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MAKING KANT'S EMPIRICAL REALISM POSSIBLE

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SIMON ROSS GUROFSKY

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“[...] transcendental idealism is realism in an absolute sense.”

–Immanuel Kant, *Opus postumum*, 21:99

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When I try to explain what I get out of studying Kant, I often resort to aesthetic considerations. This will seem bizarre to many, but I find profound beauty in the Critical philosophy. The best way I can describe the phenomenon is that to read Kant's philosophy is to feel the earth move beneath my feet. I had that sensation, though I would not have been able to put it that way, from my first encounter with Kant, in a first-year undergraduate survey of the history of philosophy taught by Richard Manning in 2005-06. Thus long before I was in a position to have anything like the thoughts that I agreed with Kant or accepted his ultimate conclusions, or even just that I by and large understood what he was trying to tell me (all things I should perhaps still be cautious about saying), I had a firm faith that time spent with his philosophy would always reward, which, to date, has proven well placed. This dissertation is my attempt to articulate whatever it is that spoke to me way back in 2006 and has continued to do so ever since. If it helps another to be moved by Kant's philosophy as I am, *dayenu!*

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As I mentioned above, I first met Andrew Brook during my undergraduate studies, when he taught an upper-year seminar on the first *Critique*. My final paper for that class was also the writing sample that I submitted to doctoral programs and earned me my spot at Chicago. Six or so years later, I presented a version of the first chapter of this dissertation as a talk at Carleton. Andrew generously spent a couple hours of his time giving me detailed comments, and although it was clear that we read Kant quite differently, and he, indeed, quite differently from the prevailing trends at Chicago, for that very reason his comments were especially helpful. I decided then to invite him to join the committee, and he was consistently generous with his time and attention throughout the remainder of the dissertation process.

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## Introduction

“The transcendental idealist”, Kant instructs us, “can be an empirical realist” (A370). But how is that possible?

### 1. Historical Background: The Dialectic and the Current State of Play

#### 1.1. Subjective/Empirical Idealism, Things in Themselves, and Strawson

At one time, the consensus among Anglo-American Kant-commentators was that it is not possible. Perhaps that is not surprising; after all, ‘realism’ and ‘idealism’ look like contraries if not outright contradictories, and it is not obvious what work the modifiers ‘transcendental’ and ‘empirical’ can do to get around that. But beyond that, most thought that Kant’s transcendental idealism could not amount to a genuine realism<sup>1</sup> about empirical things, or the objects of possible experience, for two dialectically<sup>2</sup> interpenetrating reasons.

First, Kant’s distinction—between, on the one hand, empirical things as ‘mere appearances’ and, on the other, ‘things in themselves’ as that which causes, grounds, conditions, or is in any other way ‘behind’ the appearances—suggested to many commentators that things in themselves are *the real things* and that, correspondingly, the mere appearances that experience gives us are somehow less-than-real. And second, Kant seemed to many to endorse epistemological doctrines that look straightforwardly subjectively or psychologically idealistic—in Kant’s terms, empirically idealistic, by which is meant that they entail denial of or doubt about

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<sup>1</sup> There is, of course, a lot of room to dispute what ‘realism’ means or what has to be true of a given realism for it to be ‘genuine’. For now I rely only on the reader’s intuitive sense of what McDowell calls “the realism of common sense”, my idea being that common-sense realism already places significant constraints on what other doctrines could turn out to be compatible with it (McDowell 2009b, 141). See chapter one for an elucidation of what realism about empirical things must amount to at a minimum.

<sup>2</sup> Throughout, when ‘dialectic’ and ‘dialectical’ appear uncapitalized, I am using the word in its ordinary, non-Kantian sense. When I mean to refer to a section of one of the *Critiques* thus titled or to use ‘dialectic’ and ‘dialectical’ in the special sense at issue in those sections, I write ‘Dialectic’ and ‘Dialectical’.

the thesis that “Outer perception directly proves an actuality in space” (A376-7).<sup>3</sup> Some took Kant to accept a version of the early modern ‘Way of Ideas’ thesis, according to which we are only ever directly aware of psychologically ‘inner’ mental items—ideas, impressions, sensations, notions, or what have you—and awareness of what is not merely ‘in the mind’ must be by way of *inference from* such items or *construction out of* such items. But even many of those who did not find that very commitment in Kant nevertheless held that for him, some or all of the constitutive conditions for the possibility of the human presentational capacity—the *forms* of that capacity—are, somehow or other, *merely subjective*. By that was meant that those conditions were something like ‘projections’ or ‘impositions’,<sup>4</sup> onto a reality that—in itself—may not really be as we, through our merely subjective conditions of presentation, are compelled to present it.

Those two dialectically interpenetrating reasons are at first glance conceptually isolable. That things in themselves are *the most real things* or *the only real things* and consequently that mere empirical things are at a lower level of ‘reality’ is a metaphysical thesis; that all we can be aware of is what we merely subjectively project or construct or even just mere mental items as such is an epistemological thesis. Nevertheless, many have regarded the metaphysical thesis as supportive of the epistemological for understandable reasons. For if things in themselves are what there *really* is, and empirical things are something lesser; and if, meanwhile, part of the explanation for why we can make epistemic contact with empirical things but not with things in themselves is that the former but not the latter are somehow conditioned by the human capacity for presentation, so that availability to that capacity is ‘built into’ empirical things; then on a straightforward interpretation of the Kantian position, the explanation of the *metaphysical* fact, if

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<sup>3</sup> For the purposes of this introduction, I take for granted, with Strawson among others (see below), that empirical idealism is (perhaps a form of) subjective idealism. I substantiate that claim of identity in chapter two.

<sup>4</sup> I borrow the language of ‘imposition’ from Robert Pippin (in conversation, though see, e.g., Pippin 2013).

it is one, that empirical things are ‘less real’ than things in themselves is that empirical things are—in some respect or other, and to this or that extent, and subject to many other *ad hoc* qualifications and adjustments—*creatures of the human presentational capacity*: They are empirically ideal.

A notable exponent of the thought that the metaphysics of things in themselves and some kind of subjective or psychological idealism go together is P. F. Strawson. Strawson, whose 1966 *The Bounds of Sense* more than any other work made Kant ‘safe’ for analytic philosophers, takes as his task in that book to separate the wheat from the chaff of Kant’s theoretical philosophy. And on the side of the chaff, Strawson places both Kant’s alleged metaphysics of things in themselves and his alleged subjective idealism.

Strawson’s way of understanding Kant’s route to a subjective idealism has Kant beginning by modeling the concept of a capacity for presentation on a sense organ. Sense organs require for their functioning an affection by an object, and their physiological constitution no doubt bears on the manner in which they make the object available to us. Thus, e.g., we account for some people’s colour-blindness, others’ statistically normal colour vision, and still others’ ability to see many more colours than the average person in terms of physiological facts about their respective eyes. As Strawson reads Kant, Kant draws “a certain misleading analogy” between that model and the very idea of a capacity for presentation,<sup>5</sup> according to which the capacity can only present an object insofar as the object is presented in accordance with “our own cognitive constitution”.<sup>6</sup>

Strawson does not immediately indicate how exactly he takes the analogy to be misleading. One possibility that fits his subsequent argument reasonably well is that it is not at

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<sup>5</sup> Strawson 1966, 15.

<sup>6</sup> Strawson 1966, 16.

all obvious that a sense organ is *itself* a capacity to present rather than merely an enabling condition of a capacity to present, where such a condition would belong to the conceptual order of mindedness rather than to that of physiology. (That is a way of saying that the analogy involves a category-mistake.)

But in any case, the misleading analogy is a single philosophical gesture whose result, according to Strawson, is at once both Kant's putative subjective idealism and his putative metaphysics of experience-transcendent things in themselves, the conjunction of which is "transcendental idealism":

The natural world as we know it, the whole content of our experience, is thoroughly conditioned by the features just referred to [i.e., categories and forms of intuition]: our experience is essentially experience of a spatio-temporal world of law-governed objects conceived of as distinct from our temporally successive experiences of them. But all these limiting features simply represent ways in which things must appear in the experience of beings constituted as we are, with such a sensibility and such an understanding as ours. Of things as they are in themselves as opposed to these appearances of them, we have, and can have, no knowledge whatever; for knowledge is possible only of what can be experienced, and nothing can be experienced except as subjected to the forms imposed by our sensibility and understanding.<sup>7</sup>

And a little later, Strawson associates with transcendental idealism a "picture of the receiving and ordering apparatus of the mind producing Nature as we know it out of the unknowable reality of things as they are in themselves".<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Strawson 1966, 21.

<sup>8</sup> Strawson 1966, 22. Note that Strawson there objects to a feature of Kant's position that is *prima facie* separable from the more flatfooted claim that all we can be aware of is our mental items, which is (for our purposes, anyway) approximable to Berkeley's position and a variant of the 'Way of Ideas' thesis mentioned above. That Strawson goes on to say that Kant is nevertheless more Berkeleian than he would like to admit (see just below) suggests that Strawson regards a 'projective' or 'impositionist' understanding of the *form* of the human capacity for presentation—an understanding on which empirical things appear to us to be spatial *because* we humans present things spatially and not vice versa—as ultimately leaving us with a position that is not different in kind but only in degree or minor detail from that according to which all we can be aware of is our mental items: Both positions are subjective idealism. I accept that thought and elaborate on it in chapter one.

No surprise, then, that Strawson regards Kant's claim to be an empirical realist with skepticism<sup>9</sup> and that notwithstanding Kant's putative realism about things in themselves, Strawson takes "Kant, as transcendental idealist, [to be] closer to Berkeley than he acknowledges."<sup>10</sup> For Strawson, the differences Kant presses between the transcendental idealism that he endorses and the empirical idealism that he rejects do not suffice for the transcendental idealist to declare themselves an empirical realist with a straight face.

### 1.2. Allison's Kant: Neither Empirical Idealist nor Realist about Things in Themselves

Suppose, however, that one accepted the dialectical inseparability of (a) a commitment to the most fundamental reality comprising experience-transcendent things in themselves from (b) a commitment to subjective, i.e., empirical idealism—but then that one wanted to reject an empirically idealistic reading of Kant's Critical philosophy. In that case, one would have to reject Kant's putative realism about things in themselves as well. And thus the pendulum swings to so-called 'deflationary' Kant-interpreters, among whom the 800-pound gorilla is clearly Henry Allison with his two editions of *Kant's Transcendental Idealism*<sup>11</sup> (though, of course, Allison is preceded in the twentieth century by Graham Bird<sup>12</sup> and Gerold Prauss<sup>13</sup> and heavily influenced by the latter).

For Allison, the transcendental idealist can indeed be an empirical realist. For first, the appearance/thing in itself distinction is merely 'methodological' rather than 'metaphysical'. Things in themselves turn out to be the very same things as empirical things, and the terms

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<sup>9</sup> Strawson 1966, 21.

<sup>10</sup> Strawson 1966, 22.

<sup>11</sup> 1983 and 2004.

<sup>12</sup> 1973.

<sup>13</sup> 1971 and 1974.

‘empirical thing’ and ‘thing in itself’ correspond merely to two different ways of considering the very same given thing,<sup>14</sup> namely 1) in its conformity to the conditions under which it is presentable by us in experience and 2) in abstraction from its conformity to those conditions. The two modes of consideration are licensed only for certain methodological or reflective purposes and do not correspond to a substantive distinction *in the thing* between the empirical and the in-itself. Hence things in themselves can be no more real than the empirical things that they in fact are.<sup>15</sup> And second, for Allison, the concept of a constitutive condition of the human presentational capacity, to which I just referred in distinguishing ways of considering things, is the concept specifically of an *epistemic* condition. Hence such a condition does not merely permit *presentation* of things but *knowledge* of them (or such, at any rate, is Allison’s aspiration).<sup>16</sup> If the forms of intuition (space and time), say, are specifically epistemic conditions, then that is just to say that insofar as we empirically present things spatio-temporally, we have *knowledge* of spatio-temporal things.

So if empirical things are no less real than things in themselves and in presenting them through our presentational capacity we present them in accordance with specifically epistemic conditions, then perhaps Kant can be an empirical realist after all.

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<sup>14</sup> There are worries in the vicinity of that claim about equinumerosity of empirical things and things in themselves, but they do not matter for the present purpose.

<sup>15</sup> Allison 2004, 57.

<sup>16</sup> Allison 2004, 11-19. I am being cavalier here with respect to the knowledge [*Wissen*]/cognition [*Erkenntnis*] distinction. The distinction receives a proper discussion in chapter four.

### 1.3. A New Route to Empirical Realism: The Metaphysics of Things in Themselves?

At such a high level of abstraction, and granting that Allison's interpretation can raise a question about how Kant can be any sort of idealist at all,<sup>17</sup> that interpretation can look very attractive, particularly to a reader who is antecedently unsympathetic to revisionary metaphysics<sup>18</sup> or to its transcendent-metaphysical or subjective-idealist guises. But in the last fifteen or twenty years, skepticism has emerged about a shared assumption of Strawson and Allison, namely that subjective or empirical idealism, on the one hand, and a metaphysics of experience-transcendent things in themselves, on the other, stand or fall together. On the contrary: Perhaps *accepting* such a metaphysics is the only way to *reject* subjective idealism and respect empirical realism.

That is the position of Rae Langton<sup>19</sup> and Lucy Allais,<sup>20</sup> among others,<sup>21</sup> who correctly note that Allison inadvertently opens conceptual space for their positions. As I mentioned above, Allison's methodological interpretation of the appearance/thing in itself distinction is framed in opposition to a *metaphysical* interpretation of that distinction. But Allison assumes that a metaphysical interpretation of the distinction is equivalent to a *two-object* interpretation—that is, to an interpretation on which the empirical thing and the thing in itself are two numerically

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<sup>17</sup> The difficulty being that idealism is usually understood to be some sort of mind-dependence thesis about the objects of our awareness, and part of Allison's non-subjectively idealistic strategy involves minimizing any commitment to a mind-dependence thesis. That is part of the bite of Guyer's criticism of Allison that Allison's understanding of Kant's transcendental idealism is "anodyne" (Guyer 1987, 336 and ff.) As the reader will see, the argument of this dissertation culminates in a conception of Kant's transcendental idealism that, although not Allison's, raises a similar question and if anything with even greater force. I describe that conception and my answer to the question in chapter eight.

<sup>18</sup> A term of Strawson's (1959, 9). Whereas a descriptive metaphysics aims to describe to us "the actual structure of our thought about the world" or, as I should like to say, of the world itself, revisionary metaphysics aims to convince us to change that structure or, in other words, to understand the world to be quite different from what we had antecedently taken it to be.

<sup>19</sup> In her 1998.

<sup>20</sup> In her 2015.

<sup>21</sup> These days there are numerous transcendent-metaphysically inclined but empirically realist readers of the first *Critique*. An important foundation was almost single-handedly laid for them over several decades by Karl Ameriks (as documented in his 2000, 2003, 2006, and 2012a).

distinct things. Thus he glosses his methodological interpretation of the distinction as not a two-object but a two-*aspect* interpretation, and for him, to go two-aspect is *per se* to go methodological.<sup>22</sup> But that neglects the possibility of a *metaphysical two-aspect* understanding of the appearance/thing in itself distinction and of transcendental idealism more generally. What if things in themselves and empirical things are the very same things not because the terms ‘empirical thing’ and ‘thing in itself’ correspond to two different *ways of considering* one given thing but because they correspond to two different *sets of properties* of that given thing, one empirically knowable by us humans and the other not? That is recognizably two-aspectism, yet it is metaphysical rather than methodological.<sup>23</sup>

So far that is just a conceptual possibility. But it begins to get serious traction when we further note that instabilities at key moments in Allison’s position positively encourage it. For instance, when he distinguishes an epistemic condition as “a necessary condition for *the representation of objects*” from an ontological condition by describing the latter as “a condition of the possibility of the *existence* of things”,<sup>24</sup> that seems to suggest that whatever epistemic conditions are, they are specifically *not* ontological—they do not characterize things *as they exist*, merely *as we present them*.<sup>25</sup> But if that is right, then ontological conditions, not ‘epistemic’ ones, look like what we would need to take us beyond subjective idealism to genuine *knowledge* even of merely empirical things—to say nothing of things in themselves—and thence to genuine empirical realism.

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<sup>22</sup> Allison 1987.

<sup>23</sup> Here I flag that I do not directly address current metaphysical two-object readings in this dissertation (e.g., Stang 2014). But the force of my arguments against metaphysical two-aspect readings (in chapters one, two, four, and five) is all the stronger against two-object readings.

<sup>24</sup> Allison 2004, 11; emphases mine.

<sup>25</sup> Note that I there re-render Allison’s talk of ‘representation’ in terms of what we ‘present’. More on my preference for the language of ‘presentation’ over that of ‘representation’ in section 3 below.



And now the proposals of Langton and Allais can seem to be just what is needed. For as they read Kant, no distinction between epistemic and ontological conditions need be drawn, and consequently no retreat need be made to the former and, as it turns out, weaker sort of condition. While retaining a two-aspect interpretation of the appearance/thing in itself distinction, they can insist that the two aspects of a given thing consist in two metaphysically distinct sets of properties that both equally objectively characterize that thing. It is just that one aspect, the empirical, is within the reach of the human presentational capacity, while the other aspect, the in-itself, lies beyond that reach. What is more, neither aspect need be construed as more or less real than the other, and neither need be accounted for in terms of being merely how we present the thing rather than how it really is. There is just an aspect we happen to be able to be aware of—the thing’s empirical aspect—and another aspect that we happen not to be able to be aware of—the thing’s in-itself aspect.<sup>26</sup>

Isn’t that a superior way of respecting empirical realism to Allison’s?

#### 1.4. A Fundamental Objection for Allison and the Metaphysical Readers: The Bruteness of the Forms of Sensibility

And meanwhile, from an angle much less friendly to experience-transcendent metaphysics than Langton and Allais’s, Robert Pippin<sup>27</sup> and John McDowell<sup>28</sup> have raised a fundamental worry about Kant’s position along Hegelian lines. If the worry is sound, then Kant simply cannot respect empirical realism without altering his position so fundamentally that it is no longer recognizably Kantian.

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<sup>26</sup> Langton and Allais too face a burden of explaining how Kant’s transcendental idealism as they understand it can count as an idealism at all (see note 17 above). I shall have more to say about Allais’s strategy in chapter eight.

<sup>27</sup> In his 2005b, among others.

<sup>28</sup> In his 2009c, among others.

Pippin and McDowell object to Kant's indulgence in the possibility (exactly what sort of possibility is somewhat unclear, and I deliberately leave it vague for now) of forms of sensible intuition other than space and time. That possibility follows from a pretty fundamental Kantian commitment, namely his 'two-stem' account of the human presentational capacity. According to that account, even if the human presentational capacity is an *essential* unity, it is a unity containing genuine *complexity*. For it does not disallow the conceptual distinguishability of intellect (one stem), as power of thinking and explaining, from sensibility (the other stem), as power to be given things to think and explain. And that conceptual distinguishability entails that there is no relation of logical implication between the bare thought of a finite intellect and any particular forms of intuition that a sensibility united to that intellect would have, leading Kant to say, for instance, that "we cannot decide [...] that any finite thinking being must necessarily agree with man" in respect of spatio-temporality of sensibility (B72).

But that in turn raises a worry about the 'bruteness' or non-rationally-imposed character of any particular forms of intuition, i.e., a worry that they are arbitrary and contingent relative to the very idea of a capacity for knowledge. If they are thus arbitrary and contingent and yet they make a constitutive contribution to my capacity to present a world, then it looks like in 'knowing' empirically, the 'reality' that I present does not appear to me as it does *because that is how it in fact is* but rather *because I contingently happen to present in the way that I do*. That is, it looks like I am once again stuck with subjective idealism and blocked from empirical realism. So if Pippin and McDowell are correct, Kant can only attain empirical realism at the expense of the two-stem doctrine and with it the Critical philosophy.

Could Allison's Kant defend himself against that objection? His best bet would be to appeal to what Allison has dubbed *anthropocentrism*: the view that the only appropriate

standpoint from which to evaluate whether human knowledge counts as knowledge is from *within* the standpoint of that very knowledge. If we are entitled to anthropocentrism, then there is no norm for what counts as knowing that the human knower can reasonably take up besides the very one that is in fact expressed in the ways that humans generally go about knowing. And to that latter norm belong space and time as forms of sensibility.

But part of the force of the Pippin-McDowell bruteness objection is that for an appeal to anthropocentrism to be compelling, we would *first* need to understand how such an appeal can be *rational* rather than itself symptomatic of bruteness—of our simultaneous awareness that our spatio-temporal forms of intuition are necessary for us and that we *cannot* explain that necessity in terms of an epistemic capacity's requiring just those forms of intuition to count as genuinely epistemic at all. Yet it is not obvious that Allison's anthropocentrism can be an overcoming of bruteness rather than a concession to it.

And although nowadays the momentum in Kant-interpretation, at least among interpreters who purport to find in Kant an internally consistent and compelling position,<sup>29</sup> is clearly behind the transcendent-metaphysically inclined readers, they look no better placed to respond to the bruteness objection than is Allison. For although they can certainly *stipulate* on Kant's behalf that experience permits us to know things (or at any rate, their empirically available aspects) as they independently exist and not merely as we contingently happen to present them, that rather presupposes than explains how the restriction that space and time places on our capacity to present is a rational and hence knowledge-enabling one. And unless we can indeed explain the latter, we have not made empirical realism possible. Couple that with the distinctive new problems that the transcendent-metaphysical line of interpretation generates for

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<sup>29</sup> That is to set aside interpreters like Guyer (1987), with his patchwork-theoretic approach, and James Van Cleve (1999).

itself—most obviously, the *prima facie* implausibility that Kant could consistently endorse an experience-transcendent metaphysics and the consequent need to discover in Kant or innovate on his behalf distinctions, qualifications, hypotheses, or even unargued assumptions that would minimize the inconsistency—and it can begin to look like that line of interpretation is destined for the same fate as Allison’s.

## 2. Kant’s Strategy for Making Empirical Realism Possible: A New Proposal

### 2.1. The Basic Strategy

The present state of play among readers of Kant, then, is that prospects for showing that a genuine realism about empirical things is possible along recognizably Kantian lines remain somewhat dim.<sup>30</sup> Yet all parties agree that Kant’s empirical realism is an essential part of his view.<sup>31</sup> And vindicating his entitlement to that realism looks like a necessity for realizing the promise of that view, a powerful reason to accept it without which it is significantly less attractive.<sup>32</sup>

Against the background of that philosophical impasse, I propose a novel strategy for excavating a genuine empirical realism from Kant’s Critical philosophy consistently with the

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<sup>30</sup> I have omitted a couple of important contributions from my narrative, those of Robert Hanna (2001 and 2006) and Paul Abela (2002). I shall have more to say about Abela in particular in chapters two and six. Here I note only the following two points: First, Hanna commits himself to a variation of the ‘information processing’ reading of Kant’s transcendental idealism that I describe below, which I do not believe can be rescued from a slide into subjective idealism (2001, 32). And like Allison, he appeals to anthropocentrism without apparent sensitivity to the bruteness worry (89-92). And second, while Abela’s reading is in many ways close in spirit to my own, his textual case for that reading is pretty underdeveloped, and I take more seriously the burden of reconciling a genuine empirical realism with Kant’s other commitments (most notably his transcendental idealism and his claims about experience-transcendent things) than Abela seems to.

<sup>31</sup> See Strawson 1966, 256-63; Allison 2004, 45-9; Langton 1998, 212-18; Allais 2015, 207-31; Ameriks 2012c, 100-19; Pippin 2005c, 33, more extensively discussed in his 1983; McDowell 2009d, 189-94.

<sup>32</sup> Very few are prepared baldly to renounce the attractions of some sort of realist commitment about empirical things. Even Berkeley felt compelled to argue that in insisting that empirical things are mere ideas, that “by no means detracts from the existence or reality” of them (Berkeley 2008, 96). At least at first glance, Berkeley has an even tougher row to hoe to entitle himself to empirical realism than Kant does.

Critical Kant's other major philosophical commitments. Almost every feature of the strategy is determined by its opening gambit: a reversal of conventional interpretive priorities between 'transcendental idealism' and 'empirical realism'.

The conventional interpretive priority places Kant's forbiddingly complex transcendental idealism before his empirical realism. That is natural enough. For the Critical philosophy is a system, and the implications for that system of one's take on transcendental idealism are enormous. Is transcendental idealism, say, a theory of *information processing*? On that interpretation, data of some sort are worked up into representations as of a world outside me. (In keeping with the basis of the 'information processing' model in computer science, I deliberately say 'representations' rather than 'presentations' there to indicate that on this view, what results from the information processing is an epistemic intermediary between myself as knower and object known, something like a picture of more or less complexity.)<sup>33</sup> If that is what transcendental idealism amounts to, then, among other consequences, (1) we seem to have to regard Kant's references to things in themselves as expressing a *causal hypothesis* about the origins of the information fed into the system, with things in themselves being altogether distinct from the representations that the system produces; (2) any case in which reason, construed as an element of the human information processor, pushes us beyond the bounds of sensibility looks like it would have to have no more significance than a malfunction of the processor; and (3) when Kant makes a claim such as the following one from the A fourth Paralogism, that "external objects (bodies) are mere appearances and hence are also nothing but one of the kinds of my presentations [*Vorstellungen*]" (A370), we must take him to be saying that empirical things are

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<sup>33</sup> I borrow the concept of an epistemic intermediary from Donald Davidson (2006, 230). In a remark that parallels an argument of Kant's at A368, Davidson notes that "we can't swear [such] intermediaries to truthfulness", and consequently there is always a risk that even "if they deliver information, they may be lying."

really nothing more than psychologically inner “representations of themselves”<sup>34</sup> produced by our inner information processor and existing in the empirical mind—and then the meaning of Kant’s commitment to ‘empirical realism’ must be calibrated to that claim.

Or might transcendental idealism rather be a thesis about, say, the *merely subjective character of space and time*? In that case, we can accept that any not-merely-subjective reality would not be spatio-temporal (setting aside ‘neglected alternative’-style worries) while insisting that it *would* be governed by the categories that characterize human thinking. And then (1’) the doctrine of the thing in itself could express not a causal hypothesis but a commitment to there being more to the things we present than their spatio-temporal properties; (2’) reason’s forays beyond the bounds of sensibility look somewhat more respectable, as they can appeal to a presumed continuity of *categorical* even if not also *sensible* form between empirical things and whatever lies beyond possible experience; and (3’) although we must regard things that show up in space and time as merely subjective *in respect of any of their features that presuppose spatio-temporality*, that may not require saying that the things themselves—the very ones that appear to us in space and time—are ‘in the mind’ inasmuch as their existence apart from their showing up in sensibility need not be spatio-temporally qualified. And clearly, the space of possible meanings of ‘empirical realism’ opened by (3’) is quite different from that opened by the suggestion that empirical things are mere “representations of themselves” ((3) in the previous paragraph).

Those two conceptions of transcendental idealism are by no means the only ones possible, and they are drawn in pretty crude strokes. But they give a sense of the extent to which

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<sup>34</sup> Guyer 1987, 335.

one's interpretation of the Critical philosophy as a whole, and hence of Kant's empirical realism, will be inflected by prior choice of a conception of his transcendental idealism.

But what if one does not start with any particular conception of transcendental idealism at all? As I have emphasized, Kant's claim uniquely to enable us to accept empirical realism is a major part of the promise of his position. But if the meaning of 'empirical realism' in that very promise follows from or must be calibrated to other doctrinal commitments that may themselves be strongly idealistic, then the promise is empty. If transcendental idealism and transcendental realism are exclusive and exhaustive alternatives, as Kant seems to suggest (A369-70), and *only* the transcendental idealist can be an empirical realist, then that gives us an argument for a different approach to interpreting the Critical philosophy, beginning from empirical realism as a kind of methodological control on how we understand Kant's other commitments. That is the reversal of conventional interpretive priorities I described above: We must begin by taking Kant's transcendental idealism, and with it the Critical philosophy as a whole, to explain not *what empirical realism is*, namely whatever antecedently understood idealistic commitments permit it to be, but rather *how empirical realism, as nothing other than genuine realism about empirical things, is possible*.

That methodological control forces a kind of discipline on the Kant-interpreter. Any interpretation of Kant's transcendental idealism or of his Critical philosophy more broadly that forces us to renounce the possibility of empirical realism as a genuine realism about empirical things, or to modify our conception of 'empirical realism' so that it is really no more than an *ersatz* or quasi-realism, must be rejected. Then we see if anything remains that truly makes empirical realism possible. If not, then we know that Kant's claims to empirical realism cannot be substantiated, and the Kant-interpreter can with less unease regard Kant's position as

belonging to the same broad family as the various other subjective idealisms of the early modern period. But if my interpretive strategy finds in Kant an account of the possibility of empirical realism that is consistent with Kant's other philosophical commitments while permitting us to regard that empirical realism as a genuine realism about empirical things, then that is itself a powerful vindication of the strategy—all the more so if the resulting total position that we attribute to Kant has not just interpretive attractions but philosophical ones also.<sup>35</sup>

I shall go on to argue in this dissertation that that interpretive strategy requires that we reject any reading of Kant on which he is some sort of 'Way of Ideas' theorist, that is, on which holds a view on which the only direct objects of our empirical awareness are mental items of any sort—even if, indeed, those mental items are to act as representations of an external world or elements in a construction of such a world. The strategy thus requires that we reject not only, e.g., broadly phenomenalist readings (e.g., Bennett's)<sup>36</sup> but also 'indirect realist' ones (e.g., at certain points, Guyer's).<sup>37</sup> The strategy further requires rejecting any view on which we, although avoiding the claim that the direct objects of our awareness are literally psychologically inner, nevertheless concede that they are *merely subjective* just insofar as they are presentable by us. More controversially, my strategy also requires that we reject any realism about *experience-transcendent* things (however minimally construed) and hence reject the possibility of a

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<sup>35</sup> My interpretive strategy has a family resemblance to that proposed by Ameriks under the heading of a 'regressive approach' (Ameriks 2003, 10-12). Ameriks's idea is that Kant's Critical enterprise begins from a "modest" or "moderate" starting point, "simply that we have some valid everyday theoretical, or practical, or aesthetic judgmental experience" (10). So far, so unobjectionable. But Ameriks then takes Kant to build into that modest starting point, without any argument, an astonishingly contentious assumption about what conditions a putative thing would have to satisfy to count as a genuine thing (Ameriks calls it a "thing *simpliciter*"). Thanks to that contentious assumption, we can know that if empirical things were all there is to things, genuine *things* would not be possible at all, so that the presence to us of an empirical thing must either be a) the presence to us of a "mere appearance" that entails an in-itself or experience-transcendent existent (of which the empirical 'thing' as mere appearance is an aspect) or b) an illusion (33-5). Needless to say, when I begin from empirical realism, I do not make or take Kant to make Ameriks's contentious assumption.

<sup>36</sup> Bennett 1966 and 1974.

<sup>37</sup> Guyer 1987, 241-9.



metaphysics thereof. For I shall argue that there is no viable way of accounting for the philosophical requirement of those commitments without inviting either problematic or even dogmatic idealism. But finally, it requires that we find in Kant a way to answer the Pippin-McDowell bruteness objection, that is, a way actually to *entitle* ourselves to Allisonian epistemic anthropocentrism with respect to both the intellectual and sensible conditions of the human presentational capacity.

The picture of the total Critical position that emerges from this dissertation is novel and provocative in several respects. For example, fully excavating Kant's empirical realism turns out to require a rehabilitation of what Strawson calls Kant's "principle of significance", a conceptual-semantic theory on which we cannot even meaningfully think what cannot be exhibited in or related to possible experience in some way. That aspect of Kant's philosophy is widely believed to be not only undermotivated and inconsistent with other, at least equally fundamental Kantian commitments but also philosophically hopeless. But my approach to the Critical philosophy enables me to account textually for the presence of the conceptual-semantic theory and to defend it against several pressing philosophical objections. Second, my approach leads me to happy discovery of what I believe is *the* definitive solution to the neglected alternative objection. Third, I bring to the fore questions about Kant's practical philosophy that are important but seriously neglected—most notably, how the moral law, as an *imperative*, could nevertheless be *synthetic*—and shows how a proper appreciation of such questions forces us seriously to reconsider what it could mean to accept a *theoretical* judgment on merely *moral* or *practical* grounds, as in Kant's doctrine of the practical postulates.

But fourth and most importantly, the interpretation of Kant's transcendental idealism that I arrive at is, I contend, the only interpretation of his transcendental idealism that can genuinely

respect Kant's commitment to empirical realism. It does so by insisting that one just cannot understand what *reality* is, what 'reality' even means, in isolation from an account of the human presentational capacity as genuinely epistemic, i.e., essentially capable of presenting that very reality knowledgeably—and equally by insisting that one cannot understand what the human presentational capacity is in isolation from its being a capacity to present nothing less than reality. Thus I make good on Kant's slogan that on his view, the conditions of possibility of experience are at the same time the conditions of the possibility of objects of experience. I do not contend that my reading of Kant's transcendental idealism is the only possible reading. But I do contend that if it fails, then Kant's empirical realism simply cannot be a genuine realism about empirical things. And then Kant's boast that the transcendental idealist can be an empirical realist must ring hollow.

## 2.2. Overview of the Argument

In chapter one, I articulate a minimal conception of empirical realism as a genuine realism, according to which we have nothing less than knowledge of what are nothing less than empirical things. The conception is meant to be maximally weak while still generating recognizably realist commitments. I do not yet claim that it expresses *Kant's* empirical realism but only some minimal notion of what any putative empirical realism would have to be to be a genuine realism about empirical things. I argue that numerous interpreters who purport to respect Kant's empirical realism as a genuine realism cannot square their account of that realism with my minimal conception. In particular, neither Allison nor Allais, who have two of the more promising recent proposals for finding a genuine empirical realism in Kant, can avoid committing Kant to varieties of subjective idealism. For Allison cannot show how his so-called

epistemic conditions are in fact not merely subjective conditions of non-epistemic presentation, and Allais cannot show how her attempt to locate the ground of empirical reality in the experience-transcendent avoids generating a skeptical challenge to the reality of that empirical ‘reality’. The lesson I take from Allison and Allais is that for empirical realism to be possible, we cannot understand the human epistemic capacity in a way that would make it constitutively defective—neither as *parochial* in virtue of merely subjective presentational conditions nor as *essentially disconnected* from an experience-transcendent ground of empirical reality.

In chapter two, I argue that there is good textual evidence that Kant’s own empirical realism aspires to be a genuine realism about empirical things. I argue that we can find in Kant four different dimensions of empirical realism as he conceives it: (1) Empirical realism requires that I be capable of direct awareness of empirical things; (2) empirical realism requires that empirical things are outside of me in space, in a location different from my own; (3) empirical realism requires that empirical things are in no way existentially mind-dependent or otherwise empirically ‘inner’ or merely subjective; (4) empirical realism requires that the human epistemic capacity is not defective in respect of parochiality or essential disconnection. Part of the burden of my argument is to make especially plausible that Kant has a genuine empirical realism in view by finding evidence of it in unlikely textual places, particularly the famously idealistic-sounding A-edition fourth Paralogism. And part of the burden of my argument is to show that the arguments that I make against Allison and Allais in the first chapter regarding their failures to respect empirical realism are arguments that Kant could or should have made himself, given the resources of his position and certain of his other commitments. By the end of the chapter I take myself to have produced local textual evidence of Kant’s aspiration to genuine empirical realism,

but that raises the question of how such empirical realism could be possible in the context of Kant's larger view.

In chapter three, I begin developing the materials necessary to account for the possibility of empirical realism within the context of Kant's broader system. I excavate a region of Kant's technical vocabulary or concept-set that ranges intriguingly over epistemological and what we would now think of as semantic territory, covering his technical notions of objective reality and validity, meaning (*Bedeutung*), reference (*Beziehung*), immanent and transcendent use, logical and real possibility, and content and emptiness. It is not news that Kant has some provocative things to say about the conditions of meaningfulness of concepts and judgments, but a large part of what I show in chapter three is that that conceptual-semantic position is operative far more widely in the Critical philosophy than one will at first notice if one does not see how those technical concepts fit together. By the end of the chapter, some of the implications of Kant's conceptual-semantic theory begin to become evident, particularly that Kant seems radically to restrict the possibility of meaningful concepts and judgments to possible experience. But what is not yet clear is how that position interacts with or contributes to making possible Kant's empirical realism.

In chapter four, I turn directly to Kant's conceptual-semantic theory and put it to use in the service of empirical realism. The central claim of the chapter is that Kant's conceptual-semantic theory is fundamental for making Kant's empirical realism as a genuine realism possible. For first, only on the basis of that theory can we respond to the Pippin-McDowell bruteness objection (articulated in section 1.4 above) and definitively rule out the conception of the human epistemic capacity as defective on grounds of parochiality. And second, the theory further undermines the thought that Kant could have meaningful experience-transcendent realist

commitments. The argument of chapter four is complex and ranges over a number of issues. I address the knowledge (*Wissen*)/cognition (*Erkenntnis*) distinction, arguing that it does not interfere with the course that my argument has been taking nor open a prospect for evading my understanding of Kant's empirical realism. I then turn to a reading and analysis of the Phenomena and Noumena chapter of the first *Critique*, wherein Kant's conceptual-semantic theory is expressed in its most concentrated way and also explicitly and systematically related to the argumentative program of the Aesthetic and Analytic. I exhibit Kant's conceptual-semantic theory in detail and defend it from objections. According to that theory, we cannot even *meaningfully think* of what does not in principle belong to possible experience, either as an item in it or as a formal condition of it. I address a number of objections, including that it is simply implausible that thought untethered to possible experience is meaningless and that the theory forces Kant to deny the possibility of, e.g., fictional discourse. I then use the conceptual-semantic theory to address the bruteness objection by arguing that the objection can only get traction if we can think meaningfully of epistemic capacities essentially different from our own, which, by Kant's conceptual-semantic theory, is not something we can do. An important result of the chapter is an understanding of the place that concepts that purport to be of experience-transcendent objects have to play in Kant's philosophy notwithstanding that, interpreted as such concepts, they are meaningless, the *Ur*-case of which is the noumenon in the negative understanding (*Verstande*).<sup>38</sup>

In chapter five, I begin the work of showing how Kant's conceptual-semantic theory, which, I contend, is absolutely necessary to establish his empirical realist credentials, is compatible with many apparent claims about putatively experience-transcendent entities. Chapter

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<sup>38</sup> See chapter four, section 5.1 for an account of my use of the expression 'negative understanding'.

five focuses on the case of the thing in itself. I argue that the concept ‘thing in itself’ is the concept of an object that, were it really possible, would be knowable through intellect alone, and consequently that it is the concept not just of a ‘most real thing’ but an *intelligibile*. I argue that we are impelled by a necessary but subjective need of reason to think the concept ‘thing in itself’ but that that does not entitle us to any experience-transcendent realist or metaphysical commitments about actual or possible things in themselves. ‘Thing in itself’ is no more than a negatively meaningful boundary concept and the generic form of the Ideas of theoretical reason, lacking any positive meaning or use in its own right. Reason’s need along with the conception of a merely negative meaning for a concept developed in connection with the noumenon in the negative understanding in chapter four fully account for everything that Kant seems to assert about things in themselves,<sup>39</sup> existence or nature, and seeing that finishes the case against the conception of the human epistemic capacity as defective by virtue of essential disconnection from a putative experience-transcendent ground of empirical reality. Along the way, I offer a novel and tidy solution to the centuries-old problem of the neglected alternative—the problem of how Kant can be in a position to insist that things in themselves *are not* spatio-temporal rather than holding, more modestly, that we *cannot know whether they are or are not* spatio-temporal—and take that to be strong evidence in support of my reading.

In chapter six, I continue to show how Kant’s conceptual-semantic theory and the empirical realism it makes possible are consistent with the experience-transcendent domains of

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<sup>39</sup> That somewhat odd possessive construction, with an apostrophe following ‘themselves’ rather than ‘things’, makes clear that I am here treating ‘things in themselves’ as a single noun. Ideally I would flag as much by hyphenating it (and also in expressions like ‘the appearance/thing in itself distinction’), but that seems to me philosophically suggestive in a way I aim to avoid. In this case, philosophical considerations must trump good style.

Kantian discourse, this time in reference to the theoretical Ideas.<sup>40</sup> I argue that while the concept ‘thing in itself’ is the generic form of the three theoretical Ideas, those Ideas in their specificity, unlike ‘thing in itself’, have positive uses. The positive use of the Ideas, however, does not entail their referentiality to experience-transcendent things. Rather, it is grounded in their being concepts of forms of explanation at the empirical level oriented towards explanatory maxima. The Ideas’ positive use is thus essentially experience-immanent and does not take us beyond possible experience. Consequently there is no genuine reference to the putative experience-transcendent objects of the Ideas, and Kant’s use of ‘as if’-talk and apparent permission to us of a kind of faith in the existence of those putative objects does not ultimately involve thinking into their concepts more than what can be made sense of negatively (in the manner of ‘thing in itself’) or intra-experientially.

In chapter seven, I complete the task of proving the consistency of Kant’s conceptual-semantic theory and empirical realism with his apparent experience-transcendent commitments through an examination of Kant on the practical Ideas. I argue that the practical Ideas derive their meaning wholly from the moral law, which in turn does *not* derive its meaning from reference to anything experience-transcendent, whatever else the meaning of the moral law might be derived from. Along the way I argue that there is only a temptation to see a practical route to metaphysics in Kant because of a misconception of what practical knowledge and cognition really amount to. Practical knowledge and cognition, I argue, are essentially knowledge and cognition of what to do, not what is the case. And that requires that however we understand the apparently experience-transcendent concepts that occur in certain key items of practical knowledge or cognition (notably, the practical postulates), we need to understand such

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<sup>40</sup> Throughout, I capitalize ‘Idea’ and ‘Ideas’ when I mean to speak of Kant’s technical concept (i.e., of an Idea of reason).

judgments as essentially action-oriented and thus semantically ‘experience-facing’, i.e., ‘about’ what we are to do in the empirical world.

In chapter eight, I conclude by asking what Kant’s transcendental idealism must be in order to make the empirical realism that I find in the Critical philosophy possible. I argue that Kant’s transcendental idealism is different in kind and not just in degree from all conventional, subjective idealisms, and hence from the empirical idealism that Kant rejects. The most fundamental commitment of transcendental idealism, I contend, is the identity of conditions of the possibility of experience with conditions of the possibility of empirical things. I understand that to be a methodological commitment to a unity of account between the form or nature of the human epistemic capacity and the form or nature of reality as such, so that the *real possibilities*, though not the actual *existences*, of that capacity and of reality—or the meaningfulness and even the meanings of the concepts of each—are mutually implicating and ultimately one and the same. Such unity of account cuts at the root the abiding skeptical worry about how mind, considered in isolation, meets world, considered in isolation, and permits us to be satisfied that reality is essentially the possible object of empirical awareness, just as empirical realism requires. I argue that my strongly anti-subjectively idealistic reading of Kant’s transcendental idealism is nevertheless compatible with much of Kant’s much more straightforwardly idealistic-sounding rhetoric and at the same time that the robust empirical realism I find in Kant does not eventuate in transcendental realism. I conclude with a reflection on the therapeutic or phenomenological character of Kant’s transcendental idealism and a final consideration of Pippin and McDowell’s bruteness objection.



### 3. Some Terminological Notes

For the sake of terminological and conceptual hygiene, I have made the following adjustments to the conventional Kantian technical vocabulary that ought to make various key distinctions easier to track (without, I hope, introducing any that are not really in Kant): First, I use the terms ‘human epistemic capacity’ and ‘human presentational capacity’ interchangeably as far as their denotations are concerned. By both I mean the human mind as comprising both intellectual and sensible presentational powers (thus I do not use ‘mind’ to mean specifically ‘intellect’ or ‘understanding’ or ‘reason’, etc., in abstraction from sensibility). There is, however, a rhetorical difference, namely that I shall tend to speak of the ‘human presentational capacity’ when I mean to emphasize a possible doubt as to whether that capacity is not *merely* presentational (= for all we know, merely subjective) but in fact epistemic (= knowledge-enabling, reality-presenting). Thus I shall tend to speak of the ‘human epistemic capacity’ when I do not mean to indicate any such possible doubt. And, as the reader has just seen, I shall speak of the capacity’s being *merely* presentational to indicate how we must regard it if we find ourselves unable to dispel or compelled to give into that doubt.

Second, reserving ‘capacity’ for the human mind as a unity of sensibility and intellect, I shall use ‘power’ or ‘stem’ to designate what Kant regards as its two essential elements. Hence sensibility can also be called the sensible presentational power or stem, and intellect the intellectual presentational power or stem. The idea is to use ‘power’ and ‘stem’ to indicate that what is being discussed is not a presentational *capacity* in its own right, only an element of such a capacity.

Third, I shall make a point of using ‘intellect’ as the general term for the intellectual stem of presentation rather than ‘reason’, ‘understanding’, or ‘judgment’. Each of the latter three terms

is used by Kant both in a general way, to designate the intellectual stem of presentation, and in a narrower way, to designate a particular aspect of that stem. As much as possible I try to use those three terms solely in their narrow senses, and I shall take them each to designate a specific power of the intellect, or intellectual power, but importantly *not* to designate a stem. The idea is that reason, understanding, and judgment not only are *not* presentational *capacities*, they are also (at least presumptively, pending further argument) *not* each individually capable of constituting a *stem* of a capacity, but rather come together as a package. They are three powers which, while distinguishable as powers, nevertheless require mutual enabling, and only the mutually enabling set of all three powers constitutes an intellect. (That may sound as though I am committing Kant to something contentious. But all I need now, to count as tracking Kant's usage, is that Kant nowhere claims that any of those intellectual powers would be possible without the others. We will see later, in chapters five and six, that aspects of Kant's position indeed require his regarding the intellectual powers as mutually enabling and presupposing.)

Fourth, throughout I mostly prefer 'empirical thing' to Kant's technical term 'appearance'. That can risk looking like terminological sleight of hand, but the principle underlying the preference is that 'appearance' is a term whose significance for Kant—in particular, whether it by itself indicates or requires subjectively idealistic commitments—needs clarifying, notwithstanding the term's apparent early definition in the first *Critique*.<sup>41</sup> That empirical things are, as Kant no doubt supposes, in fact appearances in his sense (whatever that sense may be) is meant to be an *elucidatory* claim, viz., of the nature of the ordinary things that, pre-philosophically, (a) we take ourselves to experience or to be able to experience and (b) we

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<sup>41</sup> At A20/B34, Kant writes that "The undetermined object of an empirical intuition is called appearance." Cf. Kant's claims that, strictly speaking, definitions are not possible in philosophy, only *Explikationen*, which Pluhar renders as 'spellings-out', and that to the extent that even mere *Explikationen* are possible, they are so only at the conclusion of philosophical work rather than the outset (A727-31/B755-9).

would not for a moment scruple at calling ‘things’. Hence we do not prejudice any issue of the meaning of the elucidatory term ‘appearance’ by declining to use it until we can reasonably take ourselves to grasp it securely—and to grasp what is at stake in elucidating the nature of empirical things. (I discuss Kant’s reasons for calling empirical things ‘appearances’ in chapter eight, section 2.)

Fifth, I shall generally prefer to render ‘*Vorstellung*’ and ‘*vorstellen*’ as ‘presentation’ and ‘to present’, respectively. That can create problems because of the large body of Kant secondary literature that prefers ‘representation’ and ‘represent’ not only in translating Kant but also in developing a reading of him or arguments based on his perceived position. In quotations from other authors who follow the latter convention, I shall leave their usage undisturbed, but I shall do my best to avoid confusion by, where necessary, freely deploying the German terms and sometimes temporarily sliding into talk of representations and representing when discussing another author’s view (where differences in semantic nuance may mean that the view cannot properly be rendered if I substitute in my own preferred terms).

Sixth, although mostly I use ‘presentation’ to mean ‘mental item’ and distinguish presentations from objects presented, I make no assumption that for Kant, ‘presentation’ (‘*Vorstellung*’) can only mean something mental and psychologically inner. The observation that ‘*Vorstellung*’ harbours a grammatical ambiguity between *the presenting* or *that which presents*, on the one hand, and *the object of the presenting* or *the presented*, on the other, goes back at least to Frege, who, in *The Foundations of Arithmetic*, distinguishes subjective and objective meanings of ‘*Vorstellung*’ and makes a distinction *within* objective *Vorstellungen* between concepts and objects. (He then complains that Kant invited confusion about “his true view” because he “associated both [the subjective and objective] meanings with the word

[*Vorstellung*]”.)<sup>42</sup> The question of how Kant uses ‘*Vorstellung*’ is, of course, not settled by that, but we can henceforth be sensitive to the reasonableness of that question.

Seventh, I use the expressions ‘intellectual presentation’ and ‘thought’ interchangeably, and under that combined heading I subsume finer differences between various kinds of intellectual presentation/thought, namely concepts, categories, Ideas, judgments, intellectual schemata, logical forms/functions (or logical forms *and* logical functions, if one is committed to their mutual distinctness), etc. Given my stated openness to an objectival meaning of ‘*Vorstellung*’, hence of ‘presentation’, I suppose I should also be open to treating intellectual *objects*, if any there be, as intellectual presentations. But for reasons that will become clear in chapter five, for intellectual objects I reserve the term ‘*intelligibile*’ (‘*intelligibilia*’ in the plural).

Eighth and finally, due to some recent developments in the Kant secondary literature, trying to discuss Kant’s views using ordinary epistemological terms has become exceedingly fraught. Particularly if one speaks too casually of *knowledge*, one invites an accusation of having confused *knowledge* with *cognition* and can end up spending the bulk of one’s efforts trying to swim out of the emergent terminologico-dialectical swamp. To some extent that can be avoided by a retreat to more abstract terms; that is part of the reason why I often refer to the ‘human *epistemic* capacity’ instead of the ‘human capacity for *knowledge*’. Nevertheless to systematically avoid all uses of ‘know’ and its cognates would involve absurd contortions that would take this already long and complex dissertation several steps closer to total unreadability. So with some trepidation, from the first I use the vocabulary of ‘knowing’ where elegance demands it and simply try to be attentive to moments when I thereby risk attributing something

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<sup>42</sup> Frege 1960, 37n1. I learned of this passage from Hanna 2001, 158.

contentious to Kant. But I directly address the knowledge/cognition distinction and its significance for my argument in chapter four.

## Chapter One: Minimal Genuine Empirical Realism

That Kant affirms a doctrine called ‘empirical realism’ in the *Critique of Pure Reason* is not controversial. But I claim that Kant’s empirical realism is a genuine, robust realism about empirical things. The claim immediately faces a major interpretive hurdle. For if Kant’s empirical realism is a genuine *realism*, how can he also be, as he famously is, a transcendental *idealist*—‘realism’ and ‘idealism’ being generally regarded as mutually exclusive? Indeed, even among those who purport to respect Kant’s commitment to empirical realism as a genuine realism about empirical things, the temptation to treat Kant’s empirical realism as a quasi- or pseudo-realism is difficult to resist.

My task in this first chapter is to guide the interpretive effort to come by showing what it takes to resist that temptation. I offer a preliminary and rough formulation of what empirical realism must be to count as a genuine realism and an argument that prominent efforts to find such realism in the Critical philosophy fail. Although I cite some passages from Kant, my intent in this chapter is not to demonstrate that Kant can consistently endorse such realism, only to bring it into view (though I hope the Kantian pedigree of my approach will be evident). To that end, I compare my rough formulation of empirical realism with the views of several Kant commentators, especially those of Henry Allison and Lucy Allais. The elaboration and direct defense of empirical realism as a reading of Kant begins with the second chapter.

This chapter comprises four parts. First, I orient the project around a reversal of conventional interpretive priorities, captured by my slogan that transcendental idealism explains not *what empirical realism is* but *how empirical realism is possible*. The latter explanation presupposes a minimal but methodologically controlling grasp of empirical realism as an interpretive starting point. Then I offer my preliminary formulation of empirical realism. At first

glance, it holds no more than that objects of our empirical awareness, i.e., empirical things, are nothing other than empirical things. That does not sound like much, but it requires that we reject as empirically idealistic any view on which (1) empirical things are reducible or equivalent to something other than empirical things, (2) we do not experience ‘empirical’ things at all, but only infer to them,<sup>1</sup> or (3) the world and the things in it do not have at least such independence of our epistemic capacity that our common-sense engagement with them presupposes.

Second, I examine Allison’s interpretation of Kant’s transcendental idealism with an eye to its implications for empirical realism. Allison aims for a conception of Kant’s transcendental idealism that is to a minimal degree recognizable as a variant of subjective idealism, just enough to warrant the label ‘idealism’ as Allison understands that term, but nevertheless can respect empirical realism. The result is an idealism of ‘epistemic conditions’, conditions on the presentation of objects by subjects like us humans. Epistemic conditions are supposed to be at once *subjective* and *objectivating*, i.e., to make possible *our knowledge* of a mind-independent<sup>2</sup> but empirically available *reality*. But for a variety of reasons, most notably Allison’s failure to entitle himself to epistemic anthropocentrism, putatively objectivating epistemic conditions turn out to be indistinguishable from *subjectivizing, merely presentational, non-epistemic* conditions. The result is that the empirical ‘reality’ that our presentational capacity presents is subjectively

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<sup>1</sup> In conversation, Clinton Tolley raised the possibility that our experience of objects could be mediated not by inference but by *Sinn* (something like Fregean sense or Husserlian meaning). The proposal, I take it, is that a certain concatenation of subjective states or episodes ‘means’ something objective but not in virtue of the latter being inferred from the former. If that is just to say that my subjective states can give me knowledge of empirical things just insofar as they figure for me *as* states of awareness of those things (insofar as they bear the ‘meaning’ ‘subjective state of awareness of such and such empirical things’), then I do not object. For then ‘meaning’ is not the name of an epistemically intermediary entity but precisely the object-presenting character of those subjective states. But then the proposal does not seem to me to entail phenomenalism, which Tolley wants it to. Cf. his forthcoming book, *Kant on the Dynamics of Mind: Transcendental Idealism as a Theory of Intentionality*, where the proposal will be worked out in detail.

<sup>2</sup> Phrases like ‘mind-independent’ raise a question about whether such independence consists in a thing’s being in a different place from me in space or independent of me in some more radical way. At least for Allison’s purposes, empirical things are officially both outside of me in space and existentially mind-independent, though my criticisms of his position in this chapter will cast doubt on his ability to claim the latter full-throatedly.

conditioned in a way that does not make genuine empirical realism possible. We learn two lessons from Allison. First, for empirical realism to be possible, we cannot conceive of our epistemic capacity as *essentially defective*.<sup>3</sup> And second, to conceive of our epistemic capacity as *parochial*,<sup>4</sup> i.e., as a capacity not for knowledge of things but for knowledge-for-us-humans of things-for-us-humans, is necessarily a way of conceiving of it as essentially defective.

Third, I examine Allais on Kant's transcendental idealism. Allais is much less concerned than Allison to make Kant look recognizably idealistic. The central concern governing her development of Kant's transcendental idealism is his alleged realism about things in themselves, but she does not see why such realism should preclude an equally robust realism about empirical things. So at first glance, she does not require a distinction between subjectively conditioned and unconditioned parts of reality but merely a distinction between essentially knowable and essentially unknowable parts. But to the extent that the thought of an unknowable part of reality is introduced in response to a genuine explanatory requirement and does not amount merely to a gratuitous posit of what is merely logically possible, its effect is to revive the threat of that variety of subjective idealism that Kant calls problematic idealism. We thus learn an additional lesson from Allais: Another way to conceive of our epistemic capacity as essentially defective, and so to preclude the possibility of a genuine empirical realism, is to conceive of that capacity as *essentially disconnected* from a part of reality explanatorily required by the part we can know.

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<sup>3</sup> 'Defective' is clearly a normative word. I cannot see a better way to characterize an explanation of some *explanandum* that is supposed to be at once an instance of a type and to lack features that essentially belong to the type, which, I shall argue, is the explanatory situation Allison and Lucy Allais ultimately find themselves in regarding the human epistemic capacity. We must also distinguish between the mere *fallibility* of a capacity and its *defectiveness* (or equivalently, *inadequacy*). To conceive of a capacity as fallible is to conceive of it as one of which there can be acts or exercises that go wrong. To conceive of a capacity as defective or inadequate is to conceive of it as one whose acts or exercises go wrong *just insofar as they are acts or exercises of that very capacity*. My terminological choices here are influenced by John McDowell (e.g., 1998b, 39; 2011, 36-9).

<sup>4</sup> I picked up that way of speaking from Andy Werner (2017, 14).



Fourth and finally, I discuss some implications that Kant's empirical realism has for his transcendental idealism. The genuine realism of Kant's empirical realism requires that transcendental idealism be different *in kind* rather than merely *in degree* from subjective or empirical idealism, and it requires the rejection of any conception of empirical reality on which we are required to be realists about things in themselves to explain its possibility.

### 1. Getting Empirical Realism into View

As I've indicated, in this chapter I do not vindicate my contention that Kant is an empirical realist in the sense I'll elucidate. But why think that Kant is genuinely a realist in any sense? For as I noted, he is famously committed to 'transcendental' (or 'critical', or 'formal') idealism, and idealism in general seems opposed to realism. Thus he rejects at least one putative variety of realism, 'transcendental realism' (A369-70). And isn't Kant the philosopher who holds that "reality is supersensible and we can have no knowledge of it",<sup>5</sup> whose "transcendental perspective" introduces a "supersensible reality" whose "radical independence of our thinking" makes "the empirical world's claim to independence [...] seem fraudulent by comparison"?<sup>6</sup> If realism is conventionally the position that we can know what exists independently of our minds, and idealism the position that we can know not what exists independently but only our own mental items or subjective states, impositions, or projections, then those quotations from Strawson and McDowell suggest a conventionally, i.e., subjectively idealist view.

But however things stand with transcendental idealism and realism, Kant calls himself an empirical realist. Indeed, he holds that only his position (transcendental idealism and all) truly

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<sup>5</sup> Strawson 1966, 38.

<sup>6</sup> McDowell 1996, 41-2.

merits the title ‘empirical realism’ (A369-70):<sup>7</sup> Whereas “[t]ranscendental realism [...] gets necessarily into a quandary, and finds itself compelled to make room for empirical idealism”, the “transcendental idealist is [...] an empirical realist and concedes to matter an actuality [i.e., an existence] that [...] is directly perceived” (A371).<sup>8</sup> Now in getting to grips with Kant’s position, there is a temptation to begin with his transcendental idealism. Not only is transcendental idealism at once forbidding and arresting, soliciting the interpreter’s gaze with its complex maze of commitments—it is also, plainly, hugely systematically important for exactly how one understands the various other elements of Kant’s view. But the temptation leads to a tendency to try to account for Kant’s empirical realism only with some more or less worked out interpretation of transcendental idealism already in view. And that in turn tends to prejudice the interpretive outcome towards an understanding of transcendental idealism, as after all some sort of idealism or other, that is broadly subjectively idealistic and so towards an understanding of empirical realism merely as an *ersatz* realism.

I propose, therefore, to resist the temptation and to rely on no prior conception of transcendental idealism in articulating Kant’s empirical realism. Kant himself suggests at times that transcendental idealism explains not *what empirical realism is* but rather *how empirical realism is possible* and that its doing so is a selling-point of his overall view.<sup>9</sup> Respecting that suggestion, we should suppose not that Kant intends to give empirical realism an analysis (at

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<sup>7</sup> It should go without saying that this shows at most that Kant *aspires* to empirical realism, not that he convincingly achieves it. But it does make pressing the question of how he could have taken himself to do so, and whether thus took himself rightly.

<sup>8</sup> The equivalence of ‘actuality’ and ‘existence’ for Kant is attested to by, e.g., his freely moving between those two terms in his discussion of the Refutation of Idealism in the B Preface (Bxxxixn.).

<sup>9</sup> The suggestion appears at A369-71, but that stretch also contains some of Kant’s most subjectively-idealistic-sounding rhetoric. More persuasive is the Refutation of Idealism, where Kant uses transcendental idealist premises to prove an empirically realist conclusion and not to redefine the concept of an empirical thing in conventionally idealist terms (B275-6). His aspiration to entitle us to empirical realism also comes to the fore at moments when Kant feels pressed to explain that his view is not that empirical things are “a mere *illusion*” (B69).

least, not a reductive or substitutive one) but rather that he takes empirical realism as a methodological starting point whose possibility *as just what it is at the outset* is to be explained. So herein I begin with Kant's empirical realism and thence build my way out into its presuppositions and ramifications, leaving an explicit discussion of the transcendental idealism that emerges to the final chapter.<sup>10</sup>

With respect to what is Kant an empirical realist? I must ask because although the most obvious answer is surely 'Empirical things!', that is not how Kant is standardly interpreted. In the phrase 'empirical realism', the word 'empirical' is often taken not (or not only) to designate the set of objects about which Kant is a realist but primarily to *weaken* the realism at issue; thus Strawson writes that "It is only [...] an 'empirical' realism [Kant] is propounding."<sup>11</sup> Kant's 'merely empirical' realism is, e.g., restricted to a certain point of view, or only for some restricted set of purposes, or apart from some further 'transcendental' realization about the ultimate nature of things. And if Kant's realism about empirical things is not thus weakened, many believe, it is simply inconsistent with his transcendental idealism, which is taken to be the more fundamental commitment.<sup>12</sup> Nevertheless, as a genuine realism about ordinary empirical things—Austin's medium-sized dry goods<sup>13</sup>—is exactly how I shall interpret Kant's empirical

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<sup>10</sup> Ultimately, I agree that one does not fully understand empirical realism without also understanding transcendental idealism. For a full explanation of something seems to me to include what makes it possible. But whatever explanatory contribution knowledge of conditions of possibility makes, it cannot be to make us give up the very thing whose possibility we were trying to account for.

<sup>11</sup> 1966, 257.

<sup>12</sup> Among those who find empirical realism as a genuine realism and transcendental idealism straightforwardly inconsistent are Strawson 1966, Wilkerson 1976, Guyer 1987 (aided by a patchwork theory of the first *Critique's* composition), and McDowell 1996. Among those who try to prove their consistency but, I shall contend below, cannot really respect the genuine realism of Kant's empirical realism are (in various ways) Bennett 1966 and 1974, Walsh 1975, Allison 1983 and 2004, and Allais 2015.

<sup>13</sup> Austin 1962, 8.

realism. I mean thereby nothing stronger than what McDowell calls “the realism of common sense.”<sup>14</sup>

Kant also calls empirical things ‘appearances’, which are, minimally, those items that make necessary or explain the subjective presentations we enjoy such that those presentations have a kind of unity rather than being “haphazard or arbitrary” (A104). Now the latter sentence may seem to have a lot packed into it. But it simply spells out some of what Kant takes us ordinarily to presuppose in thinking of everyday empirical things in the common-sense way that we do. Whatever else we are conscious of, we are sometimes conscious of items distinct from us at least to this extent, that we think of them as explaining our experience (‘I see a red cube because one such is before me’) rather than being explained by it (‘All there is to the red cube is my seeing it’) and hence as not ‘in our minds’ in a pretty straightforward sense. Just those items, I suggest, are what we must be realists about if we are genuinely to be empirical realists.

Yet clearly mine is a minority approach, and great creativity has gone into devising new ways to read realism out of Kant’s empirical realism. Some interpreters, for instance, find Kant’s empirical realism to be a form of ‘anti-realism’, and my head spins a little when I try to decide if the upshot is that that empirical realism *is* or *is not* a realism.<sup>15</sup> Walsh, by contrast, takes Kant to hold that empirical realism and transcendental idealism correspond to different reflective or philosophical ‘levels’. That may sound like it makes room for a genuine empirical realism until we learn that on the empirical level, we may be realists only to the extent that we may permit

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<sup>14</sup> McDowell 2009b, 141. I agree with McDowell that “any idealism with a chance of being credible must aspire to being such that, if thought through, it stands revealed as fully cohering with the realism of common sense”, and that that is Kant’s aspiration for his transcendental idealism (though, of course, showing that Kant thus aspires is not the same as showing that he succeeds).

<sup>15</sup> See, e.g., Stevenson 1983, Walker 1983.

empirical things to “*pass as fully real*”.<sup>16</sup> And at the transcendental level, we realize that since “space and time are the forms of all our intuition”, they do not *enable* us to experience reality, but, on the contrary, they and the empirical things that they inform “as it were stand as a *barrier* between us and independent reality.”<sup>17</sup> Or for a more recent example, consider Westphal, who seems to grant that Kant’s empirical realism is the view that empirical things are actual,<sup>18</sup> but at the very same time holds that transcendental idealism “*reveals* [... that] spatiotemporal objects exist only in their being represented by us”.<sup>19</sup>

If empirical realism is not *really* realism, then how is it not just what Kant calls empirical *idealism*, i.e., subjective idealism? A way to block that consequence that is commonly read into Kant is to insist that whatever empirical realism turns out to be, to have expected anything more—viz., a genuine *realism*—to be possible was itself a kind of philosophical mistake. Now Kant is not the first philosopher to appear to make that move; an earlier case is Berkeley. He is not ashamed of a pretty straightforward idealism<sup>20</sup> or to insist that empirical things are really merely ideas, modifications of minds. But at the same time, he insists that if we think that through, we will see that such ideas are *all we could ever reasonably have meant* by ‘empirical thing’. So what looked like a downgrade or a loss, the denial that empirical things are non-mental or non-subjective, is actually no such thing: Once we discover that the thought denied was fundamentally confused, then what we really *do* have, ideas in our minds, are *upgraded*. We have not lost anything in denying that empirical things are non-mental, for what we thought we

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<sup>16</sup> Walsh 1984, 84; emphasis mine.

<sup>17</sup> Walsh 1975, 28; emphasis mine. The expedient of appealing to different philosophical ‘levels’ to permit us to make claims at one ‘level’ that would be false if made at another ‘level’ tends to be a desperate one. Walsh’s use of it at least has the virtue of wearing its difficulties on its sleeve.

<sup>18</sup> Westphal 2004, 58-9.

<sup>19</sup> Westphal 2004, 60; emphasis mine.

<sup>20</sup> Though, as Michael Kremer pointed out in conversation, he predates that coinage; he calls his view “immaterialism” (Berkeley 2008, 236).

possessed was really spurious. The result is a re-establishment of our vocabulary for describing reality in terms of the new idealistic standpoint: Though empirical objects are simply ideas, they are nevertheless “real things” and remain distinct from “chimeras”.<sup>21</sup> And so “[i]f any man thinks [Berkeley’s idealism] detracts from the existence or reality of things, he is very far from understanding”.<sup>22</sup>

As I say, many readers of the first *Critique* are inclined to read into it a move similar to Berkeley’s. The move looks like this: Transcendental realism, the position that Kant opposes, proposes a relation of our knowledge to things that is epistemologically extravagant—something like a relation in which we could know *how things really are*, however that is spelled out. Kant rejects transcendental realism, and so he claims that we cannot know how things really are. But he also claims that there is something we *can* know—say, how things merely *appear*. Knowledge of how things really are is a spurious possession, hence was never more than ‘knowledge’ of how things really are. Consequently what we do have, knowledge of how things merely appear, is *knowledge*, as much so as we could reasonably want knowledge to be. Put in terms of objects rather than subjects, ‘reality’, the object of knowledge, turns out to comprise not how things really are but how things merely appear. But once we finish the critical investigation, we realize that that is what *reality* is, just insofar as we can do no better; we could not reasonably ask for more.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Berkeley 2008, 95.

<sup>22</sup> Berkeley 2008, 96. To anticipate a bit: I do not deny that Kant employs rhetoric at various points in the *Critique* that resembles the Berkeleyan strategy. But the resemblance, I hope to show, is superficial, and misleading if one is captivated by it from the outset.

<sup>23</sup> That is heavily simplified for the present purpose and notably leaves out any talk of noumena, things in themselves, transcendental objects, etc. It does not obviously take in positions, such as those of Langton and Allais, that heavily deemphasize the role that subjective presentational conditions play in human knowledge. But as I shall argue below (section 3), positions of that shape have their own problems where empirical realism is concerned.

One reading of the Critical philosophy that has that Berkeleian form is the anti-realist, which I mentioned above.<sup>24</sup> The realism/anti-realism debate is not primarily oriented around Kant-exegesis, but several philosophers, such as Hilary Putnam, have thought of their positions in that debate as Kant-inspired.<sup>25</sup> And some Kant-commentators have situated their readings with reference to that debate. To get our bearings: Anti-realism is the position, classically stated by Michael Dummett, that statements that are ‘recognition-transcendent’—beyond our ability to justify or warrant assessments of truth and falsity—in fact have no truth-values. There are only truth-values, hence facts, where human practices of investigation and assessment (more or less idealized) can reach.<sup>26</sup> Above I made a distinction between ‘how things really are’, a spurious possession, and ‘how things merely appear’, what we ought to be satisfied with instead. The anti-realist reading of the Critical philosophy preserves that distinction. ‘How things really are’ becomes ‘what is the case irrespective of our ability to discover (or investigate, or have evidence for) it’, and ‘how things merely appear’ becomes ‘what can be asserted with justification or warrant, given our ability to discover (or etc.)’.

Leslie Stevenson, for instance, reads the first *Critique* as defending a form of anti-realism.<sup>27</sup> He takes Kant’s real interest to lie in answering the question, “what makes possible the intersubjective, universal validity of empirical judgement”?<sup>28</sup> Following Crispin Wright,<sup>29</sup> the two candidate answers to that question that Stevenson considers are (1) “some unknowable kind of correspondence to some unobservable object or fact” and (2) “the rules which we follow in

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<sup>24</sup> I owe much in the following discussion of anti-realist readings to Abela 2002.

<sup>25</sup> Putnam 1981, 60-4.

<sup>26</sup> Dummett 1978a, 146-7.

<sup>27</sup> Stevenson 1983, 145.

<sup>28</sup> Stevenson 1983, 143.

<sup>29</sup> Wright 1980.

applying our concepts in the judgements we make”.<sup>30</sup> As his rhetoric indicates, Stevenson takes (1) to be a non-starter. But he intends the only alternative that he seems to have in view, (2), to be heard coherentistically,<sup>31</sup> to that extent paralleling Wright’s suggestion that there may be no more to a statement’s possessing a truth-value than its decidability by “a solicitable community of assent”<sup>32</sup> and no more to the statement’s truth or falsity than the “consensus verdict” of that community.<sup>33</sup> That gives a sense of what is at stake for Stevenson when he reads what he calls Kant’s ‘transcendental objects’, i.e., things in themselves, as putative facts the possibility of whose truth-values is distinct from “our modes of knowledge”<sup>34</sup>: The availability to us of the (for Stevenson) genuine facts, the statements whose possession of truth-values we can countenance, can be made sense of only through a retreat from a conception of knowledge according to which knowledge is essentially responsive to a fact (or object) that is anyway a truth-value bearer (or is anyway there and anyway how it is).<sup>35</sup> And now we are in a position to see the Berkeleyan move in Stevenson: The thought, ‘The facts that our minds can reach bear, independently of those minds, truth-values to which knowledge must be responsive’, was the spurious possession, a futile grasping at ‘how things really are’. And our limitation to facts whose possession of truth-values depends on “*only* our concepts, our judgements, our consciousness”<sup>36</sup> is, we realize, all

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<sup>30</sup> Stevenson 1983, 143.

<sup>31</sup> Stevenson 1983, 142.

<sup>32</sup> Wright 1980, 219.

<sup>33</sup> Wright 1980, 220.

<sup>34</sup> Stevenson 1983, 145.

<sup>35</sup> For Stevenson does not seem willing to accept that the idea of knowledge’s being thus responsive could be substantively distinguishable from knowledge’s consisting in “some *unknowable* kind of correspondence to some *unobservable* object or fact” (Stevenson 1983, 143; emphasis mine). Hence he cannot readily accept the possibility of a non-coherentist alternative to the latter conception of knowledge.

<sup>36</sup> Stevenson 1983, 141; emphasis mine.



we could reasonably have wanted, ‘how things merely appear’.<sup>37</sup> And thus the *anti-realist* reading of the first *Critique* purports to explain Kant’s empirical *realism*.

Another interpretation of the Critical position, the phenomenalist, equally denies us knowledge of how things really are (construed now in a different way) in favour of knowledge of something else which we are to realize is good enough. In general, phenomenism is the view that empirical objects are reduced to, explained by, or derived from sensory or perceptual states. For a phenomenalist, the real turns out to comprise those states or their combinations (according to whatever principle), and the spurious possession was knowledge of anything that was supposed not to thus comprise. Jonathan Bennett is representative.<sup>38</sup> He sometimes defines his phenomenism in terms of statements about objects, sometimes in terms of objects themselves. Thus he sometimes claims that statements about empirical objects “are equivalent to statements about actual and possible sensory states” and hence that the first set of statements is reducible to the second,<sup>39</sup> and sometimes that empirical objects are logical constructs out of actual or possible sense data.<sup>40</sup> So for Bennett, ‘how things really are’ comprises any objects, or features thereof, statements about which *cannot* be reduced to statements about sensory states or that *are not* ‘logical constructs’ out of sense data. And ‘how things merely appear’ just comprises all those objects statements about which *can* etc., or that *are* logical constructs. Again, we are not to have lost anything in trading the latter for the former. The former was a spurious possession, and

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<sup>37</sup> To be fair to Stevenson, there is a way in which some (though not all) of his formulations could characterize the position I find in Kant. For I shall eventually argue that Kant denies the meaningfulness of claims containing concepts of objects that would be *in principle* or *essentially* beyond possible experience were they possible at all. Yet I take that to be perfectly consistent with rejecting anti-realism (or coherentism) regarding knowledge of empirical reality. It is rather a challenge to the intelligibility of the question of whether we should be realists or anti-realists (or coherentists or correspondence-theorists) about putative knowledge of what allegedly lies beyond the empirical.

<sup>38</sup> Another, more recent example of a phenomenalist reading is Van Cleve 1999.

<sup>39</sup> Bennett 1966, 22.

<sup>40</sup> Bennett 1966, 127.

hence accepting Bennett's phenomenalism as our "conceptual background" lets us have "[empirical] *realism* as our view of what there is."<sup>41</sup>

Hitherto I have dwelt on Berkeley and readings of the first *Critique* that find there a Berkeley-style move primarily to show that what 'realism' means is surprisingly controversial.<sup>42</sup> Readers are prepared to read Kant's claim to be an empirical realist quite flexibly, whether because of the obscurity of Kant or perhaps even the obscurity of the concept 'realism'. I now offer a formulation of empirical realism that will distinguish it from the foregoing 'realisms', though without yet fully clarifying it:

Empirical realism is the view that the objects that we know empirically, i.e., empirical things, are nothing other than empirical things.

Now that looks pretty unhelpful on its face. But it serves two purposes. First, emphasizing that we have knowledge of *empirical things*, just as such, rules out any approach on which the empirical 'things' that we know turn out *really* to be some other sort of entity besides a thing—neither some distinctively *subjective* entity nor some *not fully real* sort of entity.<sup>43</sup> And second, emphasizing that we have *knowledge* of empirical things rules out any approach on

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<sup>41</sup> Bennett 1966, 24.

<sup>42</sup> For that reason, I have not addressed Bennett's effort to distinguish his phenomenalism from empirical idealism. But the effort is underwhelming. Quoth Bennett: "[w]hereas transcendental idealism [construed as phenomenalism] offers an analysis of statements about tables and chairs, empirical idealism denies that there are any tables and chairs" and hence "without reducing statements about non-mental items to ones about mental items, says that there are in fact only mental items" (Bennett 1966, 23). I do not see how the distinction Bennett there draws can motivate calling the phenomenalism so described 'realism'. If the question is, what are empirical things?, then both the answer 'mere ideas' and the answer 'logical constructs out of sensory states' seem to concede that such objects are not non-mental. I also note that Berkeley, the empirical idealist *par excellence*, would deny that he rejects the existence of tables and chairs. Berkeley's position, as we have seen, is that there *are* tables and chairs—it's just that tables and chairs are *ideas*. Allison agrees that Bennett's phenomenalism is not adequately distinct from empirical idealism, though he bases his criticism on a claim with which I disagree: that Bennett's position treats sensory states as things in themselves (Allison 2004, 38). See chapter five, section 1.3 for an account of that disagreement.

<sup>43</sup> Hence I am not worried about anyone who wants to maintain that empirical things are *really* molecules or atoms or, in general, denizens of empirical reality that are not specifically the ones we took ourselves to be confronted with in experience. For Kant, any such denizen itself counts as an empirical thing, and Kant seems not to be too concerned about identity conditions of empirical things in respect of whether we should say that one such is *really* the thing we commonsensically experience it as being or, on the contrary, that it is *really* some more basic set of empirical things concatenated in such and such a way.

which there is a divide, on the far side of which lies *reality*, the things and how they are, and on the near side of which lies us human ‘knowers’ and *how things merely seem to us*. To the extent that what we know in *knowing* empirical things are *things* and not merely the semblance of things, what we know empirically is just reality.

An upshot of the foregoing is that if we are to be genuine empirical realists, then, to paraphrase Bennett, the concept ‘empirical thing’ must take an irreducible place in our conceptual scheme.<sup>44</sup> That is not to deny that that concept might admit of certain kinds of explanation. But it rules out any sort of explanation that involves the substitution for that concept of some other or others, such that it would be appropriate to say, ‘An empirical thing is *actually* x’, where x is anything that is not an empirical thing—and in particular, something merely subjective or less than fully real.<sup>45</sup>

Kant’s empirical realism as a genuine realism turns out to require more than is evident from my minimal formulation. I begin spelling out that ‘more’ in chapter two. Now I contrast the minimal empirical realism I’ve proposed with what I take to be the two best approaches to finding empirical realism in Kant extant in the literature: Allison’s in his *Kant’s Transcendental Idealism* and Allais’s in her *Manifest Reality*.<sup>46</sup> Seeing how those two interpretations cannot

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<sup>44</sup> Bennett 1966, 23. I have substituted ‘empirical thing’ for Bennett’s ‘non-mental item’. The latter is entailed by the former on a properly realist view.

<sup>45</sup> One might reasonably ask: ‘But surely we can say *something* about empirical things, or about the concept, ‘empirical thing’? And if we can, how can the place of that concept in our conceptual scheme be irreducible?’ But that question presupposes that the only possible form of explanation or analysis is reductive. Bennett certainly fails to distinguish reduction from other forms of explanation or analysis: For him, giving an analysis of a concept is just reducing it (e.g., at Bennett 1966, 23). But when, for instance, an Aristotelian gives an explanation of a thing’s being of form and matter, they do not mean to be suggesting that talk of *things* is in some way derivative upon talk of form and matter compounds. In learning that things are of form and matter, we *enrich* our concept of a thing, rather than *dispelling* it. That sort of explanation of an empirical thing is perfectly compatible with empirical realism.

<sup>46</sup> Abela 2002 is, in an obvious way, even closer to genuine empirical realism than Allison or Allais, and I find his view attractive. But the textual case he makes for it is somewhat underwhelming, such that I would be surprised if anyone who was not antecedently sympathetic would be persuaded. And he does not even vaguely gesture at how the empirical realism he finds in Kant relates to Kant’s transcendental idealism or could be compatible with it, such that the question of how empirical realism is possible does not really come up. Finally, the aspects of Kant’s

really tolerate empirical realism, even given my minimal formulation, will help us to understand how we must read the *Critique* if we really want to find empirical realism in it.

## 2. Allison's Epistemic Conditions Interpretation

### 2.1. What are Epistemic Conditions?

Allison understands the first *Critique* to be advancing a theory of 'epistemic conditions': conditions on the possibility not so much of *things* but of the *presentation* of things.<sup>47</sup> He distinguishes epistemic conditions from psychological and ontological conditions. Psychological conditions are what one appeals to when one gives a genetic, temporal explanation of some cognitive episode in terms of other cognitive or mental facts. Psychological conditions can be descriptively correct (viz. of a temporal series of mental events) but have no properly epistemic role to play: Whether some belief is justified, e.g., is not answerable by appeal to its psychological conditions. Allison's example is Humean association, a mechanism for bringing it about that when I think of A, I also think of B. Clearly, that mechanism has no bearing on whether any beliefs about B formed on the basis of A's presence are justified.<sup>48</sup> Ontological conditions are conditions on the possibility not merely of *presentation* of things but of their *being*. Allison takes such conditions to be, by definition, conditions of Kantian things in themselves. What seems like a condition on the possibility of *empirical* things themselves, and hence an *ontological* condition thereon, e.g., thoroughgoing community of influence (A211/B256ff.), must therefore instead be conceived as a condition of the possibility of

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empirical realism that interest Abela are somewhat different from those that interest me, in part because of his deeper interest in the realism/anti-realism debates of the '70s, '80s, and '90s. For all those reasons, we do better to attend to the views of Allison and Allais.

