing is left in my concept of substance except the logical representation of the subject, which I try to realize by representing to myself something that can occur solely as subject (without being a predicate of anything) (*KrV*, A242–243/B300–301).

Here, Kant can be understood as urging us to perform a kind of mental experiment by which we succeed in disentangling the two meanings of substance. From the complete concept of substance, as it were, we are first told to *remove* permanence (referred to as a “sensible determination”, and defined explicitly, at least in the second quotation, as “existence at all times”). Next, after this removal or abstraction step, Kant invites us to contemplate all that we are left with: the mere representation of ‘a something’ [*ein Etwas*] which can *only* be a subject and *never* a predicate. Kant complains that this representation, which he labels as logical, is by itself useless: “Now out of this representation I can make nothing, as it shows me nothing at all about what determinations the thing [*das Ding*] that is to count as such a first subject is to have” (*KrV*, A147/B186–187).

But then it is not only the case that I do not even know of any conditions under which this logical preeminence can be attributed to any sort of thing; it is also the case that absolutely nothing further is to be made of it, and not even the least consequence is to be drawn from it, because by its means no object whatever of the

³ I quote from Guyer's and Wood's translation (in Kant, 1998). Here and elsewhere, I have modified it slightly for the sake of terminological consistency, using *permanence* instead of its synonym *persistence* as a translation of *Beharrlichkeit*. References to Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* use the A (first edition) and/or B (second edition) pagination; references to other works, volume and page number of the Academy Edition (Kant, 1990–).

use of this concept is determined, and one therefore does not even know whether the latter means anything at all (*KrV*, A243/B301).

I think from these passages it quite clearly emerges that, for Kant, the complete concept of substance necessarily includes both a logical and an objective component. Although this is disputed in the literature by some authors (such as Ameriks, 2000, or Langton, 1998, who argue that the objective meaning is not compatible with the logical one), I take it to be the general consensus (Guyer, 1987; Paton, 1936; Rosenberg, 2005; van Cleve, 1999) that the concept of substance can only attain its full semantic weight if permanence is added to, or combined with, the pure logical notion of something only being a subject, and never a predicate (for an overview of the literature on that point, see Oberst, 2017).

Without this addition of the temporal notion (or 'schema'), the category or pure concept of substance would not lack meaning altogether—since it would still possess *logical* meaning—but it would certainly lack what Kant terms *Sinn und Bedeutung* (*KrV*, A156/B195), which we may translate loosely as 'sense and reference'.⁴

This brief summary of the different meanings of substance does not, I believe, raise any deeply controversial issues. However, one question remains highly disputed in the scholarly debate about substance. What is the exact *reference* of substance? In other words, what kind of object, or objects in experience, are supposed to meet in experience the conditions demanded by (the combination of) the logical and objective meanings of substance? Framing this question further in semantical terms, I will call this question one about the *referential* meaning of substance.

Now, the Kantian texts seem to make room for *different* kinds of objects satisfying the concept of substance, and hence allow—to put it slightly frivolously—for *substantially* different interpretations. In the remainder of my paper, I will therefore first present (section 2) two examples of the main interpretations available in the literature. One associates the reference of substance exclusively with matter (see Hahmann, 2009, 2010; Strawson,

⁴ Kant seems to use *Sinn* and *Bedeutung* more or less interchangeably, but when both terms are used in conjunction in the expression *Sinn und Bedeutung*, they seem to come down to what I have called the complete concept of substance, or what Kant describes as 'the objective reality of concepts'. For a comparison between Kants' terminological uses of *Sinn* and *Bedeutung* and Frege's see Nolan (1979).

2000); the other also identifies substance with empirical or 'ordinary particular objects' (Jáuregui, 2021).

In the next section (section 3), I will then examine some passages from the First Analogy of Experience to see which interpretation fits better with this text (the *locus classicus* of Kant's discussion of substance), and in particular, with the new 'Proof' of the 'Principle of Permanence' in the B-Edition. I will argue that, although there is good textual evidence on both sides, the Strawsonian interpretation is to be preferred on systematic grounds. Finally (section 4) I will briefly discuss an intriguing problem raised by Jáuregui's interpretation: the question of whether ordinary particular objects are identical to their constituent material parts. Jáuregui argues that they are, suggesting that ordinary particular objects, despite appearances, hold the status of absolutely permanent substances. I will challenge Jáuregui's view, objecting that it leads to an implausible conception of ordinary particular objects, one that commits her to mereological essentialism.

