

The Southern Journal of Philosophy (2006) Vol. XLIV

Kant and the Problem of Idealism: On the Significance of the Göttingen Review

Jennifer Mensch

The Pennsylvania State University

Abstract

This essay examines the impact of the Göttingen review on Kant. Taking up each of the charges laid down in this first, critical review of the *Critique of Pure Reason*, I will argue that these criticisms stem largely from Kant's account in his discussion of the Paralogisms, before going on to defend Kant from the claim that he altered his stance on realism—in reaction to the review—as the only hope for distinguishing transcendental idealism from the immaterialism of George Berkeley.

While it seems that not much should be at stake in discussions concerning a distant quarrel, in disputes between Kant and his critics we find that there is, in fact, quite a bit left to be said. This is not simply because a good story is always worth telling, but because in one particular case, that arising from the appearance of the so-called Göttingen review, Kant felt it necessary to launch a public defense of transcendental idealism in what had originally been conceived as a straightforward “handbook for teachers,” the *Prolegomena Concerning any Future Metaphysics That Should Come Forward as a Science*. The result was a controversy whose effects can still be felt today, a dispute, indeed a split, between two ways of interpreting Kant's intentions in the *Critique of Pure Reason*. Is it the case, commentators asked then, as they do now, that Kant signals the defeat of transcendental idealism in the combined efforts of the *Prolegomena* and the subsequent second edition of the *Critique*? Is the critical system, in the end, incapable of managing its fine balance between the intuitive implausibility that is idealism and the epistemic pitfalls of realism? In Kant's

Jennifer Mensch is assistant professor of philosophy and STS at the Pennsylvania State University. She works and publishes in the areas of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century metaphysics and epistemology and Kant's theoretical philosophy in particular.

day neither side would claim him for their own: Kant's position was rejected by materialists and idealists alike. Today the landscape is different. Realism, lured on by the twin affinities of common sense and science, dominates interpretation of Kant, arguing, as a result, for a path that some would say Kant could never have taken. It is my own sense that Kant would never have turned to realism, and that the original break over the review—one source of evidence for reading realism in Kant—has come to be “so well known” that only a very few know anything in particular about it at all anymore.¹ In what follows I provide an examination of the specific charges laid out in the review and show how Kant's additions to the *Prolegomena* must be read in response to this attack. The results should take us some way closer to Kant's original course.

1.

The first, and most notable, charges against the *Critique of Pure Reason* were leveled by J. G. H. Feder and Christian Garve in a review published anonymously on January 19, 1782, in the *Zugabe zu den Göttingischen Anzeigen von gelehrten Sachen*.² The important effect had by this piece cannot be separated from the history surrounding Kant's *Prolegomena*. Within weeks of the *Critique*'s publication in 1781 Kant was writing of plans for a more popular version of his “metaphysics of metaphysics.”³ This expository project took on a different tone, however, after the appearance of the Göttingen review.⁴ Kant closed his now-finished “popular” exposition, the *Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics That Will Be Able To Come Forward as a Science* [1783] with a demand that the reviewer make himself be known.⁵ Indeed, with its heightened concern to clarify central positions, the *Prolegomena* was haunted throughout by charges meant for the *Critique*. In the *Prolegomena*'s Appendix, Kant spoke directly to the review, describing its author as having been motivated by either “impatience at thinking out a lengthy work, or vexation at a threatened reform of a science in which he believed he had brought everything to perfection long ago, or, what I am reluctant to suppose, real narrow-mindedness that prevents him from ever carrying his thoughts beyond his school metaphysics” (Ak. IV, 373). Such words had the desired effect and within months Christian Garve wrote to Kant, declaring himself to be partly responsible for the anonymous piece.⁶ That he was only “partly responsible” Garve explained in the following terms. His first mistake had been agreeing to review Kant's book before he had actually seen it. As it was, when he did receive his copy, he was nearly overwhelmed by the difficulty and length of the text and it was only after several months and many false starts that he was able to finish the review at all. The result was an essay that was too long but one that at least,