<sup>47</sup> That immediately creates a terminological problem, for I shall go on to argue that Allisonian epistemic conditions are not *genuinely* epistemic. For now I permit him the label, but once the argument runs its course the reader should not understand Allison's use of 'epistemic' to be agenda-setting for mine.

<sup>48</sup> Allison 1983, 11.

empirical presentation of not-*per-se*-empirical things (and hence a strictly epistemic condition).<sup>49</sup> Perhaps a clearer way of putting Allison's point is to say that epistemic conditions are conditions on things-as-(possibly?)-presented, whereas ontological conditions are conditions on things apart from (the possibility of?) presentation.

Epistemic conditions are conditions *on* presentation of objects; they are conditions *for* a certain sort of mind: the human. First, they are not conditions for God, who, if He has epistemic conditions at all, has none in common with us. And second, some of them, at least, are not even conditions for all logically possible discursive or finite<sup>50</sup> minds. No particular *sensible* epistemic conditions are entailed by discursivity (i.e., the possession by a mind of a finite intellect), only that there be some such. Thus there could, at least logically, be discursive knowers who share our intellectual epistemic conditions but not our specifically human sensible ones.<sup>51</sup>

Does that make human knowledge, first, second-rate relative to a standard set by God's knowledge, or second, only one of a plurality of possible 'knowledges' that must then be regarded as merely subjective projections (i.e., corresponding to the merely subjective presentational-psychological peculiarities of kinds of mind)?<sup>52</sup> Those questions are pressing because if the answer to either question is 'yes', then we must conceive of the human epistemic capacity as *essentially defective*: as subject to putatively 'epistemic' conditions that are not

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<sup>49</sup> Allison 1983, 11-12; cf. his 2004, 61-2, where he assigns the transcendental object the role of "object that appears". On epistemic vs. ontological conditions, I find Allison difficult to follow. Can't we give an *ontology* of empirical things in the relevant sense, provided we realize that it's empirical things rather than things in themselves that are at issue?

<sup>50</sup> For my purposes, 'finite mind' and 'discursive mind' are equivalent.

<sup>51</sup> Allison 1983, 86-7.

<sup>52</sup> I mean that second possibility to echo Pippin's worry that although Kant would insist that the subjective conditions on the possibility of knowledge that he introduces are "nonpsychological", not *merely* subjective, Kant's procedure raises the question of what they could possibly be "if not psychological" (2005a, 16). We will see that Allison's response to the worry is unsatisfying.

actually constitutive of its counting as an *epistemic* capacity at all but, on the contrary, preclude its so counting. And that is to conceive of ourselves as lacking an epistemic capacity at all.<sup>53</sup>

But Allison's answer to both questions is no. He only answers the first question directly, but that answer, if sound, is also responsive to the second. As Allison reads Kant, Kant is no Leibniz. For Leibniz, human knowledge and divine knowledge differ not in kind but only in degree, and although no human could ever actually attain divine knowledge, divine knowledge sets the standard against which human knowledge is measured. Divine knowledge is thus *normative* for human knowledge, and human knowledge is defective to the extent that it deviates from the norm.<sup>54</sup> But, Allison says, Kant need not think of human knowledge that way. Of course, Allison's epistemic conditions model does not deny the mere logical possibility of differences between human and other sorts of knowledge. But it aspires to be *anthropocentric* rather than *theocentric*: It says that the only norm for human knowledge is given by the epistemic conditions of that (human) knowledge because human knowledge is not merely a lesser *degree* of knowledge but an altogether different *kind*. Human knowledge does not relate to God's knowledge as worse to better; they are just different, and are mutually *indifferent* from a normative point of view.<sup>55</sup> And, extending Allison's reasoning, to the extent that we can be anthropocentrists about comparisons of our knowledge with the divine kind, we can equally be anthropocentrists regarding discursive but non-spatio-temporal kinds of knowledge.

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<sup>53</sup> Cf. McDowell 2011, 36-9.

<sup>54</sup> Allison 1983, 20. Note that what is here at issue is Leibniz<sub>Allison</sub>. I do not claim that Leibniz<sub>Allison</sub> is Leibniz.

<sup>55</sup> I do not take Allison to be committed to the existence of non-human kinds of mind, for instance, the divine. Allison's anthropocentrism seems indifferent to the question of whether there is such a mind as God's or not, or even, so far as I can see, whether a mind like God's is really possible. Thus, e.g., at Allison 2004, 17, we are told that the concept of God's mind is a "fiction".

So: Does the epistemic conditions model permit Kant to be an empirical realist? Allison says yes.<sup>56</sup> And if we could make sense of human knowledge's being subject to no norm save that set by its own epistemic conditions, then that knowledge would be as much knowledge as it could possibly be. Consequently there would be no relevant perspective, e.g., a 'transcendental' one, from which an empirical thing could turn out *really* to be something other than what it is given to empirical knowledge as being—for instance, a complex of sensory states or an explanatorily self-*insufficient* expression or aspect of an underlying reality. If human knowledge calls itself 'knowledge' with entitlement, then what is 'empirically' something cannot turn out *really* ('transcendentally') to be something else, and empirical realism is in view.<sup>57</sup>

## 2.2. The Inadequacy of an Epistemic Conditions Model for Empirical Realism

Allison characterizes Kant's empirical realism this way:

When Kant claims that he is an empirical realist, [...] he is really affirming that our experience is not limited to the private domain of our own representations, but includes an encounter with 'empirically real' spatiotemporal objects.<sup>58</sup>

That 'empirically real' appears in an explanation of what Kant means by 'empirical realist'—and in scare quotes at that—is somewhat worrying. Why not say that when Kant calls himself an empirical realist, he affirms that our experience ("empirical") includes an encounter simply with *real* ("realist") things—granting, to be sure, that no such things are things in themselves? Nevertheless, there Allison is, insisting that spatiotemporal, i.e., empirical, things are real and that in experiencing them we are not stuck experiencing our own merely inner presentations but the things themselves (though not *in* themselves).

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<sup>56</sup> Allison 1983, 7.

<sup>57</sup> Cf. McDowell 2009b, 141, where the stand-in for what empirical 'reality' would turn out to be if we do not achieve empirical realism is "a mere reflection of self-standing features of our subjectivity."

<sup>58</sup> Allison 1983, 7.

That is the position Allison *aspires* to find in Kant. But he does not succeed.<sup>59</sup> For if epistemic conditions are conditions merely on the possible *presentation* of things, conditions, moreover, that are specific to *us humans*, then has the possibility that human knowledge is essentially defective really been neutralized? True enough, Kant says that on his proposal, “the proud name of an ontology [...] must give way to the modest name of a mere analytic of pure understanding” (A247/B303). Allison’s suggestion that epistemic conditions condition our possible *presentation* of things rather than their possible *being* may seem consonant with that. But seemingly, as Allison reads Kant, human knowledge is not of things but of things-for-humans, which looks like less than we’d hoped for.

From whom did we get such high hopes? From Kant himself, for whom objectivity is indissolubly connected with universality and necessity.<sup>60</sup> The ‘objectivity’ to which the epistemic conditions model entitles us is only *comparatively* universal (i.e., more universal than were it restricted only to a subset of humans, say) and *contingently* necessary (i.e., necessary relative to a particular kind of subject whose choice as the norm of knowledge is itself contingent). ‘Empirical realism’ on this model starts to look less like ‘realism about empirical things’—I have *knowledge* of *things* given to me empirically—and more like ‘relativism about empirical things’—empirical things are *what my distinctively human epistemic conditions permit me to count as* empirical things, and my ‘knowledge’ of them is how I am constrained to present by those conditions. Call the worry I am expressing about Allison’s conception of Kant’s empirical realism a worry about the *parochialism* of human ‘knowledge’ and the ‘reality’ that it presents.

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<sup>59</sup> Ameriks (2012b) mounts a similar line of criticism against Hanna’s position in Hanna 2001 and 2006.

<sup>60</sup> PrL 4:298; the doctrine is echoed in §19 of the B Deduction (B140-2).



Allison might protest that I thereby ignore his anthropocentrism. On his view, the norm for human knowledge is the set of epistemic conditions constituting human minds, and nothing else. Hence the only admissible standard for the question, ‘Does this count as knowledge?’ is the question, ‘Does this count as human knowledge?’ So, Allison might reason, there is no pressing worry about parochialism. It does not make sense, in answering the question ‘Is what humans have knowledge?’, to compare human knowledge with some other putatively possible kind; human knowledge can thus be regarded as just *knowledge*, full stop.

But note that Allison’s choice of norm looks stipulative and leaves us wondering just what *entitles* us to be epistemically anthropocentric. To be sure, if we were unreflective theocentrists—if it never occurred to us to wonder whether we might be better off thinking of human knowledge as setting its own norm rather than being normatively constrained by God’s knowledge—Allison’s intervention would be salutary, i.e., as a suggestion worth exploring. But it is no stopping point. What entitles us to reject the ‘theocentric’ norm and accept the ‘anthropocentric’? The simple entrance of anthropocentrism onto the scene does not provide that entitlement. But without it, Allison does not sufficiently differentiate his Kant from the empiricists, who also aimed at anthropocentrism but missed their shot.<sup>61</sup>

Now I want to be clear: The absence of an account of our entitlement to anthropocentrism *by itself* jeopardizes empirical realism.<sup>62</sup> Without that account, we must wonder why we should

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<sup>61</sup> Allison gestures at Locke’s anthropocentrism at Allison 1983, 22. Allison explicitly recognizes the empiricists’ aspiration to anthropocentrism at Allison 2004, 38.

<sup>62</sup> In an article published after the second edition of *Kant’s Transcendental Idealism*, Allison actually uses something like my slogan, suggesting that Kant “argues *from* rather than *to* [empirical] realism” (Allison 2006, 2), and he indicates sensitivity to the need to articulate conditions of possibility of such realism (18-19). But, puzzlingly, he does not seem to notice that an issue of *entitlement* to empirical realism or to epistemic anthropocentrism is thereby raised. I suspect that the reason lies in Allison’s view that the first *Critique*’s account of empirical realism is not supposed to be a response to a “radical skeptical challenge.” One can agree with Allison there if one is sufficiently precise about what sort of challenge he has in mind and what a response to it would have

think that our merely *opting* not to compare our knowledge to God's (or any other kind) bears any philosophical weight, and the threat of epistemic parochialism remains. Indeed, prominent members of the tradition preceding Kant (e.g., Leibniz) took such comparison to be perfectly appropriate, and simply declining it seems dialectically feeble, question-begging, or dogmatically quietistic.

Allison's insensitivity to the requirement of an entitlement to epistemic anthropocentrism corresponds to a weak grasp of what empirical realism must be to be a genuine realism, which leads him to adopt philosophical positions that are inconsistent with such realism. For instance, Paul Abela notes that Allison's position contains a residuum of 'constructivism'.<sup>63</sup> Abela takes Allison to differentiate Kant's position from empirical idealism by assigning to Kant's position a role for formal, *a priori* elements, namely categories and forms of intuition.<sup>64</sup> That is well and good, as far as it goes, but Allison leaves room for something like 'transcendental matter' to play a role in cognition. That is, Allison supposes Kant to be committed to (possible or actual) unsynthesized or unconceptualized intuitions, pure undifferentiated sensation. What sensibility gives to the mind is originally only 'raw data', constitutive only of a 'proleptic' intuition,<sup>65</sup> and those intuitions that yield consciousness of empirical things are those happy few proleptic ones that are subsequently brought under concepts.<sup>66</sup>

Talk of unconceptualized intuitions immediately raises Sellarsian worries about mythical Givenness. How could intuitions at once be altogether distinct from and independent of concepts

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to look like. But that Kant is not *responding* to the sort of challenge that Allison has in view does not entail that he lacks the philosophical resources to *be responsive* to such a challenge, which Allison does not seem to see.

<sup>63</sup> The criticism I am about to level against Allison is likewise applicable to Hanna 2001 (32ff.).

<sup>64</sup> Abela 2002, 34.

<sup>65</sup> Allison adopts that way of speaking from Walsh 1975, 15.

<sup>66</sup> Allison 1983, 67-8. I am indebted to Jim Conant for drawing my attention to that passage, and see his 2016 for a related line of criticism.

and rationally constrain the activity of conceptualizing them?<sup>67</sup> And Kant is famously committed to the *blindness* of intuitions without concepts: They are not presentations of anything apart from their unity with thought (A51/B75).<sup>68</sup> If human knowledge proceeds in two stages, of which the first is the provision to some ‘transcendental’ cognitive mechanism<sup>69</sup> of blind intuitions as raw material, then the second, conceptual stage is justificatorily entirely arbitrary relative to the first. Irrespective of whether we consider that second stage of conceptualization as somehow compelled from outside or impelled by the intellect’s own nature, we must acknowledge that the *experience* that the two stages are to constitute is not a relation of rational responsiveness of knowledge to the object it presents but, on the contrary, a kind of *construction* or *projection* by the intellect as data-processor that *produces* the object rather than responding to it and that is constrained only by whatever rules govern the processor.<sup>70</sup> Thus the thought that there is *any* role for mere data (even if only ‘transcendentally’ given) leaves a recognizably “constructivist paradigm” in place, *a priori* forms notwithstanding: “the subject synthesizing privately given transcendental matter and ‘producing’ objectively valid representations.”<sup>71</sup>

One can, of course, *aspire* to combine anthropocentrism with a constructivist paradigm—and to think a contradictory thought. But if we were actually entitled to anthropocentrism, then we could conceive of ourselves as having nothing less than a capacity for *knowledge* as a

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<sup>67</sup> Sellars 1991. I am influenced in my understanding of Sellars’s point by McDowell 2009a, 256-7.

<sup>68</sup> Note that that claim is not contradicted by Kant assigning to sensibility, in the sentence preceding the famous one about emptiness and blindness, the role of *giving us objects*. It is perfectly compatible with that being sensibility’s distinctive role that it only be able to fulfill that role in tandem with the understanding, at least in a rational creature.

<sup>69</sup> On readings like that, the meaning of the word ‘transcendental’ is very obscure, except insofar as it is supposed indeterminately to invoke some piece or other of Kant’s explanatory apparatus.

<sup>70</sup> Characterizing the activity of constructing or projecting the world as unconscious or without agency does not help anything, nor would the fact, if fact it be, that the activity proceeds in a way common to all human beings towards a common result (i.e., my projection seems to match yours). For first, the fact that I cannot be blamed for producing the world does not make less disturbing the thought that the world is a product (as though, were I hallucinating, I would be any less epistemologically disturbed by that fact once I reflected that I had not consciously or deliberately brought the hallucination about). And second, since we lack entitlement to conceive of ‘human’ as designating a norm of knowledge, we are no better off than we would be in a case of shared hallucination.

<sup>71</sup> Abela 2002, 35.

capacity for rational responsiveness to mind-independent objects. And an upshot of Abela's argument is that we cannot really so conceive of ourselves without abandoning the two-stage epistemic model on which merely proleptic intuitions are, posterior<sup>72</sup> to their reception by us, conceptualized. That Allison conceives of his epistemic conditions as conditions on a kind of mental processing of antecedently formless material positively invites the thought that the 'things' given empirically are really only 'things-for-us' or 'things-for-me',<sup>73</sup> the product of a merely projective process—clearly incompatible with a genuine empirical realism.

But even if Allison abandoned all talk suggestive of a constructive or projective idealism, and even if we assiduously restrict ourselves to the human standpoint and simply refuse to bring God up, the mere thought that so-called epistemic conditions are 'merely epistemic' without also being ontological, conditions of presentation rather than being, is enough to estrange Allison from the possibility of empirical realism. To see that, consider his reply to an objection from James Van Cleve. The objection is that Allison cannot distinguish a case of reality from one of mere semblance because he cannot distinguish, e.g., something's *really being* spatial<sup>74</sup> from its *merely seeming to be* spatial. After all, Allison is committed to the claim that things are spatial only in relation to us humans and our peculiar epistemic conditions. Given that commitment, we need some model to understand how spatiality-only-in-relation-to-us-humans counts as a genuine property of things and not a mere illusion, in us, about things.<sup>75</sup>

Allison's reply is striking:

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<sup>72</sup> Allison would probably insist that the kind of posteriority required on his conception is logical, not temporal. But that does not solve the problem, which ultimately arises out of the supposition that intuiting cannot *itself* be an intellectually informed activity.

<sup>73</sup> I was going to write, 'or, worse, things-for-me', but that's not really so. We do not scale *up* to universality by going from one to many. As soon as we have fallen at all short of universality, knowledge is off the table.

<sup>74</sup> Here 'spatiality' does duty for any human epistemic condition.

<sup>75</sup> Van Cleve 1999, 147.

[Van Cleve's] characterization of this [epistemic] relation is tendentious and conceals an important ambiguity. "*Appearing to us to have such-and-such a shape*" [hence appearing to us to be spatial] may mean either merely *seeming* to us to have it, much as the stick seen in the water seems to us to be bent, or as justifiably claimed to have it, qua considered in relation to the conditions under which it appears to beings with our forms of sensibility.<sup>76</sup>

Now who is really being tendentious here? Take two cases. (1) In the first, suppose I am experiencing an illusion, that sort where I am aware that it is an illusion but the awareness does not dispel it—like the stick in water. In that case, I grant that the stick itself is not bent, and the claim, 'The stick is bent', is false. Yet the claim, 'The stick seems to me to be bent', is true. It is true not 'just for me' but for everyone (which is just what 'true' means): Frank and Sally, my partners in viewing the stick, can rightly affirm that the stick seems to *me* to be bent, even if the stick does not seem so to *them* and even if none of us accepts that the stick is in fact bent. (2) Now in the second case, talk not about the stick's seeming bentness but instead about its spatiality. What now is the deep distinction that Allison needs between the claims (a) that the stick *merely seems* spatial to me—which, again, is true for everyone—and (b) that the stick *is* spatial but only *for us humans*?

How about this: In the first case, the illusion that the stick is bent is not comprehensive. Although it *looks* bent, I can, e.g., feel that it is not bent, or lift it out of the water, or otherwise discover facts with which its actually being bent is not compatible. In the second case, meanwhile, I cannot get 'behind' spatiality; there is nothing I could learn about the stick *from my experience of it* that would show me that it is not spatial. But that does not make the second case better described by (b) than (a). For on Allison's position, although *experience* can yield no knowledge of the stick that would count against its spatiality, I have other—'transcendental'?—knowledge that spatiality is an epistemic condition, hence that the stick as it is in itself is not

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<sup>76</sup> Allison 2004, 44.

spatial.<sup>77</sup> Since I have that other knowledge, why should it not count against the spatiality of the stick, just as my experiential knowledge that the stick will look straight when I pull it out of the water counts against the stick's being bent even supposing I leave the stick immersed?

What about this: In the first case, the stick does not appear bent to all humans. Maybe it would appear bent to all humans *under the same circumstances*. But as things stand, one has to be looking at the stick (rather than, say, touching it), under certain lighting conditions, from certain angles and not others, and so on. Conceivably, every human could at once be suitably positioned for the stick to appear bent to all of them, but that would not mean that the stick seeming bent to the perceiver is entailed merely by the perceiver's being human. By contrast, in the second case, the stick's spatiality follows just from the perceiver's humanity. All humans have the same epistemic conditions, among them spatiality, hence all things given to humans must be given spatially. That way of formulating the difference between the first and second cases comes closer to Allison's language in the quotation above. Does it entitle Allison, in the second case, to a distinction between (a) and (b), and to the description of his position by (b)—that the stick *is* spatial, though only *for us humans*?

The answer remains no. It would entitle Allison if he could furnish an *argument* that scaling up from 'some humans, suitably positioned' to 'all humans, regardless of position' was a difference not merely in degree of generality but in epistemic kind. As things stand, however, epistemic conditions simply look like more conditions to which one could be subject. If I perceive the stick under *these* conditions, namely visually, from this angle, while the stick is partially immersed in water, it will seem bent. And if I perceive it under *these* conditions, namely through a spatial form of intuition, it will seem spatial. The upshot is that the insistence that the

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<sup>77</sup> Or, at least, that the stick's being spatial for us humans has no bearing on whether the stick is spatial in itself; that the former is no evidence for the latter.

stick really *is* spatial seems incompatible with the thought that its being spatial depends on epistemic conditions, where the latter figure as conditions merely of my presenting it. Of course, one could move to collapse the distinction between ‘being’ spatial and ‘seeming’ spatial. But that would not give Allison what he wants, as it would require, one way or other, a repudiation of his distinction between epistemic and ontological conditions.

Now an argument that the concept of ‘humanity’ specifies a genuinely epistemic norm—an argument on behalf of Allison’s anthropocentrism—would give Allison what he needs here. It would, in fact, allow Allison to call his ‘epistemic conditions’, which are really merely *presentational* conditions on his present account, genuinely epistemic with a straight face. For then they would characterize what *knowledge* is, so that we cannot wonder whether what is known is reality, an actual thing, or merely semblance, what is only *presented as* a thing. But absent such an argument, the claim that the stick ‘is’ spatial for all us humans—the (b) description—does not look significantly different from the claim that for all us humans, we will seem to see a spatial thing when we perceive the stick—the (a) description. And if that’s right, then the case of the spatial stick, as adequately characterized by (a) as by (b), does not significantly differ from the case of the bent stick. Hence empirical realism cannot be satisfied with the claim that we can *justifiably* say that empirical things *are* spatial *for us humans*. For that is just to accept parochialism about human knowledge.

We learn from our consideration of Allison that for empirical realism to be possible, we must be entitled to think of ourselves as bearers of a genuinely *epistemic* capacity, a capacity to present *reality*. The particular barrier that Allison faces to that requirement is his inability to find in Kant an entitlement to, rather than merely a stipulation of, epistemic anthropocentrism, and hence to fend off the charge of epistemic parochialism. Without that entitlement, the human

presentational capacity cannot, after all, be a capacity for knowledge. And that is as much as to grant that *qua* knowers we humans are defective, and empirical realism is beyond our reach.

We shall presently see that a very different line of interpretation, one that is at first glance less subjectively tinged than Allison's, nevertheless has its own difficulty making empirical realism possible. The line of interpretation is the recently prominent transcendent-metaphysics-friendly approach best argued by Rae Langton and Lucy Allais, for which Allais will figure as our representative.

### 3. Allais's Metaphysical Two-aspect Interpretation

#### 3.1. Reality and Its Essentially Manifest and Essentially Non-manifest Aspects

Allais's interpretation of the Critical philosophy has rather different priorities from Allison's. She is less motivated to find in Kant an idealism that even minimally resembles ordinary subjective idealism, and she is a committed realist about things in themselves. She aims for a conception on which neither empirical things nor things in themselves are more or less real than each other. There is simply a part of reality about which we can *in principle* or *essentially* get to know (even if we *accidentally* cannot, e.g., because our sense organs are too weak) and another part which is in principle or essentially beyond the reach of our epistemic capacity. The part of reality within epistemic reach consists of *essentially manifest qualities*: qualities that things have that are just the sorts of qualities about which knowers like us can in principle know.<sup>78</sup> Empirical 'things' are in fact constituted entirely out of such qualities.<sup>79</sup> Strictly

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<sup>78</sup> Allais 2015, 117.

<sup>79</sup> Allais 2015, 137-44.



speaking, therefore, empirical things are not *things* in their own right but the essentially manifest aspects of metaphysically more fundamental things.<sup>80</sup>

However, essentially manifest qualities are not self-subsistent; they must be grounded. Moreover, what grounds them cannot merely be the things that they qualify, if those are construed as lacking any further qualities. Rather, the grounds of empirical things, constituted out of essentially manifest qualities, are (although Allais does not use this term) the *essentially non-manifest qualities* that characterize things as they are in themselves.<sup>81</sup> To call them ‘essentially non-manifest’ is to mark that they are the sort of qualities of which we could *not*, in principle, have any knowledge (save *that* there must be some such qualities). And the claim that essentially non-manifest qualities ground essentially manifest qualities is supposed to provide an attractive and elucidative gloss on Kant’s occasional claims that things in themselves ground empirical things, which claims are an important part of the textual basis of Allais’s metaphysically oriented reading.

Now to say that empirical ‘things’ are really aspects of things rather than things in their own right makes them ontologically derivative. But at first glance it does not make them *less real*, any more than an attribute’s inhering in a substance makes it less real than the substance. What is more, on the empirical side, although Allais makes an effort to show that there is some admissible sense in which empirical things as she conceives of them are mind-dependent, her conception of that mind-dependence begins and ends with the thought that empirical things are at least possibly knowable by us. She offers no account of *why* some qualities are essentially manifest and others essentially non-manifest and *a fortiori* not an account in terms of the subjective conditioning of our presentation of the essentially manifest qualities. She merely notes

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<sup>80</sup> Allais 2015, 19.

<sup>81</sup> Allais 2015, 7; cf. 231-43.

that in-principle-possible knowability or experienceability seems to her to be some kind of mind-dependence and that she aspires to no stronger sort of mind-dependence than whatever sort that is, and leaves matters there.<sup>82</sup> As far as empirical cognition is concerned, she even positively rejects a representationalist epistemology on Kant's behalf in favour of direct perceptual realism. She thus seems to have a stronger claim to be able to explain the possibility of a genuine empirical realism than Allison does,<sup>83</sup> her realism about things in themselves notwithstanding.

Allais's treatment of empirical things as, in fact, merely essentially manifest *aspects* of things that are not *per se* empirical might seem to go against my initial formulation of empirical realism as requiring that empirical things not turn out really to be something else, or that the concept 'empirical thing' not turn out to be reducible to or substitutable for some other concept or concepts. But Allais could plausibly push back, first, on the basis of her otherwise apparently quite non-subjectivistic approach to Kant's empirical epistemology, and second, by arguing that to say that the *thing* is not *per se* empirical is merely to observe that we do not experience, over and above a thing's qualities, the thing that has those qualities somehow independently of them. In any case, however, there is a deeper problem with her approach.

### 3.2. Allais's Commitment to Our Essential Disconnection from the Ground of Empirical Reality

To get the problem into view, consider the following worry of McDowell's:

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<sup>82</sup> Allais 2015, 132-7. Her position contrasts interestingly with Ameriks's 'moderate interpretation' of Kant's idealism (2012b). Ameriks's approach is similar to Allais's in many respects, including its commitment to realism about things in themselves. But Ameriks is more committal than Allais about a place for some kind of subjectivism in Kant's transcendental idealism and for some notion of differing degrees of reality between empirical things and things in themselves. Kant's idealism, as Ameriks understands it, is *moderately* subjective in that it confers on empirical things a status in between the radical subjectivity of mental items and the radical mind-independence of things in themselves, which in turn corresponds to a *moderate* degree of reality, higher than that of mere mental items but lower than that of things in themselves (75-6).

<sup>83</sup> Note, however, that Allais simply doesn't develop her view under the same philosophical pressures as Allison, and so does not take up certain questions that, if she did, might push her in a more subjectively idealistic direction.

[N]ote that what Kant insists on, in passages like Bxxvii, is an identity of things as they appear in our knowledge and “those same things as things in themselves”; not “those same things as they are in themselves”. (This latter wording pervades, e.g., Henry E. Allison’s non-two-worlds reading, in *Kant’s Transcendental Idealism* [Allison 1983].) Things in themselves are the very things that figure in our knowledge, but considered in abstraction from how they figure in our knowledge. That is not to say: considered as possessing, unknowably to us, other properties than those they appear as possessing in our knowledge of them. With this latter construal of things in themselves, the non-two-worlds reading might as well be a two-worlds reading. The picture still involves two realms of fact, one knowable by us and one unknowable by us; it does not undermine the damage this does to say that the same objects figure in both.<sup>84</sup>

Now that worry is, of course, framed in reference to Allison’s interpretation of the *Critique*, not Allais’s. But it contains an ambiguity, viz., between two possible sorts of “damage” that McDowell could mean to object to. I suggest that those possible sorts of damage correspond to Allison’s and Allais’s approaches, respectively (even if McDowell did not have the ambiguity, or Allais’s approach in particular, in mind).

The first sort of damage is that what distinguishes the two “realms of fact” is that one, the in-itself, is fully objective and nothing other than how things are, while the other, the empirically available, is rather a realm of ‘fact-for-us-humans’, not how things are but merely how things must appear to be given that it is us humans who are presenting them. That is the damage of supposing that the human epistemic capacity is parochial; it is the damage done by the Allisonian interpretation. The second sort of damage is that of supposing our knowledge is in principle incomplete in a certain way, namely because we are epistemically *cut off* from a realm of being that transcends our distinctively human epistemic conditions, whatever our empirical circumstances. That, I contend, is the sort of damage done by Allais’s interpretation.

Yet why that amounts to ‘damage’ at all can at first be difficult to make out. To get clear about that, we must begin by reflecting on the difference between the following two cases: (1) A

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<sup>84</sup> McDowell 2009f, 42.

case in which I am precluded from knowing everything there is to know simply because first, what there is to know is an indefinite or even infinite quantity, and second, I am subject to contingent, empirical limits (where in space and when in time I find myself, the nature and acuity of my sense organs, what technology is available, etc.) on how much of that indefinite or even infinite quantity is within my reach in a finite human lifespan or even, conceivably, a finite lifespan of the universe. Call that a case of *mere incompleteness*. (2) A case in which quite aside from any such contingent, empirical limits, even at the maximally idealized limit of absolutely perfected inquiry, there are some facts or elements of reality which are *in principle* or *essentially* unknowable by a being with my epistemic capacity. Call that a case of being *essentially disconnected* from a part of reality, or more briefly, a case of *essential disconnection*.

In the first case (mere incompleteness), it is coherent to indulge in counterfactuals about what I would be able to know were I to find myself under different circumstances—in a different place, with better technology. ('I would have been able to observe that asteroid billions of lightyears away had I only been nearer to it or had I a more powerful telescope.') In the second case (essential disconnection), with respect to the unknowable facts, such counterfactuals make no sense. No matter how well placed I am or how perfected my means of knowing, the facts in question necessarily escape me. The contrast between cases is important to see clearly because the sort of incompleteness of finite human knowledge represented by the first case is in fact *no threat to empirical realism at all*. Indeed, it pretty clearly corresponds to Kant's own view of the limitlessness (or at least the indefinability of limits) of possible knowledge. The threat to empirical realism lies, rather, in the second case.

There is a temptation to assimilate the second case to the first, and hence to deny the threat, in something like the following way: There are certain things that I, personally, will never

plausibly be able to know in my lifetime. Bees, for example, are sensitive to colours that humans ordinarily are not,<sup>85</sup> and we are at present in no position to confer the ability to see those colours on humans and may never be. But that is no threat to the thought that right now, I know all sorts of features of reality by sight. Analogously, surely there could be aspects of reality that are unknowable for me not because of any features of my empirical situation (my circumstances and my empirical-biological constitution) but just insofar as I am the sort of *knower* that I am—let us say the *discursive* sort—and that may seem not to threaten the thought that I am at any rate a knower of what is knowable by me. No doubt if I had bees' eyes, then I would not be precluded from knowing those exotic colours, because my capacity for knowledge is not constituted by the kinds of sense organs that I have but by something more general, my discursivity—my being the sort of knower whose knowing is, in the most basic case, conceptually mediated sensibly intuitive awareness.<sup>86</sup> But analogously, if I were not a discursive knower but some other sort, then seemingly I could know the facts that the non-discursive knower knows. And why not suppose that there is an even higher level of generality at which my capacity for knowledge is constituted as such, higher than discursivity, such that capacities for knowledge divide into the discursive and the non-discursive types and, at that level, stand to each other exactly as do differently sensitive sense-organs belonging to different species of organism?

But the assimilation is suspect. We speak about the colours to which bees are sensitive and to which we are not because we actually *know*, albeit indirectly, that those colours belong to the very same world that we look out upon through our own sense-organs. We understand the physiology of light-sensitivity and the physical conditions under which light energy of just such-

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<sup>85</sup> Here I am happy to treat colours as an objective property of things, though many would reject that. The contentiousness of the example does not affect the soundness of the point.

<sup>86</sup> This line of argument is not addressed to worries specifically about the spatio-temporality of the human epistemic capacity, for reasons that will soon become apparent.

and-such frequencies and wavelengths is generated well enough to be able to say that were our eyes only more like bees', we would see colours that at present we do not. (Indeed, we can draw such comparisons between more and less colour-sensitive human beings.) It belongs to the natural-law-governed character of the empirical world that the possibility is opened to us discursive knowers to get to know aspects of it *indirectly* on the basis of what is *directly knowable*; direct knowledge that we have now can rationally motivate judgments about what is, for now and possibly forever, an object of indirect knowledge.

Could there be anything that, analogously, rationally motivates supposing that there is a region of reality that is beyond my ability to know it just insofar as my epistemic capacity is discursive? Here I want plainly to grant that a totally *unmotivated*, free and arbitrary postulation of a part of reality that is in principle unknowable does not yet pose a threat to empirical realism, so far as I can see. Yet I want also to insist that it poses no such threat only to the extent that it is a completely idle thought-game, something we have no reason at all to accept. For as soon as we start to ask why we might feel philosophically *required* to postulate the discursively unknowable, trouble brews. Clearly, we have no direct encounters with non-discursive knowers or with the discursively unknowable facts that they would putatively know, so that is not a source of philosophical pressure. There is also no natural place *within* our world-picture, carved out for us by what we already know within that picture, for discursively inaccessible facts and means of knowing them in the way that there is such a place for the colours that only bees sense and the organs with which they sense them—precisely not! If there is any possible rational motivation for the postulation of discursively inaccessible facts, something that would take us beyond the philosophically idle, it therefore seems to have to be some explanatory requirement generated by our world-picture just as such that cannot otherwise be satisfied than by stepping beyond that

picture. There must be something about empirical reality, the region of reality-writ-large that we discursive knowers can know, that requires explaining and that nothing immanent to that region can explain.

But if that is right, then we are in the position of finding that the discursively knowable region of reality *needs explaining* and, at the same time, that what would actually *do the explaining* would have to be in principle unknowable by us just insofar as it must belong to the discursively unknowable region. That is, we can know of the empirical world both that it requires explanation and that we could never, even in principle and under the most idealized of epistemic circumstances, be able to explain it, so long as we have the discursive epistemic capacity that we do.

That is the situation in which we find ourselves if we follow Allais. On her reading, we posit essentially non-manifest qualities because we find ourselves unable to accept the possibility of a reality exhausted by things with none but essentially manifest qualities, i.e., empirical things. Essentially manifest qualities are “relational”, and objects characterized solely by relational qualities are “logically impossible” and hence “really impossible”.<sup>87</sup> Consequently, discursively knowable essentially manifest qualities require discursively unknowable essentially non-manifest non-relational qualities for their explanation.<sup>88</sup> (Allais might try to deny on her Kant’s behalf that the explanation putatively provided by essentially non-manifest qualities is as entirely unknowable as I have made out—for instance, by an appeal to “unschematised categories”<sup>89</sup> or, what amounts to the same thing, so-called transcendental content. But such an

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<sup>87</sup> Allais is there invoking Kant’s technical notion of real (im)possibility. See chapter three, section 4 for a discussion of that notion.

<sup>88</sup> Allais 2015, 240.

<sup>89</sup> As at her 2015, 69.

appeal is philosophically underwhelming<sup>90</sup> notwithstanding its alleged Kantian provenance, and since all we are doing now is assessing the compatibility of a certain shape of position with empirical realism, we may set that appeal aside.)

Now the thought that the discursively knowable region of reality both requires explanation and, just insofar as we know discursively, essentially defies our ability to explain it should worry us for at least the following two related reasons. First, there is something peculiar about postulating an item as both requiring and defying the possibility of explanation. It looks like such an item, in this case empirical reality, would have to count for us as (as Kant would say) an unconditioned conditioned, and hence as incoherent on its face. Of course, the expedient of my opponent is to avoid the incoherence by locating what explains beyond the reach of discursive knowledge. But that is to say that we are in the position of having dubiously to treat the judgment that ‘There must be an explanation, albeit one we could never even in principle grasp’, as itself doing explanatory work. For if we concede what is obvious, that the judgment explains nothing (no more than the dormitive potency of opium explains its soporific character in Molière’s famous example), then since the only ground we have for making the judgment in the first place is the line of reasoning that terminates in it, that the line of reasoning thus terminates seems like a strong reason to reject it.

But second, and this is the deeper worry from the standpoint of empirical realism, by placing the necessary explanatory ground of empirical reality beyond the reach of our epistemic capacity, we give renewed life to the question of whether we really are in epistemic contact with reality at all even in our awareness of what seems to be its empirical part. For even if we grant

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<sup>90</sup> Briefly, because it leaves utterly mysterious why we are entitled to take such unschematized categories or transcendental content to characterize the otherwise unknowable part of reality rather than merely subjective necessities of our thinking.



that empirical reality requires for its possibility an experience-transcendent and discursively unknowable ground, all we have thereby granted is a *hypothetical judgment*: If what we are aware of empirically is reality (albeit only a part of it), *then* its required unknowable-by-us explanatory ground lies in the experience-transcendent realm. But precisely because that ground is unknowable by us, *how do we know that what we are aware of empirically, discursively, is any part of reality at all?* To settle that question, we would need to get behind the discursively knowable part of reality, which, by hypothesis, is just what we cannot do. So if empirical reality really does generate an explanatory requirement<sup>91</sup> that exceeds the reach of our epistemic capacity, we are in the position akin to that of what Kant calls the *problematic idealist*: that variety of subjective idealist for whom “it remains doubtful whether all so-called outer perceptions are not a mere play of our inner sense” (A368). That, I submit, is the damage done by a conception of the human epistemic capacity as subject to essential disconnection.

And if that is right, then we can now see that the thought that our epistemic capacity is subject to what I have called essential disconnection because of an unfulfillable explanatory requirement eventuates in the same broad conclusion about our epistemic capacity as the thought that our knowledge is essentially parochial: that the human epistemic capacity is *defective*, not really capable of knowledge of a mind-independent reality and hence not genuinely epistemic. And any view on which our putatively *epistemic* capacity turns out to be a *merely presentational* capacity cannot make empirical realism possible.

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<sup>91</sup> In chapter five, section 1.2, I shall have to complicate matters slightly by drawing a distinction between a genuine *explanatory requirement* and a mere *need of reason*, where the latter lacks direct objective purport. We *must think* things in themselves out of a need of reason but not because empirical reality defies *sufficient explanation* on its own account and thereby generates a genuine explanatory requirement.

#### 4. Kant's Transcendental Idealism?

Yet reflecting once more on Allison's approach and others like it, I cannot deny that it has a significant *prima facie* attraction: that Kant describes his position as a transcendental *idealism* as well as an empirical realism. Unlike me, and perhaps unlike Allais, Allison can respect the label 'idealism' in something like its conventional, subjective meaning (though, to be sure, that meaning is to some extent modified by 'transcendental', whatever that means). If 'idealism' in some domain is, conventionally, the position that the objects of that domain are mind-dependent, then 'transcendental idealism' on Allison's interpretation is the position that such necessary and universal features as empirical things, just as such, must have are really necessary and universal conditions on the presentation of things by us humans, and are to that extent mind-dependent.

And reflecting once more on Allais's approach and others like it, I cannot deny that it, too, has a significant *prima facie* attraction: that Kant's transcendental idealism does, after all, seem to have an ineliminable place for talk of the supersensible, or of things in themselves. Unlike me, Allais can provide a pleasingly straightforward account of why Kant seems to claim at various points that things in themselves exist: because that is his view!<sup>92</sup> If the specifically transcendental variety of idealism is distinguishable by its commitment to the existence of things in themselves, then that is a commitment that Allais's approach can respect.

The empirical realism that I have been developing, by contrast, seems like it cannot itself tolerate transcendental idealism—at least, not if transcendental idealism is any sort of subjective

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<sup>92</sup> It is always important to note that Kant's claims on behalf of the existence of things in themselves are quite variable in their strength. So Allais has a significant interpretive task in explaining all the passages where Kant seems to say something weaker than that we *know* that things in themselves exist, or even where he indicates agnosticism about whether there is an experience-transcendent ground of empirical things (which, for a metaphysical reader like Allais, is just a thing in itself). See chapter five as a whole and especially section 2.1 for more on that point.

idealism and not if it requires realism about things in themselves. If Kant is the empirical realist that I believe he is, then he must hold that human knowledge of empirical things is nothing other than *knowledge*, that the objects of our empirical awareness are nothing less than *real*, and that reality lies *in principle* within our epistemic and explanatory grasp. If anything resembling an Allisonian epistemic condition remains in view (say, in the form of the thought of a ‘form of knowledge’), it must lose its merely subjectively idealistic character. Its being a condition on knowledge of things will not preclude its being a condition on things themselves (though never things *in themselves*) and thus ontological in a way that Allison cannot make room for.<sup>93</sup>

Consequently subjective idealism will be forced out of the interpretive picture altogether. And at the same time, if there remains a point to talk of the thing in itself, that point will not lie in the assertion that such things exist, or even just that they are really possible, but in some role that the *thought* of the thing in itself can play in our capacity for knowledge of *empirical* things.<sup>94</sup> A construal of Kant’s transcendental idealism as specifically transcendent-metaphysical will likewise be forced out of the interpretive picture.

We have paid close attention to Allison’s and Allais’s proposals to get clearer about the demands that a genuine empirical realism makes on the Kant interpreter. *Any interpretation of the total Critical position on which we have not entitled ourselves or cannot entitle ourselves to think of our capacity for presentation as an epistemic capacity, or for non-accidental presentation of an objective, mind-independent reality, cannot tolerate genuine empirical realism.* Hence any interpretation on which it differs from subjective idealism only in degree and

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<sup>93</sup> I have in mind here the ‘equipoise’ McDowell seeks to find between subjective and objective in what he thinks of as a respectable idealism (McDowell 2009c, 75).

<sup>94</sup> I expand on this line of argument in chapter five, sections 1.1 and 1.2.

not in kind, or on which it requires the existence or, as I shall later argue, real possibility of an essentially unknowable part of reality, cannot tolerate empirical realism.

But that still leaves me with an interpretive choice. Shall I say that Kant's empirical realism compels us to read transcendental idealism as something altogether different from what it has been taken to be? Or, finding that to be an impossible task, shall I simply concede that transcendental idealism and genuine empirical realism are irreconcilable? In keeping with my guiding thought that we must understand transcendental idealism as explaining not what empirical realism is but how empirical realism is possible, we must begin by making clear what empirical realism is on its own account. But from there we will need to proceed towards what empirical realism presupposes for its possibility, and that, on Kant's view, is precisely transcendental idealism. Hence as I articulate the conditions of empirical realism's possibility, I will be, in effect, constructing an account of transcendental idealism at the very same time. And so by the final chapter, I shall be in a position to say something directly about the required conception of transcendental idealism.

In this chapter, I have tried to bring empirical realism into view, first with an initial sketch of it, then by comparison with Allison's and Allais's readings of Kant. In the following chapter, I shall elaborate on the interpretive restrictions placed on our understanding of the Critical position by empirical realism as a methodological control. Two have already been gestured at: (a) Empirical things cannot be reduced to or eliminated in favour of something other than empirical things, *viz.* the mental, inner, or subjective; and (b) empirical realism cannot tolerate a conception of our capacity for knowledge as essentially defective. The other two are that (c) empirical things must be the possible objects of a *direct* awareness, or perception; and (d) empirical things must be spatial (and temporal). Unlike in the present chapter, the focus of the

next chapter and the remainder of the dissertation will be more squarely on the Critical texts themselves. And part of the burden of chapter two will be to show that the two arguments I have just brought to bear against Allison and Allais on behalf of empirical realism are arguments that Kant himself can and even must make by his own lights.

## Chapter Two: Getting Kant's Empirical Realism into View

In the previous chapter, I introduced a minimal conception of empirical realism—presented initially not so much as Kant's but as what any position would have to be, whatever else it is, to qualify as a genuine realism about empirical things.<sup>1</sup> On that conception, empirical things are, just as *things*, objects of our empirical *knowledge*, and the concept of an empirical thing is thus basic. I also brought out these further, more specific requirements for the possibility of genuine empirical realism: first, that we must be able to take our epistemic capacity not to be parochial, that is, restricted to what only counts as 'reality' for us humans; and second, that we must be able to take our knowledge of reality not to be essentially disconnected from an required but unknowable or experience-transcendent explanatory ground (hereafter just 'essentially disconnected' or 'subject to essential disconnection'). Both of those are requirements for the possibility of empirical realism because for either not to be satisfied is for us to have to take our capacity for knowledge to be defective *as a capacity*, and that is as much as to say that we would lack a capacity for knowledge at all.

But in the previous chapter, I did not vindicate in any detail my claim that Kant is an empirical realist in my sense, nor fully spell out the constraints placed on an interpretation of the Critical philosophy by empirical realism as a methodological control. Those are the tasks of the present chapter. Importantly, this chapter is not primarily concerned to philosophically defend empirical realism, only (and only in part) its imputation to Kant. But the philosophical attractions of the empirical realism I find in Kant, particularly as enabling a distinctive strategy for blocking certain apparently pressing skeptical worries, should begin to emerge in this chapter.

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<sup>1</sup> Though I introduced some thin Kantian motivations, namely Kant's staunch insistence on his own (uniquely) realist commitments, and his insistence that empirical things constrain our presentation of them and that knowledge-claims about such objects bear the stamp of universality and necessity (which we shall revisit in section 4 below).

Herein I argue that Kant's empirical realism as a genuine realism comprises at least these commitments: (a) that empirical things (or their effects) can be directly perceived and not merely known through inference from inner items;<sup>2</sup> (b) that I am located in space and that outer things are in space in locations different from my own; (c) that those things and the space in which they are located are not mere mental, inner, or somehow subjective items, modifications of an empirical mind, but are existentially mind-independent;<sup>3</sup> (d) that human knowledge is not defective and thus in principle neither parochial nor essentially disconnected.<sup>4</sup> As I shall argue, those four commitments are really not independent of each other, as though we could think of ourselves as having 'some' realism if we adhere only to a subset of them. If any of them is jettisoned, then realism is lost. But the commitment which is the most fundamental relative to the others and certainly the most controversial as an interpretive claim is (d), which will motivate much of the subsequent development of the dissertation. In what follows, I substantiate my claim that those commitments are Kant's, and I argue that they constitute a genuine unity of philosophical purpose. Yet the most obviously pertinent passages in Kant are by no means

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<sup>2</sup> I take that to commit Kant to the thesis that the content of perceptual awareness is the very thing perceived. But that is to put the point in terms closer to those of contemporary philosophy of perception than to Kant's own. Kant would be less inclined to talk about the content of *perception* than either the content of *a concept*, by which he would either mean the intension of that concept (in his terms, its marks) or that concept's objective reality or meaningfulness (see chapter three, sections 1 and 7). What we now mean to refer to by the phrase 'perceptual content' is what Kant would speak of simply as that which an empirical intuition refers or relates to, namely, the very thing intuited. Nevertheless, the more contemporary formulation—that the content of a perception of an empirically outer thing is just that very thing—gives us a way of understanding what Kant could mean besides a baldly idealistic thesis by saying, as he does in the A fourth Paralogism, that there is an admissible sense in which outer things are 'in' my mind. I shall have more to say about the A fourth Paralogism and the issues it raises throughout this chapter.

<sup>3</sup> I do not mean to imply, though, that they may well be modifications of some other sort of mind, e.g., 'transcendental'. I only insert the qualification 'empirical' to avoid prejudicing thorny interpretive issues that come up in dealing with key passages, notably the A fourth Paralogism (discussed throughout this chapter).

<sup>4</sup> That (a) and (d) are epistemological theses and (b) and (c) ontological theses is no accident. A consequence of my argument against Allison is that whatever Kant's transcendental idealism amounts to, it cannot require a distinction between Allisonian epistemic conditions and properly ontological conditions and a restriction to the former conditions without falling into subjective idealism and thereby making empirical realism impossible. That gives us a way of interpreting Kant's claim in the A Deduction that his view is show that "[t]he a priori conditions for a possible experience as such are *at the same time* [*zugleich*] conditions for the possibility of objects of experience" (A111; emphasis mine).

unequivocally on my side. Hence part of the burden of this chapter will be a close reading of those key, controversial passages.

The order of my argument is as follows. I begin in section 1 by trying to substantiate commitments (a) (availability to direct awareness) and (b) (spatiality). That's actually not hard to do: The A fourth Paralogism (hereafter A4P) offers strong support for them—but seemingly only at the expense of (c) (not merely mental or subjective) and perhaps also (d) (human knowledge is not parochial or incomplete), suggesting that Kant is in key respects an empirical idealist by my lights.<sup>5</sup> Next, in section 2, I turn to B's Refutation of Idealism (hereafter the Refutation), which also strongly supports (a) and (b) but stakes out what appears to be a strong opposition to the empirical idealist tendencies of A4P. Rather than take the two passages to be inconsistent, I take the strong realism of the Refutation to be a hint that we should find another way to read A4P. In section 3, I develop that alternative reading by paying careful attention to Kantian distinctions between 'inner' and 'outer', 'empirical' and 'transcendental', and '*Vorstellungen*' and 'things in themselves', and to their nexuses. The key to the reading is the recognition of empirical and transcendental senses of inner and outer and thence of the fact that space cannot be 'inner' in the same sense in which mental items are 'inner' if key Kantian commitments present in both A and B are to make any sense. By the end of section 3, a case for commitment (c) as well as (a) and (b) is established. In section 4, I turn to commitment (d). For all that sections 1-3 have shown, Kant could still hold that our knowledge is defective, which, I contend, would vitiate any anti-subjectively-idealistic force of the non-mentality of space and spatial things (c). Through an examination of key passages from the first *Critique*, the *Prolegomena*, and two essays from the

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<sup>5</sup> I shall argue in section 2 below that my lights are also Kant's, even in the A first *Critique*. If that is right, it lends plausibility to the thought, defended below, that the A fourth Paralogism's seeming incompatibility with commitments (c) and (d) must be a *merely* seeming incompatibility.



1790s, I show that Kant himself is committed to the non-defectiveness of the human epistemic capacity and hence that we may take his claims that we have *knowledge* of an empirical *reality* at face value. In section 5, I exhibit the unity of those elements of Kant's empirical realism that I have thus far exhibited piecemeal. I conclude with a consideration of the terrain that the argument of this chapter leaves uncovered.

### 1. Empirical Idealism and the A Fourth Paralogism

The two passages in the first *Critique* where empirical realism is discussed most directly and at greatest length are A4P, marked A because it was wholly rewritten for the B edition and hence found only in A,<sup>6</sup> and the Refutation, found only in the B edition.<sup>7</sup> At first glance, the passages share some significant commitments: the orienting claim that empirical idealism is false, both in its problematic (Descartes) and dogmatic (Berkeley) guises (A377; B274); the claim that direct (*unmittelbar*) awareness of empirical things is possible (A371; B276); the claim that empirical things are in space, namely in a different location from mine (A373; B275).

Yet where the Refutation is fairly unequivocally realist, the argument of A4P looks like a variant of the Berkeleyan strategy I described in the previous chapter: a 'downgrading' argument that what we thought were real things, viz., empirical things, are really something else that is ontologically lesser and epistemologically subjective, combined with a compensatory 'upgrading' argument that that lesser status is all that we could reasonably want the concept of an

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<sup>6</sup> The changes that the fourth Paralogism underwent between the A and B editions are not merely presentational; the point of the argument of the B version appears basically different from that of its counterpart in A. Cf. Brook 1994, §2.

<sup>7</sup> I emphasize the distinction in editions because patchwork-oriented commentators are apt to conclude that apparent inconsistencies between the two passages reflect a change of mind on Kant's part. Although I do not have as a primary aim to show that he did *not* change his mind, we shall see that as far as the relevant issues are concerned, there are fewer reasons to attribute a change of mind to him than has often been thought.

empirical thing really to designate. The effect is to seem to satisfy the first two elements of Kant's empirical realism outlined above<sup>8</sup> at the expense of the second two.<sup>9</sup>

Let's take a closer look. In A4P, Kant contends against a position he calls 'empirical idealism'. Thus far I have more or less assumed that empirical idealism and subjective idealism are equivalent, but to avoid prejudicing any interpretive issues here, we should treat 'empirical idealism' as a technical term of Kant's whose meaning is to be determined. Empirical idealism has at least two variants: skeptical or problematic, and dogmatic. The first, associated with Descartes, holds that what is 'external' is knowable only by a causal inference from what is 'internal', mental items of some sort, and doubts the inference (A368). The second, associated with Berkeley, holds that the 'external' is in principle impossible and hence that the 'internal' is all there is to know (A377).<sup>10</sup> Those two positions share a commitment to the claim that whatever is true of my awareness of the 'external', I have direct perception of the 'internal', i.e., the mental or merely subjective. They thus instantiate a familiar trope of early modern philosophy on which the starting point for describing my epistemological situation is my unproblematic

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<sup>8</sup> That empirical things, or their effects, can be directly perceived, and that those things are in space in locations different from my own.

<sup>9</sup> That empirical things are not mere modifications of an empirical mind but are existentially mind-independent, and that our knowledge, insofar as it is of such objects, is not in principle parochial or cut off from part of reality. The latter would follow from the commitments in A4P in conjunction with realism about things in themselves.

<sup>10</sup> The Hume of the *Treatise* (1888) would have an interesting place in this discussion. Berkeley, as Kant understands him, grounds his idealism in a denial that the concept of the spatial or material is coherent. Hume makes no such argument, but, crucially, he does not pursue the Cartesian project of trying to establish a relation of mediated knowing between 'impressions' and 'external' objects that those impressions would correspond to. Such a project lacks any motivation on Hume's view, since he thinks he can explain object-talk in terms of impressions and rules of their association, without ever having to advert to anything 'external' (1-25). So: Is he a problematic idealist or a dogmatic one? (As I observe in chapter five, Kant does not seem incredibly interested in the details of Hume's sense-impression epistemology, only in what Kant calls Hume's "empiricism in principles" as a source of skeptical doubt (KpV 5:52).)

enjoyment of my own inner states or mental contents, and the question is how to get from there to knowledge of what lies beyond those, outside my mind.<sup>11</sup>

Against empirical idealism, Kant does not offer a novel argument for how we could shore up the dubious inference from the ‘internal’ to the ‘external’. Rather, he denies the epistemological starting point shared by problematic and dogmatic idealists. Kant rejects the claim that our entitlement to knowledge of what is ‘external’ would have to come in a second, derivative step after knowledge of the ‘internal’ is secured. The possibilities of awareness of the ‘internal’ and ‘external’ are equiprimordial, A4P seems to say, and hence the project of finding a legitimate way of moving from one to another can’t get off the ground. Thus Kant claims that “external things exist just as well as I myself exist—and both, moreover, on the direct testimony of my self-consciousness” (A370-1).

Now at this point in the dialectic (not Dialectic), *empirical* idealism certainly looks like a subjective idealism, and one could be forgiven for expecting that in rejecting the former, Kant intends to reject the latter. But how does Kant entitle himself to that rejection? In answering that question, we arrive at the textual difficulties presented by A4P. For when Kant assures us of the direct testimony of our self-consciousness to the existence of the ‘external’, he does so on the basis that empirical things are

only a kind of presentations [*Vorstellungen*] (intuition), called external; they are called external not as referring to objects *in themselves external*, but because they refer perceptions to the space wherein all things are external to one another, although the space itself is in us. (A370)

The message of that passage seems clear. Presentations are mental items—contents or states of an empirical mind. Nevertheless, we can distinguish two sets of presentations, the distinguishing

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<sup>11</sup> I have been using scare quotes around ‘inner’/‘internal’ and ‘outer’/‘external’ because what those terms mean is not yet clear.

mark of one of which is that its members *appear to be* spatial and which we hence ‘count as’ external. Of course, they are external only proximately, as it were, and not ultimately. For the space in which they appear is itself also an inner item. We might say that Kant’s view here is that there are two sets of inner items, namely, the *outer-inner* items and the *inner-inner* items.<sup>12</sup>

Some might object that that commits Kant to an absurdity, namely, that a presentation *qua mental* item could itself *be* spatial instead of merely *referring* to a spatial thing.<sup>13</sup> Others do not think that the mooted position entails that commitment.<sup>14</sup> I do not have a horse in that race, though I take the discomfort of the former commentators as a clue that a different interpretation that bypasses the issue is available.<sup>15</sup> But in any case, were the mooted position Kant’s (and that is a big ‘if’), would he have really rejected subjective idealism?

The answer is no. Among the many possible variants of subjective idealism, two are the phenomenalist and the epistemological (speaking orthogonally to the problematic/dogmatic idealism distinction). And if Kant’s rejection of empirical idealism consists merely in dividing presentations *qua mental* items up into the inner-inner and the outer-inner and insisting that we have an equally direct awareness of both, then he is merely rejecting the epistemological variety of subjective idealism in favour of the phenomenalist.<sup>16</sup> Epistemological idealism holds that we can only know directly of presentations *qua mental* items, that therefore knowledge of ‘external’

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<sup>12</sup> Cf. Bennett 1966, 15: “the proper contrast is not between ‘outer’ and ‘inner’ but between ‘outer (and also inner)’ and ‘only inner.’”

<sup>13</sup> E.g., Bennett 1966, 45; Wilkerson 1976, 25-6.

<sup>14</sup> Brook suggests as much in his 2004, 23 and in conversation. He proposes that space and time can be thought of as “matrices” that do not themselves qualify sense impressions but permit us to interpret those impressions as referring to (merely intentional) objects that we thereby present as in space and time. Brook’s reading of Kant, which takes Kant to hold that “all that one is directly aware of is states of oneself”, is subjectively idealistic by my lights (2004, 14-15), though that obviously counts against it only to the extent that the argument of this dissertation persuades.

<sup>15</sup> Those who make the objection often find Kant’s error here sufficiently spectacular that one wonders why they think plausible that he made it (e.g., Prichard 1909, 38n4).

<sup>16</sup> Abela is not always careful to keep those two variants of idealism apart (e.g., Abela 2002, 30). Generally, his arguments have more direct force against epistemological than phenomenalist idealism.

things could only be by inference from those items if it were possible at all, and that in fact that possibility is doubtful or nonexistent.<sup>17</sup> In that scenario, restriction to mental items is equivalent to ‘enjoying only illusion’, or “a mere play of our inner sense” (A368).

Plainly enough, Kant rejects the epistemological variant of subjective idealism. Instead, his strategy seems to be to grant to the skeptical empirical idealist that we cannot claim to know more than our presentations but then to *deny* that the consequence is that we know only the inner. But the cogency of that denial seems to rest on his distinction of presentations *qua* mental items into the outer-inner (“a kind of presentations [...] called external”) and the inner-inner (presumably, the kind called ‘internal’). We can imagine him reasoning thus: We are tempted to an epistemological subjective idealism only because we confusedly suppose that a distinction between what is outside me and what is within me cannot be drawn *within* the realm of presentations *qua* mental items. But if everything we want out of that distinction can be got by distinguishing between varieties of presentation *qua* mental item, the ‘outer-inner’ and ‘inner-inner’ varieties, then from the fact that I perceive only presentations, no worry about how to get from the ‘inner’ to the ‘outer’ arises. So my ultimate limitation to inner sense does not stop me from calling a proper subset of its contents ‘outer’, which is all that access to a world of outer things could amount to. If that is Kant’s reasoning, then his rejection of *empirical* idealism is no rejection of *subjective* idealism, only of its epistemological variant.

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<sup>17</sup> Guyer attributes to some prominent phase of Kant an ‘indirect realism’ on which we interpret (i.e., infer) our way to external things from inner items and interpretation rules (Guyer 1987, 248). As far as I can tell, Guyer adduces no argument in Kant for how such indirect realism would evade Kant’s own objection to epistemological idealism, i.e., that inferences from inner to outer are always dubious (A368). He is led to attribute such indirect realism to Kant by his formulation of the fundamental Critical question: How are judgments in various domains *justified*? That is not a bad question, but giving it pride of place in his interpretive enterprise leads him to distort some crucial arguments—as when he reads the Analogies as answering the question, ‘How could claims to know empirical things be justified on the basis of direct awareness of inner items?’ More on Guyer’s view in section 2 below. Cf. Longuenesse 1998, 335, whose view is similar to Guyer’s on the relevant points. Sebastian Rödl offers an incisive discussion of what he calls the epistemological interpretation of Kant’s project at Rödl 2012, 113ff.

That the variant of idealism that, on that understanding of Kant's reasoning, remains in place is phenomenistic and hence subjectively idealistic is evident from its proximity to the Berkeleyan view. Recall Berkeley's insistence that the alleged fact that all empirical things are nothing but ideas has no implications for their reality and distinctness from illusion. Think also of Bennett's phenomenism, on which empirical things' being logical constructs out of sense data is held to be no denial of the reality of those things.<sup>18</sup> So for all I've said so far, perhaps we should conclude that Kant indeed endorses direct awareness of empirical things in space, but that he does so only by commitment to phenomenistic subjective idealism and hence rejects that such things are not (ultimately) presentations *qua* mental items.

## 2. Realism and the Refutation of Idealism

Does the strategy of A4P map onto that of the Refutation? Seemingly not.<sup>19</sup> True enough, they both purport to argue that we have direct (non-inferential) experience of external things. But what is an 'external thing'? According to the Refutation, it is "an existence apart from our own" (B275) or of what is "other" than "my own existence" (B276),<sup>20</sup> something the possibility of

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<sup>18</sup> Bennett, of course, tries to differentiate his phenomenism, which he alleges respects empirical realism, from Berkeley's position, which he alleges does not. But he can only do so by falsifying Berkeley's view, as we saw in chapter one, note 42. Richard Aquila offers what is at first glance a different sort of phenomenist reading in his 1983. Aquila takes a Kantian appearance, what I have been calling simply an empirical thing, to be an intentional object along Husserlian lines—a *noema*. Noemata have no referential relation to further objects (he makes that clear in his 1979, 301). So far, that *could* be compatible with genuine empirical realism. But Aquila makes clear that his appearances-as-intentional-objects are *merely intentional* objects constituted ultimately out of the fact that "certain perceptions are possible" under specifiable counterfactual conditions, and thereby veers back into a more or less standardly phenomenist view (1983, 118). (I am somewhat dubious that Husserl is the phenomenist Aquila takes him to be.)

<sup>19</sup> Cf. Kemp Smith: "This new refutation of idealism given in the second edition differs from that given in the fourth *Paralogism* of the first edition, not only in method of argument but also in the nature of the conclusion which it seeks to establish. Indeed it proves the *direct opposite* of what is asserted in the first edition" (2003, 312).

<sup>20</sup> In conversation, Andrew Brook has drawn attention to a possible distinction between something's being outside [*außer*] me and its existing independently of me. Until one has already proven that the Kant of the Refutation does not remain subjectively idealistic, one cannot assume that the first entails the second, since what is 'outside me' could be so in the 'outer-inner' sense discussed above and thus not be existentially independent of me. Note, then,

experience of which A4P seems to preclude. And true enough, an external thing must be in space, which in A4P Kant says is itself a presentation ‘in me’, and with it, all that appears in it. But according to the Refutation, I enjoy direct awareness “not [of a] mere *presentation* of a thing outside me” but of “a *thing* outside me”, i.e., of precisely *not* a presentation *qua* mental item (B275). Finally, both A4P and the Refutation argue that our awareness of ‘outer’ items is direct rather than inferential. But only the Refutation maintains that inner experience *depends for its possibility* on actual outer experience (B277). So the Refutation claims that we have direct experience of items that are not merely “called external” (A370) but that are not inner items at all and, moreover, that we could not even enjoy experience of inner items were we not actually enjoying direct experience of what is external in the Refutation’s stronger sense.

Now of course, the Refutation was written after A4P, and its appearance in the second edition of the first *Critique* coincided with A4P’s disappearance. One can easily conclude that the two passages are simply inconsistent<sup>21</sup> and hence that Kant underwent a change of mind between A and B, his protests to the contrary notwithstanding (Bxxxviiff.). I do not, for three reasons. First, inasmuch as Kant took the two editions to express no substantive differences in doctrine, and inasmuch as a shift from a very strong idealism to a proof of an opposed realism would make no small difference, a reading of the first *Critique* that does not find such a glaring inconsistency between A and B is preferable, all else being equal. Second, I suspect a skepticism about the unity of A and B is itself a motivation not to take Kant’s empirical realism seriously. For if Kant is a committed subjective idealist in A, and (what is the case) most explicit discussions of empirical realism appear either in passages only in A or else in both A and B, then

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that while in the B275 quotation, what Pluhar renders as “apart from” translates “*außer dem*”, in the B276 quotation, Kant states that the Refutation proves the existence of “*anderer Dinge*”, i.e., existences other than my own.

<sup>21</sup> As in Brook 2011. I do not see that Brook’s reading is mandatory, as I hope to show presently.

the Refutation notwithstanding, that Kant holds anything like the robust empirical realism that I am searching for even just in B is *prima facie* rather implausible.<sup>22</sup> And third, as I shall go on to argue, a reading of A4P that is fully compatible with the Refutation is available and even compulsory so long as one pays sufficiently careful attention to Kant's technical terminology. Even so, perhaps a unified reading of A4P and the Refutation is not strictly mandatory for me; it might be possible just to argue that the empirical realism I attribute to Kant appears in B, whatever is the case with A. But in later chapters I will range freely over passages from both A and B to make my argument, and that procedure is methodologically much sounder if it is backed up by a demonstration that two of the passages that *prima facie* most disagree between the two editions and most directly pertain to my inquiry not only *can* but *should* be read together.

We start with the last of the three variances between A4P and the Refutation, the latter's claim that actual, direct, outer experience *makes possible* inner experience. Is that doctrine really nowhere to be found in A4P? Indeed it is not, but it appears elsewhere in A, namely in the Analogies, though a reader of the Analogies on the model of the epistemological idealist above will not be able to see that. Consider Guyer. He takes Kant to argue that if I am justifiably to make judgments about objective temporal order (*viz.*, of outer events) and not simply about the order of my subjective states, I need a rule for interpreting those states. Guyer thus reads Kant as granting that I enjoy immediate awareness of both inner items and their temporality and responding to a puzzle about how I could ever thence become aware of outer things and their temporality. And the solution is inference licensed by interpretation rules, of which the law of cause and effect is one. Hence for Guyer, the Analogies affirm a doctrine of the indirect

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<sup>22</sup> Guyer takes Kant not to completely settle on realism until the 1790s (1987, 323).



awareness of outer things.<sup>23</sup> And if he is right, then the Analogies do not express or entail the Refutation doctrine of the presupposition by inner experience of outer experience (since they would have to assume that we can enjoy merely inner experience to first have a basis for inference to outer experience).<sup>24</sup>

But as we saw above, Guyer's interpretation is rendered dubious by Kant's denial of the plausibility of an inferential move from the subjective to the objective. Why the move would be any more plausible when speaking of events and their objective time relations is, needless to say, not clear. But then what is the alternative?

Abela has proposed that we can see our way to such an alternative by concentrating on Kant's claim that in discriminating the objective temporality of an event, "I shall have to derive the *subjective succession* of apprehension from the *objective succession* of appearances" (A193/B238). He takes Kant to claim that we cannot experience a merely subjective succession of inner items as determinately temporally ordered without actual experience of an objective temporal order among outer things.<sup>25</sup> If that is right, then indeed, the possibility of inner experience presupposes outer experience insofar as no experience is possible at all without determinate temporal order. Now Abela makes his own interpretive task a little too easy for himself,<sup>26</sup> but there is more evidence in the Analogies for Abela's reading than he cites, even

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<sup>23</sup> Guyer 1987, 248.

<sup>24</sup> In fact, on Guyer's view, although the Analogies do not express or entail as a consequence the doctrine of the Refutation, they do *presuppose* the truth of that doctrine (1987, 207-8). Rödl (2012) argues effectively against that proposal: "According to Paul Guyer, [the Refutation] is supposed to justify a presupposition of the Analogies [...]. If this were so, then Kant first overlooked a crucial premise of the Analogies, which, when he noticed it, he placed after the Postulates of Empirical Thought, as opposed to before the Analogies. This is an astounding interpretive hypothesis" (125).

<sup>25</sup> Abela 2002, 143.

<sup>26</sup> He fails to note that in the key claim about deriving subjective succession from objective, Kant seems concerned with under what circumstances our subjective states can constitute awareness of an objective succession in a thing or state of affairs, not with under what circumstances we can be aware of *any temporal order at all*, even merely among our subjective states apart from their making possible awareness of objective temporality.

restricting ourselves to passages that appear in A as well as or rather than B.<sup>27</sup> Consider the proof of the first Analogy. There Kant gives an argument from the possibility of awareness of time at all. The argument is meant to establish the necessity of an outer permanent in perception for the possibility of “the empirical presentation of time itself” (A183/B226). For time, on Kant’s view, cannot itself be perceived, and hence if *any* relations in time are to be determined (whether among inner or outer items), they must be so with reference to something permanent, which is thus the ‘substratum’ of the empirical presentation of time. And permanence is only possible in the realm of (outer) appearance, since mere subjective apprehension is always successive and hence cannot present something which endures relative to what varies (A182-3/B225-6).

Note that that line of argument requires that the possibility of the empirical presentation of time (and not specifically of the ‘outer-empirical’ presentation of time) and likewise of experience as such (and not specifically ‘outer experience’) depends on the awareness of a permanent in (outer) perception. For Kant, the permanent is necessary to distinguish simultaneity from sequentiality and for awareness of duration. And there is no suggestion that the scope of the argument is limited to time determinations only as pertaining to outer things. Nor would such a restriction be especially philosophically tempting. For there is nothing special about time relations among ‘inner’ items such that those and only those relations should be directly perceivable in the absence of an outer permanent.

So we have taken a first step: Even in A, in which A4P appears, is present the doctrine of the Refutation that the possibility of inner experience presupposes actual outer experience. Thus if Kant does not mention that doctrine in A4P, that need not be because it is not part of his

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<sup>27</sup> In making these arguments, I follow Rödl 2012, 113ff., which offers a very sensitive discussion of the present issue. But note that on this point Rödl cites passages that are unique to B, whereas my purpose here is to expose the relevant line of reasoning precisely in the A Analogies.

considered position. But there remain the two other variances between A4P and the Refutation: whether what is ‘outer’ enjoys an existence independent of mine and whether the ‘outer’ comprises *things* and not mere presentations *qua* mental items. Nothing I have said so far yet explains what do to about those. In fact, the prospect of a finding of gross inconsistency may seem to loom larger still, now within A rather than between A and B. For as I earlier observed, A4P maintains that *all* objects of awareness are ‘inner’ in some sense—but what is permanent cannot itself be ‘inner’ because “[o]ur [subjective] *apprehension* of the manifold of appearance is always successive, *and therefore always varying*” (A182/B225; second emphasis mine).

Suppose, however, that we held out for consistency. We would then need a viable reading of Kant’s talk of ‘presentations’ and what is ‘inner’ in A4P that somehow accommodates the doctrines of the Analogies and the Refutation. That would require that we accept a very strong distinction between what I called above ‘outer-inner’ and ‘inner-inner’ presentations, stronger than the distinction appeared to be in the phenomenalist reading of A4P. It could not be merely that we call some presentations *qua* mental items ‘inner’ and others ‘outer’. Whatever the innerness of space and things in it amounts to, it would have to be an innerness *different in kind* from that of merely mental items. For the mere possibility of experience of mental items requires actual experience of things in space, which requirement could not be satisfied if space itself were mental—‘inner’—in just the same sense. That, I believe, is a deeper insight latent in the earlier mentioned worry about the absurdity of ‘spatializing’ presentations: Even if we can find a way around attributing to Kant the view that mental items *are* spatial in some flatfooted, highly literal way,<sup>28</sup> we require a robust ‘inner’-‘outer’ distinction for the spatiality that empirical things (whatever we call them) must have to do the work they need to in Kant’s larger argument.

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<sup>28</sup> As construals of Kantian appearances as existentially mind-dependent intentional objects (Aquila 1983, perhaps Brook 2011) might be able to do.

So on the one hand, the A and B editions of the first *Critique* are both committed to the doctrine that actual outer experience is a condition of the possibility of inner experience, which entails that the ‘outer’ cannot be ‘inner’ in the sense in which the latter term occurs in that doctrine. Yet on the other hand, while the Refutation can respect that commitment, A4P does not seem able to. What to do?

### 3. Making Some Distinctions: Empirical and Transcendental, Inner and Outer, Presentations and Things in Themselves

The solution to our interpretive problems lies in grasping several key distinctions Kant makes, particularly in their bearing on one another: between the empirical and the transcendental; between the inner and the outer; and between presentations and things in themselves.<sup>29</sup> Because of their complex interrelations, we cannot easily discuss one without the others, but I shall try to address them in as natural a progression as possible.<sup>30</sup>

Our starting point is a parenthetical remark of Kant’s in A4P. Introducing the reader to the empirical idealist line of reasoning, Kant writes:

We may rightly assert that only what is in ourselves can be perceived directly, and that solely my own existence can be the object of a mere perception.<sup>31</sup> Therefore

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<sup>29</sup> In what follows, I do not press into service the well known ‘ing/ed’ ambiguity latent in terms like *Vorstellung*, *Anschauung* (intuition), *Erscheinung* (appearance), and so forth (mentioned in the Introduction to this dissertation, section 3). I accept that there is such an ambiguity and that attentiveness to that fact can help to make room for a non-subjectively-idealistic reading like mine. However, A4P is *so* apparently subjectively idealistic, and in so many ways, that a reliance on the observation that there is such an ambiguity would not, I think, go far by itself. And meanwhile, I have other interpretive bows in my quiver that I think will do the trick without placing a lot of weight on the ambiguity.

<sup>30</sup> The discussion that follows is indebted to Bird 1973, 36-51.

<sup>31</sup> (1) ‘Perception’ is there meant in the sense given in the *Stufenleiter* of varieties of presentation (A320/B376-7). ‘Perception’ is the first step under the genus ‘presentation’ and signifies merely ‘presentation with consciousness’. A ‘mere perception’ would therefore be a ‘presentation with consciousness’ *without any further specification or more determinate character* and hence not a perception in the usual sense of that term (i.e., not a specifically sensory and objective consciousness of some thing or non-hallucinatory phenomenon). A ‘direct perception’ that is not a ‘mere perception’, by contrast, can only be an intuitive, singular presentation that refers directly to the object presented—i.e., much closer to what we nowadays usually mean by ‘perception’. Kant is thus granting to the empirical idealist

the existence of an actual object outside me (if this word is taken in its intellectual meaning) is never given straightforwardly in perception. Rather, perception is a modification of inner sense, and the existence of such an actual object can only be added to perception, as its external cause, in thought and hence can only be inferred. (A367)

What shall we make of the parenthetical—“if this word is taken in its intellectual meaning”? The word in question is ‘outside’, *äußer*.<sup>32</sup> So there is a distinctively ‘intellectual’ meaning to ‘outerness’, as well (at least) as some other which is not intellectual but of some other type. The empirical idealist is thus committed to the thought that for an object to be genuinely ‘outer’, it must be *intellectually* outer. And, Kant seems to grant, the empirical idealist is correct to suppose that one cannot directly perceive the intellectually outer. Hence if the intellectually outer is to be reached at all, then, indeed, it would have to be by way of ‘inner’ items, like perceptions. But if there is a distinctively ‘intellectual’ sense of ‘outer’, as well as a non-intellectual sense, there is perhaps the same multiplicity of senses of ‘inner’. Hence of any item, we can ask not only whether it is inner or outer but also, for either, in which sense: intellectual or non-intellectual.<sup>33</sup>

We can refine our understanding of the two senses of ‘outer’ by looking elsewhere in A4P. Characterizing the transcendental realist, Kant writes that they conceive outer items as

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(“We may rightly assert”), in the first ‘that’-clause, that I may be *intuitively* conscious only of what is ‘in me’ (though, I shall argue, there is an ambiguity in ‘in’ that disguises a disagreement), and in the second, that I may be *merely perceptually* conscious, i.e., conscious through mere ‘presentation with consciousness’, only of my own existence. (2) Such consciousness through mere ‘presentation with consciousness’ is the sort that one can have of one’s existence through consciousness of one’s spontaneous acts of intellect: It is consciousness of one’s existence as that of a capacity (B157-9). Such a consciousness might seem to sit rather uneasily between in-itself and appearance, especially inasmuch as the existence of which I am thus conscious is “not appearance” (presumably because the consciousness is not sensory) (B157). Brook (2011) suggests that such a “bare consciousness” may be equivalent to an act of reference, though without the possibility of description, that reaches all the way to the in-itself, whether in me or in things (246). But a consciousness of my existence solely as a “power of combination” is not a consciousness of the existence of *a thing*, of which we would have to decide whether it is in-itself or merely appearance, to which the power or capacity belongs. Put differently, that the existence in question is “not appearance” does not yet entail that it *is* in-itself; that my mere *existence* is implicated is not enough to settle whether it is an existence in appearance or in itself.

<sup>32</sup> I accept Pluhar’s judgment on that point, at A367n118 of his translation.

<sup>33</sup> Of course, the empirical idealist is not necessarily cognizant of the equivocality of the terms ‘inner’ and ‘outer’ as they use them.

“things in themselves that exist independently of us and of our sensibility, and that would therefore be *outside* us even according to pure concepts of understanding”, i.e., in the intellectual sense of ‘outside’ (A369). That tells us that to think of an item as ‘outer’ in the intellectual sense is to think of it as a ‘thing in itself’, and, moreover, as ‘independent of our sensibility’. Now the transcendental realist, Kant thinks, is the empirical idealist, either actually or at least potentially.<sup>34</sup> And the empirical idealist, as we saw, thinks that genuinely outer things, if any there be, would have an existence independent of our sensibility not merely in the straightforward sense that they exist and are what they are when they are not actually being sensed but in the much stronger sense *that they are in principle unavailable to our sensibility*. After all, they cannot be perceived; at best their existence and character can be inferred from inner items (perceptions). Thus should we understand ‘independent of our sensibility’ in the present context: An intellectually outer item is not just any item but that special sort called a thing in itself, which cannot in principle be given sensibly. Such strong independence (stronger than mere existential independence) is what intellectual outerness, or outerness “according to pure concepts of understanding”, amounts to.

So far, we have got a better grip on what the intellectual sense of ‘outer’ means, and we have seen that it bears on another of the terms I shall discuss, ‘thing in itself’. Since, as we have already seen, Kant’s proposal in A4P is to treat outer items not as ‘things in themselves’ but instead as ‘presentations’, we should understand that whatever the latter term means, it at least means this much: the sort of item that does not have the radical independence of us (specifically,

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<sup>34</sup> The two positions are not strictly equivalent. However, I take Kant to hold that transcendental realism entails empirical idealism. For once one has made the transcendentially realistic commitment only to count as genuinely outer what is in principle beyond the possibility even of our sensing it, one has put oneself into a scenario of skeptical doubt about the existence of such outer things from which there is no epistemological recovery. Thanks to Michael Kremer for urging me to get clear on this point.

of our sensibility) that a thing in itself has. At the same time, a presentation in the sense of that term in which it is contrasted with ‘thing in itself’ is compatible with a kind of permanence or duration through changes of determination (A381)<sup>35</sup> that, we have seen, is simply not possible for what belongs solely to inner sense, i.e., a mental item (A182/B225).

Next we turn to the distinction between the ‘empirical’ and the ‘transcendental’.

Explaining the ambiguity between the intellectual and non-intellectual senses of ‘outer’, Kant writes:

The expression *outside us* thus carries with it an unavoidable ambiguity, sometimes meaning something that *as thing in itself* exists as distinct from us, and sometimes meaning what belongs merely to outer *appearance*. [...] Hence in order to release this concept from the insecurity [of ambiguity], let us distinguish *empirically external* objects—from those that might be called external in the transcendental sense—by calling them, straightforwardly, things *that are to be found in space*. (A373)

What we have hitherto been calling the ‘intellectual’ sense of ‘outer’ is what Kant now calls the ‘transcendental’ sense; it is opposed to the empirical sense, on which some item is outer just insofar as it is in space. Finally, on this basis we may readily extrapolate to an empirical sense of ‘inner’, namely that on which something is inner just in case it is *not* to be found in space but rather merely in my mind, or ‘inner sense’. Humans are capable of both ‘outer’ and ‘inner’ experience, viz., of things in space and mental items, respectively, where ‘inner’ and ‘outer’ are used there in their empirical senses.<sup>36</sup>

We now have in view empirical and transcendental (or intellectual) senses of ‘inner’ and ‘outer’, and we know that a thing in itself is outer in the transcendental sense, whatever else is true of it, and that a presentation, at least as that word is used in A4P, is inner in the transcendental sense. Yet for all that, empirically, presentations can be inner or outer, with

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<sup>35</sup> My attention was drawn to this passage by Brook 2011.