2. The Referential Meaning of Substance: Matter *or* Ordinary Particular Objects?

Let us begin with the first interpretation, championed by authors like Andree Hahmann (2009, 2010) or Peter Strawson (2000). According to them, the referential meaning or reference of substance is, and can only be, matter [*Materie*]. In other words: strictly speaking, only matter, defined by Kant as "the movable in space [...] insofar as it itself possesses a moving force" (*OP*, AA 21: 491) or as "the *movable* in space, insofar as it *fills* a *space*" (*MAN*, AA 04: 496), is substance; ordinary particular objects are thus excluded from this status.

This interpretation comes in two versions. In strong, monist versions, the only object referred to by 'substance' is the whole of matter, or "all matter" (Hahmann, 2009, p. 192; Sans, 2005, p. 59; Strawson, 2000, p. 270). According to this, there would only be "One Big Substance" (as Hannah puts it [2006, p. 392ff.]). In a weaker, pluralist reading, however, any of the parts into which matter can be divided counts as substance as well (this I take to be the view of Buroker [2006] and Melnick [1973]). For such a view, there

would be, as it were, Infinitely Many Substances, as for Kant, no part of matter is ultimately indivisible.⁵

One passage that supports the reading of substance as matter, in both monist and pluralist versions, stems from the *Metaphysical Foundations of Natural Science*. There Kant writes:

The concept of substance means the ultimate subject of existence, that is, that which does not itself belong in turn to the existence of another merely as a predicate. Now matter is the subject of everything that may be counted as belonging to the existence of things. [...] Thus matter, as the movable in space, is the substance therein. But all parts of matter must likewise be called substances, and thus themselves matter in turn, insofar as one can say of them that they are themselves subjects, and not merely predicates of other matters (*MAN*, AA 04: 503; Kant, 2012).

Notice that the first sentence (“substance means the ultimate subject of existence”) is merely a restatement of what Kant, following the Aristotelian tradition, takes to be the *logical* meaning of substance. After this, we might have expected Kant to go on mentioning the next necessary (and objective) component of this concept: permanence. Instead, Kant proceeds to identify straightaway what we have called the referential meaning of substance, namely matter. About this matter, this passage says only that it is “the movable in space”, and likewise, that it is “[the] substance therein [*sc.* in space]”, but again without any mention of or hint at permanence. However, as we shall see later,⁶ Kant thinks indeed that matter *is* sempiternal, claiming at one point that “we do not have [...] anything *permanent* on which we could base the concept of a substance, as intuition, except merely matter” (see *KrV*, B278).

According to the second interpretation, defended recently by Claudia Jáuregui (2021), the referential meaning of substance should not be restricted to matter. It should include ordinary particular objects of our experience as well, that is, individual physical objects like tables, chairs, stones, or pieces of paper. One should be mindful, however, that Jáuregui is not suggesting that substance has two different *referential* meanings, compatible at the same time—say, on the one hand matter, and on the other hand ordinary particular

⁵ See for instance the rejection of the thesis of the Second Antinomy.

⁶ As we shall see in section 3 discussing the ‘combustion of wood’ example.

objects. Her point is rather the opposite: parts of matter and ordinary objects are, in her view, *identical*; in other words, ordinary objects are nothing but parts of matter. I quote one passage of her paper: “The objects of our everyday experience are parts of matter, and those parts are as substantial as matter itself, and must be absolutely permanent” [“[L]os objetos de nuestra experiencia cotidiana son partes de la materia, y esas partes son tan sustanciales como la materia misma y han de permanecer de un modo absoluto”] (Jáuregui, 2021, p. 24, a. trans.).

Thus, if I understand it correctly, Jáuregui's argument runs something like this:

- i) All ordinary particular objects⁷ are parts of matter.
- ii) All parts of matter are substances.
- iii) Therefore, all ordinary particular objects are substances.

Let us pause for a moment to look at each of these propositions. The second premise is hardly contentious. I have quoted the text of the *Metaphysical Foundations of Natural Science*, in which Kant himself states that “all parts of matter must likewise be called substances” (*MAN*, 04: 503). Even interpreters with monist leanings, like Strawson, allow for parts of matter—divisible out of the totality of matter—to be called by the name ‘substances’ (although, as a matter of fact, only in a rather condescending, secondary and ‘courtesy’ sense, *cf.* Strawson, 2000).