according to Garve, displayed fidelity to Kant's text. Unable to manage the length requirement himself, Garve returned the review to the journal and requested that either it be published as a whole or that someone else attempt to edit it down. To his dismay, the review that finally appeared had been altered to the point that it was "barely recognizable." As Garve put it, "I saw that my work—which was really not done without difficulty was as good as forgotten, and not only forgotten, it was now made pernicious."⁷ In spite of this, Garve explained, he could not in good conscience reveal the review's editor to Kant and begged him to remain circumspect over the entire affair, promising, in closing, to send a copy of the original review that it might bear witness to the truth of his tale. Kant agreed to remain quiet, though he could, in his words, "guess very well who this man is, from his style, especially when he tells us his own ideas."⁸ The editor was in fact J. G. H. Feder, one of two philosophers in Göttingen closely affiliated with the Scottish school of "commonsense philosophy." A devotee of Thomas Reid in particular, Feder's philosophical prejudices not only influenced his reaction to the *Critique*, they gave him away as the anonymous critic once readers came to a sermon regarding the virtues of "ordinary human understanding" used by Feder to close the review.⁹

Now the question concerning the exact influence had by the Göttingen review has been a source of interest almost since the *Prolegomena's* appearance in 1783. In its most general terms, the Garve-Feder review charges the *Critique of Pure Reason* with a thoroughgoing idealism, a philosophical system incapable of achieving the "mean between excessive skepticism and dogmatism."¹⁰ Responding to this, the *Prolegomena* opens with a declaration of skepticism overcome, takes on the idealism of Berkeley and Descartes, and closes with a direct attack on the anonymous review. This new-found emphasis on skepticism and dogmatism caused trouble for Kant, however, since his contemporaries mistakenly took the critical position to have shifted as it strove to distinguish itself, in particular, from Berkeley's immaterialism. This purported shift became an immediate breaking point within the community of Kant's supporters, a break characterized by Kant's former student, J. S. Beck, as falling between those who understood the true spirit underlying the critical system and those who could not see past the lines of Kant's texts, the so-called *Buchstäbler*. As Hans Vaihinger reports Beck's position, "Whoever claims that Kant in general, and in particular here in distinguishing himself from Berkeley, depends on the existence of things in themselves, who understands him to have committed an unbelievable 'blunder,' who interprets him dogmatically as opposed to critically, has detected not even the slightest trace of the 'spirit of transcendental philosophy' but remains confined to mere literalism."¹¹ Transcendental

dental idealism, now a “problem” to be dealt with, could only be saved if the critical system could avoid Berkeley’s immaterialism. For interpreters, this became the grounds for an all-out search for the thing in itself, arguing, as they did, that only if the thing in itself were directly responsible for sensation could Kant survive the charge of idealism. And nowhere did this seem more likely to indeed be the case than in the *Prolegomena*. As one interpreter argued, in the *Prolegomena*, “The existence of the thing [in itself] has moved from an unquestioned presupposition to a specific feature of transcendental idealism.”¹² This division between supporters willing to overlook apparent lacunae in Kant’s account of transcendental synthesis and those who took Kant to have positively adopted the thing in itself as a determinable source of affection reached its climax in Erich Adickes’s claim that the tension in Kant’s account could only be resolved once empirically real appearances *and* the transcendently real thing in itself be together recognized as sources of a double affection.¹³

2.

Any inquiry into the nature of Kant’s idealism should of course begin with Kant’s own first formulation of the problem. The 1781 edition of the *Critique* includes an untitled “refutation of idealism” in the body of the fourth Paralogism where “The term *idealist* is not,” as Kant explains it, “to be understood as applying to those who deny the existence of external objects of the senses, but only to those who do not admit that their existence is known through immediate perception, and who therefore conclude that we can never, by way of any possible experience, be completely certain of their reality.”¹⁴ What is immediately striking about this definition is that under the terms of this description the threat of idealism turns not on immaterialism or questions concerning the existence of objects, but instead on skepticism. As a result, the philosopher to be dealt with is not Berkeley, but Descartes. Kant understands Descartes’ empirical idealism to be the necessary consequence of any theory that begins with an assumption of the independent existence or transcendental realism of objects external to the senses. The problem, as Kant sees it, is that once objects are considered to be materially distinct from the mind and yet the basis for all claims regarding them an unbridgeable epistemic gap is opened up such that the only certain knowledge available is that which exists in inner intuition.¹⁵

In contrast to the empirical idealism of Descartes, in the fourth Paralogism Kant offers his own transcendental idealism as the only system capable of overcoming the skepticism that follows from a belief that due to the “grossness of our senses,” independent objects cannot be known. As Kant puts it,