<sup>36</sup> Kant mentions inner experience at various points in the first *Critique*; one passage found in A is A37.

empirically outer presentations able to endure through changes of determination and hence be permanent in a way that empirically inner presentations cannot. Moreover, when we say that presentations are transcendently inner, we say no more than that they are not so radically independent of the human epistemic capacity that they *could not possibly be sensed*. Thus we may not, on the basis of the foregoing distinctions, conclude that presentations in the A4P sense are mental, subjective, or empirically inner items, having no reason to think that if anything is in principle sensible, then it is a mere determination of a mind in which it inheres.<sup>37</sup>

So A4P and the Refutation are not so much at odds as they first appeared, and consistently with the Refutation, Kant's rejection of empirical idealism in A4P can be a rejection not merely of specifically epistemological subjective idealism but of phenomenalism as well. The presence in A of the Refutation doctrine that the possibility of inner experience presupposes actual outer experience compelled us to seek a sense of 'inner' on which the putative innerness of space does not threaten that doctrine, and we have found it. We need only now note that when the Refutation argues that the possibility of experience requires actual awareness of a *thing* and not of a mere presentation of a thing, we must conclude that 'presentation' there means, indeed, a mental item, and hence distinguish empirical and transcendental senses of presentation. When A4P declares all outer items presentations, it speaks of presentations in a transcendental sense.

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<sup>37</sup> I mentioned above (note 20) Brook's suggestion that there is a distinction between what is 'outside' of me and what is 'independent' of me, where the former is perhaps compatible with existential dependence on me, perhaps by way of being an item in my mind. Brook is correct that language along the lines of independence (in respect of empirical things) is more prevalent in B, especially in the Refutation, and absent in A4P. However, an upshot of my argument in the present section is that given the distinction between empirical and transcendental senses of 'inner' that Kant is clearly committed to in A4P and likewise his commitment there to a sense of 'presentation' merely as *transcendentally* inner, we are not obliged in reading A4P to reserve only independence-terms and specifically *not* outerness-terms for reference to what is existentially independent of me.



But when the Refutation declares that inner experience is impossible without actual awareness of spatial things and no mere presentations thereof, the sense of ‘presentation’ there is empirical.<sup>38</sup>

I have now shown Kant’s commitment to an empirical realism that respects these requirements: (a) Empirical things are directly perceivable; (b) they are in space; and (c) they are not merely mental or subjective (we can now say: empirically inner) items. That commitment is present in both editions of the *Critique* and rules out not only an epistemological but also a phenomenalist idealism, the latter also being subjectivistic and hence requiring that outer things be ‘inner’ in an empirical rather than merely transcendental sense. But I have not yet substantiated Kant’s commitment to my fourth element of empirical realism: that our knowledge is, in principle, neither parochial nor essentially disconnected. And as we shall see, without that additional commitment, the position so far articulated is not yet secure.

#### 4. The Adequacy of Human Knowledge

##### 4.1. Necessity, Universality, Objective Validity

Why should Kant reject the essential defectiveness of human knowledge and assert instead its essential adequacy as part of a doctrine of empirical realism? On that point, I gave two arguments in the previous chapter, corresponding to two *prima facie* distinguishable sorts of defect: *parochiality* and *essential disconnection*. As regards parochiality: We are knowers and

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<sup>38</sup> A natural enough question is this: Why distinguish empirical and transcendental senses of presentation rather than simply use two different terms? Mustn’t there be some reason why the term ‘presentation’ is appropriate in both applications? In fact, there is. Recall again the ‘ing/ed’ ambiguity in ‘presentation’: A presentation can be either that which is presented or the presenting (or means of presenting). Now consider also Kant’s direct realism about perception. On that view, the ‘content’ of perception, in the idiom of current philosophy of perception, is simply the object perceived. But in that case there is something natural about saying that the object perceived is thereby ‘in’ my consciousness—to indicate *not* that the object is a merely subjective entity residing in my mind but rather that my perceptual awareness does not stop anywhere short of the very object perceived. That would make Kant’s way of speaking in A4P the rhetorical mirror image of McDowell’s elaboration of Putnam’s semantic externalism into the claim that not only meanings but the mind itself “is not in the head” (McDowell 1998c, 276).

we are humans. Does that mean that ‘humanity’ is a *differentia* of ‘knowledge’ and that the knowledge we have is the specifically human kind? We certainly cannot rule out that possibility if we can take seriously the thought of *other* kinds of knowledge that somehow differ essentially from ours and yet still count as knowledge, as would the knowledge of God or that of a finite knower with different forms of intuition. But in that case our knowledge is threatened with parochiality: What we humans enjoy is not knowledge of reality, but knowledge-for-us-humans of reality-for-us-humans, such that to other kinds of ‘knower’ correspond other discrete ‘realities’. In that case, for all the foregoing about the non-mentality of empirical things, they would fundamentally still be merely subjective. For they could not then be distinguished from an imposition or projection of our minds, even if one to which all humans may be equally subject and which is internally coherent and organized to the maximal degree.<sup>39</sup> To insist otherwise would be to endorse what Kant calls “the witty proposition that constant illusion is truth” (Prolog 4:376).

And as regards essential disconnection: If we are explanatorily required to postulate a part of reality from which we are essentially cut off, then even supposing we have a presentational capacity of some sort, it cannot be a genuinely epistemic one. For were the capacity genuinely epistemic, we could not be subject to systematic doubt about whether what seems to us to be reality really is so. Yet we must be subject to such doubt if the part of reality about which we can in principle know presents itself to us as resting for its possibility on an experience-transcendent ground whose actual existence is essentially unknowable by us. For in that case, we can never know whether we are in fact aware of a part of reality or merely seem to

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<sup>39</sup> On that point, Conant 2016, 82-6 is instructive.

be, the differentiator between those cases always exceeding our grasp, and hence we are in an epistemological situation akin to what Kant calls problematic idealism.

But are those arguments that Kant would endorse? Is there any textual evidence that Kant is committed to the essential adequacy of human knowledge? The answer is yes. And we can begin to see that if we consider two constraints Kant places on his concept of objectivity or objective validity, namely *universality* and *necessity*. To that end, the place to begin is with an oft criticized discussion in Kant's corpus: the distinction between judgments of perception and judgments of experience in the *Prolegomena*.<sup>40</sup>

In sections 18-19 (Prol 4:297-9), Kant's task is to give an account of 'objective validity': that in which the objectivity of a judgment consists. We can, of course, associate perceptions, concepts, or any other contents of consciousness in any way we like (or are impelled to do by our psychology). But such associations are not, just as such, objectively valid judgments. An objectively valid judgment has a special principle of connection between its elements. Its specialness consists in this, that we take it not to be a matter of our merest willful thought but demanded of us by something independent of our thought. If we have met the demand, we judge correctly; if we have not, we judge incorrectly. In either case, that our judgment is subject to such a demand at all is its 'objective validity', its responsibility to a reality other than itself.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> Cf. Longuenesse 1998, 167ff. for a helpful discussion of that distinction.

<sup>41</sup> There are aspects of *activity* and *passivity*, or *spontaneity* and *receptivity*, subsumed under the idea of responsibility that I have in mind here. On the one hand, that what is at issue is the distinctively epistemic relation of responsibility and not, say, a merely mechanical relation of effect (our judgment) to cause (its object) is a reflection of the activity or spontaneity at work in any exercise of a rational capacity. For a rational capacity, just insofar as it is spontaneous, is one whose acts are explained by nothing but its own internal explanatory principle (such that if, *per impossibile*, it were caused to act, that act would not count as an exercise of that capacity at all). On the other hand, that there is something *to which* we are responsible is a reflection of the passivity or receptivity that is at work in any case of knowledge of a mind-independent reality: We could not count as responsible in the right way if that to which we took ourselves to be responsible were merely an artefact of our subjectivity, not something existentially independent of us. That is a tricky point to state correctly because of the risk that it will seem that our capacity for knowledge can only contain a passive aspect as a separate non-rational component, like a data-gatherer, and hence that we will lapse into a 'constructivist' or 'impositionist' picture of our knowledge. I am guided in my thinking

That responsibility of judgments to their object is, of course, a kind of normativity. And judgments so responsible are judgments ‘of experience’.

Kant has frequently been criticized for his distinction between judgments of experience and judgments of perception,<sup>42</sup> and he drops it by the B *Critique* in favour of a treatment of judgment in general that resembles his treatment of judgments specifically of experience in the *Prolegomena* (B142). A major source of worry about the distinction is that according to the *Prolegomena*, a judgment of perception does not “require a pure concept of the understanding”, i.e., a category, and has not objective validity but merely subjective validity (Prol 4:298). For if categories are *a priori*, hence necessary, forms of the intelligibility of objects, how can judgments of perception, which at least refer to objects, not require categories? A related worry is that the involvement of categories in judgment is what differentiates judgment from mere association. If Kant is here suggesting that the involvement of categories in judgment is optional, then is he not committing himself to the possibility of ‘judgments’ that are *nothing but* associative unities, and hence to a kind of Humeanism?

We need not detain ourselves directly with those worries here, though I tend to think they testify only to a sloppiness of formulation on Kant’s part rather than to a deep difficulty.<sup>43</sup>

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about this by McDowell’s talk of “responsible freedom” (1996, 10-13). Thanks to Andrew Brook for urging me to think about this more.

<sup>42</sup> Guyer reports that the distinction was already “notorious” at the time of writing of his 1987. In typical fashion, his solution to the interpretive problem posed by the distinction is to attribute to Kant an ambivalence that has survived into his published work in the form of not insignificant inconsistency (100-1). Longuenesse (1998) finds more value in Kant’s discussion here than most.

<sup>43</sup> To expand a little: Consider Kant’s examples of a judgment of perception, “If the sun shines on the stone, it becomes warm”, and a judgment of experience, “The sun warms the stone” (Prol 4:301n). Obviously enough, we employ categories just insofar as we are able to grasp terms like ‘sun’, ‘stone’, ‘shining’, ‘warmth’, ‘becoming’. Kant’s point is simply that the judgment of perception does not register that there is a *categorical connection* between the sun’s rays and the stone’s warming, namely a causal one. Thus insofar as we make the judgment of perception but refrain from making the judgment of experience, we establish no relationship of explanation between the elements of the judgment and hence no *necessity*. So were the stone suddenly to cool in the sun, the judgment of experience would be falsified in a way that the judgment of perception would not, i.e., in respect of a posited explanatory relationship on which the judgment of perception is silent. But for all that, we need not conceive of

Rather, we should pay close attention to Kant’s concept of objective validity and its role in distinguishing judgments of experience—which Kant will later simply call ‘judgments’ *simpliciter*. To understand objective validity, compare it with subjective validity: the holding of a judgment “only for us, i.e., for our subject”. Subjective validity requires only “the logical connection of perceptions in a thinking subject” (Prol 4:298). That is, I can make a judgment of perception just insofar as I enjoy empirically inner presentations (no doubt categorially structured) that I can associate, and whose association I can express in propositional form, wherein I assert a connection between terms that is *itself* other than categorial, i.e., other than explanatory. The judgment that garlic tastes delicious is of that character: There is an association that I experience between the presence of garlic and feelings of pleasure and that I am able to take up into thought. Yet although the garlic in some sense causes my pleasure, I say nothing about *garlic* when I judge that it is delicious; from my love of garlic, its deliciousness *to me*, nothing follows about the nature of garlic as such. One sign of that is that garlic-preference is wildly various from person to person, and there is no property of garlic, the ‘deliciousness’ property, that we can isolate independently of the particular reactions of particular people.

By contrast, objective validity requires not merely the connection of elements, be the ground of that connection what it may, but that the connection be such that the judgment demands agreement *from everyone* and *at all times*. Kant glosses that requirement as one of *necessity* and *universality*. A judgment of experience is characterized by necessity, because in being such a judgment, it *requires*, rather than merely recommends or suggests, the agreement of rational beings. It is characterized by universality insofar as that requirement is a norm for *all*

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judgments of perception as lacking *any* categorial structure for the contrast Kant wants to make sense. Nor is it clear what a ‘judgment’ that lacked any and all such structure would really amount to—as I observed, Kant’s example of a ‘mere’ judgment of perception is rich with categorial structure.

such beings, rather than just one or some.<sup>44</sup> The characteristics are expressed together in Kant's striking claim that "[j]udgments [...] are objective, *if they are united in a consciousness in general*, i.e., are united *necessarily* therein" (Prol 4:304-5; emphases mine).<sup>45</sup> Kant suggests that those two characteristics of judgment entail *objectivity*, and vice versa, because the relation of my judgment to something other than myself and my inner state is required for that judgment intelligibly to have such universality and necessity at all: We *must all* thus judge because *that is how things are*. (In fact, the 'vice versa' there, faithful to Kant's presentation in the *Prolegomena* though it is, is a little too quick; as we shall see in section 4.2, although objective validity entails necessity and universality, whether the latter two entail the former turns out to be a bit tricky.) Returning to my garlic example: If we grant in advance that garlic's tasting delicious is actually just a subjective association of presentations of garlic and of pleasure in my mind, demanding that others assent just on *that* basis that garlic *is* delicious, in a way that outstrips the subjective association, makes no sense. The demand is only intelligible insofar as I take the judgment, 'Garlic tastes delicious', precisely to be *about garlic* rather than my subjective, inner life.

Now we must be careful here. There is indeed something objective about my claim that garlic tastes delicious. What is objective, namely, is that *I* am in the relevant subjective state of associating presentations of garlic and feelings of pleasure. Although it is *not* true that tasting delicious is a property of garlic independent of its presence to me and hence my being in the relevant inner states would not compel my friend John (who hates garlic) to endorse that claim, it *is* true that I am in those relevant inner states and that garlic reliably induces them in me, hence that garlic tastes delicious *to me*. That being so, the judgment 'Garlic tastes delicious *to Simon*'

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<sup>44</sup> Of course, as a matter of fact, people can fail correctly to judge. But insofar as I take myself to have made a judgment of experience, I regard my judgment as one that *all* knowers just as such should endorse.

<sup>45</sup> Note that Kant speaks there not of a consciousness considered under this or that specification (e.g., a *specifically human* consciousness) but of a consciousness *überhaupt*.

has objective validity after all. Nevertheless, a claim that garlic *is such as to taste delicious*, where that purports to be about a property that garlic has independent of who actually tastes it and whether they find it pleasing, does not—at least, not insofar as its basis is nothing beyond my subjective states.

So: According to the *Prolegomena*, the objective validity of a judgment of experience—or, in the language of the B *Critique*, simply a judgment<sup>46</sup>—is its necessity (normative compulsion of assent) and universality (governing all knowers).<sup>47</sup> And the same doctrine appears in the first *Critique*. First, somewhat fleetingly, in the A Deduction Kant asks what we mean by the expression “object of presentations”. His answer is this:

We find, however, that our thought of the reference of all cognition to its object carries with it something concerning necessity. It does so inasmuch as this object is regarded as what keeps our cognitions from being determined haphazardly or arbitrarily [...]. For these cognitions are to refer to an object, and hence in reference to this object they must also necessarily agree with one another, i.e., they must have that unity in which the concept of an object consists. (A104-5)

Now concerns of ‘publicness’ are not made explicit there. Kant’s emphasis is not so much on the ‘Who must so judge?’ side as on the ‘What determines what ought to be judged?’ side.

Nevertheless, we see there the doctrine that the concept of an object of cognition is the concept of something that is normative for our thinking: It *necessitates* (though only normatively) that cognition relate to that object, i.e., that we judge of it, just in *this* way. If that is a constraint on

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<sup>46</sup> As we saw in the previous paragraph, an upshot of my discussion is that even judgments of perception are objectively valid provided we are not distracted by possibly misleading surface grammar. The distinction between judgments of perception and judgments of experience is therefore a *relative* one—relative, that is, to the particular categorial connection affirmed by the judgment of experience but not by the corresponding judgment of perception.

<sup>47</sup> At this point, I should mention passages like that B3-4, where Kant distinguishes ‘comparative’ from ‘strict’ universality and assigns the former to empirical judgments. I do not think such passages undermine my argument. Kant’s point is that there are cases where I may make judgments on empirically defeasible grounds, whereas there are some judgments that are not so defeasible. Yet the former are still *judgments*, and it is part of my treating them as such that I take them to be normative for all *judgers*. That I later turn out to be wrong in this or that case shows that I was wrong so to judge, not that the concept of a judgment does not contain in it universality and necessity.

‘cognition’, i.e., presentation that is genuinely epistemic, then, by implication, it is a constraint on any being that counts as a knower insofar as it so counts, and hence universality is in view.

The position is articulated again in the B Deduction, section 19. Kant there argues that the logical form of a judgment is “the objective unity of apperception” (B140). Now apperception, or self-consciousness, has a distinctive sort of unity. And that unity is necessary in this sense, that apperception would not be possible at all without that unity. But the necessity of that unity of apperception is binding upon anything of which we can enjoy a self-conscious awareness, and so in the present case on empirical things. Thus even empirical judgments, which are in some sense contingent (namely, in that they are *a posteriori*), are also and in another sense necessary, namely in that whether we must accept them or not does not vary from one knower to the next. That is, they do not “have only subjective validity”, but rather reflect a combination “in the object, i.e., [...] independently of what the subject’s state is” (B142). Judgments (‘judgments of experience’ in the *Prolegomena* parlance), in being essentially object-directed, are thus that sort of empirically inner presentation that are responsive to the objects they purport to be about. And hence, again, we see objective validity dovetailing with *necessity*—the demand a judgment makes on the assent of other knowers—and *universality*—that the demand is one that cannot vary from knower to knower and hence must hold for *all* knowers, not merely some.<sup>48</sup>

We see, then, that Kant thinks that for something to be a judgment, and thus knowledge, it must be normatively binding on *all* knowers—“a consciousness in general”. Now that means that Kant has the resources he would need *if* he were inclined to make an argument like the one I

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<sup>48</sup> Kemp Smith criticizes Kant for holding (or seeming to hold) a position in the first *Critique*’s introduction that precludes recognition of the distinctive necessity and universality I have been discussing. Nevertheless, Kemp Smith thinks that Kant *should* recognize such necessity and universality if he is “to live up to his own Critical principles”. So Kemp Smith and I agree that Kant is committed to this talk of universality and necessity, though we disagree that Kant’s commitment to it is inconsistent. (Kemp Smith 2003, 40)



developed in the previous chapter, that a conception of our ‘knowledge’ as only comparatively universal (ranging across all *humans* yet not across all *knowers*) and contingently necessary (necessary relative to *humans*, not to *knowers* just as such) is a conception of it as parochial and hence defective. But since our task is exegetical as well as philosophical, we cannot just assume that Kant saw that argumentative possibility. And, indeed, there seems to be good evidence that he did not, namely his willingness to speculate about forms of intuition other than space and time (A27/B43, among other places) and varieties of knower (e.g., God) other than the finite discursive sort (B145-6). For just to the extent that we are to take the knowledge of which we are capable merely as one possible kind among others and hence as a view on one possible reality among others, we commit ourselves to parochiality and hence defectiveness. I must, therefore, show that Kant would be sensitive to that very line of reasoning (though I put off settling the issue of other forms of intuition and divine knowers until chapter four). To do so, I now turn to section 27 of the B Deduction.

#### 4.2. A Kantian Argument for Why Knowledge Cannot Be Merely Parochial

Kant’s own version of an argument against parochiality emerges in his objection to what he calls the ‘preformation system of pure reason’ (B167-8). That system is proposed as an alternative to the ‘Copernican hypothesis’ that the conditions of the possibility of experience are at the same time the conditions of possibility of empirical things. The proposal would have it that there is a certain way humans must think, entirely independent of how things are, but also that that way we must think happens (for whatever reason) to match up with how things are. What is directly at issue in Kant’s reply is categories, and Kant observes that on the preformation system proposal, “categories would in that case lack the *necessity* which belongs essentially to the

concept of them” (B168). For their correctly characterizing the world would be accidental rather than essential and hence *objectively* contingent, though *subjectively* necessary (insofar as we cannot think in any other way than through categories, on the present proposal).<sup>49</sup>

But just what is wrong with that accidental matching? The problem is not that, as a matter of fact, there are beings otherwise constituted, such that the match doesn’t actually always hold from one knower to the next.<sup>50</sup> The problem is that from the concept of a merely subjective necessity, building up to a properly objective necessity is not possible.<sup>51</sup> That is what Kant tells us when he writes that, even if humans really are one and all such as to think according to the categories, nevertheless judging in accordance with those categories “would be false if it rested only on an arbitrary subjective necessity,” such that “then all our insight, achieved through the supposed objective validity of our judgments, [would be] nothing but sheer illusion” (B168). Note especially that nothing about that objection rests on the presence in the scenario of a radically knowledge-independent world with which our thinking is to match. Illusion does not stop being illusion if that to which it fails to correspond vanishes altogether, and Kant does not say there that the mistake is only to fail to realize that the subjective necessity obviates needing to match anything by sufficing for a reality all by itself. The engine of the objection is the thought that a position on which the way we think is “arbitrary”, even if inescapable, is one on which objectivity is not in view. Bringing objectivity into view would require showing that categorial form is *not arbitrary*. But what would that require?

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<sup>49</sup> As I indicated above in section 4.1, that thought experiment reveals that necessity and universality do not *per se* suffice for objective validity. Objective validity is only on the scene if the ground of the necessity lies *in the object*. That suggests that although the concepts of necessity and universality can be used to elucidate the concept of objective validity, they cannot simply be substituted for it, since we cannot grasp the relevant kind of necessity in a separate act of thought from grasping objectivity.

<sup>50</sup> Though Kant does not doubt that were this view widely accepted, there would be those who deny they are so constituted, since after all they are different subjects. (B168)

<sup>51</sup> Or, indeed, from a restriction on thought that is not essentially a *rational* restriction, we cannot build up to rationality; and hence ‘thought’, as characterized by the present proposal, cannot be built up into *knowledge*.

We can see the answer if we ask, ‘Non-arbitrary with respect to what?’ Categories are arbitrary on the preformation proposal because they bear no relation to the possibility of objectivity, which on that proposal is vested in the *per hypothesi* unavailable world, and would, I note again, not be put into the appropriate relation to the categories simply through the deletion of that world. To show that the categories are non-arbitrary, we must show that they are *essentially* implicated in objectivity.<sup>52</sup> That would be as much as to say that they characterize *knowledge*, full stop, and consequently are the forms not merely of subjectivity but of the reality onto which subjectivity is an epistemic window. Yet if ‘human knowers’ are a proper subset of ‘knowers’ and categories are the forms of knowledge of merely ‘human knowers’, then they do *not* characterize knowledge just as such; relative to knowledge, categorial form is accidental, that is, arbitrary. In that case, the empirical judgments of a well functioning human being, in the best possible case, lack true universality and necessity. For they cannot bind all knowers *qua* knowers, but merely all human knowers (even if all knowers happen, as a matter of fact, to be human), whose distinctive brand of ‘knowing’ is, moreover, enabled by what can only be considered a non-rational restriction, namely categories. But then so-called ‘human knowledge’ is no *knowledge* and is hence, as knowledge, defective.

To the extent, therefore, that Kant insists that knowledge is not on the scene unless the *object* of judgment, and not merely the *judging subject* and its constitution, is universally and necessarily normative for judgment, hence for the judgment of any knower whatever and not

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<sup>52</sup> Note that when I say that categories should be thought of as essentially implicated in objectivity, I am not denying that there is a straightforward sense in which the categories themselves make objectivity possible. But the sentence, ‘the categories make objectivity possible’, can equally well be read (1) as a claim that a certain psychological fact about how our minds work, with ‘mind’ now not construed as *per se* epistemic, gives us the merely subjective impression that we are answerable to a mind-independent reality; or (2) as a claim that our mind, now construed as an epistemic capacity, is in fact in touch with such a reality, and that that is only possible to the extent that categories are as much forms of object known as they are forms of knowing. Thanks to Michael Forster for pushing me to get clear on this point.

merely some putative proper subset of knowers—to that extent, I say, Kant is committed to the non-parochiality of human knowledge. For empirical realism to be possible, human knowledge must be knowledge, full stop.

#### 4.3. A Kantian Argument for Why Knowledge Cannot Be Essentially Disconnected

Kant thus has the philosophical resources to mount an argument against the parochiality of human knowledge and himself makes most of the key steps of that argument. But in the previous chapter, I argued that for Kant to be a genuine empirical realist, he cannot countenance the possibility that we are essentially in an epistemic situation of essential disconnection, i.e., from an explanatorily required but essentially unreachable experience-transcendent ground of the empirical. Does Kant either make or else at least have the resources to make an argument against the essential disconnection of human knowledge? On the one hand, I must concede that Kant nowhere makes quite the argument I made in the previous chapter in direct connection with the possibility of empirical realism. On the other hand, I shall argue that a key philosophical commitment requires him to make an even stronger claim about essential disconnection than I made: that it entails not just *problematic* idealism but *dogmatic* idealism, the view on which the ‘outer reality’ that we seem to present is in fact not possible as a genuine outer reality at all. And I shall argue that the same commitment entails the rejection of essential disconnection. (In what follows, the issues of necessity and universality give way to that of *explainability*, and the question is not so much whether essential disconnection permits the objective validity of judgment as whether it permits us to grasp even the possibility of the part of reality to which an essential disconnection theorist intends to permit us access (i.e., the empirically available part).)

The key philosophical commitment I just mentioned is Kant's position on the principle of sufficient reason (PSR), which he glosses as the principle that "All things have their ground," or in other words, everything exists only as a consequence" (ÜE 8:213n).<sup>53</sup> Kant is clear that the Critical philosophy restricts the legitimate use of the PSR to "things as appearances in space and time" (ÜE 8:213n) and that without such a restriction the PSR can "belong only to logic", i.e., hold as a logical relation among judgments rather than a real relation among things (FM 20:277). Kant's rationale is that the PSR is meant to be *ampliative* of our knowledge or cognition and thus to be a basis of possible *synthetic* judgments, and synthetic judgments are not possible apart from intuition, whether empirical or formal.

Suppose, however, that one ignored that scruple about the possibility of synthetic judgment and wanted to go ahead and use the PSR in the Leibnizian-Wolffian manner. That manner would consist in, on the one hand, trying to apply the PSR to empirical things while, on the other, doing so in a way that did not 'schematize' the PSR to spatio-temporality. That use would thus require, in particular, that the sufficient ground of the empirical thing not be *temporally prior* to the thing's ongoing existence, since temporal priority is obviously provided for by time as a form of sensibility. Now trying to use the PSR thus would lead us into, Kant says, an "absurdity" (FM 20:277). Why? Because "the sufficient reason whereby [the empirical thing in question] was so viewed [i.e., only as a consequence of the existence of some other thing] would be nowhere at all to be found" (FM 20:277). The reader should attend closely to Kant's claim there of an "absurdity" and of the fact that what generates that absurdity is not *that there is certainly no such sufficient reason* but rather merely that *no such sufficient reason is to*

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<sup>53</sup> In fact, I suspect that resources for my reading could also be marshalled from A4P, and the reader may wonder why I do not exploit them. But the interpretive complexities involved in doing so are pretty severe, whereas what follows is a much more straightforward case to make.

*be found*. The absurdity is thus generated not by the *non-existence* of a sufficient reason but by our *essential ignorance of* or, in my parlance, our *essential disconnection from* any possible sufficient reason.

The point that Kant makes there can perhaps be made more intuitive if we use his more familiar language of the conditioned and the unconditioned. The PSR in its unschematized form amounts to what Kant calls, in the Dialectic of the first *Critique*, the “principle of pure reason”: “if the conditioned is given, then the entire series of conditions subordinated to one another—a series that is hence itself unconditioned—is also given (*i.e., contained in the object and its connection*)” (A307-8/B364; emphasis mine).<sup>54</sup> Givenness, for Kant, is availability to an intuitive power; that is why Kant supposes that, e.g., to be able to know non-sensibly would not be to bypass intuition altogether but to enjoy a specifically *intellectual* intuition (B72). If the unschematized PSR holds, then in being given anything contingent, I must in the same gesture be *given* all of its conditions (though perhaps very indistinctly or obscurely); i.e., I must somehow intuit them in my intuition of the contingent item itself. But of course *our* intuitive power, sensibility, does not along with any conditioned that it gives us also actually *give* us the conditions. It does not do so insofar as it is temporal (ignoring spatiality for simplicity’s sake), so that relations of conditioning play out across time and hence the conditioned *succeeds* the condition and is given apart from it.<sup>55</sup> Kant’s claim that the attempt to apply the unschematized PSR to empirical things generates an “absurdity” thus rests on the observation that it would involve saying of some conditioned empirical thing or state of affairs at the same time that its

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<sup>54</sup> Omri Boehm (2016) concurs on that identification of the principle of pure reason with the PSR.

<sup>55</sup> That doesn’t quite work for the condition-conditioned relation ‘substance-attribute’, but that does not matter for the point I am about to make.

condition *must be given* and that, as specifically temporally conditioned, its condition *is not given*<sup>56</sup>—an absurdity in the strongest sense, i.e., a contradiction.

We should now recall some details from my argument for the incompatibility of essential disconnection with genuine empirical realism. The nub of that argument is that if the empirically knowable world is one of which our epistemic capacity can know both (a) that it certainly requires, and hence that there must exist, an experience-transcendent explainer and (b) that such an explainer could never be presented by or given to our epistemic capacity, then we open up the persistent possibility of two opposed inferences: first, from the fact that I am aware empirically of a part of reality to the existence of its experience-transcendent ground; but equally second, from the fact that I could never be given the actuality of that ground (because it could never be given to or presented by my epistemic capacity) to its possible *non*-existence and thence to the conclusion that I am not actually empirically aware of a part of reality at all. That entails that we are in a position at best of *problematic idealism* because we cannot know which inference is correct.

But now note that essential disconnection posits a relation of explanation between empirical things, or the region of reality that they belong to, and what is not empirical, the mysterious experience-transcendent explanatory ground. Such a relation of explanation would have to be governed by the *unschematized* PSR (since temporality is intra-empirical),<sup>57</sup> and thus it would require that the experience-transcendent ground of empirical reality is *actually given*, i.e., intuited (pure-rationally), along with the empirical reality that it grounds, whether we think

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<sup>56</sup> Even granting that it *can be* given under the right circumstances, i.e., through historical investigation. The point is that that is just the condition's *giveability*, as it were, not its actual givenness, which is what the unschematized PSR requires.

<sup>57</sup> That is to set aside 'neglected alternative' worries that the experience-transcendent might be in itself temporal. I can do so here because what is at issue is Kant's own commitments, of which the non-spatio-temporality of things in themselves is clearly one, but I also respond to the neglected alternative objection in chapter five, section 1.4.

of that ground as substance, cause, or disjunctive whole. Yet *per hypothesi* essential disconnection requires precisely that the explanatory ground *could not in principle be given*. (For that reason, an appeal to unschematized categories or transcendental content would be no help here, because what is at issue is *givenness* in Kant's sense, i.e., intuitability, and not anything categorial.) And that in turn entails that if my putatively epistemic capacity is subject to essential disconnection, then it eventuates in a contradiction: The 'reality' that it purports to present must be conditioned by (i.e., requires explanation by) a condition both necessarily given with it and necessarily not given with it. The result is not merely *problematic* idealism but *dogmatic* idealism: the view that the 'outer reality' that our allegedly epistemic capacity presents is, as such, impossible and hence illusory.

Kant's restriction of the PSR to a schematized use solely in reference to empirical things and their spatio-temporality thus avoids dogmatic idealism—by entailing the rejection of the essential disconnection conception of the human epistemic capacity. I do not thereby mean to claim that Kant sees directly the bearing of his restriction of the PSR on the possibility of empirical realism. It is not implausible to me that he did see it, but I have not made that case. What I have shown is that Kant's restriction on legitimate use of the PSR entails rejecting essential disconnection and to that extent respects and makes possible genuine empirical realism.

## 5. The Unity of Kant's Empirical Realism

I have now argued that Kant's empirical realism comprises all four of the elements I listed earlier: (a) empirical things are in principle available to a direct awareness; (b) they are in space; (c) they are not mental items or determinations; (d) our knowledge of them is not, in principle, parochial or essentially disconnected. How do those elements hang together?



One line of dispute in the Kant literature is whether he means to be replying to skepticism, and if so, to what kind(s) and by what means.<sup>58</sup> This much seems to me indubitable: that the Critical philosophy contains an exceptionally thorough grounding of the possibility of knowledge of the empirical world. But why should that be so? Well, empirical realism must be such as to allow the most precise, systematic, and successful bodies of knowledge we have, mathematics and the exact sciences, to count as knowledge—or else what would? And yet empirical realism is not only relevant to such comparatively esoteric knowledge. Systematic knowledge of nature is made possible by actual experiences, which are already knowledge-bearing or -enabling in a way that is potentially systematizable long before the advent of sciences proper. In other words, if we are not to be skeptics about the status as knowledge of our scientific knowledge of the world, we must begin by not being skeptics about the most basic case of our knowledge of the world, namely actual, unsystematic experience of some small portion of it.

The elements of empirical realism that I have found in Kant can be cast as a kind of progression, in reference to the goal of safeguarding ordinary empirical knowledge of the world. We begin by rooting out comparatively obvious skeptical impediments, namely (a) the denial that knowledge of the real can be had directly rather than through inferences that then must be shored up in some way and (b) the insistence that if we have direct knowledge of anything, it is only of what is non-worldly and mental (and perhaps that is even all we know about, directly or otherwise). We then notice a ground of the initial obvious impediment, the thought that for something to be real it must be a thing in itself, i.e., not even in principle given to sensibility. Jettisoning that ground, we say that direct awareness of spatial *things* (and not mere subjective presentations thereof) is possible because the real is in principle available to sensibility. Finally,

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<sup>58</sup> Taken up in, e.g., Strawson 1966, Stroud 2000a and b, Allison 2006, Forster 2008.

since what we have said thus far casts objectivity, and hence objects, in relation to the possibility of knowledge for subjects, we face the possibility that, for all we know, the objectivity secured by our account is no more than merely *subjective*, ‘how we must think’ (because an essentially defective epistemic capacity is one whose presentation is at best restricted to the merely subjective). We see that that turns objectivity into ‘objectivity’ (i.e., ‘objectivity-for-subjects-like-us’), knowledge into ‘knowledge’, and reality into ‘reality’. And since empirical realism is to secure our basic commitment to empirical knowledge (and all that derives from it), we see that empirical realism cannot tolerate such a subjective conception.

I do not claim that a single progression of arguments along those lines is found straightforwardly in the texts. As the reader has seen, the arguments are scattered throughout otherwise distinctive discussions. What I think that progression captures is a logical or conceptual unity to this particular domain of the Critical enterprise. Empirical realism is the view that makes possible empirical knowledge—and, as I shall later argue, knowledge more generally.

## 6. We’re Not Done Yet

In this chapter, I take myself textually to have demonstrated Kant’s commitment to the elements of empirical realism as I have characterized it. Those elements are: (a) that objects of possible experience admit of direct awareness; (b) that they are in space; (c) that they are not mere mental or subjective items; and (d) that the knowledge we have of them is neither parochial nor essential disconnected.

However, I have remained at a fairly local level of discussion, dealing with a select few passages and their interpretive difficulties. And some readers will naturally feel that I can draw my conclusions about those particular passages only at the expense of ignoring the whole,

particularly in reference to (d). Either they will think that there is no broader support for my line of interpretation to undergird the readings I've offered herein; or worse, they will think that what I have said is positively irreconcilable with fundamental commitments of the *Critique*. How, for instance, can I insist that Kant rejects essential disconnection with a straight face, given his enthusiasm about the role of the thing in itself in his system? Indeed, isn't Kant deeply committed to some means of access or other to a noumenal realm, and doesn't the presence of that realm in the picture more or less render moot everything I have said here?

The reader has a right to be dubious. It will be the business of the following two chapters to lay out the fundamental Critical doctrines and conceptual apparatus that make sense of the picture of Kant I have begun to paint in this one, and the three after that to demonstrate the consistency of that picture with Kant's broader view.

### Chapter Three: Kant's Conceptual-Semantic Terminological Toolkit

In chapter one, I outlined a minimal conception of empirical realism, trying to capture only what any view must be committed to if it is to be a genuine realism about empirical things. In chapter two, I argued that there is good textual evidence that Kant's empirical realism respects or at least has sufficient resources to respect the requirements of genuine empirical realism. But I conceded that even if a reader is persuaded by my interpretive arguments about certain key passages, there is still major and broader interpretive work to be done to make the reading I'm building up plausible.

In particular, I have not yet done enough to dislodge a couple of standard proposals, not necessarily mutually exclusive, for understanding Kant's transcendental idealism that are at odds with the empirical realism I purport to find in him. (1) The first of those is the proposal that either *the* or at least *a* focal point of transcendental idealism is the forms of intuition. There are blunter and more nuanced versions of that proposal.<sup>1</sup> The blunter take space and time to be 'merely subjective' and 'imposed' on deliverances of sensibility that do not antecedently conform to them,<sup>2</sup> suggesting the metaphor of spatio-temporal spectacles proposed by Russell.<sup>3</sup> The more nuanced take Kant not to *mean* to advocate such a crude idealism, accepting that he tries to demonstrate the genuine objective validity of the forms of intuition in the Transcendental Deduction,<sup>4</sup> but nevertheless hold that since Kant leaves open the possibility of other forms of

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<sup>1</sup> The distinction between 'blunter' and 'more nuanced' is not meant to be evaluative.

<sup>2</sup> E.g., Guyer 1987, ch. 16, esp. 360-2, and Allison 1983 and 2004 (though that is not by any means the reading Allison means to give, as we have seen).

<sup>3</sup> Russell 1972, 707.

<sup>4</sup> The Deduction is, of course, not primarily concerned with the forms of intuition but rather with the categories. But arguably the Deduction's demonstration of the objective validity of the categories is at the same time a demonstration of the objective validity of the forms of intuition. For pending the completion of the Deduction we cannot say how sensibility and its forms make *cognition* possible (the answer being that they do so through sensibility's cooperation with intellect). I am influenced in that way of reading the Deduction by Pippin (in classes and conversation), Conant (in classes and his 2016), and McDowell (2009c).

intuition, our own forms of intuition reduce to a merely subjective imposition.<sup>5</sup> The difficulty lies not so much in Kant's indulgence in speculation about the possibility of other forms of intuition but in the fact that even if he did not so indulge, he could say nothing against that possibility: He cannot show that the forms of intuition are *not* specifically human, i.e., entitle himself to Allisonian epistemic anthropocentrism. Thereby he lets in the merely subjective and imposed character of our forms of intuition, so that our epistemic capacity might be parochial.

(2) The second standard proposal for understanding Kant's transcendental idealism, lately on the ascendant in a new form, locates *the* or *a* focal point of that idealism in Kant's alleged existential commitment to things in themselves. Again, there are blunter and more nuanced versions of that proposal. The blunter versions take that existential commitment to go along with a straightforwardly subjective idealism.<sup>6</sup> They take their cue from passages like that in the *Prolegomena* where Kant (on a flatfooted reading) seems to suggest that *the* significant difference between his idealism and the empirical idealism that he rejects is that his idealism requires realism about things in themselves (Prol 4:289). The more nuanced versions aspire to separate Kant's alleged realism about things in themselves, which they accept, from anything more than the most minimally idealist commitments.<sup>7</sup> Shifting away from the strongly epistemological focus of a commentator like Allison, they concentrate on the many passages where Kant seems to claim that things in themselves *exist* and that they *cause* or *ground* or *condition* empirical things (which, presumably, also entails that they exist).<sup>8</sup> Now I take myself to have given, in the previous chapter, arguments that this standard proposal, which entails

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<sup>5</sup> E.g., McDowell 2009c, Pippin 2005b, 2007.

<sup>6</sup> Guyer 1987 is again representative; see ch. 15. Strawson 1966 also falls under this heading.

<sup>7</sup> E.g., Langton 1998 and Allais 2015. Many views seem to lie between the two extremes, e.g., those of Ameriks (2012) and Colin Marshall (2013).

<sup>8</sup> Allais offers a catalogue of such claims at 30-3 of her 2015, though they vary widely in the extent to which they are even *prima facie* such claims at all.

essential disconnection, could not possibly be Kant's view without gross systematic inconsistency. But that does not at all explain those many apparently existentially committal passages or even vaguely suggest to us how to go about interpreting them if not as requiring realism about the experience-transcendent and hence essential disconnection—a major interpretive burden that requires discharging if my reading is to be compelling.

The business of this chapter is not directly to dislodge those proposals. But it is to lay the ground for doing so by further shifting from merely describing Kant's empirical realism to giving the account of how his Critical position can make it possible.<sup>9</sup> For understanding how Kant's empirical realism is possible is, I contend, largely a matter of understanding how apparent impediments to its possibility are *merely* apparent, resting on assumptions our entitlement to which cannot be vindicated. And those assumptions are precisely what seem to make the aforementioned proposals for understanding Kant's transcendental idealism plausible interpretive options.

The first major step in unfolding the Critical ground of possibility of genuine empirical realism is an investigation of a key subset of Kant's technical terminology and the conceptual relations among the terms therein. For grasping those terms and how they hang together reveals a surprising *conceptual-semantic* dimension of his position that bears directly on the possibility of his empirical realism. Kant seems to have an important place in his thinking for some notion of the *sense* (*Sinn*) or *meaning* (*Bedeutung*) of intellectual presentations (i.e., concepts, judgments, categories, Ideas—in a word, thoughts) and of a relation (*Beziehung*) between thought and object that is in the vicinity of what we now think of as reference. He thus turns out to have something like a *theory of meaning* not so much for language but for thought, and that theory has deep,

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<sup>9</sup> 'Further shifting' because to some extent my argument in the previous chapter against the systematic possibility of essential disconnection for Kant already began that shift.

systematic implications for Kant's broader position. In particular, it seems to place stiff and, at least today, somewhat counterintuitive limits on what we can meaningfully think about. But even the mere presence of the theory, and certainly its centrality to Kant's position, can be easy to miss if one does not first of all become sensitive to the rather various terms in which it manifests itself again and again in the Critical works. So before we can evaluate the theory and its conceptual connection to the Critical philosophy and to empirical realism in particular, we need first to learn to see it wherever Kant puts it to work. And that is all the more true in view of the dominant tendency in the recent literature toward denial that Kant can be taken seriously when it comes to his claims about the necessary conditions for meaningful thought.<sup>10</sup>

A pair of terms will serve as our touchstone: *objective reality* and its cousin, *objective validity*.<sup>11</sup> I shall argue that if a concept has objective reality, not only does it, as concept, have *logical* possibility but its object has *real* possibility (or, as I shall also say, is *really possible*<sup>12</sup>); the concept has a *meaning* (*Bedeutung*) or *sense* (*Sinn*); the concept *refers* or *relates*<sup>13</sup> to (*sich*

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<sup>10</sup> Examples of the tendency are Kain 2010, 211, Chignell 2010, 179, Dennis Schulting 2011, 164-72, and Allais 2015, 212-3. Beiser (2005) purports to wear the mantle of historical responsibility when he takes a stand against those who want "to make Kant scrubbed and sanitary for a more positivistic age", i.e., against those who propose to take Kant's more controversial semantic commitments seriously, as I do (589). Westphal 2004 is a more complicated case: He rightly calls attention to the semantic dimension of Kant's thinking but somewhat cavalierly interprets his way around certain key elements of it. Hanna 2001, with his interest in what he calls Kant's "cognitive semantics", is a welcome exception, though he does not seem to see the systematic bearing of that semantics on the possibility of empirical realism.

<sup>11</sup> Some have attempted to distinguish objective validity from objective reality, but the attempts are controversial at best (e.g., Allison 1983, 133ff.; 2004, 162n11). But for the sake of terminological cleanliness, I try to reserve 'objective reality' for non-judgmental intellectual presentations and 'objective validity' for judgments.

<sup>12</sup> Note that I therefore use 'really possible' in connection with Kant's technical notion of 'real possibility' and, as I have been doing, 'genuinely possible' when I wish to emphasize a contrast with 'allegedly/putatively possible'.

<sup>13</sup> Pluhar prefers 'reference' for '*Beziehung*' and correspondingly for cognates, reserving 'relation' for '*Verhältnis*' and '*Relation*'. He appears to be correct that Kant intends the latter terms to have a distinct technical meaning from the former (cf. Greenberg 2001, 57-74, who is idiosyncratic but intriguing in this area). But for a desire to distinguish *Beziehung* from the latter German terms for an English reader, its more natural translation outside the context of Kant's philosophy might well be 'relation'. But a problem is created by the fact that, as I shall argue, Kant really is trying to capture an at least reference-esque relation, one that is more naturally captured by the English word 'reference' than merely by 'relation' so long as we take care not to let assumptions about what the former word means be uncritically imported from twentieth-century philosophy of language. Indeed, I shall even contend that what Kant is up to in this region of his thinking is significantly related to (though no doubt crucially

*auf beziehen*) an object of possible experience (i.e., an empirical thing) or to possible experience as such (hence to its forms or conditions); the concept has a *use*; that use is *immanent* to possible experience rather than *transcendent* of it; and the concept has *content* rather than being *empty*. I focus on concepts rather than on any other sort of intellectual presentation or on thought generally because concepts are Kant's most elementary sort of intellectual presentation, so that what the conceptual-semantic view says about them redounds to all other sorts.

Some readers will probably already be detecting the philosophical implications of those conceptual connections for our understanding of the Critical enterprise, implications that I shall draw out at greater length in chapter four. There I shall have more to say about whether the position that this way of thinking points to is defensible or, rather, is so absurd and objectionable that if the Critical Kant really holds it, then he must either be rejected or corrected. For now, I merely emphasize once more that these connections are really present and are in most cases emphatically stated and heavily leaned on by Kant over and over again. There is thus a major exegetical cost to not attending to them.

### 1. Objective Reality and Objective Validity

We have already encountered objective validity. As I argued in chapter two, it is that property of a judgment (strictly so called)<sup>14</sup> whereby the judgment is answerable to the object(s) that it purports to be about. That answerability consists in the judgment's being possibly true or

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different from) the tradition in thinking at the boundary of philosophy of language and of mind whose most characteristic exponents are Frege, Strawson, Gareth Evans, and McDowell. So my solution for now is to speak, with Pluhar (and others, e.g., Manley Thompson in his 1972), of reference but frequently to flag that the term I am translating is *Beziehung* or a cognate, and to be assiduous about not letting that translation choice prejudice the interpretive case for finding a conceptual-semantic theory in Kant in my favour. Thanks to Michael Kremer for pushing me to get clear on these matters.

<sup>14</sup> I mean by that to indicate that I am adopting the way Kant speaks of judgments in the B Deduction, where there is not even a question whether there might be a species of judgment that lacks objective validity.



false: I.e., the judgment is a unity of presentations whose principle of unity is not merely a fact about me or my psychology but is rather its responsibility to, or normative constraint by, how things stand with the object presented. In virtue of a judgment's objective validity, it thus belongs to "a consciousness in general" and binds with universality and necessity, just insofar as if it is true, its truth for one knower is its truth for all (and likewise with its falsehood if it is false). For now, I set objective validity in the foregoing sense aside; I shall return to it and to its relation to objective reality in chapter four.

I have just spoken as though objective validity is a property distinctively of judgments, but in fact, Kant predicates objective validity of concepts as well (e.g., A255/B311), and in that connection, Kant makes no systematic distinction between it and *objective reality*. So what is objective reality? In particular, can we get a grip on it independently of any of the other technical concepts in Kant's lexicon? Unfortunately not, as we will soon see. Let us begin with an exemplary case of it, namely that of a humdrum empirical concept, like 'tree' or 'house' (A84/B116-7). Outside of the context of Kant's technical vocabulary, one could be forgiven for thinking that for a concept to have objective reality is just for the object of that concept to be *objective* or *real* or even *objectively real*.<sup>15</sup> And the basic case before us conforms to that thought: Trees and houses certainly exist, in a sense of 'exist' that is innocent of any debates about realism and idealism; they have their properties independently of who is perceiving them, they resist us if we try to pass through them, and so on. Nevertheless, this much is clear: that the basic case is not exhaustive, nor does it tell us exactly what objective reality consists of. For the categories have objective reality, yet they are *a priori* rather than empirical, and 'formal' rather than of classes of objects or properties:

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<sup>15</sup> It is unfortunate that, in both ordinary and philosophical usage, the terms 'objective' and 'real' are used with a plurality of sometimes overlapping senses. That is a significant impediment to understanding Kant's real view.

[1] If, therefore, there are a priori concepts, then they cannot indeed contain anything empirical; but they must nonetheless all be a priori conditions for a possible experience, for on this alone can their objective reality rest. (A95)

[2] [...] the objective reality of the understanding's [pure] concepts is based solely on the fact that, since they amount to the intellectual form of all experience, their application must always be capable of being shown in experience. (A310/B367)

Not only that, but principles of theoretical reason and the practical Ideas also have their objective reality:

[3.1] Reason never refers straightforwardly to [*bezieht sich niemals geradezu auf*] an object, but refers solely to the understanding, and by means of it to reason's own empirical use. (A643/B672) [3.2] Now, every principle that lays down a priori for the understanding the thoroughgoing unity of the latter's use holds also, although only indirectly, of the object of experience. *Hence the principles of pure reason will have objective reality as regards this object also* [my italics -SG]—not, however, so as to *determine* anything in this object, but only so as to indicate the procedure whereby the understanding's empirical and determinate experiential use can become thoroughly accordant with itself. (A665-6/B693-4)

[4] Now the concept of freedom, insofar as its reality is proved by an apodeictic law of practical reason, forms the *keystone* of the whole edifice of a system of pure reason, even of speculative reason. All other concepts (those of God and immortality) that, as mere ideas, remain unsupported in speculative reason now attach themselves to the concept of freedom and acquire, with it and through it, stability and objective reality. I.e., their *possibility* is *proved* by freedom's being actual, for this idea reveals itself through the moral law. (KpV 5:3-4)

And even the concept of a natural purpose, a concept that Kant calls “subjective”, that he tells us is employed only for reflection on objects rather than determination of them (KU 5:395-6), and that is in some important way inexplicable (KU 5:395),<sup>16</sup> has objective reality:

[5] Hence organized beings are the only beings in nature that, even when considered by themselves and apart from any relation to other things, must still be thought of as possible only as purposes of nature. It is these beings, therefore, which first give objective reality to the concept of a *purpose* that is a purpose of *nature* rather than a practical one, and which hence gives natural science the basis

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<sup>16</sup> Kant makes the claim explicitly in the title of the relevant section. I take Kant's claim in that section also to entail that the concept 'natural purpose', although a concept under which particular natural products are subsumed, is not thereby used to determine such products, i.e., as object, and hence does not permit causal inferences to a basis for such natural products in a purposive power (i.e., a power to reason) or being (reasoner).

for a teleology, i.e., for judging its objects in terms of a special principle that otherwise we simply would not be justified in introducing into natural science (since we have no a priori insight whatever into the possibility of such a causality). (KU 5:375-6)

So whatever objective reality is, it is uncontroversially possessed by ordinary empirical concepts but also by pure concepts of the understanding, principles of theoretical reason, Ideas or principles of practical reason, and the concept of a natural purpose.<sup>17</sup> So what is it?

## 2. Possible Experience

Here we must make our first terminological connection. In a way, the choice of which to begin with is arbitrary. But probably the easiest place to start is with reference (*Beziehung*—importantly, not specifically *singular* reference) to objects of possible experience, i.e., empirical things, or to possible experience as such, thus including the latter’s forms or conditions of possibility. (For the purposes of this discussion, emphasis will not be on ‘reference’ but on ‘possible experience’. Reference and what exactly that word means for Kant are discussed in section 6 below.) At a first pass, the objective reality of a concept just is its referring to experience, whether some actual, particular experience or the object thereof, or just possible experience as such. The case of ordinary empirical concepts is again easy enough. Being empirical, their origin is an actual encounter with their corresponding objects in the course of

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<sup>17</sup> There is perhaps some controversy in the last case, as Kant, in section 74 of the third *Critique*, suggests both that the concept of a natural purpose “is a concept that cannot be abstracted from experience” and that, although it is used on the basis of a rational principle of judgment, “reason is quite unable to prove the concept of a natural purpose, i.e., that it has objective reality” (KU 5:396). How can the concept have objective reality conferred upon it if not in the manner of a straightforward empirical concept nor through an *a priori* proof? Kant’s method and problematic in the third *Critique* is too distinctive from that used elsewhere in his Critical philosophy to find an appropriate place in this dissertation, but my (very short) answer now is that what it is for the concept ‘natural purpose’ to have objective reality is inflected by the fact that it is a concept used by *reflective* rather than *determinative* judgment. Consequently it has objective reality precisely as a concept of *how we think about* organisms, not of organisms themselves. (In an earlier version of this note, I confused the concept of an organized being, as straightforwardly empirically available, with the concept of a natural purpose, as the concept of the only sort of explanation of which we can conceive for such a being. Thanks to Michael Kremer for helping me to see that.)

experience and an abstraction thence.<sup>18</sup> For any such concept, that it refers, in Kant's sense, to experience is proved by its object being found in an actual experience—the very object the encounter with which is the occasion for the introduction of that empirical concept in the first place.<sup>19</sup> Hence there can be no doubting the objective reality of such a concept, provided that we have not introduced it by mistake (on the basis of a misperception, e.g.).

Admittedly, the case is not quite that simple with all empirical concepts. Kant is prepared to admit that there might be a “magnetic matter permeating all bodies”, the concept of which would have to be empirical inasmuch as it arises from “the perception of the attracted iron filings” and yet the “direct perception of [which matter] is impossible for us in view of the character of our organs” (A226/B273). That is still, however, a case of the thing's (the magnetic matter's) belonging to possible experience on Kant's view. For the latter, it suffices that something be *causally connected* to directly perceivable objects and events, and hence to actual experience, however distally:

[6] But the existence of a thing can be cognized even prior to the thing's perception, and hence *comparatively* a priori, provided that the thing coheres with some perceptions in accordance with the principles of their empirical connection (the analogies). For then the thing's existence does, after all, cohere with our perceptions in a possible experience, and we can, with those analogies as our guide, get from our actual perceptions to the thing [contained] in the series of possible perceptions. (A225-6/B273; emphasis mine, emendation Pluhar's)

That the hypothesis of magnetic matter turned out to be more or less false is not a problem for Kant's point there, any more than would be a problem for the objective reality of the basic case

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<sup>18</sup> For an extended discussion of empirical concept formation, see Longuenesse 1996, ch. 5 (107-30).

<sup>19</sup> Note that that is a claim not merely about the empirical *origin* of the concept, if that be conceived of as separable from the object that the concept is of. The claim is rather that the objective reality of an empirical concept is secured because its object is one whose actuality is manifest to us in experience—but that manifestation is what prompts concept-formation.

of empirical concepts that sometimes we misperceive.<sup>20</sup> What is important is that concepts of postulated empirical things (i.e., on the basis of observed empirical phenomena) are empirical concepts and hence that their objective reality can be proven through actual experience.

Before moving on to non-empirical concepts, note that while Kant indicates that actual experiences of particular things, or their properties or effects, *suffice* to prove an empirical concept's objective reality, it is less than clear that they are *required* so to prove. Kant does not say anything to suggest that the concept of a certain breed of dog that no one has bothered to breed yet, e.g., would be a concept that lacks objective reality. Neither does he say anything to suggest that it would not be an empirical concept. When we turn to non-empirical concepts, then, we should not assume that what proves their objective reality, which as we shall see is undoubtedly more minimal than an actual experience of a particular, would not also suffice to prove the objective reality of empirical concepts.

So: What about categories? They are 'formal' concepts: They do not designate particular kinds of empirically encountered objects among others (e.g., the substances), nor particular properties (e.g., the property of being a substance). Being thus 'formal', they are *a priori*, which is to say that they inform our experience universally and necessarily irrespectively of what, in particular, we are experiencing. But that entails that their objective reality cannot be proven merely through abstraction from particular experiences. For that would not establish their objective reality *as a priori*, i.e., as having the requisite universality and necessity.

But quotations [1] and [2] above already contain Kant's account of the categories' objective reality in terms of merely possible experience: namely, in terms of their status as

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<sup>20</sup> At one point, Kant seems to suggest that whether or not a concept has objective reality is 'indicated' by the number of "true consequences" that arise from it—the more such consequences, the more strongly the concept's objective reality is indicated. (B114)

*conditions of possibility* of experience just as such and hence as necessarily referring to that possible experience. Another way of putting the claim from the previous paragraph that the categories are ‘formal’ is to say that they express or constitute experience’s *form*. But that is just to say that they constitute the latter’s possibility by being its necessary conditions. Hence a certain reference to possible experience as what they make possible is as it were built into their conception, and thence to the objects that must be given in that possible experience if they are to be given at all, i.e., empirical things.<sup>21</sup> (Recall that the Transcendental Deduction, whatever else it is, is an extended argument that categories are precisely nothing other than conditions of the possibility of experience and that experience as such would not be possible at all without such (intellectual) conditions (B161).)

The same holds of the sensible conditions, space and time as forms of intuition, and that formal body of knowledge derivative upon them, mathematics: They all earn their objective reality by a built-in reference to possible experience. For they too are *a priori*, and hence require for a ground of proof of their objective reality something that is at once empirical (in a certain sense) and yet not any particular experience: possible experience as such. For the objective reality of mathematical concepts, the need of reference even merely to possible experience may be surprising. On Kant’s own account, are mathematical concepts not constructed *a priori*? And isn’t possible experience irrelevant to the possibility of such a construction procedure? But Kant is convinced that although we may not have experience or the empirical things it presents to us

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<sup>21</sup> One is tempted to hear the phrase ‘possible experience’ as designating a *merely* subjective and occurrent phenomenon, as though it meant something like ‘some unspecified subjective episode’. And then to claim that an empirical thing can only be given in that experience would have to be to claim that the existence of a putatively mind-independent thing actually depends upon the *actuality* of some merely subjective episode, which looks like straightforward subjective idealism. Obviously that is not what I mean to suggest. I point it out merely to note a place where it might be easy for a reader to read me as slipping into subjective idealism, my best intentions notwithstanding. I mean to show ultimately that there need be no slippage in such formulations if we can hear them from the vantage point of a position that has achieved ‘equipose’ between idealism and realism (McDowell 2009c, 75).

explicitly in view when we construct mathematical concepts, nevertheless what those concepts *are* are ultimately concepts of formal conditions of possible givenness of empirical things to sensibility, i.e., in space and time: “The [mathematical] concept always remains one that is produced a priori along with the synthetic principles or formulas based on such concepts; yet their use and their reference to alleged objects can in the end be sought nowhere but in experience, *whose possibility (as regards form) is contained a priori in those concepts*” (A240/B299; italics mine).

Principles of theoretical reason and hence the Ideas properly (i.e., Critically) construed also have objective reality through reference to possible experience. That reference is yet more indirect than those of categories or forms of intuition. Obviously they do not refer to particular objects of possible experience, and though they do refer to possible experience as such, they do not do so *directly* or *immediately* (*unmittelbar*) by comparison with the categories and forms of intuition, which constitute the form of that possible experience.<sup>22</sup> Rather, as Kant says in quotations [3.1] and [3.2] above, they refer to the understanding, that power of the intellectual stem of presentation<sup>23</sup> that enables the presentation of empirical things through judgment. What I mean is this: In cooperation with sensibility, the understanding (reminding the reader that here I mean the understanding narrowly construed) makes possible the givenness to awareness of things that are not merely sensible but also thinkable. Thus, through the understanding, empirical things are essentially or necessarily objects of possible judgment. But reason, another power of

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<sup>22</sup> That sentence has been formulated so as to indicate that the categories and forms of intuition refer *comparatively more directly* to possible experience in virtue of their joint constitution of its form. Kant nevertheless holds that only intuition refers *directly* to empirical things, and concepts *indirectly*; hence one may want to hold that, analogously, only the forms of intuition refer directly to the possibility of experience as such, and the categories only indirectly, i.e., by way of their reference to the forms of intuition. That is admissible, provided we recognize the comparatively greater indirectness of reference of rational principles and Ideas relative to the categories. Thanks to Robert Pippin for urging me to get clear on this point.

<sup>23</sup> Where, recall, the stems of presentation that together constitute the human epistemic capacity are intellect and sensibility.

the intellectual stem, relates judgments to one another in an explanatory or syllogistic system, presupposing the givenness of empirical things and judgments. Hence reason's principles are principles *directly* (or, at least, comparatively directly) of the understanding's operations insofar as judgments are to be systematized, and hence *indirectly* or *ultimately* of the possible experience, judgments about whose constituents—empirical things—are to constitute a system.<sup>24</sup>

So far, I have exhibited three increasingly indirect cases of reference to possible experience: those of an empirical concept, a formal or *a priori* concept, and a principle of theoretical reason. Given the increasing indirectness, one might worry that there is no real unity to the concept 'reference to possible experience'. But one can keep a stable grip on the concept by keeping always in mind what it precludes, viz., reference to the experience-transcendent. Empirical concepts obviously lack such reference; their objects are experience-immanent. But so too do categories, the concepts of space and time, mathematical concepts, and the Ideas in their non-Dialectical use. None of those concepts presents a special object that, just insofar as those concepts are non-empirical, would not be given in experience at all but lie beyond it. But then if those concepts refer neither to empirical nor to experience-transcendent objects, what are they for? The answer is, again making reference to quotations [1] and [2] as well as [3.1] and [3.2] above, that each of those concepts helps to make experience possible, that is, by being a concept not of some particular object but of some formal aspect of experience as such. To that extent the

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<sup>24</sup> Strictly speaking, the account given in the foregoing paragraph is too weak. For it construes the principles of theoretical reason only subjectively, as governing the use of a power of the intellectual stem of presentation. In the Appendix to the Transcendental Dialectic, Kant calls the principles thus construed 'logical' and contrasts that construal with a 'transcendental' one, on which nature itself, not just our judgments about it, forms a system (A650-1/B678-9). Further, he argues that the use of merely logical principles in scientific investigation of the natural world would be neither justified nor even possible did not transcendental principles hold of nature itself (A651/B679). So there is both a subjective and an objective purport to Kant's teaching: knowledge, taken as a body, and the objects known, i.e., the whole of nature, share a form or a condition of possibility, namely systematicity. That line of argument will be elaborated in chapter six, section 1.2.



foregoing non-empirical concepts refer to possible experience (bearing in mind we have not yet clarified what exactly Kant means by ‘refer’ (*beziehen*) in these contexts).

The concept of a natural purpose, which we find in the third *Critique*, is an intriguing hybrid case. (Note that the concept is not equivalent to the concept of an organized being, which is empirical, but rather is the concept of an organized being *as the object of a certain sort of explanation of its existence*, viz., through a purpose.) Like an ordinary empirical concept, it is the concept of a particular subset of empirical things, one whose having an occasion for use in experience is contingent (there need not have been organisms, the beings that we reflectively classify as natural purposes (KU 5:398)).<sup>25</sup> Hence it does not express a condition of the possibility of experience as such and, for that reason, does not admit of a deduction in Kant’s strict sense—an *a priori* argument for the objective reality of a concept from its necessity for the possibility of experience (or, in the practical philosophy, for the possibility of the moral law). Yet it is “regulative for reflective judgment” rather than “constitutive for determinative judgment”, and hence to present an organized being is not *per se* to present a natural purpose, which it would be if ‘natural purpose’ were an ordinary empirical concept (KU 5:396). Exactly what that means or entails is too thorny a question for me to sort out here, but at a minimum it reflects the odd purpose that the concept serves: We introduce it to satisfy a need for explanation (viz., for the possibility of organized beings) that we cannot otherwise satisfy, yet in such a way that we do not entitle ourselves actually to judge that such a basis *exists* or even to purport really to understand it (KU 5:396). Nevertheless, Kant does not doubt that organized beings are given in experience and that the concept of a natural purpose is one that is at any rate *necessary* for us

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<sup>25</sup> That is not to say that, unlike organisms, there *must* have been non-living matter. There very well might not have been, but then no experience would be possible. The same is not true of the absence of organisms (aside from experiencers, but that is a different sort of requirement). Thanks to Robert Pippin for urging clarity on this point.

to think *in virtue of that very experience*. So we once again have a case of reference to possible experience, albeit an idiosyncratic one (KU 5:375-6).<sup>26</sup>

### 3. Immanence and Transcendence

What of the one set of concepts remaining to be discussed, the practical Ideas of freedom, God, and immortality? They too have objective reality, as we saw Kant maintain above in quotation [4]. Yet how can they possibly refer to possible experience? There are at least these two, perhaps mutually incompatible, grounds for dubiety: First, Kant's solution to the problem of the opposition of freedom to determinism seems to require that the practical Ideas refer, somehow or other, to experience-transcendent objects, most notably a noumenal moral agent whose causality is independent of the natural series of cause and effect. And second, the practical Ideas are, after all, practical, and their proper reference may seem not so much to be to possible experience as to possible action—not to what I might perceive but to what I might do.

Fully to understand what Kant means when he assigns objective reality to the practical Ideas requires dealing with issues in Kant's practical philosophy, which is the business of chapter seven. But we can make enough progress for now if we consider Kant's distinction between *immanent* and *transcendent* uses of intellectual presentations in theoretical and practical contexts, which shifts us to our next terminological waystation. There turns out to be a relation between immanence and objective reality, so that understanding how a use of reason can be immanent will help us to understand the objective reality of practical Ideas. But we must begin with the theoretical case, rather than proceeding directly to the practical, because a theoretical context is where the concepts of immanent and transcendent uses are first introduced and

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<sup>26</sup> See note 17 above.

because there is an interpretive puzzle about how to understand Kant's use of that language in the practical case that cannot be clearly seen without having the theoretical in view.

Kant first introduces the immanent/transcendent distinction in the first *Critique* as follows: "Let us call the principles whose application keeps altogether within the limits of possible experience *immanent* principles, and those that are to fly beyond these limits *transcendent* principles" (A295-6/B352). Thus put, the connection of immanence to objective reality and the estrangement of transcendence from objective reality should be clear enough. Kant there speaks of principles, not concepts; nevertheless, his point is that an immanent use of a principle is one that refers that principle to experience, whereas a transcendent use refers (or purports to refer) that principle specifically to the experience-transcendent.

Kant later revisits and elaborates on the distinction in the context of the theoretical Ideas:

[7] [...] presumably the transcendental ideas will have their good and consequently *immanent* use, although when their signification is misunderstood and they are taken to be concepts of actual things, they can be transcendent in their application and can on that very account be deceptive. For it is not the idea in itself but merely its use that can in regard to our entire possible experience be either *overreaching* (transcendent) or *indigenous* (immanent), according as the idea either is directed straightforwardly to an object that supposedly corresponds to it, or is directed only to the understanding's use as such in regard to the objects dealt with by the understanding. (A643/B671)

Kant there speaks of Ideas instead of principles, and he also calls Ideas "concepts of reason" (A299/B356) and even describes them as "nothing but categories expanded up to the unconditioned" (A409/B436),<sup>27</sup> so we are back on the familiar terrain of concepts. And there the relation between immanence and objective reality is even clearer. The proper use of a concept is immanent, and by that Kant means a use in reference not to an experience-transcendent object but to an experience-immanent one, which, since we are talking about Ideas of reason, is

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<sup>27</sup> I shall amplify that point below in section 5.

proximately the understanding and ultimately empirical things. To the extent that the transcendent use is a use at all (which does not really seem to be Kant's thought),<sup>28</sup> it is based on misunderstanding, which makes the Idea "deceptive" and its use "overreaching" just insofar as it purports to exceed the bounds of possible experience. We may conclude straightforwardly that a (*per impossibile*) transcendent use of an Idea is one that fails to refer that Idea to possible experience and so prevents it from having objective reality, whereas an immanent use of that Idea indeed refers it to possible experience and hence confers objective reality upon it (assuming that its status as an indirect condition on the possibility of experience is vindicated).

Now what about the practical case? Here the interpretive situation is more complex. Kant uses the language of immanence and transcendence in the second *Critique* (though not in the *Groundwork*), but close scrutiny reveals that he usually uses it to draw a line not between what belongs to and what exceeds *possible experience* but rather between what lies within and what without the scope of what eventually turns out to be *moral* or *pure willing*. That, for example, is what is going on in this passage:

[8] The use of pure [practical] reason, if one has established that there is such a reason, is alone immanent; the empirically conditioned use [of practical reason] that presumes to be sole ruler is, on the contrary, transcendent and expresses itself in demands and in commands that go entirely beyond that reason's domain—which is exactly the inverse relation of the one that we were able to state concerning pure reason in its speculative use. (KpV 5:16; all emendations Pluhar's)

Kant's point there is not, bizarrely, that somehow merely practical (i.e., not pure practical) reason, just insofar as it is empirically conditioned, oversteps the bounds of possible experience. He is rather claiming that only pure practical reason is a source of unconditional imperatives and

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<sup>28</sup> Later in this chapter (section 5), we shall consider compelling evidence that Kant does not take the transcendent use of an intellectual presentation to be a genuine use but rather a use merely putatively or *per impossibile*. And later in the dissertation (chapters five to seven), we will see in detail on what philosophical basis Kant should take that position. Thanks to Michael Kremer for urging clarity on this point.

hence an appropriate ground of pure (free) willing, so that empirically conditioned practical reason transcends *its* proper bounds when we adopt moral heteronomy.

However, notwithstanding that shift in usage between the first and second *Critiques*, we find our way to a recognizable case of objective reality by attending to what pure practical reason's immanent use is directed at or what its object is:

[9] [Through] the concept of a reason directly determining the will (through the condition of a universal lawful form of the will's maxims) [...] the moral law is able for the first time to give to reason—which always became extravagant when it wanted to proceed speculatively with its ideas—objective although only practical reality, and converts reason's *transcendent* use into an *immanent* use (wherein reason, through ideas, is itself an efficient cause in the realm of experience). (KpV 5:48; emendations mine)

Just after that, Kant writes that the practical Idea of freedom, as the concept of a non-natural causality whose form is the moral law, gains “objective reality” through that moral law “inasmuch as the idea of the law of a causality (causality of the will) itself has causality, or is its determining basis” (KpV 5:50). And at the same time, the objective reality of that concept specifically does *not* depend on an expansion “in such a way as to extend its use beyond the mentioned boundaries [i.e., of possible experience]” (KpV 5:49).

Obviously there is a lot going on in those quotations, but what is clear is (a) Kant's insistence that an immanent use of pure practical reason is one that brings about effects *in possible experience*, (b) that the ground of possibility of that immanent use, the moral law, is also the ground of the objective reality of the practical Idea of freedom, and (c) that whatever Kant has been arguing there, it in no way makes possible an experience-transcendent use of a concept—most germanely, the concept of causality.<sup>29</sup> Now obviously the relation of the practical

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<sup>29</sup> Readers with noumenalist sympathies in Kant's practical philosophy will undoubtedly be disturbed by the implications of what I am saying here. For now, all I can say is that I believe I have reported Kant's *prima facie*

Idea of freedom to possible experience is different from the relation of concepts to possible experience in the theoretical case. For here the Idea is *productive of empirical effects* rather than merely referring to what is empirically given or giveable. I shall have more to say about the implications of that fact in chapter seven (section 3). For now, we can say that although practical Ideas (for those of God and immortality turn out to inherit objective reality from the Idea of freedom) relate to possible experience productively rather than receptively—and although Kant uses the language of immanence and transcendence somewhat differently in his practical philosophy from his theoretical—there is nevertheless a straightforward case for objective reality’s consisting in the reference (*Beziehung*) of a concept to possible experience even in the practical context, and for pure practical reason’s use counting as immanent even in the first *Critique*’s sense of that term.

#### 4. Logical and Real Possibility

The next stop on our terminological journey is Kant’s distinction between *logical* and *real possibility*. Those concepts have already been lurking in the background in some of the discussions above and in previous chapters, and ‘real possibility’ and ‘objective reality’ turn out to be not exactly extensionally equivalent but at any rate extensionally corresponding. For any really possible *object* is the object of an objectively real *concept*, and for a concept to have objective reality is just for its object to have real possibility. That correspondence is on display in a passage from the Postulates of Empirical Thought giving real possibility its first proper treatment (though the concept of real possibility has already been used and elucidated by that point in the first *Critique*):

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position correctly, but that does not mean I have precluded any possibility of dispute about Kant’s deeper views. But I discuss those views in chapter seven.

[10] That [...] a concept must contain no contradiction is indeed a necessary logical condition; but it is far from sufficient for the concept's having objective reality, i.e., for the possibility of such an object as is thought through the concept. Thus there is no contradiction in the concept of a figure enclosed by two straight lines, because the concepts of two straight lines and of their meeting contain no negation of the figure. Rather, the figure's impossibility rests not on the concept in itself but on its construction in space, i.e., on the conditions of space and of its determination; and these conditions in turn have their objective reality, i.e., they apply to possible things, because they contain a priori the form of experience as such. (A220-1/B268)

Although Kant does not use the language of logical versus real possibility explicitly there, his point is not hard to make out: A concept that contains no contradiction is logically possible, but for a concept's object to be possible *as object* and thus to have real possibility, the concept must not merely be self-consistent (like the concept of a two-sided figure) but also must refer to an object of possible experience (which a two-sided figure is not) or to possible experience as such.

That paraphrase is borne out by a footnote in the B Preface:

[11] In order for me to *cognize* an object I must be able to prove its possibility (either from its actuality as attested by experience, or a priori by means of reason). But I can *think* whatever I want to, even if I am unable to commit myself to there being, in the sum of all possibilities, an object corresponding to the concept. All that is required in order for me to think something is that I do not contradict myself, i.e., that my concept be a possible thought. But I require something further *in order to attribute objective reality* to a concept (i.e., *real possibility*, as distinguished from the merely logical possibility just mentioned). (Bxxviii.; last two emphases mine)<sup>30</sup>

The “logical possibility just mentioned” is the minimal requirement that a thought must meet to be thinkable at all, namely, that it not contradict itself. Real possibility, on the other hand, is something more—“i.e.,” objective reality.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Some emendations of Pluhar's omitted, not because I disagree with them but, on the contrary, because they prejudice the interpretation of the passage in my favor. Also, note how the talk of proving possibility parallels the language in quotation [4], from the second *Critique*.

<sup>31</sup> Kant also affirms the extensional correspondence of real possibility and objective reality at A596/B624n.

So far, I have given an account of the objective reality of a concept according to which objective reality consists in the reference (*Beziehung*) of that concept to objects of possible experience or to possible experience as such, directly or indirectly, productively or receptively. I have further shown that a concept with objective reality is one whose use is immanent rather than transcendent and that the object of such a concept has real possibility, over and above the logical possibility of the concept itself. What is emerging is a picture of Kant's terminological apparatus in which several seemingly disparate ways of speaking turn out to be deeply systematically interrelated. Now notice that just now (and throughout this chapter), I have used two terms of which I have yet to give an account, 'reference' and 'use'. They too will turn out to interrelate systematically to those already discussed and, at the same time, will permit the transition to the final four technical terms whose relation to those foregoing is most controversial: meaning and meaninglessness, content and emptiness.

## 5. Use

Kant deploys 'use' in his account of the distinction between immanence and transcendence: What is immanent or transcendent is the *use* of some concept or principle. That is interesting in its own right because it suggests a distinction between a concept and that concept's use. Take, for instance, the Idea of God in theoretical philosophy. In its putative transcendent use, it would designate a very special object, some combination of a necessary being and the *ens realissimum*. In its legitimate, immanent, not merely putative use, it expresses the systematic form of knowledge and perhaps also of nature itself as sum total of objects known.<sup>32</sup> But, Kant seems to suggest, those are two different uses of *the same* concept, hence, presumably, with the

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<sup>32</sup> See note 24 above.



same marks, and not simply two different concepts confused with one another. I postpone the discussion of that suggestion to chapter six (section 1.2.2), where, we shall see, the suggestion turns out not to be as odd as it might at first seem. What matters now is a claim that we have not yet seen explicitly made, the claim that the *only* uses of concepts are immanent, not transcendent:

[12] [...] the principles of modality are nothing more than explications of the concepts of possibility, actuality, and necessity in their empirical use; and thereby they are also restrictions of all the categories to merely empirical use, and do not admit and allow transcendental use of the categories. For if the categories are not to have a merely logical signification and to express analytically the form of *thought*, but are to pertain to *things* and their possibility, actuality, or necessity, then they must concern possible experience and its synthetic unity, wherein alone objects of cognition are given. (A219/B266-7)

Objects of cognition are given in possible experience *alone*.<sup>33</sup> Hence, Kant reasons, *the only* legitimate use of the categories is ‘empirical’, not in the sense that categories are empirical concepts but in that they are concepts of conditions of the possibility of experience and, derivatively, of empirical things—the *only* “things” to which the categories can pertain at all—as subject to the form of possible experience. Kant makes the point even more emphatically in the following passage, for the length of which I beg the reader’s indulgence:

[13] We may say, therefore, that the use that the understanding can make of all its a priori principles and, indeed, of all its concepts is nothing but an empirical and never a transcendental use; and this is a proposition that, if it can be cognized with conviction, points to important consequences. A concept is used transcendently in any principle if it is referred to things *as such and in themselves*; but it is used empirically if it is referred merely to *appearances*, i.e., to objects of a possible *experience*. That only the empirical use can occur at all, however, can be seen from the following. Every concept requires, first, the logical form of a concept (the logical form of thought) as such; and then, second, also the possibility of our giving to it an object to which to refer. Without an object the concept has no sense and is completely empty of content, although it may still contain the logical

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<sup>33</sup> Here is a place where recent debates around the knowledge (*Wissen*)/cognition (*Erkenntnis*) distinction threaten to be relevant. The most natural place for a discussion of the *Wissen/Erkenntnis* distinction is in the following chapter (section 2). However, I note here that in passage [12] Kant clearly suggests that the *only* way for categories to “pertain to *things*” is for them to refer to objects of *cognition*. That dampens the prospect that perhaps categories can reach all the way to things in themselves in an act of *Wissen* in a way that they cannot in an act of *Erkennen*.

function for making a concept from what data may come up. Now, the object cannot be given to a concept otherwise than in intuition; and if a pure intuition is possible a priori even before the object, still this pure intuition itself also can acquire its object, and hence objective validity, only through empirical intuition, whose mere form the pure intuition is. Therefore *all concepts*, and with them *all principles*, however possible these [concepts and principles] may be a priori, refer nonetheless to empirical intuitions, i.e., to data for possible experience. Without this reference they have no objective validity whatever, but are mere play, whether by the imagination or by the understanding, with their respective presentations. (A238-9/B297-9; final two emphases mine)

So it now seems that if a concept has a use *at all*, that use will be immanent (in the parlance of the passage above, ‘empirical’) and not transcendent (‘transcendental’).

Of course, quotations [12] and [13] limit themselves explicitly to the understanding and its concepts and principles. Perhaps the restriction of ‘use’ to ‘immanent use’ falls away when reason rather than understanding is at issue. (That is what a metaphysical reader must hope for.) But that is not plausible. For first, it supposes a sharpness of divide between understanding and reason in these contexts that the texts do not support. Consider, for instance, Kant’s discussion of speculative theology in section 7 of the Transcendental Ideal. Speculative theology is a (putative) science of reason and rational inference, an attempt “to make a merely speculative use of reason” (A636/B664) that requires “an expansion of our cognition beyond all bounds of experience” (A637/B665). Yet Kant speaks indifferently in that section of the uses of reason and of understanding, and of principles of both the former and the latter; and we already saw above (section 3) that Kant treats Ideas as a species of concept. Thus when Kant says in [13] that *all* concepts and *all* principles refer merely to empirical intuitions, that includes Ideas.

But second and more decisively, Kant restricts all principles of reason to a merely immanent validity:

[14] Now by the proofs that we have given above, *all* synthetic a priori cognition is possible only through the fact that it expresses the formal conditions of a

possible experience; and hence *all* principles [i.e., including speculative principles of reason (A631/B659)] have only immanent validity, i.e., they refer solely to objects of empirical cognition, or [i.e.] to appearances. (A638/B666; emphasis mine, second emendation Pluhar's)

That is, for reason to have a transcendent use, it would have to make possible synthetic *a priori* cognition.<sup>34</sup> But there are two logically distinguishable varieties of such cognition: either (a) cognition of possible experience as such, i.e., of its forms or constitutive conditions; or (b) cognition of an experience-transcendent thing. Only if reason makes possible the second variety does it have a transcendent use. But in fact only the first variety is possible at all. Hence reason has no transcendent use, though it does have an immanent use (cf. the Appendix to the Transcendental Dialectic (A643/B671)).<sup>35</sup> So although a use and an *immanent* use are not conceptually identical, they too turn out to correspond extensionally: Any presentation of a finite epistemic capacity that has a use at all has only an immanent use.

## 6. Reference

Now as I mentioned above (note 13), the family of terms that I have been rendering as 'reference' and 'to refer to', namely '*Beziehung*', '*sich auf etwas beziehen*', and so forth, must be handled with care. On the one hand, Kant clearly intends some kind of technical distinction between '*Beziehung*' and its cognates and the terms '*Verhältnis*' and '*Relation*' and their cognates, as he consistently prefers the first to the latter two in cases where the relation of concept (or, more generally, presentation) to object is at issue. On the other hand, it would certainly be a mistake simply to identify all of Kant's uses of '*Beziehung*' with uses of the technical concept of reference familiar from post-Fregean philosophy of language. For first, Kant

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<sup>34</sup> See previous note.

