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Priestley and Kant on materialism

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ABSTRACT
Kant maintains in the *Critique of Pure Reason* that both materialism and spiritualism cannot explain our existence. This paper argues that Kant's relation to (psychological) materialism is more complex than this rejection suggests and is usually thought, and it evaluates this relation in a new and more positive light. The paper shows that Priestley anticipates some of Kant's arguments against rationalist psychology, and that Kant's rejection of materialism does not commit him to an immaterialist metaphysics of the soul. These arguments involve a discussion of the problem of the unity of consciousness and of notions such as simplicity and identity.

KEYWORDS
materialism; soul; consciousness; unity; simplicity; identity; apperception

Kant argues in the *Critique of Pure Reason* that materialism is "incapable" of "explaining my existence".[1,2] Several commentators, including, notably, Henry Allison, take Kant's rejection of materialism to be a "refutation", suggesting that Kant attempts to prove that materialism, as a metaphysical thesis, is false. In this paper, I argue that Kant's relation to materialism is more complex than is usually thought and that it is not as negative as is usually thought. In order to establish this, we need to have an idea of what kind of materialism constitutes the object of Kant's critique. Scholarly treatments of Kant's critique of materialism tend to neglect this issue and ignore actual eighteenth-century materialist positions that form the background to Kant's treatment.

In fact, when Kant discusses materialism, he does not merely refer to this position in general terms or refer to German or French materialists of the time, which is what one may perhaps expect.[3] Instead, it seems that his favourite materialist philosopher is Joseph Priestley. Kant rarely mentions other materialist thinkers, such as Diderot, for example.[4] In focusing on Priestley, however, Kant picks out the most important and influential materialist thinker of his time. Unlike many other eighteenth-century materialists, Priestley does not present his materialism as a kind of dogma, but carefully and extensively discusses the pros and cons, considers objections, analyses the opposing position and relates the issue to the science of the day. It is surprising, therefore, that Priestley does not seem to play a major role in accounts of eighteenth-century materialism and that Kant's relation to Priestley has hardly been examined in any detail.[5] Indeed, as we shall see, Priestley anticipates some of Kant's arguments against rationalist psychology,

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involving issues such as the unity of consciousness and notions such as simplicity and identity.[6]

1. Psychological materialism

The term "materialism" here refers not to a cosmological thesis about the nature of the universe but to a theory about the nature of the mental, also referred to as "psychological materialism".[7] In the eighteenth century, this thesis about the materiality of the human soul or mind was often discussed under the title of "thinking matter".

By the 1770s, materialism had become a powerful force, partly because of developments in physiology and the related development of a new, dynamic concept of matter. Both of these aspects are important to Priestley's own materialism. Priestley's materialism must, of course, be understood as part of a development to which thinkers such as Charles Bonnet, with his *Essai analytique sur les facultés de l'ame* (Copenhagen 1760) and his *Palingénésie philosophique* (Genevia 1769) and, especially, David Hartley, with his *Observations on Man* (London 1749), belong. Both Bonnet and Hartley reject materialism in spite of their naturalistic tendencies when explaining mentality. Priestley takes up their ideas, however, and cites both in support of his materialist metaphysics. For reasons of space, we cannot take into account Priestley's relation to his predecessors here or be concerned with genetic questions concerning the development of Kant's thought or the question of whether Priestley had "influenced" Kant's thought in a particular way. Rather, our concern is with systematic relations of aspects of Kant's critical philosophy to the most important version of materialism of the time.

Still, we should briefly consider the question of what Kant knew about Priestley's thought, and what his overall assessment of Priestley was. These questions cannot be answered simply and straightforwardly, however.[8] Kant makes clear at least that he is "familiar with what Priestley […] maintains".[9] Indeed, there are several references to Priestley in his writings and lecture notes.[10] The *Critique of Pure Reason* devotes almost a whole page to Priestley's thought.[11] Kant here presents Priestley (correctly) as a thinker "who is devoted only to the principles of the *empirical* use of reason and is disinclined to all transcendent speculation".[12,13] For Priestley, Kant says, "the interest of reason […] is diminished by the exemption of certain objects from the laws of material nature, which are the only ones that we can know and determine with precision".[14] Despite his rejection of materialism, however, Kant values Priestley highly as a person and as a philosopher. The remark that Priestley is a "well-meaning man"[15] might remind us of Kant's dismissive comment on the "good *Berkeley*".[16] However, Kant praises the consistency of Priestley's thought[17] and emphasizes that Priestley is a "highly respected" thinker, not only "because of his piety" but also because of his judiciousness ("Einsicht").[18]

Other contemporary critics of Priestley did not share Kant's positive assessment. Notwithstanding his explicit commitment to the Christian religion, which he thought of as compatible with a materialist metaphysics, Priestley was accused of atheism. Defenders of substance-dualism such as Thomas Reid did not think highly of Priestley's intellectual abilities. Thus, in stark contrast to Kant, Reid thinks that Priestley "surely mistook his talent when he attempted to write on abstract subjects".[19]