By *transcendental idealism* I mean the doctrine that appearances are to be regarded as being, one and all, representations only, not things in themselves, and that time and space are therefore only sensible forms of our intuition, not determinations given as existing by themselves, nor conditions of objects viewed as things in themselves. (A369)

Matter is [for the transcendental idealist], therefore, only a species of representations (intuition), which are called external, not as standing in relation to objects *in themselves external*, but because they relate perceptions to the space in which all things are external to one another, while yet the space is in us. (A370)

So defined, transcendental idealism avoids any epistemic gap between “internal” representations and “external” objects not merely because the objects are now regarded as appearances versus things in themselves, but because a material isomorphism has been asserted with respect to representations and appearances. We are thus as “intuitively certain” of those objects appearing outside us as we are of our inner sense, “For,” as Kant puts it, “in both cases alike the objects are nothing but representations, the immediate perception (consciousness) of which is at the same time a sufficient proof of their reality (*Wirklichkeit*)” (A371). Of course, as Kant acknowledges, such isomorphism will lend itself to a certain amount of “ambiguity” when describing appearances as “outside us,” but this ambiguity can be held at bay so long as we remember that appearances are never to be considered as “outside us” in the sense that transcendental realism asserts them to be. In other words, objects may one and all appear to be outside us in space, but as a form of sensible intuition, space is transcendently ideal and therefore “in us.” Although our experience of objects in space will always be treated as real, this empirical realism must therefore be recognized as being founded on the tenets of transcendental idealism. And transcendental idealism, epistemically considered, is founded in the first place in response to just these problems of relating “outside” and “inside.”

Kant’s final step in overcoming the epistemic gap turns on the presumed objection that such a system is incapable of accounting for the difference between dreams and objective reality. Kant responds with a “rule” according to which, “Whatever is connected with a perception according to empirical laws, is actual (*Wirklich*)” (A376). This means that any series of perceptions exhibiting a logical coherence within the context of all other series (as themselves considered under the conditions of transcendental synthesis) must be taken to be real.

It is worth considering what Kant means when he describes something as “real.” This is a point especially pertinent for the English speaker since both *Wirklichkeit* and *Realität* are easily

translated into English as “real,” and when there is a technical distinction to be made between the two it becomes critical that the English translator find a way to distinguish them—a task made all the more difficult since ordinary German itself allows for some fluidity between the two. This difficulty is clearly at work in the Kemp Smith translation of the fourth Paralogism and yet it is crucial that the distinction be tracked if Kant’s vulnerability to the charge of immaterialism is to become clear.¹⁶

The difference in Kant’s use of *Wirklichkeit* and *Realität* is clearest when comparing those sections in the Principles corresponding to the categories of “quality” and “modality.” With respect to “quality” Kant is concerned with the spectrum between *Realität* and nothingness or negation, arguing that with sensation the degree of intensity—the intensive “magnitude” of the sensation—will be synthesized such that it falls within that spectrum.¹⁷ He defines *Realität* as follows: “*Realität*, in the pure concept of the understanding, is that which corresponds to a sensation in general; it is that, therefore, the concept of which in itself points to being (in time)... Since time is merely the form of intuition, and so of objects as appearances, that in the objects which correspond to sensation is the transcendental matter of all objects as things in themselves (*die Sachheit, Realität*)” (A143/B182).¹⁸ As a category, “modality” plays a different role with respect to appearances since whereas the synthesis of an intensive magnitude is understood to be constitutive of appearances in general, modality, qua “dynamical” principle, is regulative for intuition and thus expressive only of the relationship that an appearance has to apperception.¹⁹ This proves to be an important point when we consider that the second category of modality is that of “existence.” Existence understood under the terms of an appearance’s relation to apperception takes on an entirely different cast than it would have if existence is determined to be a statement about an object in itself. As Kant develops this in the second Postulate, it becomes clear that in terms of our relation to an appearance we consider its existence within the schema of possibility-actuality-necessity to be actual (*Wirklich*), but that this consideration has only the force of a mediate proof for an object’s existence in itself since “in the mere concept of a thing no mark of its existence is to be found” (A225/B272). A mediate proof is not, indeed, directly disadvantageous for Kant since knowledge claims can always be advanced so long as they remain within the bounds of the understanding’s empirical employment: we are able to make a judgement regarding the existence of magnetism on the basis of our perception of attracted iron filings, to use Kant’s example, precisely because the series of appearances that we experience fall under the understanding’s rule that every effect must have a cause. As Kant puts this, “The postulate bearing on knowledge

of things as actual (*wirklich*) does not, indeed, demand immediate *perception* (and, therefore, sensation of which we are conscious) of the object whose existence is to be known. What we do, however, require is the connection of the object with some actual (*wirklich*) perception, in accordance with the analogies of experience, which define all real connection in an experience in general" (A225/B272).