The conclusion of Jáuregui's argument—that ordinary objects are substances—can also claim some strong independent textual evidence in its favour. For instance, in the Proof of the Third Analogy, Kant appears to treat *ordinary* particular objects (although of a peculiarly large size, as we shall see in a moment) as if they were downright paradigms of substance. Thus, to illustrate the principle that substances coexisting in time stand in causal interaction with each other, he chooses the Moon and the Earth as examples:

⁷ Besides “objects of our everyday experience” [“objetos de nuestra experiencia cotidiana”], Jáuregui also uses the locution “particular objects” [“objetos particulares”] (2021, p. 24–25), so no harm will follow, I think, from using ‘ordinary particular objects’ to mean roughly the same.

Things are *simultaneous* if in empirical intuition the perception of one can follow the perception of the other *reciprocally*, and vice versa (which in the temporal sequence of appearances, as has been shown in the case of the second principle, cannot happen). Thus I can direct my perception first to the Moon and subsequently to the Earth, or, conversely, first to the Earth and then subsequently to the Moon, and on this account, since the perception of these objects can follow reciprocally each other, I say that they exist simultaneously (*KrV*, B256–257).

The first premise, however—that ordinary objects are parts of matter—is highly contested. Many authors deny it (Sans, 2000; Tetens, 2006; Thöle, 2011) on the grounds that ordinary objects are only made of, or composed of, matter. We can find a clear example of this view in Strawson's article "Kant on Substance". There he writes: "Kant's doctrine regarding ordinary composite material objects is not that they are, strictly speaking, substances, but rather that they are (adjectivally) substantial, i.e. composed of substance or matter" (Strawson, 2000, p. 269). Ordinary objects, as it turns out, do not fulfill the criteria imposed by the two meanings of substance, which, when conjoined, yield what we identified earlier as the complete concept of substance. First, ordinary particular objects, such as an individual man, or an individual horse (the typical examples of substance given by Aristotle in his writing *Categories*),⁸ do not seem to satisfy the logical criterion of *always* being a subject, and *never* a predicate. This is presumably because we could say something like 'this portion of matter is Socrates', thus turning this individual man into a predicate (see van Cleve, 1999). Next, ordinary objects do not seem either to satisfy the objective criterion of being permanent, that is, of existing at all times. (As is well known, all men are mortal, and Socrates is, well, a man).

I quote Strawson again:

Kant, though he would of course admit that such ordinary individuals as Alexander and Bucephalus can be, and are, represented as subjects of predication, must hold that they are not *irreducibly* such, but can rather be thought of as mere determinations of something else; he must hold that if he is to be faithful *both* to his formal criterion of substance *and* to the view that, in the field of phenomena, i.e. in

⁸ "Substance [...] in the primary sense of the term [...] is that which can be neither predicated of a subject nor found in a subject, for example a particular man (ὁ τις ἄνθρωπος) or a particular horse (ὁ τις ἵππος)" (Aristoteles, *Cat.* 2a. 11–13; 1938, a. minor modifications on translation).

the field of the only significant application of the concept (category) only what is permanent is to count as substance. For it is clear that such ordinary individuals as Alexander and Bucephalus and lumps of rock are not permanent, but do come into and go out of existence (2000, p. 271).

One might want to raise two objections to Strawson's denial that ordinary objects can be substances. The first is on textual grounds. If Alexander and his horse are not proper Kantian substances, it seems to follow that neither the Earth nor the Moon can be, which contradicts the passage from the Third Analogy just quoted above. The second objection is more systematic, and is made by Jáuregui (2021) in his interesting reply to this line of argument. The thrust of it is to reaffirm that ordinary objects *are* parts of matter (identical to parts of matter), not merely composed of matter. Insofar as they are parcels of matter, as it were, they are genuine substances.

Jáuregui's view, which, as far as I can see, resembles mereological essentialism about ordinary objects in contemporary metaphysics—the view that “whatever parts a thing has, it has essentially or necessarily” (Loux and Crisp, 2017, pp. 243–245), deserves a separate discussion. But before examining it more closely, I propose to have a fresh look at what is arguably Kant's most important text about substance, the First Analogy of Experience. Perhaps this will put us in a better position to understand what the reference of substance ultimately is.