Priestley's most important philosophical writings on materialism, such as *Disquisitions Relating to Matter and Spirit*, appeared towards the end of the 1770s and were not published in French or German translations prior to the first edition of the *Critique of Pure Reason*.[20] Priestley's *Letters to a Philosophical Unbeliever* of 1780 came out in German in 1782.[21] However, there were several, sometimes extensive, early German reviews of Priestley's writings. Christoph Meiners, a Göttingen philosopher at least tending towards materialism, plays a special role in this context.[22] Perhaps most important are the German translations of Priestley's three essays on David Hartley's *Observations on Man*, mentioned above. These essays appeared as introductory tracts in an abbreviated edition of Hartley's *Observations*, which Priestley published in 1775, titled *Hartley's Theory of the Human Mind*. Priestley's essays are important in that they emphasize the materialist tendencies in Hartley and, in 1778, they appeared in German in the first volume of the *Magazin für die Philosophie und ihre Geschichte*, edited by Michael Hißmann, a colleague of Meiners' at Göttingen.[23] Thus, a concise account of Hartley's theory of the mind was available to the German public, an account, moreover, that interprets Hartley's theory in Priestleyan materialist terms. Further, Hißmann's own version of materialism is for the most part in terms of Priestley's account.[24] It may not be possible to determine precisely what Kant's sources were for his knowledge of Priestley; it is plain, however, that Priestley's materialism was very much present in the German-speaking world of the late 1770s.

Any analysis and evaluation of Kant's relation to Priestley's psychological materialism must take into account the general philosophical differences between the two thinkers. In stark contrast to Priestley, Kant, of course, is *not* "devoted only to the principles of the *empirical* use of reason", although he is, like Priestley, "disinclined to all transcendent speculation".[25] Moreover, we need to take into account the difference between the empirical, transcendental and noumenal aspects that are relevant to Kant's analysis. Notwithstanding the systematic differences between the two thinkers, Kant is quite close to the thought of the materialist philosopher on a number of issues. We shall look, in particular, at the role of consciousness or inner sense, at the concepts of unity and simplicity and their relation to the question of the materiality of the soul and, finally, at the relation between materialism as a methodological position on the one hand and as a metaphysical thesis on the other. We shall see further that, in contrast to what has been maintained in the literature, there is no such thing in Kant as an "ontological commitment" to the immateriality of the soul.

2. Consciousness of mental states and consciousness of unity

Priestley argues that consciousness (or "intuition", "inner feeling") is not able to tell us anything about the essence of the soul, and this includes the question of its materiality or immateriality. According to the view that Priestley rejects, however, there is an inner feeling which assures us of the simplicity and the immateriality of the soul. If this were right, then there would be (inner) experiential evidence for the thesis of immateriality. Priestley objects that one must distinguish carefully between that which is directly given through consciousness and what can be inferred from what is given in consciousness. Priestley's statements about what it is that is immediately given through consciousness vary, however. On the one hand, he writes several times that consciousness is an "internal

feeling" through which we know only of individual thoughts and feelings; that is, of "what passes within our own minds".[26] Like Hume, then, Priestley seems to hold that inner experience gives us access only to "our *ideas*, and the *various affections of our ideas*".[27] According to this, the subject of thought itself is not an object of immediate consciousness or inner experience. Rather, our views of the essence of this subject of thoughts and feelings have to be inferred from what is immediately given through consciousness. Clearly, in this view, the thesis that the subject of thought is a simple and immaterial substance, too, would have to be argued for and cannot be accepted on the basis of a mere appeal to inner consciousness.[28] On the other hand, there are several passages in Priestley which suggest a different view. Here, Priestley seems to maintain, now unlike Hume, that there is a feeling of the *unity* of the self.[29] However, Priestley argues, as we shall see in Section 3, that even such a feeling of unity can provide no evidence for immateriality.

Kant, too, speaks of the empirical consciousness of representations and of its relation to the thought of the unity of the self. Empirical consciousness of representations or empirical apperception is, for Kant, an awareness of mental states. As Kant puts it, "empirical consciousness […] accompanies different representations" and "is by itself dispersed and without relation to the identity of the subject".[30]

> The consciousness of oneself in accordance with the determinations of our state in internal perception is merely empirical, forever variable; it can provide no standing or abiding self in this stream of inner appearances, and is customarily called *inner sense* or *empirical apperception*.[31]

Thus, inner sense or empirical apperception, by itself, does not provide us with a representation of a unitary subject,[32] for "all the determining grounds of my existence that can be encountered in me are representations".[33] In inner sense I do not encounter a unitary self beyond the representations. "For in that which we call the soul, everything is an continual flux". Inner intuition "gives cognition only of a change of determinations". There is "no intuition of the soul itself, as an object" but only "the intuition of its inner state" or its "inner determinations".[34] Kant calls the self "as empirical consciousness" or of inner sense the "psychological self".[35]

These comments on what is given to inner intuition seem to agree with Hume's corresponding remarks, according to which we perceive only a multiplicity of perceptions but never a self beyond the perceptions. Priestley's relation to Hume on this issue is ambivalent, as we saw. On the one hand, like Hume and Kant, he thinks of consciousness as an "internal feeling" through which know only "what passes within our own minds" and which does not concern the subject of thoughts and feelings. In other passages, however, he assumes, unlike Hume and Kant, an immediate (empirical) awareness of the unity of the self.