<sup>35</sup> Of course, there are other, non-terminological reasons to reject the hypothesis that reason has a transcendent theoretical use, most notably that that seems to require that we have a power of intellectual intuition.

sometimes uses that word in a way that implies a possible bidirectionality that is not commensurate with post-Fregean reference talk;<sup>36</sup> second, the concept-object or presentation-object (or even presentational capacity-object) relation that Kant is interested in is not one that he locates in the philosophy of language; and third, ‘reference’ in its prevailing technical sense is usually thought of as *per se* singular, whereas Kant’s *Beziehung* obtains between *concepts* and objects, and Kant takes concepts necessarily to be general<sup>37</sup> (although permitting singular *use*).<sup>38</sup>

Moreover, Kant sometimes uses *Beziehung*-talk in contexts where the relation at issue seems to be of a different sort altogether, as when, in the second *Critique*, he speaks of “the natural law governing appearances in reference [*Beziehung*] to one another, viz., the law of causality” (KpV 5:29).<sup>39</sup> And that might seem to threaten the idea that a *Beziehung* is a distinctive kind of relation among others, rather than just a relation generically identified.

But we need not account for every instance of *Beziehung*-talk that occurs in the Critical corpus to be able to discuss one consistent use of that talk: to characterize the relation that a concept must have to an empirical thing or to possible experience as such for that concept to have objective reality. What Kant seems to have in mind in that use is something more or less intentional, in Brentano or Husserl’s sense: That to which a concept stands in a *Beziehung* such that the concept has objective reality is simply whatever that concept is *of* or *about*. In the case of empirical concepts, that is once more easy enough to understand. The concept ‘tree’ refers to empirical things, viz., trees, just insofar as those things are that in the intuition of which the marks of the concept ‘tree’ are instantiated. Put differently, when we use the concept ‘tree’ in

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<sup>36</sup> E.g., at KpV 5:25, he writes that objects ‘refer’ to the power of desire.

<sup>37</sup> Implicit in his claims that concepts are “discursive” and present what is “common” to other things or presentations that fall under them (A68/B93), and claimed explicitly at Log 9:91.

<sup>38</sup> As in singular judgments (A71/B96).

<sup>39</sup> Thanks to Michael Kremer for this reference and the one in the previous note.

thinking an object, the object is not the concept itself, but the thing or things, given in experience, that are picked out on the basis of the concept's marks.

With respect to formal concepts, like those of space and time, or the categories, what the relevant relation could amount to may seem more opaque but is not ultimately that difficult. Let us take for granted that a category refers to (*bezieht auf*) no particular empirical object. So what does it refer to? The two possible answers Kant indulges are first, that it refers to experience-transcendent things, and second, that it refers to possible experience as such, viz., by being or expressing a condition of the latter's possibility. And the first is ruled out because, as it turns out, reference (*Beziehung*) and objective reality go together: "If a cognition is to have objective reality, i.e., if it is to refer to an object [*sich auf einen Gegenstand beziehen*] and have in that object its signification [*Bedeutung*] and meaning [*Sinn*],<sup>40</sup> then the object must be capable of being *given* in some way" (A155/B194). And objective reality, as we have seen, is not possible through transcendent but solely through immanent reference. Thus:

[15.1] [...] all concepts, and with them all principles, however possible these [concepts and principles] may be a priori, refer nonetheless to empirical intuitions, i.e., to data for possible experience. Without this reference they have no objective validity whatever, but are mere play, whether by the imagination or by the understanding, with their respective presentations. (A239/B298-9) [15.2] [...] With respect to a priori concepts,] their use and their reference to alleged objects can in the end be sought nowhere but in experience, whose possibility (as regards form) is contained a priori in those concepts. (A240/B299)

The final sentence of that quotation tells us how we should understand the reference of a formal concept to its object. A category, for instance, indeed refers to (*bezieht auf*) empirical intuitions, and thus to empirical objects, as it must if it is to have objective reality. But that reference is not

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<sup>40</sup> Pluhar usually translates '*Sinn*' as 'sense'. It's not obvious why he doesn't do that here.

*direct or immediate*. Rather, the category refers more directly<sup>41</sup> to possible experience as such, more specifically to an aspect of its form, and only thereby achieves an indirect reference to all empirical objects, which, as empirical, are subject to that form.<sup>42</sup>

Unsurprisingly, given what we already seen, the same style of account can be given for the reference (*Beziehung*) of principles of theoretical reason. (Here the Kantian notion of reference is once again distinctive. For notwithstanding its propositional form, he does not hold that a principle of theoretical reason *bezieht sich auf* a truth-value but, as we are about to see, ultimately to possible experience.) Those principles and the Ideas from which they are derived have a legitimate, immanent use. But of course, even less so than the categories or the concepts of space and time do the Ideas refer directly to empirical things. Their more direct object is rather the understanding and its judgments, with whose systematization reason is concerned. But those judgments concern empirical things (A643/B671); and, moreover, the understanding and its judgmental activity, and hence experience itself, would not even be possible did not reason take the understanding and its empirical judgments as object (A651/B679). Hence even the theoretical Ideas and their attendant principles refer to possible experience insofar as they too express a condition of that experience's possibility, via a more direct reference to the understanding.<sup>43</sup>

The practical Ideas raise especially provocative questions that deserve and will receive a separate, extended account in chapter seven. The account is partly derivative from considerations, developed in the argument of chapter six, regarding the theoretical Ideas and the doxastic attitudes we can hold toward them. For now, I note only that Kant is clear that the

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<sup>41</sup> I do not write 'directly' but prefer to speak of degrees of directness or indirectness, because at various points in his arguments, Kant interposes intermediate items between some presentation and its ultimate object (see, e.g., A141/B180, where we discover that the direct object of an empirical concept is strictly not the corresponding thing but the concept's schema), but he nowhere offers a systematic accounting of all such possibly intermediary items.

<sup>42</sup> See A157/B196 for an example of Kant using the language of direct and indirect reference himself.

<sup>43</sup> This may seem not to account for the Ideas' role as concepts of the *unconditioned*. I address that in chapter six, sections 1.1 and 1.2.

practical Ideas do not refer—stand in a *Beziehung*—to any experience-transcendent object. The practical Ideas and the postulates of pure practical reason in which they figure refer, rather, to *the moral law* (e.g., at KpV 5:56).

At this point, we should once more take stock of where we are, for we are about to move into the most provocative part of this chapter. So far, we have seen that any concept and so, derivatively, any intellectual presentation requires objective reality, which, in turn, is provided for by the reference (*Beziehung*) of that presentation to possible empirical objects or possible experience as such. I have set aside the practical Ideas as requiring more complex and extended treatment, which comes in chapter seven. Nevertheless, all intellectual presentations have an immanent use if any, and the only explicit formulation Kant offers of what that means is for such a presentation to be usable for reference to particular empirical things or possible experience as such. Moreover, objective reality also turns out to correspond extensionally to real possibility—that is, any concept that bears objective reality is a concept whose object is really possible, and hence one may not immediately infer that a merely logically possible concept has objective reality or that its object has real possibility. Finally, we have seen that Kant’s conceptions of immanent use and immanent reference do not preclude the use of formal concepts to refer to possible experience as such, so long as we understand that they in turn refer less directly to the particular empirical objects of that experience.

### 7. *Bedeutung* and *Sinn*, and Content

The final terms to be discussed in this chapter are those contained in Kant’s distinctions between meaning and meaninglessness and between content and emptiness, respectively. The former, in particular, have elicited the hypothesis that Kant cannot possibly mean what he seems

to in many of the claims he makes using those terms. Given their systematic relation to the other Kantian terms that I have documented above and that are sprinkled liberally throughout the Critical corpus, the hypothesis should look pretty dubious by the conclusion of this chapter. But the broader interpretive and philosophical case for the position that eventuates from the present discussion begins in the next chapter.

As with ‘reference’, ‘meaning’ (*Bedeutung*) is a term redolent with associations in twentieth-century philosophy of language. And if a theory of meaning is *per se* linguistic, Kant does not have a theory of meaning. For that reason, and also because ‘*Bedeutung*’ receives a slightly different rendering in each of the three major English translations of the first *Critique* (Kemp Smith: ‘meaning’; Pluhar: ‘signification’; Guyer-Wood: ‘significance’), I shall prefer the German term for the remainder of this chapter. But although Kant lacks a theory of *linguistic* meaning, I contend that he clearly has a *conceptual-semantic* theory, i.e., a well worked-out view about the conditions under which an intellectual presentation has a *Bedeutung*. And here it is: An intellectual presentation (in the most basic case, a concept) has a *Bedeutung* just in case it refers, directly or indirectly, to an object of possible experience (an empirical thing) or to possible experience as such.<sup>44</sup> In other words, a *bedeutungsvoll* (‘meaningful’) concept is a concept with objective reality, whose object is hence really possible; it has an immanent use, referring to the right sort of object, namely, to an empirical thing or to possible experience as such, and specifically *no* use in reference to an experience-transcendent object.

Before I present the evidence that that is Kant’s view, I must clarify that there is no compelling reason to suppose that Kant uses the terms ‘*Sinn*’ and ‘*Bedeutung*’ to mark the distinction made famous by Frege using those terms. That is not to deny that Kant has in view or

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<sup>44</sup> Readers familiar with Strawson’s 1966 will doubtless be reminded of the “principle of significance” (16). I discuss Strawson and the principle in chapter four, section 4.



has the resources to make such a distinction, just that it is not latent in his use of those words.

Now one might begin to think me wrong about that on the basis of passages like these:

[16] We employ a multitude of empirical concepts without being challenged by anyone. And we consider ourselves justified, even without having offered a deduction, to assign to these empirical concepts a meaning [*Sinn*] and imagined signification [*Bedeutung*], because we always have experience available to us to prove their objective reality. (A84/B116-7)

[17] Solely *our* sensible and empirical intuition can provide [the categories] with meaning [*Sinn*] and significance [*Bedeutung*]. (B148-9; emendation mine)

For why would Kant go out of his way to mention both *Sinn* and *Bedeutung* if they mean the same thing? However, repetition of synonymous terms can be emphatic, as in the rhetorical device of *synonymia*. The possibility that that is what Kant is doing is raised to a high probability by other passages in which *Sinn* and *Bedeutung* are identified or treated as equivalent:

[18] Suppose, on the other hand, that the *Critique* is not in error when it teaches us to take the object in *two different senses* [*Bedeutungen*], viz., as appearance and as thing in itself; and that the deduction of the *Critique*'s concepts of understanding is correct, so that the principle of causality applies to things only in the first sense [*Sinn*], viz., insofar as they are objects of experience, but that these same objects are not subject to that principle when taken in the second sense [*Bedeutung*]. (Bxxvii)

[19] Hence, too, we require that an abstract concept be *made sensible*, i.e., that the object corresponding to it be displayed in intuition, because otherwise the concept would remain (as we say) *without sense* [*Sinn*], i.e., without signification [*Bedeutung*]. (A240/B299)

So on the strength of that evidence, we should not expect the terms '*Sinn*' and '*Bedeutung*' to have different uses or to designate different concepts from one another.<sup>45</sup>

Now here is the evidence that Kant's view of *Bedeutung* and *Bedeutungslosigkeit* ('meaninglessness') is as I characterized it above. The terminological links most strongly attested to by the first *Critique* are those between *Bedeutung*, reference (*Beziehung*), and objective

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<sup>45</sup> Thanks to Michael Forster for pushing me to get clearer on this point.

reality. Thus in quotation [16] above, Kant observes that empirical concepts do not require deductions to count as *bedeutungsvoll* just insofar as their objective reality is otherwise proven (namely through experience). That is, objective reality *suffices for a Bedeutung*. And in the following passage, Kant indicates that having a *Bedeutung* and having objective reality are equivalent, and both are provided for by reference of a presentation to experience or its objects:

[20] If a cognition is to have objective reality, i.e., if it is to refer to an object and have in that object its signification and meaning, then the object must be capable of being *given* in some way. For otherwise the concepts are empty; and though we have thought by means of them, we have in fact cognized nothing through this thinking, but have merely played with presentations. To be given an object—if this is not again to mean to be given it only indirectly, but is to mean, rather, to exhibit it directly in intuition—is nothing other than to refer the presentation of the object to experience (whether actual, or at least possible, experience). (A155-6/B194-5)

The same connection between *Bedeutung*, reference, and objective reality is attested to amply elsewhere, as, for instance, when Kant claims that schemata furnish concepts with reference (*Beziehung*) to objects and *hence* with *Bedeutung* (A146/B185); or that if we consider the categories apart from their reference to sensibility and hence to experience and its objects, we can understand the possibility neither of their *Bedeutung* nor of their objective reality (A242); or that synthetic *a priori* cognitions are only possible, and hence only have objective reality, through their reference to the possibility of experience (A157/B196). The three items of terminology do not always appear together, but their association in various configurations is frequent, and there are no uncontroversial cases in which they come apart.

Of course, that does not mean that there are no cases at all. In particular, there are Kant's occasional references to a 'logical' or 'transcendental' *Bedeutung* that the categories might retain even apart from any relation to sensibility and hence to possible experience and its objects (e.g., A147/B186, A248/B305). But those can be readily dispensed with. For Kant is clear that by

those terms he means something that is simply different from *Bedeutung* in its usual sense: Transcendental *Bedeutung* is nothing more than a category's being "merely the pure form of the understanding's use regarding objects as such, and the pure form of thought" (A248/B305), and logical *Bedeutung* is "the mere unity of presentations" (A147/B186)—neither of those sufficing for the use of categories in judgment or an application of them to objects. Transcendental and logical *Bedeutungen* thus certainly do not entail and are not equivalent to reference to possible experience or its objects, objective reality, immanence, real possibility, and so forth.<sup>46</sup>

There are various other passages in the first *Critique* where *Bedeutung* is associated in the relevant ways with other terms from our set. But since I take myself to have shown the strong links (extensional equivalence, extensional correspondence, or mutual entailment) between *Bedeutung*, objective reality, and reference (*Beziehung*) to possible experience and, in turn, between those latter two terms and the others from our set, I better serve the reader by drawing this chapter to a close. Hence I now turn to 'content' and 'emptiness'. My contention is that, in Kant's usage at any rate, for a concept to have a *Bedeutung* and for it to have content are one and the same—not merely extensionally but even intensionally equivalent—*on one of two Kantian uses of the word 'content'*. I make the latter qualification because Kant sometimes uses the word 'content' to mean the *intension* of a concept, which in a Kantian context means a concept's marks or the further concepts that it contains. In that sense of 'content', *bedeutungslos* concepts do *not* necessarily lack content.<sup>47</sup> However, Kant has another stable usage of 'content' that is indeed both extensionally and intensionally equivalent to '*Bedeutung*', and in particular, it is that use of 'content' that is usually at play when Kant denies content to a concept by calling it

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<sup>46</sup> For logical *Bedeutung*, see A147/B186, A219/B266-7. For transcendental *Bedeutung*, see A248/B305. As far as I can see, logical and transcendental *Bedeutung* are the same thing.

<sup>47</sup> Even that concession, though, will have its sense modified over the next couple of chapters.

‘empty’. If that is right, it suggests a dim prospect for the strategy of defanging Kant’s rhetoric of the *Bedeutungslosigkeit* of experience-transcendent concepts by suggesting that he means to say ‘only’ that they lack content, at least if one is trying to remain within Kant’s own usage.

What is the evidence that there is a use of ‘content’ on which it and ‘*Bedeutung*’ are equivalent? Once more, it is rather copious. To begin with, there is quotation [20] above, which counterposes a concept’s being empty not only to its possessing a *Bedeutung* but also to its referring to possible experience and its bearing objective reality. There is also quotation [13] above, which states that without a referent a concept lacks both sense (*Sinn*, which, as we saw above, is not distinct from *Bedeutung*) and content. Further, there are many affirmations in the first *Critique* of the equivalence of ‘content’ and ‘reference to an object’, of which this one is representative: “General logic, as we have shown, abstracts from all content of cognition, i.e., from all reference of cognition to its object” (A55/B79).<sup>48</sup> And as we have seen, if a concept has reference to an object, it has a *Bedeutung*. And lest one think that in that last quotation, the word ‘object’ denotes something altogether more abstract than a specifically empirical object, consider the following passage from the B Deduction:

[21] The pure concepts of understanding are free from this limitation and extend to objects of intuition as such, whether this intuition is similar to ours or not, as long as it is sensible rather than intellectual. But this further extension of the concepts beyond *our* sensible intuition is of no benefit to us whatsoever. For they are then empty concepts of objects, i.e., concepts through which we cannot judge at all whether or not these objects are so much as possible. I.e., the pure concepts of understanding are then mere forms of thought, without objective reality; for we then have available no intuition to which the synthetic unity of apperception—which is all that those concepts contain—could be applied so that the concepts could determine an object. Solely *our* sensible and empirical intuition can provide them with meaning and significance. (B148-9)

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<sup>48</sup> A55/B79. Other, similar passages are A58-9/B83, A62-3/B87, and A95.

That quotation makes clear that even if, in an earlier stage of Kant's argument, the object that is the necessary referent of a contentful concept is not specified as to its nature, in actuality the only object possible for our epistemic capacity is one furnished by our sensible intuition, i.e., an empirical thing. What is more, the quotation draws many of the terminological connections I have been attributing to Kant. For it states that apart from their reference to sensible intuition and hence to possible experience, the categories are empty and lack objective reality and that, by contrast, so long as they are referred to possible experience, they shall have content, objective reality, and *Bedeutung*.

At this point, the reader may themselves object that Kant simply cannot be taken to mean what he is saying, that there must be some distinction between content and *Bedeutung* such that a concept could lack the former and retain the latter. I grant that I certainly have not yet explained how Kant could consistently hold the view that has been emerging in this chapter. There may be all kinds of reasons why we ultimately decide to reject Kant's own use of his vocabulary—say, because we think it obscures his real position—but that is not to deny that he uses it thus at all.<sup>49</sup>

## 8. A Glance Back

I can now give an overview of the territory we've canvassed in this chapter. Every class of intellectual presentation in the Critical philosophy has objective reality under the right circumstances. Specifically, an intellectual presentation has objective reality if it refers (*beziehen*) to an object of possible experience (an empirical thing) or to possible experience as such. Intellectual presentations may seem to admit of two logically distinct uses, transcendent and immanent. But only the latter is bound to possible experience, and hence only the latter is

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<sup>49</sup> Substantive philosophical objections to Kant's conceptual-semantic theory are addressed in the next chapter (section 4).

compatible with the objective reality of an intellectual presentation. And an intellectual presentation has a use only to the extent that it has objective reality; i.e., only the immanent use is genuinely a use at all. To be sure, concepts putatively of objects that would transcend possible experience are logically possible. But only objects of objectively real concepts have real possibility, and hence the logical possibility of concepts putatively of experience-transcendent objects does not permit a transcendent use of an intellectual presentation in reference to those putative objects. Returning to the claim that an intellectual presentation has objective reality only insofar as it refers to objects of possible experience or possible experience as such, we understand the reference-relation to be broadly intentional, a matter of what the intellectual presentation is about or what is ‘thought through’ it. And if an intellectual presentation lacks the right sort of reference, then it lacks a *Sinn* or *Bedeutung*, which is as much as to say that it is empty or lacks content. But if the presentation has any of those, it has the others as well.

We find, then, that we can draw a dividing line between objective reality, reference to possible experience, immanent use, real possibility, *Bedeutung*, and content, on the one hand, and varying degrees of the absence of those (e.g., merely logical possibility, or, more strongly, logical (absolute) impossibility), on the other. There is a consistent use of all of those terms on the former side of the dividing line, even if, in some cases, that use is not the only one, such that if an intellectual presentation satisfies one of them, it satisfies them all, and if it does not satisfy one of them, then it satisfies none. As I have been at pains to emphasize, that pattern of usage does not settle any interpretive controversies all by itself. But as we shall see, it is highly suggestive, and if an interpreter decides to ignore it in this or that case, they face the burden of explaining the legitimacy of so doing.

This chapter only has a right to be in the dissertation to the extent that it helps to make the case for the attribution to Kant of genuine empirical realism or helps to explain how Kant's philosophy makes such realism possible. In the introduction to this chapter, I gestured at a couple of standard and well defended interpretations of Kant's transcendental idealism that we shall have to definitively rule out if Kant's philosophy really is to be the empirical realist philosophy I take it to be. In the following chapter, we will see how the materials developed herein can finally dislodge the first interpretation, and by chapter five we will have amassed sufficient resources to eliminate any remaining apparent interpretive plausibility of the second.

#### Chapter Four: Phenomena and Noumena and Kant's Conceptual-Semantic Theory

In the first chapter of this dissertation, I offered an initial sketch of a position worthy of the title 'empirical realism', suggesting that the position is to be found in Kant and bringing out the failure of some commentators to respect Kant's empirical realist credentials. In the second chapter, I turned to some Critical texts, first, to develop the initial sketch of empirical realism into the actual Kantian position, and second, to consider some passages the correct interpretation of which sets the stage for seeing that position in Kant. With chapter three, I shifted from the question, 'What passages, suitably interpreted, attest to the presence of a genuinely empirical realist commitment in Kant?' to begin the process of explaining how Kant *could* be so committed given his broader view. The first step consisted in exposing a systematically interrelated conceptual or terminological set that, when fully exposed, is pervasive throughout the Critical corpus and attests to a surprising and provocative conceptual-semantic theory. The purpose of this chapter is to bring that theory to the forefront and to show directly how it not only enables but even requires the empirical realism I have been seeking in the Critical philosophy.

What has emerged from my argument thus far is a picture of Kant's empirical realism on which empirical things are not mental items inhabiting a 'space' somehow in my mind but are ontologically, existentially, and spatially distinct from me. Moreover, I have *knowledge* of empirical things as nothing other than *things*, nothing other than *reality*, and that knowledge is neither by empirical things' being reducible to complexes of mental items nor by inference from mental items but rather is direct, at least in the basic, perceptual case. And finally, the epistemic capacity whereby I enjoy knowledge of such things is not in principle defective—neither *parochial* nor *essentially disconnected*.



If Kant's empirical realism is anything like the conception I have been developing, clearly it is not compatible with any subjective idealism. And hence transcendental idealism, whatever it ultimately is, must be different *in kind* rather than merely *in degree* from subjective idealism. The interpretive significance of my slogan—that transcendental idealism explains not *what empirical realism is* but *how empirical realism is possible*—and of the treatment of empirical realism that my slogan expresses—i.e., as a methodological control on any suitable reading of transcendental idealism and the Critical philosophy more generally—should by now be unmissable.

But defenders of a subjective idealist reading of the Critical Kant will likely not yet be persuaded. Hasn't Kant deep methodological and architectonic commitments that rule out any such realism? Consider, for example, Kant's mooted possibility of non-spatio-temporal forms of intuition.<sup>1</sup> If that is a genuine possibility, aren't objects of non-spatio-temporal forms of intuition, that is, experience-transcendent objects (at least so far as us humans are concerned), likewise genuinely possible?<sup>2</sup> The same could be asked with respect to the possibility of a divine epistemic capacity (B149, B307-10): If such a capacity is possible, aren't its objects also? Both of those possibilities seem to suggest that to the extent that human beings have just the sort of epistemic capacity that we do, we are *restricted*. And that immediately raises a question about whether the restriction amounts to the thought that what we took for our *knowledge of reality* is really just knowledge-for-us-humans of reality-for-us-humans, i.e., about whether the human epistemic capacity is after all parochial, Kant's realist intentions notwithstanding. Even Kant's famous Copernican hypothesis that objects must "conform" to our knowledge of them (Bxvi) or more specifically to certain *a priori* concepts (Bxvii) could easily give the reader the impression

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<sup>1</sup> This possibility is mooted several times in the *Critique*; see, e.g., A27/B43, A35/B51, A42/B59, B72, B148.

<sup>2</sup> A lot hangs on what it takes for a possibility to be 'genuine'; see section 1 below.

that Kant advocates a subjective idealism.<sup>3</sup> Moreover, those worries about Kant's deeper commitments cannot adequately be dealt with piecemeal, solely by the reinterpretation of isolated passages. What is needed to put a stop to the predictable contest of citation against citation is a credible way to orient ourselves with respect to the whole of the first *Critique's* argument, which in turn can guide our interpretation of the other Critical texts. But is anything like that to be found?

The answer is yes, and the purpose of this chapter is to expose that orienting resource. I thereby provide an interpretive base broad and centrally enough placed to motivate the reading of Kant that I have been developing, and along the way I make the key move in vindicating Kant's ability to respond to the parochialism worry. The orienting resource in question is the Phenomena and Noumena chapter of the first *Critique* (hereafter PN).

That may seem an odd choice. PN has the task of instructing the reader what they should have learned from the Transcendental Analytic. The question is twofold: First, shall we (indeed, must we) be content with the bounds of possible knowledge established hitherto; and second, within those bounds, is what we have indeed knowledge, rightfully so called? And PN offers "a summary account of the Analytic's solutions" to those questions (A236/B295). One might think that a mere summary of doctrines expounded in greater detail earlier in the argument does not have a lot to tell us in its own right.

But that would be false. First, Kant makes claims in PN whose pedigree in what has come before is hardly transparent. But second, in that section we receive a glimpse of the first *Critique's* broadly constructive part *as a whole* in a way that is very difficult for the reader to

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<sup>3</sup> That worry has been both pressed against me and dismissed as irrelevant by readers of earlier drafts of this chapter. Needless to say, there seems to be room for controversy. But see chapter eight, note 16.

achieve even by careful study of the difficult and sprawling arguments of the *Analytic* (as well as the *Aesthetic*, on the interpretation of which PN also bears).

The plan of the chapter is as follows. In section 1, I give a preliminary explanation of why we are interested in PN, namely because PN offers us a way to respond directly to the lingering threat of subjective idealism posed by our inability to entitle ourselves to epistemic anthropocentrism.<sup>4</sup> In section 2, I discuss Kant's distinction between *Wissen* and *Erkenntnis*, or knowledge and cognition, which, in light of recent scholarship, has seemed to some to hold out the possibility of epistemic contact with the experience-transcendent. (I eventually argue, in section 5, that in fact it does not.) In section 3, I give an in-depth analysis of the first half of the argument of PN and its relation to our own problematic. I suggest that the worry with which PN turns out to be centrally concerned, about whether epistemic contact with the in-itself might be possible, is grounded in a picture of the human epistemic predicament that would make empirical realism impossible; and I suggest that the picture of our epistemic predicament that Kant would rather we adopt is precisely that which entitles us to epistemic anthropocentrism and makes empirical realism possible. In section 4, I give a detailed exposition and limited defense of Kant's conceptual-semantic theory, which, although relied upon periodically throughout the first *Critique* and elsewhere in the Critical corpus, receives its fullest expression in PN. I argue that the account of meaning is *the* key bit of philosophical apparatus with which Kant can beat back the threat of subjective idealism while remaining Kantian. In section 5, I return to the main line of argument of PN with Kant's account of the meaningfulness of thought in hand, and I show how it can be applied to drain the logical possibilities of things in themselves, other forms of intuition, and other types of epistemic capacity of any tendency to threaten the status of our

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<sup>4</sup> Recall that by 'epistemic anthropocentrism', I mean the thesis that the only appropriate standpoint from which to evaluate whether human knowledge counts as knowledge is from *within* the standpoint of that very knowledge.

knowledge or cognition as genuinely epistemic or reality-presenting, thus avoiding subjective idealism. Finally, in section 6, I consolidate the results of the chapter and briefly reflect on Kant's strategy as one of shifting the burden of proof, namely against a skeptical opponent who purports reasonably to doubt our entitlement to regard ourselves as knowers.

The reader should note that in this chapter, I concentrate on worries about parochiality to the exclusion of worries about essential disconnection. If my interpretation of Kant in this chapter is correct, that gives us further reason not to find an essentially disconnected conception of the human epistemic capacity in the Critical philosophy, beyond those already adduced in chapter two. But I do not directly address the most important interpretive or philosophical ground of temptation toward such a conception until chapter five.

### 1. The Problem to Which Phenomena and Noumena Provides an Answer

I have suggested that an empirical realism that is a genuine realism is incompatible with a conception of the human epistemic capacity as essentially parochial. In particular, it is therefore incompatible with the possibilities of other forms of sensible intuition (besides space and time) or other types of intellect (e.g., the intuitive), or of objects whose own possibility entails the former ones. If our epistemic capacity is to be genuinely epistemic, we have to be able to grasp all of its forms, sensible and intellectual, as rational and knowledge-enabling and thus to grasp the capacity itself as reality-presenting.

But what is the precise nature of the incompatibility? At least three sorts are distinguishable. The strongest is one on which empirical realism cannot be a genuine realism unless the parochiality or disconnection of human knowledge is *not consistently thinkable*. That would require that the putative possibilities just mentioned are in fact *logical* impossibilities—

that, e.g., the concept of a form of sensible intuition other than space and time contains a contradiction. A second, weaker sort of incompatibility is one where empirical realism cannot tolerate that those putative possibilities are *real* possibilities but can accept that they are logical possibilities. From the previous chapter, we know that that means that, again taking other forms of intuition as our example, the concept of such an other form would contain no contradiction, but nothing in possible experience, whether its matter (particular experienceable items) or its form (possible experience as such, or its conditions of possibility), could answer to it. A third, weakest kind of incompatibility is one on which the relevant possibilities are both logical and real, but their *actualization* is not tolerable—empirical realism is possible and even actual unless or until we actually encounter, e.g., a being with a form of intuition other than space and time, or things that would be knowable by such a being.

The third sort of incompatibility is implausible on its face. But the first sort of incompatibility is certainly too strong to fit Kant's texts. He repeatedly goes out of his way to claim that forms of intuition other than space and time and minds other than the discursive are logically possible. And even if he did not, his argumentation strategy in the first *Critique* would have to look very different if he were positively to exclude such logical possibility. It would have to look, namely, like Hegel's, of which Pippin and McDowell have each articulated simplified versions, criticizing Kant precisely for allowing the possibility of other forms of intuition.<sup>5</sup> Their shared idea is that for Kant really to be successful in his primary aim in the Transcendental Deduction—to demonstrate the objective validity of the categories or, more generally, the

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<sup>5</sup> What follows is a revisiting of what I called, in the Introduction to this dissertation (section 1.4), the Pippin-McDowell bruteness objection.

possibility of thought's objective purport at all<sup>6</sup>—he would have to give an argument that the very concept of the sort of intellect that we humans have determines that the forms of sensibility be none other than space and time. If that were Kant's strategy, then the concept 'form of sensibility other than space and time' would be logically impossible: The strategy would build into the very concept 'form of sensibility' that its only possible species are space and time. And that would also require that Kant's presentation of the relation of intellect to sensibility be radically different: They would have to be not two conceptually distinct 'stems' (even if essentially united ones) but rather two 'moments' of a conceptually unitary capacity that are revealed to belong to that capacity in the unfolding of its concept in a single logical progression along Hegelian lines. What exactly is involved in the latter is a matter of controversy,<sup>7</sup> but clearly, the Hegelian strategy is not Kant's.

The argument that I just made, however, is purely textual. Kant evidently *didn't* go the Hegelian way and try to exclude even the logical possibility of forms of intuition other than space and time. But that does not explain why not. And that is a problem because, following Hegel, Pippin and McDowell suggest that Kant's idealism must be psychological or subjective—in Pippin's terms, *brute*—if the *logical* impossibility of other forms of intuition cannot be established. Thus, for them, we cannot legitimately be epistemically anthropocentric without

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<sup>6</sup> The first of those formulations reflects the argument of Pippin 2005a, the second, that of McDowell 2009d. In the latter work, McDowell imagines that that difference of formulations reflects a deep disagreement between him and Pippin, but I agree with Pippin (2007) that to ask after the objective validity of the categories just is to ask after the objective purport of thought at all (414-8).

<sup>7</sup> In his 2009c (89n25), McDowell suggests that eliminating the logical possibility of other forms of intuition could be achieved by a 'simple' route (i.e., simpler than the forbiddingly complex Hegelian route), whose final destination is more or less his *Mind and World* (1996). Sebastian Rödl (2008) argues that McDowell underestimates the scale of the changes necessary to Kant's strategy to eliminate the logical possibility of other forms of intuition (177-8) and that the 'simple' route proposed by McDowell does not get past Kant's Deduction as Kant himself presents it (182-4). Andrew Werner (2017) poses an interesting challenge to Pippin and McDowell on what shape a 'two moments' conception of sensibility and understanding would have to take for Hegel (ch. 6, 250-85).

establishing that logical impossibility.<sup>8</sup> They contend that if other forms of intuition (and, analogously, other kinds of understanding besides the discursive) are even logically possible, then there is no way to get around conceiving of the forms of intuition as substantively restricting the objective validity of the categories or the objective purport of thought generally, viz. to what those particular forms of intuition, the ones that *we humans just happen to have*, are able to present. But a putative epistemic capacity some of whose *formal*, i.e., *essential*, features are ones that ‘just happen’ to characterize that capacity cannot be genuinely epistemic—I do not count as knowing any ‘reality’ I just happen to present but rather only count as *knowing* if I am able to present *reality*.<sup>9</sup>

I must grant that Pippin and McDowell are perfectly correct that Kant never does rule out the logical possibilities that trouble them and that doing so would require a long walk down the road from Kant to Hegel. The question that faces us now is therefore this: Could there be a strategy, different from the Hegelian but viable nonetheless, that Kant had in mind to avoid a commitment to the parochiality of the human epistemic capacity—a strategy that would therefore be compatible with empirical realism?

I answer yes. Kant’s strategy is not to find concepts of other forms of intuition or other varieties of mind (or of experience-transcendent entities that would be knowable by them) to be *logically inconsistent*. It is rather to argue that anyone who wants to use one of those concepts themselves bears a burden of *entitlement*, namely to show that the concept is *meaningful* and hence (for Kant) that its putative object is really possible. Kant is committed to the denial of the meaningfulness of the thought of an epistemic standpoint outside the human and to the insistence

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<sup>8</sup> Pippin is more self-conscious on that point (2005b, 212). McDowell consistently avoids the language of logical vs. real possibility, so exactly what he means to argue takes a little more interpretation (cf. his 2009c and d).

<sup>9</sup> Pippin 2005a, 212-3; McDowell 2009c, 75-9. That is a strong paraphrase of what they have written, but I take it to be faithful to their reasoning.

that only from such an extra-human standpoint could human knowledge be found wanting and a pressing worry about subjective ideality arise. Thus, although two-stemmedness does license talk of a ‘restriction’ of the categories to sensibility, that restriction need not be substantive, i.e., to one of a plurality of meaningfully thinkable (hence really possible) alternatives. And hence it need not entail subjective idealism and the impossibility of genuine empirical realism.

That, I submit, is the deepest move in Kant’s strategy to beat back subjective idealism and make empirical realism possible. It is outlined in PN, whose exegesis is the topic of sections 3 through 5 below. First, however, one more preliminary discussion is necessary, namely of the distinction between *Wissen* and *Erkenntnis*.

## 2. Knowledge and Cognition

To this point in the dissertation, I have not been careful to distinguish knowledge (*Wissen*) from *Erkenntnis* (cognition). That was permissible because when I have discussed knowledge, cognition, or other epistemic concepts so far, I have tried to rely only on common-sense, non-technical meanings and not to make any of my interpretive arguments rest on which such epistemic concept is in question. Thus it has been sufficient my purposes to rely on the bare thought that ‘knowledge’ and ‘cognition’, as Kant uses those terms, are indeed *epistemic* concepts, whatever else they are: To cognize an object and to know that such-and-such is the case are both cases of my non-accidentally presenting reality (or even my merely being in a position to non-accidentally present reality) truly or rightly.

But in recent years, a strong interest has emerged, especially among transcendent-metaphysically inclined Kant-interpreters, in finding a way to circumvent Kant’s rejection specifically of *cognition* of things in themselves. If there is a technical distinction between



cognition and knowledge, that might be just what is needed to vindicate an experience-transcendent metaphysics, however underdeveloped, of things in themselves—we might be able to *know* about such things even if we cannot *cognize* them. Yet my position suggests that for Kant, to the extent that the concept of an experience-transcendent thing in itself is correlated with the concept of a way of knowing other than the human,<sup>10</sup> the objective reality of the first of those concepts implies that of the second, which opens up a standpoint from which the human epistemic predicament can only be regarded as subjectively idealistic. And below I purport to find in PN a conceptual-semantic view on which neither of those concepts could be meaningful at all. If those interpretive positions of mine are correct, I must be able to show that the knowledge/cognition distinction does not after all permit an experience-transcendent use of the concept of the thing in itself. I shall do so eventually (section 5.3). But first I clarify exactly what the knowledge/cognition distinction consists in and the stakes raised by its interpretation. My reference points are the two recent discussions of Michael Forster<sup>11</sup> and of Eric Watkins and Marcus Willaschek.<sup>12</sup>

Forster takes Kant's commitment to a knowledge/cognition distinction to be less than consistent. "Kant", he writes, "often uses the word *Erkenntnis* as a synonym for *Wissen*."<sup>13</sup> But to the extent that there is a distinction, it is a genus-species one: The genus is cognition, and its

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<sup>10</sup> In the *Inaugural Dissertation*, Kant endorses the general doctrine that for any thing, its own (real) possibility entails the (real) possibility of an epistemic capacity to which it could in principle be intuitively given (MSI 2:413; Kant does not yet have there the vocabulary of 'real' vs. 'logical' possibility, but that he means something stronger than mere logical possibility is clear enough). Does that doctrine survive into the Critical period? The answer appears to be yes. Inasmuch as the concept 'thing in itself' is the concept of what is essentially unintuitable by us humans, the doctrine would require that the possibility of such things entails the possibility of knowers, different in kind from the human, by which those things could be intuited. And indeed there is good evidence of just that thought in the first *Critique*, namely Kant's habit of sliding without remark between talk of the 'problematic' modality of a given sort of object and that of the epistemic capacity to which objects of that sort could be given (A256/B311-2, A287/B343-4).

<sup>11</sup> 2008.

<sup>12</sup> 2017b and unpublished.

<sup>13</sup> Forster 2008, 59. Generally, I shall follow Pluhar and prefer 'faith' to 'belief' for translating *Glaube*.

species are knowledge and faith (or belief—*Glaube*). Forster observes that knowledge and faith are varieties of holding-to-be-true, or what Pluhar translates as ‘assent’ (*Fürwahrhalten*). What distinguishes them is their “cognitive ground”: The ground of knowledge is “sufficient both subjectively and objectively” but that of faith “only subjectively and is at the same time regarded as objectively insufficient” (A822/B850). That knowledge and faith are species of cognition would therefore suggest that cognition *per se* must also be, generically, an assent.<sup>14</sup>

A strength of Forster’s interpretation is that it can accommodate Kant’s claim in the Architectonic of Pure Reason that a science is a system of *cognitions* (A832/B860ff.) and Kant’s apparent equivocation between cognition and knowledge in the same section: “Thus far, however, the concept of philosophy is only a *school concept*, viz., the concept of a system of *cognition* that is being sought only as *science* [*Wissenschaft*], and that has as its purpose nothing more than the systematic unity of *this knowledge* [*dieses Wissens*] and hence the *logical* perfection of *cognition*” (A838/B866; emphases mine except “*school concept*” and “*logical*”). Forster’s reading also makes reasonably good sense of Kant’s intermittent tendency to use ‘cognition’ in a way that is equivalent to ‘judgment’ or, at least, to ‘intuitive conceptual presentation’<sup>15</sup> (i.e., an intuitive awareness of empirical things that is conceptual and, hence, an exercise of the capacity to judge (A69/B94)<sup>16</sup>).<sup>17</sup> For it is natural to suppose that knowledge comprises judgments and the seeings, hearings, and so forth that make judging possible.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Forster 2008, 58-9.

<sup>15</sup> I adapt that phrase from Sellars 1968, 29.

<sup>16</sup> Cf. McDowell 1996, 10-3.

<sup>17</sup> E.g., when Kant speaks of analytic or synthetic cognition (as at A47/B64-5), since analyticity and syntheticity are strictly properties of judgments (A6-10/B10-14).

<sup>18</sup> There is some slipperiness in what I have just written between judgment as *act* and as logical object or product of the act. Kant is often not clear on which he has in mind. Clearing up such slipperiness is important to Watkins and Willaschek, as we are about to see, though there is room for dispute about whether they can do so without being artificial to Kant’s actual usage.

For Watkins and Willaschek, the distinction between knowledge and cognition is not species-genus but is rather disjunctive: *either* cognition *or* knowledge.<sup>19</sup> They agree with Forster that knowledge is a kind of assent,<sup>20</sup> along with faith and also opinion, but deny that of cognition.<sup>21</sup> Even if a given cognition is a judgment, even a *true* judgment, still that is not to say that that cognition is knowledge.<sup>22</sup> For a judgment is the logical object *of* an assent (as of a propositional attitude) but not thereby just identical to that very assent.<sup>23</sup> That is not to say that there is not an important and deep relation between knowledge and cognition: Those cognitions that are intuitive conceptual presentations are perhaps the paradigmatic case of an objectively sufficient cognitive ground, such that one's assent to a judgment made on the basis of such a presentation counts as knowledge.<sup>24</sup> Nevertheless, no cognition, and hence no judgment insofar as it is a cognition, ever itself counts as knowledge on Watkins and Willaschek's picture.

There is a further important distinction that Watkins and Willaschek draw between cognition and knowledge: namely, that cognition *and not knowledge* is "a conscious representation of a given object and its general features".<sup>25</sup> Watkins and Willaschek do not claim that Kant *denies* that knowledge could ever involve presentation of a given object and its general features. But first, strictly speaking, not knowledge but the judgment known is what would thus present. And second, when Kant characterizes knowledge as presupposing an objectively sufficient ground, that does not obviously entail that only cognitions, or the given objects and their features that cognition presents, are all that could be such a ground. Perhaps other grounds—ones that do not involve the givenness of objects—could count as objectively

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<sup>19</sup> Watkins and Willaschek, unpublished, 1.

<sup>20</sup> Watkins and Willaschek, unpublished, 14.

<sup>21</sup> Watkins and Willaschek, unpublished, 2.

<sup>22</sup> Watkins and Willaschek, unpublished, 11.

<sup>23</sup> Watkins and Willaschek, unpublished, 14.

<sup>24</sup> Watkins and Willaschek, 2017b, 88.

<sup>25</sup> Watkins and Willaschek, 2017b, 87.

sufficient and hence make knowledge possible without themselves making possible or counting as cognition.<sup>26</sup> The knowledge thereby made possible would be subject to certain restrictions, though still knowledge for all that: It could not be “*substantive*” and of “*specific things in themselves*” but would rather have to be “generic in character”, knowledge of things in themselves generally rather than one or some; and it could not depend on “any particular cognition we might have” for its justification.<sup>27</sup>

Though Watkins and Willaschek can accommodate passages where Kant seems to equate ‘knowledge’ with ‘cognition’ less easily than Forster, a strength of their reading is that they can more readily respect the official definitions of those terms than can Forster (particularly in respect of the *prima facie* oddity of thinking of cognition as an assent). However, clearly Watkins and Willaschek mean to hold out the hope of a transcendent-metaphysical payoff of their way of drawing the distinction<sup>28</sup>—legitimization of realism about things in themselves within Kantian constraints—in a way that Forster does not,<sup>29</sup> and to that extent I find them further than Forster from the spirit of Kant’s philosophy. But since I shall go on to argue that Kant can countenance *no* genuine epistemic contact (i.e., neither cognition nor knowledge) with things in themselves, I shall be arguing that they are foreign also to the Kantian letter—if not in reference to the cognition/knowledge distinction, then in reference to what vistas for experience-transcendent knowledge it opens (or fails to open). Specifically, I shall argue that restrictions on

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<sup>26</sup> Watkins and Willaschek, unpublished, 22.

<sup>27</sup> Watkins and Willaschek, unpublished, 22-3.

<sup>28</sup> For an example of recent work that tries to trade on a cognition/knowledge distinction to earn its way to knowledge of things in themselves, see Marshall 2010. Marshall argues, in reference to the self, that the fact that we cannot *cognize* the self does not entail that we cannot *know any facts about* it (5). Marshall’s article precedes those of Watkins and Willaschek by several years, and so does not make quite the use of the distinction that they countenance. But his proposal is in the vicinity of theirs.

<sup>29</sup> Forster observes that Kant later seems to endorse at least one “noumenal fact”, namely transcendental freedom. I shall disagree with him about that, or at least about what it really means, in chapter seven. But his interest is restricted to knowledge of freedom, not of things in themselves generally, and he expresses skepticism even about such knowledge, granting at most that Kant’s countenancing it need not amount to “crass inconsistency”. (2008, 62)

the *meaningfulness* of thought preclude the possibility not only of cognition but also of knowledge of things in themselves. For if I cannot meaningfully think of things in themselves, then I certainly cannot know anything about them, no matter how generic and justificatorily isolated from cognition the putative knowledge is to be.

Our preliminaries complete, we may now turn to the argument of PN. Note, however, that with the knowledge/cognition distinction now in play, at least for the remainder of this chapter I will defer to Watkins and Willaschek and cease speaking of knowledge when I mean, indifferently, knowledge or cognition in Kant's technical senses. Henceforth when I speak of an 'epistemic capacity', I shall be intending self-consciously to speak at a level of generality higher than the knowledge/cognition distinction without meaning to deny or elide any such distinction. (I take for granted that even on Watkins and Willaschek's disjunctive interpretation of the distinction, a capacity for knowing and one for cognizing go together.) And, in general, I shall try to follow Kant in speaking of cognition or knowledge where he does. Yet I shall continue to treat both 'knowledge' and 'cognition' as genuinely epistemic, and hence to regard 'cognition' that turns out to be estranged from reality as defective (not really cognition at all).

### 3. Phenomena and Noumena

#### 3.1. Articulating the Problem

In section 1, I suggested that PN takes a position on which there is a significant restriction of the possibility of meaningful thought. That position is examined in section 4. But to see, first, that it is genuinely *Kant's* position, and second, that the problem with which PN is centrally concerned is at the same time *our* problem about the possibility of empirical realism,

we must begin by understanding PN in its own terms. (The application of the position to our problem and that of PN comes in section 5.)

As I mentioned above, the ‘official’ task of PN is summary. The two questions it poses have, Kant tells us, already been answered earlier in the *Critique*. Those questions are:

[1] whether we might not perhaps be content with what this land[, i.e., the land of pure understanding,] contains, or even must be content with it from necessity if there is no other territory at all on which we could settle. And [...] [2] by what title we possess even this land and can keep ourselves secure against all hostile claims. (A236/B295)<sup>30</sup>

Kant begins his answer with a claim he takes himself to have established in the Transcendental Deduction: that the understanding, even in respect of what *a priori* cognition it affords, has no use apart from its use in experience and with objects of possible experience (A236/B295; cf. B147-8). By itself, perhaps that is not yet enough to answer [1] above. For mightn’t we have powers of cognition besides the understanding that reach beyond possible experience and its objects? But Kant rejects that possibility. The Deduction is to have demonstrated the limits not merely of the understanding’s use but of the use of our entire capacity for cognition (B165-6).<sup>31</sup> But might that not still leave room for *knowledge*, though not cognition, to reach beyond possible experience? Not at all. For first, Kant claims that just insofar as the understanding and its pure concepts and principles circumscribe the form of possible experience, they are “the source of *all* truth”, where the possibility of truth is the possibility of

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<sup>30</sup> Note that Kant distinguishes the question of whether *we can do no better* than the land of understanding from the question of whether *we are entitled* to the land of understanding. Kant thereby suggests that it does not suffice, in answer to the question, ‘Does what we have really amount to knowledge?’, merely to reply, ‘Well, we can do no better’—a common empiricist (/pragmatist/anti-realist) response. That suggestion, in turn, displays a sensitivity to the threat of skepticism on Kant’s part that must be lacking in one who thinks ‘we can do no better’ entails ‘what we have is knowledge’. Cf. McDowell’s criticism of Crispin Wright in the former’s 1998d, 225ff.

<sup>31</sup> The claim there is that “no cognition is possible for us *a priori* except solely of objects of possible experience” (italics removed). There is no possibility that there is a *posteriori* cognition of objects other than those of possible experience, on pain of contradiction, so if there is also no *a priori* cognition of such objects, then the limits of the understanding’s reach are indeed the limits of the reach of the faculty of cognition *tout court*.

our *cognition*'s having an object with which it may agree (or disagree) (A237/B296; italics mine).<sup>32</sup> And since knowledge, as an assent to a judgment, is not possible where there is no possibility of truth (or, indeed, of falsity) and hence of judgment,<sup>33</sup> the limits of the capacity for cognition would seem to have to be the limits of possible knowledge also. So, second, we should not be surprised to see Kant later claim explicitly that “speculative *knowledge* [*Wissen*] proper cannot concern any object at all other than an object of experience” (A471/B499).

So we have our answers to [1] and [2]. In reverse order: We may take ourselves rightfully to inhabit the land of understanding because in that land truth is possible. And we may be content with it because by the same argument by which we established the possibility of truth there, we have also established that truth is possible nowhere else.

But that is not by any means the end of PN. Even given what has been said, Kant takes us still to be under the threat of a “delusion” (B305). The delusion is one about the possibility of cognition of certain at least logically possible objects, namely: first, of an aspect of empirical things that is not possibly experienceable, that is, “the character that they have in themselves” (B306); second, of things that are not objects of possible experience at all but whose entire ‘character’ is exhausted by whatever properties are uniquely appropriate to the ‘in-itself’ (B306); and third, of an epistemic capacity adequate for cognizing the in-itself in both the foregoing varieties (B307 and A256/B311-2).<sup>34</sup> Now the in-itself is an (aspect of an) object that, if we

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<sup>32</sup> Some readers will already be worried about how I am to reconcile these remarks with the positive claims on reason's behalf in the Dialectic. I exhibit my reconciliation strategy in chapter six, especially section 1.2.

<sup>33</sup> By that I do not mean to suggest that Kant would accept talk of ‘false knowledge’, only that being in a position to call something ‘knowledge’ presupposes that something's being evaluable for truth or falsity.

<sup>34</sup> At B307, what is at issue is “a nonsensible intuition” (italics removed), whereas at A256/B311-2 what is at issue is a certain sort of understanding. But even in the latter case, the question is of the possibility of an understanding *that would itself be nonsensibly intuitive* or else *that would be united to a nonsensible intuition* (I think the former reading is more plausible, but there seems to be room for the latter). Kant therefore seems to be speaking of an intuitive power that is also intellectual in some sufficiently broad sense, hence of a capacity *to cognize* (not merely to think or merely to intuit).

could affirm its real possibility at all, would have to be cognizable by us humans merely through the understanding (B306). (Specifically *real* possibility because something must be really possible to be able to exist, and we cannot cognize what cannot exist.)<sup>35</sup> That is why the in-itself is opposed to what is possibly experienceable: Where experience necessarily has a sensory aspect, the in-itself would be cognizable, *if at all*, merely through thought, apart from any operation of sensibility. Hence the possibility being mooted is of a class of things or their properties that *cannot* be characterized in terms that refer to sensibility and its forms, space and time.<sup>36</sup> If we suffer from the delusion, we suppose that through our mere thinking we could cognize the in-itself (B306-7) or at least the being whose epistemic capacity could reach the in-itself (A256/B311) and hence that we could be satisfied as to their real possibility. And the business of the remainder of PN is to cure us of the delusion.

Given the purpose of PN stated at its outset, why it should have the task just described is not obvious. However, in characterizing the threatening delusion just now, I evaded some tricky details in Kant's presentation of it. Getting clear about them will help us to see why the delusion, and Kant's cure for it, are indeed relevant to the questions that motivate PN as a whole.

### 3.2. Elaborating the Problem

Kant first introduces the putative possibility of the in-itself in the following way. Taking for granted what has been argued up to B305 in the *Critique*, the reader may be tempted to

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<sup>35</sup> There is controversy in some recent literature about whether real possibility is primarily a metaphysical notion or an epistemic and/or semantic one (see, e.g., Chignell 2011, Watkins and Willaschek 2017a). I cannot settle that controversy here, but I certainly grant to Chignell that the sort of metaphysical *impossibility* that is at issue in a case of an object's being the putative bearer of really opposed or 'really repugnant' determinations is real impossibility.

<sup>36</sup> Incidentally, that feature of the in-itself—that it *cannot* bear features that presuppose the possibility of its givenness in sensibility, hence in space and time—explains what Guyer calls Kant's "harshly dogmatic insistence [...] that things in themselves, whatever else they may be, *are not* spatial and temporal" (1987, 333) and provides the key to a novel and satisfying reply to the traditional neglected alternative objection. I develop and defend that claim in chapter five, section 1.4.



suppose that the categories have a use apart from their relation to the forms of intuition. That is because of the two-stem doctrine of the human epistemic capacity: Our capacity comprises an intellect and a sensibility that, even granting their essential unity, are such that neither can be reduced to or completely explained through the other (A15/B29); rather, each is a “separate source of presentations” (A270/B326) whose “form[s are] original” (A268/B324).<sup>37</sup> Hence the form of thought (categories) seems to be characterizable apart from the form of intuition (space and time); and hence, a reader might suppose, an “application” of those categories apart from intuition is perhaps not *verboten* (B306). Now Kant has already given us reason to suspect that no such application is possible. For he has argued, in the B Deduction, that “we cannot *cognize* an object thought by us except through intuitions corresponding to those concepts” (B165). Yet we (we Kantians, anyway) nevertheless call empirical things ‘appearances’, ‘beings of sense’, ‘phenomena’, terms denoting their specifically sensible character and implicating the distinctively sensible presentational stem. Thus a conceptual contrast is implied with a character of things corresponding solely to the distinctively intellectual stem. And on that basis, the understanding “frames [...] a presentation” of a “being of the understanding” (B306-7).<sup>38</sup> So the B Deduction notwithstanding, we are nevertheless invited at least to *think* such beings as things in themselves. And now, the hypothetical reader appears to ask, if the thought of a purely intellectual thing in itself is not adventitious but eventuates naturally out of the understanding

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<sup>37</sup> I take that to be essentially the same claim as this slightly more cautious formulation: that sensibility and understanding are ‘analytically distinguishable’ or ‘conceptually distinguishable’. It does not entail that, in us, the two stems are not an essential unity.

<sup>38</sup> Kant there seems to distinguish between the “presentation” of the “object in itself” (italics removed) and putatively possible concepts of that object, suggesting that the presentation first mentioned is not itself a concept. I suspect that this is a lingering trace of the concept of the transcendental object, excised from the B version of PN, which shares with the ‘I think’ the character of being at once an intellectual presentation and wholly indeterminate (because empty of marks), for which reason “we cannot even say that it is a concept” (A345-6/B403-4).

through the concept of an appearance as specifically sensible, ought we not to be able to *cognize* the putative object of that naturally eventuating thought (B306-7)?

One puzzle about the foregoing line of reasoning as Kant presents it is why a presentation that the understanding “frames” seemingly on so slender a basis as an implied conceptual contrast (even a natural one) should be philosophically enticing. If the B Deduction claim and its supporting arguments were convincing, why should what seems to be a mere matter of semantics threaten us with “delusion”?

Part of the answer is actually not given in PN but in the Amphiboly and the opening sections of the Dialectic, which I discuss in chapter five.<sup>39</sup> But insofar as PN responds to that question, it does so by reference to “the way in which *we* intuit” (B306; emphasis mine). That refers to Kant’s doctrine of the *logical* possibility of forms of intuition other than space and time. That logical possibility consists in the non-deducibility (in any sense of ‘deducible’) of the spatio-temporality of sensibility from the concept of a discursive intellect (and, though this is not usually remarked on, from the mere concept of a sensibility at all). Now by itself, a logical possibility may not seem to amount to much. But we saw above that it is enough to provoke Pippin and McDowell, following Hegel, to an accusation of merely subjective idealism. And we can see why for ourselves if we recall Kant’s way of introducing that possibility in the Aesthetic, viz., with claims that space and time are merely *subjective* (A23/B37-8) and a *peculiarity* (A34-5/B51) of the human epistemic capacity even just in comparison with other finite epistemic capacities (B72). When Kant suggests that space and time are like presentations of biologically human modes of sense (e.g., “sensations of colors, sounds, or heat”) insofar as they “belong

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<sup>39</sup> See sections 1.1 and 1.2. The full answer involves reason’s need for explanatory completeness, a need that—even once we see that it does *not* show that the empirical world has a problem of explanatory *sufficiency* (and thus that we are in an essential disconnection epistemic scenario)—still affects the operation of our epistemic capacity.

merely to the subjective character of the kind of sense involved” (B44), it can be hard to resist Russell’s ‘blue spectacles’ thought: Through our spatio-temporal spectacles, what we see *seems* to be spatio-temporal, just as through blue spectacles, what we see *seems* to be blue. If that really captures Kant’s view, then our forms of intuition, though on the one hand conditions of the possibility of presentation *for us humans*,<sup>40</sup> will on the other hand not be conditions of the possibility of presentation of a *reality* that in fact need not itself be spatio-temporal at all.

Meanwhile, however, although Kant in fact also speaks of the intellectual stem as “subjective”<sup>41</sup> and even at one point suggests that it is a “peculiarity” of the *understanding* that it employ just the categories it does—a peculiarity that is on a par with that of sensibility, i.e., that the latter’s forms happen to be space and time (B145-6)—nevertheless thought seems to have a greater range than sensibility (B305). For according to the Deduction, anything that is sensible is thinkable (B165-6),<sup>42</sup> whereas we seem to be able to form concepts in a way that is limited not by sensibility but only by the law of non-contradiction. And hence if concepts without the possibility of intuition really count as thoughts, then whatever is thinkable need not be sensible.

And that apparently greater range of thought, when coupled with the seeming subjective ideality of space and time and the resulting suspicion that genuine reality would have to lie on the far side of an appearance/in-itself contrast, invites the delusion of the possibility of cognition of the in-itself. If the logical possibility of ways of intuiting other than the spatio-temporal really does entail that space and time are merely subjective peculiarities of a parochially human

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<sup>40</sup> At least to the extent that we cannot ‘take them off’ and have a look at how things are without them.

<sup>41</sup> A89-90/B122, A97, A114, A149/B188. The A Deduction highlights such subjectivity in a way that the B does not. But given the way that references to the subjective source or basis of cognition, as inclusive of the intellectual stem, survive in the B *Critique* as a whole, I find hard to believe that that difference between Deductions represents a change of doctrine rather than a change of emphasis.

<sup>42</sup> Cf. A89-92/B122-4, where the Deduction is introduced in reference to the task of ruling out the possibility of intuitions that could not be brought to concepts (remaining agnostic, for the purposes of this note, about the conceptualist/non-conceptualist debate about how exactly the Deduction rules out that possibility).

presentational capacity, that provides a strong temptation to regard the appearance/in-itself contrast as onto-epistemological rather than merely conceptual, viz., between the sensible ‘reality’ that we humans must settle for and the genuine, sensibility-transcendent *reality* lying beyond it.<sup>43</sup> Hence we seriously wonder just how things might be ‘in themselves’, apart from the spectacles of sensibility and hence as those things *really* are (speaking from the deluded point of view). And then thought’s seeming ability to range beyond the sensible promises to be just what we need to reach sensibility-transcendent reality: Perhaps cognition of the in-itself is possible through pure thinking alone.

In section 3.1, I asked why PN should be concerned with the present line of reasoning at all, given its stated aims. We can now see the answer. Consider two key suppositions in the previous paragraph: first, that the forms of intuition do not enable cognition, but narrow or even obscure it; and second, that we therefore have reason seriously to wonder how things are apart from such forms. Plainly enough, those suppositions undermine Kant’s affirmative answers to the two questions posed at the outset of PN. Recall: The first question was whether we can be content with what cognition the arguments of the Aesthetic and Analytic permit us. And the second was whether we call that cognition *cognition*, i.e., genuinely epistemic, with full right—whether we humans enjoy access to *truth*. Now limiting ourselves to the arguments of PN, there may be room for disagreement about whether there being more to reality than what the senses reveal is *per se* a reason for discontent within the limits of human cognition (question [1]). But we certainly cannot be content within those limits if they turn out not to delimit “the land of truth” at all but only the land of subjective ideality, that is, if our right to the land of truth turns out to be spurious (question [2]). So the weight of the first question shifts onto the second.

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<sup>43</sup> Ontological, because the contrast is between two sets of distinctively constituted beings, the sensible and the merely intellectual; epistemological, because the former set is knowable or cognizable in a way the latter set is not.

But if the forms of sensibility do not put us in epistemic touch with non-spatio-temporal reality but rather contaminate our presentations with their own merely subjective, distinctively human contribution, then we cannot even call such ‘cognition’ as we putatively have *cognition* if the latter is to be genuinely epistemic. *That* is what pure thinking, in touch with things through only itself, would give us. Our ‘cognition’ is of things-for-spatio-temporal-sensibility, i.e., things-for-us-humans, and hence is mere cognition-for-us-humans, merely subjective even in spite of belonging not to a single subject but to a group (human minds as a class). So if the Aesthetic and Analytic are supposed to have given us contentment with and entitlement to the territory on which they commend us to settle, Kant had better be able to lay to rest the threat that appears to be posed by the logical possibilities of other forms of intuition (or other varieties of epistemic capacity more generally) and of the in-itself.

### 3.3. The Relation of the Problem of Phenomena and Noumena to Our Own

In chapter one, I developed a line of argument according to which a genuine empirical realism cannot tolerate the thought that the human epistemic capacity is parochial, and in chapter two, I showed that Kant is committed to rejecting a parochial conception of the human epistemic capacity through his commitment to the non-arbitrariness or non-accidentality of the forms of that capacity. The basic problem with a parochial conception of the human epistemic capacity is that it entails that the capacity is actually *less than* epistemic—what we ‘know’ or ‘cognize’ through such a capacity are not mind-independent things that make a normative demand on the judgment of any rational being whatever but rather subjectively tinged things-for-us-humans, the

norm for judgment of which is only *comparatively* universal and *contingently* necessary.<sup>44</sup> I now suggest that in PN, Kant is confronting head-on any lingering temptation to conceive of the human epistemic capacity as parochial.<sup>45</sup>

For what is at issue is this question: Does sensibility *enable* epistemic contact with reality, or does it *prevent* it, acting as an epistemic barrier? If sensibility's so-called 'contribution' to our cognition is no better than a subjective projection, then our epistemic capacity is certainly parochial (because the projection has no title to count as a presentation of *reality*). And if, at the same time, thought's reach is not limited by sensibility, and the human understanding even has a natural tendency to introduce the concept of a thing that lies beyond sensibility and hence beyond its subjective contamination, then the hope is held out of a *genuine* cognition that would overleap the sensible barrier between us and reality, namely through pure thinking. The thought of the thing in itself as really possible and hence an object, somehow, of possible cognition is thus the ontological correlate of the thought that human cognition cannot both remain sensible and count as epistemic after all.

PN's task is to fend off not only the prospect of cognition of the in-itself but also and especially the picture of the human epistemic capacity that generates it. And that is just to say that PN is to provide for the possibility of empirical realism as a genuine realism. But Kant's strategy is not, like the Hegelian, to show that concepts of other forms of intuition or other varieties of mind are *logically impossible*, nor that the concept of an object thereof is logically

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<sup>44</sup> Perhaps it would be useful to remind the reader that although Kant can countenance knowledge or cognition of my own subjective states, he cannot countenance a picture on which such merely inner knowledge or cognition is all that we have. As the Analogies and the Refutation argue, a condition of the possibility of inner experience is the actuality of outer experience (i.e., of existentially mind-independent things in space). Thus there can only be facts about how things stand with me if I am situated against a larger backdrop of mind-independent reality as an element of that reality. (That point echoes Gareth Evans's that my capacity to refer to egocentric space presupposes my capacity to locate myself in objective space (1982, 151-70).)

<sup>45</sup> Though I take the strategy Kant develops in PN to push against essential disconnection also.

impossible. And nor is it even to show that those *concepts* (though not their objects) cannot have any place in respectable philosophical thinking. Rather, Kant's strategy is to show that those *mere* logical possibilities do not open any route to the subjective ideality of the human epistemic capacity. Kant's account of human cognition aspires to be an account of a genuinely epistemic capacity, one that reaches all the way to reality, and hence that account must leave open no philosophically provocative questions about further realms of fact that sensibility bars us from. Only thereby is genuine empirical realism possible.

#### 4. Phenomena and Noumena and Meaning

How will PN prosecute its task of dispelling the delusive possibility of cognition of the in-itself? Through what I have called Kant's conceptual-semantic theory, that is, his theory of *meaning*.<sup>46</sup> Kant will not merely argue that such cognition is, after all, not possible. He will argue that it is not possible *because meaningful thought of what exceeds the bounds of possible (sensible) experience is not possible*. And he will present that claim, more than a little surprisingly, as a corollary of the more detailed arguments of the Aesthetic and Analytic. Now if one has been reading the first *Critique* up to PN without attentiveness to the place of empirical realism in its argument, one is apt to find the suddenly high concentration of emphatic claims of meaninglessness of this or that concept or judgment baffling. And as I have mentioned, a near-consensus today is that those claims simply cannot be taken seriously. A significant strength of my interpretation is that it can find a natural place for Kant's meaning-talk in his argument and allows us to take him to mean pretty much what he says. Note, moreover, that because of PN's status as a *précis* of the most important results of the Aesthetic and Analytic, we risk distorting

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<sup>46</sup> That way of speaking need no longer threaten confusion with doctrines from the philosophy of language at this point.

not only the argument of PN but that of the whole first half of the first *Critique* if we cannot make adequate sense of the account of meaning that appears so centrally in it. And by the same token, we should expect an adequate grasp of PN's argument in all its gory details to have far-reaching implications for how we interpret what has come before it—implications, I contend, that are congenial to the conception of empirical realism that I have been developing.

My presentation of Kant's conceptual-semantic theory as offered in PN has a dialectical structure: I offer an initial articulation of the theory and the textual case for my interpretation of it, consider an objection, develop the philosophical plausibility of the theory, and conclude with the consideration of two further objections. That structure is necessitated by the provocative character of the account. It needs defending in the course of its development to gain a proper hearing. After articulating Kant's conceptual-semantic theory, I resume the main line of argument (wherein I apply the theory) in section 5 below.

#### 4.1. Initial Articulation and Textual Evidence

If we narrow our gaze and consider Kant's remarks on meaning in comparative isolation, his position is remarkably straightforward and firmly stated. It is, roughly, that for an intellectual presentation, or a thought (in the most basic case, a concept), to be meaningful, it must be a thought of, i.e., refer to (*bezieht auf*), (a) an empirical thing, (b) experience as such, or (c) a condition, however proximal or distal, of the possibility of experience. Call that the Reference Requirement. Now that much ought not to surprise the reader; we worked over this ground in the previous chapter. Of the quotations offered there in support of the present interpretive thesis ([16]-[20]), only [19] was from PN, indicating that the position I am now attributing to Kant is



not limited to PN. But PN is an embarrassment of riches unto itself for further pertinent passages:

[2] Every concept requires, first, the logical form of a concept (the logical form of thought) as such; and then, second, also the possibility of our giving to it an object to which to refer. Without an object the concept has no sense [*Sinn*] and is completely empty of content [...]. (A239/B298)

[3] Just take as an example the concepts of mathematics, and take them, first, in their pure intuitions. Space has three dimensions; between two points there can only be one straight line; etc. Although all these principles, and the presentation of the object that this science deals with, are produced in the mind completely a priori, yet they would mean nothing [*gar nichts bedeuten*] if we could not always display their meaning [*Bedeutung*] in appearances (empirical objects). (A239-40/B299)<sup>47</sup>

[4] Not even one of the categories can we define really, i.e., make understandable the possibility of its object, without immediately descending to conditions of sensibility and hence to the form of appearances; to these appearances, as their sole objects, the categories must consequently be limited. For if we take away the mentioned condition, then all meaning [*Bedeutung*], i.e., reference to the object, is gone; and through no example can we make comprehensible to ourselves just what sort of thing is in fact meant by such a concept. (A240-1/B300; Pluhar's translation modified as per note 47)

[5] In a word, if all sensible intuition (the only intuition that we have) is removed, then none of these concepts [i.e., the categories] can be *supported* by anything and their *real* possibility be established thereby. All that then remains is logical possibility, i.e., the fact that the concept (the thought) is possible. What is at issue, however, is not this, but whether the concept refers to an object and hence means [*bedeute*] something. (B302n.; Pluhar's translation modified as per note 47)

And if we exploit the terminological connections I drew attention to in the previous chapter, some of which are already manifest above (e.g., between meaning and content in [2]; between meaning and reference to the empirical in [2], [4], and [5]; between meaning and real possibility in [5]), there is yet more grist for my interpretive mill:

[6 – use] We may say, therefore, that the use that the understanding can make of all its a priori principles and, indeed, of all its concepts is nothing but an empirical and never a transcendental use [...]. A concept is used transcendentially in any

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<sup>47</sup> I have modified Pluhar's translation by writing 'mean' and 'meaning' instead of 'signify' and 'signification'.

principle if it is referred to things *as such and in themselves*; but it is used empirically if it is referred merely to *appearances*, i.e., to objects of a possible *experience*. [But] *only the empirical use can occur at all* [...]. (A238-9/B297-8; final emphasis mine)

[7 – objective validity/reality] Therefore all concepts, and with them all principles, however possible these [concepts and principles] may be a priori, refer nonetheless to empirical intuitions, i.e., to data for possible experience. Without this reference they have no objective validity whatever, but are mere play, whether by the imagination or by the understanding, with their respective presentations. (A239/B298-9)

The only terminological connection from the previous chapter not attested to explicitly in PN is that between meaningfulness and meaninglessness, on the one hand, and *immanent* and *transcendent* uses of intellectual presentations (concepts, judgments, Ideas, principles, etc.), on the other, the latter distinction only being introduced later in the first *Critique* (at A295-6/B352). And even the latter distinction appears by another name in [6], as a distinction between *empirical* and *transcendental* uses of principles and concepts. To a first approximation, Strawson looks not to have been exaggerating when he suggested that claims like the foregoing are “typical of dozens in the *Critique*.”<sup>48</sup>

#### 4.2. A First Objection

The foregoing passages already enable a reply to what is probably the first natural objection to Kant’s position as I present it: that it cannot tolerate the meaningfulness of ‘formal’ concepts (mathematical concepts, logical concepts, categories, concepts of the forms of intuition, etc.). Even before we ask what Kant means by the ‘meaning’ of a concept or why such meaning

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<sup>48</sup> Strawson 1966, 16n1. For an incomplete but extensive documentation of such claims, with quotations, see my “Kant’s Principle of Significance” (unpublished). Relevant passages include but are by no means limited to B148-9, A139/B178, A146/B185, A156/B195, A219/B266, A238-41/B298-300, A246/B303, A248/B305, B306, A348-9, A515/B543, A609/B637 (many of which contain a multiplicity of affirmations of the Reference Requirement or—equivalently in my view—of what Strawson calls Kant’s “principle of significance” (Strawson 1966, 16)).

should depend on reference (*Beziehung*) to an object, we can dispense with the objection by pointing out that a concept can be meaningful just by being a concept of a condition of the possibility of experience, however distal. (Note that in the latter sentence, ‘experience’ must be understood in a way that evokes McDowell’s “equipoise between subjective and objective”, i.e., in a way that does not imply merely subjective presentation but, on the contrary, allows for the presence *to* a subject of what is at the same time *objective*: in the basic case, empirical things.<sup>49</sup>)

Thinking that way, we can observe that categories and forms of intuition (and hence also the concepts of the latter) are all conditions of the possibility of experience and empirical things, characterizing as much our capacity to present empirically as the things thus presented. Quotation [3] above suggests that we should take mathematical concepts likewise to refer to such conditions, and we can readily take them to do so if we understand them to be articulating various properties of forms of intuition as conditions of empirical things, as Kant himself suggests: “[mathematical concepts’] use and their reference to alleged objects can in the end be sought nowhere but in experience, *whose possibility (as regards form) is contained a priori in those concepts*” (A240/B299; emphasis mine).

Logical concepts might at first seem more resistant to that sort of treatment. For we seem able to indulge in exercises of pure thinking that bear no relation at all to empirical things. But that is no more a difficulty than that we can engage in exercises of imagination that are likewise unrelated. In both cases, pure thinking or pure imagining, the exercises in question have a form, the form is that of the power for such exercises, and such a power is *essentially* a constituent of a capacity for presentation of empirical things—which is as much as to say that an empirical thing must be thinkable according to the *a priori* rules of general logic (or the *a priori* rules of

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<sup>49</sup> My entitlement to that cannot be fully vindicated until chapter eight, but it is expressive of a requirement *on* the nature of transcendental idealism *of* a genuine empirical realism.

imagination) and cannot require for its presentation that those rules be defied. Even the concepts that belong to Kant's transcendental lexicon—stem of presentation, apperception, synthesis, and so forth—are simply what belongs to an exposition of the possibility of presentation of empirical things.

And just as my interpretation of Kant's position is immune to that objection, so, too, is Strawson's. Consider his "principle of significance":

[8 – Strawson's principle of significance] This is the principle that there can be no legitimate, or even meaningful, employment of ideas or concepts which does not relate them to empirical or experiential conditions of their application. If we wish to use a concept in a certain way, but are unable to specify the kind of experience-situation to which the concept, used in that way, would apply, then we are not really envisaging any legitimate use of that concept at all. In so using it, we shall not merely be saying what we do not know; we shall not really know what we are saying.<sup>50</sup>

It has been fashionable to read into that principle a species of verificationism,<sup>51</sup> and Chong-Fuk Lau has argued that, interpreted verificationistically, the principle of significance cannot accommodate the meaningfulness of those concepts that comprise "the very theoretical foundation on which Kant develops his epistemology", e.g., "such [concepts] as sensibility, understanding and transcendental apperception".<sup>52</sup> I address the charge of verificationism against my reading (and hence against Strawson's) in section 4.4.1 below. For now, I observe only that Strawson nowhere associates his principle with verificationism in *The Bounds of Sense*<sup>53</sup> and that his principle does not obviously require a verificationist interpretation (which *would* have severe difficulty accommodating the formal concepts that I have just discussed, and other difficulties

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<sup>50</sup> Strawson 1966, 16.

<sup>51</sup> E.g., Westphal 2004, 42-6; Lau 2015, 447-8.

<sup>52</sup> Lau 2015, 450.

<sup>53</sup> Lau motivates his reading of Strawson in part by association with Bennett (1974), who attributes to Kant what he calls "knowledge-empiricism" and "concept-empiricism" (27). Even in Bennett's case, it is somewhat unclear whether he really means to attribute verificationism to Kant thereby; but in any case, Bennett is not Strawson.

besides). For why can *experience as such*, whose possibility cannot be articulated without concepts such as sensibility, understanding, and transcendental apperception, not be an ‘experience-situation’ in Strawson’s sense?

### 4.3. Making Kant’s Account of Meaning Plausible

#### 4.3.1. Meaning/Content vs. Intension/Marks

But even if Kant is emphatic and clear about his commitment to the Reference Requirement, the reader will probably find it implausible. The basic objection is that we seem able to formulate concepts that, completely irrespective of whatever relation they stand in to experience (or its objects or conditions), permit consistent thinking and communication between thinkers. Famously, Kant denies that the theoretical Ideas of God, the soul, and the world-whole have, in their Dialectical (putative) use, any relation to possible experience; yet we seem able intelligently and even comprehendingly to think and discuss them.<sup>54</sup> Yet there are peculiarities to those Ideas that merit separate treatment. So take a less loaded example—say, the concept of telepathy, which Kant articulates as “an ability of the mind to stand in community of thought with other human beings (no matter how distant they may be)” (A222-3/B270). That concept seems perfectly meaningful even though Kant takes it to defy the conditions of possible experience, i.e., to lack a really possible object and hence not to be capable of referring to (*beziehen auf*) anything.

To begin to find our way into Kant’s point of view, we need to take note of a couple of preliminary points. First, we must distinguish, as I did in section 7 of the previous chapter, between ‘conceptual content’ as that phrase would be used today and Kant’s most typical

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<sup>54</sup> Allais presses that point at her 2015, 213.

technical usage of ‘content’, where it seems equivalent to ‘reference (*Beziehung*) to a really possible object’. What we today call ‘conceptual content’ is a concept’s intension, its marks—though Kant sometimes (albeit rarely) also refers to marks as the content of a concept (e.g., A6/B9-10, A65/B90). The ‘content’ that is equivalent to ‘reference to a really possible object’ is what Kant often calls the content of *cognition* (e.g., A54/B78, A62-3/B87, A131/B170). But he also sometimes calls it the content of *thought* (as in the famous dictum that thoughts without content, i.e., intuitions, are empty (A51/B75)) and of a concept (A95), and a cognition with no content in Kant’s distinctive sense is simply a concept without intuition—an *empty* concept. I shall henceforth reserve the terminology of ‘marks’ and ‘intension’ to speak of conceptual content in our current sense, and I shall use ‘content’ only to mean ‘reference (*Beziehung*) of a concept to a really possible object’. With that in mind, we can see that when Kant denies *content* and hence *meaning* to a concept, we need not take him *directly* to be claiming that the concept lacks *marks* or an *intension*.

Now that might not seem like a big gain in plausibility: Isn’t Kant just using the word ‘meaning’ (both *Bedeutung* and *Sinn*) in an idiosyncratic and misleading way if he denies meaning to concepts that nevertheless have marks? That brings us to our second preliminary point: There is an *indirect* connection between meaning and intension on Kant’s view. That indirect connection is, namely, between a concept’s having a meaning in Kant’s sense and its intension’s being *fixed* and *determinate*, and hence the concept’s having a *stable inferential location*.<sup>55</sup> Seeing why Kant’s Reference Requirement is plausible therefore requires seeing how in the ordinary case, the fixity and determinacy of a concept’s intension, and consequently the stability of a concept’s inferential location, depend on conformity to that requirement.

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<sup>55</sup> I owe that phrase to Andrew Brook.

#### 4.3.2. A Twentieth-Century Parallel

As we think our way through Kant's position, a helpful parallel to bear in mind is that tradition in twentieth-century philosophy of mind and language to which belong Frege (arguably), Evans, and McDowell, one of whose defining commitments is an embrace of the possibility that one could *try* but *fail* to think a thought, and even fail to be aware that one has thus failed. In such a case, the failure to think is explained by a failure of *singular* reference of a referring term contained in the thought, whether because the referring term does not pick out one object uniquely or because the putative referent does not exist. In that case, the referring term is meaningless. And then the possibility of truth-conditions and hence a truth-value of the thought in which the term occurs is not provided for. And the latter possibility is a *sine qua non* of thought at all (according to the exponents of that tradition). So one may take oneself to be thinking a thought but fail thus to be thinking because of a failure of singular reference. And a sentence that expressed the putative thought would thus itself be meaningless.

Now clearly there are many important differences between that line of thinking and Kant's. For one thing, the word 'reference' there is used in its current, standard sense to indicate a relation between a *singular term* and some particular entity, whereas Kant is interested in the relation of necessarily *general* concepts and even judgments to their objects. For another, considerations of existence and non-existence are pertinent to the evaluation of reference-success or -failure for the Frege-Evans-McDowell tradition (if I use a demonstrative referring expression, e.g., for a thing that does not in fact exist, then I am in a case of reference-failure), whereas not *existence* but only *real possibility* pertains to the relation that Kant has in mind between intellectual presentations and their objects. But for all that, there are important analogies between the Frege-Evans-McDowell position and Kant's. We shall have occasion to bring those out in

somewhat more detail below, in section 4.3.4. But for now it suffices to draw attention to a common interest in the possibility of *truth-values* of thoughts or statements. In the next section, I argue that that is genuinely an interest of Kant's, namely under the heading of *objective validity*.

#### 4.3.3. Objective Validity, Truth, and Analytic and Synthetic Judgments

I argued in chapter two, section 4.1 that objective validity consists in a normative relation between some bit of reality (a thing, an event, a state of affairs) and my judgment: a demand that I judge just *thus* and not otherwise, one that I am subject to just insofar as I am a rational being or “a consciousness in general” (Prol 4:304). And in chapter three, section 1, I drew a connection between a judgment's being objectively valid and its being possibly true or false, i.e., its possessing a truth-value. Now the nature of that connection is straightforward enough at a first pass. The idea is just that a judgment must be about something other than itself if it is to be assessable as true or false (i.e., of that something). That fits the conception of judgment that Kant articulates in the B Deduction, in which the emphasis is on a combination of presentations “in the object, i.e., combined independently of what the subject's state is” (B142). But there may seem to be an obvious exception: analytic judgments. Analytic judgments can be objectively valid—they are certainly not merely subjectively valid—and yet they seem true or false not in virtue of an object beyond the concepts that figure in them but solely because of those very concepts (i.e., their intensions).