Kant's distinction between reality and actuality in the Principles can thus be summarized as follows: *Realität* is that which corresponds to sensation; *Wirklichkeit* is also connected to sensation as part of the material conditions of experience, but qua regulative, it specifically refers to the fact that while we consider the existence of all appearances to be actual, we cannot make any further claim regarding their existence in themselves. In the fourth Paralogism Kant adds to this an account of "*das Reale*," explaining that the "material or real [*Reale*] element, the something which is to be intuited in space" has a necessary connection with perception since "perception exhibits the actuality (*Wirklichkeit*) of something in space" (A373): "Space itself, with all its appearances, as representations, is, indeed, only in me, but nevertheless *das Reale*, that is, the material of all objects of outer intuition, is actually given in this space, independently of all imaginative invention" (A375). The point here is that Kant avoids the charge of immaterialism on the basis of the material or real element at the heart of sensation. From the instant of its apprehension, however, *das Reale* is schematized first synthetically with respect to the concept of *Realität* and then regulatively with respect to our considerations of an object's existence. This, in a sense, defines Kant's empirical realism: we will always take objects to be real and actually existing, but the very concepts of *Realität* and *Wirklichkeit* are themselves generated out of the empirical employment of the understanding. Thus while we may posit a transcendental object as the logical correlate for appearances, aside from Reason's demand for logical symmetry, nothing more can be said about a transcendently real source for our sensations.

3.

With the argument from the fourth Paralogism in mind, it is easy to see that anyone predisposed to find Berkeleyan elements in Kant's position would not have to look long. For Berkeley, the skepticism entailed by the primary-secondary quality distinction is the main threat to both science and morals. Taking his lead from Pierre Bayle's articles on Pyrrho of Elis and Zeno the Eleatic, Berkeley was convinced by the Malebranchian critiques of Descartes' proofs for the existence of things outside the mind. His response was an argument that started from the denial of abstract ideas and ended with the reduction of all qualities to

sensible ideas immediately perceived by the mind. For this, Berkeley was recognized by supporters of the Scottish common-sense philosophy as attempting to combat an overly refined philosophical skepticism via an appeal to the “vulgar” trust in the senses. In his *Inquiry*, Thomas Reid characterized an “ingenious Berkeley” as the first to see that the basis of the primary-secondary distinction could not be upheld on the testimony of our senses, and who thus “occasioned by the terror of skepticism” was the first philosopher able to break away from the path of Descartes and Locke.²⁰ Despite such praise, Berkeley’s philosophy received, on the whole, a poor reception. Immaterialism may have been a handy response to the insistence on a material divide between sense and object, but it was rejected out of hand by most members of the “Republic of Letters.” As one commentator describes it, Berkeley’s *Principles* came to be considered “a low form of intellectual comedy,” and Berkeley himself was portrayed as “an Egomist, a Pyrrhonist, an idealist, an atheist, a denier of the reality of our sense experience, and a dabbler in paradox, so that Reid felt obliged to call him ‘good’—and Beattie didn’t!”²¹ In fact, even Reid’s support was not unqualified insofar as he remarked at one point that “Of all the opinions that have been advanced by philosophers, this of Bishop Berkeley, that there is no material world, seems the strangest, and the most apt to bring philosophy into ridicule with plain men who are guided by the dictates of nature and common sense.”²²