3. The First Analogy of Experience: Change, Alteration, and the *Sempiternity* of Substance

The formula of the First Analogy of Experience, in the A-version, reads as follows: “All appearances contain that which is permanent (substance) as the object itself [*der Gegenstand selbst*], and that which can change as its mere determination, i.e., a way in which the object exists” (*KrV*, A182). In this first formula, as many commentators since Bennet (2006) have noted, the two meanings of substance—logical and objective—are present at the same time. Kant describes substance, on the one hand, as an object [*Gegenstand*] possessing a determination [*Bestimmung*]. This determination (which we could also describe as an *accident*, *property*, or *attribute*) is, in turn, defined as a mode, or way [*eine Art*], in which the object exists. These characterizations correspond closely to the logical meaning of substance. Yet

Kant also describes substance, on the other hand, as the permanent or persistent [*das Beharrliche*], in contrast to the transitory or changeable [*das Wandelbare*]. This latter characterization corresponds closely enough to the objective meaning of substance. Both meanings, however, are presented in combination: as it turns out, the permanent *is* the object, and the transitory or changeable, its determination.⁹

Now there are two approaches for fleshing out, as it were, the reference of substance in this formula. One is to illustrate it with commonsensical examples. A leaf of a tree turns from green to yellow; what changes are the colours, but the leaf itself doesn't change, it persists (*cf.* van Cleve, 1999). A car gets a new wheel; the wheel is changed, but the car remains the same. Water freezes; the state of the water changes, but water itself does not thereby disappear.¹⁰ From these examples, we might conclude that ordinary objects are substances. However, these examples seem, on closer inspection, to conflict squarely with the strict definition of permanence given by Kant. Permanence is, for Kant, not relative (existence for *some* particular stretch of time, however long that stretch may be) but absolute. It is existence at all times, in one word, *sempiternitas*.¹¹ Measured against this standard, the

⁹ It is true that in the formula of the B-Edition (“In all changes of appearances substance is permanent [*beharrt*], and its quantum is neither increased nor diminished in nature”) this combination of meanings has disappeared, and only the second sense of substance (‘substance as the permanent’) is mentioned. However, this does not need to imply a contradiction with the A-Edition formula, as suggested by Hall (2011) and others. For a sustained argument against a contradiction between the formulas see Hahmann (2010).

¹⁰ For a version of this example, used however to illustrate the category of causality, see *KrV*, B162–163.

¹¹ In the First Analogy at least, the closest Kant comes to employing the word ‘sempiternity’ (the word used in the anglophone Kant scholarship following the lead of Bennet) occurs within the paraphrase of the principle of substance as “[the principle of] sempiternal existence [*immerwährendes Dasein*] of the proper subject in the appearances” (*KrV*, A185/B228) (Guyer and Wood translate *immerwährend* as ‘everlasting’). In the *Opus Postumum*, however, the word appears explicitly: “Sempiternitas ist necessitas phaenomenon” (*OP*, AA 21: 584). The German word used by Kant himself for the Latin *sempiternitas* is ‘alldauernd’ (*OP*, AA 21: 584). Another useful passage that sheds light on the meaning of sempiternity stems from §29 of the Inaugural Dissertation: “*Nam mundus hic, quanquam contingenter existens, est sempiternus, h. e. omni tempori simultaneus, ut ideo tempus aliquod fuisse, quo non exstiterit, perperam asseratur*” [“For, although this world exists contingently, it is sempiternal, that is to say, it is simultaneous with every time, so that it would, therefore, be wrong to assert that there had been a time at which it did not exist”] (*MSI*, AA 2: 417; Kant, 1992, p. 413; I have substituted the more etymological ‘sempiternal’ for Walford’s more idiomatic ‘everlasting’). Although the context is different—sempiternity is applied here to *mundus* and not to *substantia*—it can be seen that already at this stage of Kant’s thinking, ‘sempiternity’ (permanence) is defined as existence “simultaneous with every time” (*omni tempori simultaneus*), another way to say: existence at all times. Finally, a note might be in order about the difference between the meanings of ‘eternity’ and ‘sempiternity’. Sometimes *sempiternity* is defined so as to apply to entities that will go on existing for all time future, but which, however, were created by God in the past (this applies for example in Catholic Theology to *angels*). In contrast, *eternity* would be the wider concept, applying to an entity that existed always in the past, exists

temporal careers of leaves, cars, and water molecules are by far too short-lived.