Strictly speaking, that is correct. Yet there is something potentially misleading about it. Kant holds that analytic judgments are merely *explicative* of our concepts; only synthetic judgments are *ampliative* of our cognition (A7/B11).<sup>56</sup> Although an analytic judgment can bring

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<sup>56</sup> Here I prefer Kemp Smith's ‘ampliative’ and ‘explicative’ to Pluhar's ‘expansive’ and ‘elucidatory’.



to clarity what is already thought in its constituent concepts, only through a synthetic judgment can I learn anything new (and not merely what I already think, implicitly or explicitly). Now the merely explicative character of an analytic judgment does not entail that it lacks relation even to a merely logical object (i.e., an object in the loosest possible sense, like a *relatum*). But the direct logical objects of an analytic judgment are the very concepts that occur in it, *not* things independent of those concepts. Hence the judgment can have objective validity in a minimal way merely in virtue of the concepts that occur in it, just insofar as there is a fact of the matter about what marks are thought into those concepts. (E.g., it can be a fact that when I think the concept ‘telepath’, I think in it the mark ‘capable of direct community of thought’, and to that extent the analytic judgment ‘Telepaths are capable of direct community of thought’ is objectively valid.)

But the priority of synthetic over analytic judgment as a source of cognition tells us something important about just how minimal that objective validity really is, and in what respect. In the case of synthetic judgments, again, they are assessable by a standard that is not idiosyncratic but public and normatively necessitating for any rational being, “a consciousness in general”. And an analytic judgment whose concepts are derived from synthetic cognition, and thus arrived at in conformity to the requirement of epistemic responsiveness to the objects of which they are concepts, inherits that robust form of objective validity. But what about a concept whose origin does not lie in synthetic cognition but is wholly invented and even defies the mere possibility of synthetic cognition, like ‘telepath’? The objective validity of the judgment that telepaths are capable of direct community of thought goes only as far as *what I happen arbitrarily to think into the concept*. Thus someone might challenge me that telepaths are not after all capable of direct community of thought. And if my challenger means not, ‘Your concept is not well formed; there is no fact of the matter here’, but rather means to teach me something

about telepaths from the challenger's own arbitrary concept thereof, there is no question of true or false here at all. There is no settling how things stand *with telepaths*, and any judgment that purports to settle *that* is *not* objectively valid. There is only settling what each participant in the dispute happens to think into their concept.

Thus in a case wherein the connection between a concept and synthetic cognition is severed altogether, we face a problem of the concept's fixity and determinacy, of the stability of its inferential location, and hence of how to evaluate the *truth* of judgments in which the concept occurs. To say that the concept 'telepath' makes no reference (*Beziehung*) to anything really possible is to grant that it can vary in its content from thinker to thinker, or across time for the same thinker, and hence both to permit me to reason on its basis perfectly arbitrarily (so long as I do so consistently) and to render any dispute that might arise about telepaths insoluble in principle—even notwithstanding the weak form of objective validity that remains available.<sup>57</sup> But that is just to grant that for any judgment in which that concept occurs, if that concept is taken to be a way of thinking *of an object other than itself*, then the judgment *cannot have a truth-value*. The possibility of the judgment's being true or false depends essentially on the recognition that it is not about *how things are* but rather merely about the concepts that figure in it. Hence it requires recognizing that those concepts themselves are not being used as presentations of objects but merely as logical functions of unity among stipulated marks.<sup>58</sup> (Note

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<sup>57</sup> Note that it is no solution to invoke a community or communal practice here. It may well be that if I insist that telepaths eat all and only cheeseburgers, I am breaking a rule of telepath-discourse among my peers. But for Kant (at least), I need some reason to suppose that that communal discursive practice is *objectively valid*; objective validity is not earned just by scaling up from one idiosyncratic thinker to what might be thought of as an idiosyncratic group.

<sup>58</sup> Here I can tie up a loose end from the previous chapter: What precisely is the relation between *objective validity* and *objective reality*? I observed there that Kant often uses those terms interchangeably but that there was some value in reserving one term for a property of *judgments* and another for a property of *concepts*; and I chose 'objective validity' for the former and 'objective reality' for the latter. Bearing that in mind, I now suggest that the *objective reality* of a concept is a necessary condition of the *objective validity* of a judgment in which the concept occurs. Hence a judgment cannot be possibly true or false unless the concepts in it refer to really possible objects.

the clear resemblance between the hypothetical dispute about accounts of telepathy that I have just described and the endless controversies of metaphysics that Kant often complains of.)

#### 4.3.4. Why Meaningfulness Presupposes Reference (*Beziehung*)

The question to which we have been developing an answer since the beginning of section 4.3 is this: Why should the meaningfulness of a concept depend on the possibility of its referring to (*beziehen auf*) an object independent of it (specifically, for Kant, to empirical things or to possible experience)? And we seem now to be able to give an answer interestingly analogous to that which the Frege-Evans-McDowell line would give about why the meaningfulness of a singular thought (or sentence) depends on the successful singular reference of the referring term in that thought (or sentence). In the latter case, successful reference is required because otherwise what the thought predicates of the putative referent is *neither truly nor falsely predicated* of that referent. There is no condition the satisfaction or failure of satisfaction of which establishes the truth or falsity of the thought (i.e., no truth-condition), and hence it is neither true nor false and no thought at all. In Kant's case, a reference of a no doubt different sort (one that need not be singular and that requires only real possibility and not existence of its object) is required of a concept to an object other than itself because otherwise the judgment in which the concept figures, *taken as a claim about how things are*, lacks objective validity and hence the possibility of truth or falsity, and thus, by the B Deduction, is no judgment at all.

The parenthetical 'taken as a claim about how things are' is quite important, and also has an analogue in the Frege-Evans-McDowell line. Evans is careful to emphasize that in a case of reference-failure, a subject "may fail to have a thought *of the kind* he supposes himself to

have”.<sup>59</sup> And McDowell, in his capacity as editor of Evans’s monograph, observes that Evans can as much embrace the possibility of error as regards a thought’s *identity* as he can as regards a thought’s *existence*.<sup>60</sup> (I take the difference between those to be solely that the second is compatible with my thinking nothing at all while the first is not.) And Kant will have to (and certainly can) make a similar hedge. For in a case where, for example, I am *attempting* a judgment about telepathic beings (not merely about the concept ‘telepath’), I am *merely* so attempting; since telepaths are not even really possible, let alone existent, I may take myself actually (or *meaningfully*) to be making such a judgment, but if I do, I will falsely so take myself. Yet I could in that very attempt be making a different judgment that I *mistake* for a judgment about telepaths, namely, a judgment about what I think in *my* concept ‘telepath’. We will later see (chapter six) that for attempted subreptive uses of certain seemingly experience-transcendent concepts that are more important than ‘telepath’ and are the subject of enduring metaphysical controversy, such as ‘God’, Kant’s diagnosis requires the attribution of something like a mistake of identity of thought.<sup>61</sup>

An important corollary of the position that I have been developing is that a concept can be meaningless in Kant’s sense even if the marks that it contains are perfectly meaningful taken serially. The concept of a figure enclosed by two straight lines is the concept of a geometrical object that is not really possible, and hence the concept counts as meaningless by Kant’s lights. Yet that is not because any of the concepts ‘figure’, ‘enclosed space’, ‘line’, ‘straight’, ‘two’, and so forth are not meaningful. On the contrary, each of those concepts has objective reality. But a

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<sup>59</sup> Evans 1982, 45; emphasis mine.

<sup>60</sup> In the Appendix to chapter six of Evans 1982 (201).

<sup>61</sup> More precisely, in offering his account of the theoretical Ideas, Kant distinguishes between uses, one legitimate and one ‘subreptive’ or illegitimate, of *the very same Idea*. Thus to try to make any of the well known Dialectical inferences is to *mistake* the relevant Idea, as a concept of what must be immanent to possible experience if that concept is to have objective reality, for a concept of something experience-transcendent.

geometrical figure that (*per impossibile*) corresponded to the concept ‘figure enclosed by two straight lines’ would suffer from what Chignell calls the “real repugnance” of its determinations and hence be really *impossible*.<sup>62</sup> Hence we can certainly *think that concept* as a logical unity of marks. But we cannot *use* it to *think an object*, and to that extent it is meaningless—i.e., if we try to use it in reference to an object, we *try* but *fail* to think a thought. (The same analysis could be given, I believe, of the concept of telepathy.)

At this point, I take myself to have completed the initial presentation of Kant’s conceptual-semantic theory or theory of meaning. My interpretation has the significant virtue of finding an intelligible and compelling position in the emphatic letter of Kant’s meaning-talk, both in PN and elsewhere in the first *Critique*, in a way that few if any other interpretations of the first *Critique* are able to match. But before we can return to the main thread of the chapter and see in detail how Kant’s theory of meaning can help us dispense with the parochiality worry about the human epistemic capacity, I must confront some further objections.

#### 4.4. Two Further Objections

Here I consider two objections that threaten not to let Kant’s theory get off the ground. First, if Kant holds the theory of meaning that I allege he does, he seems to be a verificationist. Second, the theory of meaning seems to entail the impossibility of fictional concepts.

##### 4.4.1. Verificationism

As I have mentioned, few Kant-interpreters take seriously his claims about meaning or, what is the same thing, Strawson’s attribution to Kant of the principle of significance. A generic

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<sup>62</sup> Chignell 2010 and 2011.

reaction is Chignell's: He takes Kant's claims to be 'going overboard' and otherwise does not much explore them.<sup>63</sup> A more determinate complaint is that Kant cannot really mean what he seems to say on pain of being *positivistic* or a *verificationist*. Some variant of that complaint is made by, e.g., James Van Cleve,<sup>64</sup> Kenneth Westphal,<sup>65</sup> Frederick Beiser,<sup>66</sup> Graham Bird,<sup>67</sup> Robert Greenberg,<sup>68</sup> Patrick Kain,<sup>69</sup> Colin Marshall,<sup>70</sup> Lucy Allais,<sup>71</sup> and Chong-Fuk Lau.<sup>72</sup>

There are three basic worries that an objection from verificationism could express (each presupposing that Kant's theory of meaning as I have outlined it is verificationistic). One worry is simply that verificationism is philosophically indefensible, and (hence) with it, Kant's theory of meaning. A second is about the compatibility of Kant's putatively verificationist theory of meaning with other very basic commitments of his, particularly with his discussion and use of various concepts that are not derived from *particular* things, events, or states of affairs in experience. Such concepts include both what I have above called 'formal concepts', on the one hand, and the concept 'thing in itself' and the theoretical and practical Ideas, on the other (the latter evidently having *some* role to play in Kant's system). And a third worry is that the putatively verificationist theory of meaning is an anachronistic projection onto the first *Critique*.

To respond adequately to those worries, we need some idea of what a charge of verificationism amounts to. Two influential examples of verificationism are A. J. Ayer's and Michael Dummett's. Ayer endorses a "criterion of verifiability": "We say that a sentence is

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<sup>63</sup> Chignell 2007, 359.

<sup>64</sup> Van Cleve 1999, 68-9.

<sup>65</sup> Westphal 2004, 42-6.

<sup>66</sup> Beiser 2005, 589.

<sup>67</sup> Bird 2006, 346.

<sup>68</sup> Greenberg 2008, 56-7.

<sup>69</sup> Kain 2010, 211.

<sup>70</sup> Marshall 2010, 4.

<sup>71</sup> Allais 2015, 212-3.

<sup>72</sup> Lau 2015, 446-50.

factually significant to any given person, if, and only if, he knows how to verify the proposition which it purports to express—that is, if he knows what observations would lead him, under certain conditions, to accept the proposition as being true, or reject it as being false.”<sup>73</sup> We can set aside that Ayer is concerned with sentences whereas Kant is concerned with thought, and not only propositional thought (judgment) but also with mere concepts. Though Ayer strives to interpret the criterion liberally enough to accommodate scientific laws,<sup>74</sup> verifiability in principle rather than in practice,<sup>75</sup> and even *a priori* truths,<sup>76</sup> there is a striking divergence from Kant in Ayer’s claim that the only admissible *a priori* truths are *tautologies*, i.e., analytic truths.<sup>77</sup> Dummett’s anti-realist verificationism<sup>78</sup> does not, by contrast, involve any general restriction of admissible *a priori* truths to tautologies, largely because Dummett is not an anti-realist in general but only on a case-by-case basis, where a ‘case’ is a particular class of statements.<sup>79</sup> But he diverges strikingly from Kant on another important point, namely his flirtation with anti-realism about the past: For Dummett, there is a serious question about whether statements about the past that are not decidable on the basis of present evidence have truth-values, which is to say about whether past events that are now beyond the reach of our verification belong to reality at all.<sup>80</sup>

Do those divergences from Kant *prove* that Kant’s theory of meaning, taken according to its letter, is not verificationist? No, they do not. But they are evidence either of that or else of

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<sup>73</sup> Ayer 1952, 35.

<sup>74</sup> Ayer 1952, 37.

<sup>75</sup> Ayer 1952, 36.

<sup>76</sup> Ayer 1952, 41.

<sup>77</sup> Ayer 1952, 41.

<sup>78</sup> Dummett does not typically take himself to be a *verificationist* in this or that domain of discourse, but rather an *anti-realist*. But many who follow him have taken him to be continuing or resuscitating verificationism, e.g., Anthony Appiah (1985) and McDowell (1998a, 349).

<sup>79</sup> 1978a, 146.

<sup>80</sup> 1978b. In more recent work (2004 and 2006), Dummett has backed away from anti-realism about the past, and to that extent his position in respect of the reality of the past *may* be assimilable to Kant’s. But Dummett still wants to cast that position as a realistically inflected “justificationism”, i.e., anti-realism, rather than just a realism, whereas I share Abela’s suspicion that to inflect an anti-realist position with enough realism to approach Kant’s own view is just to give up on anti-realism (Abela 2002, 241-4).

Kant's inconsistency (i.e., of Kant's commitment both to verificationism and to positions incompatible therewith). Now I have already argued (section 4.2) that Kant's theory of meaning is perfectly compatible with the meaningfulness of any *a priori* concept that belongs to the articulation of the possibility of experience or of empirical things, including concepts of presentational powers or their aspects and concepts in mathematics and logic. And over the next three chapters, I shall further argue that Kant's theory of meaning is compatible with the meaningfulness of the theoretical and practical Ideas provided that they are *used* correctly, viz., to refer not to their nominal experience-transcendent objects but to possible experience. If those arguments are convincing, then Ayer's and Dummett's divergences from Kant look more straightforwardly like evidence that Kant's theory of meaning is not verificationist.

And that evidence is bolstered by reflection on the relation between ideal verifiability and Kant's idea of a *form* of possible experience. A verificationist cannot tolerate that idea. For it cannot be described merely in analytic terms, and it provides for the possibility of truths that are verification-transcendent except under circumstances so idealized that they are no longer obviously verificationist. I have already mentioned Kant's discussion of magnetic matter (chapter three, section 2), in which he initially seems to suggest that such matter belongs to possible experience just in case it is only *accidentally* unperceivable by me, where the stock examples of such accidental impediments are crude sense organs and insufficiently powerful technology (B273). That may look like an ideal-verificationist view. But as I argued there, what is criterial for belonging to possible experience is *standing in a natural-causal connection to what is perceivable*—not obviously a criterion that a verificationist can embrace.<sup>81</sup> And as Abela

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<sup>81</sup> That is not to say that my other gloss of belonging to possible experience, namely, something's being only *accidentally* but not *essentially* unperceivable, was wrong, but to bring out the possibility that it too is not really verificationistic.



argues, Kant's point is not that what counts as belonging to possible experience is explained by the limits of ideal verification but, on the contrary, that the admissibility of considerations of ideal verifiability is explained *by the form of possible experience*,<sup>82</sup> which in fact provides for the possibility not merely of verifiability but of *truth* (A237/B296). And that form is the very one provided for by the categories and forms of intuition as forms of empirical things and is articulable only in synthetic *a priori* judgments.

So the evidence seems strong that taking Kant at his word on meaning does not require taking him to be a verificationist. But if that is right, then I can answer all three variants of the objection from verificationism at once: None of them land, because Kant's theory of meaning as I have interpreted it is not a verificationist theory.<sup>83</sup>

#### 4.4.2. Fictional Concepts

The claim that a concept is only meaningful if its object belongs to possible experience might seem to invite an objection from the possibility of fictional concepts. There is, indeed, a parallel objection to the Frege-Evans-McDowell line on singular referring terms: If the reference-failure of a referring term requires that the term be meaningless and, consequently, that the sentence or thought in which it figures is not the sentence or thought that the speaker or thinker takes it to be (or is none at all), how can we make sense of thought and discourse about fictional entities? Now exactly what reply we should offer on Kant's behalf is a little hard to

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<sup>82</sup> Abela 2002, 237-41.

<sup>83</sup> I cannot resist pointing out that the charge of anachronism is particularly lame. Often it is made as though it proves that an interpretation is false, when in fact anachronism can only ever *diagnose* an interpretation's antecedently established falsehood. And when someone like Beiser diagnoses anti-transcendent-metaphysical readings of the Critical philosophy in terms of a contamination, beginning in the 1960s, of Kant scholarship by positivistic urges peculiar to Anglo-American philosophy (2006, 589), one wonders how that accounts for the readings of Fichte (1982 but, of course, originally 1794) and Heidegger (1973 but originally 1962, and not plausibly influenced by trends in Anglo-American philosophy of the time).

make out because of the differences between his worry (about the meaningfulness of *general concepts*) and, for instance, Evans's (about the meaningfulness of *singular referring terms*), a salient one of which is that Kantian concept-meaningfulness requires only *real possibility* of the concept's object whereas Evansian referring-term-meaningfulness requires (at least in the basic case of outer empirical things) both the *existence* and the *uniqueness* of the referent.

Still, it seems open to Kant to rely on more or less the same strategy for fictional concepts that Evans,<sup>84</sup> along with Kendall Walton,<sup>85</sup> develops to handle fictional singular referring terms. That strategy is to interpret a domain of thought or discourse that uses fictional singular referring terms as involving *make-believe that*, i.e., the *adoption of a pretense as though*, some term refers that does not in fact do so, so that the one pretending operates within a rule-governed space of possible thought and discourse opened up by the pretense. Thus, for instance, there is communal agreement about Santa Claus's properties because there is a communal pretense that 'Santa Claus' refers, and the truth or falsity of statements about Santa Claus is grounded in the make-believe facts of the matter (i.e., the 'facts' that are internal to the pretense) about the thing that we pretend that 'Santa Claus' refers to.<sup>86</sup> With minimal adaptation, we can imagine a similar treatment of the concept 'telepathy' as, for example, it has been built up in some domain of science-fiction or fantasy-literature: If we make-believe that telepaths are really possible, then within the scope of that pretense, we can develop a communal conceptual apparatus and accompanying body of thought about telepaths and their properties. We can even dispute with those who want to assign to the entities that we make-believe are really possible certain predicates that, within the scope of the pretense, those entities do not have—yet one who insists

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<sup>84</sup> Evans 1982, ch. 10 (343-72).

<sup>85</sup> Walton 1990, 385-430.

<sup>86</sup> Evans 1982, 365.

on assigning such predicates will not (except within the scope of the pretense) properly be regarded as *getting telepaths wrong* but rather as refusing to follow the community's rules about what one shall pretend to predicate of telepaths, i.e., as refusing to play the shared game.

Obviously that is very quick, but it suffices for the present purpose, given the constraints of my inquiry. But one point needs clarifying before we move on. In an ordinary case of make-believe, participants are aware of the status of their claims (thoughts or sentences) as belonging to a mere pretense. Most of us would probably want to say that of ourselves if we found ourselves debating the properties of telepaths. Make-believe thinking (or discourse) is thus a deliberate and self-conscious activity, a *legitimate* activity within its limits albeit one whose possibility is derivative upon or logically posterior to that of the more basic case of ordinarily meaningful, object-directed thinking. Now the idea of such an activity gives us a way of thinking about metaphysical claims and disputes that turn out to be meaningless, i.e., because the objects that they purport to concern are not really possible. Nevertheless, it would be too quick simply to assimilate meaningless metaphysical philosophizing to make-believe, for the simple reason that in the latter case the philosopher is *mistaken* about their own thinking (i.e., that it is meaningful, about something other than the very concepts thought into it) and not self-consciously pretending to think. Kant has a term for such merely apparently meaningful thinking as occurs, specifically, in the attempts at experience-transcendent metaphysics characteristic of the early modern period: *Dialectical*. Thinking that is Dialectical is like fictional thinking in that it can at once be rule-governed and lack reference to anything really possible. Yet as we will see in chapters five and six, Dialectical thinking is unlike fictional thinking in that first, we mistake it for meaningful thought rather than deliberately making-believe that it is meaningful, and second, Dialectical thinking originates in *a priori* presentations of reason and stable and determinate *needs* of reason

rather than in contingent communal inaugurations of a domain of fictional thought. And because of that origin, the course that Dialectical reasoning takes is systematically related to non-Dialectical reasoning—specifically, to the inferences that we are licensed to make when we use reason’s *a priori* presentations correctly, in reference to possible experience rather than (putatively) to the experience-transcendent.

### 5. Resolving the Problem of Phenomena and Noumena, and Our Own

Having now completed my interpretation and defense of Kant’s conceptual-semantic theory, we may return to the point in the argument of PN where we left off at the end of section 3: Kant’s explanation of the impossibility of cognition of things in themselves. I shall argue that his account of meaning is the backbone of the argumentative strategy underlying that explanation. Kant explains the impossibility of *cognition* of things in themselves by explaining why we cannot take them to be *really possible* and hence why we cannot enjoy *meaningful concepts* of such things (though a *caveat* must be made for Kant’s conception of ‘negative understanding’). Kant makes the same argument vis-à-vis the concept of an epistemic capacity that, according to its concept, could cognize things in themselves: i.e., that that concept too is of an object to which we cannot assign real possibility. And although he does not explicitly extend the argument to the case of other logically possible forms of intuition, the extension to that case follows from the fact that space and time are themselves constitutive of real possibility. I shall close section 5 with a brief reflection on the prospects for *knowledge (Wissen)* and of ‘bare awareness’ of things in themselves in the wake of my reconstruction of PN.

### 5.1. Cognition of Things in Themselves: Dispelling the Delusion

When we left the main line of argument of PN (section 3.3), we were on the cusp of Kant's explanation of why the apparent possibility of cognition of things in themselves is *merely* apparent and why the hankering after such cognition, as arising out of a false picture of the human epistemic predicament, is misplaced. (Kant actually speaks here mostly of noumena, though occasionally also of things in themselves. For now, I treat as unproblematic the identity of those concepts; I defer arguing for that identity to the next chapter, section 1.1.) Now the most straightforward path would simply be for Kant to apply his account of meaning and declare the concept of a thing in itself meaningless. But Kant evidently has some respect for the urge to cognize things in themselves and wants to preserve some role in his system for the *concept* 'thing in itself', even if he does not take that concept to be one through which we can think an *object*. Hence Kant now introduces a distinction, viz., between the concept of the noumenon in the *negative Verstande* and the concept of the noumenon in the *positive Bedeutung* (B307).

I have used Kant's German there because to a person, every major translator has ignored that Kant uses different German words in the two phrases when rendering them into English. Kemp Smith translates the distinction as between negative and positive *senses* of 'noumenon'; Guyer and Wood follow him; and Pluhar translates the distinction as between negative and positive *meanings* of 'noumenon'. That is significant because if 'meaning' (*Bedeutung*) just entails reference (*Beziehung*) to a really possible object, then whatever negative meaning is, it would seem to require that even the concept that bears it nevertheless refer to things in themselves. And that might tempt us to take 'noumenon' in the negative meaning to be just a less *determinate* but nevertheless *referential* (in Kant's sense) concept of something supersensible. But if what Pluhar translates as 'negative meaning' is in fact no *Bedeutung* at all, then it is an

open question whether a concept with a merely negative *Verstande* refers to anything, i.e., whether it relates to a really possible object or is *merely* a thought. Henceforth I shall translate ‘*negative Verstande*’ as ‘negative understanding’—no doubt clumsier-sounding than ‘negative sense’ or ‘negative meaning’ but much the better to avoid confusion.<sup>87</sup>

But what exactly does the distinction distinguish? Here is Kant’s formulation of it:

[9] If, by abstracting from our way of intuiting a thing, we understand [*verstehen*] by noumenon a thing *insofar as it is not an object of our sensible intuition*, then this is a noumenon in the *negative* understanding [*Verstande*] of the term. But if by noumenon we understand [*verstehen*] an *object of a nonsensible intuition* and hence assume a special kind of intuition, viz., an intellectual one—which, however, is not ours and into the possibility of which we also have no insight—then that would be the noumenon in the *positive* meaning [*Bedeutung*] of the term. (B307; translation modified)

And Kant will later gloss the distinction in terms of negative and positive *uses* of the concept ‘noumenon’.

There is a question about what exactly a merely negative understanding of the concept ‘noumenon’ could amount to and what purpose it could serve. But for now we may set that aside and focus on the concept ‘noumenon’ in the positive meaning. Kant seems to suggest a dialectical development of the concept ‘noumenon’ in the positive meaning out of the merely negative starting point. The concept ‘noumenon’ in its merely negative understanding corresponds to the stage of thinking at which one merely becomes cognizant of a conceptual contrast between the thought of an empirical thing as *phenomenon*, i.e., as that which is an object of human sensibility, and the thought of a thing that would *not* be a phenomenon and hence be beyond the reach of sensibility. As we saw in section 3.2, a conception of that contrast as being

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<sup>87</sup> As though to emphasize the significance of his choice of words, Kant repeats the expression ‘*negative Verstande*’ at the beginning of the paragraph following that which introduces the negative/positive noumenon distinction. I must concede, however, that Kant does use the expression ‘*negative Bedeutung*’ once, at B309. Nevertheless, I think we are licensed to view the use of terms in the distinction’s introduction at B307 as canonical, and his later use of ‘*negative Bedeutung*’ as terminological casualness on Kant’s part.

founded on a fundamental parochiality of our way of intuiting induces a hankering after not merely a logically possible concept but *cognition* of that concept's putative object. Here enters the concept 'noumenon' in the positive meaning. For since it is to satisfy a hankering for cognition, its object must be cognizable; but that requires the positing of an epistemic capacity different from our sensible one in that it would be fit for intuiting such a noumenon.

Now here Kant applies his account of meaning. If in thinking the concept 'noumenon' we refrain from positing non-sensible intuitive powers, then the concept is certainly meaningless. For, Kant observes, our only grasp of what is really possible and hence what can be the object of a meaningful concept goes by way of the character of *our* sensibility, whereas a noumenon is just that which, in principle, exceeds the reach of that sensibility. In respect of such a thing, "the entire use of the categories—indeed, even all their meaning [*Bedeutung*—ceases completely, because we then have no insight even into the [real] possibility of the things that are to correspond to the categories" (B308). We might, however, seem to be able to work our way back to the meaningfulness of the concept if we indeed posit non-sensible intuitive powers. To such powers would correspond different conditions of real possibility, and hence a whole new ontological region would be opened up for our concepts to refer to. But—and this is the really crucial move—the concept of a non-sensible epistemic capacity is itself a noumenal concept and hence one that is just as meaningless, or objectless, as the concept of the noumenon that it was introduced to support. Not only can we not say whether things in themselves are really possible, we cannot even say whether an epistemic capacity that could cognize such things is really possible. That is, we cannot say that to the concept 'non-sensible epistemic capacity' there can correspond an object any more than we can say that of the concept 'noumenon' (A256/B311-2).

It is difficult to overstate the importance of that last move. The sort of non-sensible epistemic capacity at issue for Kant is that which God would have, an intellectual intuition, so we may start there. Recall Allison's aspiration to an epistemically anthropocentric reading of Kant (in which aspiration I follow him) and his inability to explain how Kant's anthropocentrism can be principled and not arbitrary. But here Kant gives us just what we need: Our epistemic anthropocentrism is perfectly legitimate because our concept of God's epistemic capacity, as one that would clearly be not only essentially different from but also superior to our own, is not a meaningful concept—its putative object lacks real possibility. If we are interested not in what *thoughts* are (merely logically) possible but what *things* are (really) possible, we find that we cannot classify a divine epistemic capacity among the *possibilia*. What is more, precisely the same move can be made with respect to the logical possibility of forms of intuition other than space and time: We have no more grasp of their *real* possibility, as *objects*, than we do of the real possibility of noumena or of the divine epistemic capacity.

Recall also the worry of Pippin and McDowell that I discussed in section 1, that the logical possibility of other forms of intuition would entail the parochiality and hence defectiveness of our epistemic capacity. The Kantian move that we are now considering seems to upset that entailment. For if we cannot establish the real possibility of those other forms of intuition, then our concepts of them were, in fact, *merely putatively* of them and are actually objectless and hence *meaningless*, i.e., not able to figure in genuinely object-dependent, objectively valid thought. So there is nothing of which we can meaningfully think a comparison with which can reveal our way of knowing or cognizing to be merely parochial.

Now Pippin and McDowell could reply that that does not directly address their worry. After all, 'parochial' is my own term of art, not theirs; they are worried about *subjective*



*idealism*. And they may therefore insist that for all I have said, the forms of intuition, in their particularity, are the forms that we humans *just happen to have*, hence are epistemically arbitrary and therefore entail, by their presence, subjective idealism; and that that remains the case irrespective of whether meaningful thought of other forms is possible.

But that would be to miss the force of Kant's point. *For how do we come by our concept of an epistemic capacity?* Certainly not *analytically*, by privileged access to a free-floating concept with which we can then compare our own, putatively epistemic capacity. Rather, the origin of our concept of an epistemic capacity is *synthetic*: We are aware of ourselves as bearers of such capacities just insofar as we exercise them.<sup>88</sup> But that is just to say that our concept 'epistemic capacity' possesses a meaning only in its being the concept of the only sort of epistemic capacity that we can know to be really possible: *ours*. And hence we certainly cannot conceive of the particular forms of intuition that we possess as epistemically arbitrary, even if it is originally a *synthetic* truth that intuition bears just those forms. On the contrary: They belong to the canonical object of the concept 'epistemic capacity', and *the only meaningful concept that we have of such a capacity is precisely of one that has, specifically, space and time as the forms of its intuition*. Hence the mere logical possibility of other forms of intuition (or, again, of a different sort of mind altogether, like God's) does nothing to show that our epistemic capacity is really a capacity for subjectively ideal presentation but, on the contrary, is entirely compatible with its being the epistemic capacity *par excellence*.

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<sup>88</sup> The word 'synthetic' suggests a role for intuition, but what role intuition plays here is obscure. It is enough for the present point to insist that my entitlement to the concept of an epistemic capacity presupposes my awareness of myself as (a bearer of) one such and cannot be provided for without that awareness. (My burden here is not to give a complete account of the possibility of such awareness but only to show that some such awareness is required to secure our entitlement to use *any* concept of an epistemic capacity at all.)

Now a reader may have doubts about how faithful I am being to the letter of the argument of the latter part of PN. For Kant indisputably does not speak there in terms of worries about the defectiveness of our epistemic capacity. But we can be reasonably sure that I am being true to the spirit of Kant's argument so long as we hold clearly in view the delusion that is to be dispelled—that we can cognize the experience-transcendent—and what is necessary to dispel it. Specifically, for the latter, we must show (a) that such cognition is not after all possible, but also (b) that our hankering after it, which motivated the positing of its possibility, was itself misplaced. But the interpretation I have offered here does that work perfectly. We show that such cognition is not possible by showing that the concepts of what is to be cognized, the in-itself, are in fact meaningless. But that is not even the crucial move, for Kant takes himself to have concluded as much as far back as the Transcendental Deduction. The key move is that we show that the hankering was misplaced by showing that the intolerable picture of the human epistemic situation that gave rise to it, on which the forms of our sensibility as spatio-temporal and the nature of our sensibility as finite and receptive imply the possibility of different or better sorts of epistemic capacity, itself depends on the possibility of concepts of such epistemic capacities that cannot be meaningfully thought and yet only in reference to which we can regard our epistemic capacity as defective.

The foregoing line of argument was cast in largely negative terms: Kant, I have argued, is *denying* that certain thoughts are meaningful, where their meaningfulness would be required to get into view genuine alternatives to the only epistemic capacity of whose possibility we are aware. Yet at its heart is, I submit, a positive insight of Kant's and an essential lesson of the Aesthetic and Analytic: that our original grasp of what it is and how it is possible for thought to have content—to be about anything—is via thought's essential relation to sensibility. To take

that seriously is to grant that the forms of sensibility are not epistemically arbitrary restrictions but indeed *enabling conditions* of a capacity meaningfully to think and, *a fortiori*, to cognize and know. The point, therefore, is not to arbitrarily declare certain apparently pressing philosophical possibilities meaningless so as not to have to deal with them. It is rather to remind us that those possibilities' appearing pressing, and even meaningful, itself depends on an *antecedent* concession that forms of sensibility could, for all we know, be subjectively idealistic restrictions rather than enabling conditions of a genuinely epistemic capacity. And if that is right, then those putative possibilities cannot themselves motivate or require that concession but themselves need independent philosophical defense. I shall return to that claim in section 6 below and again in chapter eight (especially section 4).

## 5.2. The Concept of the Noumenon in the Negative Understanding

But what, exactly, is the concept 'noumenon' in the negative understanding, and why should Kant leave a place for it? The answer to the first question may seem easy—why, it is just the concept of a thing insofar as it is *not* a possible object of my sensibility—but what makes the question pressing is the argument I made earlier (section 4.3.3) about the arbitrariness of the marks thought into a concept with no really possible object. Kant takes 'noumenon' in the negative understanding to be fit for a negative *use*, i.e., as a “boundary concept” through which we think the limits of cognition: both of the intellect<sup>89</sup> in respect of what it can meaningfully think (only sensible things) and of sensibility in respect of what it can intuit (only what is really possible and conforms to the forms of sensibility, not what is merely logically possible)

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<sup>89</sup> Throughout PN, Kant mostly speaks of the “understanding” in a way that makes it hard to see whether he means understanding in the narrow sense or the wide sense, where I consistently signify the latter with the word ‘intellect’. But at A257/B313, Kant makes clear that the restrictions on meaningful thought that PN places on the understanding govern reason as well.

(A255/B310-1). But if the concept ‘noumenon’ in the negative understanding has a legitimate use, then seemingly its intension must be fixed and determinate and its inferential location stable. And how that is possible without reference (*Beziehung*) to a really possible object is as yet mysterious. Hence there is a temptation that I adverted to above (section 5.1) to take Kant to be saying not that the concept ‘noumenon’ in the negative understanding makes no reference at all to an object but only that it does not do so *determinatively*, i.e., does not tell us anything *about* the object to which it nevertheless successfully refers.<sup>90</sup>

Notwithstanding that temptation, there is ample reason to think that Kant does not intend himself to be thus understood. I already quoted Kant (section 5.1) claiming that the categories have no use in respect of noumena. To that I can add his claims that a thing’s real possibility cannot be proven without intuition of it, which is impossible for the noumenon, whether conceived negatively or positively (B308); that the concept of the noumenon is merely problematic and hence merely logically possible, which entails that we cannot think an object through it (A254/B309-10); that “the range outside the sphere of appearances” is empty for us and that the understanding cannot make assertions beyond the bounds of sensibility (A255/B310); that concepts of non-sensible objects (including just of such an object as such, not further determined) lack objective validity (A255/B311); and so on. But if all that is right, then what fixes the intension of the concept in the negative understanding such that it can have a use? And what can that use be if not for thinking an object beyond itself?

The answer lies in the genesis of the concept. It arises out of a contrast with the concept ‘phenomenon’. Now the latter concept is perfectly fixed and determinate, for it is simply the concept of an empirical thing, i.e., of that sort of object that is givable in space and time and just

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<sup>90</sup> Watkins and Willaschek (unpublished) give in to something like that temptation when they suppose that *knowledge* but not *cognition* need not require determination of an object (18-9).

to that extent thinkable according to the intellectual form of possible experience (categories, principles, and so on). And the concept ‘noumenon’ in the negative understanding is no more than a partial negation of the concept ‘phenomenon’: Where a phenomenon is a thing that we in principle can sense, a noumenon negatively understood is simply a (putative) thing that in principle we *cannot* sense. And if that negative concept turns out to have a certain utility for thinkers like us just in virtue of the nature of our epistemic capacity—namely, as what Kant calls a ‘boundary concept’, through which we are enabled to think the limits of our epistemic capacity *without* thinking those limits as a restriction *from* a further reality that lies beyond them<sup>91</sup>—then we seem to have an explanation both of the concept’s determinacy and of its utility. Just as the rational beings we are, we are motivated to think the limits of our cognition. That motivation is determinate enough to prompt a specific act of thought, namely the partial negation of a concept that is itself fixed and determinate. And the concept that results, through the stability both of the motivation that yielded it and the material from which it was generated, is itself fixed and determinate—*not* because it refers to any object but because of its origin.

In fact, that is understating the case somewhat. In the next chapter, we shall see that Kant has in mind additional stable motivations to think the thought of the in-itself that arise specifically from reason, motivations that do not come out clearly until the Amphiboly and that further determine exactly what we think into that thought. But we have said enough to have in view an intelligible account of the possibility of a merely negative understanding of a concept.

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<sup>91</sup> A helpful parallel here might be the concept of the nonsensical. If we say that human thought is limited to the sensical (as it were), we do not thereby imply another range of thought, the nonsensical, to which human thought is inadequate and from which it is consequently barred. Of course, it can be hard to see how ‘limiting’ human thought to the sensical is really a limiting at all. But if certain tendencies of reason inclined us naturally to suppose that there might really be thoughts to be thought beyond the sensical ones, then the revelation that we cannot understand even the mere possibility of such thoughts would figure—through the lens of those tendencies—as a limit.

### 5.3. Can We Know, or Be Barely Conscious of, What Cannot Be Cognized?

A final loose end that must be tied up is Watkins and Willaschek's proposal that perhaps we can know what we cannot cognize, i.e., the in-itself, and a related proposal of Andrew Brook's that we might be capable of a 'bare consciousness' of the in-itself in certain cases.

Rather short work can be made of Watkins and Willaschek's proposal, alas. First, as we saw above, there is Kant's claim that "speculative *knowledge* [*Wissen*] proper cannot concern any object at all other than an object of experience" (A471/B499). Second, there is the fact, observed in section 3.1, that Kant unreservedly defines 'truth' as correspondence between *cognition* and its object (A58/B82, A237/B296), which seems to restrict cases of possible knowledge (as *per se* true) to cases wherein cognition of the object of knowledge is possible. And third, Watkins and Willaschek's commitment to the thought that we could have knowledge, if at all, only of things in themselves in general and not of particular things in themselves is obscure on independent philosophical grounds. For how could my putative knowledge be about anything if it could not, even in principle, be about anything *in particular*?

A more promising proposal for some kind of epistemic contact with things in themselves is Brook's: that we enjoy a 'bare awareness' or 'bare consciousness' of the self in itself.<sup>92</sup> Although such an awareness is almost as difficult to square with the Kantian commitments I have been elucidating as Watkins and Willaschek's proposal, there are a number of highly suggestive (at a minimum) passages where Kant indeed seems to countenance something like that awareness (at least B157-9 and B157n, B422n, and B428-9). And Kant nowhere seems to have an explicit methodological discussion of the epistemic limits of 'awareness' or 'consciousness', at least leaving open the possibility that he means to give it a special epistemic

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<sup>92</sup> Brook 1994, 68.

status. Suppose, now, that what I am barely conscious of is, indeed, my noumenal self. Then it would not be a big stretch to suppose that I might also be capable of a bare consciousness of things in themselves other than my self in itself.

Notwithstanding the doctrines of PN, the passages in which Kant discusses self-awareness are sufficiently cryptic and intriguing that we are likely to miss something important if we simply say that whatever they may *seem* to be saying, they cannot really be saying it on account of PN. But Brook takes a step that exceeds what is licensed by Kant's text, refraining from which leaves room for us to hazard a sketch of a non-noumenalistic understanding of bare consciousness. That unlicensed step is, namely, to take it that if I am aware of my own existence, and that awareness is not of an appearance or a presentation of myself, then the existence of which I am aware can only be that of something *noumenal*, of my self in itself.

Now it is striking, especially by comparison with current transcendent-metaphysical readers, that Brook does *not* assume that the noumenal self could only be an experience-transcendent thing or substance of some sort. Brook's own interpretation of Kant's theory of mind is that the mind is a "global representation", and Brook is open to *that* turning out to be what the mind is in itself.<sup>93</sup> But that simultaneously marks both a measure of agreement and a measure of disagreement between Brook and me. Brook is right not to take us to enjoy consciousness of the noumenal self *qua* a noumenal *thing* or *substance*. But he and I disagree about what counts as the in-itself or the noumenal: For reasons I shall explore in the next chapter (sections 1.1 and 1.2), I hold that consciousness of the noumenal self or the self in itself would

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<sup>93</sup> Brook 1994, 248.

have to be consciousness of an experience-transcendent thing or substance were such consciousness possible at all, but that such consciousness is really only *per impossibile*.<sup>94</sup>

Interestingly, at one point Brook suggests that my bare consciousness of self is of “the kind that one gains by doing, not by sensing”.<sup>95</sup> That quasi-Fichtean suggestion nevertheless seems faithful to Kant. But rather than calling that consciousness of my *noumenal* self, which Kant never quite does, I would rather call it consciousness of myself *as a rational capacity*. A rational capacity sits at an interesting place in Kant’s transcendental ontology. On the one hand, it raises questions about how it is possible in a natural being. On the other hand, although Kant frequently entertains candidate answers to such questions, those answers never involve a straightforward ‘relocation’ of the capacity from the natural to the noumenal realm but rather, at most, the necessity of a *presupposition* that the capacity has some noumenal-substantial substrate. And the objective validity of such a presupposition either is dubious or else rests on peculiar grounds, whence Kant is clear that the presupposition does no real explanatory work but, on the contrary, merely permits us not to doubt that we have the capacity at all.<sup>96</sup>

But in any event, what is clear is that none of the passages in the first *Critique* in which consciousness of the self’s existence is at issue unequivocally assert a consciousness of an object that would have to exist, if at all, in the noumenal realm. On the contrary: Across all the relevant passages, Kant is consistently cagey about what exactly it is that I am saying exists when I say

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<sup>94</sup> I don’t mean to suggest that therefore my self-awareness must *omit* awareness of some further thing, the noumenal substrate, that I *really* am. But I mean to reserve the adjectives ‘noumenal’ and ‘in itself’ specifically for the experience-transcendent. Brook could be entirely correct that the self *really is just* a global representation, or that *all there is to the self* is a global representation, and that I enjoy awareness of that fact; but that would not make the self ‘in itself’ a global representation on my usage, since the self would not in that case be anything experience-transcendent. (The grounds for my usage of ‘noumenal’ and ‘in itself’ are elaborated in the next chapter (sections 1.1 and 1.2).)

<sup>95</sup> Brook 1994, 251.

<sup>96</sup> I have in mind here Kant’s way of approaching the question of the possibility of pure practical reason in the second *Critique*. I shall have more to say about that in chapter seven and about apparent limit-cases of objective validity in chapters six and seven.



that I am conscious “only that I am” (B157) or that my existence “is identical with” the proposition ‘I think’ (B422n). For instance, he goes out of his way to deny that in so saying I “determine my existence as that of a self-active *being*” (B157n; emphasis mine) just insofar as such beings would have to be given non-temporally (i.e., in the manner of noumena, *per impossibile*). Given that fact and the position that Kant stakes out in PN, that he intends to affirm a merely intellectual but nevertheless genuine awareness of what is experience-transcendent, either in the subjective or in the objective case, seems doubtful.

## 6. Consolidation and Conclusion

The strategy that I have purported to find in PN could be described, at a sufficiently high level of abstraction, as an effort to shift the burden of proof against a skeptic regarding our entitlement to take ourselves to be bearers of a genuinely epistemic capacity. A skeptic who doubts the epistemic credentials of our putative cognition or knowledge demands that Kant prove our entitlement to those credentials without presupposing it. But Kant does not think he needs to *prove* any such entitlement—not, in any case, from a dialectical starting point of having given it up. All the entitlement that we need to be able to consider ourselves genuine knowers and cognizers is provided for by our ordinary activity of knowing and cognizing, ‘from the inside’ of that activity, the whole transcendental apparatus of the Aesthetic and Analytic being no more than an immanent articulation of the form of that activity. Now the skeptic seems to get a foothold when they purport to take up a standpoint ‘outside’ that activity from which to measure it against an external norm: If my thinking can reach beyond the appearances, then from the point of view at which I have arrived in thought, I can cast my glance back on where I came from and wonder if they may not be *mere* appearances, less than the reality that my thought now

inhabits. Or if I can, in thought, inhabit the perspective of a being whose epistemic capacity would differ formally from my own, then I can wonder whether my own epistemic capacity, considered now from ‘outside’, is really epistemic at all. But Kant’s response to such wondering is to argue that, on the contrary, the skeptic must *themselves* first prove that the point of view from which they purport to find our epistemic capacity wanting is one that they can meaningfully think of—that they have raised an intelligible possibility. If they cannot, then we can rest content with our reflective knowledge of ourselves ‘from the inside’ as beings with a genuinely epistemic capacity that (hence) presents us with nothing less than reality.

But there are still many difficulties to be cleared up before the interpretation of Kant that I have been building up can be maximally plausible. To some extent the next chapter, and certainly the two after that, are largely concerned with showing that the strategy I have purported to find in Kant in this chapter is genuinely compatible with various other fundamental commitments of his philosophy: with some role, however minimal, for the concept ‘thing in itself’ in finite thinking and with a construal of the theoretical and practical Ideas as meaningful and permitting a legitimate use. Perhaps the most immediately pressing task of the next chapter is to answer this question: If the concept of the thing in itself, or of the noumenon, is genuinely *meaningless*, how can Kant possibly have so much to say about such things? Answering that question will provide us with a novel account of what belongs to the concept of the thing in itself and a novel understanding of its role in our cognitive economy. But in answering it, I shall also further develop the resources necessary to lay to rest the essential disconnection conception of our epistemic capacity, thus allowing us to grasp that capacity as essentially adequate rather than defective and thereby enabling genuine empirical realism.

## Chapter Five: The Thing in Itself as the Non-Referring Concept of an *Intelligibile*

In chapters three and four, I have made a case that Kant is committed to restrictions on the range in which intellectual presentations can be meaningful, namely only insofar as they relate to empirical things or possible experience as such (including its forms or constitutive conditions). For Kant, a concept that does not so relate is, I have argued, one that I cannot use, that lacks objective reality, whose object lacks real possibility, and so on. And such a concept is consequently *sinnlos* or *bedeutungslos*, senseless or meaningless. That restriction is required by and enables empirical realism because it is required to entitle us to epistemic anthropocentrism and thereby to rule out a conception of the human presentational capacity as parochial, hence no *epistemic* capacity, and of the empirical things that the capacity presents as mere projections. And earlier, in chapter two, I have argued that Kant's restrictions on legitimate use of the principle of sufficient reason entails the rejection of a conception of the human epistemic capacity as essentially disconnected from a required explanatory ground of empirical reality. That too is necessary for empirical realism to be possible because if our epistemic capacity were indeed subject to essential disconnection, then we would at best be in an epistemic position akin to problematic idealism and, by Kant's own detailed arguments, perhaps even stuck with dogmatic idealism. If those lines of reasoning persuade, then I have shown from Kant's own systematic commitments that his transcendental idealism can neither be a subjective idealism of space and time as brute, non-epistemic conditions of presentation nor require realism about things in themselves.

Yet even supposing that the reader is thus far convinced, or at least sufficiently intrigued to want to see how all this plays out, they will surely be wondering: *What about things in themselves?* Just the first *Critique* contains (or seems to contain) claims about the nature of

things in themselves in general, about their existence, about their being causes or grounds of empirical objects and perhaps also of empirical subjects, about their possible varieties. Yet usually when Kant makes those claims, ‘thing in itself’ seems for all the world to designate an entity that is experience-transcendent (though we will briefly discuss what looks like a key exception below). Precisely such claims lead McDowell, for one, to suppose that Kant *embraces* a realm of knowledge-transcendent facts or objects rather than abjuring it.<sup>1</sup> They also give ample grist to the mill of transcendent-metaphysically inclined interpreters like Ameriks, Langton, and Allais. And they may look impossible to reconcile with Phenomena and Noumena’s doctrine of the *Bedeutungslosigkeit* of experience-transcendent concepts, even granting the minimal role I have already allowed for ‘noumenon’ in the negative understanding.

That problem is only heightened when we note that ‘thing in itself’ is not the only concept in Kant’s repertoire that purports to designate an experience-transcendent object. Each of the three theoretical Ideas in the Dialectic of the first *Critique* is at first glance the presentation of what, were it really possible, would necessarily lie beyond possible experience. And the same seems to be true of the practical Ideas in the second *Critique*. So for it really to be plausible that Kant accepted the restrictions on meaningfulness that I have suggested, I must account for Kant’s various claims in each of those domains within the limits of his theory of meaning.

This and the next two chapters provide that account. The present chapter addresses things in themselves as such, the next the theoretical Ideas, and the one thereafter the practical Ideas. The key to the argument of this chapter is an extension of the strategy first brought into play with respect to the concept ‘noumenon’ in the negative understanding from the previous chapter. For

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<sup>1</sup> Indeed, I have borrowed the language of a realm of fact that transcends our knowledge from McDowell (2009f, 42n30), though the supposition that Kant embraces such a realm appears in his earlier 1996 (41-2). McDowell ultimately moderates that supposition quite a bit, restricting Kant’s error in this connection to the latter’s claim that forms of intuition other than space and time are logically possible (McDowell 2009c, 75-9).

the sake of elegance, I shall now set aside the unwieldy ‘noumenon in the negative understanding’ and allow myself to speak more concisely of the negative *use* or *meaning* of ‘noumenon’ and of negative uses and meanings more generally.

I shall argue that the only legitimate meaning or use of the concept ‘thing in itself’, as with the concept ‘noumenon’ as described in Phenomena and Noumena, is negative. In fact, I take ‘noumenon’ and ‘thing in itself’ to be synonymous expressions (I shall defend that identification in section 1.3 below). But Kant ultimately loads more into the intension of ‘thing in itself/noumenon’ than one could glean solely from the discussion of the negative meaning of ‘noumenon’ in Phenomena and Noumena *even while he retains a merely negative meaning or use for that concept*. That is, that intension is fixed not by its relating to any thing that could be given intuitively, as in the ordinary case of empirical thinking, but by its *differentiation* from the concept ‘empirical thing’ according to determinate intellectual motivations producing a stable conceptual result. But the intellectual motivations turn out to be richer than the Phenomena and Noumena chapter leads us to suppose.

For first, that a noumenon even only negatively defined would be what is *not* sensibly given entails that insofar as we try to think an *object* for that concept—something that, of course, we cannot successfully do but can either make a *pretense* of doing or else *mistake* ourselves for doing, both possibly in accordance with determinate rules—we strip away every determination belonging to the concept ‘empirical thing’ that depends on the thing’s presentability through the forms of sensibility. The result is a surprisingly rich concept *as of* (i.e., merely putatively of) an *intelligibile*—an object that would be given merely to intellect were it really possible at all. And second, we are motivated to think through all that rich determinacy by a subjective but determinate and necessary *need of reason* not just for explanatory *sufficiency* but indeed

explanatory *completeness*—explanation up to the unconditioned—where such completeness could only be satisfied by *intelligibilia* were they only really possible. Yet that the need is on the one hand *of reason*, hence common to finite knowers just in virtue of our epistemic capacity, but on the other hand *subjective* is what differentiates it from the sort of objective explanatory requirement that, I argued in chapters one and two, would lead to the essential disconnection conception of our epistemic capacity.

Indeed, because ‘thing in itself’ has a merely negative meaning, its richly determinate intension notwithstanding,<sup>2</sup> the only legitimate use of that concept is to mark what sort of explanatory demands are in fact not legitimate at all and hence to mark the limits of our knowledge and cognition—not in a way that implies a really possible, even ontologically populous *outside* to that knowledge and cognition but merely so as to indicate where and why we are tempted by reason to postulate precisely such an outside and hence to descend into confusion. On the account offered herein, to say that we cannot know or cognize things in themselves is thus not to say that there are things in themselves and that we cannot know or cognize them but that the concept ‘thing in itself’ refers to no proper object of *any* epistemic capacity of which we can meaningfully think. We will see in chapters six and seven that the theoretical and practical Ideas do not have merely negative meanings and uses but positive though immanent ones as well, so the strategy of this chapter is distinctive. Yet in the end, it will not be out of place to

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<sup>2</sup> Despite the case I made in the previous chapter, that may still immediately seem like a paradox. The best way, I think, to keep that impression at bay is to imagine meaningless concepts as like the symbols used for constants and variables in logic. Symbols *mean nothing intrinsically*. Yet I can stipulate that there is a set of symbols that stand in various, perhaps quite elaborate logical relations to one another such that I can end up with a network of inferential connections among terms that have stable inferential locations within the network. Does that all by itself *confer meaning* on the symbols? Clearly not—we never established how even one of them referred to any *object* beyond itself. Yet it is clear that we have enough for manipulations of the symbols to be rule-governed and for each symbol to have its own determinate logical or inferential behaviour. That, I submit, is just how we should think about the marks we shall soon discover in the concept ‘thing in itself’ and the *seeming* judgments that they license, i.e., according to the rules of the conceptual game.

think of the concept ‘thing in itself’ as *generic* at least with respect to the theoretical Ideas proper.

The bare thought that the concept ‘thing in itself’ refers to no proper object of knowledge or cognition at all may sound pretty much Allisonian. But a corollary of my approach to defending that thought is that things in themselves cannot merely be empirical things now regarded from a point of view that abstracts from their knowability, as Allison’s methodological approach to the empirical thing/thing in itself distinction requires.<sup>3</sup> The concept ‘thing in itself’ has its source in the intellectual stem of presentation, arising in response to distinctively intellectual motivations to think it. And that fixes ‘thing in itself’ as the concept of a specifically intellectual object: an *intelligibile*. So part of the interpretive task of this chapter is to show that Kant’s dominant use of ‘thing in itself’ is not just as the concept of a vague and not specifically intellectual ‘most real thing’. And hence I must show that commentators who take things in themselves to fall into intellectual and sensible varieties on a conceptual par with one another, notably Allison, are mistaken. But a major advantage of my understanding of the thing in itself as *intelligibile* is a resolution—and, I believe, *the* resolution—of the centuries-old ‘neglected alternative’ objection to Kant’s claims that things in themselves are specifically *not* spatio-temporal.

The structure of this chapter is basically two-part. First, I make the case that the concept ‘thing in itself’ really is the concept of a merely intellectual object and that all the claims Kant makes about it can be derived through negation from the concept ‘empirical thing’ in accordance with a determinate explanatory need of reason. For that case, I rely primarily on two key discussions in the first *Critique*, the Amphiboly and the opening sections of the Dialectic. I also

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<sup>3</sup> Allison 2004, 16ff.

address the objection that ‘thing in itself’ can mean, indifferently, ‘*sensibile*’ or ‘*intelligibile*’ by arguing that Kant was open to finding the empiricisms of Locke and Hume to be confused and inconsistent. I conclude this first part with my resolution of the ‘neglected alternative’ objection.

Second, I show the power of my interpretation of the concept ‘thing in itself’ by using it to explain Kant’s occasional claims that things in themselves *cause* or *ground* appearances, recently emphasized by Rae Langton and Lucy Allais, among others. On my account, we not only *can* but *must* think the thing in itself as ground or condition of empirical things because of reason’s subjective need, which eventuates out of reason’s nature as a power of explanation. But that does not make the thing in itself any more than an *ens rationis*<sup>4</sup> (i.e., the merely nominal or putative object of what is in fact “a concept without an object” (A290/B347)), albeit one we cannot think away—any more than we can think away optical illusions through our awareness that they are illusions.<sup>5</sup> In the course of giving that account, I clarify the sense in which I take the concept ‘thing in itself’ to be generic with respect to the Ideas though not strictly an idea in its own right. I then close with a brief discussion of Kant on transcendental freedom in the resolution to the third Antinomy. The resolution to the third Antinomy is a *locus classicus* for readings of the Critical philosophy that find it to include a commitment to the existence of an experience-transcendent realm of noumenal beings. But I argue that the resolution remains entirely on the terrain of merely logical possibility and hence that it poses no problems in principle for my developing account. The result of this chapter is twofold: First, we see how to

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<sup>4</sup> As, indeed, Kant calls it several times in the *Opus postumum* (e.g., at 22:32 and 22:37). But I do not want to rest too much interpretive weight on that late, fragmentary work, and I have not given the *Opus postumum* a major place in my argument.

<sup>5</sup> There is an affinity between the view of things in themselves I shall propose here and the fictionalist view, exemplified by Eva Schaper in her 1966. Our views differ at least in two key respects: First, for Schaper our thinking the thought ‘thing in itself’ is not *necessary* but merely *useful*, which obviously I am at odds with. Second, for her the thought of the thing in itself amounts to an act of *hypothesizing*, viz. about a reality more mind-independent than that ‘reality’ that comprises empirical things. Since, on my view, the concept ‘thing in itself’ is merely a negative or boundary concept that refers to no object, it cannot amount to a hypothesis about anything.



reconcile Kant's talk of things in themselves with his conceptual-semantic theory without resorting to an accusation of inconsistency, and second, we go most of the remaining way to laying to rest the conception of the human epistemic capacity as essentially disconnected.

Before proceeding, I note that I have not been assiduous about always speaking of 'the concept "thing in itself"' rather than (more straightforwardly but less correctly) simply of things in themselves. Let the reader not interpret that as a concession of things in themselves' real possibility, let alone of their existence.

## 1. The Thing in Itself as Merely Intellectual Object

### 1.1. The Thing in Itself in Relation to the Pure Understanding: The Amphiboly

The Amphiboly is a natural place to turn for a deeper understanding of Kant's conception of things in themselves for two reasons. First, as I mentioned above, it is Kant's single most sustained discussion of them. It is full of claims about the properties of things in themselves, or rather the properties they *would* have *were* they really possible, and about our means of presenting things in themselves, or rather the means by which we *would* present them *could* we do so through objectively real concepts. Second, things in themselves figure in the Amphiboly as elements of a diagnostic engagement with Kant's predecessors. Certain characteristic errors of early modern philosophy,<sup>6</sup> most obviously but not exclusively rationalism (see section 1.3 below), rest on confusions involving things in themselves, and Kant highlights the differences between his approach and that of his predecessors by reference to how they each take knowledge

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<sup>6</sup> There is reason to think that Kant takes or ought to take the relevance of the Amphiboly to be historically farther reaching than just the early modern period. For the possibility of amphibolous thinking, the sort of error that the Amphiboly is concerned to diagnose, is grounded in a failure properly to grasp that our epistemic capacity is two-stemmed. And as Kant presents the history of philosophy, pretty much everyone he picks out is a committed one-stem theorist (see especially *The History of Pure Reason* in the first *Critique*, A852-6/B880-4, where ancient figures like Plato, Aristotle, and Epicurus are made to take up arms in the 'Which stem?' debate).

or cognition to relate to things in themselves. So we can learn a lot about how Kant conceives of things in themselves by attending to certain details of the Amphiboly's argument.

The official purpose of the Amphiboly is to clear up a confusion about our presentations, namely in what stem of presentation they are situated (A261/B317) (their 'transcendental location' (A268/B324)) or, in a less subjective register, whether they are presentations of sensible or of merely intellectual objects (A262/B318). A presentation may seem to be intellectual (that is, be situated in the intellectual stem) that is really sensible (situated in sensibility), or vice versa; or several presentations may seem to be interrelated in a way that presupposes that they belong to some given stem of presentation, or all to the same one, when really they do not. To be swayed by that misleading semblance is to be gripped by an amphiboly. And that activity whereby we sort out our presentations, and their putative objects, and free ourselves from the amphiboly is 'transcendental deliberation' (A261/B317). A secondary purpose of the Amphiboly is to introduce what Kant calls "concepts of reflection" (A260/B316) or "comparison concepts" (A262/B318) (hereafter 'concepts of comparison'): certain concepts, different from categories but of some sort of foundational importance in their own right, that we use to compare or relate objects or presentations to one another. Those concepts come in sets of two and are the following: sameness (or identity) and difference, agreement and opposition, intrinsic and extrinsic, matter and form. Why Kant decides to introduce the concepts of comparison just here is not completely clear,<sup>7</sup> but that need not detain us. What matters for us is just that he clarifies the confusions of amphibolous thinking through contrasts of legitimate and illegitimate uses of concepts of comparison that result from such thinking.

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<sup>7</sup> Cf. Brook 2010.

I'll use as an ongoing reference point the concepts of comparison 'sameness' and 'difference'. In merely logical deliberation (or reflection),<sup>8</sup> concepts are compared in respect of their 'logical form'. To differentiate or identify them, one looks to their respective intensions, that is, the marks they contain. If the intensions differ, then the concepts are distinct, but if they do not, then the concepts are identical. Suppose English had, in addition to the expression 'drop of water', another expression, 'blargh', whose use so far coincided with that of 'drop of water'. If, through reflection on the concepts expressed by each expression, we discovered that those concepts have identical intensions, we would justifiably conclude that they are the same concept, differing expressions notwithstanding. Distinct from logical deliberation is an activity that Kant calls "objective comparison" but which, for consistency of usage, I'll call objective deliberation (A262/B318-9).<sup>9</sup> Objective deliberation would be the comparison not of *concepts* but of *things*,<sup>10</sup> yet still according to the concepts of comparison—e.g., (a somewhat fictitious case) when I assess whether what seem to be two objects are really the very *same* object or rather two *different* objects.

But distinct from both of those sorts of deliberation is *transcendental* deliberation, which is not yet a comparison of anything but rather a basis of possibility of properly conducted

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<sup>8</sup> As far as I can see, Kant uses the two words Pluhar translates as 'deliberation' and 'reflection', '*Überlegung*' and '*Reflexion*', more or less synonymously in the Amphiboly.

<sup>9</sup> It is easy to miss that Kant distinguishes three kinds of deliberation (logical, objective, transcendental), not merely two.

<sup>10</sup> The Amphiboly is another place where Kant seems to slide between talk of 'things' or 'objects' and talk of 'presentations'. But that does not confirm a Guyerian reading on which empirical things, as 'presentations', are for Kant 'merely subjective items' or 'mental items' but in fact counts against it. For Kant is discussing how the proper use of concepts of comparison differs with respect to empirical things *and with respect to things in themselves*, and he makes the slide between 'object' and 'presentation' in reference to both; yet things in themselves are obviously not themselves presentations in Guyer's 'merely subjective item' sense. Kant's point rather seems to be to emphasize that for him, the concept of an object is always the concept of an object *of some capacity for or stem of presentation or other*, "always the correlate of a particular manner or 'faculty' of knowing" (Allison 1978, 44). Kant's usage here lends support to the thought, at least as old as Frege (Frege 1960, 37n1), that Kant sometimes deliberately uses *Vorstellung* in its accusative meaning (i.e., to designate a 'presented', a *Vorgestellt* or object of presentation, rather than a 'presenting' or 'presenter').

objective deliberation. Kant's idea is that for each set of concepts of comparison, how they are to be used in an act of objective deliberation depends on the stem of presentation through which we take the object(s) to be given. Thus the criteria of sameness or difference in reference to *sensibly given objects* are not those in reference to *intellectually given objects*, supposing the latter sort of object is possible at all. So before we set about comparing objects in objective deliberation according to the concepts of comparison, we must first of all situate the objects to be compared in the appropriate stem of presentation. (A262/B318)

Now Kant could have distinguished the use of concepts of comparison proper to sensibly given objects from the use proper to intellectually given objects in the following way: He could have explained the criteria by which empirical things are assessed with respect to their sameness or difference, their being in agreement or opposed, etc., and then said that with respect to putative objects of merely intellectual givenness, we cannot identify any such criteria because such objects are not really possible: We do not really understand what it would be to be given them at all; their concept lacks objective reality and hence is meaningless. Transcendental deliberation would then consist in situating the putative object in the sensible stem of presentation or *not* situating it *at all*.

But that is not what Kant does. The Amphiboly is full of hypothetically voiced claims of the form, 'If empirical things (i.e., sensibly given objects) were intellectually given objects, then the use of concepts of comparison appropriate to them would be like such and such'. For instance, Kant is clear that empirical things' sameness or difference rests at least in part on a specifically sensible criterion: sameness or difference of location in space at a given time. Thus, e.g., two drops of water, though both falling under the concept 'drop of water', are nevertheless distinct things because at present, one is over here and another over there (A263-4/B319). By

contrast, he is happy to say that if we were considering intellectually given objects, the only criterion of sameness or difference would be agreement or disagreement of the *concepts* of those objects, whence Leibniz's principle of the identity of indiscernibles, i.e., of objects falling under identical concepts (A264/B319-20). So Kant must take himself to be working with a determinate concept of an intelligibly given object, an *intelligibile*, and hence a determinate conception of what it would be to situate an object in the intellectual stem of presentation and to present merely intellectually.

Moreover, in the Amphiboly, Kant speaks rather indifferently of things in themselves, noumena, objects of pure understanding, and (merely) intelligible objects. For instance, he claims of Leibniz that he took empirical things "to be things in themselves, and hence to be *intelligibilia*, i.e., objects of pure understanding" (A264/B319-20) and not long thereafter calls a reality "presented only by pure understanding" "*realitas noumenon*" (A264/B320). Throughout the Amphiboly, the governing distinction is always between what is true of things if they are sensibly given versus what would be true of them if they were objects of pure understanding and thus merely intellectually given, and in articulating the latter side of the opposition, Kant variously speaks of "noumena" (A266/B321, A269/B325, A276/B332), "things as they are in themselves" (A267/B323), the/a "thing in itself" (A270/B326 (emphasis removed), A271/B327, A273/B329), "things in themselves" (A271/B327, A274/B330, A276/B332 (emphasis removed)), "intelligible substances" (A276/B332), "the intelligible" (A279-80/B335-6), and so on. The Amphiboly, at least, strongly suggests that to have the determinate grip that we do on the concept of an intelligibly given object is to have such a grip on the concept 'thing in itself' or 'noumenon'. Hence the Amphiboly is strong evidence that Kant takes things in themselves and

noumena to be *intelligibilia* as there described and hence that he takes us to have a *determinate and stable* concept of things in themselves.

Now if we really have a stable and determinate concept of a kind of object other than the sensibly given kind, we can perhaps see why amphibolous thinking is not a merely random error in the history of philosophy but characteristic, in Kant's view, of large swaths of that history and in need of a detailed diagnosis and exposure. But whence that determinate and stable concept? After all, as I argued in the previous chapter, a concept that lacks a really possible object is meaningless, and part of Kant's thought there is that without a really possible object, what we think into a concept is arbitrary and a matter of the speculator's caprice. If the concept 'thing in itself' is stable and determinate enough for Kant to equate things in themselves with a specific conception of *intelligibilia*, mustn't Kant countenance the possible givenness to us of its object and hence the objective reality and meaningfulness of the concept by his own lights?

The Amphiboly itself can give us part of an answer, though only the first part of two.<sup>11</sup> That first part consists in two observations. First, Kant's conception in the Amphiboly of what a merely intellectually given object would be can be derived through partial negation from the concept of an empirical thing in a two-step procedure: 1) Abstract from the concept 'empirical thing' all marks belonging thereto in virtue of such things being sensibly given, thereby yielding the concept 'thing as such [*überhaupt*]'; 2) treat the resulting abstracted concept as the concept of a distinctive class of things in its own right, non-sensibly given things in themselves. Second, once we arrive at the concept 'thing in itself' in that way, our only way to make sense of what remains is through hypostatization of the bare idea of intellectual presentation, or thinking, and hence for a thing in itself to be an *intelligibile* is for it to be, as it were, a *concept-like object*.

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<sup>11</sup> The second comes in section 1.2 below.

That the concept ‘thing in itself’ stands in some kind of negative relation to the concept ‘empirical thing’ is already evident in Kant’s procedure in dealing with each of the sets of concepts of comparison (which he goes through no less than three times per set). Empirically given things can differ *not only* in their respective concepts<sup>12</sup> *but also* in their respective spatial locations at a given time, whereas intelligibly given objects can differ *only* in their respective concepts. Or, to turn to another set of concepts of comparison, ‘agreement’ and ‘opposition’, predicates of empirical things can be opposed *not only* logically (an animal cannot be both ‘four-legged’ and ‘not-four-legged’) *but also* really (as when two forces acting in opposite directions are brought to bear on the same object), whereas predicates of merely intelligibly given objects can be opposed *only* logically (A264-5/B320-1).

But we get a better sense of exactly how the moment of negation in the genesis of the concept ‘thing in itself’ works from the following passage:

The principle of the indistinguishable [i.e., the principle of the identity of indiscernibles] is in fact based on the presupposition that if a certain distinction is not found in the concept of a thing as such [*überhaupt*], then it is also not to be found in the things themselves; and that consequently all things that are not already distinguished from one another (in quality or in quantity) in their concepts are completely the same (*numero eadem*). *Yet in the mere concept of some thing or other one has already abstracted from some necessary conditions of an intuition*; and hence, through an odd hastiness, what one is abstracting from is taken for something that is not to be found at all, and nothing is granted to the thing except what its concept contains. (A281/B337-8; emphasis mine)

There we see Kant describing the very procedure I described above for yielding the concept ‘thing in itself’ as something merely intellectual. The essential first step of that procedure is an *abstraction*, a partial negation: the concept ‘thing as such’ is the concept ‘empirical thing’

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<sup>12</sup> I have in mind a case as mundane as what seem to be two things really being two because, say, one is an elephant and the other is a golf club.

stripped of any marks dependent on the thing's being possibly given in sensibility.<sup>13</sup> We then arrive at the concept of a merely intellectual thing by, "through an odd hastiness", taking the abstracted concept to designate a new class of things rather than merely the same old empirical things at a certain level of abstraction.

That brings us to my second observation: I claimed above that the concept 'thing in itself' construed as equivalent to '*intelligibile*' is effectively the concept of a concept-like object. Because we arrive at the concept 'thing in itself' through a mere abstraction from givenness in sensibility and not on the basis of any new discovery about what it would be for an object to be given directly to or in the intellect, we make possible no positive account of any contributions to the givenness of an object that the intellect would make were it intuitive. So the Leibnizian rationalist, whose well worked-out theory of the thing in itself we should probably regard as expressing a maximally realized natural tendency of reason rather than a unique and isolated confusion, has no resources with which to articulate the nature of the *intelligibile* save what we are already familiar with from the intellect's ordinary operations as a power of thinking. We should not be surprised, therefore, that for things in themselves, conceptually indiscernible objects would be identical. After all, *concepts* that have identical intensions are in fact the same concept, and as for concepts, so for things in themselves.

Kant's discussions of each of the other sets of concepts of comparison reveal the concept-likeness of things in themselves, each time in a new respect: (1) Real opposition could not occur between things in themselves because concepts can only be logically opposed. (2) Things in

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<sup>13</sup> As Kant says of Leibniz (whose procedure the quotation from A281/B337-8 describes) earlier in the *Amphiboly*, "The conditions of sensible intuition, which carry with them their own distinctions, [Leibniz] did not regard as original." Consequently, "He compared all things with one another merely by concepts, and naturally found among them no differences other than those by which the understanding distinguishes its pure concepts from one another." (A270/B326)



themselves must have non-relational (i.e., *intrinsic*) as well as relational (i.e., *extrinsic*) properties because concepts' identity rests (at least for Kant) on the marks they contain and not (or not merely) on their relations to other concepts (A265-6, 274-5, 282-5/B321-2, 330-1, 338-41). (3) Things in themselves as *matter* cannot be ontologically posterior to a *form* by which they would be made possible because the mereology of concepts is part-to-whole (i.e., concepts as wholes are nothing but functions of the marks or higher concepts they contain and are nothing without them) so that any 'form' that prevails among a plurality of concepts must presuppose and not make possible those concepts as contentful mark-bearers (A266-8, 275-6, 285-6/B322-4, 331-2, 341-2).<sup>14</sup>

That the thing in itself should turn out to be structurally homologous to concepts is instructive. It further supports my suggestion that the concept 'thing in itself' has its origin in a transition between two different but closely related concepts: (a) the concept of an object of discursive human knowledge or cognition insofar as *we abstract from* any contribution sensibility makes to the possibility of our knowledge or cognition of it (but not, as Allison holds, from *all* 'epistemic conditions' and hence from the categories); (b) the concept of an object of discursive human knowledge or cognition insofar as the possibility of our knowledge or cognition of it *is independent of* any contribution from sensibility.

I said above that the Amphiboly gives us *part* of an answer to the question: Whence a concept of the thing in itself that is not entirely arbitrary but rather *determinate* and *stable* enough to sustain hypothetical judgments about the nature of such a thing (supposing such a thing were really possible)? We can now see that all the rich determinacy that Kant loads into the

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<sup>14</sup> Limitations on the scope of my argument preclude my going into more interpretive detail on those points, but I do not believe anything in the Amphiboly's three treatments of each pair of concepts of comparison falsifies my claim that the thing in itself as it is presented in the Amphiboly is concept-like in the way I have indicated.

concept ‘thing in itself’ arises out of a determinate act of abstraction from and thus a partial negation of the concept ‘empirical thing’, by which we arrive at the concept of a thing in itself not just as a vague ‘most real thing’ but specifically as an *intelligibile*. And a determinate concept can be the basis of possible *analytic judgments*—or, perhaps better, of a possible *rule-governed pretense* of making analytic judgments or of a possible *meaningless but rule-governed intellectual activity mistaken for one of making analytic judgments*.<sup>15</sup>

But that is only part of an answer because the mere act of concocting a concept remains in itself merely arbitrary even if, once stipulated, it admits of a determinate analysis. The other part we still need is an explanation of why the thinking of the concept ‘thing in itself’ is in fact not arbitrary but either rationally required or at least rationally motivated. For otherwise it is hard to see why it should be so central to Kant’s diagnosis of fundamental errors of early modern philosophy or, indeed, why Kant should retain a place for mentions of things in themselves in his own corrected view. Phenomena and Noumena gave us a limited picture of the rational motivation—too limited, in particular, to fully explain why we would ever find necessary to say

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<sup>15</sup> Are the *apparent* analytic judgments that can occur in a pretense of thinking and in thinking that is meaningless but mistaken for objectively valid *really judgments*? The question is tricky, because on the one hand, such apparent judgments lack reference (*Beziehung*) to the really possible, but on the other hand, they so strongly *resemble* judgments that a denial that they really are judgments can look pretty implausible on its face. And Kant himself is evidently sensitive to its trickiness. His own nervousness about whether the possibility of analytic judgments does or does not require the real possibility of their objects emerges at a few key moments in the first *Critique*. For instance, in *On the Supreme Principle of All Analytic Judgments*, Kant writes that “*if a judgment is analytic*, whether it be negative or affirmative, then its truth must always be cognizable sufficiently by reference to the principle of contradiction” (A151/B190). So far, nothing surprising—analytic judgments can be falsified by a demonstration that they violate the principle of non-contradiction, and for that, we need only consider the concepts occurring in them and seemingly not any extra-judgmental objects they may or may not refer to. But then Kant goes on: “For denying the reverse of what already lies, and is thought, as concept *in the cognition of the object* will always have to be correct; *but the concept itself will necessarily have to be affirmed of the object, because the opposite of the concept would contradict the object*” (A151/B190-1; emphasis mine). He thereby invokes the relation of the concepts in an analytic judgment to their extra-judgmental objects in a way that is peculiar if object-relatedness simply does not bear on the possibility of analytic judgments. That sort of remark leads Robert Hanna to introduce on Kant’s behalf a distinction between analytic judgments proper, as essentially meaningful and hence object-related (objectively valid), and “miserable tautologies”: “propositions that are analytic by their form alone yet lack objective validity, hence are truth valueless” (Hanna 2001, 234). Taking up Hanna’s distinction, rule-governed analyses of concepts of not-really-possible objects would be miserable tautologies.

that things in themselves *exist*. But we can discover what further we need in the opening sections of the Dialectic and its account of that distinctive power of the intellect that Kant calls ‘reason’.

## 1.2. The Thing in Itself in Relation to Reason: The Opening of the Transcendental Dialectic

Preliminary to our consideration of the opening sections of the Dialectic, consider the following passage from the B Preface:

[...] what necessarily impels us to go beyond the boundary of experience and of all appearances is the *unconditioned* that reason demands in things in themselves; reason—necessarily and quite rightfully—demands this unconditioned for everything conditioned, thus demanding that the series of conditions be completed by means of that unconditioned. (Bxx)

I shall shortly discuss what Kant means by ‘unconditioned’. But already we can see claims that reason *demand*s the unconditioned and that the unconditioned, whatever it is, would have to lie at least in things in themselves wherever else it might lie (as we shall soon see, nowhere else). Now the Amphiboly does not, by itself, allow us to see why things in themselves should be thought as bearers of the unconditioned that reason demands. But that slack is taken up by Kant’s examination of reason in the opening of the Dialectic, which I now exhibit.

What is reason, construed not as the intellectual stem of presentation as a whole but as a specific power of that stem? Regarded as a merely logical power (i.e., one that pertains merely to the activity of thinking), Kant calls it “the power of making mediate inferences” (A299/B355). It is the power that allows us to reason syllogistically or from principles, or to order the knowledge<sup>16</sup> already in our possession into a syllogistically structured inferential system (A299-

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<sup>16</sup> Here is another place where trying to be as careful about the knowledge/cognition distinction as recent discussions would seem to require would mandate an extremely artificial way of speaking. To avoid excessive dialectical contortion, I mostly follow Kant’s own usage, which permits sliding between ‘knowledge’ and ‘judgment’, even

300/B356-7). At the same time, reason is not just a logical power but also has an experience-immanent yet real use (expounded in the Appendix to the Transcendental Dialectic): It permits us to judge, albeit somewhat indeterminately, in advance of experience that the objects of that experience will themselves be systematically organized in a way that is amenable to our development of a system of knowledge about them.<sup>17</sup>

Reason's logical and real uses are the subjective and objective sides, respectively, of reason as our power of *explanation*: our power to grasp how our knowledge and its objects each fit together into respective wholes governed by relations of *conditioned* to *condition*, i.e., of explained to explainer (A307/B364). If all we had was understanding, the power discretely to judge and form at best immediate, that is, trivial inferences (e.g., 'Bob and John are humans, therefore Bob is a human'), our knowledge could only amount to a heap of disparate facts—only ever knowledge *that* such and such is the case. But thanks to reason, we can come to know that at least sometimes, our judgments belong to a larger system. And thereby we can at least aspire to enjoy knowledge *why* such and such is the case, at least to the extent that whatever facts constitute the 'why' lie within reach.

Yet that last qualification on the extent to which we can know why is quite significant. For Kant, a key difference between understanding and reason is that reason pushes beyond what is available in any finite quantity of experience in a way that understanding does not (A308/B355). When I form a judgment on the basis of a perceptual episode, the understanding's act is completed. That is not to say that the perceptual episode cannot be rich enough to sustain the possibility of other judgments on its basis, only that the judgment is in itself a complete act,

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though I accept Watkins and Willaschek's point that on the official definition of 'knowledge', the latter is assent *to* a judgment.

<sup>17</sup> Whether that judgment has genuinely objective purport or is a merely subjective 'way we must think' is controversial; I shall argue for the former in the next chapter (section 1.2).

not lacking anything, already a judgment in its own right. That can be true even if the possibility of a single judgment presupposes the possibility or even actuality of other judgments. But explaining is not like that. When I offer an explanation, that explanation is only as good as the premises from which it begins, and for those premises, too, one can intelligibly ask for an explanation. But if the premises need explaining, too, then the explanation that terminated in them looks like it was no explanation after all, and the act of reason, ‘to explain’, remains uncompleted. There is a familiar feeling we can sometimes work ourselves into that, when we are asked for an explanation of some fact, we have not really explained *anything* until we have explained *everything*—every premise that stands inferentially between the fact to be explained and a premise that is itself not in need of explanation at all. (The child endlessly asking ‘Why?’ until we are brought up short is perhaps the *Ur*-case of that feeling.) The feeling is expressive of reason’s “drive” (WDO 8:139) beyond the proximately available material for explanation, namely a finite body of experience, to what would explain *completely* and thus permit explanation really to take place at all: the *unconditioned*.

Of course, from a common-sense point of view, that is a little misleading. Explanation usually bottoms out not in premises that are explanatorily unconditioned but in premises that are secure on some other basis. Most obviously, we ordinarily take ourselves to have a capacity for perception, and if something that needs explaining can be put into a syllogistic chain whose highest premise is a perceptual judgment that we can all make for ourselves and find to be true, then explanation can satisfactorily stop there. But that is only insofar as our aim is not to explain for its own sake but merely to secure some putative knowledge by subordinating it syllogistically to some other knowledge that we take to be already secured. The already-secured knowledge can do what we need it to in that case by being mere knowledge-*that*: ‘I know such and such because

I see *that* such and such'. But we remain aware of a distinction between knowledge-*that* and knowledge-*why* ('I know such and such because I know *why* such and such must be so') and hence that if we wanted to, we could continue to ask, 'Why?' To that extent the explaining is incomplete. And that is why Kant says of reason that it seeks not just the condition for every conditioned (the proximate explainer for everything that needs explaining) but the *unconditioned* (A307/B364): the place where all need of explanation would stop for good and where reason's task would finally be complete.