Now Feder was certainly aware of Berkeley’s reception in general and of the opinions of Reid and the other commonsense philosophers in particular. Feder had written reviews of Beattie’s *Essay* and Priestly’s *Examination* in 1771, Oswald’s *Appeal* in 1774, and Reid’s *Inquiry* in 1775, all for the *Göttingische gelehrte Anzeigen*.²³ But apart from all this, idealism as a strain of thinking in general had already been discussed in Germany as early as 1721 by Christian Wolff, and specifically in reference to Berkeley by the same in 1734.²⁴ Feder’s personal attitude was that the problems presented by the idealists could ultimately be described as linguistic errors, writing, “[I]f it does not cause any discomfort to call ‘being’ what appears to all humans in this way ... why do you not want to speak as all other people speak, and why do you want to cause confusion in our whole system of concepts and thoughts by banishing one word?”²⁵ Given this background, Feder needed to be only roughly familiar with Berkeley’s actual texts to have seen similarities between Berkeley and Kant: both men had been motivated by a perceived failure in the Cartesian system, each professed to have overcome the skepticism entailed by the material break between objects and sense experience by declaring the “reality” of “immediately perceived” sense, and both systems obscured the natural way of talking about objects “outside us.” As Berkeley understood such

objects, “[The] arguments foregoing plainly shew it to be impossible that any colour or extension at all, or other sensible quality whatsoever, should exist in an unthinking subject without the mind, or in truth, that there should be any such thing as an outward object.”²⁶

Though it was no doubt a bit of a surprise for readers of the *Prolegomena* to come across a somewhat bitter description of the Göttingen review, Kant was, perhaps, justified. As he put it, “In order to take a position from which my reviewer could most easily set the whole work in a most unfavorable light, without venturing to trouble himself with any special investigation, he begins and ends by saying: ‘This work is a system of transcendental (or as he translates it, of higher) idealism’” (Ak. IV, 373). Indeed, Feder went further than simply caricaturing Kant’s system as that of a “higher idealism,” he expressly identified Kant with Berkeley’s sensationism, an association which, given the philosophical reception of Berkeley, could only prove, as Garve had noted, “harmful” to the *Critique*.²⁷ Within the review itself, Feder organized the discussion around three points of criticism. First, in an implicit gesture toward Kant’s “immaterialism,” Feder described the manner in which objects are “made” by the understanding out of the modifications of ourselves, summarizing Kant, then, as follows:

All our cognitions arise from certain modifications of ourselves. What these exist in, where they come from, is ultimately completely unknown to us.... [On this conception] of sensations as mere modifications of ourselves (on which *Berkeley* too chiefly builds his idealism) and of space and time [“as nothing actual outside us”] rests the one basic pillar of the Kantian system. Out of *sensible appearances*, which are distinguished from other representations only by the subjective condition that time and space are connected with them, the *understanding* makes objects. It makes them.²⁸

Feder’s second point of criticism turned on Kant’s manner of distinguishing between dreams and “objective” reality.

For the author, experiences in contrast to mere imaginings or dreams, are sensible intuitions connected with the concepts of the understanding. But we confess that we do not see how the difference between the actual (*wirklich*) and the imagined—a distinction which is usually so easy for the understanding—can be adequately based on the *mere* application of the concepts of the understanding without assuming that [at least] one characteristic of the actual is found in the sensation itself.²⁹

With respect to this point, recall that in the fourth Paralogism Kant solves the problem of determining which of our represen-

tations are dreams by pointing us toward the field of appearances. Those series of perceptions demonstrating a logical coherence within the context of appearances as whole—with the appearances themselves being connected according to the rules of the understanding—are taken to be true. What needs to be especially noticed here, however, is that given the isomorphism of appearances and representations, Kant's solution has to be "internal" to the transcendently ideal field of appearances. This means that the distinction between dreams and "actual" representations cannot be based on the relationship each one has with its object because the representations do not refer to transcendently real objects. Their distinction from dreams can thus only be based on the logical coherence they present in relation to the objectively real appearances. Whether Feder deliberately obscured the niceties of Kant's solution can only be a matter for speculation. What is clear, however, is that Feder demanded a materialist account as the only natural way of distinguishing representations from dreams. Given that the entire epistemic success of transcendental idealism turns on its avoidance of appeals to materially independent objects as the sole criteria of all true statements regarding them, a materialist account is the last thing Kant would offer. One can see this in the way Kant describes his "Copernican Revolution": "If intuition must conform to the constitution of the object, I do not see how we could know anything of the latter a priori; but if the object (as object of the senses) must conform to the faculty of our intuition, I have no difficulty in conceiving of such a possibility" (Bxvii).

Now Feder might argue that Kant's "object of the senses" as appearance and representation simply presents us with an elaborate immaterialism, but in this passage he has himself inadvertently identified the one piece of the Kantian system that is definitively material, that is, sensation. Sensation may not be able to serve the role Feder would like, namely, the role of the transcendently real object to which our representations and therefore knowledge claims must correspond, but it is nonetheless responsible for the original realization of the understanding.