There is, then, no such thing as an immediate feeling of unity, according to Kant. The unity of consciousness that is required for the possibility of experience must be a matter of the understanding. For Kant, the "necessary unity of apperception"[36] as a condition of "thinking in general"[37] belongs to "the transcendental logic". There is nothing in Priestley that corresponds to this idea. Unlike Kant, Priestley holds (as we saw, at least in some passages) that empirical consciousness can reveal the unity of the self. For Kant, unity, understood as the necessary unity of apperception, needs to be distinguished carefully from empirical apperception, which is "by itself dispersed".[38] The unitary self is a purely

intellectual representation, as it necessarily "occurs in all thinking".[39] It "precedes a priori all *my* determinate thinking".[40] In this sense, the self of pure apperception has a mere "logical significance".[41] Therefore, Kant calls the self of pure apperception the "logical subject of thinking"[42] or simply the "logical self".[43] In short, while Priestley believes (at least according to some passages) that the unity of the self is given to us through an immediate feeling, Kant holds that that unity is not an object of empirical intuition, but a necessity of thought.

3. Unity and simplicity

Priestley distinguishes between the thesis about unity and the thesis about the simplicity of the thinking subject. While he accepts that there is a feeling of the unity of the subject, he argues that the simplicity and immateriality of the soul cannot be inferred from the feeling of unity. Priestley concedes that unity is not just a matter of a (perhaps illusory) feeling, and holds that the thinking subject is in fact a unitary entity. There is a real unity that corresponds to the feeling of unity. Priestley writes that it "can be inferred from this is, that I am only *one person, one sentient and thinking being*, and not two persons, or two sentient or thinking beings".[44] A sentient being, Priestley argues, cannot be divided into two sentient beings, as this would destroy the one "*system of intelligence* which we call *the soul of man*". Again, however, Priestley argues that the simplicity, immateriality and indestructibility of the soul do not follow from this oneness. For it is, of course, possible, Priestley writes, that the soul of man "may be so divided, or dissolved as to become no system of intelligence at all".[45]

Thus, Priestley's position is that the (alleged) simplicity of the thinking subject is neither an object of direct inner experience nor something that can be inferred from our consciousness of representations or from the feeling of unity. While he holds that unity can be an object of direct inner consciousness or a "feeling", statements about the nature of the thinking subject require reason and argument. Priestley believes that reason and argument do not lead to simplicity, however, but, as we shall see, to the idea of the soul as a complex and material entity.

For Kant, too, the "dogmatic spiritualist" is someone who "thinks he perceives immediately in the 'I' […] the unity of a thinking substance" and who assumes a "consciousness of the immaterial nature of our thinking subject".[46] As noted above, for Kant, however, there is no such thing as an immediate empirical consciousness of unity and no "consciousness of the immaterial nature of our thinking subject". Kant argues, further, that the logical unity of the self that is a necessity of thought cannot be used as a basis for inferring the simplicity of the soul, as a substance. Priestley holds that the simplicity of the thinking subject cannot be inferred from the feeling of unity (which, in contrast to Kant, he accepts). Similarly, but in a different systematic context, Kant argues that one cannot infer the simplicity of the thinking substance from the "necessary unity of apperception".[47] It is true that Kant several times characterizes the self of pure apperception or the logical subject of thought as "simple".[48] This simplicity, however, has nothing to do with any simplicity of the soul as a substance. "*I am simple* signifies no more than that this representation *I* encompasses not the least manifoldness within itself".[49] This simplicity is, then, "merely a logical unity" of the subject.[50] In short, "the simplicity of consciousness is thus no acquaintance with the simple nature of our subject".[51] Even the mere

substantiality of the soul, Kant argues, cannot be inferred from the logical simplicity of consciousness. "It is not possible at all through this simple self-consciousness to determine the way I exist, whether as substance or as accident".[52]

Thus, in different ways, both Priestley and Kant reject the inference from unity to the simplicity of the subject. In the eighteenth century, this by-now forgotten similarity between the thought of the materialist and the transcendental philosopher was noted and emphasized. In his *Grundsätze der Logik und Metaphysik* of 1794, Johann Georg Heinrich Feder refers to an argument against spiritualism according to which "only the unity of the logical subject follows from the unity (individuality) of thinking, willing etc., but not the unity of the metaphysical subject or substance".[53] Feder then ascribes this argument, presented in Kantian terminology, to both Priestley and Kant: "Vergl. *Priestley* p. 86 sq. *Kant* Crit. der R.V. 460 ff. 769ff. 812 ff."[54] Feder is very much aware of the general philosophical differences between Kant and Priestley. Like many present-day commentators, however, he thinks (mistakenly) that Kant eventually opts for the immateriality of the soul. At least he does so with the qualification that, for Kant, the doctrine of the immateriality of the soul must not present itself as a "science".[55]