We find a clear-cut statement of the sempiternity of substance in one of the many glosses that follow the Proof of the First Analogy:

[W]e can grant an appearance the name of substance only if we presuppose its existence at all time [*ihr Dasein zu aller Zeit*], which is not even perfectly expressed through the word 'permanence' since this pertains more to future time. Nevertheless the inner necessity of being permanent [*zu beharren*] is inseparably connected with the necessity of always having existed, and the expression may therefore stand (*KrV*, A185–186/B228–229).

The second approach that can be taken to illustrate the formula of the First Analogy in the A-Edition (recall: "All appearances contain that which is permanent (substance) as the object, and that which can change as its mere determination, i.e., a way in which the object exists" [*KrV*, A182]) avoids using common-sensical examples. Instead, it uses examples that presuppose a certain scientific view of ordinary particular objects—namely, the view that they are made up of matter. One such example is provided by Kant himself in the First Analogy:

A philosopher was asked: How much does the smoke weigh? He replied: If you take away from the weight of the wood that was burnt the weight of the ashes that are left over, you will have the weight of the smoke. He thus assumed as incontrovertible that even in fire the matter (substance) never disappears but rather only suffers an alteration in its form (*KrV*, A185/B228).

In this example, probably inspired by Lavoisier's principle of conservation of mass (Allison, 2010), substance is equated to matter. In contrast, the ordinary objects involved—the piece of wood before combustion and, subsequently, the ashes and the smoke—are presented not as substances,

now, and will exist in the future, that is, a being that exists at all times (again for Catholic Theology, in this case, God). Kant's use of sempiternity differs from this. He seems to be aware of it, since he points out that he will be using the word 'permanence' *although* "the word 'permanence' pertains more to future time" ["das Wort Beharrlichkeit geht mehr auf künftige Zeit"] (see *KrV*, A185–186/B228/229), and hence does not express perfectly his own thought that substance exists at *all* times, including also the whole past (*KrV*, A185–186/B228/229).

but quite on the contrary, as mere manifestations or accidents of substance. In other words, they are instances of the different *forms* that matter can take (cf. the expression “suffers an alteration in its form”, for German “die Form derselben [*sc.* der Materie] [erleidet] eine Abänderung”). Thus, the example of the burning wood provides good *prima facie* textual evidence for the need to exclude ordinary objects from being genuine substances.¹²

This impression is strengthened if we take into consideration how Kant defines two key terms used in the First Analogy: *change* and *alteration*. According to Kant's definition, change [*Wechsel*] implies a change in existence itself. If something changes, then it either comes into existence or goes out of existence; it arises or perishes. On the other hand, according to Kant's definition, alteration [*Veränderung*] it's not a change in existence but only a modification in the way, or mode, in which an object exists. The passage where this distinction occurs is the following:

Alteration is a way of existing that succeeds another way of existing of the very same object. Hence everything that is altered is *lasting* [*bleibend*], and only its *state changes*. Thus since this change concerns only the determinations that can cease or begin, we can say, in an expression that seems somewhat paradoxical, that only what is permanent (the substance) is altered, while that which is changeable does not suffer any alteration but rather a change, since some determinations cease and others begin (*KrV*, A187/B230–231)

We may sum up this view by saying that change [*Wechsel*] is existence-change (cf. Bennet, 2006), whereas alteration [*Veränderung*] is a replacement of properties in the course of time, that is, a replacement of old properties by new ones in one and the same object.

Now, given these definitions, it seems fair to say that ordinary particular things, at some point or another in time, experience a *Wechsel*, an existence-change. Because, for all we can observe or know, they come into existence and also pass away. This includes not only leaves of trees but also the Earth, the Sun or even, according to the current cosmological theories, all

¹² I say *prima facie* because as noted earlier, there are passages (the Third Analogy for instance) where Kant clearly seems to identify ordinary particular objects with substances. In other words, the textual evidence on this point seems to be conflicting.

atomic elements. Hence, it would be simply a mistake to assume that these objects are substantial.

Claudia Jáuregui would likely disagree with this argument. In her paper, she argues that the coming into being and going out of existence of ordinary objects are only apparent. I quote again from her paper: “Everyday experience confirms the thesis of the absolute permanence of particular objects. They therefore have a proper substantial character. Its relative permanence is only apparent” [“La experiencia cotidiana confirma la tesis de la absoluta permanencia de los objetos particulares. Ellos poseen pues un carácter propiamente sustancial. Su permanencia relativa es solo aparente”] (2021, p. 26).