There are, however, grounds for thinking that reason's task is in principle *uncompleteable* so long as our knowledge is restricted to the empirical. To see that, consider an empirical thing, understood along broadly Kantian lines as a thing that can be given to knowers like us in virtue of our sensibility but can be *understood* and *explained* by knowers like us in virtue of our intellect. Even if one is committed on Kant's behalf, as I am, to the essential unity of our epistemic capacity and hence to the thought that all sensible givenness is essentially informed by the intellect,<sup>18</sup> nevertheless that distinction of 'in virtue of's' in the previous sentence is inescapable given Kant's two-stem thesis about our epistemic capacity. What that means, however, is that it is not essential to the givenness of some empirical thing that it be *actually understood* or *actually explained*. The thing's givenness, its availability to our awareness such that we can judge *that* there is such and such a thing, is secured apart from our having in hand an explanation of *why* there is such and such a thing—in the most basic case, secured by our perceiving that a region of space is occupied over a stretch of time by the thing in question. That

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<sup>18</sup> That amounts to a commitment to *conceptualism*, the view that Kant does not really take the intuitions possibly given to a rational knower to be, at any temporally or logically isolable 'stage' of their existence, specifically non-conceptual presentations. But even a non-conceptualist reader can accept that Kant disallows so-called 'rogue intuitions', i.e., intuitions that *could never* be conceptualized, and that is enough to accept my claim that all empirical things, as sensibly given, are essentially possibly understood and explained.

the intellect essentially informs sensibility means that what is given through sensibility is essentially *understandable* and *explainable*.<sup>19</sup> But that sensibility, not intellect, is the stem of presentation through which we can be given things at all means that what is given is so prior to achievement of complete understanding and explanation.

Not only that, but the distinctive character of space and time as formal intuitions, not concepts, entails that complete explanation of any given empirical thing is indefinitely postponed. For instance, consider the explanatory relation of causality. Though in itself a concept, the category of causality in its bearing on empirical things is essentially temporal: Exercises or expressions of causality are always temporally prior to their effects (A202-4/B247-9).<sup>20</sup> So causal explanation is always a moving backwards through time. Yet as we know from the Antinomies, the extent of time (also space) is indefinite, and the attempt to think a ‘first moment’ or ‘earliest bound’ in time generates contradictions, which amounts to a *reductio* of the attempt (see the first Antinomy and its resolution at A517-23/B545-51). Consequently, causal explanations as essentially temporal are likewise indefinite. And therefore the givenness of the empirical thing to sensibility is necessarily its givenness not only apart from the actuality of its complete explanation but even apart from the possibility of an anticipatably finite complete explanation.

Evidently there is a kind of essential challenge to the possibility of complete explanation posed by the mere nature of empirical things as such—or, more specifically, by their spatio-temporality, as that which grounds the requirement of indefinite postponement of the possibility

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<sup>19</sup> I use ‘explainable’ and ‘explainability’ rather than the more idiomatic ‘explicable’ and ‘explicability’ because of the various technical meanings that have been conferred on the latter (and relatedly on ‘explication’).

<sup>20</sup> That is a consequence of the fact that insofar as empirical things are under consideration, what is relevant is the category of causality *schematized to time* and not in abstraction therefrom (A144/B183). For present purposes we may set aside other allegedly possible uses of the category of causality apart from that schematization.

of explanatory completeness. That allows us to understand two other features of this region of Kant's thinking. First, insofar as reason is a power, on the one hand, that is necessarily engaged in experience<sup>21</sup> and yet, on the other hand, the completion of whose characteristic exercise, explanation, is necessarily indefinitely postponed with respect to empirical things, we can make sense of Kant's characterization of reason in terms of agential or will-like language and particularly as having or grounding a *need* (A309/B365). Reason as a power is simply activated as soon as there is occasion for its exercise; empirical things are given as essentially *explainable* but also, for that very reason, *in need of explaining*. Yet it cannot ever reach its constitutive goal, not merely proximate but complete explanation. Second, because the ground of reason's inability completely to achieve its essential aim—indeed, its inability to complete the act for which it is the power—is the nature of the empirical as such as sensibly conditioned, that seems to suggest that our philosophical options are either to deny ourselves knowledge insofar as we are confined to the empirical or to reach for completeness by overstepping the bounds of the empirical. Hence we can make some sense of Kant's idea that reason in some way impels us both to explanation generally and, when we come to recognize the necessary indefinite postponement of explanatory completeness, to speculation about the transcendent. For only in the transcendent could there be a *complete explainer* of empirical things, giveable in its explanatory totality if it is giveable at all.

But now note: *a specifically non-sensible transcendent*. It is only because space and time are extensively indefinite and intensively infinite (A512-3/BB540-1) that the complete explanation of empirical things is indefinitely far off; nothing belonging only to the abstract concepts 'thing as such' or, consequently, 'thing in itself' that Kant develops in the Amphiboly entails explanatory infinitude or indefiniteness. Does that mean that we can immediately take

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<sup>21</sup> Even for those who take Kant's conception of reason's demands for systematicity to be thoroughly subjective.



reason's ideal object, the experience-transcendent complete explainer, to be an *intelligibile* as characterized in the Amphiboly? That is slightly too quick, but mediated by a few steps that is the right inference to draw. As we saw in chapter two, section 4.3, a thing that could be given directly to reason would be one for which just insofar it is given as conditioned, all of its conditions all the way up to the unconditioned *are also given* (e.g., at A497/B525). In other words, it would be an object of which we could not be aware at all without our being aware of what completely explains or grounds it, so that explanatory completeness is always guaranteed. Now I do not want to claim that we can find an entailment *from* something's being an *intelligibile* as described by the Amphiboly *to* its being the sort of thing that would have to be given in the way pure reason would require of things given to it directly.<sup>22</sup> What I do want to claim, however, is twofold. First, there is no inconsistency between something's being an *intelligibile* and its being giveable in the way reason would require. And second, something's being giveable in the way reason would require indeed entails that it would be an *intelligibile*, because whatever else would be true of it, it would count as a thing but would not belong to space and time.

Moreover, Kant seems pretty clearly not to take reason and understanding to be potential stems of presentation in their own right but aspects of a unity that is simpler than that between intellect as a whole and sensibility (compare A15/B29, where Kant calls the two presentational stems "*sensibility* and *understanding*", and A835/B863, where he calls the intellectual stem "*reason*" and emphasizes that he thereby means "the whole higher cognitive power"). So that gives us further reason to suppose that the object that would be given directly to pure reason,

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<sup>22</sup> Perhaps such an entailment can be found, but the issue does not seem pressing for present purposes.

were one such really possible, would have to be none other than the object that would be given to pure understanding, were one such really possible.

But now we have everything we need for a complete answer to the question: Whence the determinate and stable concept of the thing in itself if not through the possible intuitive givenness of the concept's object? The thing in itself, as *intelligibile*, is not merely an object of pure understanding, were one such really possible. It is also, or would be, an object of pure reason, the completely explained or the complete explainer. Our thinking the concept 'thing in itself' is thus not merely an arbitrary or optional negating of predicates belonging to the concept 'empirical thing', nor is it even *merely* the logical correlate of the recognition that the bounds of thinking seem to extent more widely than the bounds of sensing, as Phenomena and Noumena suggested. It is determinately motivated by a need of reason in response to what appears to be an essential impediment to the completion of reason's characteristic exercise, the impediment being the necessarily spatio-temporal character of empirical things. Hence although we can in fact intuit no object corresponding to the concept, nevertheless the concept might be one we *must* think or at least will necessarily *tend* to think insofar as we are finite, hence sensible, rational beings.<sup>23</sup> And hence it can have a stable place in our thinking and be a bearer of determinate marks even while having a merely negative meaning (i.e., referring to no object and being strictly meaningless—*bedeutungslos* and *sinnlos*).

Of course, that raises a question about what other solution there is to the problem posed by empirical things' recalcitrance to the explanatory demands of pure reason beyond either skepticism or permitting ourselves to do experience-transcendent metaphysics. For if there is no

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<sup>23</sup> Note, moreover, that that would be true of *any* finite rational being just insofar as that being is sensible; specifically *spatio-temporal* sensibility is not required. For Kant's arguments in the Aesthetic for the intuitive rather than conceptual character of space and time rest on a conception of what characterizes intuitive presentation *generally*, to which space and time are then compared. See section 1.4 below.

other solution, then we must concede what I have called the essential disconnection of the human epistemic capacity and thereby give up on genuine empirical realism. But there is another solution: We must countenance a distinction between explanatory *completeness*, on the one hand, and explanatory *sufficiency*, on the other. To be sure, that those two concepts can come apart is something we *cannot* countenance so long as we, like Leibniz and Wolff, take the intellect *alone* to be constitutive of the possibility of knowledge. If all knowledge were purely intellectual, then there would be no sense we can make of the possibility of our being given an object that did not fully satisfy the requirements of both understanding and reason, where those are considered in isolation from sensibility. And that means that any object we could be given at all would have to have *given* with it, i.e., intuitively (though *per impossibile* not sensibly), all of its conditions all the way up to the unconditioned. Hence there could be no distinction like the one I drew earlier in this section between knowledge-that and knowledge-why; knowledge that would consist in knowledge-why. And sensibility, insofar as it obscures our view of the series of conditions rather than making it transparently available to us, would have to be regarded as a mere hindrance to knowledge, a ‘power’ only to conceal from us what the intellect alone would present clearly, as Leibniz and Wolff supposed.

By contrast, if we can regard both stems of our finite discursive epistemic capacity as genuinely *constitutive* and *enabling* of knowledge, then a new option is opened to us, namely to accept as broadly correct what I called, near the beginning of this section, the common-sense view on knowledge. On that view, I can attain knowledge-that without yet actually attaining knowledge-why because my epistemic capacity comprises not only intellectual but also sense-perceptual powers of knowing. In being able to reach, in my explanatory activity, sense-perceptually secured knowledge-that, I can achieve explanatory *sufficiency* with respect to the

thing, event, or state of affairs I originally set out to explain even without having achieved explanatory *completeness*. For the point at which an explanatory regress arrives at a judgment secured sense-perceptually is just the point at which every step of the regress up to that point is now anchored in genuine knowledge—in givenness, in intuition. And I can regard reason as enabled rather than hindered by sensibility insofar as only by informing sensibility (indirectly, through the understanding) can reason's explanatory activity be *about* anything and not simply endless games with meaningless concepts.

But getting us to regard our epistemic capacity thus is a lot of work and indeed requires not only the diagnostic Amphiboly and Phenomena and Noumena chapters but, at a minimum, the whole first *Critique*. And meanwhile, that reason, even on this picture, never can completely achieve its aim—to explain—and hence remains needy and drive-like explains the continuing necessity of thinking things in themselves, even once we recognize the illusion therein (much in the same way we continue to see the stick bend in the water long after we are not deceived thereby). Reason's lingering need not just for explanatory sufficiency but for explanatory completeness is thus *merely subjective*: “a subjective ground for presupposing and assuming something which reason may not presume to know through objective grounds” (WDO 8:137).

### 1.3. Objection: Things in Themselves are Indifferently *Intelligibilia* or *Sensibilia*

Against that, one might object that I have too hastily equated things in themselves with *intelligibilia* and thereby falsified Kant's real view. Now the literature is replete with proposals for technical distinctions between things in themselves, noumena in general, noumena in the positive meaning, noumena in the negative meaning, transcendental objects, and so forth—and for that matter, with proposals about how to assimilate various of those objects to one another.

Many of those proposals, however, are motivated primarily by considerations internal to a broader interpretive position on Kant with which the proposals hence stand or fall.<sup>24</sup> For that reason, I do not here take most of them up. But one is especially pressing and stands pretty much on its own. That is Allison's proposal<sup>25</sup> that Kant must use the expression 'thing in itself' sometimes to mean an *intelligibile* and sometimes to mean a *sensibile*, which amounts, on Allison's argument, to a sense-impression. If that is right, then we need to distinguish sensible things in themselves from intellectual things in themselves. And that would be bad not only locally, for my interpretation of the Amphiboly, but also for the larger mission of this chapter, which is to account for why we *must* think the concept 'thing in itself' in a way that requires that the object of that concept could be given directly to the intellectual stem of presentation (if only that object were really possible).

The strongest direct textual motivation for Allison's proposal<sup>26</sup> is Kant's claim of Hume that the latter takes "objects of experience to be things in themselves (as, indeed, is done almost everywhere)" (KpV 5:53). Hume is famously committed to an epistemology on which the most epistemologically and ontologically fundamental items of which we are *directly* aware are sense-impressions. So seemingly, for Hume, the 'objects of experience' can only be those sense-impressions. And of course a mere sense-impression cannot be an *intelligibile*. Precisely not: A sense-impression is, for an early modern empiricist, that which can be given to sensibility directly and logically prior to any operation of an intellectual power (which at most only 'orders' what is thus given (A271/B327)). As Allison observes, Kant's claim that Berkeley is committed to 'transcendental realism', in the context of Berkeley's likewise empiricist epistemology, seems

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<sup>24</sup> That is true, for example, of Allais's account of the distinction between negative and positive noumena in her 2015.

<sup>25</sup> Which is a development of an earlier proposal from Lewis White Beck (1960, 181-2).

<sup>26</sup> Allison 1976, 231-3.

to generate the same problem. And so indeed does Kant's claim in the Amphiboly that Locke "sensitized all of the concepts of understanding" and regarded sensibility as "the one source [of presentations] that in his opinion referred directly to things in themselves" (A271/B327).

In reply, I first note that Kant takes Locke, at least, to be inconsistent in his empiricism. While Locke's official epistemological position is no doubt empiricist, he at key moments tries to use concepts that for him must have a sense-experiential genesis to think that which is specifically non-sensuous and experience-transcendent, e.g., God and immortal souls (Kant levels the accusation at A854-5/B882-3). It is not implausible, therefore, that when Kant says of Locke that he regarded the senses as *the* source of presentations that puts us in touch with things in themselves, he is describing Locke's official position compatibly with holding that, nevertheless, Locke is ultimately committed to the objects that the *senses* put us in touch with being the sort of object demanded by the *intellect*. On this reading, Locke would have failed to see that because, being a one-stem theorist, his whole epistemology is deeply confused (at least from a Kantian point of view), yet that would not prevent him from being responsive, in his own way, to reason's need.

Second, the worry generated by Berkeley's transcendental realism can be dealt with even more quickly. Does Berkeley's transcendental realism consist in his treating sense-impressions as 'transcendentally real'? That seems implausible in the face of the fact that Berkeley's epistemology involves *two* kinds of presentation, not only sense-impressions but also what he calls 'notions',<sup>27</sup> where the latter are *non-sensible* and put us in touch with the only genuinely self-standing *things* that he countenances, namely God and (perhaps) finite minds.

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<sup>27</sup> Berkeley 2008, 118-9.

Third and finally, while Hume's epistemology is indeed sense-impression-based and contains as an essential moment a worry that all we can *ever* know about is our sense-impressions (setting aside Humean ideas, which are derivative from sense-impressions), it is open to Kant to find Hume inconsistent, just as he did Locke. So while it would not give Kant enough credit to suppose that he somehow *missed* Hume's sense-impression-based epistemology, we should look to what Kant actually says about Hume in the relevant passages and see if it really rules out a construal of things in themselves as *intelligibilia* given that Kant could take Hume to have a confused position.

Now in the passage from the second *Critique* that drives Allison's interpretation of things in themselves as, in Hume's case, *sensibilia*, Kant's account of Hume does not mention Hume's sense-impression epistemology at all. What Kant focuses on is Hume's "empiricism in principles" (KpV 5:52, emphasis removed) as a source of skepticism about the possibility of a concept of cause and effect as a relation of genuine necessity. Empiricism in principles requires that causality either be a logical relation or be *a posteriori*. But causality is clearly not a logical relation since causality is "the connection of the existence of what is different and, specifically, insofar as it is different", and it is clearly not *a posteriori* because "The concept of *cause* is a concept that contains the *necessity*" of that connection (KpV 5:51), and necessity cannot be given *a posteriori*. Empiricism in principles, Kant thinks, leads to skepticism—but only "in every *scientific* theoretical use of reason" and not at the level of *a posteriori* awareness of outer things (5:53). Kant also characterizes Hume as taking us to be capable of perceiving "things or their determinations" and of awareness of "the existence of things", albeit in the context of an empiricism that forces on us skepticism about the possibility of natural science as a body of *a*

*priori* (or aprioristically founded) cognition<sup>28</sup> (5:51). Clearly, Kant is not there interested in Hume's empiricistic conception of *perception of individual objects* but rather in his empiricistic account of *a priori* cognition, i.e., of how most alleged such cognition is not genuinely possible. And what is more, if we turn to Hume's own arguments against the possibility of knowledge of cause and effect as genuinely *a priori* in the *Enquiry*,<sup>29</sup> we find that the entire argument is carried out in terms of "objects", not impressions, and hence in isolation from the skeptical considerations Hume raises later in the *Enquiry* (section 12) about the senses as a source of perceptual knowledge.

What that suggests is that Kant does not and need not take Hume's sense-impression based epistemology to be relevant to the difficulty that he finds in Hume. Hume's difficulty rests solely on a conception of objects on which we cannot make sense of causality as a necessary connection of the existence of what is different insofar as it is different. And things in themselves as *intelligibilia* are one such conception just insofar as we have no material at the level of the merely conceptual with which to make sense of the possibility of such a necessary but non-logical connection (i.e., a connection not grounded in the principle of non-contradiction): Although once we grasp the objective reality of the concept of causality in reference to empirical things, we can *consistently think* intellectual things in themselves as standing in causality-like relations, that is nothing but a claim about what is not formally contradictory, not a claim that we have any idea how such relations among things in themselves are really possible (KpV 5:54).

I do not purport to show thereby that Kant could not possibly have meant to accuse Hume of treating sense-impressions as a special, sensible kind of thing in itself, as Allison holds. But

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<sup>28</sup> Kant speaks consistently of cognition in his discussion of Hume in the second *Critique*.

<sup>29</sup> Hume 1999, 109-118. The *Enquiry* is widely presumed to be Kant's primary source of information about Hume's views, beyond limited excerpts from Hume's *Treatise*.



the evidence in favour of a reading of things in themselves as objects of pure intellect is very strong outside of Kant's isolated remarks about Locke and Hume. That, combined with (a) Kant's willingness to find Locke to be at once empiricistic and inconsistently committed to the possibility of cognition of merely intellectual objects and (b) Kant's total avoidance of any mention of Hume's sense-impression epistemology in the context of his accusation that Hume regards appearances as things in themselves, is sufficient reason to read Kant as consistently committed to the specifically intellectual nature of things in themselves at least insofar as 'thing in itself' is a concept that finite rational beings *must* or *essentially tend to* think.

#### 1.4. Indirect Support for an Intellectualist Reading of Things in Themselves: The Solution to the Problem of the Neglected Alternative

The problem of the neglected alternative is the thought that while Kant positively asserts that things in themselves are *not* spatio-temporal, he neglected the possibility that things in themselves *are* spatio-temporal even though we cannot know or cognize them to be. Now if things in themselves are indifferently sensible or intelligible objects, or even less specifically, if they are just the 'most real things', whatever exactly those might be, then the alternative seems like a live one. If, however, Kant all along has in mind a conception of things in themselves as of objects of pure intellect, then the neglected alternative evaporates. To see that, we need only attend to some of Kant's claims about the contrasting mereological structures of concepts and intuitions in the Aesthetic.

In the third and fourth arguments of the Metaphysical Exposition of Space (and, *mutatis mutandis*, in the fourth and fifth arguments of the Metaphysical Exposition of Time, but I will focus on space for simplicity), Kant purports to show that space is essentially intuitive rather

than conceptual. Space as such, Kant argues, precedes its parts (discrete spaces) and makes them possible, and to the extent that space comprises a plurality, that is only insofar as limitations are introduced within it, not insofar as it is itself an aggregate of already distinct parts (A24-5/B39). Moreover, space is what Kant calls an “infinite given magnitude” (A25/B39, emphasis removed) because it contains at least potentially “an infinite multitude of presentations *within itself*”, namely insofar as it is infinitely divisible (A523-7/B551-5). By implicit contrast, a concept is such that its parts (marks, higher concepts) precede and make possible the whole to which they belong, and hence any concept save a completely simple one (if such is even possible) necessarily contains actual limitations, i.e., differences between the parts. And by explicit contrast, no concept, at least none thinkable by a finite discursive intellect, contains an infinite multitude of marks, presumably because finite discursive intellects think in time and such a concept would require infinite time to grasp (A25/B39-40).

Now recall my earlier claim that *intelligibilia*, as objects of pure intellect, have to be concept-like objects because we have no resources to understand what such objects would really be save that they would be objects given directly to a specifically conceptual presentational power. That means that things in themselves, if they are *intelligibilia*, would have to have the mereological structure (simplifying somewhat, part-to-whole) to which Kant opposes the mereological structure of space in the Metaphysical Exposition (whole-to-part). But in that case Leibniz is entirely correct: Any frame of relations between things to which things in themselves ‘belonged’ would in fact have to be constituted out of those things as preceding the frame; *matter* would have to precede and make possible *form* (A266-8/B322-4). And then space and time, as conditions of possibility of and hence presupposed by whatever appears in them (namely, insofar

as the possibility of appearing in space and time presupposes a larger background of space-time from which the occupied region is delimited), would not be possible.<sup>30</sup>

Compare that solution to the neglected alternative with Allison's: that things in themselves are not spatio-temporal because (a) 'thing in itself' is just the concept of a thing abstracted from its Allisonian epistemic conditions and (b) space and time are Allisonian epistemic conditions.<sup>31</sup> Guyer justly complains that the solution is trivial and doesn't engage with the problem:<sup>32</sup> If Allisonian epistemic conditions are specifically not conditions on the *being* of things, how does a lack of spatio-temporality at the level of Allisonian epistemic conditions license the *denial* (rather than just agnosticism) that things, in their *being*, are spatio-temporal? By contrast, my solution faces no such difficulty. The only concept of a thing in itself that has systematic philosophical significance for Kant<sup>33</sup> is the one determined by reason's essential need, and *that* concept is the concept of a being that—were it really possible—could not be given sensibly and so cannot have any properties that presuppose sensible givenness for their possibility. That my interpretation of things in themselves as *intelligibilia* permits that neat and tidy solution to the neglected alternative objection is strong evidence in its favour.

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<sup>30</sup> Is that contradicted by Kant's argument, in the Axioms of Intuition, that all appearances are extensive magnitudes and extensive magnitudes are such that "the presentation of the parts makes possible (and hence necessarily precedes) the presentation of the whole"? (A162/B203). I do not have space here to consider the objection in detail, but briefly: (1) However that doctrine of the Axioms is to be reconciled with the doctrines of the Aesthetic, that the latter are as I have presented them is quite clear. And (2) Daniel Smyth has argued compellingly that the topic of the Axioms is magnitudes that are themselves composite, i.e., that presuppose our having first of all placed limits on limitless and mereologically whole-to-part space (Smyth 2015, 369-74).

<sup>31</sup> Allison 1983, 111-4. Cf. his 2004, 128-32.

<sup>32</sup> Guyer 1987, 333-43.

<sup>33</sup> I make that qualification because, of course, we can play whatever games we want with thinking, and so we could always conjure up a different concept of a thing in itself that was not the concept of an *intelligibile*. It's just that *that* concept would have no relevance to Kant's philosophy.

## 2. Things in Themselves as Subjectively Necessary Thinkable Grounds of Empirical Things

### 2.1. An Interpretive Test-Case

I have argued above that Kant is most plausibly regarded as taking things in themselves to be objects that would be given directly to the intellectual stem of presentation, i.e., to be *intelligibilia*, and that what Kant regards as the necessity or at least necessary tendency of finite rational beings to think the concept ‘thing in itself’ is explained by reason’s drive for complete explanation as for a completion of its characteristic exercise or act. That drive of reason, originating in the essential nature of that power as a power to explain, makes the thinking of the concept ‘thing in itself’ not arbitrary but stable and the concept itself determinate and surprisingly rich in marks (namely those that license Kant’s analytically derived, hypothetical claims in the Amphiboly about what *would* be true of appearances *were* they things in themselves). Yet that only suffices for conferring a *negative meaning* on or enabling a *negative use* for that concept, namely to mark where we risk becoming confused by reason’s need—just as, indeed, an inescapable but recognizable optical illusion marks for us a kind of unintended byproduct of the proper functioning of our sense-organs.<sup>34</sup> Through the merely negative use of ‘thing in itself’, we do not gain any understanding even of the mere possibility of the putative object of that concept, only a clearer recognition of reason’s proper task: the systematization of

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<sup>34</sup> That is recognizably a variant of the interpretive line on which the concept ‘thing in itself’ is a *limiting* concept. Against that line, Allais writes that “the claim that the notion of things in themselves is a merely limiting notion which does not involve the commitment to anything actually existing is not something Kant says anywhere” (Allais 2015, 67). But that appears to be false. At A254-5/B310-11 Kant identifies the concept ‘noumenon’ as the concept of what “is to be thought (solely through the pure understanding) as thing in itself” and goes on to characterize that concept as “only a *boundary concept* serving to limit the pretension of sensibility [which] hence is only of negative use.” Moreover, at A288-9/B344-5, Kant instructs us that the presentation of an object variously identified as “transcendental object” and “an object in itself” but which is in any case “the cause of appearance” “does not serve for anything but to mark the bounds of our sensible cognition and to leave us with room that we can fill neither through possible experience nor through pure understanding.” Although Kant does not use the phrase ‘thing in itself’ in the latter context, he does at least use ‘in itself’, and the core notion of an experience-transcendent cause or ground of appearance is clearly present there and is what matters most both for my and for Allais’s purposes. (Strikingly, Kant also there claims that that object could just as well “be annulled simultaneously with sensibility” as “remain if we removed sensibility.”)

our *empirical* knowledge into relations of entailment that, in conjunction with sensibility as the only stem of presentation through which things are *given* to us, permit explanatory sufficiency apart from the possibility of explanatory completeness. An important corollary of that interpretation of the thing in itself is that although our thinking it is responsive to *reason's need*, it is not just thereby responsive to any genuine *explanatory requirement* that we be able to ground empirical reality in something beyond it, and consequently we avoid an essential disconnection picture.

But can that account of the concept 'thing in itself' *really* explain all the apparently strongly existentially committal remarks Kant makes about things in themselves? A recent wave of transcendent-metaphysically inclined Kant-interpreters would be skeptical. Two of the more prominent recent exponents of that line of interpretation,<sup>35</sup> Rae Langton<sup>36</sup> and Lucy Allais,<sup>37</sup> copiously document Kant's seeming endorsements of the existence of things in themselves or of claims that entail the existence of things in themselves, and that body of textual evidence looks *prima facie* pretty impressive. I cannot hope to provide a commentary on every single such passage, so instead I shall make do with what at first glance is one of the most difficult for my reading to make sense of. My goal here is not so ambitious as to show, in isolation from the broader argument of this dissertation, that mine is the *only* way the passage can be read. It is enough here to show that my reading is a sensible interpretive option, one that the rest of my argument then gives us strong reason to accept.

The passage in question is the following from *On a Discovery*:

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<sup>35</sup> An important forebear is Karl Ameriks (2000, 2003, 2006, 2012a, among others), who seems for a long time to have been almost alone in arguing for a reading of Kant that is both transcendent-metaphysically committal and broadly internally consistent.

<sup>36</sup> In her 1998.

<sup>37</sup> In her 2015.

Having raised the question (p. 275): “Who (what) gives sensibility its matter, namely sensations?” [Eberhard] believes himself to have pronounced against the *Critique* when he says (p. 276): “We may choose what we will—we nevertheless arrive at *things-in-themselves*.” Now that, of course, is the constant contention of the *Critique*; save that it posits this ground of the matter of sensory representations not once again in things, as objects of the senses, but in something super-sensible, which *grounds* the latter, and of which we can have no cognition. It says that the objects as things-in-themselves *give* the matter to empirical intuitions (they contain the ground by which to determine the faculty of representation in accordance with its sensibility), but they *are* not the matter thereof. (ÜE 8:215)

The thrust of the passage seems to be that the thing in itself is needed to explain the origin of our actual perceptions—not, mind you, the conditions of possibility of perception in general or ‘as to its form’, as Kant would also say, but of the fact, assuming all such general-formal conditions are satisfied, that I then actually perceive something. If the thing in itself is a mere thought-entity expressive of reason’s need for complete explanation, how can it discharge that explanatory burden? And if it cannot, how can the first *Critique*’s “constant contention” plausibly be that things in themselves *ground* empirical things and *give* the matter of empirical intuition, as Kant emphatically writes?

But there is reason to think that the passage expresses a rather different thought than at first appears. First, consider the uncharacteristically polemical context in which Kant is writing there, namely against an uncharitable Leibnizian critic, Eberhard. Eberhard has been arguing against Kant that things in themselves must ground appearances by way of being imperceptible (because, in essence, too small) simples that are nevertheless *in* appearance, as parts thereof, rather than experience-transcendent. So part of what Kant is trying to do is draw a sharp conceptual distinction between Eberhard’s concept ‘thing in itself’ and Kant’s own, according to which the *concept* ‘thing in itself’ is of a complete explainer, i.e., a ground, of what is sensibly given, where that ground is not *itself* sensibly given in any sense. That is compatible with Kant

treating the thing in itself whose concept he is opposing to Eberhard's as an *ens rationis*, the merely putative object of what is in fact an objectless concept.

Second, only slightly before so emphatically declaring that things in themselves *ground* appearances, Kant criticizes Eberhard for using the principle of sufficient reason (““All things have their ground,’ or, in other words, everything exists only as a consequence” (ÜE 8:213n)) “in its unlimited universality” (ÜE 8:212). Kant contrasts that with his own restriction of the PSR to empirical things: It “holds without exception of all things as appearances in space and time, but in no way of things-in-themselves” (ÜE 8:213n). Now that formulation does not altogether rule out that the PSR as Kant countenances it permits a minimal, totally indeterminate explanatory ‘crossing-over’ from empirical things to things in themselves. But the formulation certainly does not go out of its way to highlight the possibility of such a crossing-over. And a good thing too, since, as we saw in chapter two, using the PSR “in its unlimited universality” and hence as equivalent to the Dialectic’s “principle of pure reason” requires that things in themselves as condition be *given with* the empirical things that they condition, which is impossible for beings with a sensible intuitive power. Even setting that aside, we would seem to need some pretty good reason to suppose that a crossing-over of the boundary from empirical things to the experience-transcendent is genuinely explanatorily required. But familiar Kantian doctrine actually gives us strong reason to believe it is not needed at all, namely the broad lesson of the Analogies that one can never lack for grounds of empirical things or their existence, and hence for sufficient explanation thereof, within the bounds of the empirical.

Third, Kant uses an intriguing word there when he writes that the first *Critique* “posits” the ground of the matter of sensibility in things in themselves. ‘Positing’ is, for Kant, a quasi-technical term. That is, it is one that he uses frequently but never seems to define, at any rate not

in the Critical corpus.<sup>38</sup> What is clear, however, is that Kant often does not mean anything much stronger by it than ‘suppose’ or ‘think affirmatively’ or even, to speak somewhat anachronistically, ‘intend’ in the Brentanian-Husserlian sense, and he almost never means by it anything as strong as ‘know to exist’ or ‘cognize the existence of’. Thus, for example, Kant speaks of the contradiction involved in ‘positing’ a triangle while yet ‘annulling’ its three angles, and while certainly it would be contradictory for there to *exist (per impossibile)* a triangle that had more or fewer than three angles, the contradiction lies at the level of thinking, i.e., in the attempt to *think* (or even *think as existing*) a triangle that was thus unconventionally angled (A594/B622). Or again, when I think to myself, ‘The soul is nonmortal’, Kant calls that a positing, specifically a logically affirmative act of thinking (A72/B97). But nothing about Kant’s discussion there suggests that the act’s logically affirmative character amounts to my having thereby pronounced that *there are such things as souls*. What matters to Kant is only that I have therefore thought as belonging to the concept ‘soul’, as logical subject, a predicate, ‘nonmortal’, and thereby thought the concept ‘soul’ as a lower concept under the higher concept ‘nonmortal things’ and thus “posited the soul in the unlimited range of nonmortal beings.” So it is suggestive that Kant claims in the passage from *On a Discovery* that the first *Critique* “posits” things in themselves as grounds of the empirical: It is compatible with that claim that the *Critique* has a place for *thinking* ‘thing in itself’, namely in response to reason’s need, while yet having no place for an assignment of objective reality to that concept.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> Kant does discuss what he calls “absolute positing” in *The only possible argument in support of a demonstration of the existence of God*, where it is synonymous with an affirmation of a thing’s existence (BDG 2:73-5). But neither the expression ‘absolute positing’ nor any cognate thereof appears in the first *Critique*.

<sup>39</sup> Strikingly, in the *Opus postumum*, Kant writes that “The thing *in itself* is not an object given outside presentation, but merely the position [*Position*] of a thought-entity which is thought of as corresponding to the object” (OP 22:31). (By the Latinate *Position* Kant presumably means the same technical concept as his *Setzen*, standardly translated as ‘positing’; the presumption is licensed by, for instance, A234n, where Kant uses the two terms interchangeably.) That further supports my contention that ‘positing’ as that concept occurs in the ÜE passage



Fourth and finally, in the A Paralogisms—a locus of strongly subjective-idealist-sounding rhetoric in the first *Critique*—Kant takes a much more measured approach to what appears to be the same basic question that Eberhard presses. Kant writes:

[...] the notorious question concerning the communion of the thinking and the extended, if everything merely imaginary is separated from it, would come down solely to this: *how in a thinking being as such there is possible an outer intuition—viz., that of space (specifically, a filling of space with shape and motion)*. Finding an answer to this question is, however, impossible for any human being; *and we can never fill this gap in our knowledge, but can only mark it by ascribing outer appearances to a transcendental object: an object which is the cause of this kind of presentations, but with which we are not acquainted at all and of which we shall also never acquire any concept*. In any problems that we may encounter in the realm of experience we treat those outer appearances as objects in themselves, without worrying about the primary basis of their possibility (as appearances). *But if we go beyond their boundary, then for this the concept of a transcendental object becomes necessary*. (A392-3; all emphases except first mine)

Now Kant does not use the terminology of things in themselves there, but rather of the transcendental object. Still, the question is: How can we account not for the possibility of perception in general but for the actuality of perceptions (“a filling of space with shape and motion [in outer intuition]”)? And the answer in the A Paralogisms passage is not a flat assertion of the existence of things in themselves as the necessary, ultimate grounds of appearance. It is a more circumspect ‘ascription’ of appearances to an experience-transcendent ground that we are motivated to carry out *if* we undertake to explain the possibility of appearances in general from beyond the boundary of possible experience. And the ascription does not “fill” the epistemic gap opened by that undertaking but only “mark[s] it”.

What all that suggests is that on closer inspection of the ÜE passage, what appears at first to be aggressively realist rhetoric about things in themselves as existent grounds of the matter of

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means something weaker than ‘knowing to exist’ or ‘cognizing the existence of’. But I confine this observation to a footnote because systematic reliance on the *Opus postumum* for textual support would require significant defense in its own right.

sensibility is in fact only rather dubiously so. The passage does not force us to read it as making a claim stronger than that *reason necessarily motivates us to think things in themselves as grounds of empirical things*. And we have available to us a perfectly good explanation of that necessary motivation of reason, namely reason's subjective need for complete explanation in conjunction with the in-principle impossibility of the attainment of complete explanation within the bounds of possible experience.

## 2.2. A Kantian Argument against the Possibility of Existence- and Real-Possibility Judgments about Things in Themselves

But suppose the reader is not convinced by the above interpretive moves, perhaps for no other reason than that Kant's apparent affirmations of the existence of things in themselves are so copious. In that case, let the reader attend to the fact that not only Kant's conceptual-semantic theory but also his related but distinct doctrine of synthetic judgment rules out the possibility of existence- and real-possibility judgments about things in themselves, on both two-object and two-aspect construals of the thing-in-itself doctrine.<sup>40</sup>

In a judgment, syntheticity is that property of the connection between subject and predicate such that the connection is not one of containment, or does not rest on the law of non-contradiction (A6-7/B10-11).<sup>41</sup> What makes a synthetic judgment true or false must thus lie beyond its concepts. Kant calls it a "third something", or simply a third thing (A157/B196)—basically, the object that the judgment is about. Thus, for instance, if I judge truly that some cats are black, that judgment's truth rests not merely on the concepts 'cat' and 'black' but on the

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<sup>40</sup> For an expansion of this argument, with specific reference to possible moves a transcendent-metaphysically inclined reader like Allais might make to avoid it, see my "Syntheticity and Metaphysical Readings of Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*" (unpublished).

<sup>41</sup> That is rough and ready, but good enough for us. Cf. Hanna 2001, 120-80.

black cats themselves. Thus much should be unsurprising given our earlier discussions of objective validity.

On Kant's view, synthetic judgment is not possible unless its object is, in principle, available to the judging subject (A156-7/B195-6), wherefore answering the *Critique's* guiding question, "How are synthetic judgments possible a priori?" (B19; emphasis removed), requires first an exhibition of that power that gives us objects: sensible intuition. Grasping that power, we see that a synthetic connection between subject and predicate can lie not just in an actually given thing but also in what is merely (really) possible and even in sensible intuition's mere form, as with geometrical judgments (A155/B194). In every case, the possibility of synthetic judgment lies not just in the object linking subject and predicate but in the in-principle intuitive availability (hereafter, simply 'intuitability')<sup>42</sup> of that object to the judging subject (cf. A259-60/B315).

And sensible intuition is, as I have emphasized, the *only* medium of givenness for subjects like us.<sup>43</sup> But for "the possibility of experience", which is sensible, "synthetic propositions are entirely impossible a priori" (and, *a fortiori*, impossible *a posteriori*) (A157/B196).<sup>44</sup> Kant writes that "If we are to judge synthetically concerning a concept, then we must go beyond this concept, viz., to the intuition wherein it is given" (A721/B749) and that "from mere categories [and hence apart from sensible intuition] no synthetic proposition can be

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<sup>42</sup> To emphasize: Intuitability does not require the object's existence, only its real possibility: "To be given an object [...] is nothing other than to refer the presentation of the object to experience (whether actual, or at least possible, experience)" (A155-6/B195; emphasis mine).

<sup>43</sup> Sensible intuition is "the only intuition that we have" (B302n), and "no object can be given to us in any other manner than through sensibility" (A19/B33).

<sup>44</sup> A157/B196. I regard 'proposition' and 'judgment' as synonymous. In *The Jäsche logic*, Kant suggests that judgments are problematic and propositions, assertoric (Log 9:109). But in the first *Critique*, Kant speaks freely of problematic propositions (A75/B101, A348, B406) and assertoric judgments (A74/B100, A75/B100n, A781/B809), and frequently shifts between 'judgment' and 'proposition' (e.g., throughout A154-8/B193-7, or at A259/B315). And even *The Jäsche logic* speaks of problematic propositions (Log 9:122) and assertoric judgments (Log 9:66).

made” (B289).<sup>45</sup> So synthetic judgments depend for their possibility on the specifically sensible intuitability of the third thing.<sup>46</sup>

Before and throughout the Critical period, Kant holds that existence-judgments must be synthetic. He writes in 1763 that “one does not examine the concept of the subject in order to demonstrate the correctness of the proposition about the existence of such a thing. [...] If one wishes to demonstrate the correctness of such a proposition, one examines the source of one’s cognition of the object. One says: ‘I have seen it’ or ‘I have heard about it from those who have seen it’” (BDG 2:72-3). Although that lacks the analytic/synthetic terminology, the latter emerges when, in the first *Critique*, Kant brusquely insists that “any reasonable person must [admit] that any existential proposition is synthetic” (A598/B626). And it is present again when, in the second *Critique*, Kant restates the account of existence-judgments from 1763: “[A]ny existential proposition—i.e., one that says, concerning a being of which I frame a concept, that it exists—is a synthetic proposition, i.e., one by which I go beyond that concept and say more concerning it than was thought in the concept: viz., that for this concept *in the understanding* there is posited correspondingly also an object *outside the understanding*” (KpV 5:139).

But why regard existence-judgments as necessarily synthetic? Kant takes existence-judgments to have the logical grammar as of a judgment of some *concept* that it is instantiated, or ‘attaches to a thing’.<sup>47</sup> And that a concept is instantiated is never contained in that very concept. Hence existence-judgments too require a third thing beyond subject and predicate, namely the object to which the subject-concept purports to refer (BDG 2:72-3).

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<sup>45</sup> Cf. also A47/B64-5, A63/B88, A148/B187, A154-8/B193-7, A184-5/B228, A216-7/B263-4, and B288-9.

<sup>46</sup> There is a single uncontroversial exception, the moral law, which is synthetic but does not presuppose the *prior* availability of sensible intuition (KpV 5:31). I give an account of the moral law’s syntheticity in chapter seven, section 3.

<sup>47</sup> As Hanna argues, ‘exists’ is a second-order predicate, i.e., of concepts rather than things (2001, 209n56).

Kant is likewise committed to the syntheticity of real-possibility judgments, though he does not make that commitment explicit. As we have seen, real possibility is more demanding than logical possibility. In particular, a concept's object is really possible only if it satisfies non-logical conditions that are necessarily intuitive. There is no contradiction in the concept 'figure enclosed by two straight lines', yet that figure is impossible because it cannot be constructed in space (A220/B267-8). And even were the putative object of some non-sensible intuition at issue, the mere logically possible concept would leave open whether that intuition permitted the object's real possibility.<sup>48</sup> But if that is right, then a judgment of real possibility always *originally* involves a movement beyond the intensional content of the subject-concept by comparing it to the conditions of possibility of things given in intuition<sup>49</sup> and to any further conditions on real possibility.<sup>50</sup> Such conditions thus function as the third thing, and real-possibility judgments are essentially synthetic.

But now there is a clear systematic difficulty for anyone who wants to attribute to Kant objectively valid, meaningful judgments that things in themselves exist: How could that be possible given that things in themselves, whether aspects of the things that appear to us or objects in their own right, are essentially experience-transcendent? That difficulty emerges pretty straightforwardly out of fairly fundamental Kantian commitments even if one bypasses his controversial conceptual-semantic theory. And it is a difficulty no number of passages appearing to make existence-claims about things in themselves can answer. So that gives us another

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<sup>48</sup> Even as regards God's cognition (A256/B311-2).

<sup>49</sup> 'Originally' because one could surely stipulate into a concept reference to conditions of real possibility. But such stipulating-in could only *follow upon* vindication of the object's real possibility as its concept was *antecedently* framed. Otherwise any 'proof' of real possibility would be spurious.

<sup>50</sup> For objects given *a posteriori*, real possibility requires not only conformity to the forms of intuition (as for geometric figures) but also satisfaction of the Principles.

powerful reason to prefer my way of reading such passages: as expressing reason's need to think a complete explainer of empirical things.

### 2.3. The Concept 'Thing in Itself' as Generic Idea

At the beginning of this chapter, I suggested that it would not be out of place to think of the concept 'thing in itself' as a generic theoretical Idea. Yet as I shall argue in the next chapter, Ideas proper refer ultimately to possible experience, and thus although they are *misusable* for futile attempts at epistemic contact with the experience-transcendent, nevertheless they also have positive albeit experience-immanent uses. By contrast, Kant does not anywhere suggest that the concept 'thing in itself' admits of schematization or has an immanent use, and I have been content throughout this chapter to countenance a merely negative use for that concept. How, then, can a concept whose only use is negative be the genus with respect to which the theoretical Ideas with their positive, immanent uses are species?

To see the answer, we must focus on the fact that the concept 'thing in itself', taken as a concept of an object in its own right, is the concept of no more than a complete explanatory *ground* or *condition*. 'Ground' (translating *Grund*, which Pluhar also renders as 'basis') and 'condition' are not specific explanatory relations. A substance is a ground or condition of its attributes, a cause a ground or condition of its effects, a community a ground or condition of the mutual determination of its members. (We can see Kant expressing as much when, for instance, in *On a Discovery*, he contrasts a rendering of the principle of sufficient reason in terms of *grounds* with one in terms of *causes* and indicates that the latter has particular objectionable consequences for Eberhard's position that the former does not, suggesting that the latter is more specific than the former (ÜE 8:213n.)) Each of the theoretical Ideas proper corresponds to one

of the three categories of relation, and its positive, immanent use involves the schematization (or something analogous) to possible experience of the form of explanation corresponding to each such category (A664-5/B692-3). And each of those Ideas represents an explanatory maximum—an indefinitely far-off, asymptotically approached completion of explanation in the manner corresponding to the relevant category.

Now although I postpone a full account of the possibility of a positive though immanent use of the Ideas to the next chapter, I can say here that a constitutive condition of the possibility of such a use is its determinacy with respect to a particular category of relation. That determinacy allows each Idea to make a specific contribution to the form of empirical knowledge and, I shall argue, to the form of possible experience as such. But the concept ‘thing in itself’, which would have to amount to the concept of an explanatory maximum as such according to no particular category of relation, cannot make any such contribution in its own right. It at best merely abstractly represents what each of the three theoretical Ideas proper have in common. But then in being *abstract* with reference to the theoretical Ideas, it is *generic* with respect to them, even though in being thus generic, it can have no positive use in its own right (just as ‘thing as such’, an abstraction from the concept ‘empirical thing’, turns out not to have a positive use in its own right, as we saw the Amphiboly indicate in section 1.1 above).

But if the restriction to a merely negative meaning and use of the concept ‘thing in itself’ is no barrier to conceiving of it as a generic Idea, then doing the latter has obvious attractions. For as I have just observed, both the concept ‘thing in itself’ and each of the theoretical Ideas is a concept of a maximum or a completion of explanation. Yet hitherto exactly the nature of the explanatory requirement that only the thing in itself could satisfy, and hence why, exactly, Kant should feel the need for any use of the concept ‘thing in itself’ at all, has been a point of

obscurity in the literature, perhaps reaching its apotheosis in the suggestion of Karl Ameriks and Lucy Allais that Kant *just assumes* that empirical things are underlaid by things in themselves.<sup>51</sup> But we can state the requirement with precision: The thing in itself is the generic concept of a complete explainer, an unconditioned ground, of the empirical, and its introduction rests on the unattainability of complete explanation in experience—just as, indeed, the theoretical Ideas are each a specific concept of a complete explainer (some messiness surrounding the subdivided argumentative structure of the Antinomies notwithstanding) whose introduction rests on the unattainability of complete explanation in this or that dimension thereof in experience. And we are then in a position to learn further lessons about Kant’s conception of things in themselves by the way he handles the theoretical Ideas, as we will see in the following chapter.

#### 2.4. A Difficult Case? Freedom in the Third Antinomy

I have been arguing that the apparently determinate claims Kant makes about things in themselves as *intelligibilia* are compatible with assigning to the concept ‘thing in itself’ a merely negative meaning and use. If that is right, then they are compatible with the doctrine of the negative noumenon that issues from Phenomena and Noumena, as discussed in the previous chapter. The concept of the thing-in-itself, in expressing *merely* a demand of reason and not a full-blown condition of the possibility of experience, marks a limit on the knowledge possible for discursive rational beings—yet a limit on the other side of which there is not anything positive from which we can suppose ourselves to be cut off. But even if all the predicates Kant assigns to things in themselves in the Amphiboly have the origin I have described, i.e., in a determinately

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<sup>51</sup> Ameriks 2003, 33-4; Allais 2015, 34.



motivated partial negation of the concept ‘empirical thing’, aren’t his pronouncements in the resolution to the third Antinomy far bolder than anything in the Amphiboly?

The answer is no. To see why, begin by noting that there is an important distinction between the third Antinomy’s discussion of transcendental freedom and those that appear in the moral works. The latter are concerned to give an account of the *objective reality* of the key metaphysical concepts implicated in morality: the soul, transcendental freedom, and God. In the third Antinomy, by contrast, Kant remains strictly on the terrain of logical possibility (A558/B586). That means that he is not constrained by any account of the reference of those concepts to objects. His task is solely analytic: to unpack the mere concept of transcendental freedom as the concept of a causality whose cause, on the one hand, lies outside of nature and is hence unconstrained by natural-causal laws but whose effect, on the other hand, is to transpire within nature. That is why his solution to the dynamical antinomies is that both thesis and antithesis *can* be true (not ‘must be true’ or ‘are true’): The *concept* ‘transcendental freedom’ is *logically* possible and does not contradict the concept ‘natural causality’ (which we know to have a really possible object, in an extended sense of ‘object’), and that is enough to dispel the antinomy (A531-2/B559-60).<sup>52</sup>

It may seem unbelievable that Kant understands his task in the third Antinomy to be so minimal as I have just described. Indeed, if each side of the Antinomy is an apodictic proof and each side *can be true*, that seems to follow that the Antinomy just proves both sides true—and is hence a direct proof of a substantive, metaphysical distinction between the empirical realm and an ontologically populous experience-transcendent realm. I therefore hasten to note that in the resolution of the Antinomy, Kant does *not* simply show that the two sides do not contradict each

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<sup>52</sup> What do we really gain from Kant’s rather minimal conclusion that both thesis and antithesis of the third Antinomy can be true? We will get a better sense of that in chapter seven.

other and leave matters there. Over and above that, he also significantly restricts what each side can actually show even once the appearance of antinomial opposition is dispelled. How? By the fact that the opposed proofs that constitute the Antinomy share a false assumption: *that appearances are things in themselves* (A506/B534). Once the assumption is jettisoned, the two proofs lose their force as proofs, so that the concession of the logical compatibility of thesis and antithesis—i.e., that they *can* both be true—is *not*, at the same time, a granting that “the *actuality* of freedom” or even “the *possibility* of freedom” as a “real basis [*Grund*]” (i.e., hence, *real* possibility) has been established (A558/B586).

Hence my task now, limiting myself to the Antinomy and not taking Kant’s practical philosophy proper into consideration, is simply to demonstrate that no predicates belonging to the concept ‘transcendental freedom’ presuppose any *givenness* to us of that concept’s object, but rather that they can all be arrived at solely by a negative procedure on the model of that used to generate the concept ‘thing in itself’. I address Kant’s account of the objective reality of the concepts ‘soul’, ‘transcendental freedom’, and ‘God’ in his practical philosophy directly in chapter seven.

Kant introduces the concept of transcendental freedom with an observation about natural causes: A natural cause exercises its causality according to temporal conditions. More specifically, we cannot make sense of a cause transitioning from inertness to the exercise of its causality without some intervening event in the time-series that itself caused that transition. Thus, for instance, if we expose a piece of wood to some flame, we cannot make sense of a scenario in which, for some arbitrary length of time, nothing occurs, and then all of a sudden the wood is set alight, without at least the possibility of explaining why, until that moment, the causality of the flame was not exercised in terms of other events in the time-series (e.g., the

wood becoming sufficiently dry to catch fire). But if for every exercise of causality, a further cause is presupposed, then the occurrence of any event in nature immediately raises the prospect of an indefinite regression through ever-earlier causes in the time-series. For such a causal series, the givenness of the conditioned (the present event) does not entail the givenness of the unconditioned (a first cause or the whole causal series in its totality) (A532/B560).

Now the third Antinomy concerns the concept of just such an unconditioned cause. Reason frames for itself the concept of an exercise of causality which, unlike one of natural causality, is not itself caused by any temporally antecedent event. When Kant says that by freedom he means “the power to begin a state *on one’s own*”, he has in mind precisely such an uncaused exercise of causality, begun ‘on one’s own’ just insofar as the exercise’s explanation lies in nothing beyond the cause itself. A free cause would be one that can exercise its causality without being determined to do so by anything temporally prior, and such a cause would be fit to begin a causal series in just the way reason demands, as an unconditioned starting point. (A533/B561)

Granting that transcendental freedom thus construed would indeed satisfy reason’s demand, we can still ask: How, specifically, does reason go about framing that concept? Once more, we begin with a concept to which our entitlement is secure, that of the causality of a natural cause.<sup>53</sup> We note that part of that concept is its reference to a temporally prior event determining the cause to act, so that the causality is exercised at just *this* moment and not some other, according to natural laws. We also note that it is just that part of the concept that raises an explanatory prospect that frustrates reason’s ambition: the indefinite postponement of complete

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<sup>53</sup> Note that we do not start with the concept ‘caused *event*’, partial negation of which would yield ‘uncaused event’. The dialectical (not Dialectical, although we are in the Dialectic) starting point is the concept of a certain sort of *causality*, the temporally conditioned kind, and we are working our way towards a different sort of causality from there.

causal explanation as we regress through the causal chain. And now reason negates that problematic part of the concept of natural causality: *temporality*. The result is a new sort of causality, transcendental freedom, whose distinguishing determination when it first appears is that it need precisely *not* be determined to act by anything temporally prior, hence by nothing in nature. At least from a point of view within nature, a transcendently free cause can thus be determined to exercise its causality by nothing other than itself. (A537/B565)

Importantly, that is not *necessarily* to have thought an altogether ungrounded or self-grounding causality, i.e., to have thought a cause whose being *non-temporally conditioned* is logically impossible. “[...] the causality of [transcendental] freedom”, Kant instructs us, “is not in turn subject, according to the law of nature, to another cause that determines it *as regards time*” (A533/B561; emphasis mine). But only temporality enforces the necessary infinitude of causal series. So with temporality excluded from the concept of transcendental freedom as a kind of causality, there is no longer any reason for altogether excluding the possibility (as contradictory of temporality) that transcendently free causality is ungrounded or self-grounding. And at the same time, we also, thanks to reason’s need, have a logically possible concept (albeit one whose objective reality and hence positive meaning we cannot secure) *as* of an object appropriate to seat a transcendently free causality, namely that of a merely intellectual and hence non-temporal thing in itself. Thus the cause that bears transcendently free causality is an “intelligible cause” (A537/B565).

So far, we have not encountered anything that requires or even enables us to move beyond mere concepts and logical possibility to really possible objects. But what about Kant’s concept of an “intelligible character” of a transcendently free cause? By ‘character of a cause’, Kant means “a law of its causality without which it would not be a cause at all” (A539/B567).

Kant's proposal here is that insofar as we introduce transcendently free causality in part to think the possibility of *human* freedom in the context of Kant's thoroughly deterministic conception of nature, we should want to attribute to our own agential causality both an *intelligible* character and an *empirical* character. The empirical character of our causality is just whatever natural laws (including psychological laws) govern our actions as empirical events during our lives. But the intelligible character of our causality is what belongs to such causality as is seated in a transcendently free, merely intelligible cause, the law of that causality (A539/B567).<sup>54</sup> Now whatever that law amounts to, to qualify an *intelligible* cause it cannot, as I have been emphasizing, presuppose that the cause belongs to time. And in spelling out what that entails, Kant issues some novel-looking determinations of that cause (i.e., the subject of action conceived as transcendently free):

In this subject no *action* would *arise* or *pass away*. Hence it would also not be subjected to the law of all time determination and of everything changeable, viz., that everything *that occurs* has its cause *in appearances* (those of the previous state). In a word, the subject's causality, insofar as it is intellectual, would not stand at all in the series of empirical conditions that make the event necessary in the world of sense. We could not, indeed, ever become acquainted with this intelligible character directly, because we cannot perceive anything except insofar as it appears; but we would still have to *think* it in accordance with the empirical character, just as in general we must—in thought—lay a transcendental object at the basis of appearances although we know nothing about this object as to what it is in itself. (A539-40/B567-8)

Do any of those claims require us to move beyond logical possibility?

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<sup>54</sup> On this and the next two Akademie pages of the *Critique*, Kant is once again fairly cavalier with his usage of the technical terms 'thing in itself', 'transcendental object', and 'noumenon'. The intelligible character, we are told, is the character "of the thing in itself" (A539/B567). But that intelligible character of the thing in itself is thought of as the basis of the empirical character of a corresponding appearance "just as in general we must—in thought—lay a transcendental object at the basis of appearances although we know nothing about this object as to what it is in itself" (A540/B568). And that same transcendently free thing in itself, thought of now as the subject of an action, "would nonetheless have to be pronounced free from any influence of sensibility and determination by appearances. For insofar as this subject is *noumenon*, nothing *occurs* in it [...]" (A541/B569). A reader who wants to draw careful distinctions between those technical terms has their work cut out for them here.

No. We are already familiar with the negative derivation history of the concept ‘thing in itself’. Things in themselves are objects that are *not* sensible but *only* thinkable, and just to that extent they are outside of time and not conditioned by it. So any causality they would exercise would thus not be temporally determined but, from an empirical point of view, spontaneous. *But that is just the intelligible character of a transcendently free cause* (A539-40/B567-8). And if the transcendently free cause at issue in the third Antinomy is subsequently identified with reason (A546-7/B574-5), that is again not because Kant thinks we have any intuitive acquaintance with it, such that it is any more than merely logically possible. It is rather because in its practical guise, reason needs precisely the present concept of a transcendently free cause to make sense of its thought of itself as subject and legislator of genuine moral imperatives (A547-8/B575-6). In other words, the identification is motivated by a need of reason.

Thus the resolution to the third Antinomy indeed assigns determinate predicates to the thing in itself as transcendently free cause. But just as with the assignment of determinate predicates to the concept ‘thing in itself’ in the Amphiboly, what makes the assignment determinate is not any possibility of *givenness* of an object that would correspond to the concept, and hence not reference, objective reality, real possibility, positive meaning, or, in general, any move beyond logical possibility.

### 3. Concluding Remarks and Next Steps

In this chapter, I have given an account of the concept ‘thing in itself’ that conforms to the constraints on meaning and use laid down in the previous chapter. I had to explain why talk of things in themselves appears in the Critical system at all given those constraints and how such talk can nevertheless respect them. Having done so, I take myself to have done the main positive

work required to undermine any apparent interpretive necessity of finding in Kant a conception of our epistemic capacity as essentially disconnected from an experience-transcendent ground of the empirical realm, a conception that makes empirical realism as a genuine realism about empirical things impossible. The recent transcendent-metaphysical turn in Kant-interpretation is not obligatory, and if we are to respect Kant's entitlement to empirical realism, we must and now can safely reject it.

The picture of the concept 'thing in itself' that emerges from this chapter is that of an Idea-like concept. It is Idea-like in being negative and limiting and a provoker of Dialectical reasonings about experience-transcendent objects. But as I have emphasized, it is not like the Ideas proper in another respect, namely in that, properly interpreted, the theoretical Ideas have not merely negative but positive though immanent meanings and uses, and hence are positively meaningful in a way that the concept 'thing in itself' is not.

But for all I have said here, how that could be possible in light of Kant's conceptual-semantic views is still pretty mysterious. So to show that Kant's theory of meaning, which I claim to be essential to the possibility of his empirical realism, does not pose insuperable problems in any major region of his Critical philosophy and that the Ideas do not force us to bring transcendent metaphysics right back into the interpretive picture, I turn now to an account of the positive but immanent uses of the theoretical Ideas and, in chapter seven, to an account of the positive but immanent uses of the practical Ideas. The basis of the account of the theoretical Ideas is the Appendix to the Transcendental Dialectic, where we find that if we use Ideas to refer not to *unconditioned objects* but to *the understanding in its dealings with objects* and *the systematicity of nature*, that use is legitimate. For that use is simply for explanation and

explainability within the limits of the empirical and hence is indeed immanent rather than transcendent.



## Chapter Six: The Immanent Use of the Theoretical Ideas

Our continuing task is the revelation of a genuine empirical realism in Kant's Critical philosophy. The task of this and the next chapter is to show that that realism and the Kantian doctrines that I have put to work to develop it do not generate major inconsistencies with Kant's theory of Ideas in the theoretical and practical domains. Once that task is complete, I will close, in chapter eight, with a reflection on the conception of Kant's transcendental idealism that emerges from the distinctive interpretive method that I have all along been guided by herein: to treat empirical realism as a methodological control on the interpretation of the Critical philosophy and thereby clearly to see whether and, if so, how that philosophy can make empirical realism possible.

In the previous chapter, I argued that Kant's concept 'thing in itself' had a merely negative meaning or use. By that I mean that it does not refer to any really possible object and hence, by Kant's lights, is strictly *sinnlos* and *bedeutungslos*, but that it has a determinate and stable intension, grounded in a necessary though merely subjective need of reason, and can function for us as a boundary or limiting concept, i.e., for our epistemic capacity—not, however, as indicating a barrier between us and a further reality that we cannot know but rather as separating knowledge from rational delusion. I also suggested that 'thing in itself' is *generic* with respect to the three canonical theoretical Ideas.

Now of course, the Ideas do *not* have a merely negative meaning or use. The lesson of the Dialectic, brought home in the Appendix, is that the Critical refutations of the various Dialectical inferences is not equivalent to a wholesale rejection of the Ideas, and the use that Kant retains for them is clearly more than merely to mark the limits of our epistemic reach. Yet the theoretical Ideas are, at first glance, concepts of experience-transcendent objects, so that if Kant

countenances a more than merely negative use for them, that would seem to have to be fundamentally inconsistent with his rejection of meaningful thought of the in-itself. And as I have argued, Kant's conceptual-semantic theory is absolutely crucial for making possible his empirical realism. So if we are to remain committed to that conceptual-semantic theory and to Kant's empirical realism as a genuine realism, we need to be able to see how the theory can yield a satisfying reading of Kant's doctrine of the theoretical Ideas that shows at once first, how those Ideas can, properly used, refer (*beziehen*) to what is experience-immanent, and consequently second, how the discovery of their meaningfulness need not be the discovery that their putative experience-*transcendent* objects are really possible.

The task of this chapter is to prove that that can be done. I shall argue that although theoretical Ideas are in fact *not* presentations of particular experience-transcendent objects and are empty and meaningless if they are interpreted as such, that is entirely compatible with their having a positive use and meaning grounded in their referring *ultimately* to possible experience and, hence, empirical things. And in so referring, the theoretical Ideas are or express, like the categories and forms of sensibility, *conditions of the possibility of experience and of empirical things*: They characterize nature's inherent systematicity, that is, its availability to explanation through real relations of conditioned to condition according to the relational categories; and such systematicity is a prerequisite for experience's being organized enough to enable empirical truth and thereby amount to experience at all.

The order of my argument is as follows. Section 1 makes the case for a thoroughly immanentist reading of the legitimate use of the Ideas of theoretical reason. I begin by characterizing what a transcendent use would be and why no such use is genuinely possible. I then argue that Kant's rejection of the possibility of a transcendent use for the Ideas requires that

we find the legitimate use for them that he accepts to be thoroughly immanent, requiring no reference of the Ideas to experience-transcendent unconditioned things, and hence that the meanings of the Ideas in their immanent uses be exhausted by their bearing on possible experience as a system of explanation. In section 2, I consider an objection to that thoroughly immanent account of the meanings of the Ideas in their legitimate use from Kant's account of doctrinal faith. I reply that the latter account is not substantively different from doctrines of the Appendix to the Transcendental Dialectic that motivated my argument in section 1. And in section 3, I draw out a key implication of the argument of this chapter: that nature's systematicity is not just a subjective projection but an objective feature of empirical reality.

One prefatory remark: One ought, if one is being careful, to distinguish between the principles of reason (homogeneity, variety, affinity (A657-8/B685-6)—not to be confused with the “principle of pure reason” discussed in chapter two) and the Ideas strictly so called. Kant discusses them in different places in the Appendix, but he does not clarify what the distinction amounts to. My purpose herein is not exhaustively to explain the doctrines of the Appendix, and so I tolerate some fuzziness in that distinction.<sup>1</sup> But an adequate rough-and-ready characterization is this: Insofar as reason aims at a systematic unity of knowledge or cognition and thus at a kind of whole, the principles describe the shape we can expect that whole to take (i.e., what we are looking for), whereas the Ideas in their immanent use describe the principles or presuppositions of the investigation that yields that whole (i.e., how we are to look for it).<sup>2</sup> But

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<sup>1</sup> Guyer 2005 is helpful in that connection.

<sup>2</sup> Guyer observes a distinction between the sort of systematicity predominantly discussed in reference to the principles of reason in the first half of the Appendix (the systematicity of empirical concepts and their corresponding objects as belonging to genus-species hierarchies) and the sort predominantly discussed in reference to the Ideas in the second half (the systematicity of empirical judgments and their corresponding objects as belonging to chains of explanation or conditions). To keep this dissertation a manageable length, I don't go into how those two sorts of systematicity are related in any detail here. But I suspect that the joint is in the Idea of God as a specifically *rational*

notwithstanding that distinction, Kant obviously takes there to be a fairly intimate relation between the principles of reason and the Ideas, as he introduces the former precisely to substantiate his claim that the Ideas “have a superb and indispensably necessary *regulative* use” (A643/B671), one that is “*indigenous* (immanent)” to possible experience (A644/B672).

## 1. Ideas: Their Transcendent and Immanent Uses

### 1.1. Ideas in Their Transcendent Use: Their Motivation and Their Failure

As I noted in the previous chapter, although the concept ‘thing in itself’ is in many ways Idea-like, it is not strictly an Idea in its own right. We saw Kant use it to diagnose certain pathologies characteristic of early modern philosophy, but the disputes that those pathologies give rise to (or at least the ones that interest Kant) are not so much about things in themselves as such as about particular (putative) experience-transcendent things. That reflects the fact that when we attempt to do metaphysics, our proximate concern is not with explanation in general but with this or that determinate sort. When we consider a self and its mental states, for instance, we seem to have an example of a logical relation of subject to predicate. So to satisfy reason’s demand for complete explanation, we posit not just any thing in itself but one that would ground an explanation in subject-predicate terms, namely an ultimate or unconditioned substance, a bearer of attributes that cannot be reduced to further substances and is thus simple.

There are three basic sorts of explanatory relation for Kant: substance and attribute, cause and effect, and community. Correspondingly, there are three sorts of unconditioned object

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basis of the world, thus as both a supreme condition (second kind of systematicity) and one whose nature would require that what it conditions be intelligible to other rational beings (first kind). (Guyer 2005, 16ff.)

posited by reason, conceived of as the ultimate terms of those explanatory relations.<sup>3</sup> In the Dialectic, we thus get the Ideas of the soul, the world as a whole, and God, each conceived of as unconditioned explainers of aspects of the world of appearance according to the three relations of explanation. If, by contrast, we simply posited the thing in itself as such at the terminus of each of those explanatory relations, the weakness of the explanation would be evident: It would amount to the claim that for whatever needs explaining, something must explain it. The tailoring of the concept of the thing in itself to each distinctive kind of explanation holds out the hope of something more informative. ‘Perhaps,’ an early modern metaphysician might think, ‘we can determine the nature of the experience-transcendent unconditioned explainer by attending to the form of explanation that is to terminate in it.’

Of course, that turns out not to be so. For each of the three Ideas, Kant argues that the inferential chain by which we are to reach its experience-transcendent object is invalid or unsound.<sup>4</sup> Yet those chains of inference are somehow *necessary*, their problems notwithstanding. The thought that we might cognize such experience-transcendent objects is what Kant calls “transcendental illusion”, and such an illusion “does not cease even when we have already uncovered it and have, through transcendental critique, had distinct insight into its nullity” (A297/B353). Seeing why will further confirm the conception of reason that I have been developing, as a source of needs or demands because of its nature as the power of explanation. At the same time, it will clear the ground for the possibility of the Ideas’ immanent and positive use.

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<sup>3</sup> As I noted in the previous chapter (section 2.3), that is somewhat over-simple with respect to the object of the cosmological Idea, the world-whole, out of which four different cosmological unconditioneds emerge.

<sup>4</sup> The Paralogisms are invalid, as are the proofs of God’s existence discussed in the Transcendental Ideal. The Antinomies, by contrast, comprise inferences that are valid in their own terms but share assumptions that lead to the assertability of contradictory claims, and are unsound on the basis of those assumptions.

Consider the Paralogisms. They are inferences whose purpose is to give an object for the 'I' of the 'I think' to refer to and to specify that object's nature (A343/B401). The specification is to take place in each case by observing a characteristic of the mere presentation 'I think', as the simple and empty *form* of any possible awareness, and then attempting to assign that characteristic as an attribute to the putative referent of the 'I', called the soul (B407-9). The form of explanation at issue in the Paralogisms is subject-predicate, or substance-attribute. Hence insofar as reason's end is explanatory completeness, the object allegedly designated by 'I' must be an unconditioned subject or substance (A344/B402).

Take the A first Paralogism:

[P1] That whose presentation is the *absolute subject* of our judgments and hence cannot be used as determination of another thing is **substance**.

[P2] I, as a thinking being, am the *absolute subject* of all my possible judgments, and this presentation of myself cannot be used as predicate of any other thing.

[C] Therefore I, as thinking being (soul), am **substance**. (A348)

The inference is formally invalid: The phrase 'absolute subject' must have a different meaning in each of the two premises, so that the conclusion does not go through. Beginning with the second premise, the 'I' is the *logical subject* of its distinctive predicates, viz., its judgments. That is, in thought, I never find the 'I' predicated of any further subject but rather find inner items qualifying it, and that state of affairs reflects the fact that the 'I think' is the form of possible consciousness or thought in general. However, the 'I', even if it is not quite a concept proper (A347/B404), is in any case no intuition (A382) but an intellectual presentation (B132), and only through intuition can objects be given for cognition. Hence the 'I' is *no more than* a logical subject and can only be an 'absolute subject' in that sense. By contrast, in the first premise, the 'absolute subject' is to be not merely a logical subject but a *substance*, hence a thing. (The 'that' with which the first premise begins is thus elliptical for 'that thing' or 'that object'.) That whose

presentation *in intuition* is the absolute subject of our judgments would indeed be a substance in the sense at issue in the paralogism, could such a thing be presented in intuition at all. But, of course, it cannot, and *a fortiori* not through an empty intellectual presentation (A396-403).

Thus the inference is indeed a paralogism in Kant's sense, that is, a formally invalid syllogism. But it is, moreover, a *transcendental* paralogism, one that "has a transcendental basis for inferring wrongly as regards form" and that has "its basis in the nature of human reason, and will carry with it an illusion that is unavoidable although not unresolvable" (A341/B399). And that basis is reason's essential drive for explanatory completeness according to the explanatory relation substance-attribute.

When reason is dealing with judgments, its characteristic activity is to arrange them, so far as possible, into syllogisms, such that some judgments are explained as conclusions through others as premises. That creates a system of justification and gives reason the task of finding a highest premise, through which all derivative conclusions can be ultimately justified. Confronted now with objects, reason seeks explanatory completeness through a chain of *real conditions*, terminating now not with a highest premise but a highest object, an unconditioned in terms of which all conditioned objects can be explained. If reason lacks what Kant calls "discipline" (A710/B738), i.e., "that [which] will subdue its propensity toward expansion beyond the narrow bounds of possible experience" (A711/B739), it actually posits that unconditioned object as *given* through reason's sheer demand for it and hence posits the possibility of our *a priori* cognition of it. In the present case, it posits an absolute substance all of whose properties are either derived from the logical characteristics of the 'I' or from the putative substance's being

merely intellectual (hence non-spatio-temporal): simple, immortal across time, and capable of existing independently of anything other than itself (A344/B402).<sup>5</sup>

The attempt to cognize an unconditioned substance with those properties through the empty intellectual presentation 'I' is clearly an attempt to overstep the bounds of possible experience. For first, unconditioned objects cannot even logically-possibly be given empirically. To see why, consider that ordinary empirical things, being given in space and time, are just thereby conditioned by the infinitely divisible and indefinitely extended spatio-temporal manifold. Moreover, the categories schematized to space and time yield dynamical principles whose direct implication is that no empirical state of affairs is understandable save as the effect of an antecedent causal event, so that explanation of empirical states of affairs in terms of prior events is always *really possible* and all such states of affairs are thereby conditioned (B233-4). The mere concept of empirical givenness thus precludes that any absolutely unconditioned be empirically given.<sup>6</sup>

And second, the unconditioned substance that reason posits in the Paralogism is somehow or other to be cognized, and cognition requires intuition. But just insofar as the inference to the existence of that unconditioned subject is purely rational and not empirical, our entitlement to the inference presupposes the possibility of reason's own intuition of the unconditioned substance, without any cooperation of sensibility. Yet sensibility is partly constitutive of possible experience. Hence reason's own conception of its activity in trying to cognize the unconditioned substance requires that it move beyond the empirical.

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<sup>5</sup> In an earlier draft, I suggested that reason's practical interest partly determined the properties of the soul in the Paralogisms. The remonstrations of Andrew Pitel and Andrew Brook convinced me I was wrong about that.

<sup>6</sup> That argument did not depend on the fact that the unconditioned object at issue in the Paralogisms is specifically an unconditioned *substance*. One could, in connection with that putative object in particular, additionally appeal to Kant's claims in the first Analogy and the Amphiboly that substance, in appearance, is a mere sum of relations, and that the conditions of possible givenness to sensible subjects altogether precludes the possibility of givenness of that which is not merely relation but something intrinsic. (A265-6/B321-2)



So reason's effort to explain the conditioned by positing an unconditioned object must fail (not a surprising result by this point in my argument). For reason is no intuitive power, wherefore its drive for completeness of explanation is not reflected in a directly constitutive condition of objects that would hence be given as not just *sufficiently* but *completely* explainable, all the way up to their unconditioned condition. And thus the theoretical Ideas of reason, *construed as concepts of unconditioned things*, have a merely negative use. "There is," Kant writes, "no rational psychology [or cosmology or theology] as a *doctrine*, which would furnish us an addition to our self-cognition, but only as a *discipline*, which in this field sets bounds for speculative reason that cannot be overstepped" (B421). The Ideas construed as concepts of unconditioned things, in other words, indicate precisely what reason cannot achieve, and hence what explanation cannot be: the complete satisfaction of explanatory demands through rational givenness (i.e., a rational intuition) of an unconditioned object.

### 1.2. Ideas in their Immanent Use

I have contended that Kant assigns a positive use to the Ideas. Yet any attempt to use the Ideas to refer to unconditioned things is necessarily an attempt to use them transcendentally; for no unconditioned thing can be given empirically. So any possible positive use must be *immanent* or else no use at all. And it is important for the continuing plausibility of my reading that there really be such a use. For given Kant's conceptual-semantic theory as I have presented it, only if we can show that the theoretical Ideas have an immanent use—a use such that they refer to possible experience, its objects, or its conditions—will we show that they have a positive *meaning*. And if the conceptual-semantic theory compelled us to say that the Ideas are simply not meaningful, that would be a major interpretive cost to pay. So: What is the Ideas' immanent use?

We find our answer in the Appendix. Kant there instructs us that

[...] it is not the idea in itself but merely its use that can in regard to our entire possible experience be either *overreaching* (transcendent) or *indigenous* (immanent), according as the idea either is directed [*richtet*] straightforwardly to an object that supposedly corresponds to it, *or is directed only to the understanding's use as such in regard to the objects dealt with by the understanding*. (A643/B671; final emphasis mine)

The immanent use of the Ideas is their being 'directed' not to unconditioned things but to the understanding and its use. And shortly after that passage Kant instructs us in more familiar terms that reason, with its Ideas, "never refers straightforwardly to an object, but refers solely to the understanding" (A643/B671). Now we already saw in chapter three (sections 2 and 6) that Kant takes a relation of *indirect* reference to hold between the principles of reason and empirical things by way of a more proximate reference of those principles to the understanding. But that raises the question of what, precisely, it is for a presentation to 'refer' (*beziehen*) not to an object but to a power of a stem of presentation. Is the *Beziehung* of an Idea to the understanding a reference in precisely the same sense in which the *Beziehung* of a concept to an object is a reference? Or does Kant there speak by analogy, or simply carelessly?

To develop an answer, I must first exhibit reason's activity when functioning correctly, which requires characterizing its bearing on the activity of the human epistemic capacity more generally. I will then be able, second, to turn directly to a consideration of the Ideas and their reference to possible experience.

### 1.2.1. A Sketch of Reason's Correct Functioning

Reason's correct functioning is in an important way *cooperative*, i.e., with the other powers of the human epistemic capacity. Reason, Kant instructs, "does not *create* any concepts

(of objects), but only *orders* them and gives to them that unity which they can have in their greatest possible extension, i.e., the unity which they can have in reference to totality on the part of series” (A643/B671). The understanding furnishes the concepts (and judgments) that reason orders. Understanding’s characteristic activity at the level of thinking, or what we might call the logical level, is the reflection of experience into concepts, which proceeds by way of judgments. Concepts and judgments are each a sort of unity. Yet they are *discrete* unities: The activity by which they are generated is not simply identical to the activity by which they are integrated into a system of knowledge. In Kant’s terms, they bear “distributive unity”, that is, taken serially or one by one, but that is something distinct from a possible “collective unity” in which they would be elements of a single whole (A664/B672). A system, bearing collective unity, would first make possible explanation by arranging concepts according to genus and species<sup>7</sup> and giving syllogistic structure to judgments, so that particular judgments could be cognized as necessary in terms of others (which is all that explanation amounts to). So the claim that reason, correctly used, ‘refers to’ the understanding or its activity means at least this: that reason’s own activity presupposes that of the understanding just insofar as the understanding provides for reason a *matter* (concepts and judgments) to which reason contributes a *form* (systematicity).

We may seem now to have said enough to have the Ideas and their correct function clearly in view. They each correspond to a distinctive form of explanatory relation among judgments. But Kant introduces another distinction between the correct and incorrect (i.e., immanent and transcendent) uses of the Ideas. A transcendent use would be a *constitutive* use. That is, it would be a use “whereby concepts of certain objects would be given”, i.e., a use to

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<sup>7</sup> Kant’s commitment to systematization of concepts according to genus and species is much weaker than Aristotle’s. Kant has no *a priori* commitments about, e.g., how many species can fall at the same logical level under a given genus, or which *differentiae* are appropriate grounds of speciation and which others not.

designate an object (A644/B672). But if an Idea is used *regulatively*, we do not take it to designate any object at all. It is the concept merely of a form of explanation for the understanding's judgments.<sup>8</sup>

Our picture of reason's correct functioning is almost complete. Earlier I characterized the understanding's concept- and judgment-forming activity as 'logical' and sketched the correct functioning of reason in its relation to that logical activity. But that does not exhaust the understanding's activity. It also has an as it were *objective* function—'as it were' because I do not mean to suggest by 'objective' that the understanding's logical activity is 'merely subjective', a matter of how beings like us contingently happen to think, but to indicate the understanding's use in relation to the objects of concepts and judgments: empirical things. That objective function or activity is its direct informing of sensibility in the latter's deliverance of intuitions (not in a second step, after the intuitions are already 'present' in some minimal and purely sensible way, e.g., "proleptically"<sup>9</sup>), so that what sensibility presents is always *per se* thinkable.<sup>10</sup> Such a function is obviously related to the understanding's function in judgment. For sensibly given empirical things are precisely that about which we judge in the most basic case.<sup>11</sup>

We might therefore expect a similar distinction between logical and objective functions of reason, just insofar as the possibility of explanation informs the understanding in its logical and objective functions. Just as reason's logical function is the systematization of our concepts and judgments, its objective function would be the informing of the deliverances of sensibility by

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<sup>8</sup> Note that at least as the constitutive/regulative distinction first appears in the Appendix, it is not obviously a distinction between 'a use that reflects how things are' and 'a use that reflects merely how we must think things are, given our contingent natures'. I shall return to that point in section 3.1 below.

<sup>9</sup> Allison 2004, 82.

<sup>10</sup> Here I again flag my sympathy for 'conceptualist' readings of the relation between understanding and sensibility.

<sup>11</sup> That is not to deny that we also make judgments about what is not given *in* sensibility but precedes it, i.e., synthetic *a priori* judgments. But such judgments are enabled by the forms of sensibility and are thereby about possible experience, where the latter is just the possibility of our actual sensible encounter with particular empirical things (what I have called 'the most basic case' of judgment).

systematicity, so that sensibility presents empirical things as themselves systematically arranged—nature. And there would be reason to think that the possibility of reason’s logical function presupposes its objective bearing on the deliverances of sensibility. For our judgments about empirical things can only be as systematic as the things themselves permit, so that if nature were nothing more than a disorganized heap, then the judgments describing it could never amount to systematic knowledge. Empirical things themselves, in other words, would have to belong to a comprehensive system of explanation or, if one prefers a term in a more objective register, of *grounding*, if our cognition of those objects were likewise to form a system.