4. Unity and materiality

Priestley deals extensively with a standard objection to materialism, according to which the alleged materiality of the soul is not compatible with the unity of consciousness and the self. On this view, if we assume the soul to be material, then every single material particle of which the soul is composed must be able to exist for itself and to have its own consciousness. Otherwise, so the objection continues, the combination of those particles could not result in an entity that is capable of thought and consciousness. If, however, every material particle had its own distinct consciousness, the objection argues, there would be a multiplicity of conscious entities, which would not constitute a unity and which could not be combined into a unitary entity. If the soul were material, the objection says, the soul would not only have no consciousness of itself as a unitary entity but could also not *be* a unitary entity. As it is obvious, however, that we perceive the soul to be a unitary entity and that it must *be* a unitary entity to perform its operations, the soul cannot be material. This objection to materialism can appeal to the fact that materialists, too, do not deny the unity of the soul and of consciousness. This means, according to the objection, that materialists ascribe a property to the soul that is not compatible with the latter's alleged materiality.

Indeed, we saw that Priestley, too, thinks of the soul or the human mind as of a unitary entity and that he even speaks of a consciousness of this unity. He argues, however, that this is not incompatible with the materiality of the soul, as unity and materiality are not incompatible. Priestley rejects the very premise of the objection, according to which the assumption of the materiality of the soul requires that every single material particle of the soul must have its own distinct consciousness, as unconscious material particles cannot make up a conscious whole.[56] Priestley argues in very general terms against the principle behind the argument of this objection to materialism. This is the principle that we cannot ascribe that to a whole which is not also present in all the parts that make up the whole.[57] Applying this to the special case of the soul or the human mind, he argues that ascribing consciousness to the nervous system as whole does not mean

that we must assume that the individual parts that make up this whole must each have their own distinct consciousness. Rather, he argues, thought and consciousness require a *system* of material parts. For, first, we know from experience that consciousness occurs only in connection with material entities and, second, the subject of consciousness cannot be "simple" because of the complexity of consciousness. This complexity requires a system of interconnected material particles; in other words, a brain or nervous system. Thus, the unity of the self and of consciousness is not at all threatened, according to Priestley, by the materialist view of the soul. Rather, the materialist can provide a better explanation of the unity of consciousness and the soul than the defenders of the immateriality of the soul are able to do.[58]

What is very odd is that some scholars ascribe this objection to materialism that Priestley criticizes and rejects to Kant who, they claim, makes use of this objection in his own "refutation" of materialism, maintaining, moreover, that Kant argues pretty much like a Leibnizian here.[59] In fact, however, like Priestley, Kant argues *against* this objection if, of course, not in the same way as Priestley and without subscribing to materialism in the process. Kant argues that it is not possible to prove that materiality is incompatible with the unity of thought and consciousness and that, therefore, it is not possible to prove on this basis that the thinking subject must be simple and immaterial. Kant begins by reconstructing the immaterialist argument as follows.

> [1] For suppose that the composite were thinking; then every part of it would be a part of the thought, but the parts would first contain the whole thought only when taken together. [2] Now this would be contradictory. For because the representations that are divided among different beings (e.g. the individual words of a verse) never constitute a whole thought (a verse), the thought can never inhere in a composite as such. [3] Thus it is possible only in *one* substance, which is not an aggregate of many, and hence it is absolutely simple.[60]

Kant points out that the "so-called *nervus probandi* of this argument lies in the proposition that many representations have to be contained in the absolute unity of the thinking subject in order to constitute one thought".[61] He argues, however, that one cannot prove this proposition "from *concepts*". It is not an analytic proposition. "There can be no insight into the necessity of presupposing a simple substance for a composite thought".[62]

> For the unity of a thought consisting of many representations is collective, and, as far as mere concepts are concerned, it can be related to the collective unity of the substances cooperating in it (as the movement of a body is the composite movement of all its parts) just as easily as to the absolute unity of the subject.[63]

Second, the proposition cannot be proved "synthetically and fully *a priori* from sheer concepts". This is obvious, Kant notes, when one considers "the ground of the possibility of synthetic propositions *a priori*", as established earlier in the *Critique of Pure Reason*.[64]

Third, it is impossible also to derive that proposition *a posteriori* or "from experience". "For experience gives us cognition of no necessity, to say nothing of the fact that the concept of absolute unity is far above its sphere".[65]