Jáuregui provides an independent argument to explain why it only *appears* that particular objects are relatively permanent, whereas, in fact, they are absolutely permanent. But before delving into it, we might want to know why, for Kant, substances *must* be absolutely permanent in the first place. For that, let us take a look at the Proof of the First Analogy in the B-Version.

All appearances are in time, in which, as substratum (as permanent form of inner intuition), both *simultaneity* as well as *succession* can alone be represented. The time, therefore, in which all change of appearances is to be thought, lasts and does not change; since it is that in which succession or simultaneity can be represented only as determinations of it. Now time cannot be perceived by itself. Consequently, it is in the objects of perception, i.e., the appearances, that the substratum must be encountered that represents time in general and in which all change or simultaneity can be perceived in apprehension through the relation of the appearances to it (*KrV*, B224/225).

This passage is notoriously difficult (prompting some interpreters to confess their bafflement at it, for instance van Cleve, 1999 [*cf.* Bennet, 2006]). However, I take Kant to be making an analogy between time and substance. Just as time is the substratum of all change of appearances that we perceive in inner sense, so must substance act as the object underlying all changes that we perceive in outer sense. By the same token, just as time itself *can't* change (if it is to be the underlying object of all change in inner sense), neither can substance change (if it is to be the substratum of all changes of

appearances in outer sense).¹³ The conclusion of the argument is that, in order to make possible the perception of change in outer sense, substance must be supposed to always remain the same [*bleibt immer [die]selbe*]:

Consequently, that which is permanent, in relation to which alone all temporal relations of appearances can be determined, is substance in the appearance, i.e., the real in the appearance, which as the substratum of all change always remains the same. Since this, therefore, cannot change in existence [*im Dasein nicht wechseln kann*], its quantum in nature can also be neither increased nor diminished (*KrV*, B225).

One step in the argument leading to this conclusion is especially relevant to our leading question (What is the reference of substance?). This is the premise that “time itself cannot be perceived”. This premise is offered by Kant as a reason to look, in the next step, “in the objects of perception” [*in den Gegenständen der Wahrnehmung*] for something that, being perceptible, can serve as a representative or proxy of time in experience. In one word, from the impossibility of perceiving time as substratum of change in outer sense, Kant infers the need to look for substance instead, locating this very substance in the phaenomenon [*Substanz in der Erscheinung*].¹⁴

However, as noted in the literature, this step confronts us with a dilemma (Hall, 2011). If substance must be something perceptible, and at the same time the reference of substance is said to be matter, then it follows that matter should be an object of our perception. However, as many critics point out, matter itself cannot be perceived directly either. We perceive only its manifestations (Oberst, 2015; Thöle, 2011). We can see, for example, the

¹³ The argument depends thus on the premise that what constitutes the basis of change cannot itself change. This anti-regress assumption has been called into question, on the grounds that this basis might also be forever changing (so Caird quoted in Kemp Smith, 1923; for a defence see Allison, 2010). Van Cleve (1999) helpfully points out to a similar anti-regress argument in the Second Analogy: “[A]ccording to the principle of causation actions are always the primary ground of all change of appearances, and therefore cannot lie in a subject that itself changes, since otherwise further actions and another subject, which determines this change, would be required” (*KrV*, A205/B250).

¹⁴ For an account of how empirical objects might best be used as proxies of time in experience, and thus used to measure time, see Buroker (2006; cf. also Melnick, 1973). However, that these objects and their actions (the movement of the Earth around the Sun to calculate a year, or the oscillations of an atom Caesium to calculate a second for instance) are only approximations of substance, and not genuine substances, follows again if we consider that none of these objects is known to exist “at all times” i.e., known to be sempiternal.

piece of wood, and then the ashes and the smoke, but we cannot *see* matter.¹⁵ If, on the other hand, we understand ordinary objects to be the referential meaning of substance (this would be a possible reading of “the objects of perception” in the text above) we face the problem of explaining how it comes about that we ever do *perceive* the coming into (and going out of) existence of them, say, perceive the birth and death of individual men and horses. On that point, Kant seems uncompromising. For him it is conceptually impossible to have a *perception* of a substance arising or perishing:

[A]rising or perishing per se cannot be a possible perception unless it concerns merely a determination of that which is permanent, for it is this very thing that is permanent that makes possible the representation of the transition from one state into another, and from non-being into being, which can therefore be empirically cognized only as changing determinations of that which lasts (*KrV*, A188/B231).