The argument I just gave is also Kant’s. For Kant, that principle according to which our concepts and judgments are, so far as possible, to be integrated into a system is the logical principle of reason. A principle according to which empirical things themselves constitute a system would be, if there really is such a principle, what Kant calls “a *transcendental* principle of reason” and corresponds to a *transcendental* (not *transcendent*) use of reason (A648/B676).<sup>12</sup> Now whether Kant accepts such a genuinely objective principle (where ‘objective’ is what I understand the force of ‘transcendental’ to amount to in this context) is a matter of interpretive controversy. The majoritarian reading is that corresponding to reason’s logical use in the systematization of our judgments is the *necessary but merely subjective expectation* that empirical things are in themselves systematically arranged, but nothing more. I contest that reading in section 3.1 below. But meanwhile I have said enough to consider our picture of reason’s correct functioning more or less complete.

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<sup>12</sup> In the *Dialectic*, Kant is not careful to distinguish between ‘transcendental’ and ‘transcendent’. When I refer to reason’s ‘transcendental use’, I mean strictly to indicate its use in connection with possible experience, and certainly not a use for the presentation of an unconditioned thing.

Drawing the picture of reason's correct functioning is the first of two steps necessary to understand Kant's talk of reason's *Beziehung* to the understanding, which in turn is necessary to understand the Ideas' immanent use. We now have an idea of what that 'reference'-relation is supposed to make possible, namely an unproblematic integration of reason's drive for explanation into the intra-empirical functions of understanding and sensibility. We can now ask exactly what 'reference' means in this context.

### 1.2.2. The Reference of Ideas

Now in a way, the answer is pretty simple. An Idea in its legitimate, immanent use is a concept not of some thing but of a form or function of explanation whose material is furnished by sensibility and understanding, each with their own distinctive forms or functions. We might call reason's activity of explanation 'immanent explanation' to distinguish it from that explanatory activity which disregards the formal contributions to cognition made by sensibility and is informed only by reason's unencumbered demands, culminating in the positing of experience-*transcendent* unconditioned things. That Idea, e.g., which in its transcendent use is the concept of an unconditioned substance is in its immanent use the concept of the explanation of empirical things according to relations of substance and attribute (such that in experience we are never licensed to judge that we are given an 'absolute' substance). And since sensibility conditions whatever is given through it, makes possible the giving of things without the givenness of their conditions, and enables a separation between completeness and sufficiency of explanation, immanent explanation is explanation of what is really-possibly *always further explainable* and yet does not presuppose the real possibility of *actually being completely explained*.

But with that, we seem to have all we need: An ordinary empirical concept refers to ordinary empirical phenomena; a category refers to possible experience as such, and thereby, ‘indirectly’, to empirical things; and now an Idea, used correctly, refers to a form of immanent explanation, taking as its material concepts, judgments, and conceptualized intuitions, and thereby refers even more ‘indirectly’ to empirical things. Categories, as intellectual presentations, have meaning because they belong to the understanding’s immanent use, i.e., as constitutive conditions of possible experience and empirical things as *comprehensible*. And while I have not yet addressed the question whether reason, too, sets conditions on the possibility of sensibly given empirical things in the same direct way that understanding does, it at any rate conditions the possibility of “coherent use of the understanding” (A651/B679; cf. A654/B682), so that experience is impossible without an understanding and understanding is impossible without reason. Trying to hold onto an understanding of ‘reference’ in this context that is recognizably semantic, we might thus say that an Idea is proximately ‘about’ a form of explanation, but that the concept ‘form of explanation’ is not itself about anything unless there is material that requires explanatory systematization (concepts and judgments), and those in turn are not about anything unless there is something we are capable of cognizing through them: empirical things. Hence Ideas refer *ultimately* to empirical things just insofar as they would be meaningless if we could not cognize such things, even though Ideas are strictly concepts of forms or functions of immanent explanation.

But that reasonably straightforward account can seem doubtful thanks to difficulty seeing how the concept of some unconditioned thing, on the one hand, and of a form of immanent explanation, on the other, could be the very same concept. Even granting that one of those objects is merely putative, different *intensions* (i.e., sets of marks) would seem to be required

even to purport to pick each object out, and hence altogether different concepts. So semantically, it seems more plausible to say that those are simply two different concepts that we have confused than that the very same concept can seem to have two such radically different referents. But so saying would come with its own cost, namely that it undermines Kant's explanation of the *necessity* of the Dialectical inferences. For they would boil down to the substitution of one concept for another and thereby threaten to lose the character of being *unavoidable* in the way that, e.g., optical illusions are unavoidable.

The Appendix contains a doctrine of the *schematization* of reason that might seem to promise to help solve that puzzle. The thought would be that differing schemata can provide for different (perhaps merely putative) objects of reference for the very same intellectual presentation. But the doctrine, such as it is, is murkily expressed, dispersed throughout the Appendix, and appears at first glance to threaten internal inconsistency, and I have come to the conclusion that it is best avoided lest we become sucked any more deeply than we are into interpretive arcana. Happily, however, we also do not need it. For the problem I articulated in the previous paragraph now seems to me to be merely a pseudo-problem.

To see that, we just need to note that an Idea is *per se* just a concept of a *maximization of this or that sort of explanation* (A508/B536). That characterization is abstract as between Idea *qua* concept of an unconditioned thing and Idea *qua* concept of a rational form of understanding's function, and the question is what *that* abstract concept refers to. If, *per impossibile*, reason could intuit and hence the principle of *pure* reason (from earlier in the Dialectic) held for us, then maximization of explanation would indeed consist in the actual givenness to us of an unconditioned explainer, an actual explanatory *maximum*, whose nature would be minimally determined by its being the terminus of a particular relation of explanation.



But because we can intuit only sensibly and consequently the empirical things that we cognize are necessarily given as conditioned, the maximization of explanation cannot terminate in an actual maximum and can only consist in *doing ever more explaining*. And the Idea in its relation to understanding would be the formal condition that insofar as the sensibly given thing is, as sensibly given, also *thinkable*, it is also necessarily *explainable* and never merely brutally present.

That way of understanding Kant's thinking in this vicinity allows us to make sense of his subsequent deployment of 'as if'-talk when characterizing our concrete use of Ideas in systematizing our knowledge. For instance, he suggests that to present objects as systematically related according to, e.g., relations of subject and predicate is to present them "as if" they belong to a series whose first member is an unconditioned subject or substance (A671/B699). There is an obvious problem there: Wouldn't that Idea already have to have a *meaning* in terms of a really possible unconditioned thing even to serve the merely "heuristic" function that Kant is gesturing at (A671/B699)?

No. To say that we should regard certain appearances 'as if' they belong to a series with an unconditioned first term is to say no more than that, notwithstanding the fact that no such first term is really possible, those appearances stand in the very explanatory relations that we once falsely took to license us to posit such a first term as actual. It is to insist, in other words, that the fact that a shortcut to complete explanation of the conditioned through rational intuition is unavailable does not make impossible the serial explainability of the conditioned through prior conditions. We already saw in chapter three that reason's immanent principles refer to objects of possible experience indirectly, by referring directly to the understanding and its discursive activity. The Ideas, employed immanently, turn out to be no more than special applications of those principles in particular scientific domains. Thus, e.g., in psychology (at least as Kant

conceives of it), we regard 'inner' (mental) phenomena 'as if' they belong to an unconditioned subject that persists in existence and identity through variations in those phenomena (A672/B700). But whereas if we were actually given such a subject through the relevant Idea, we could "derive the internal appearances of the soul" and any order among them from that subject, all that the Idea in fact licences is a "derivation" of those appearances one from another, i.e., explanatory relations of causal dependence over time, 'as if' their emergent explanatory unity were provided for and guaranteed by an underlying unconditioned subject (A673/B701). And even the soul's figuring as such an unconditioned is a consequence merely of the emptiness of the presentation 'I'. Were that presentation contentful, explanation could continue further up the series.

And so the heuristic use of an Idea, on the basis of which we explain phenomena 'as if' they belong to series of conditions terminating in an actual unconditioned, ends up more like a *projection from* our finite discursive explanatory practices on the basis of reason's need for completeness rather than a *derivation of* those practices from an already meaningful concept of a being that would satisfy reason's need. That is why Kant is later content to go so far as to call the Ideas not just "heuristic" but "heuristic *fictions*" (A771/B799), and to differentiate the role that they play in our explanatory activity from the role they could play if their meaning as concepts of unconditioned objects were ascertainable, namely to "be used as a basis for explaining actual appearances through a hypothesis" (A771/B799).

Hence we may be content with the pleasingly straightforward picture of the ultimate reference of the Ideas in their immanent use to empirical things and possible experience. And so Kant's doctrine of the Ideas of reason is fully compatible with his conceptual-semantic theory and the genuine empirical realism it makes possible.

## 2. An Important Objection: Doctrinal Faith

On the interpretation of the Ideas I've been offering, when we are using them legitimately, their status as concepts of certain unconditioned things when we use them illegitimately is basically irrelevant. They are concepts of forms of explanation of empirical phenomena brought to bear in particular domains of investigation and oriented towards explanatory maximization. And if we speak of our regarding those empirical phenomena 'as if' they are conditioned by one such unconditioned thing when we carry out our investigations, that is to say no more than that we may always regard empirical phenomena as *in principle explainable*: For any conditioned empirical phenomenon, we may always assume the possibility of its explanation in terms of a higher condition (albeit one that is itself conditioned in turn), even if that higher condition is not yet itself given. And that is as much as to say that we may regard the objects of nature and our judgments about them as forming systems, albeit ones whose contours and limits cannot be anticipated and into the ultimate grounds of which we cannot claim any *a priori* insight.

But if all that is right, what are we to make of Kant's claim in the Doctrine of Method that I may have *doctrinal faith* in the objects of the Ideas transcendentally construed? If I have *faith*, e.g., that an intelligent God has organized nature so as to enhance its knowability by me, isn't that a faith *in God*, and consequently a determinate doxastic attitude about *some object*? How can Kant countenance that within the bounds of his conceptual-semantic views?

To see how, we must locate Kant's discussion of doctrinal faith in the context of Kant's discussion of what we might now call propositional attitudes in Opinion, Knowledge, and Faith. Kant builds up to the discussion of doctrinal faith with his distinction among kinds of assent, where the kinds are differentiated by degrees of subjective validity (basically, how much I

believe some belief) (A822/B850) and objective validity (to what extent the belief has a basis that would convince anyone provided they are rational) (A820/B848). Opinion is sufficient neither subjectively nor objectively, i.e., I am not convinced of some proposition's truth, and I cannot see that it must be true, given what I know or cognize antecedently. Faith is sufficient subjectively but not objectively: I have conviction that some proposition is true, but I recognize that my present knowledge or cognition does not show that it must be true (i.e., is compatible with its falsehood). Knowledge (translating *Wissen*) is sufficient both subjectively and objectively (A822/B850). Now strictly speaking, there is no theoretical faith; faith only has a place, Kant writes, "in a *practical reference*", namely for either contingent or absolutely necessary (viz., moral) *purposes*. Nevertheless, in respect of contingent purposes, we may distinguish two sorts of faith: pragmatic and doctrinal (A823/B851).

Pragmatic faith is a faith on the basis of which one undertakes an action, the success or failure of which depends to some extent on the correctness of the belief (and is thus to the same extent a test of it). That that is what Kant has in mind by 'practical faith' is actually none too clear from the difficult passage where he describes it, but the example he gives is illustrative of the conception I've described: a physician who must treat a patient on the basis of his best educated guess and thus must *act* from a state that is like conviction in being (if only of necessity) a sufficient basis for action but unlike conviction in being nevertheless uncertain (A823-4/B851-2).<sup>13</sup> Doctrinal faith is like pragmatic faith in being a basis sufficient for acting that is nevertheless uncertain, but it is unlike pragmatic faith in that the action one undertakes on its basis cannot count as a test of its correctness. More specifically, Kant seems to suggest, a

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<sup>13</sup> 'Treating the patient' is the contingent purpose in the service of which the doctor has pragmatic faith in their best guess.

doctrinal belief is one whose verifiability by experience is unforeseeable by us (though it may turn out to be falsifiable in the long run) (A825/B854).<sup>14</sup>

His two examples are illustrative. The first is of his own faith in the existence of aliens (!). Kant would bet all that he owns that aliens exist on other worlds. Now that example is not altogether happy, because Kant does not specify a contingent purpose to the accomplishment of which faith in the existence of aliens is at all relevant. But in any case, it is an example of what, he thinks, *could* reasonably be presupposed for the benefit of some enterprise to which it mattered. At the same time, although Kant does not foreclose the possibility that we may someday be able to verify that aliens exist, faith in their existence need not presuppose that possibility to be legitimate.

But the question of the existence of aliens, though a recurring motif in Kant's work, is not the most important example of a possible doctrinal faith. Introducing his second example, he writes that "we must admit that the doctrine of the existence of God belongs to doctrinal faith" (A825-6/B853-4). The idea is that taking for granted purposive unity in nature facilitates the investigation of nature and that to think of nature as a purposive unity is nothing other than thinking of it as arising out of a "supreme intelligence" (A826/B854).<sup>15</sup> That example differs from the example of alien life in clearly specifying a contingent purpose: the investigation of nature. More importantly, it also differs in that not only can we not foresee an eventual verification of God's existence, we can be positively certain no such verification is really

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<sup>14</sup> That is my reading of (what I find to be) this exceptionally obscure passage: "Even if we cannot undertake anything at all concerning an object, and the assent regarding it is therefore merely theoretical, we can still in many cases conceive and imagine an undertaking for which we suppose ourselves to have sufficient bases if there were a means of establishing the certainty of the matter. And thus there is in merely theoretical judgments an *analogue* of *practical* judgments, and for an assent to such judgments the word *faith* is appropriate." (A825/B854)

<sup>15</sup> That may put Kant's point slightly too strongly. He writes that "I know no other condition for [the purposive unity of nature] that would make it my guide for the investigation of nature" than its basis in a supreme intelligence. That may suggest to some a looser connection than identity or analyticity between the two thoughts, 'purposive unity of nature' and 'nature's basis in a supreme intelligence'. But I cannot see that much hangs on that possible difference.

possible. Nevertheless, the thought that nature is a purposive unity, and *hence* (Kant seems to reason) that it is the sort of thing whose possibility we cannot understand save on the supposition that it is the product of a supreme intelligence, proves useful for my investigation of nature. Hence I may have a legitimate doctrinal faith in the existence of that intelligence as basis of nature.

Even still, the case is not really different from Kant's use of 'as if'-talk. There are strong parallels in subject matter and rhetoric between this part of the first *Critique* and the line of argument of the Appendix to the Transcendental Dialectic (not to mention that of The Discipline of Pure Reason in Regard to Hypotheses, whence Kant's claim that the Ideas are "heuristic fictions"). Both show a concern with the purposive unity of nature, with the connection between the latter unity and the idea of an intelligent basis for nature, and with the utility, for natural scientific investigation, of the consideration of nature as though it were the product of such an intelligent basis (A686-7/B714-5 and A826/B854). Both, moreover, show Kant at pains to foreclose any prospect of transcendent speculation he may seem to have opened. He does that by, in both cases, calling the invocation of the idea of an intelligent basis of nature a mere "presupposition" or "assumption" (A671/B699 and A826/B854). And in the Doctrine of Method, he goes so far as to say that that presupposition does not even amount to a *hypothesis* and to suggest that, moreover, that is because not merely the existence but even the mere *concept* of the 'presupposed' supreme intelligence must be *invented* (A827/B855). And my doctrinal faith amounts to no more than "the guidance that an idea gives to me, and [...] the idea's subjective influence on the furtherance of my acts of reason" (A827/B855), which characterization fits well the Ideas *qua* concepts of maximizations of finite explanatory activity. Although, therefore, the

language of ‘as if’ does not appear in Kant’s discussion of doctrinal faith, the parallels in substance and rhetoric are strong enough to be decisive.

Thus doctrinal faith does not present any additional challenge that the interpretive argument made above regarding the Appendix would fail to meet (provided it has not, in the reader’s judgment, failed to meet the original challenges for which it was developed). For Kant’s concept of doctrinal faith does not really reflect any commitment distinct from those of the Appendix at all. And so we shall say in this case, just as we could in the Appendix, that one’s belief ‘in God’ is not actually *about God* but about empirical things, namely about how we should “*search* for the character and connection of experiential objects as such” (A671/B699). Thus to have doctrinal faith in God’s existence is simply to take up the standpoint from which a certain aspect of the systematic unity of the empirical is brought to light. It is not, again, to move beyond the logically possible, or to employ the Idea for cognition of something other than a form of explanation brought to bear on possible experience.

### 3. An Important Consequence of the Preceding Argument: The Objective Reality of Reason’s Presentations

I have been arguing that Kant confers on the Ideas a legitimate, immanent use and consequently that in that use those Ideas are meaningful and referential, viz., ultimately to empirical things via the understanding. But as we saw in chapter three, any presentation that has those features is a presentation that also has *objective reality* or *objective validity*. And they even admit of a kind of deduction, i.e., an argument for that objective reality or validity:

[...] although these principles [of reason] contain mere ideas—which are to be observed by reason’s empirical use although they can be followed by it only asymptotically, as it were, i.e., merely approximately, without ever being reached

by it—they nonetheless have, as synthetic a priori propositions, objective but indeterminate validity and serve as rules of possible experience. (A663/B691)<sup>16</sup>

Now as I flagged above, there is a fairly common reluctance in the Kant-literature to regard reason's principles and the Ideas in their immanent use as actually binding on (empirical) things themselves and thus as full-blown conditions of the possibility of experience.<sup>17</sup> Those readers who share that reluctance are sometimes called 'methodological' readers of the Appendix.<sup>18</sup> One important motivation for their reluctance is, of course, that Kant appears to vacillate between more and less objective stands in the Appendix, which is grist for the ongoing Kantian interpretive mill. Another, more specific motivation is Kant's characterization of reason's positive, immanent function as *regulative* rather than *constitutive*, where 'regulative' is taken to suggest something like 'constraining merely how we must think'<sup>19</sup> and 'constitutive' is taken to suggest something like 'informing how (empirical) things really are'.<sup>20</sup> Nevertheless, recognition of the objective reality or validity of reason's principles and the Ideas in their immanent use requires that we leave all reluctance behind.

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<sup>16</sup> See also A650/B678, A651/B679, A664/B692, A669/B697, A670/B698. As regards deduction-talk in particular, Kant at first claims that ideas admit of no deduction at all (A664/B692), but he later allows that a deduction of them is possible after all, "even supposing that it might deviate greatly from the deduction that one can carry out with the categories" (A669-70/B697-8).

<sup>17</sup> Three examples, each in its own way, are Grier 2001, Guyer 2005, and Pickering 2011.

<sup>18</sup> As by Abela (2002, 251).

<sup>19</sup> Obviously, there is a completely innocent way in which reason dictates 'how we must think', namely insofar as it prescribes the form for thinking in general through general logic. But that is a sense of 'must' that is somewhere between normative and constitutive, or comprises both: To say that general logic prescribes 'how we must think' is to say what something must be to count as thinking at all. By contrast, the methodological reader of the Appendix is not interested in how theoretical reason is constituted but in how it is best helped; and the 'must' is a hypothetical one, whose antecedent is something like 'if we want maximally to facilitate our investigation of nature' or 'if we want to give our rhapsodically collected empirical judgments the form of a science'.

<sup>20</sup> A third motivation, or perhaps just support for the second just identified, is Kant's reversion in the third *Critique* to ways of speaking more reminiscent of the A first *Critique* than the B. I have in mind, in particular, his tendency to use 'subjective' to mean *not* 'having to do with what is inner' but rather 'having to do with what is empirical' and, correspondingly, 'objective' to mean *not* 'having to do with outer appearances' but rather 'having to do with things in themselves'. (That already represents an interpretive hypothesis about the distinctive rhetoric of the third *Critique*, but delving into the complexities of the third *Critique* would take us too far afield.)



Abela has ably argued for a fully objective reading of the doctrines of the Appendix in his *Kant's Empirical Realism*.<sup>21</sup> He brings to bear somewhat different argumentative materials from mine. His two key claims are these: First, the distinction between regulative and constitutive is a relative one, so that the identification of reason's immanent function as regulative does not yet tell us to what extent that function is objective (though it may indeed yield a clue to the *manner* in which it is objective).<sup>22</sup> That clears the way for taking at face value Kant's periodic suggestion that the principles of reason in their 'logical' guise, where they quite plainly are rules for our thinking, presuppose that those same principles have a 'transcendental' guise, on which they characterize how (empirical) things are.<sup>23</sup> And second, Kant is clear that reason's general principle of systematicity is a condition of the possibility of the use of the understanding and of empirical truth (A647/B675, A651/B679). If reason, in its drive for systematicity, governs merely 'how we must think' in a way that is disconnected from how things are (or even only accidentally corresponds to how things are), then why it should be required for exercises of the understanding in intuition or the recognition of empirical truth in the understanding's judgments looks opaque and seems like an *ad hoc* adjustment to a conception of cognition that already stands on its own<sup>24</sup> (or unsalvageably doesn't, as Abela suggests). After all, what is true is not a matter of how any being should or does think but of the mind-independent facts to which thinking is answerable.<sup>25</sup>

I won't defend Abela's arguments in any detail here, though I find them compelling. I mention them only to bring out what is distinctive about my own argument to the same

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<sup>21</sup> Abela 2002, 250ff.

<sup>22</sup> That view of Kant's first emerges clearly in the Analogies, which are regulative with respect to the existence of objects (A179/B221-2) but constitutive with respect to the experience within those objects are given (A664/B692).

<sup>23</sup> Abela 2002, 257-60.

<sup>24</sup> Abela 2002, 260-5.

<sup>25</sup> Abela 2002, 263.

conclusion, the argument from the objective validity or reality of the immanent function of reason. That argument is as follows. We have said that a concept has *objective reality* just in case that concept refers to empirical things, to possible experience as such, or to conditions of the possibility of experience or its objects. We could rephrase by saying simply that a concept has objective reality just in case it refers *ultimately* to empirical things (by way of whatever else it refers to more proximately which itself refers ultimately or proximately to empirical things). Now: Can a methodological reading, on which reason in its empirical function governs merely 'how we must think', accommodate the objective reality of reason's principles and Ideas in their immanent use?

The answer is no. We can see that by again reflecting on the fact that the Ideas and principles of reason are or express concepts of *explanation*. Explanation is essentially a truth-oriented activity. When we explain, and thus render our cognitions systematic, we do not do so in just any old way. Rather, we do so with a view to learning something about the mind-independent (though not experience-transcendent) world. An activity of systematizing our judgments in which was conceded at the outset that the resulting system was essentially unrelated to any systematic character that the objects of those judgments might themselves have would not be an activity of explanation at all. Indeed, it would be 'rational' in name only, since groundlessly taking things to be a certain way is clearly not a rational behaviour. But as I have emphasized, reason's principles are principles of explanation; and the Ideas, in their immanent use, are concepts of forms of explanation of empirical things. So if reason's presentations have

objective reality, it is *qua* presentations of how we must think *in order to get things right* and not simply because reason arbitrarily demands that we think thus.<sup>26</sup>

A reader with pragmatist inclinations might object that explanatory behaviour that does not at all presuppose any substantial thesis about getting things right can still be perfectly rational, and thus genuinely explanatory, provided it works. That reader, in making that objection, would be channeling Kant's suggestion in the Appendix that reason's principles and the Ideas in their immanent use can function heuristically. Perhaps, the suggestion goes, they can function heuristically *even in respect of the bare thought of their being responsive to empirical reality* (that is, that latter thought becoming itself a "heuristic fiction"). And then those principles and Ideas would get their objective reality as concepts of certain behaviours that we engage in because they work out all right for us. But the trouble with that suggestion is the claim of Kant's, already mentioned, that reason's presentations are conditions of the possibility of any use of the understanding at all. If the rationality of our use of them is purely pragmatic, then that use is nevertheless optional, and there is an open question, both at the outset and at any particular point in the history of investigation, whether the utility of those principles will not give out, and some others will become the rational ones to use. But then why the understanding should depend on reason's presentations—the specific ones Kant identifies—for its use is opaque; indeed, it is not clear that on that story, the understanding does so depend at all. Thus it is reason's principles and the Ideas in their immanent use construed as concepts *genuinely of explanation* whose objective reality Kant is concerned with.

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<sup>26</sup> Have I begged the question against my present dialectical opponent? Perhaps they would insist that the Ideas really are concepts merely of behaviour that we call explanatory rather than genuinely explanatory behaviour, and the principles likewise principles that we take to be rational because 'reason' demands them rather than because their rationality is evident through their orientation towards the discovery of truth. But I cannot imagine any sympathetic reader of Kant being attracted to that line of argument.

The picture that emerges is one on which there is no serious obstacle to regarding reason's principles and the Ideas as conditions of the possibility of experience. The concept of a form of explanation turns out itself to stand to the understanding's use as form to matter, just as the understanding stands to sensibility as form to matter in turn.<sup>27</sup> In the latter case, sensibility sets conditions directly on the givenness of objects (that they be given in space and time), but the understanding informs sensibility such that any object given through it is as such thinkable and a possible object of empirical judgments. In the former case, though the understanding sets the conditions of thought and judgment of objects, reason informs those conditions such that for something to be a thinkable empirical object, it must belong to a unitary explanatory system of such objects (albeit one which is indeterminate and indefinite so far as we can tell *a priori*); and, analogously, for any judgment to be possible, it must at least possibly belong in systematic relation to other judgments and thus be explainable.<sup>28</sup>

That picture is also a happy result for a robust empirical realist reader of the Critical philosophy. The primary business of this dissertation thus far has been to fend off the threat to a genuine empirical realism posed by variations on the theme of other possible epistemic capacities and other realities than the empirical. But that is in service of establishing our credentials really to *know* the objects of our experience (i.e., as *reality*) rather than to enjoy mere knowledge-for-us-humans (or cognition-for-us-humans) of objects-for-us-humans. Now the reading of the Appendix on which reason's function is merely to dictate how we must think, be

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<sup>27</sup> Speaking that way presupposes that the form/matter distinction is comparative or context-dependent. Thus space and time can be at once *forms* of sensibility (i.e., of givenness of empirical things) and *matter* informed *a priori* by the categories.

<sup>28</sup> Indeed, the relation between reason and the understanding is perhaps even more intimate than that between understanding and sensibility. For Kant believes merely sensible beings are possible (whatever those might be like), whereas his claim that the understanding depends upon reason for its use seems to rule out the possibility of being with understanding but not reason. That makes sense: Reason and understanding, though distinguishable in terms of functional role, are powers of a single stem of presentation, the intellectual, whereas sensibility is another stem in itself.

empirical things how they may, effectively institutes a new barrier between the human epistemic capacity and its object, but this time *within* the empirical. For on that reading, whether empirical things genuinely belong to a unitary system of explanation is beyond our ken, and a natural science comprising our systematically organized judgments about those things becomes, in its organization, merely the ‘appearance’ of whatever organization those things have or lack ‘in themselves’. So the rejection of a mere knowledge-/cognition-for-us-humans conception of our epistemic situation requires that we reject not only the real possibility of things in themselves and epistemic capacities that could be in touch with them but also the *impossibility* of genuinely epistemic presentation of nature’s organization.

#### 4. Concluding Remarks

We should now cast a glance back over what we have accomplished, and see how it contributes to the overall project of uncovering a genuine empirical realism in Kant.

The challenge was this: to show how Kant’s conceptual-semantic theory could tolerate assigning the theoretical Ideas a *meaning*, which is necessary for their having the immanent use and legitimacy Kant clearly believes they do. The challenge is now met. And the bearing of that result on Kant’s empirical realism should be clear enough. As I have been arguing, a major impediment to finding a genuine empirical realism in Kant is the toleration of meaningful thought of experience-transcendent entities and to epistemic capacities that could reach them. For with such entities in the philosophical picture (even only in terms of their real possibility), a way is opened for skeptical doubts about the status of our presentational capacity as a genuinely *epistemic* capacity, either because it is subject to contingent, non-epistemic restrictions on its manner of presentation or because the reality it presents is in some way incoherent. Kant’s

conceptual-semantic theory requires that experience-transcendent objects be one and all not really possible, which is equivalent to saying not even *meaningfully thinkable* by us. The more of the Critical apparatus we can show to be compatible with a strict application of the theory, the better the prospects for a thoroughly empirical realist interpretation of the Critical philosophy.

Two key difficulties remain to be addressed. The first is that posed by the practical Ideas. Mustn't they, even more so than the theoretical Ideas, positively *require* the possibility of reference to and meaningful thought of their experience-transcendent objects? The second is that posed by transcendental idealism: If I am right about Kant's empirical realism, *just what is transcendental idealism?* Resolving those difficulties is the task of the remaining two chapters.

## Chapter Seven: The Immanent Use of the Practical Ideas

In the previous chapter, I considered Ideas in Kant's theoretical philosophy. I wanted to give a reading of them that conforms to Kant's conceptual-semantic theory and thus respects his empirical realism. On that reading, the Ideas have a positive role to play in cognition and have objective reality. That is not to say, though, that they refer to experience-transcendent things. On the contrary: Their objective reality is grounded in their ultimate reference to possible experience just insofar as they are or express conditions of the possibility of that experience. We may make that latter claim notwithstanding that those very same Ideas masquerade as concepts of experience-transcendent things because of a distinction Kant draws between differing uses of the very same concept. In their putative transcendent use, they would indeed be concepts of such objects; but such a use is *merely* putative, because not really possible. But the Ideas have an immanent use, a genuine use, as concepts of maximization of explanation of empirical things according to the relational categories. On the reading I offered in the previous chapter, the Ideas' entire meaning is exhausted by that immanent use. Thus the conceptual-semantic theory is respected. And thus the positive place for the Ideas in Kant's system does not open up a vista for meaningful speculation about an experience-transcendent beyond or about epistemic capacities, different in kind from ours, that could reach it, which would undermine a genuine realism about empirical things.

But Ideas in Kant's practical philosophy seem to pose an even greater difficulty for me than theoretical Ideas. A noumenalist reader might hold that the practical philosophy only works if we can know (*wissen*) or cognize (*erkennen*) ourselves as transcendently free noumenal agents. But even a more agnostic reader might want to say that our concepts of such agents are at least *meaningful* and that they must be if Kant is not to turn out to be a straightforward empirical

determinist in the practical sphere. And how can the concept of transcendental freedom receive a new, special status in the practical philosophy that it lacked in the theoretical, such that Kant could claim that the practical philosophy resolves unfinished business in the third Antinomy? How, that is, if not by turning out (at least) to be *meaningful* in some way?

In responding to those difficulties, I cannot give anything like the sort of in-depth treatment of Kant's practical philosophy that it deserves. Such a treatment would merit an entire dissertation in its own right. Thus I do not purport to show herein that the interpretation of that philosophy to which we are pushed by an unwavering commitment to Kant's empirical realism and his conceptual-semantic theory wins the field against all competitors. What I do purport to show is that that interpretation is conceptually and textually available, and sufficiently promising to merit further development on another occasion.

This chapter has four sections. First, I present a puzzle about what appear to be competing noumenal-realist and deflationary tendencies in the second *Critique*. If only the deflationary tendencies were present, Kant's practical philosophy would be easy for me to accommodate. But the noumenal-realist tendencies, and perhaps even just Kant's willingness freely to discuss certain special noumena, pose a difficulty that must be resolved. Doing so requires answering three questions, which is the business of each of the subsequent sections. So second, I ask what exactly the 'practical point of view' is. The question matters because Kant's most extravagant-sounding claims are often qualified by the claim that they hold 'only from the practical point of view'. I find that the practical point of view is one from which, strictly speaking, we cannot be said to *know* or *cognize* the truth of the practical postulates but only have *faith* in them. Third, I ask after Kant's entitlement to assert the syntheticity of the moral law. Kant clearly envisages a close conceptual relation, and perhaps a close semantic relation,



between the practical Ideas and the moral law. And discerning whether Kant means to offer us, on the basis of the moral law, knowledge or cognition of noumena, or even just the possibility of *reference* to noumena, is vital for determining what exactly Kant means when he talks of God, freedom, and immortality and our mode of epistemic access to them. I argue that although I cannot fully account for the syntheticity of the moral law in this chapter, what is clear enough is that Kant does not take the moral law to give us any epistemic or even semantic foothold in the noumenal. For the moral law cannot possibly refer to a noumenal object, not even without our knowing it to. Fourth, I turn to the question of the objective reality of the practical Ideas. If the moral law's syntheticity is not made possible by a noumenal referent, how can the practical Ideas depend for their objective reality, and thus their meaning, entirely on the moral law? I argue that we misunderstand the practical postulates if we take them to be 'about' the noumena to which their terms (the practical Ideas) purport to refer. The practical Ideas refer to the moral law and have no content beyond what is furnished by the moral law, and we have no grip on them save in relation to that law. And just insofar as the moral law is a law precisely of the actions we are to undertake in *this*—empirical—world, the meaning of the practical postulates is experience-immanent.

I consider a virtue of my position that it has significant interpretive implications across the board. If not all of those implications can be adequately worked out in this dissertation, that only means that a path has been opened that someone will walk down some other time.

### 1. The Objects of the Practical Ideas: Logically Possible, Really Possible, or Actual?

The *Critique of Practical Reason* opens with a series of claims about what it is to “establish”, among them “*that there is pure practical reason*” and “*transcendental freedom*”

(presumably, *that there is* transcendental freedom) (KpV 5:3). Moreover, the reality or actuality of freedom proves the *possibility* of God and the immortality of the soul; and we seem licensed to assume that Kant there means *real* and not merely *logical* possibility. For he goes on to claim that “the ideas of God and immortality are provided, by means of the concept of freedom, with objective reality” (KpV 5:4). And we know from my terminological investigation in chapter three that the objective reality of a concept coincides with the real possibility of its object. So the second *Critique* accomplishes rather a lot, if the Preface is reliable.

But characteristically, what Kant gives with one hand he seems to take away almost immediately with the other. Beginning with the Ideas of God and immortality of the soul: On the very same page on which objective reality is imputed to those Ideas<sup>1</sup> (and hence real possibility to their objects), Kant observes that from a *theoretical* point of view, we can have neither cognition of nor insight into not only the actuality but even the *possibility* of the objects of those Ideas (KpV 5:4). (Again, we can safely assume that by ‘possibility’ he there means *real* possibility, for he clarifies that he takes for granted that those Ideas contain no contradictions and are thus logically possible.) So do the Ideas of God and immortality *have* real possibility or *lack* it? Kant’s answer seems to be that they have *something* that we may dub ‘real possibility’ but whose criteria are rather different from real possibility in the theoretical case. Specifically, God and immortality have their real possibility “*assumed*” in the service of some practical aim,<sup>2</sup> and indeed, one that is not contingent but absolutely necessary and *a priori*, namely the highest good (KpV 5:4). An absolutely necessary practical aim is “a basis of assent”, Kant instructs, that is “valid *objectively*” for any judgment the belief in which conduces to that aim’s achievement—

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<sup>1</sup> As in the previous chapter, I consistently capitalize ‘Ideas’ to mark off the particular, special concepts with which Kant wrestles in the Dialectic of the first *Critique* and in the second *Critique*.

<sup>2</sup> Talk of ‘assumption for a practical aim’ should evoke Kant’s discussion of pragmatic and doctrinal faith, which I discussed in the previous chapter (section 2).

even while that very same basis of assent remains “merely *subjective* in comparison to speculative reason” (KpV 5:4). Hence Kant seems to commit himself to a bifurcation of entitlements. From a theoretical point of view, the Ideas of God and immortality *even as they figure in practical reasoning* have merely logical possibility, are merely assumed, and rest on a merely subjectively valid basis of assent. From the point of view of pure practical reason, the assumption that they are really possible is *necessary* and hence no *mere* assumption, but constitutes, or at least indicates, the conferring of objective reality on those same Ideas and real possibility on their objects.

And now in respect of the Idea of freedom: Notwithstanding Kant’s apparent firmness of conviction as regards the *actuality*, and not merely real possibility, of pure practical reason and transcendental freedom, the latter at least also has a somewhat weaker foundation than might at first appear. Kant holds that even given the objective reality of freedom nominally established by the second *Critique*, such freedom remains merely logically possible from a strictly theoretical point of view.<sup>3</sup> Moreover, whereas the attribution of objective reality to an Idea in its experience-transcendent use in the theoretical case would be an “expansion of cognition to the suprasensible”, no such expansion is made possible by the doctrines of the second *Critique* (KpV 5:5). And that is because, in the practical case, “a different use is being made of those concepts [viz., God, freedom, immortality] from the use that speculative reason requires” (KpV 5:5). Then again, practical reason is said to achieve *reference to objects* through those Ideas—but, once

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<sup>3</sup> That is entailed by, for example, Kant’s claim that although pure practical reason provides the Idea of freedom with “reality” (presumably *objective* reality in Kant’s technical sense), it does so “only for practical use”, i.e., such that no use of the Idea is made possible that would depend for its legitimacy on the Idea’s having theoretically respectable objective reality conferred on it (KpV 5:6). At KpV 5:49, Kant allows that theoretical reason has gained from pure practical reason the “securing” (emphasis removed) of theoretical reason’s merely problematic (= logically possible) Idea of freedom. But he makes clear that such ‘securing’, whatever it amounts to, is not an upgrade of the Idea from logical possibility to real possibility as far as theoretical reason is concerned inasmuch as the objective reality conferred on the Idea by pure practical reason is itself “only practical”.

more, “only for practical use” (KpV 5:5). And while theoretical reason could not furnish *content*—another key bit of Kantian terminology—for those Ideas in their putative experience-transcendent use, Kant seems to imply that practical reason furnishes just such content (KpV 5:6)<sup>4</sup>—yet practical reason does not provide or have access to its own special non-empirical intuition (KpV 5:45)!<sup>5</sup> As we saw in the previous paragraph, setting aside the obscurity of the restrictions on what the objective reality of practical Ideas and hence the real possibility of their objects could amount to, those restrictions in any case purport to permit *some* kind of real possibility to God and immortality. But Kant clearly intends those restrictions to hold equally of freedom, which we no more acquire for theoretical purposes than God or immortality. But then how robust, exactly, can the claim to transcendental freedom’s *reality* or *actuality* really be?

I contend that the claim that freedom is real or actual is far less transparent than one might hope. To understand what Kant means by it, we must understand at least the following: First, what is the epistemological situation referred to by the expression ‘practical point of view’? Answering that will not be possible without understanding how that situation relates to the ‘theoretical point of view’, such that a premise to which one is entitled in the former is out of bounds in the latter. Second, how is the moral law possible, specifically in respect of its being synthetic and yet not grounded in intuition? A complete answer to that question is beyond the scope of this chapter, but we must at least be able to decide whether the syntheticity of the moral

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<sup>4</sup> I take the implication to lie in Kant’s prefacing of practical reason’s achievement of object-reference for the Idea of freedom with a ‘whereas’-clause (*da*) in which he notes that the most that theoretical reason can achieve is the recognition that it may *not* declare that content for concepts of the suprasensible is altogether impossible. That is, theoretical reason can at most prove those concepts’ logical possibility.

<sup>5</sup> Kant writes there that in respect of God, freedom, and immortality, as collectively belonging to a merely intelligible world, “in the practical problem the intuition of these objects does not at all amount to a moment of the problem.” “For what counts [in a critique of practical reason] is only the determining basis of volition in the maxims [of our will]”, and thus, Kant seems to reason, the impossibility of an *a priori* intuition of an intelligible world is simply irrelevant from a practical point of view. That line of reasoning will be central to my interpretive argument in this chapter.

law is intra-experientially directed rather than trans-experientially directed, that is, whether the moral law is ‘about’ something this-worldly or otherworldly. For it is clearly the moral law, to which we are securely and directly entitled, on which our entitlement to the practical postulates is to hang. And third, how can objective reality or real possibility, let alone actuality, be established from a practical point of view? And do those Kantian technical terms even retain their meaning in that context? Only having answered those questions may we then see how *meaningful* judgments in the practical sphere concerning God, freedom, and immortality are possible, and what precisely Kant means by his claim that freedom is actual.

## 2. The Practical Point of View

### 2.1. The Point of View of Acting, Not Knowing

What is the ‘practical point of view’ from which we may assert the actuality of freedom, the real possibility of God and immortality, and the objective reality of the concepts of all three? Whatever it is, Kant is plain enough that any theoretical judgment endorsed from within the practical point of view is inadmissible for theoretical purposes, no matter how well (practically) grounded. But although that is important to bear in mind, it does not tell us much about what the practical point of view actually is.

More helpful is Kant’s suggestive choice of words at key moments in the second *Critique*. First, discussing the special status of God and immortality, Kant identifies a “basis of assent [*Fürwahrhaltens*]” that licenses our ‘assumption’ that the objects of those two Ideas in their practical reference are really possible (KpV 5:4). Although that basis of assent is, from a theoretical point of view, “merely *subjective*”, from a practical point of view, it is “valid *objectively*” (provided that Kant is correct). Second, Kant later discusses assent in reference to all

three practical Ideas. Although only God and immortality are consistently identified as ‘postulates’ and seem to have a derivative status relative to the Idea of freedom,<sup>6</sup> all three practical Ideas are assented to (i.e., we grant the real possibility of their objects) on the basis of a need of reason, specifically of *pure practical* reason (KpV 5:142). Such a need “is based on a *duty*”, i.e., “*an absolutely necessary aim*”, namely the fulfilment of the moral law (KpV 5:142-3), which is to say the realization of the highest good (KpV 5:134). The distinction in status between freedom and the other two postulates has to do with the degree of mediacy between each of them and the moral law: Freedom, Kant thinks, is implicated immediately in the moral law just insofar as the latter is a law of a non-natural causality (KpV 5:47), whereas God and immortality of the soul are implicated only mediately in the moral law just insofar as they directly condition the possibility not of that law but of its object, the highest good (KpV 5:4). But for freedom just as much as God and immortality, the basis of assent is “an *aim* [that] must be given a priori” (KpV 5:134). And the epistemological status that one has when one has assented

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<sup>6</sup> When Kant first lists the postulates of pure practical reason together, in the second *Critique*’s Dialectic, he mentions freedom, but specifically “considered positively (as the causality of a being insofar as this being belongs to the intelligible world)” (KpV 5:132). That, combined with his insistence in the Analytic that the *actuality* of (unqualified) freedom is *proven* through the moral law (KpV 5:47), might lead one to think that *positive* freedom (that is, freedom thought as a determinate non-natural causal power) is merely a postulate, but *negative* freedom (freedom thought as an altogether *indeterminate* non-natural causal power) is not ‘postulated’ but ‘demonstrated’. Allison 1990, 246n35, following Carnois 1987, 116-21, advocates a somewhat tweaked version of that view where the ‘positive freedom’ postulated in the Dialectic is ‘autocracy’, or self-mastery sufficient for virtue. But even if autocracy *ought* to be classed among the postulates, it is clear enough that when Kant calls positive freedom a postulate at KpV 5:132, he means by ‘positive freedom’ no more than a non-natural causality whose law is the moral law. And if that is right, a distinction between ‘knowledge’ of negative freedom and mere ‘postulation’ of positive freedom is unsustainable. For first, the contrast cannot be clearly established textually, as Kant almost invariably invokes the positive determination of freedom by the moral law in the same context as that in which he claims to have proved freedom’s actuality (as, indeed, at KpV 5:47) and often fails to clarify whether he has in mind specifically negative or positive freedom (speaking simply of ‘freedom’). He thus makes it difficult to discern whether he thinks the proof of freedom’s actuality is logically separable from its positive determination through the moral law (in which freedom’s ‘postulation’ seems to consist). And second, the contrast is not philosophically attractive. For the task of *proving* the *actuality* of a non-natural causal power ought to be much more difficult than that merely of *postulating* its *determinations* supposing it were actual. One would think, that is, that if negative freedom’s actuality is proven, then there is no obstacle to proving, and not merely ‘postulating’, that freedom has a morally lawful causal character. So I can see no reason not to class freedom, positive and negative, among the practical postulates (granting that the logical relation of freedom to the moral law is tighter than those of God and immortality). On that point I follow Engstrom 2002a, xlv.

on such a basis is not, precisely, knowledge (*Wissen*) or cognition (*Erkenntnis*) but *faith* (*Glauben*) and specifically “a pure practical rational faith” (KpV 5:146).<sup>7</sup>

The claims canvassed in the previous two paragraphs should put us in mind of Kant’s discussion of opinion, knowledge, and faith from the first *Critique*. In the previous chapter of this dissertation (section 2), we saw that Kant takes belief or faith (*Glauben*), in a case of objectively theoretically insufficient assent, to be possible only “in a *practical reference*”, that is, only for the sake of some aim (A823/B852). In other words, we only have faith in cases where the ground of our conviction is objectively insufficient from a theoretical point of view; and the reason we nevertheless have faith in such cases is for the sake of *doing* something, or *acting*. Now some such beliefs are for the sake of a contingent aim. We are justified in holding them if they facilitate the achievement of that aim, but the aim itself is optional. Those beliefs are ‘pragmatic’ and, if there is no possibility of their being proven correct, ‘doctrinal’. But, of course, morality is not a contingent aim but absolutely necessary for any rational being. And so any belief the holding of which is necessary for the achievement of that aim (if for no other reason than that the belief and the aim are conceptually connected) is itself necessarily held.<sup>8</sup> And that is to say, Kant suggests, that to the extent that the idea of a belief that one ought to hold for the sake of some practical aim makes sense *at all*, a belief that one must hold just insofar as

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<sup>7</sup> I cannot deny that Kant at one point in the second *Critique* claims that we *wissen a priori* the (real) possibility of freedom (KpV 5:4) or that he therein says that practical reason achieves an “expansion” of cognition beyond what is possible for theoretical reason (KpV 5:50). But the latter claim is later qualified by that ubiquitous expression, “*only for a practical aim*” (KpV 5:133). And Kant introduces the expression ‘pure practical rational faith’ (KpV Book II, Chapter II, §VIII, 5:142-6) precisely in the context of having just elaborated what is distinctive of a merely practical expansion of cognition (KpV Book II, Chapter II, §VII, 5:134-41). As for our *Wissen* of freedom’s possibility, I shall have more to say about that below (sections 2.2 and 2.3).

<sup>8</sup> To be sure, that is the necessity of an ‘ought’ (though it is somewhat obscure whether that ‘ought’ is moral or of some other sort); it does not entail that every pure practical reasoner will in fact hold the belief, i.e., that lapses of moral faith are impossible (cf. Kant’s remarks about Spinoza’s lack of faith at KU 5:452-3).

one is *rational* and thus subject to the moral law is one whose “basis is sufficient *objectively*”, just because it is “valid for everyone” (A820/B848).

Now we must attend closely to exactly what the foregoing three paragraphs show. Recall that the guiding question of this section is: What is the ‘practical point of view’ to which the epistemology of the second *Critique* is indexed? We now have the materials for an answer. Any belief our entitlement to which holds ‘only from a practical point of view’ is one our entitlement to which consists *entirely* in its making possible our *doing* something. No doubt there is, on Kant’s usage, an admissible sense in which such an entitlement can be ‘sufficient objectively’. For a basis of assent is—from a practical point of view—‘sufficient objectively’ just in case any rational being, just insofar as that being is rational, must assent on that basis. At the same time, a belief that is objectively sufficient *only* from a practical point of view has a basis of assent different in *kind* from that appropriate to a theoretical judgment, notwithstanding that the basis for each may count as objectively sufficient in its own domain.

And that difference in kind entails that a basis of assent that is objectively sufficient from a practical point of view is not interchangeable with one that is objectively sufficient for theoretical purposes. For even the *possibility* of merely practical belief only arises where assent is, in fact, objectively *insufficient* from a theoretical point of view, and the function of belief in that case is not to enable knowledge or cognition where none was possible but to facilitate a practical aim—not to put me in closer epistemic touch with *how things are* but to enable me to *make things be a certain way*. That is why even the actuality of freedom that Kant purports to prove in the second *Critique* cannot be a premise for theoretical reasoning. And it is why the seeming expansion of cognition afforded by the arguments of the second *Critique* is a *merely* seeming expansion, as far as theoretical reason is concerned. (KpV 5:134)



So the ‘practical point of view’ whose account we’ve been seeking is this: a point of view from which I *must believe* certain propositions because doing so facilitates my achievement of a *necessary end*. It is a point of view, in other words, from which epistemological worries about how I might get in touch with the objects referred to in the relevant beliefs *drop altogether out of consideration*<sup>9</sup> because all that matters is what I am to do.

## 2.2. God, Immortality, and Freedom as Matters of Faith

The foregoing gives us one reason why Kant *ought* to prefer to call the propositional attitude we hold toward the practical postulates ‘faith’ rather than ‘knowledge’ (A828/B856, KpV 5:146).<sup>10</sup> To be sure, *Wissen* is “assent that is sufficient both subjectively and objectively”, and my assent to a judgment of pure practical rational faith is sufficient objectively and, provided I have not lost that faith, subjectively as well (A822/B850). But the objective sufficiency of my assent in the latter case must clearly be indexed to the ‘from a practical point of view’ qualifier, and thus it is an assent that abstains from epistemological considerations. And thus we should not be surprised to find that its etiology is peculiar relative to the theoretical case, viz., in that it arises out of a *need* of practical reason (KpV 5:142-3).<sup>11</sup> Now a need of practical reason is, after all, a need of reason, and is thus universal in respect of rational beings. Nevertheless that need is,

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<sup>9</sup> Beyond, of course, the bare minimum requirement of logical coherence.

<sup>10</sup> I say ‘ought’ because I am about to give an argument, built entirely on his own commitments, that that is what the attitude has to be, but Kant himself clearly wants to be able to say that we *know* ourselves to be free. And as we shall see, we may permit him that locution—provided that we understand the ‘knowledge’-descriptor to be permissible *within* the practical point of view, but the ‘faith’-descriptor to be appropriate from outside it. See below (this section and 2.3).

<sup>11</sup> In the second *Critique*, Kant first introduces the concept of a need of pure reason, as he does the concept of pure practical rational faith, in connection with the existence of God (KpV 5:125-6). But his subsequent inclusion of the Idea of freedom among the postulates, and the evident difficulty one would have trying to drive a wedge between our entitlements to merely negative (i.e., indeterminate) transcendental freedom and to positive (morally informed) transcendental freedom on the basis of Kant’s arguments (see note 6 above), argues for taking freedom just as much as God and immortality to be a matter of rational faith grounded in a need of reason.

as Kant admits (though with some hesitation) (e.g., at KpV 5:143n.),<sup>12</sup> subjective, its universality notwithstanding. All that is strictly and originally objective in the practical sphere is duty, i.e. the moral law (KpV 5:125). Thus the peculiar status of the practical postulates as mere ‘presuppositions’ that are “valid only in reference to” the moral law (KpV 5:143n).<sup>13</sup> What is thereby indicated is that calling the basis of assent to the practical postulates ‘objectively sufficient’ and leaving things at that elides some subtlety. Their *ultimate* basis, the moral law, is objective; but their *proximate* basis, reason’s need, is merely a *subjective universal*.<sup>14</sup> Thus our putative *knowledge* of the real possibility—or even the actuality—of freedom rests on an admixture of subjective and objective elements that has no parallel in the theoretical case. For that reason, it would better be called a rational *faith*.

A precise understanding of the concept of a ‘practical point of view’ thus helps us find a clear path through Kant’s apparent vacillation between, on the one hand, strongly objective-sounding claims about *proving* the *actuality* of freedom and *knowing* (*Wissen*) its real possibility that appear earlier in the second *Critique* and, on the other hand, his much more modest claims from later in the *Critique* that freedom is a mere *presupposition*, a *postulate* of practical reason, where ‘postulates’ are characteristically matters of pure practical rational *faith*. Within the limits of a practical point of view, we have as strong a basis on which to believe in our freedom, the

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<sup>12</sup> The hesitation seems to concern what it would mean to say that a need is ‘merely subjective’. One might be tempted to think that all such needs are in fact *inclinations*, whereas Kant is concerned to distinguish needs of reason from inclinations. Even were there an inclination that happened to hold of every human being universally, it would, just as an inclination, be contingent. A need of reason, however, while subjective, is *necessarily* universal because its ground is itself something objective, namely the moral law, which commands unconditionally, though without bringing with it an explanation of its own possibility.

<sup>13</sup> Cf. KpV 5:70: “Of all the intelligible absolutely nothing but freedom (by means of the moral law) has a reality for us except for the sake of this law and the use of pure practical reason, *and even freedom has such reality only insofar as it is a presupposition inseparable from that law*” (emphasis mine).

<sup>14</sup> The reader should here be put in mind of Kant’s formulations in the *Critique of Judgment* (e.g., at KU 5:212), though the aesthetic subjective universals discussed there are somehow “not [...] cognitive” (5:280) in a way that seems to differ from needs of reason or judgments issuing from them.

existence of God, and the immortality of the soul as could be necessary; but that is only to the extent that from the practical point of view, epistemological questions are put into abeyance. Beyond those limits, the practical point of view figures as one from which what matters is *acting*, not *knowing*, and for which the term ‘faith’ more correctly describes the propositional attitude of an agent towards the experience-transcendent claims made on behalf of God, freedom, and the immortality of the soul.

### 2.3. A Further Argument for Faith in Freedom

Stephen Engstrom gives us another reason to consider the propositional attitude we hold toward the postulate of freedom faith rather than knowledge. In his introduction to the Pluhar translation of the second *Critique*, Engstrom is content to ignore the vicissitudes of Kant’s use of the term ‘postulate’ and treat all three of freedom, immortality, and God uncontroversially as postulates of practical reason.<sup>15</sup> Why? Because of Kant’s definition of a practical postulate as “a *theoretical* proposition”—i.e., a proposition about not *how things ought to be* but rather *how things are*—“though one not provable as such [i.e., not provable by a purely theoretical argument, which relies on no practical propositions], insofar as it attaches inseparably to a *practical* law that holds a priori [and] unconditionally” (KpV 5:122).<sup>16</sup> In particular, by ‘inseparable attachment to a practical law’ Engstrom takes Kant to mean inclusion, in the argument in support of a proposition, of a practical proposition (in this case, a law of practical reason) as a premise.<sup>17</sup> But plainly, even the ‘proof’ of merely negative, transcendental freedom

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<sup>15</sup> Engstrom 2002a, xxvii.

<sup>16</sup> Cited at Engstrom 2002a, xlv. First emendation Engstrom’s, second Pluhar’s.

<sup>17</sup> Engstrom 2002a, xlv.

in the Analytic of the second *Critique* employs a practical proposition, viz. the moral law. And hence freedom, negative as well as positive, must be a postulate.

Now Kant takes there to be two kinds of cognition, theoretical and practical. Kant writes in the first *Critique* that “reason’s cognition can be referred to the object of that cognition in two ways: either in order merely to *determine* the object and its concept (which must be supplied from elsewhere), or in order to *make it actual* as well. The first is reason’s *theoretical*, the second its *practical cognition*” (Bix-x).<sup>18</sup> As I observed in chapter four (section 2), we are not entitled to assume without argument that cognition (*Erkenntnis*) and knowledge (*Wissen*) do not differ for Kant, and the passage speaks of the first, not the second. Nevertheless, cognition and knowledge are obviously closely related concepts, and there seems to be no barrier to our envisioning a corresponding distinction between theoretical and practical knowledge, namely insofar as it is theoretical or practical judgments (which are themselves cognitions) that are assented to. In that case, theoretical knowledge would consist of judgments about what is the case for which the grounds of assent are subjectively as well as objectively sufficient, whereas practical knowledge would consist of judgments about what ought to be the case for which the grounds are subjectively and objectively sufficient.

But if that is right, then we cannot, strictly speaking, have practical knowledge of freedom. For what we are to know in allegedly having such knowledge is *that we are free*—a matter of what is the case—and not anything we ought to will, do, or bring about.<sup>19</sup> Of course, one could draw the distinction between theoretical and practical differently in the case of

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<sup>18</sup> Quoted in a different translation at Engstrom 2002b, 57. At that point in the B Preface, Kant is using ‘reason’ loosely to refer to the whole intellectual power, which is made clear by his subsequent reference to “the pure part” of reason’s cognition (reason strictly so called being as such ‘pure’).

<sup>19</sup> The propositions, therefore, of which we would and do have practical knowledge are categorical imperatives, whose form is the basic law of pure practical reason: “So act that the maxim of your will could always hold at the same time as a principle of a universal legislation.” (KpV 5:30)

knowledge from the case of cognition. But that would seem to be *ad hoc*; the only motivation would be to preserve the status of our judgment that we are free as knowledge rather than faith. But that status is precisely what is at issue. Hence, with Engstrom, we ought to say of postulates generally, inclusive of freedom, that just insofar as they are theoretical judgments whose justification depends on a practical premise, they are matters of faith or “practical-rational *belief*.”<sup>20</sup>

#### 2.4. Our Results So Far

The picture that has emerged is thus as follows. The practical point of view is that from which we ask not what *is* but what *ought to be* the case. With respect to theoretical judgments, assent to one such judgment from the practical point of view is assent the ground of which is facilitation of the realization of what ought to be the case, or of the achievement of some end. And if that practical point of view is specifically a moral one, then the relevant end is necessary, not optional, for any practically rational being. Assent from the practical point of view is faith, and assent from the specifically moral point of view is a firm faith, made so by the necessity and universality of the relevant end. Postulates of pure practical reason are theoretical judgments whose ground of assent is a necessary practical proposition, the moral law. But that is just to say that we assent to those postulates only to the extent that doing so facilitates the achievement of the end set for us by the moral law. Moreover, although the moral law has the status of an objective universal, assent to the postulates is assent merely from a need of reason, and hence has

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<sup>20</sup> Engstrom 2002a, xx. In the passage from which that quotation is taken, Engstrom is not mindful of the knowledge/cognition distinction, and thus to *belief* he opposes theoretical and practical *cognition*. But the point he intends to make is clear enough, viz., that just insofar as a judgment is a postulate of pure practical reason, it is a matter of *Glauben*. (Nowhere in his introduction to the second *Critique* does Engstrom claim that we know or cognize freedom.)

the status of merely subjective universality. Therefore, both because postulates of pure practical reason are assented to on a partially practical ground and because that assent reflects a mere need of reason, assent to the postulates is *faith*, not knowledge. And *that* is why none of the postulates—not even that of freedom—can be taken up as a premise by theoretical reason:<sup>21</sup> When it comes to theoretical judgments, the ‘practical point of view’ is the point of view of faith, not knowledge.<sup>22</sup> And thus as regards the actuality of freedom, we must deny knowledge and make do with faith.

Nevertheless, if we stopped where we are, we would be in a troubling position. For I have earlier argued that a concept can only have objective reality, and hence be *meaningful*, if it refers to a really possible object, and that that relation of reference (*Beziehung*) depends upon the possibility of the object’s being given in intuition. God, the immortal soul, and transcendental freedom clearly cannot be given in *sensible* intuition. But then we have a problem. Kant is keen to deny that practical philosophy reveals that we have another, non-sensible kind of intuition that would be appropriate to such special objects. But in that case, object-reference fails, and with it would have to go objective reality and real possibility (our ‘assumptions’ notwithstanding), at least in the senses of those latter terms that we developed in chapters three and four of this dissertation. And then either (a) the concepts of God, the immortal soul, and transcendental

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<sup>21</sup> That result is a tidy explanation for how Kant could be permitted to bar the access of theoretical knowledge and cognition to the seemingly astonishing epistemic gains of pure practical reason. *Some* such explanation is absolutely mandatory for a compelling account of Kant’s practical philosophy; for without it, the interpreter must find to be strikingly dogmatic or *ad hoc* Kant’s claim that those gains count as such only ‘from the practical point of view’.

<sup>22</sup> That point must be handled with care. *Within* the practical point of view, beliefs in freedom, God, and immortality are *rational*, not arbitrary, and do not have the status of mere opinion. And the closer logical connection between freedom and the moral law, as versus that between the latter and God and immortality, may well make it appropriate to draw an epistemological distinction between the propositional attitudes one holds to the judgments (a) that I am free and (b) that my soul is immortal and God exists. Thus, again *within* the practical point of view, we may have no reason to scruple calling our attitude to freedom ‘knowledge’ and our attitude to God and immortality ‘faith’. Nevertheless, considered from the outside, ‘the practical point of view’ is one from which one cannot, strictly speaking, *know* assertorically but only imperatively, i.e., what to will, do, or bring about.

freedom must turn out to be *meaningless*, because objective reality (as well as real possibility) is a *sine qua non* of meaning; or else (b) Kant's practical philosophy requires not only its own distinctive variety of objective sufficiency of a basis of assent, but also its own distinctive varieties of objective reality and real possibility, and with those, its own proprietary concept of meaning.

Neither of those strikes me as attractive options, though clearly (a) is a much worse outcome than (b). In the next section, I shall give an account of the objective reality of the practical Ideas and the real possibility of their objects that conforms to the account of those Kantian technical notions that I have already developed. We shall see that although the *epistemological* postures taken up in each of the theoretical and practical points of view are distinct, the *semantic* considerations that Kant was keen to respect in the theoretical case must just as much be respected, and can be, in the practical case.

### 3. Kant's Conceptual-Semantic Theory in Practice, and the Synthetivity of the Moral Law

The second *Critique* does not lack for denials that we have a capacity for intuition of the objects of the practical Ideas. The following quotation is representative:

[1] In order to expand a pure cognition *practically*, an *aim* must be given a priori, i.e., a purpose as an object (of the will) that, independently of all theoretical principles, is presented as practically necessary through an imperative determining the will directly (a categorical imperative); and here this is the *highest good*. This [good], however, is not possible unless three theoretical concepts are presupposed (for which, because they are mere[ly] pure rational concepts, *no corresponding intuition can be found*, and hence, by the theoretical path, *no objective reality*): viz., freedom, immortality, and God. (KpV 5:134; last two emphases mine)

Kant there denies us any intuition of the objects corresponding to the practical Ideas, and on that basis he denies those Ideas objective reality—at any rate, “by the theoretical path”. At the same

time, he allows for a use of those Ideas (for their ‘presupposition’ is certainly a use of some sort), and he implies that there may be another path, perhaps a *practical* path and one that does not go by way of intuitions, to establishing their objective reality.

Indeed, Kant is keen to emphasize that the objective reality of the practical Ideas is provided for through their (proximate or ultimate) relation to the moral law. Mightn’t the moral law itself rest on intuition in some way, and mightn’t that constitute the ‘practical path’ Kant seems to have in mind? Confusingly, the answer is ‘no’ to the first but ‘yes’ to the second. Unequivocally, the objective reality of the practical Ideas flows from the moral law. And Kant claims that the moral law is a *synthetic* proposition. Nevertheless, he holds that the moral law does not depend on intuition (KpV 5:31).

And yet Kant clearly remains cognizant of the connections he had drawn in the first *Critique* between intuitability, objective reality (and real possibility), and meaning (*Bedeutung*), as the following passage shows:

[2] Pure practical reason now fills this vacant place [i.e., the intelligible] with a determinate law of causality in an intelligible world (causality through freedom), viz., the moral law. Although speculative reason does not gain anything through this as regards its insight, it does gain something as regards *securing* its problematic concept of freedom, which is here provided with *objective reality* that, although only practical, is yet indubitable. Even the concept of causality, which properly has application and hence also signification [*Bedeutung*] (as the *Critique of Pure Reason* proves) only in reference to appearances in order to connect them into experiences—even this concept reason does not expand in such a way as to extend its use beyond the mentioned boundaries. For if it sought to do this, it would have to try to show how the logical relation of basis [or ground] and consequence could be used synthetically with a kind of intuition different from the sensible, i.e., how a *causa noumenon* is possible. This it cannot accomplish at all; but as practical reason it is also in no way concerned with this, for it only posits the *determining basis* of the causality of the human being as a being of sense (a causality that is given) *in pure reason* (which is therefore called practical). [...] But as for the concept that [pure practical reason] frames of its own causality as noumenon, this concept it need not determine theoretically for the sake of cognizing this causality’s suprasensible existence, and thus it need not



be able to give it signification [*Bedeutung*] to this extent. For this concept acquires signification [*Bedeutung*] anyway, even if only for practical use, viz., through the moral law. [...] The signification [*Bedeutung*] that reason provides to this concept through the moral law is solely practical, inasmuch as the idea of the law of a causality (causality of the will) *itself has causality*, or is its determining basis. (KpV 5:49-50; final emphasis mine)

Many of the technical terms in that passage should look familiar. There is the language of entitlement to a concept (‘securing’), where that consists in the provision of objective reality for that concept. There is talk of use and meaning (‘application’ and ‘signification [*Bedeutung*]’). Regarding the concept of causality through freedom, its objective reality and meaning seem to come together, not separately. And both are ‘only practical’ or ‘only for practical use’ of that concept. A passage like the foregoing should not make us suppose, as many do, that Kant should not be taken at his word when he tries to set bounds on the possible meaningfulness of concepts.<sup>23</sup> On the contrary: Especially appearing in the second *Critique*, where textual support for a noumenal realist (and hence empirical idealist, on my view) reading of Kant’s philosophy seems otherwise to be at its strongest, the passage demands that we try to understand it on its own terms—especially inasmuch as it suggests that Kant has a strategy in mind to avoid falling afoul of his restrictions on meaning.

We shall to return to passage [2] in the next section, as it contains the essentials of that strategy. But properly to appreciate it requires first that we understand, within limits, Kant’s contention that the moral law is a synthetic *a priori* proposition.<sup>24</sup> Its being synthetic is clearly part of its credential as a *fact* of reason. And yet Kant is unequivocal: It is “not based on any

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<sup>23</sup> Two recent examples specifically in connection with Kant’s practical philosophy are Chignell 2010, 179 and Kain 2010, 211.

<sup>24</sup> For my purposes, there is no point in distinguishing between the basic law of pure practical reason and the moral law. In any case, I take the distinction to be merely expository rather than substantive: The basic law is introduced as something provisionally distinct from the moral law only subsequently to be identified with it. See Engstrom 2002a, xl-xliii.

intuition, whether pure or empirical.” Kant clearly thinks that positing the possibility of a synthetic judgment without intuition is preferable to granting us a special practical intuition. For, he argues, the moral law would be analytic if freedom of the will were presupposed, viz., as a concept whose objective reality was antecedently secured; but that would require, he suggests, *intellectual* intuition, “which certainly cannot be assumed here at all” (KpV 5:31). But why should we accept the possibility of a synthetic judgment without intuition? And that question is pressing because, as we have noted and as passage [2] above reiterates, the objective reality and meaning of the Idea of freedom (and, ultimately, of the Ideas of God and immortality) turn out to depend in some way upon the relation of practical Ideas to the moral law, i.e., in that those Ideas receive their objective reality and meaning “through” that law.

Note that for my purposes, I need not completely explain how a synthetic *a priori* judgment is possible without intuition (or whether that really is Kant’s considered position<sup>25</sup>). That is well worth doing, but would involve a lot of close reading and reconstruction of Kant’s position from the comparatively few things he says on the issue. Nevertheless, I must be able to show at least this much: that to the extent that the moral law is synthetic, its semantic orientation, as it were, is not towards the experience-transcendent but the experience-immanent. What I mean by that is that it *cannot* turn out that the moral law is *primarily* a descriptive or assertoric judgment about our noumenal nature (i.e., that we are free) and only *secondarily* an injunction to realize certain objects of volition in the empirical world, or even just to will their realization. For that would effectively be to concede that the moral law ought after all to be a ground of synthetic cognition of the noumenal. And that cannot be Kant’s position, particularly if my interpretation thus far is correct but also for textual reasons that will become clear later in this chapter. If the

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<sup>25</sup> I have a hunch that it is not, or, at any rate, that there is a way that intuition can be involved that is not yet clearly in view when Kant denies the possibility of such involvement. I sketch my hunch below.

moral law contains a synthetic connection, that wherein the connection lies, the ‘third thing’, cannot lie on the far side of the phenomenal/noumenal divide, wherever else it may lie.

So: Why think that the moral law is synthetic? How, indeed, does it even make sense to think of an imperatival judgment as being a candidate for analyticity or syntheticity? We can make some headway if we rephrase the moral law as a descriptive claim, along the following lines: I am the sort of being the law of whose action (or willing) is so to act that the maxim of my will could always hold at the same time as a principle of a universal legislation.<sup>26</sup> Rephrased thus, we can see why the moral law would be analytic if freedom of the will could be presupposed (though, seemingly, only specifically positive freedom). ‘I’, in the subject position, would in that case be the (singularly used) concept of a being that exists outside the empirical causal order and, moreover, has as the principle of its causality the very law that is articulated in the predicate position. But of course, I enjoy no intuition of myself as an extra-empirical being; as we know from the Paralogisms, ‘I’, construed as abstracting from anything empirical about me, designates merely a logical subject, useless for practical philosophy. What must thus be designated by ‘I’ in my reformulation of the moral law is myself as a sensible practical reasoner. Such a being is the sort that has a will whose determining ground lies in maxims between which choice is possible. Nevertheless, such a being belongs to the empirical causal order, and we cannot infer from its concept that it belongs to any other. And the empirical causal order consists exclusively of natural causality, as argued in the second Analogy. So I may not infer from my mere concept of myself, whether as logical subject or as practical reasoner, that the law of the causality of my will is the moral law. Hence the connection between ‘I’ as subject and the moral

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<sup>26</sup> Adapting the formulation of the basic law at KpV 5:30: “So act that the maxim of your will could always hold at the same time as a principle of a universal legislation.”

law as predicate is synthetic.<sup>27</sup>

Now as to how we can be entitled to assert that synthetic connection, Kant is clearly attracted to the thought that the important question is not *how* we can be thus entitled, but simply *whether* we are. And the doctrine of the fact of reason is the doctrine that the answer to the ‘whether’ question is simply *yes*. Kant begins from a position of certainty that we are at least practical reasoners. What he asks is only whether practical reason has a pure part, which is to say: whether we can act for reasons that are not merely prudential (KpV 5:3).<sup>28</sup> But, Kant argues, I find myself conscious of a ground of possible determination of my will whose explanation lies not in the matter of maxims (i.e., prudence) but in their form (i.e., the moral law). Or, put more simply, I find myself conscious of non-prudential, specifically moral reasons to act. And that is enough: For a being of which there is no antecedent doubt that it is a practical reasoner, one whose will can be determined by reasons *generally*, the consciousness of moral reasons for action is just the consciousness that it *could* act on such reasons and that it is thus a specifically moral, i.e., *pure*, practical reasoner (KpV 5:30-3).<sup>29</sup>

But is that the most that Kant can say? I contend that he has the resources to say at least somewhat more. And he had better. For if the moral law is synthetic and seems to license claims about noumena, then denials about intuition notwithstanding, one may be tempted to suppose

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<sup>27</sup> That argument is in line with the account Kant gives at GMS 4:440. The argument could also be put, I believe, in terms of the will: From the mere concept of my will as the will of a sensible practical reasoner is not entailed that the law of its activity (i.e., of my willing) is the moral law.

<sup>28</sup> See also KpV 5:15: “With the practical use of reason the situation is indeed different. [...] For there reason can at least succeed in determining the will and, insofar as volition alone is at issue, always has objective reality. Here, therefore, the first question is whether pure reason is sufficient by itself alone to determine the will, or whether reason can be a determining basis of the will only as empirically conditioned.” I.e., the question of whether pure or only empirically conditioned reason can determine the will presupposes that reason can determine the will, and that presupposition is true, and thus the concept of reason’s determination of the will has objective reality. That brings out an interesting feature of Kant’s view, that naturalism about practical reason does not entail reductionism about it. I can have a will, and my will can be determined by maxims, and I may have an ability to choose among those maxims, and none of that may be describable in merely physical terms, *and yet still* I might belong merely to the natural-causal sequence just insofar as my will can only ever be determined prudentially.

<sup>29</sup> I am influenced in my understanding of Kant’s doctrine of the fact of reason by Ware 2014, 7-14.

that the moral law can ground a Kantian noumenal realism<sup>30</sup> that, I have argued, leads inexorably to empirical idealism. What needs to be shown is that the moral law does not sneak in theoretical knowledge about noumena by a backdoor. But a two-step argument is made available by the second *Critique* that would show just that and thus guarantee that whatever the ground is of the synthetic connection contained in the moral law, no epistemological foothold in the noumenal is gained through the syntheticity of the moral law. The first step is to argue that the moral law, as an imperative rather than an assertion, *must* not have a relation to *a priori* or *a posteriori* intuition of empirical objects analogous to that in which concepts or categories stand to such intuition in the theoretical case, on pain of losing its character as a ground of *willing* or *acting*. The second step is to show that the ‘third thing’ requirement on any synthetic judgment cannot be satisfied by anything noumenal, not only because we lack intuition of any noumenon but also because such a noumenal satisfaction, even were it possible, would transform the moral law from essentially imperativel to essentially assertoric or descriptive. Both steps rely on the basic thought that although the moral law can be paraphrased as an assertion in order to bring out its syntheticity, its being an imperative is not *accidental* but *essential* to it.<sup>31</sup> Here follows that two-step argument.

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<sup>30</sup> Chignell appears to make that suggestion casually in his 2010, 182n8, though he may not mean there what he seems to at first glance. A worked-out version of the reading of Kant as a noumenal realist on practical grounds is Adams 1997. I think a similar impulse would have to underlie a reading that tried to employ the *Wissen/Erkenntnis* distinction to argue that although we may not *cognize* noumena, we may nevertheless *know* that they exist. Watkins and Willascheck (unpublished) lay the ground for such a reading.

<sup>31</sup> In conversation, Owen Ware has objected that that claim is incompatible with Kant’s claim that “imperatives are only formulae expressing the relation of objective laws of volition in general to the subjective imperfection of the will of this or that rational being, for example, of the human will”, inasmuch as “no imperatives hold for the *divine* will and in general for a *holy* will: the ‘ought’ is out of place here, because volition is of itself necessarily in accord with the law” (GMS 4:414). Now clearly such essentially morally upright beings are different *in kind* from us imperfect willers, and so for them it can well be the case that the moral law is at bottom descriptive, i.e., of a causality that they necessarily have and inexorably proceeds according to that law. My point, however, is that the moral law is *for us imperfect willers* essentially imperativel. The law cannot bind us in the right way if its objective reality (i.e., its meaning), so far as we can grasp it, turns out to bottom out in its being a description of some noumenal state of affairs. Thanks to Owen for helping me to think through this point.

Step one is to argue that not only *a posteriori* but also *a priori* intuition of empirical things could not perform a function for the moral law that is at all analogous to the function that intuition performs in the theoretical case, even were it somehow available. We can see that if we attend to the imperatival form of the moral law. True, the moral law admits of an assertoric paraphrase. But its true form is not assertoric but imperatival. That is to say that its essential function is not to characterize an object that may be given, or the possibility of objects generally, but to determine the will.<sup>32</sup> That entails that it must logically precede the actuality of its object, and hence the synthetic connection of subject and predicate cannot be something that we are passively given *a posteriori*. But it also entails that the moral law could not, even in principle, determine an *a priori* intuition in a manner analogous to the categories. For even *a priori* intuition is simply the manner in which objects are given to us, the form of our receptivity; whereas practical cognition, as cognition of what ought to be, is not at all concerned with what is given but only with what is to be brought about through our own willing, with respect to which we are active. The moral law does not wait on intuition to give its object and hence would have no more need of a form of that *giving* than of what would be thus *given*. Rather, the moral law instructs us to change the world, albeit in a way that we could subsequently intuit (i.e., theoretically).<sup>33</sup> Thus if, what is impossible, the moral law related to an *a priori* intuition, it would revert to a description—it would, as a matter of fact, simply be the intellectual form of whatever was given through that intuition. Hence the moral law could not possibly relate to its own special kind of intuition on pain of losing its imperatival character.

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<sup>32</sup> Again, for us imperfect pure practical reasoners—the only sort of pure practical reasoner whose real possibility we can vouchsafe. (See previous note.)

<sup>33</sup> That is a reflection of Kant's abstract observation that whereas in theoretical philosophy, one must begin from sensibility and proceed thence to concepts and finally to principles, in practical philosophy, one must begin with principles and proceed through concepts to sensibility. (KpV 5:16)

That that line of argument is not only Kantian but Kant's own is evident from a key moment in the section, "On the Deduction of the Principles of Pure Practical Reason". Kant distinguishes two problems of pure reason: first, how "pure reason can a priori *cognize* objects"; and second, how "it can be directly a determining basis of the will" (KpV 5:44-5). The first problem is the business of the first *Critique*, and the second of the second. "[I]n the practical problem", Kant writes, "the intuition of [the objects of volition] does not at all amount to a moment of the problem." Why? Because determination of the will is not a matter of intuition at all, Kant claims. Intuition only enters in at the level of the theoretical or technical possibility of the object of volition (whether, *once* I have willed that I bring it about, I can do so). Both my thinking of a moral maxim and my determining my will on its basis are thus events on the level of mere thought (KpV 5:45).<sup>34</sup> But, Kant argues a bit later, that is in the nature of the case. For whereas principles of theoretical cognition concern cognition of what is given to me "from elsewhere", i.e., through my being affected, the moral principle is altogether to precede objects, and to become the ground of their existence through its antecedent determination of the will (KpV 5:46).

Here we come to step two. For all step one has shown, the moral law may rely on an *a priori transcendent* intuition. Indeed, we may even think that it must so rely, however covertly. For any synthetic judgment allegedly requires a 'third thing' in which subject and predicate are united, and such 'third things' can only be provided in intuition. And that is because just insofar as the connection is not analytic but synthetic, a concept just won't do, since it can only provide for the connection by containing both subject and predicate within itself, rendering the judgment not synthetic but analytic. Now in the *Groundwork*, Kant toyed with regarding the Idea of

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<sup>34</sup> That is an interesting claim for Kant to make. It would seem to mean that awareness of my thinking is not mediated by inner sense.

(positive) freedom (GMS 4:447), or the analytically connected concept of autonomy (GMS 4:452-3), as the ‘third thing’. But of course, he was committed to the claim that intuition of freedom is not possible, and in the second *Critique*, he abandons talk of a ‘third thing’ altogether and gives up on the project that motivated that move in the *Groundwork*, namely the deduction of the moral law. But even that may not seem like enough fully to block a practical noumenal realist. For since Kant has argued *that* the moral law is possible, irrespective of how, one may wonder whether the ‘third thing’ does not nevertheless somehow lie in the noumenal, even if our access to it is extremely weak.

Grant, for the sake of argument, that that wonder is coherent (though I strongly doubt that).<sup>35</sup> It still faces a problem in connection with the essentially imperatival character of the moral law: Just insofar as the moral law is an imperative, what is it really *about*? Its function in our cognitive economy is not to guide us as to *how things are* but rather *how things ought to be*. True, Kant thinks that it is a ground of assent to the postulates. But we are not conscious of the moral law *so that we may come to believe the postulates*. We are conscious of it *so that we may will rightly* and thereby change the (empirical) world. But for the ‘third thing’, that object in which subject and predicate are connected synthetically, to be a noumenon would be for the moral law essentially to be a judgment *about the nature of that noumenon*, i.e., an assertoric, theoretical judgment. And of course the moral law is paradigmatically *not* theoretical; and its practicality consists in its imperatival character. Hence whatever the moral law is about, it is something *immanent*, if only in a sense capacious enough to include our willing as well as

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<sup>35</sup> The ‘third thing’ is, among other things, an *epistemological* requirement: I know that the cat is black because I can perceive the cat and see that it is not only a cat, but also black. If the cat were (*per impossibile*) beyond possible experience for me (a noumenal cat?), then it could not ground the synthetic connection in my judgment, even if it really were black. So the idea that the ‘third thing’ requirement could be satisfied without our knowing it is dubiously coherent. But I suspect that the proposal is one to which many readers of the second *Critique* will be instinctively attracted.



objects of outer intuition, and not *transcendent*. And hence the ‘third thing’ could not, even in principle, be a noumenon.

So however the syntheticity of the moral law is possible, the ground of that possibility must be strictly non-noumenal. I suspect that Kant’s official position in the second *Critique*—that questions of intuition are irrelevant to its problem, which concerns only the will and not “the objects of volition”—obscures some nuance latent in that position. Specifically, my hunch is that although intuition is for certain purposes irrelevant to the question, ‘How can pure reason determine the will’s maxim?’, that does not prevent us from holding that the moral law is, in effect, a command to realize its own truth, or the truth that it would express were it assertoric. The synthetic connection would thus be *produced* each time I will on the basis of the moral law. That is supported by Kant’s observation that practical *a priori* concepts do not require intuitions given *antecedently* “in order to acquire signification [*Bedeutung*] [...] for the noteworthy reason that they themselves [i.e., those concepts] *give rise to the actuality of that to which they refer*” (KpV 5:66; emphasis mine). And although Kant appears to accept that I can will with no possibility of achievement of my end, the case in which I will what is in my power to bring about is the basic case of willing (KpV 5:15).<sup>36</sup> And thus the basic case of willing is *acting*—an event in the empirical world. Now the moral law cannot be transparently *exhibited* or *displayed* in action. For any action, as an empirical event, always has a sufficient empirical explanation,

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<sup>36</sup> I am influenced on that point by Engstrom’s Kant-inspired argument that practical judgments concern ‘doables’, or what one is somehow or other capable of doing (2009, 56-8). It cannot be merely accidental that the will is, as Engstrom says, efficacious. In conversation, Owen Ware has objected that that looks incompatible with Kant’s claim that even a will that “should wholly lack the capacity to carry out its purpose” could nevertheless be a good will, hence a will at all. But there is no incompatibility there. A will that is *essentially* efficacious, and for which the basic case of its activity is indeed achieving its aim (namely, an effect in the empirical world), can nevertheless be *accidentally* impeded, right up to the point of total incapacity. To say that the will is essentially efficacious is therefore to make a logical point about the sort of capacity that a will is (namely, a rational capacity for action), one that is not borne on at all by the circumstances, perhaps comprehensively unfavourable, under which that capacity strives to actualize itself. Thanks to Owen for urging me to think through this point.

whether its agent's will is determined prudentially or morally, and thus we cannot tell just by perceiving it whether it is moral or non-moral. But that does not mean that the moral law cannot be *realized* in action, just insofar as we really are capable of determining our wills through the moral law. And any such action will therefore have not only a sufficient empirical explanation but also an explanation in terms of that law whose explanandum is present in experience. So if the moral law is a command to realize its own truth, to provide for a connection between its subject and its predicate, then the basic case in which I do so is the case of moral action in *this* world.