According to Kant, rational psychology, in its attempts to prove simplicity and immateriality**,** concludes the questionable proposition (mistakenly) from pure apperception, namely from the fact "that we demand absolute unity for the subject of a thought only because otherwise it could not be said: 'I think' (the manifold in a representation). For

although the whole of the thought could be divided and distributed among many subjects, the subjective *I* cannot be divided or distributed, and this *I* we presuppose in all thinking".[66] This notion of the unity of apperception or logical simplicity as presupposed in all thinking leads us back to the relation between unity and simplicity discussed above. On this, Kant states, in agreement with Priestley and against rational psychology, that "the simplicity of consciousness is thus no acquaintance with the simple nature of our subject, insofar as this subject is supposed thereby to be distinguished from matter as a composite being".[67]

5. Spiritual matter and a common ground of spirit and matter

As indicated above, materialist positions became more powerful in the course of the eighteenth century, which was partly due to the development of a dynamic concept of matter. On this view, matter is not essentially passive and inert (as immaterialist philosophers of mind had held) but is endowed with active powers. Priestley argues vehemently for such a dynamic concept of matter.[68] Matter is not solid and impenetrable and without powers of its own. Rather, powers such as attraction and repulsion are part of its constitution.[69] As matter thus understood is penetrable, Priestley argues, it is possible to ascribe to it properties and capacities that used to be thought of as genuinely "spiritual".[70] He concedes that his position amounts to a certain "spiritualization" of matter and that it, strictly speaking, negates the very distinction between spirit or mind and matter. He does not see this as a problem, however, and writes:

> If I be asked how upon this hypothesis matter differs from spirit […] I answer that it no way concerns me or true philosophy to maintain that there is any such difference between them as has hitherto been supposed.[71]

Indeed, he thinks it would make no difference if others prefer to call "spirit" what he calls "matter", as this is merely a verbal matter.

> If they chuse to call my matter by the name of *Spirit*, I have no sort of objection. All that I contend for is such a *conjunction of powers in the same thing*, or substance, by whatever term it be denominated.[72]

Obviously, then, Priestley simply negates mind–body (substance-)dualism. He opts for a monism, according to which the mental (or "spiritual") and the physical are appearances of one and the same substrate.[73] Of course, for Priestley, this common substrate of mental and physical properties is an object of possible experience.

Kant, by contrast, distinguishes between mind and matter, at least in the sphere of objects of possible experience (appearances).[74] He does so, however, merely in the sense of "the difference between an object of inner sense and that which is merely thought of as an object of the outer senses".[75] According to Kant, that which appears to us as objects of the outer senses is matter; inner sense, however, "gives, to be sure, no intuition of the soul itself, as an object" but only its "inner determinations".[76] For Kant, as matter and mind are to be conceived of merely as objects of outer and inner sense, respectively, they can be nothing but mere appearances. As Kant says, "external things – namely matter in all its forms and alterations – are nothing but mere appearances".[77,78] Similarly, the thinking subject, "which is the object of this [inner] sense, can only be represented by

its means as appearance". In other words, Kant accepts a kind of "dualism" of mind and matter for the sphere of appearances. He emphasizes, however, that this dualism holds "only in the empirical sense"; that is, only in the sphere of possible objects of outer and inner sense.[79,80] Kant thus reduces the mind–matter divide to a difference between two distinct ways of accessing objects of possible experience, i.e. to outer and inner sense.

For Kant, the dualism of mind and matter makes no sense, however, when considered independently of the sphere of appearances. Rather, he argues that we must think a possibly common, but in any case unknown, ground of both kinds of appearances. Like Priestley, then, Kant speaks of a common substrate of both physical and mental appearances; unlike Priestley, however, he holds that this common substrate ("the transcendental object") is not an object of possible experience. In this "transcendental sense",[81] therefore, the mind–matter divide must be given up.

> The *transcendental object* that grounds both outer appearances and inner intuition is neither matter nor a thinking being in itself, but rather an unknown ground of those appearances that supply us with our empirical concepts of the former as well as the latter.[82]

As far as the common or transcendental ground of both kinds of appearances is concerned, then, the rationalist arguing for immateriality is no better off than the materialist.[83] The essence of the mind, "in the transcendental sense", cannot be explained by any of the rival metaphysical doctrines. The rationalist, as well as the materialist, Kant says, should admit, rather, "that he does not know how to explain the possibility of a thinking nature".[84]

6. Materialism as metaphysics and as method: "physical" and "transcendental hypotheses"

It is important to note that Priestley's position is more modest than some of his radical rhetoric may suggest. In the last analysis, he does not at all claim to prove a thesis about the essence of the soul. We saw above, first, that, for Priestley, the nature of the soul is not accessible to immediate inner consciousness. We saw, second, that, according to Priestley, the (alleged) simplicity and immateriality of the soul or mind cannot be inferred from what is given to consciousness. This applies, no matter whether we think of inner consciousness as relating only to mental states or hold that this consciousness is a feeling of the unity of the self. We can add now, third, that Priestley does not even attempt to prove the materiality of the soul. For Priestley, we can no more establish a demonstration of materiality than we can prove immateriality on the basis of what is given in inner consciousness. Although in places his terminology may suggest that he thinks of the materiality of the soul as a matter of absolute certainty, and although it is clear that he firmly believes that the seat of thinking is the brain, his arguments aim only at showing that the materialist thesis is highly probable. His main argument is, in short, as follows:

> As far as we can judge, the faculty of thinking, and a certain state of the brain, always accompany and correspond to one another; which is the very reason why we believe that any property is inherent in any substance whatsoever.[85]

It is plain that this does not suffice for a demonstration of materiality, and Priestley accepts that. For Priestley, materialism remains a highly probable hypothesis, based on experience, what Kant would call a "physical" hypothesis.[86]

Do Kant's rejections of materialism, saying that the latter is "incapable" of "explaining my existence",[87] amount (a) to a "refutation" of materialism as a metaphysical thesis, and (b) to a commitment to the immaterialist view of the soul? This question indicates that we must distinguish between psychological materialism as a metaphysical position about the nature of thinking substances on the one hand and as a matter of method on the other.[88] Priestley sees materialism clearly in terms of both metaphysics and method. Materialism, to him, claims, first, that the soul is a material substance and, second, that the soul can and should be investigated in terms of an empirical method of observation and experiment. In other words, he thinks of the soul or mind as an object of a physiological psychology.

In evaluating Kant's position on materialism, however, the distinction between metaphysics and method makes a crucial difference. In terms of the question of method, we saw that Kant clearly argues *against* materialism as a position that would be capable of "explaining my existence". In the sphere of appearances, the materialist method would ignore the perspective of inner sense. From a transcendental perspective, Kant points out, the formal unity of apperception cannot be explained by materialist means, i.e. it "allows of no explanation from something composite".[89,90] An explanation from the perspective of materialism alone would, for Kant, reduce the subject to an object of the outer senses. The subject can, of course, be viewed as such an object. Kant distinguishes between "that which we call the soul",[91] insofar as it is accessible empirically through inner sense and can become an object of empirical psychology, and the human being, i.e. the thinking being as an object of the outer senses. "The thinking being (as a human being)", Kant writes, "is at the same time an object of outer sense".[92] Materialism, however, would view the subject exclusively from this perspective. On the other hand, Kant concedes that we must not neglect "the thinking being as a human being". This means that an explanation from the inner perspective of immaterialism would not be acceptable to Kant either. As Kant points out explicitly, "*spiritualism*" is just "as unsatisfactory" as "a way of explaining my existence" as materialism.[93]

Kant's relation to psychological materialism as a metaphysical position is to be evaluated differently, however. It has often been claimed, wrongly in my view, that, in terms of metaphysics (ontology), Kant does not remain as agnostic as it may seem and that he does not only argue against materialism but also argues positively for the immateriality of the soul, or is at least philosophically "committed" to the thesis about immateriality.[94]

We noted above that, for Kant, the common ground of mental and physical properties is not and cannot be an object of possible experience.[95] Therefore, he argues that, "in a transcendental sense", neither dualism "nor the pneumatism that is opposed to it on the one side, nor the materialism on the other side, have the least ground".[96] The problem of all metaphysical speculations, no matter of what kind, consists in this that they take appearances for things in themselves and so are unable to resolve the disputes about the nature of the soul.

> If a psychologist takes appearances for things in themselves, then as a materialist he may take up matter into his doctrine, or as a spiritualist he may take up merely thinking beings (namely, according to the form of our inner sense) as the single and sole thing existing in itself, or as a dualist he may take up both; yet through misunderstanding he will always be confined to sophistical reasonings about the way in which that which is no thing in itself, but only the appearance of a thing in general, might exist in itself.[97]

The dualist (who assumes the immateriality of the soul), but also the spiritualist and the materialist, should be "admitting, as would be better to do, that he does not know how to explain the possibility of a thinking nature".[98] It simply makes no sense to speculate (via "sophistical reasonings") about how the soul might exist in itself. "For if I wanted only to ask", Kant writes, "whether the soul is not in itself of a spiritual nature, this question would have no sense at all".[99] Therefore, Kant argues, "it will not occur to us to seek information about what the objects of our senses may be in themselves, i.e. apart from any relation to the senses".[100] Kant, then, remains consistently agnostic concerning the noumenal ground of the appearances of inner sense. Therefore, not unlike Priestley, Kant regards materialism, spiritualism and dualism as mere hypotheses. Unlike Priestley, however, he does not think of them as "physical" but as "transcendental hypotheses".[101] If "the assertions of reason", such as those about "the incorporeal unity of the soul […] are not to count as hypotheses", Kant notes, "then they are not even an issue".[102]

Thus, in terms of metaphysics, Kant neither commits himself "ontologically" to the immateriality of the soul nor does he attempt to show that the mind "in the noumenal perspective" must be immaterial. He does not attempt to prove that materialism is false, i.e. to "refute" it as a metaphysical position. He is arguing, rather, that, in terms of metaphysics, or "in the noumenal perspective", one must remain agnostic regarding psychological materialism and its rival positions that support the immateriality of the soul (dualism, spiritualism).