Kant can be taken here to be saying that, at least in the world of phenomena, substance is *permanently* being perceived—as it were, without interruption—since otherwise the very perception of change would be impossible. Notice that this is not the same, however, as claiming that *our* perception of substance must be permanent. Rather, it is claiming that our perception or representation is *of* something permanent (for this contrast, though in terms of representation and not of perception, see Kant's footnote in *KrV*, Bxli).

4. Mereological Essentialism? Jáuregui on the Absolute Permanence of Ordinary Particular Objects

I finally come to Jáuregui's strategy to avoid the puzzle posed by the Proof of the First Analogy. Recall that she has to explain why it seems that we *perceive* that ordinary objects are only relatively permanent, while in fact they last forever. As she puts it: “Therefore, we can ask ourselves why, if the objects of our everyday experience are parts of matter, and the parts of matter

¹⁵ This objection would be reminiscent of Hume's observation that we can only perceive different qualities, but not their underlying ‘substance’. Cf. the following quotes from *A Treatise of Human Nature*: “[T]here is [no thing], but what is colour'd or tangible” (Hume, 2000, p. 154), “a substance is entirely different from a perception” (Hume, 2000, p. 153). For a comparison between Hume and Kant on substance, see Rosenberg (2000).

possess absolute permanence, we tend to consider them as possessing only relative permanence” [“Así pues podemos preguntarnos por qué si los objetos de nuestra experiencia cotidiana son partes de la materia y las partes de la materia poseen una permanencia absoluta, tendemos a considerar que ellos poseen una permanencia meramente relativa”] (Jáuregui, 2021, p. 25). I am not sure that I can do justice to Jáuregui's argument in the brief space that follows. However, here is what I take it to be in a nutshell: ordinary objects possess both *necessary* material properties (since they are essentially identical to parts of matter, after all) and *contingent* empirical properties (since they are now big, now small; now warm, now cold; now red, now blue etc.). Sometimes, it so happens that when the empirical properties of an object change, we continue nonetheless to perceive the one and same object. At other times, however, when the empirical properties change, we get the (false) impression that the ordinary object itself arises or perishes. Jáuregui illustrates this latter kind of illusory impression with the following Kant-inspired example. Suppose we throw a stone and a piece of paper into the fire:

If we throw a piece of paper and a stone into the fire, after a minute the paper will have ceased to exist and will have turned to ashes. The stone, on the other hand, will remain a stone in which some change of temperature will certainly have taken place [...]. It is entirely contingent that in the case of paper, we possess an empirical concept with which we think of this new state as if it were a different kind of object, and that the appearance is then generated that the paper ceased to exist and the ashes began to exist (Jáuregui, 2021, p. 25).¹⁶

I don't think that Jáuregui's example supports well her conclusion, which, at any rate, would be overly revisionary about the concept of 'ordinary particular object' that we do have. Above all, I think it is fair to say that we do *really* perceive pieces of paper going out of existence as they get burnt. Supposing otherwise would be to suggest that a piece of paper still exists *after* being burnt—which is plainly absurd, at least if we still hold to the Kantian premise that the existence of a substance must be connected to perception.

¹⁶ “Si arrojamos al fuego un trozo de papel y una piedra, al cabo de un minuto el papel habrá dejado de existir y se habrá transformado en cenizas. La piedra, en cambio, seguirá siendo una piedra en la que se habrá operado seguramente algún cambio de temperatura. [...]. Es totalmente contingente que en el caso del papel, poseamos un concepto empírico con el cual pensamos ese nuevo estado como si tratara de un tipo de objeto diferente, y que se genere entonces la apariencia de que el papel dejó de existir y comenzaron a existir las cenizas”.

Another way to express disagreement with Jáuregui's argument would be to say that it does not seem consistent with the distinction Kant makes between change and alteration. If we follow Kant's terminology to the last consequence (which is admittedly neither a very easy, nor a very helpful thing to do in all cases, given the variety of locutions for 'change' in either Spanish or English, or for that matter in German),¹⁷ then I think we should say that fire *changes* the piece of paper, in the sense that it destroys it (*existence-change* in Bennet's [2006] terminology). It may be true that, in that sense, fire cannot change a stone, or not easily at once (stones are non-combustible). But surely this does not mean that *nothing* can change stones (an explosion will surely change them).¹⁸

To further discuss Jáuregui's view, surely, it would be necessary to consider in more detail what we really mean by the concept of an 'ordinary particular object'. In a systematic spirit, let us contemplate, however briefly, the possibility raised by her interpretation that an ordinary object is identical to parts of matter. This view, as far as I can see, closely resembles what is called *mereological essentialism* in contemporary metaphysics (*cf.* Loux and Crisp, 2017). According to this view, an object or thing is a whole essentially identical to its constituent parts, meaning that the loss of any of these parts will make this thing be *another*—and hence destroy it (for a defence of this view, see Chisholm, 1973).