That would explain why Kant is willing to permit, in the *Critique of Judgment*, that “the reality of this idea [i.e., of freedom], as [the idea of] a special kind of causality (the concept of which would be transcendent if we considered it theoretically), can be established through practical laws of pure reason and, [if we act] in conformity with these, *in actual acts, and hence in experience*” (KU 5:469; first emendation and emphasis mine). On the interpretive hunch of mine I am outlining, the moral law, just insofar as it is an imperative and not an assertion, would have to be understood as the ground of the actuality of its own ‘third thing’. And thus the ‘third thing’ would still be logically required by the moral law but as *consequence* rather than as ground or presupposition.

But I cannot properly defend that hunch in this chapter or, alas, in this dissertation. For now, it is enough that we have established that the moral law is (for Kant) synthetic but in a way that not only does not require but positively excludes that the ground of the synthetic connection be noumenal. Now we may answer the final questions: In what does the *objective reality* or *real possibility* of the practical Ideas consist, such that they may be *meaningful* by Kant's own lights? And what can I mean when I say that I am free?

#### 4. The Objective Reality of the Practical Ideas

Recall that we postponed answering those questions to first ask after the syntheticity of the moral law. We did so because the moral law, as a synthetic judgment, is clearly supposed to furnish the practical Ideas with their objective reality. Now most of the heavy philosophical weather is behind us. We need only (1) recall what Kant means by ‘objective reality’ and ‘real possibility’ and a few other key terms; (2) determine in what manner the practical Ideas relate to the moral law such that they inherit their objective reality, and their objects their real possibility, from it; and (3) come to a final conclusion about the meaning and epistemic status of the judgment that I am free.

(1) An intellectual presentation (e.g., a concept or an Idea) has *objective reality* just in case it *refers (bezieht)*, ultimately or proximately, to an empirical thing, to possible experience as such, or to a condition of the possibility of experience (both objective and subjective, i.e., including cognitive powers). If it so refers, then its object is *really possible*; an object whose concept is logically possible but which, for all we know, is not an object of possible experience lacks real possibility. Objective reality, real possibility, and the reference relation they presuppose are co-extensive with the *meaningfulness* of intellectual presentations: Kant denies, explicitly and repeatedly, that intellectual presentations that lack those properties have a meaning (*Bedeutung*) or a sense (*Sinn*). In the theoretical case, Kant also distinguishes between *immanent* and *transcendent*, and between *regulative* and *constitutive*, uses of intellectual presentations. An immanent use is one that refers the presentation to empirical things, possible experience as such, or to conditions of the possibility of experience; a transcendent use is one that refers the presentation to something altogether beyond possible experience. The regulative/constitutive distinction is more difficult to draw with precision and still fit to every deployment of it. But at

least as it was applied to the theoretical Ideas, a regulative use is an *indirect* use, i.e., for reference not to an object but to another power (the understanding) which itself refers to objects; a putatively constitutive use (really, as we saw in the previous chapter, no genuine use at all) of a theoretical Idea purports to refer that Idea directly to an object, which, as the object specifically of an *Idea*, must be experience-transcendent.<sup>37</sup>

(2) In block quotation [2] above, Kant says of our Idea of freedom, as a distinctive causality of the will, that it receives objective reality and meaning (*Bedeutung*) through its relation to the moral law. To be sure, its objective reality and meaning are “only practical” and “only for a practical use”, but they are objective reality and meaning for all that.<sup>38</sup> Elsewhere, Kant writes that in the practical case “these ideas become *immanent* and *constitutive* inasmuch as they are bases for the possibility of *making actual* the *necessary object* of pure practical reason (the highest good)” (KpV 5:135). We see him deploying some of those terms in a different combination when he writes that “the moral law is able for the first time to give to reason—which always became extravagant when it wanted to proceed speculatively with its ideas—objective although only practical reality, and converts reason’s *transcendent* use into an *immanent* use (wherein reason, through ideas, *is itself an efficient cause in the realm of experience*)” (KpV 5:48; third emphasis mine). As I mentioned in section 3, I believe the essentials of Kant’s strategy are contained in block quotation [2]; the other quotations merely round out the picture. The strategy, I submit, is to find a referent for the Ideas not in the

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<sup>37</sup> We shall see shortly that the practical Ideas are in fact *immanent* yet *constitutive*.

<sup>38</sup> The way Kant speaks in [2] is slightly different from the Preface, where he characterized the thought that the practical Ideas have objective reality as an ‘assumption’ to which the moral law entitles us. I believe he uses that language of assumption initially because he wants to keep a wedge between the epistemic statuses of theoretical judgments in theoretical and practical philosophy, respectively. However, I take his formulations in [2] better to reflect his considered position. For to assume that an Idea has objective reality is to assume that it has a meaning, but that would seem to be incoherent, at least if our purpose is actually to entitle ourselves to use that Idea. Better to say that it has a meaning, but a strictly practical one and wholly derivative on the moral law.

experience-transcendent objects to which they can *seem* to refer but in the moral law. If that is right, then the Ideas are really ‘about’ the moral law, and our faith in the postulates amounts to an attitude we adopt to that very law, not to anything experience-transcendent.

To elaborate: Whatever Kant’s strategy is, it is clearly *not* to secure us intuition of the noumenal. So that seems to leave two options: Either (a) the Ideas have objective reality and meaning in the same manner as but separately from the moral law, i.e., on the basis of their figuring directly in their own distinctive synthetic propositions that we can understand and know to be true apart from any relation to intuition; or (b) the Ideas must get their objective reality and meaning solely through their reference to the moral law, which would then be the only synthetic judgment whose objective reality Kant takes to be beyond dispute even apart from any relation to intuition. Now option (a) may look attractive. For the lesson taught us by the moral law may seem to be that synthetic propositions *in general* need not relate to intuition after all. And so why should we not take ourselves to be entitled to make the synthetic claims that we are free, that God exists, and that our souls are immortal, lack of intuition be damned?

But that cannot be Kant’s position. He is clear and emphatic that the moral law is *unique* in being at once synthetic and non-intuitive. The moral law, or our consciousness of it, “is not an empirical fact but the *sole fact of pure reason*” (KpV 5:31; emphasis mine). But that would not be so if we may likewise make synthetic *a priori* judgments without intuition in which we use the practical Ideas. Moreover, there is a clear reason why the moral law *ought* to be unique in that way, namely that it is a genuinely practical rather than theoretical judgment. I hazarded one possible account in section 3 of why an imperative might, just in virtue of its imperatival character, have a distinctive relation to intuition from the relation characteristic of theoretical judgments. But whether one accepts that particular account or not, Kant is clear enough that the

practical postulates are themselves *theoretical* and not *practical* judgments (KpV 5:122). And thus they ought to be subject to the same constraints on their syntheticity as other theoretical judgments, whatever the account of why the practicality of the moral law exempts it from those constraints. That is why Kant denies that the moral law opens any new “prospect” for theoretical reason (KpV 5:43).

A reader might object as follows. Kant takes existence-claims to be synthetic, and he gives his account of why in the second *Critique* (KpV 5:139). But he takes the moral law to instruct us that the practical Ideas “*have objects*” and to compel theoretical reason to grant “*that there are such objects*” (KpV 5:135). And what are those if not existence-claims? But context makes clear that they are not—that they *cannot* be, precisely because, in their syntheticity, they would have to refer to the objects that they allege to exist, and no such reference is possible. The moral law may ‘instruct’ us that the practical Ideas have objects, but it does so “without being able to indicate how their concept refers to an object” (KpV 5:135). Hence no cognition of such noumenal objects transpires through that instruction, because “nothing at all concerning them can thereby be judged synthetically”, and the judgment even just that they *exist* is synthetic and hence would qualify as cognition were it possible at all (KpV 5:135).<sup>39</sup> And if Kant were claiming that the moral law’s instruction is a sufficient ground to assert the *existence* of the noumenal objects of the practical Ideas, we would expect him to accept that the moral law had provided for an expansion of theoretical cognition with respect to those objects. But although he does allow that the moral law provides for an expansion of theoretical cognition, that cognition is specifically *not* of those objects but of “reason as such”, namely, that through its moral law, “a merely problematic thought has thereby for the first time acquired objective reality.” So we

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<sup>39</sup> See chapter five, section 2.2 of this dissertation.

should understand Kant there to be insisting merely that the practical Ideas have objective reality through the moral law. He is not making the stronger claim that the moral law provides for successful reference to the noumenal objects of the Ideas and is thus a sufficient ground of the *theoretical* assertion of their existence (KpV 5:135).

Still, how can the practical Ideas have objective reality and thus *mean* anything to us if not by successful reference to the noumenal objects for which they purport to stand? Here we come to option (b). On option (b), the objective reality and meaning of the practical Ideas is entirely derivative on their logical connection to the moral law as a synthetic and objectively valid judgment.<sup>40</sup> What exactly that means is clarified by Kant's analysis of the immanence and constitutivity of the practical Ideas: They are immanent and constitutive just insofar as they are necessary presuppositions of the moral law, and the moral law is itself the form of practical efficacy in the empirical world, i.e., efficacy through an intellectual presentation. In other words, we are in a position to say (echoing Kant's rhetoric from the Appendix to the Transcendental Dialectic in the first *Critique*) that insofar as we must act from the moral law, we must act *as if* we are free, *as if* our soul is immortal, and *as if* there is a God. The 'as if' there does not mean 'as if, *but not really*';<sup>41</sup> for we have no positive theoretical ground of doubt about the postulates. The 'as if' signifies, rather, that I have no grip on what it would mean for me to be free besides my consciousness of the moral law as a determining ground of my will, and I have no grip on what it would mean for there to exist a God or for my person to persist in an afterlife besides such grip as is provided for by the ideal of the highest good as something we aim to realize in *this* world, itself logically implicated by the moral law. If we follow option (b), then the referents

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<sup>40</sup> Again, this requires our taking for granted Kant's claim that the moral law is synthetic.

<sup>41</sup> See note 43 below.

of each of the practical Ideas is not any noumenal object, but (proximately or ultimately) the moral law itself.<sup>42</sup>

That the practical Ideas refer to the moral law is the message of the last sentences of quotation [2]: “For this concept acquires signification [*Bedeutung*] anyway, even if only for practical use, viz., through the moral law. [...] The signification [*Bedeutung*] that reason provides to this concept through the moral law is solely practical, inasmuch as the idea of the law of a causality (causality of the will) *itself has causality*, or is its determining basis.” The postulates are not really *about* God, freedom, or immortality. They are about how we must think when we make the moral law (an intellectual presentation, i.e., a thought) the ground of a cognition, i.e., when we *act*. To act on the basis of the moral law is to act as if one *can* so act (freedom), and to strive after the ideal of the highest good is to act as if one can count on its achievability, which (on Kant’s analysis, whatever we may think of it) is to act as if there is a metaphysical guarantor of the possibility of the right result (God) and a duration of personal existence adequate to its realization (immortality) (KpV 5:132). Freedom, in other words, is *nothing but* the power to act from the moral law, and God and immortality are *nothing but* the satisfaction of the objective conditions sufficient for realization of the highest good. There are no other marks we may think into those concepts beyond those that flow from the moral law and the bare logical form of an object from the three relational categories.

The line of interpretation I have been developing is confirmed by the following passage:

[3] However, is our cognition actually expanded in this way by pure practical reason, and is that which was *transcendent* for speculative reason *immanent* in practical reason? Of course, but *only for a practical aim*. For, indeed, we thereby cognize neither the nature of our soul, nor the intelligible world, nor the supreme

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<sup>42</sup> I say ‘proximately or ultimately’ because one might argue that the proximate referent of the Ideas of God and immortality is the highest good, and only the ultimate referent the moral law (though I am not certain whether that is Kant’s view).



being as to what they are in themselves, but have only united the concepts of them in the *practical concept of the highest good* as the object of our will; and we have done so completely a priori through pure reason, but *only by means of the moral law and also merely in reference [Beziehung] to it*, with regard to the object it commands. But how freedom is even possible and how we are to present this kind of causality theoretically and positively—into this we do not thereby have insight; rather, *that there is such freedom is only being postulated through the moral law and for its sake*. The situation is the same with the other ideas [...]. (KpV 5:133; last two emphases mine)

Kant's message there is clear. We can say that the moral law expands cognition, provided we clarify that it does so 'only for a practical aim'. But that is just to grant that there is no theoretical cognition, i.e., no cognition of *how things are*, of the soul, an intelligible world, or God through the moral law. The expansion of cognition for a practical aim consists in the conceptual unification of the three practical Ideas in the concept of the highest good, and the ultimate reference [*Beziehung*] of those Ideas to the moral law. Though I did not quote it, in the previous paragraph in the text Kant spoke of the moral law furnishing *meaning (Bedeutung)* for the practical Ideas; and when he says now that the practical Ideas are postulated both 'through' and 'for the sake of' the moral law, I take him to be making two distinct points. The practical Ideas are postulated 'for the sake of' the moral law inasmuch as believing them is (Kant supposes) analytically connected to moral action. They are postulated 'through' that law just insofar as that law is their referent and the source of their meaning—what they are ultimately *about*.

(3) So Kant's conceptual-semantic theory can, after all, be made to harmonize perfectly with his practical philosophy. The practical Ideas have objective reality, and hence meaning, through nothing but the moral law (and the mere form of thought of an object furnished by the categories), where the moral law is the referent of those Ideas and is a synthetic, objectively valid judgment (granting Kant's mysteriousness about how the latter is possible). Any content anyone purports to find in the practical Ideas or the practical postulates that cannot be traced back to the

moral law is a product of “anthropomorphism” or “fanaticism”, and nothing more (KpV 5:135-6). But having arrived at this point, what should we now say, at last, about the judgment that we are free?

In section 2, I argued that the judgment that I am free ought to be classed among the postulates. I also argued there that any judgment having the status of a practical postulate ought strictly to be regarded as a matter of faith rather than knowledge. There may well be reason *internal* to the practical point of view to distinguish the propositional attitude I hold toward the postulate of freedom from that I hold toward the other two postulates, and thus to claim, as Kant does in the Analytic of the second *Critique*, that I know the actuality of freedom, or that it is proven. But all the practical postulates are judgments whose ground of assent is objectively insufficient from a theoretical point of view. And though their ground of assent is objectively sufficient from a practical point of view, it rests on a need of reason, which has the status of a subjective universal, and includes a practical premise, the moral law, which is a judgment not about how things are but rather how they ought to be.

The account I have given of the objective reality of the practical Ideas is in line with that way of reading the second *Critique*. It means that the case of the practical Ideas is analogous to the case of the theoretical Ideas in two important respects. First, both the theoretical and practical Ideas purport to be concepts of experience-transcendent objects, but both turn out not to refer to any such objects but to a form or power of cognition, the theoretical Ideas to theoretical cognition by way of the understanding, the practical Ideas to practical cognition (i.e., of what ought to be) by way of the moral law. And second, both sets of Ideas turn out to figure in judgments of which we may affirm a pragmatic belief, that is, *faith*: The theoretical Ideas figure in judgments of doctrinal faith, in which I pursue scientific inquiry *as if* there were a God, and

thus *as if* I can rightly anticipate a systematic unity in nature amenable to science; the practical Ideas figure in judgments of moral faith—the practical postulates—so that I may act *as if* I am free, there is a God, and my soul is immortal<sup>43</sup>—in a word, *morally*. There is clearly some kind of conceptual connection between the very idea of an Idea, as that which points toward the transcendent but receives its objective reality and meaning exclusively from what is immanent, and Kant's concept of faith.

My account of the objective reality and meaning of the practical Ideas in the second *Critique* therefore supports a reading on which our propositional attitude to the claim that we are free is one of faith, even if we may permissibly call it 'knowledge' from within the practical point of view. If the Idea of freedom refers not to anything noumenal but to the moral law and is understood in terms of that law, then I do not *know* my freedom in the sense of being in any way in touch with its noumenal basis. What I know is entirely indexed to the moral law: that I am a practical reasoner, and that I am responsive to specifically moral reasons. To the extent that my beliefs purport to exceed that limit, say, by positing a being such that it could ground such a morally lawful causality, they must one and all be *mere* beliefs, or faith.

## 5. Concluding Remarks

In this chapter, I take myself to have proven false the charge that a faithful adherence to Kant's conceptual-semantic theory requires running roughshod over his practical philosophy.

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<sup>43</sup> To emphasize a point I made earlier: Nothing about this argument proves the absolute *impossibility* of the objects of the practical Ideas. What the argument does do is insist that every meaningful mark belonging to the practical Idea of God as concept gets its meaning and meaningfulness *from the moral law*, not from the Idea's referring to some further thing. So it is *both* the case that there is no positive ground to *deny* that there is a God *and* the case that my affirming the existence of God on moral grounds alone is ultimately nothing other than my affirming my being bound by the moral law. That is doubtless a very deflated view of rational faith. But it is appropriate given that Kant's view is that if God, precisely as conceived through the moral law, were *impossible*, then (analytically) so would be that moral law, and that if we could refer our intellectual presentations to the intelligible realm it would be open to us to prove God's impossibility.

And that is vital, because that theory is essential for securing a genuine empirical realism. On the other hand, I do not purport to have shown that the reading I have given of Kant's practical philosophy is the only one or the best one available. But I am convinced of its merit, and I believe it deserves to be worked out in greater detail on another occasion.

Meanwhile, with this chapter our work is almost complete. This chapter, together with chapters five and six, has largely been concerned to show that Kant's empirical realism and the strategy he employs to vindicate it are compatible with, and even illuminating about, important but difficult portions of the Critical corpus. The final chapter answers a question that has undoubtedly been building up in the mind of the reader: If Kant's empirical realism is as I have been arguing it is, *just what is Kant's transcendental idealism?*

## Chapter Eight: Kant's Transcendental Idealism

What is transcendental idealism? I have been putting that question off from the outset of my inquiry. That is appropriate given my most fundamental interpretive commitment: to use empirical realism as a methodological control on the interpretation of Kant's Critical position. For if that is the method, then the question, 'What is transcendental idealism?', ought to be asked last of all, after we have a maximally clear sense of what empirical realism is and what it requires for its possibility. Yet because Kant himself takes transcendental idealism to be precisely what makes empirical realism possible, in building up our picture of what empirical realism requires for its possibility, we have been at the same time, covertly as it were, amassing the resources for an interpretation of transcendental idealism. Consequently the substantive philosophical work of this final chapter is, in a way, almost complete. What remains is primarily to draw out and bring together the latent philosophical drift of everything that has come before.

Yet if transcendental idealism makes empirical realism possible and therefore comes at the end of the enquiry rather than the beginning, that entails that the more precisely we trace empirical realism's contours, the more we narrow the possibilities for what transcendental idealism could possibly be. And the reader may reasonably worry that we have so narrowed them that no plausible conception of transcendental idealism, particularly as an *idealism*, remains in the available conceptual space.

For genuine empirical realism demands that *knowledge*,<sup>1</sup> and not mere *knowledge-for-us-humans*, nevertheless be possible for us humans. Knowledge is objectively valid, meaning that it is answerable not to the subject who purports to have it (their state of mind) but to the object that it purports to be about. And that brings with it the characteristic features of *necessity* and

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<sup>1</sup> For the purpose of this broad discussion, I once again ignore the knowledge/cognition distinction.

*universality*. Knowledge's answerability to its object is the normative necessity that the object be judged of just *this* way and not some other. And it is at the same time the universality of that normative claim across *all* possible knowers just insofar they are knowers at all. But that means that the object about which we know must be what it is independently of the specification of any particular subset of knowers as knowing it. In other words, if we genuinely have *knowledge* of an object, or even the (real) possibility of such knowledge, then that which we know must have, as we know it, a nature that is not in any way borne on by the fact that *we* are specifically *human* knowers, or by any other determination of us that is contingent relative to our being knowers at all. So genuine empirical realism requires that the phrase, 'empirical knowledge of things as they are', not express a contradiction (i.e., between the knowledge's being empirical and its being of things as they are)—though note that I do not equate 'things as they are' with 'things in themselves' in what I have argued is Kant's technical sense, i.e., *intelligibilia*.<sup>2</sup>

Moreover, genuine empirical realism cannot tolerate the real possibility of, and hence possibility of meaningful, referential thought of, things in themselves. As I suggested in chapter four, Kant conceives of skepticism not as a sort of default position but as itself depending on a positive philosophical entitlement to enable it.<sup>3</sup> And the real possibility of experience-transcendent things in themselves would offer just such an enabling condition to a skepticism about the reality of the objects of our empirical awareness. For either (1) things in themselves lie beyond our empirical awareness because they are *unconditioned* by our presentational capacity, whereas the empirical objects of which we are aware are *conditioned* by that same capacity. But in that case those empirical objects are not objects of a universal and necessary knowledge but are epistemically parochial objects-for-us-humans. Or (2) things in themselves lie beyond our

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<sup>2</sup> See chapter five, section 1 and especially 1.1 of this dissertation.

<sup>3</sup> Sections 5.1 and 6.

empirical awareness because they are required to explain or ground the empirical, and what explains or grounds the empirical is itself necessarily non-empirical and hence epistemically unreachable by us finite discursive knowers. But in that case the empirical ‘reality’ that we putatively ‘know’ is one whose status *as reality* rests on its being experience-transcendently grounded in the right way, so that we can at best be forever in doubt about that status, if not positively know it to be spurious. In either of those cases, the real possibility of things in themselves turns our knowledge of empirical things into mere ‘knowledge’, in fact into a smokescreen lying between us and reality, and the possibility of empirical realism is precluded. So genuine empirical realism requires that empirical things and their *a priori* conditions exhaust the really possible—though that does not entail that things in themselves are *absolutely*, i.e., logically impossible.<sup>4</sup>

What logical space remains for transcendental idealism given that conception of empirical realism? Certainly, as I emphasized in chapter one,<sup>5</sup> there remains no such space for any conception of transcendental idealism on which it differs *merely in degree* rather than *in kind* from subjective idealism. But what is the alternative? If my empirical awareness reaches all the way to how genuinely mind-independent things are and does not stop merely at how they seem to me or us; and if to those things there does not correspond, in *reality* and not merely in thought, a somehow more radically mind-independent realm of things in themselves; then the answer seems to be: none at all. Indeed, what Westphal calls “Kant’s transcendental proof of realism”

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<sup>4</sup> A phrase like ‘exhaust the really possible’ must be handled with care, because *all* positive claims about things in themselves (except those that follow solely from the analysis of their concept) must be precluded. ‘Real possibility’ is simultaneously an epistemological and metaphysical property; when we deny real possibility to things in themselves, we deny that such things (and an intuition that would correspond to them) could even *logically* possibly be given *to us*, given the nature of our intuition. That does not entail that it be *logically* impossible that they be *really* possible for some other sort of being. But it does entail that the latter logical possibility be totally obscure to us as to its meaning, insofar as that meaning is to be something more than mere conformity to the principle of non-contradiction.

<sup>5</sup> Section 4.

seems to turn out to be Kant's proof of *transcendental* realism, as Westphal himself argues.<sup>6</sup> If Westphal is right, there remains room for *no* sort of idealism at that point. And part of the difficulty here is that if we abstract from Kant's philosophy and simply wonder what the minimal necessary commitments are for a view to count as idealism, we find that that is a disputable question in its own right—or, at any rate, that it has been disputed.

My agenda in this chapter is therefore not so much to prove unassailably that Kant's transcendental idealism is an idealism by some independently obvious standard but rather to exhibit those of Kant's commitments that are *arguably* idealistic and, in some cases, have historically been taken to be sufficient for idealism. One of the more obvious impediments to taking Kant to be any kind of idealist, given the constraints of genuine empirical realism, is what seems to be his lack of room for any mind-dependence thesis about the objects of knowledge. So first, seemingly I must either (a) exhibit a form of mind-dependence that is compatible with the mind-independence that empirical things must have for genuine knowledge of them as of *reality* to be possible, or else (b) offer an account of idealism without mind-dependence. (In fact, there is a significant unclarity in that disjunction, namely about what exactly is meant by 'mind-dependence'. As a result, as the reader will see, my account of Kant's transcendental idealism does not neatly fit under either disjunct to the exclusion of the other, though at a minimum it certainly requires the rejection of any *existential* dependence of empirical things on the existence of or actual presentation by finite, spatio-temporally sensible minds.) Second, I must give a sense, compatible with genuine empirical realism, to Kant's claims (a) that we know things merely as they appear, or that empirical things are mere appearances,<sup>7</sup> and (b) that such appearances are 'transcendentally inner'. And third, I must articulate a conception of things in

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<sup>6</sup> Westphal 2004, chapter 7 (228-68).

<sup>7</sup> See section 3 of the Introduction to this dissertation.



themselves on which my knowing nothing less than reality *empirically* does not amount to knowing *things in themselves* empirically—in a word, does not make the appearances into things in themselves. In fact, the material necessary to satisfy those desiderata has already mostly been supplied in previous chapters of this dissertation. And so the argument of this chapter is largely elucidative of a conception that has been before the reader's eyes all along.

The resulting idealism is basically therapeutic, in line with the therapeutic philosophical strategies of the classical German and French phenomenologists, the later Wittgenstein, and ordinary language philosophy. Therapeutic idealism has its limits. At a crucial explanatory moment it must give up complete systematic explanation and simply take things as they are. This chapter, and the dissertation as a whole, closes with a reflection on whether therapeutic idealism and the empirical realism that it aims to make possible are finally philosophically satisfying. The deep question is: Is an explanation of the possibility of knowledge that does not depend ultimately on *intellect alone* but takes for granted the two-stemmedness of our epistemic capacity any explanation at all? I think that my interpretation of Kant allows him to turn the tables against the version of that worry pressed by Pippin and McDowell that I first invoked in my Introduction, but I am not sure there are no further moves they can make in reply. But I maintain that *if* therapeutic idealism is possible at all, then Kant has attained it in its essentials.

### 1. Transcendental Idealism and Mind-Dependence

According to genuine empirical realism, empirical things are sufficiently mind-independent to exercise a normative constraint on our thought about them. They are also mind-independent in this further, perhaps stronger sense: They are in no way *creatures of* our presentational capacity—not projections, constructions, impositions, in no way existentially

dependent or dependent for having the features they appear to have on being presented by us— but rather, because that capacity is in fact not *merely* presentational but genuinely epistemic, empirical things are revealed by that capacity as being just what they are in any case. That is what gives empirical things title to be called *reality* and our presentational capacity title to be called *epistemic*. Yet if Kant’s transcendental idealism is really an *idealism*, some will say, mind-independence cannot be absolute, where for our purpose ‘absolute’ would have to mean not ‘to the maximal degree’ but rather ‘in every respect’. For, the argument will go, idealism without any mind-dependence thesis is no idealism.

That thought—that one cannot have idealism without any commitment worthy of the descriptor ‘mind-dependence’—seems to be Allais’s. Although I have argued that her view ultimately makes empirical realism impossible, she certainly *aspires* to a robustly realist view of empirical reality.<sup>8</sup> Yet even so, feeling the pressure to accommodate Kant’s transcendental *idealism*, she introduces what she regards as a mind-dependence thesis with respect to her so-called essentially manifest qualities. Recall that for her, an essentially manifest quality is not *per se* subjectively ideal, hence not *existentially* mind-dependent at all and not constituted by our presenting it. It is a quality that a thing *has*, period, irrespective of who is presenting it. It is distinct from other, not essentially manifest qualities only in that it is the sort of quality to which the possibility essentially belongs that *we* could, in principle, be aware of it.<sup>9</sup> There is, clearly, a logical leap from the thought of some *x* that it is, in principle, available to our awareness and the thought that it is existentially dependent on that awareness, or dependent in any other way that entail subjective idealism, and that is a leap that Allais does not *intend* to make. So Allais’s

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<sup>8</sup> Allais 2015, 14.

<sup>9</sup> It is not always clear to me that Allais intends quite so radical an objectivity for her essentially manifest qualities as that. But the more I have reflected on her work, the more I have been convinced that that is her real position.

mind-dependence thesis about essentially manifest qualities as she herself conceives it is not anything over and above the thesis that they are in principle knowable by us.<sup>10</sup>

*If* that non-existential mind-dependence is genuinely a form of mind-dependence at all—and that is a significant ‘if’—then I cannot deny that Kant’s empirical realism as I have described it involves a mind-dependence thesis. For as I have been arguing throughout this dissertation, we cannot *meaningfully think* of reality as extending beyond the bounds of possible experience, and what lies within the bounds of possible experience is, in principle, within the reach of our epistemic capacity (always subject to the qualifier that we can be contingently impeded by things like crude sense organs, lack of technology etc.). To the extent that one needs some minimal mind-dependence thesis to take seriously that Kant’s transcendental idealism as I understand it is an idealism at all, that is about the best I can do. But it is a conception of mind-dependence of empirical things that is compatible with their simultaneous *existential* mind-independence and with their in no way being creatures of mere subjectivity (not, at any rate, without a contentious argument from in-principle availability to knowledge to subjective ideality), such that the dimensions of dependence and independence are orthogonal to each other.

Yet not all advocates of positions called ‘idealism’ feel the need to defend *any* sort of mind-dependence thesis, at least not under that description. McDowell, for one, embraces what he takes to be idealism in some of his more recent work. Yet in his account of his idealist commitments, he makes no mention of mind-dependence and even uses formulations that suggest he would be hostile to that way of speaking. ‘Mind-dependence’ might seem to suggest a one-way relation, i.e., from whatever is dependent (the object of knowledge) to that which it depends on (the mind, or thought), and that, McDowell supposes, leads to an objectionable sort

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<sup>10</sup> Allais 2015, 116-24.

of idealism. That objectionable sort of idealism would be one on which “the form of thought [as that which is depended on] must be taken to be explicable first, before we even consider thought’s bearing on reality, and only subsequently said to coincide with the form of the world [as that which is dependent].”<sup>11</sup> It is objectionable because the suggestion that we *first* understand the form of thinking apart from its bearing on the world and then, in a *second* step, try to make it bear on the world looks like it amounts to the suggestion that thinking is something merely subjective that then projects or imposes itself onto ‘reality’. In that case, the ‘reality’ in question would clearly be mind-dependent in a way that threatens its status as a genuine *reality*. The better sort of idealism, McDowell suggests, is one in which the account of the form of thinking and the account of the form of reality are in fact a single account, such that “The form of thought is already just as such the form of the world.”<sup>12</sup>

But arguably McDowell is there committed to the world’s being ‘mind-dependent’ in the same sense in which, for Allais, essentially manifest qualities are ‘mind-dependent’ (though, to be sure, Allais’s position must collapse into subjective idealism because of her other commitments, whereas McDowell’s does not). For it seems to be a natural consequence of the claim that the form of thought and the form of the world are one that the world and anything that belongs to the world are *in principle* knowable by thinkers, notwithstanding being no projection or imposition of subjectivity, in no way subjectively ideal. At any rate, I cannot imagine McDowell rejecting that commitment even if he would reject the language of ‘mind-dependence’.

It is not my agenda to prove that McDowell *should accept* a description of his position in the language of mind-dependence, and it is clear that his thinking about *why* or *what it means to*

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<sup>11</sup> McDowell 2009b, 143.

<sup>12</sup> McDowell 2009b, 143.

say that reality is essentially knowable is better worked out than Allais's. I want only to point out a striking doctrinal convergence between Allais, McDowell, and my Kant about a sufficient condition for some kind of idealism: a commitment to the *in-principle* or *essential knowability* of reality.<sup>13</sup> What is more, an empirically realist Kant seems committed to the more determinate commitments wherein McDowell locates his own conception of himself as an idealist, for instance McDowell's thesis that "the world itself is indeed structured by the form of judgment"<sup>14</sup>—not, mind you, insofar as the judging power, as first and independently given, structures the world, but insofar as the form of that power and the form of its object are one and the same. None of that proves that any of Allais, McDowell, or Kant are 'really' idealists; but it does show that even if Kant's idealism is as minimalistic as I have been describing, he is in any case not in a group of only one member.

Refocusing our attention on Kant's own idealism, we can get clearer about what an in-principle knowability thesis about reality amounts to by reflection on the very sort of mind-independence that empirical realism and the objective validity of judgment require. That independence consists in our answerability, as knowers, to how things are—that is, in the possibility of a normative constraint exercised on our specifically epistemic presentation of things by those very things themselves. Such independence would be merely illusory if those things turned out ultimately to be constructions or projections of the mind itself, or impositions of merely subjective forms of presenting onto what is presented. For in those cases, any 'constraint' would begin and end with the mind's merely subjective act of (now not necessarily

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<sup>13</sup> Again, I hasten to add that this is not a commitment that Allais can *consistently* respect. For her, there is certainly also a part of reality that we cannot know about, the essentially non-manifest qualities. All the same, she holds that essentially manifest qualities belong to reality every bit as much as essentially non-manifest qualities, and that Kant's idealism consists solely in his commitment to that aspect (i.e., the essentially manifest qualities) of altogether existentially mind-independent reality being in principle knowable.

<sup>14</sup> McDowell 2009b, 143.

epistemic) presentation. And yet that sort of independence presupposes what I shall call a *commensurateness* between knower and thing known. It presupposes, namely, that things are essentially such as to be *able* to exercise a normative constraint on our knowledge of them, or that such normative constraint is an essential possibility for them.<sup>15</sup>

In other words, to the essential answerability of knowers, *as* knowers, to things as elements of mind-independent reality corresponds the essential fitness or aptness of things, as real, to be known, such that they *can* make a demand on our judgment at all. But that is just a way of spelling out that if Kant is a genuine empirical realist, then his account of the possibility of the human presentational capacity as a genuinely *epistemic* capacity must be, in the very same gesture and not in a second step, an account of the possibility of reality as that which the capacity genuinely epistemically presents to us.

In light of Kant's other commitments, that might seem to entail a different sort of mind-dependence thesis, different, that is, in *kind* from existential dependence of object on mind. For Kant, a thing to which, *per impossibile*, in-principle knowability is not essential is just a thing that lacks real possibility. What seems to follow is that the only grasp we have of what it is for something even possibly to exist is for it to belong to the really possible. And that can threaten to look like the thesis that what exists depends for its possibility *and hence its existence* on its being in principle knowable by us. Now I do not deny that for Kant, our only meaningful grasp of what it is for something even possibly to exist is indexed to real possibility. Yet outside of real possibility we can no more meaningfully *deny* existence than meaningfully *affirm* it. The thought is thus not that real possibility exhausts, metaphysically as it were, all that can possibly exist, or

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<sup>15</sup> This line of reasoning presupposes my arguments in chapter one, section 1 that a genuinely epistemic capacity, to be such a capacity at all, must be a capacity for presentation of *reality*, or *being*, or *how things are*, and hence a capacity whose contact with reality is essential and not merely accidental. Without that argument, we have no reason to think that to the very nature of a thing belongs its being possibly known.

that what exists presupposes real possibility as a metaphysical condition of existence. Rather real possibility, in-principle knowability, sets bounds on the domain in which questions like ‘What is there?’ or ‘Do such and such things exist or not?’ can meaningfully be asked at all.

At the same time, the real possibility of the human epistemic capacity and the real possibility of its object are mutually implicating. For from the object side, if in-principle knowability by our epistemic capacity belongs to the object *essentially*, then for our epistemic capacity to fail to be really possible is just for an essential feature of the object and hence the object itself not to be really possible. And from the capacity side, if possible objects of knowledge for that capacity were not really possible, then clearly that capacity would be no capacity for knowledge at all—for its objects would be no part of *reality*. ‘Mutual implication’ is, indeed, glossable as mutual dependence, and hence there is, indeed, *some* kind of relation of mutual dependence of object and capacity there. But once again it seems to boil down to this: that the accounts of epistemic capacity and object known are not two but one; the (real) possibility of one cannot be understood without a simultaneous grasp of the (real) possibility of the other. That will naturally put the reader in mind of McDowell’s formulation that I quoted above, according to which “The form of thought is already just as such the form of the world”. My version of it is that the form of the human epistemic capacity is already just as such the form of reality. But we find that very idea expressed by Kant when he instructs us that “the conditions for the *possibility of experience* as such are simultaneously the conditions for the *possibility of objects of experience*” (A158/B197). That, I submit, is Kant’s transcendental idealism in a nutshell.

A reader may worry that the sort of idealism that I am advocating here, in terms of the unity of account of the form of our epistemic capacity and that of reality and, as a consequence,

the interdependence of the real possibilities of each of those, presupposes subjective idealism for its possibility. If that were right, then the Kantian project as I have developed it may be incoherent. Isn't an alleged mutual dependence of the real possibilities of things and minds a striking philosophical coincidence, and hence the sort of philosophical result that requires explanation, specifically as to *why* it is or should be so? And isn't the only even remotely plausible explanation that things are, after all, creations, projections, or emanations of mind, so that their availability to knowing is guaranteed genetically?<sup>16</sup> I cannot properly address that line of questioning until we arrive at the discussion of the therapeutic character of Kant's idealism in section 4. All I can say now is that Kant would simply reject the demand for such why-explanations as misplaced.

I have been developing a conception of what transcendental idealism could be that would differ in kind and not merely in degree from subjective idealism and hence that could genuinely make empirical realism possible. If Kant's transcendental idealism as I understand it has an official slogan, it is without a doubt Kant's claim that "the conditions for the *possibility of experience* as such are simultaneously conditions for the *possibility of objects of experience*." I

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<sup>16</sup> Support for that thought may seem to be generated by the rhetoric of Kant's Copernicanism in the B Preface. For isn't the essential move there to suggest that there are only two ways to understand the possibility of cognition, either in terms of conformity of cognition to objects or in terms of conformity of objects to cognition, and then to opt for the latter given the failure of the former? And the second way seems no more to suggest two-way real-possibility dependence than the first. But rhetoric is one thing, argumentative force another, and close scrutiny of the relevant passage (Bxvi-xxii) reveals that it does not commit Kant to supposing that empirical things depend for their real possibility on our epistemic capacity but not the converse. To hold that "all our cognition must conform to objects"—the view of early modern metaphysicians, which Kant rejects—is there glossed by Kant (perhaps inadvertently) as to hold a position on which the possibility of *a priori* cognition of objects cannot be accounted for (Bxvi). And the latter position would indeed follow from any view on which either (a) our epistemic capacity lacks a form or (b) our epistemic capacity has a form but one that is indifferent to the form of objects to be cognized. By contrast, to hold that "objects must conform to our cognition" is to hold a position on which *a priori* cognition of objects can be accounted for (Bxvi). Now such cognition can indeed be accounted for if the real possibility of objects depends on the real possibility of our epistemic capacity, for that is just for the form of the object to be nothing other than the form of the epistemic capacity. Yet that does not at all preclude that the real possibility of the epistemic capacity likewise depends on (i.e., presupposes or entails) the real possibility of its object. Thanks to Michael Kremer for urging me to think through this passage.



have tried to capture the spirit of that slogan in the conception before the reader of an essential unity of account, and hence of mutual dependence of real possibility, between epistemic capacity and reality. But there are still textual worries that a reader will surely harbour. Specifically, what positive sense can be given to Kant's claims that empirical things are 'mere appearances', even 'presentations', and are 'transcendentally inner'?

## 2. The Transcendental Ideality of Appearances, Presentations, and the Transcendentally Inner

In chapter two, section 3, we saw that Kant has at least two senses of 'inner': empirical and transcendental. At that stage, it was sufficient to note that transcendental innerness is compatible with empirical outerness and hence that something's being transcendentally inner is neither here nor there with respect to whether it is *real* or *ideal*, in the conventional senses of those two terms. Likewise, I needed to say no more about appearances and presentations (*Vorstellungen*), and about why empirical things count as no more than *mere* appearances and in what sense they count as presentations, than that Kant can have empirical and transcendental senses of 'presentation' also and that for something *merely* to be an appearance is simply for it to be inner and a presentation in the transcendental senses of those terms. Hence, again, something's being merely an appearance and a presentation in the transcendental sense does not entail its conventional (empirical) ideality. But those manoeuvres were merely negative in a certain sense: They did not require me to give a positive account of any of the relevant bits of Kantiana but merely to show that Kant is *not* using any of them to express a conventionally idealistic view. But now such merely negative manoeuvres are not enough. If I am to give even a sketch of Kant's idealism in its own right, then I need to be able to say something positive about the meanings of those terms. Perhaps to the reader's surprise, this section will contain not only

that but also an explanation of the bearing of Kant's conception of sensibility and of its relation to the intellect on his idealism. For executing the former task turns out to require saying something about the latter.

In the *Inaugural Dissertation* of 1770, Kant makes the following, striking claim: "we rightly assume that *whatever cannot be cognised by any intuition at all is simply not thinkable, and is, thus, impossible.*"<sup>17</sup> The *Dissertation* is, of course, pre-Critical, even if on the cusp, and that matters because I do not take the logical/real possibility distinction that emerges in the Critical context to be perspicuously available apart from that context. Hence there is reason for caution about too casually filing the quoted claim, regarding its talk of 'impossibility', under one or the other heading. Still, we can reasonably ask what status Kant would assign the claim armed with the Critical arsenal, and the more plausible answer is that Kant there makes a claim about *real*, not logical, impossibility. The word 'thinkable' may mislead here. For the standard example of what is not even thinkable is a contradiction. But then Kant would be claiming that the concept of a thing that is not in principle presentable through any sort of intuition contains a contradiction. And first, that a concept is logically incoherent is not something we should ever merely "assume", even "rightly", but ought to be demonstrable. And second, how Kant could demonstrate the contradiction uncontroversially is mysterious. I therefore suggest that Kant is rather saying that the thinkability of a thing requires not only that its concept be logically coherent but also that it be presentable in *some* form of intuition, even if not ours, and that that thinkability requirement tracks a non-logical possibility requirement. In other words, an intellect cannot think anything all by itself but always requires the cooperation of some intuitive power or other. And what the intellect cannot think is an adequate index of what is not possible at all.

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<sup>17</sup> MSI 2:413.

Kant's faith, in the *Dissertation*, in that adequacy of the intellect is there undergirded by his conviction that the intellect somehow has a real use apart from sensibility.<sup>18</sup> That must obviously be given up in the Critical period. Nevertheless, in the quoted claim Kant is already expressing a commitment to a principle of what I called above the commensurateness of epistemic capacity and thing: that reality is apt for knowing and that our epistemic capacity is just such as to get in touch with reality. Not only that, but he is clear that that commensurateness bears *both* on understanding *and* on intuition. A thing must be thinkable to be possible. But it cannot be adequate to *thought* unless it is adequate to some variety or other of *intuition*. That, I suggest, foreshadows an aspect of Kant's transcendental idealism that I did not attend to in the previous section, namely that real possibility is defined with reference specifically to intuition and, in particular, to 'our' spatio-temporal sensibility. As I argued in chapter three (section 4), the real possibility of a thing is equivalent to the objective reality of its concept. And objective reality can be vindicated only with reference to the very intuition that co-constitutes our epistemic capacity, namely, spatio-temporal sensibility.

Were other varieties of intuition, whether sensible but non-spatio-temporal or purely intellectual, really possible, a skeptic would have the positive ground that they need, in Kant's view, reasonably to doubt the genuine objectivity of our spatio-temporal sensibility. Its being 'ours' would reveal it as parochial and *merely* subjective. But other varieties of intuition are not really possible, just insofar as they cannot themselves be intuited through ours. And that makes the thought of another variety of intuition, from whose vantage point ours would seem parochial, *meaningless*, no more than a *mere* thought or an idle play of concepts. Nevertheless, because the

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<sup>18</sup> It is not altogether clear to me that the 'real use' of the intellect that Kant identifies in the *Dissertation* is *really*, as it were, a use at all, rather than a name for a use that the intellect *would* have were it, like God's, wedded to a "perfectly intellectual" intuition (MSI 2:397). But I leave that aside here.

idle and meaningless thought of other varieties of intuition is logically available, it is helpful to introduce terms for really possible things, belonging specifically to our sensibility, that marks their status as commensurate not only with our thinking but with our particular variety of intuition. That, I suggest, is what is being flagged in the terms ‘mere appearance’, ‘presentation’ (in the transcendental sense), and ‘transcendentally inner’, with the corresponding absence of that commensurateness being flagged in the terms ‘transcendentally outer’ and ‘thing in itself’.

It is not hard to hear ‘mere appearance’ as meaning something like ‘less than fully real’. ‘Appearance’, by itself, could perhaps be innocent of that connotation. But, of course, Kant himself emphasizes that ‘appearance’ seems to imply that which appears, or that an appearance must be the appearance of some further thing. And with that thought in mind, ‘mere’ seems only to underscore that an appearance is *nothing more than* a derivative phenomenon of that which appears. What is more, an appearance *of* something is also an appearance *to* someone, and we are accustomed to thinking of a mere appearing-to-someone-a-certain-way as derivative not only upon that of which it is the appearing but also upon the presentational capacity of the one to whom it is appearing. Thus a mere appearance seems not to be fully real not only insofar as it is not self-subsistent apart from that which appears but also insofar as its very nature is merely subjectively conditioned, i.e., by me just insofar as I present it. No wonder, then, that even apart from talk of presentations, Kant’s equation of empirical things with ‘mere appearances’ seems to many commentators to suggest a subjective, empirical idealism—even if, futilely, they are at pains somehow to distinguish the idealism that they purport to find in Kant, as ‘transcendental’ in some vague sense, from empirical idealism as Kant describes it.

But consider what a different understanding of ‘appearance’ is possible on the view I have been developing. Empirical things belong *essentially* to sensibility. Their real possibility

consists in so belonging. They are appearances because it is essential to their being possible at all that they be the sort of thing that can be not merely thought but also sensed and hence *appear* to someone. That does not just thereby impugn their reality; what appears may be nothing other than a thing itself. But not a thing *in* itself—not a thing (or an aspect of a thing) built into the very thought of which is its being beyond the reach of our sensibility. For reasons I explored in chapters four and five, there are natural tendencies in human reason, first, to take things in themselves to set the standard for the reality or mind-independence that would belong to genuine thinghood, and second, to take empirical things for things in themselves. And just insofar as the thought of a thing in itself is the thought of a thing that would *not* be given in sensibility, it is the thought of a thing that, were it only more than merely logically possible, would admit of an attainable explanatory completeness that is in principle precluded for sensibly given empirical things. Now I have argued that things in themselves are indeed *not* more than merely logically possible, and hence that they are not properly taken to set a standard or norm relative to which in-principle indefinitely explainable empirical things are defective or in virtue of which they require experience-transcendent metaphysical support. But because of the tendencies of reason just identified, a Critical reminder is required not only of what empirical things *are* but also of what they *are not*. Hence empirical things are not just appearances but *mere* appearances.

Happily, that way of understanding the expression ‘mere appearance’ is consistent with Kant’s usage. Mere appearances are frequently contrasted with things in themselves, as at A45/B62, which does not force us to understand the contrast to be between two real or really possible terms, or between thing in itself as real and appearance as less-than. As usual, some of the trickier and more overtly idealistic passages are found in the A fourth Paralogism. For instance, Kant there indicates that transcendental realism falsely “regards mere appearances as

independent beings that are outside us” (A371). But as I argued in chapter two (section 3), the sense of ‘outside us’ there is not the familiar one of ‘in a different location from mine in space’ but rather ‘not even in principle available to my sensibility’. Kant indicates as much when he says in the same place that so regarding mere appearances is regarding them as “something distinct from the senses themselves” in a way that gives rise to empirical idealism.

But the most difficult passages are those where Kant seems casually to grant that a mere appearance must be an appearance of some further (real, existent) non-empirical thing. For instance, again in the A fourth Paralogism, Kant instructs that “We should bear in mind [...] that bodies are not objects in themselves that are present to us, *but are a mere appearance of who knows what unknown object*” (A387; emphasis mine). But also in the Aesthetic, Kant writes that “when a *body* is presented in intuition, this presentation contains nothing whatever that could belong to an object in itself. It contains, rather, merely the appearance of something, and the way we are affected by that something” (A44/B61). Nevertheless, even those passages are at least equally compatible with my proposed reading of appearance-talk as with the standard one. The Paralogism quotation is simply undercut not only by the fact that it disappears from the B *Critique*, without anything equivalently strong remaining or replacing it, but also by the fact that only a couple of pages earlier Kant treats the existence of “who knows what unknown object” grounding the appearance not as a certitude but merely as a permissible hypothesis, writing that “there *may well* be something outside us to which this appearance that we call matter corresponds” (A385). And the Aesthetic quotation permits that the way the object appears be precisely the way the object *is* just so long as we do not confuse that with the way the object is *in itself*—that is, were the object (*per impossibile*) an *intelligibile* and hence incapable of bearing as attributes the distinctively spatial predicates that are essential to body.

Having treated Kant's talk of 'mere appearance', I can treat his talk of empirical things as 'presentations' more concisely. I begin by reminding the reader of the 'ing/ed' ambiguity latent in that term—that is, the ambiguity between its use to designate the *act* or *means* of presentation and its use to designate the *object* of presentation.<sup>19</sup> That already takes us some way to neutralizing the implication of conventional idealism that identification of empirical things with 'presentations' seems to carry with it at first glance. So, too, does the observation I made in chapter two (section 3) that Kant can rely with perfect right on a distinction between transcendental and empirical senses of 'presentation' (and must do so insofar as the A fourth Paralogism is not to be baldly inconsistent with the Refutation of Idealism). But now I can give a precise and positive account of what a presentation in the transcendental sense actually is. As I have been arguing, transcendental idealism requires a relation of mutual dependence or presupposition between the real possibility of things and the real possibility of minds or epistemic capacities as we have them. Now an empirical thing is a presentation in the transcendental sense not because it exists *in* or *dependently on* a mind, as does a presentation in the empirical sense, but rather because it is the sort of thing that is essentially or in principle presentable by minds like ours (again, barring contingent impediments to our presentation of it, e.g., the crudeness of our sense organs) just insofar as it is really possible at all. When Kant describes empirical things as 'presentations', we can therefore understand him to be telling us that they are 'presentables', the sort of thing our epistemic capacity can put us in touch with.

A striking advantage of that interpretation of the transcendental sense of 'presentation' is that it conforms remarkably well to Kant's few scattered remarks on how he understands the meaning of the term 'transcendental'. The first *Critique* contains two that are particularly

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<sup>19</sup> See the Introduction to this dissertation, section 3.

important. Here is the first: “I call *transcendental* all cognition that deals not so much with objects as rather with our way of cognizing objects in general insofar as that way of cognizing is to be possible a priori” (A11-2/B25). And here is the second: “We must not call just any a priori cognition transcendental, but must call transcendental (i.e., concerning the a priori possibility or the a priori use of cognition) only that a priori cognition whereby we cognize that—and how—certain presentations (intuitions or concepts) are applied, or are possible, simply a priori” (A56/B80). Now real possibility is, although obviously not merely logical, nevertheless *a priori* possibility. At the same time, it is clearly a feature not merely of things but also of our cognition of them, for the very reason that our only grip on the possibility of real possibility, as it were, is in terms of fitness for possible presentation by an epistemic capacity constituted as ours is. Our awareness, therefore, that an empirical thing is just as such a presentation in the transcendental sense is nothing other than a *transcendental cognition* of that thing. That is, it is an *a priori* cognition of the thing not in its existence but merely as to its form as belonging to space and time, hence to sensible intuition, and thus as essentially presentable by us.

In my discussion of presentations in the transcendental sense, unlike in my discussion of appearances, I have not gone out of my way to emphasize sensibility in particular. Nevertheless, just insofar as a transcendental presentation is that which is in principle presentable by a mind or epistemic capacity constituted as ours is, and just insofar as an essential element of that constitution is spatio-temporal sensibility, a transcendental presentation belongs essentially to sensibility and is in principle presentable just therein. With that in mind, we may give an even more concise treatment of the positive sense of ‘transcendentally inner’. Again, I argued in my second chapter (section 3) that the transcendentially inner was not equivalent to the empirically inner (i.e., to the mental or psychological). I also argued that whereas the transcendentially outer



is so radically independent of my sensibility that I could not possibly sense it, the transcendently inner is just that which is not thus radically sensibility-independent. But for something *not* to be so radically independent of my sensibility is just for my sensing it to be an essential possibility for it. Hence transcendental innerness is nothing other than what I have been calling the *commensurateness* of thing to mind, its being essentially knowable by our epistemic capacity in virtue of a shared account of subject (capacity) and object (reality), which is all the thing's transcendental ideality amounts to.

We can even make some sense of the lingering metaphor of 'innerness'. The metaphor as it occurs in the case of empirical innerness is comparatively straightforward, not only because it is idiomatic in many Indo-European languages but also because the presentation-mind relation is naturally thought of as a case of the attribute-substance relation. For in the most commonsensical sort of case, an attribute's being 'in' a substance is its belonging to an empirical thing that has a location and spatial bounds in which the attribute may, without too much distortion, be thought of as 'contained'. The metaphor is somewhat different in the case of the transcendently inner, but nevertheless appropriate when viewed aright. A transcendently inner but empirically outer thing does not depend for its *existence* on actual presence 'in' intuition. Put more simply, its existence is not 'in' my intuition of it but 'outside' of it, since it can exist whether I intuit it or not. But now the real possibility of the thing does indeed depend on the real possibility of the epistemic capacity and hence the intuitive power that would be appropriate to it (and vice versa). And now just as we may say that the *existence* of an empirically inner (or empirically ideal) item lies in intuition, we may say that the *real possibility* of an empirically outer but transcendently inner item lies 'in' sensible intuition—so long as (1) we mean by that not the actuality of this or that episode of actual intuiting but merely the real possibility of the power, and (2) we

understand that just as much the real possibility of that power lies ‘in’ the real possibility of the object of that power.

Before closing this section, we should take a moment to reflect on the precisification of Kant’s transcendental idealism that has taken place. The comparatively minimal conception developed in section one is of an idealism whose minimal credential as such is the thesis that the forms of reality and of the human epistemic capacity are one in account, which entails the claim that the real possibility of a thing depends *and* is depended on by the real possibility of a capacity for knowledge that would be adequate to it—what I have called the commensurateness of mind and reality. And that mutual interdependence of real possibilities is grounded in the fact that transcendental idealism is in one and the same philosophical gesture an account of the possibility of knowledge and an account of the possibility of being (so that, *contra* Allison, there can be no distinction between genuinely epistemic conditions as conditions of presentation and ontological conditions as conditions of presentables).<sup>20</sup>

But now we may add the following. Real possibility can only be assessed from within the standpoint of a given epistemic capacity. The only things whose real possibility we can affirm are things commensurate with our capacity and not with some other; and essentially different epistemic capacities are not thus commensurate. So Kant’s transcendental idealism ultimately commits us to the view that what is really possible—or what we can meaningfully think of—is our epistemic capacity as specifically sensible and spatio-temporal and, correspondingly, things that could in principle be presented by such a capacity. Hence the Kantian slogan that I quoted in the previous section could be rephrased thus: The conditions of the possibility of *our experience* are at the same time the conditions of the possibility of objects of *any really possible experience*.

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<sup>20</sup> See chapter one, section 2.

So long as we keep firmly in view that the ‘our’ in that formulation does not entail skepticism-provoking parochiality (because it does not indicate the real possibility of, and therefore *the meaningfulness of the thought* of, other sorts of experience), we can take that to characterize Kant’s transcendental idealism and its specific bearing on the sort of mind that each of us humans is.

But suppose everything I have been saying herein is correct. Suppose, particularly, that Kant really does take empirical things to be independent of my mind in their existence, even if they are ‘in’ my mind in their real possibility (just as, at the same time, my mind’s real possibility is ‘in’ them). And suppose, therefore, that in my awareness of them I am aware of them simply *as they are* (barring, as usual, any merely empirical impediments to that awareness). How is that not—not just *empirical* realism but—*transcendental* realism? To answer that, we must see how transcendental realism is related to the conception of things in themselves not simply as the ‘most real things’ (or in any case ‘what is most real’, in the event that ‘most real things’ reads as too committally two-object) but specifically as *intelligibilia*.

### 3. Genuine Empirical Realism and Transcendental Realism

As I mentioned earlier, in *Kant’s Transcendental Proof of Realism*, Westphal argues that Kant’s arguments for realism overwhelm his arguments for any form of idealism and hence that Kant is committed not to empirical realism but to what Westphal calls “realism *sans phrase*”, by which he means what Kant calls transcendental realism.<sup>21</sup> Now an obvious difference between my position and Westphal’s lies in our interpretations of transcendental idealism. Westphal

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<sup>21</sup> Westphal 2004, 1. Westphal consistently prefers the phrase ‘realism *sans phrase*’ to the phrase ‘transcendental realism’. But he makes clear their equivalence at 71n6. Westphal also sometimes opposes transcendental realism to transcendental idealism and declares the latter false by Kant’s own arguments (e.g., at 79-80). That *would* entail that transcendental realism is true *if* it were opposed to transcendental idealism as a contradictory, as it is for Kant.

defends a metaphysical two-aspect reading of transcendental idealism, on which empirical things are actually aspects of an underlying noumenal reality (hence really empirical ‘things’, i.e., things only so called) and on which those empirical ‘things’ are conditioned by *a priori* constraints on our presentation of them, whereas the underlying noumenal reality is not thus conditioned.<sup>22</sup> In particular, Westphal is committed to the claim that space and time do not characterize objects “independently of human subjects”;<sup>23</sup> and lest there be any doubt in what sense he intends the adverb ‘independently’, he goes on to claim that they are “generated” by our cognitive capacities<sup>24</sup> and that “spatiotemporal objects *exist only in their being represented by us*”.<sup>25</sup> He thus commits Kant pretty straightforwardly to subjective idealism, the word ‘transcendental’ notwithstanding. And so when he argues that Kant has the resources to contend that things after all can appear to us just as they mind-independently are, he is consistent in seeing that as inconsistent with transcendental idealism as Westphal understands it.<sup>26</sup> But since our present conception of Kant’s transcendental idealism is quite different, we need not take the resources for realism that Westphal identifies to be a threat to that idealism.

But I cannot stop there, alas. For even if Westphal is wrong about what transcendental idealism is, that does not show that the view that I have found in Kant is not transcendental realism by Kant’s lights. And the impression that it is such a realism will be lent strength by a reader’s lingering commitment to a conception of the thing in itself as nothing more specific than a ‘most real thing’. For if that is all that a thing in itself is, and empirical things are the most real things of which we can meaningfully think (even if concepts purporting to be of other things are

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<sup>22</sup> Westphal 2004, 4-5 and 36-67.

<sup>23</sup> Westphal 2004, 4.

<sup>24</sup> Westphal 2004, 5.

<sup>25</sup> Westphal 2004, 60.

<sup>26</sup> E.g., at Westphal 2004, 84.

not self-contradictory), then empirical things are things in themselves, and Kant as I have presented him is a transcendental realist. The dialectical state of affairs is the same if one conceives of a thing in itself simply as anything whose properties do not depend *existentially* on the mind presenting it. For empirical realism requires that things be what and as they are regardless of what really possible knower they are to be known by. To head off the charge of transcendental realism, I must therefore be able to point to a different conception of the thing in itself from that of the ‘most real thing’ or the merely existentially mind-independent, one that is nevertheless recognizably Kantian and with respect to which empirical realism is no realism.

But such a different conception lies at hand. It is the one that emerged in the fifth chapter (section 1.1) and that I have invoked at a few points in previous sections of the present chapter: the thing in itself as object of pure intellect, or *intelligibile*. On that conception, the thing in itself is originally defined only negatively, insofar as it is equivalent to the negative noumenon. And its concept is thus determined merely as that of an object that is (in a privative way) *thinkable* but *not* an object of our spatio-temporal sensibility. On that basis alone, the concept of the thing in itself admits of a remarkable degree of determinacy. For since, in the absence of any reference to a variety of intuition that would be adequate to it, no intuitive conditions on its possibility are specifiable, the concept is simply that of an object that would be presentable through intellect alone. And so far as such an object is concerned, Kant’s view is that the Leibnizian-Wolffian analysis of its concept is in large measure correct, as emerges most plainly in the Amphiboly.

For our present purpose, the most important determination belonging to the concept of a thing in itself is that it would either be itself unconditioned or at least belong to a foreseeably finite explanatory chain terminating in an unconditioned first term. Empirical realism does not require that empirical things have that explanatory character. On the contrary: It positively

abjures it. Empirical things are precisely the sort of thing for which *sufficiency* of explanation does not entail *completeness* of explanation, because empirical things' real possibility is determined not merely in relation to reason and its syllogistic form but also in relation to sensibility, in which empirical things are *given* independently of the givenness of their conditions and in which space and time necessitate the indefinite mutual conditioning of their parts and anything that appears in them. A thing in itself would only be given insofar as its conditions were also given and would not be conditioned indefinitely. But that is so only insofar as it is independent of our sensibility even in respect of its real possibility, and thus mind-independent not only existentially but also formally, or in reference to its real possibility, and thus in a manner that an empirical thing is not. Only if we regarded empirical things as *thus* mind-independent would we be transcendental realists.

Once again, my proposal conforms well to Kant's usage. We can see that particularly clearly by comparison of certain elements of the A fourth Paralogism, the *locus classicus* for transcendental realism in the first *Critique*, and of the Refutation of Idealism. In the former, Kant claims that a transcendental realist "regards both time and space as something given in itself (independently of our sensibility)" (A369). That is, the transcendental realist conceives of space and time as existing in themselves, and hence they conceive of empirical things, which belong to space and time, as things in themselves that are nevertheless spatio-temporal. Meanwhile, in the Refutation of Idealism, although transcendental realism is not named, Kant suggests that the thought of space and time as existing in themselves and preceding and informing things in themselves *unavoidably* leads to the conclusion that space and time are *impossible* (B274).

By itself, the A fourth Paralogism position might seem to tell against my suggestion that transcendental realism presupposes a specifically intellectual conception of things in themselves.

For if things in themselves are *per se* intellectual, how can transcendental realism, which posits that they belong to space and time (themselves conceived of as existing *in* themselves), be a possible position at all? But that semblance is removed by consideration of the Refutation. Admittedly, Kant's only explanation there for the impossibility of the existence in themselves of space and time is terse and cryptic: If space (as well as time) so existed, it and everything it conditioned would be "a nonentity" (B274). But Kant's use of the term 'nonentity' in the Table of Nothing indicates that it is meant to connote absurdity and thus logical impossibility (A292/B348). So Kant is suggesting that transcendental realism's Newtonian thought of absolute (i.e., existing in itself) space and time contains a contradiction. Now the contradiction cannot lie simply in space's being an odd sort of entity, though that is the impression Kant seems to give in the Refutation and in an earlier passage in the Aesthetic (A39/B56). For how have we entitled ourselves, a Newtonian or transcendental realist might rightfully object, to a concept of the possibly existent that tolerates things in space but not space itself? Why not simply accept a more liberal ontology?

But a contradiction manifests itself in the thought of things in themselves as *objects of pure understanding*, and hence specifically intellectual, *belonging to* and thus *being conditioned by* space and time as specifically sensible. Space and time are not presentable through intellect alone, and *intelligibilia* are not presentable through sensibility at all. For each presentable has a distinctive mereological structure: That of understanding's type of presentation, the concept, is part-to-whole, whereas the mereological structure of space and time, as intuitive, is whole-to-part. And those distinctive mereological structures entail that the objects corresponding to each stem of intuition would have to be subject to different, and irreconcilable, explanatory requirements. Thus, for instance, in the Amphiboly Kant affirms that for a thing in itself

conceived of intellectually, *matter* must always precede *form*, which, he goes on to claim, entails that the *thing* cannot be conditioned by a form that precedes it. But the mereological structure of space and time is such that form precedes matter, and therefore, Kant reasons, anything present *in* space or time must be conditioned by them (A266-8/B322-4). Hence a specifically intellectual thing in itself conceived of as belonging to space and time must both be and not be conditioned by space and time—which is a contradiction.<sup>27</sup>

So if transcendental realism is the view that empirical things are things in themselves, then we have nothing to fear from it. So long as we keep in mind that a thing in itself would have to be an object of pure intellect and hence an object whose real possibility does *not* mutually depend on the real possibility of spatio-temporal sensibility, we can be uncompromising empirical realists without ever verging on transcendental realism. Indeed, we are now in a better position to see why transcendental realism requires empirical *idealism*. For the possibility of objectively valid judgment, and thus of knowledge, requires that the object of knowledge be such *essentially* and hence that its real possibility implicate the real possibility of the capacity to know it. But transcendental realism is the *separation* of the real possibility of the object from the real possibility of the capacity to know it—specifically, from the sensible stem of our epistemic capacity. Hence it is the division of being from knowability, and forces us to settle for ‘knowledge’ not of what *is* but of what merely seems to be to beings like us.

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<sup>27</sup> Though it would be too complex to go into here, I also believe that the structure of the Antinomies is grounded in the fundamental contradiction contained in the thought of specifically intellectual things in themselves as belonging to space and time.



#### 4. Transcendental Idealism and Bruteness

I'd like to close this chapter, and the dissertation, with a reflection on the limits of Kant's strategy as I understand it. I have offered the reading of Kant's position that herein appears not only because I believe it is genuinely Kant's and yet routinely missed but also because I find it attractive on its philosophical merits. I think we can see both its attractiveness and also where it *may* remain vulnerable if we focus on its fundamentally therapeutic and even phenomenological character and if we reflect once more on its resources, particularly as developed in chapter four, to reply to the objection to Kant that I raised in my Introduction (section 1.4) and revisited in chapter four (sections 1 and 5.1): the Pippin-McDowell objection to the bruteness of the forms of sensibility.

When I characterize Kant's approach as 'therapeutic', I mean that a key aspect of his strategy is descriptive, i.e., of a point of view which we necessarily presuppose as a background of inquiry and out of which we emerge into knowledge. Kant's account of the human epistemic capacity is, I suggest, a *situated* and thoroughly *immanent* account, one that does not purport to justify our consideration of that capacity as genuinely epistemic from a point of view we could take on it from outside. I therefore mean to locate Kant in the same broad camp as the phenomenologists, the later Wittgenstein, ordinary language philosophers, and—perhaps—McDowell. A therapeutic approach is perhaps best understood as trying to *dissolve* rather than *solve*. When confronted with an apparent philosophical difficulty, the philosophical therapist does not so much try to answer it as to explain why it is *merely* apparent. Their approach has two essential moments: first, the perspicuous exhibition of some phenomenon or range of phenomena; second, the revelation of assumptions that provoke philosophical puzzlement but that turn out, upon inspection, to be optional. (I describe those as moments because I do not

know that there is a clear priority of one over the other, but both seem to be involved in the typical case.)

So, for example, the characteristic method of ordinary language philosophers involved the attentive description of accepted uses of ordinary language. When applied to philosophical worries, the aspiration was thereby to reveal that they were generated by *misuses* of language, ways of speaking that were assumed by the worrier to be legitimate but in fact involved departures from the ordinary meanings and uses of the terms used. Thus philosophical problems and disputes were not to be taken as legitimate at face value and responded to in their own terms. Accepting those terms would already put one a dialectical step too late, when what was really needed was to expose them as poorly or improperly motivated.

Now I take Kant to hold that a skeptic who would deny our entitlement to empirical realism must have a *positive philosophical ground* on which to base their skepticism; and I take his method ultimately to be to challenge the skeptic's own entitlement to such a ground.<sup>28</sup> That seems to me to be the same basic strategy that I have just attributed to the philosophical therapist. The distinctively Kantian version of philosophical therapy involves the perspicuous description of our epistemic capacity *as* just such a capacity and correspondingly of the object of knowledge *as* just such an object. A fundamental assumption that the therapy exposes, the one diagnosed by Kant in the Amphiboly, is that an epistemic capacity essentially consists *solely of an intellect*.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> As I understand that method, it requires regarding so-called transcendental arguments in Kant, like the Refutation of Idealism, as downstream consequences of having already removed various skepticism-enabling assumptions, not self-standing attempts to refute a skeptic. Cf. Stroud 2000a and b and my "Kantian Reflections on Stroud's Invulnerability Strategy and the Objective Validity of Transcendental Arguments" (unpublished).

<sup>29</sup> Though I cannot defend the following here, I take Kant to attribute that assumption to early modern rationalists and empiricists alike. For I agree with Kemp Smith that Kant regards empiricism, at its most consistently and fully developed, as a form of skepticism (2003, 9). Consequently I understand the dialectic between dogmatism and skepticism that Kant describes in the A Preface to the first *Critique* (Aviii-xii) to be symptomatic of, on the one hand, an attempt to understand how knowledge is possible on the assumption that the object of knowledge must be purely intellectual if it is possible at all and, on the other hand, a skeptical conclusion, encouraged by the failure of

The corresponding perspicuously exhibited phenomenon is the very epistemic capacity that we have, one that is not only intellectual but only sensible; and a key part of what is exhibited is that sensibility (in tandem, of course, with the intellect) *makes knowledge possible* rather than hindering it. Beneath all the arcane terminology and extremely complex argumentation, Kant's strategy rests on an attentive description of the way that an epistemic capacity that is both intellectual and sensible functions and, correspondingly, of the nature of the object that the epistemic capacity is a capacity for knowledge of.

The clearest indication of that is the role that the correlated concepts of objective reality, real possibility, and meaning play in his account. Kant ventures to identify a condition on our entitlement to use any concept whatsoever: that it have objective reality. A concept can have objective reality only if its object is really possible; that the concept itself contains no contradiction does not suffice. And that which sets the terms of real possibility is the only intuition available to us, spatio-temporal sensibility. If the real possibility of the object cannot be exhibited with reference specifically to our variety of intuition, then the concept lacks objective reality and is *meaningless*. But that is how the metaphysician and their evil twin, the skeptic, are warded off: by showing that the possibility of their viewpoint requires the meaningfulness of concepts of objects whose real possibility cannot be exhibited because they cannot belong to our sensibility, hence not to possible experience. Kant says, in effect, 'This is how we in fact epistemically relate to objects, namely, *both* through intellect *and* through sensibility; and for your metaphysical or skeptical standpoint to be admissible, you must first show me *what it would*

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that attempt, that *we humans* present merely sensibly and consequently could not even in principle get into epistemic touch with the presumptively intellectual object of knowledge. If that way of understanding the dialectic is correct, then Hume's fully self-aware skepticism is no coincidence given his uncompromising empiricism; it is rather that empiricism's logical terminus.

*be* to relate to objects in some other way, or *what you could mean* by your thought of an experience-transcendent object and of the possibility of cognition of it.’

That is why Kant does not take mere logical possibility seriously as a ground of philosophizing. Thinking is not cognizing, and doubt as well as theory-construction requires, on Kant’s view, the possibility of cognition. Consider again the objection that I raised at the end of section 1, that the commensurateness of empirical thing and epistemic capacity, the mutual implication of the real possibility of each by the real possibility of the other, itself requires explanation and could only be explained by the object’s being the creation of the mind. Kant would not reply by positively proving that the thing is not the mind’s creation. He would reply, rather, by arguing that the demand for explanation is confused and has no proper ground. For it is a demand that we get, as it were, *behind* knowledge and its object, as though from the point of view of a differently constituted epistemic capacity. And that is a point of view whose real possibility we cannot exhibit and the thought of which therefore lacks meaning for us. That, I believe, is ultimately why Kant can contrive to be comfortable denying the explainability of why we think through just such categories and intuit through just such forms as we do (B145-6)—because he is convinced that any logically possible explanation would presuppose our access to different forms of thought and intuition. In a more current idiom, we can imagine Kant replying to that request for explanation by asking: ‘What other categories or forms of intuition would you rather we use?’

Now what I earlier called the descriptive or situated aspect of Kant’s method might, by a critic, be called its *bruteness*. Recall that Pippin and McDowell object to Kant that he cannot show how *thought*, *apperceptive spontaneity* or, as I should like to say, *intellect*, conceived discursively, entails that the forms of the sensibly intuitive power be specifically space and time

rather than some others. There is no accounting, on Kant's view, for why sensibility *must* be spatio-temporal in terms of the requirements of intellect, merely a granting *that* it is that is forced on us by Kant's foundational commitment to the two-stem conception of the human epistemic capacity. And if that is right, then we cannot entitle ourselves to the thought that space and time genuinely *enable* our epistemic capacity and hence that that capacity, as spatio-temporal, is genuinely *epistemic*. We can only suppose ourselves to be, for all we can tell, subject to a merely subjective restriction on what and how we present whose status is as of a veil of ignorance between us and reality. If they are right, then the better way to go is the Hegelian, in which we purport to show that space and time in their specificity are necessitated by the very concept of thought or a thinking capacity itself, complex though that route may be.<sup>30</sup>

But as for my proposal, insofar as I embrace the descriptive and situated aspect of Kant's method, his working out from the epistemic capacity that we in fact find ourselves with, I may seem effectively to be doubling down on bruteness: Yes, we *just do* have a specifically spatio-temporal sensibility, and that is a baseline commitment of our line of inquiry that cannot be overturned or further explained. If that were what I were doing, I would be trying to earn my way to entitlement to regard space and time as epistemic through, as it were, passive acceptance that they're all we've got.

But that way of viewing the dialectic seems to me misleading. It involves our accepting, with Pippin and McDowell, that we have legitimate grounds to doubt that space and time in their specificity are genuinely epistemic conditions of presentation and, what is the same thing, genuinely objective features of reality. *But do we?* Pippin and McDowell's doubts give the

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<sup>30</sup> McDowell (2009c) and Rödl (2008) disagree about exactly how complex, seemingly by an order of magnitude. McDowell's seemingly rather relaxed and minimal conception, in that article, of what going the Hegelian way would have to look like makes me wonder to what extent the way of going he recommends really differs from the Kantian way as I present it.

strong impression that they are motivated by an identification of the *intellect*, as a stem of presentation, with the whole *epistemic capacity*. But what the exhibition of Kant's Critical position through the lens of his empirical realism should have taught us is that we only grasp the intellect as epistemic *in its unity with sensibility in the only epistemic capacity of which we can meaningfully think*, which is consequently the epistemic capacity *par excellence*. Pippin and McDowell thus first need to be able to persuade *us* that we should understand the character of our epistemic capacity as genuinely epistemic as lying primarily in the intellectual stem before we can take seriously that the non-deducibility of the forms of sensibility from that stem jeopardizes that epistemic character.

In chapter four (section 5.1), I asked how we come by our concept of an epistemic capacity. As I observed there, the origin of that concept must be synthetic, and so our grasp of what it is *to know* comes first by way of the fact that *we are knowers*. And the sorts of knowers that we are—the only sorts of knowers whose real possibility we grasp—are the sort whose forms of sensibility are space and time. Thereby Kant's conceptual-semantic theory undergirds what I take to be our positive and original grasp of the concept of an epistemic capacity through our awareness of the very sort of epistemic capacity that we are, so that barring the establishment of the real possibility (i.e., meaningful thinkability) of an epistemic capacity different from ours or of objects only in principle available to such a different capacity, there just is no meaningful question about whether space and time are genuinely epistemic features of our presentational capacity.

In my Introduction, I specified a desideratum for an effective reply to the bruteness objection along the following lines: Replying to bruteness without going the Hegelian way amounts to asserting our entitlement to be epistemically anthropocentric, and if we really are

*entitled* thereto, we must be able to display the credentials of our assertion of entitlement as rational. I take the argument I have just made to satisfy that desideratum. For it gives an account of how we can understand what *knowing* is at all that in itself already constitutes a rational entitlement *pending a persuasive challenge thereto*, and it identifies the ground of an attempted challenge in a tendentious assumption that requires defending in its own right.

Even so, I suspect that would not satisfy McDowell or, especially, Pippin, or *especially* Hegel. My hunch is that the most pressing objection would be an extrapolation from the *spontaneity* of intellect—viz., the thought that if the *intellect specifically* is where spontaneity lies, then that intellect, as spontaneous, must be limited or conditioned only by itself. For whatever we say about forms of sensibility other than space and time, if we cannot show that the very concept of the spontaneous intellect requires a specifically spatio-temporal sensibility, then allegedly spontaneous intellect in its union with spatio-temporal sensibility is actually passively conditioned by something from without.

Spontaneity has not been a thematic topic of this dissertation, and I cannot here adjudicate the Kant/Hegel dispute about what a truly spontaneous intellect would have to be. What is nevertheless clear is that there are two quite different ways of worrying about bruteness. Kant's is to worry that we can *meaningfully* entertain the thought of epistemic capacities that differ from ours, thereby revealing our own capacity and its corresponding object to be merely parochial: knowledge-for-us-humans and its object-for-us-humans. I hope I have shown that the empirical realism/transcendental idealism dyad addresses that worry in full. The Hegelian way to worry about bruteness is to worry that even the mere logical possibility of other forms of intuition threatens the spontaneity of intellect and hence our very status as rational beings at all. Since the latter way of worrying about bruteness requires getting to grips with what our

spontaneity is and what it requires, the next step in vindicating Kant's therapeutic, descriptive idealism, and the empirical realism that it makes possible, against Hegel's Absolute idealism is to turn to Kant's account of finite spontaneity. But that is a step I must defer to another occasion.

### 5. Final Remark

In this dissertation, I have tried to articulate a conception of empirical realism worthy of the name, and I have tried to show that it is Kant's. I have argued that we will miss it if we do not pay proper heed to Kant's view of the conditions of possibility of meaningful thought, and that it is compatible with and even points to attractive readings of the more superficially idealistic and noumenalistic aspects of Kant's text. And I have proposed a conception of transcendental idealism that both differentiates it in kind from subjective idealism and is positively required for a genuine empirical realism to be possible at all. I cannot really say that I believe this dissertation is the last word on Kant's empirical realism, his transcendental idealism, or any other point of Kantian doctrine. But the measure of its worth is not whether it brings the literature to a standstill, but whether it thinks a worthwhile thought. I leave that to the reader's judgment.



## References and Abbreviations

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- FM = “What real progress has metaphysics made in Germany since the time of Leibniz and Wolff?” Trans. Peter Heath. Pages 337-424 in Immanuel Kant, *Theoretical Philosophy after 1781*. Ed. Henry Allison and Peter Heath. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002c.
- GMS = *Groundwork of the metaphysics of morals*. Pages 37-108 in Immanuel Kant, *Practical Philosophy*. Trans. and ed. Mary J. Gregor. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996b.
- KpV = *Critique of Practical Reason*. Trans. Werner S. Pluhar. Indianapolis: Hackett, 2002a.
- KrV = *Critique of Pure Reason*. Trans. Werner S. Pluhar. Indianapolis: Hackett, 1996a.
- KU = *Critique of Judgment*. Trans. Werner S. Pluhar. Indianapolis: Hackett, 1987.
- Log = *The Jäsche logic*. Pages 517-640 in Immanuel Kant, *Lectures on logic*. Trans. and ed. J. cMichael Young. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992b.
- MSI = *On the form and principles of the sensible and the intelligible world [Inaugural dissertation]*. Pages 373-416 in Immanuel Kant, *Theoretical philosophy, 1755-1770*. Trans. and ed. David Walford in collaboration with Ralf Meerbote. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992a.
- OP = *Opus postumum*. Ed. Eckart Förster. Trans. Eckart Förster and Michael Rosen. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993.
- Prol = *Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics That Will Be Able to Come Forward as Science*. Pages 1-134 in Immanuel Kant, *Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics That Will Be Able to Come Forward as Science with Selections from the Critique of Pure Reason*. Trans. and ed. Gary Hatfield. Revised edition. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004.
- ÜE = “On a discovery whereby any new critique of pure reason is to be made superfluous by an older one.” Trans. Henry Allison. Pages 271-336 in Immanuel Kant, *Theoretical Philosophy after 1781*. Ed. Henry Allison and Peter Heath. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002b.

WDO = “What does it mean to orient oneself in thinking?” Trans. Allen W. Wood. Pages 1-18 in Immanuel Kant, *Religion and Rational Theology*. Ed. Allen W. Wood and George di Giovanni. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996c.

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