Notes

1. Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, B 420.
2. Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, is cited according to the page numbers in the first edition of 1781 ("A") and/or the second edition of 1787 ("B"). Translations are from P. Guyer and A. Wood, eds., *Kant's Critique of Pure Reason*. Kant's other writings are cited according to the volume and page number in Kant, *Gesammelte Schriften*, abbreviated AA (for "Akademieausgabe").
3. Recently, Paola Rumore and Falk Wunderlich have examined eighteenth-century German materialism in considerable detail, without, however, focusing on its relation to Kant. See Rumore, "Kant's Understanding of the Enlightenment with Reference to his Refutation of Materialism"; Wunderlich, "Empirismus und Materialismus an der Göttinger Georgia Augusta – Radikalaufklärung im Hörsaal?"; Wunderlich, "Materialism in late Enlightenment Germany."
4. For Kant's references to Diderot, see his letters in AA 10: 27 and AA 13: 619.
5. Martin Durner provides a very useful comparison of Priestley's and Kant's conceptions of matter, which is at least indirectly relevant to this paper. See Durner, "'Immateriality of Matter'. Theorien der Materie bei Priestley, Kant und Schopenhauer".
6. Ameriks, *Kant's Theory of Mind*, viii–xxxvi, 25–83, 303–21; Allison, "Kant's Refutation of Materialism"; Rosas, *Kants idealistische Reduktion*, 51–107; Cosmus, "Über einen gewissen Vorzug des Materialismus in Kants kritischer Philosophie"; Watkins, "Kant on Materialism".
7. On this, see Wolfe, "Diderot and Materialist Theories of the Self", 76. Paola Rumore has noted that the expression "psychological materialism" has its origin in Alexander Baumgarten; Rumore, "La réception matérialiste de Spinoza et la littérature clandestine à l'âge de la Frühaufklärung", 51. The expression is also used by Georg Friedrich Meier, who distinguishes between cosmological, theological and psychological materialism. See Meier, *Metaphysik*, § 361; Rumore, "Kant's Understanding of the Enlightenment", 85. Kant makes use of this terminology in AA 06: 128.

8. On the question of the possible sources for Kant's knowledge of Priestley, see also Durner, "'Immateriality of Matter'", 304–7.
9. Kant's review of Schulz, *Versuch einer Anleitung zur Sittenlehre für alle Menschen* (1783), abbr. RezSchulz (AA 08: 12).
10. For the lectures, see, for example, V-Met/Volckmann, AA 28: 440. See also V-Met-K3/Arnoldt, AA 28: 767; V-Met/Mron, AA 29: 911.
11. Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, A 745–6/B 773–4.
12. A 745/B 773.
13. The Guyer/Wood edition misleadingly translates Kant's "transzendenten Spekulation" as "transcendental speculation".
14. A 745–6/B 773–4.
15. A 746/B 774.
16. B 71.
17. Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*, AA 05: 98.
18. Kant, RezSchulz, AA 08: 12.
19. Reid, *On the Animate Creation*, 145.
20. Priestley, *Disquisitions Relating to Matter and Spirit*. Also relevant are Priestley, *The Doctrine of Philosophical Necessity Illustrated*; Priestley, *A Free Discussion of the Doctrine of Materialism and Philosophical Necessity, In a Correspondence between Dr. Price and Dr. Priestley*.
21. Priestley, *Briefe an einen philosophischen Zweifler*, Leipzig 1782. Kant was familiar with this work. In his *Prolegomena* of 1783, he refers to Priestley's critique of Hume's analysis of causality in Priestley's *Briefe* (AA 04: 258).
22. Priestley's, *Disquisitions*, was reviewed in *Göttingische Anzeigen von Gelehrten Sachen* (1779), vol. 1, *Zugabe*, 97–108. For more early German reviews of Priestley, see Wunderlich, "Empirismus und Materialismus", 77–8; Durner, "'Immateriality of Matter'", 305–6.
23. Hißmann, *Magazin für die Philosophie und ihre Geschichte*, vol. 1, 7–60. The essays first appeared under the title *Introductory Essays*. See Priestley, *Hartley's Theory of the Human Mind*, ix–li. This work was reviewed in *Göttingische Anzeigen von Gelehrten Sachen* (1776), 249–53.
24. See Hißmann, *Psychologische Versuche, ein Beytrag zur esoterischen Logik*.
25. Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, A 745/B 773.
26. Priestley, *Illustrations of Some Particulars in the Disquisitions on Matter and Spirit*, 229–320, 280.
27. Priestley, *Illustrations*, 283; Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, I.iv.6. On this, see Thiel, *The Early Modern Subject. Self-consciousness and Personal Identity from Descartes to Hume*, 407–30.
28. "What we *feel*, and what we *do* we may be said to know by intuition; but what we *are* we know only by deduction, or inference from intuitive observations" (Priestley, *Illustrations*, 283).
29. Priestley speaks of "a feeling or perception of the *unity of my nature* or *being*" (Priestley, *Disquisitions*, 86).
30. Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, B 133.
31. A 107.
32. This is, of course, compatible with the view that it is possible to develop an idea or representation of the empirical self as unitary by other means.
33. Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, B XXXIX.
34. B 37.
35. Kant, AA 20: 270.
36. Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, B 135.
37. B 423.
38. B 132–3; A 353.
39. A 342/B 400.
40. B 134.
41. A 350.
42. A 350.