For Jáuregui, as we have just seen and at least as I have interpreted her, ordinary objects have both *necessary* material properties (namely, being essentially identical to a certain portion or quantity of matter) and *contingent* empirical properties (namely, being such and such, say having black fur and a white-tipped tail). From the first group of necessary or essential properties,

¹⁷ *Cf.* for instance the typical compound German word *Radwechsel*. Whether or not wheels are considered substances, the expression does not (ordinarily) imply that wheels get destroyed when they are changed!

¹⁸ Thus the "stone's change of temperature" noted by Jáuregui would be in Kant's manner of speaking a *change* of temperature and an *alteration* of the stone. In saying that the stone *alters*, we do not imply however that the stone is a substance in a genuine sense. Using also terminology offered by Kant, we can say the stone is a substance '*comparative*', that is, in a merely "comparative sense". Kant uses namely the Latin adverb *comparative* to qualify such a substance, as well as the expression *substantiae comparativae* (AA 18: 145) precisely for qualities or accidents which, in regard to another qualities or accidents, act as subjects, but which themselves are not *ultimate* subjects (see Oberst, 2017, for a definition, a discussion and references; *cf.* also Langton, 1998, on the related concept of *phaenomenon substantiatum*).

it follows that for any particular ordinary object x , say a cat, it is necessary for x to be some *definite* portion of matter.

Now consider the so-called Problem of the Many in the guise of a cat called Tibbles (*cf.* Burke, 1996). If Tibbles the Cat is *necessarily* identical to a specific, well-defined, and circumscribed parcel of matter then what happens if Tibbles loses her white tipped tail? Is she now another cat? It might seem so, since she is now a lesser portion of matter than before—hence *another* portion of matter altogether. It seems, therefore, that every minimal change taking place in Tibbles—even at the microparticle level—would make her another cat. There would be, as a consequence, far too many cats around. Jáuregui's view is also confronted with such a paradox. For if one holds ordinary objects to be necessarily identical to certain wholes of matter (not merely contingently made up of *this* set, or *that* set, of particles of matter), then one ends up committing oneself to a 'revisionary' metaphysics about ordinary particular objects—a metaphysics that may be philosophically attractive, but which goes against some of our most deep-seated common-sense assumptions about individual objects, such as that there is just one cat Tibbles, and not many.¹⁹

To summarize the discussion so far. We may agree that substance is 'the ultimate subject of predication' (logical meaning of substance) and even concur with Kant that it must be permanent or sempiternal (objective meaning of substance) to be fully meaningful (to have what Kant terms *Sinn und Bedeutung*, *cf.* *KrV*, A156/B195). However, when it comes to pinpointing the referential meaning of substance—the perceptual object to which this concept is to be applied—we are confronted with a dilemma. If we identify the reference of substance with matter, we face the objection that matter itself cannot be an object of perception. This is the main difficulty confronting interpretations such as that of Peter Strawson. Conversely, if we identify the reference of substance with ordinary particular objects, we are confronted with the problem that no such object is truly absolutely permanent. This is the challenge facing the interpretation of Claudia Jáuregui. Despite good textual

¹⁹ It has been helpfully pointed out to me by an anonymous referee that my example of Tibbles is not really an objection to Jáuregui's argument, since Tibbles is a proper noun, and cat is an empirical concept, that we merely use *contingently* to think about ordinary particular objects. As parts of matter, ordinary particular objects would be absolutely permanent, even though cats might not be. Although I see the point, it still seems to me that the expression 'ordinary object' [*objeto cotidiano*] is misleading if it is used to refer to everlasting parts of matter, as opposed to empirical objects such as black-furred cats with white-tipped tails.

evidence supporting both views, I find Strawson's interpretation less problematic overall, as the choice of matters at least ensures the absolute permanence of substance. To further defend an interpretation along these lines, however, more work is needed to explore the connection between matter and perception.

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