43. Kant, AA 20: 270.
44. Priestley comments on the feeling of unity that "all that can be inferred from this is, that I am only *one person*, *one sentient and thinking being*, and not two persons, or two sentient or thinking beings" (Priestley, *Disquisitions*, 86).
45. Priestley, *Disquisitions*, 87.
46. Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, A 690/B 718.
47. B 135.
48. B 135, 404, 419, 420.
49. A 355.
50. A 355.
51. A 360.
52. B 420.
53. Heinrich Feder, *Grundsätze der Logik und Metaphysik*, 242.
54. Feder, *Grundsätze*, 243. Feder's reference to Priestley obviously relates to the above cited passages in Priestley, *Disquisitions*, 86–7.
55. Feder, *Grundsätze*, 243.
56. Priestley, *Disquisitions*, 87.
57. "But surely there may be a separate unity of the whole nervous system, as well as of one atom; and if the perception that we call consciousness or that of any other complex idea, necessarily consists in, or depends upon, a very complex vibration, it cannot possibly belong to a single atom, but must belong to a vibrating system of some extent" (Priestley, *Disquisitions*, 87).
58. Priestley, *Disquisitions*, 87.
59. See Ameriks, *Kant's Theory of Mind*, 38; Allison, "Kants Refutation of Materialism", 96–8.
60. Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, A 352.
61. A 352.
62. A 353.
63. A 353.
64. A 353.
65. A 353.
66. A 354.
67. A 360.
68. On this, see the detailed comments in Durner, "'Immateriality of Matter'", 299–304.
69. Priestley, *Disquisitons*, 1–7.
70. "Since the only reason why the principle of thought or sensation has been imagined to be incompatible with matter goes upon the supposition of impenetrability being the essential property of it, […] the whole argument for an immaterial thinking principle in man, on this new supposition, falls to the ground; matter […] being no more incompatible with sensation and thought than the substance which without knowing anything farther about it, we have been used to call immaterial" (Priestley, *Disquisitions*, 18).
71. Priestley, *Disquisitions*, 17.
72. Priestley, *A Free Discussion*, 23.
73. Durner, "'Immateriality of Matter'", 302–3.
74. In Kant, *Metaphysische Anfangsgründe der Naturwissenschaft* (MAN), Kant seems to work with a conception of matter that is similar to Priestley's. This is not crucial to our concern in this paper, however. For Kant's conception of matter in comparison with Priestley's, see Durner, "'Immateriality of Matter'", 308–14.
75. MAN, AA 04: 543.
76. Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, B 37.
77. A 371–2.
78. The Guyer/Wood translation has "representations" instead of "appearances" for Kant's "Erscheinungen" here.
79. A 379.
80. This means also that Kant would not opt for materialism as a way of "explaining my existence" in the sphere of appearances, as is sometimes maintained (Rosas, *Kants idealistische*

Reduktion, 105–6; Cosmus, "Über einen gewissen Vorzug", 154–5). According to Kant, the materialist method would view the self solely as an object of the outer senses, ignoring the self as an object of inner sense. Similarly, of course, Kant would reject the view that, in the sphere of appearances, the self should be viewed solely as an object of inner sense.

81. A 379.
82. A 379–80.
83. B 417fn–418fn.
84. B 418 fn.
85. Priestley, *Disquisitions*, 27.
86. Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, A 772/B 800.
87. B 420.
88. For the distinction between materialism as metaphysics and as a method, see Pauen, "Vom Streit über die Seelenfrage bis zur Erklärungslücke. Wissenschaftlicher Materialismus und die Philosophie der Naturforscher im Vergleich mit dem Physikalismus der Gegenwart". See also Falk Wunderlich, who refers to Pauen in his article, "Johann Georg Sulzers Wiederlegung des Materialismus und die Materietheorien der Zeit", 39.
89. Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, B 417.
90. Moreover, Kant argues that, in the context of morality, materialism would not be able to do justice to the notion of personhood, as it would reduce the latter to a "psychological concept" (Kant, *Prolegomena*, AA 04: 363).
91. B 37.
92. B 415.
93. B 420.
94. Ameriks, *Kant's Theory of Mind*, 312; Watkins, "Kant and Materialism", 1035; Rosas, *Kants idealistische Reduktion*, 105. Rosas argues that Kant is a materialist "from the phenomenal perspective", but an immaterialist "from the noumenal perspective". Both parts of this statement are problematic. For Kant's alleged phenomenal materialism, see Section 5.
95. Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, B 417–18.
96. A 379.
97. A 380.
98. B 418–19.
99. B 712.
100. A 380.
101. A 771–2/B 799–800.
102. A 775/B 803.

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