Feder's final complaint is that, in the end, Kant is unable to find "the mean between excessive skepticism and dogmatism." If Kant had followed the "laws of outer sensation" set out by "the ordinary human understanding," he would have found the middle course. Kant's central mistake in this, according to Feder, was that "he set in opposition *both classes of sensations*, the inner and the outer, and then merged or transformed them into one another." For mixing outer sensation with inner sense Feder charged Kant with idealism, and for "not recognizing the rights of inner sensation" insofar as he put substance in outer sense, Kant promoted "materialism" and "anthropomorphism."

The result of all this confusion was skepticism. As Feder put it, "Skepticism does now the one, now the other, in order to confuse and to confound everything with everything else."³⁰

Feder's objections can be summarized as follows: Kant's account of sensation is unclear; it tends toward both idealism and materialism at the same time, and ends up in a skepticism deep enough that reality will never be capable of distinguishing itself from dreams. Offering his own solution, Feder called for a return "to the most natural way of thinking which provides reassurance if not complete satisfaction."³¹

4.

If Feder saw Berkeleyan elements in the Kantian system, his was a perspective that was neither singular nor specific to the eighteenth century. Describing the fourth Paralogism in 1918, Kemp Smith essentially summarizes Feder's critique, observing that it "refutes the position of Descartes only by virtually accepting the still more extreme position of Berkeley. Outer objects ... are immediately known because they are ideas merely. There is no need for inference, because there is no transcendence of the domain of inner consciousness."³² Of course, the extent to which Kant may have been aware of at least the surface similarities between his position and Berkeley's can only be a matter for conjecture.³³ In the entirety of the fourth Paralogism Berkeley is only once indirectly referred to as "the *dogmatic* idealist" who "would be the one who denies the existence of matter" based "on supposed contradictions in there being such a thing as matter at all" (A377). This is a view, according to Kant, that is based on Reason's false inferences and thus can be dealt with in the Antinomies (e.g., A506/B534).

Despite the relative lack of references to Berkeley in the first *Critique*, Kant clearly took Feder's criticism to heart, organizing whole sections of the *Prolegomena* around the charges of skepticism, idealism, and dogmatism. Whereas skepticism had formerly been specifically attributed to Descartes' position—his was a "skeptical" empirical idealism for its doubting the veracity of our senses—the problem of skepticism, now understood to be the more general account of the limits of philosophical reasoning, develops in the *Prolegomena* into an extended discussion of Hume. Although Kant had not at this point read Garve's original review, Feder's remarks were developed in part from one particular passage where Garve essentially repeated Hume's description of philosophy's slide to skepticism.³⁴ Kant's response, concentrated in the Preface to the *Prolegomena*, eulogizes Hume for changing the fate of metaphysics and Kant's own "dogmatic slumber," in particular. The only problem with Hume, Kant argues, is that he "ran his ship ashore, for safety's sake, landing on skepticism, there to let it

lie and rot" (Ak. IV, 262). Kant understands Hume to have agreed with him concerning the indispensability of the laws of association; Hume's mistake was in the assignation of their origin. Once causality, for example, can be shown to be an a priori principle for the empirical employment of the understanding, Kant argues, Hume's misascription of it to experience will be resolved. Kant thus "overcomes" Humean skepticism by referring to the critical system as founding causality within the field of appearances (Ak. IV, 260, 261).

Within the context of Feder's review, Kant's main task is to distinguish his idealism from Berkeley's. This takes place in remarks attached to §13 and in the Appendix. The connection to §13 is significant since it is there that Kant explains that if space were not a form of sensibility we could not prove the universal application of geometrical principles to objects of sense. This argument develops from Kant's reflection on "incongruent counterparts" and thus represents a point drawn as early as his *Inaugural Dissertation* of 1770.³⁵ It is a remarkable fact, as Kant puts it in the *Prolegomena*, that we can have a concept of winding helices and from their concept alone not be able to discern any differences between them. The differences, if there are any, require spatial intuition since only the attempt to actually construct such figures could reveal the helices to be winding in opposite ways (Ak. IV, 286). This reflection allows Kant to draw an immediate distinction between his own account of space and Berkeley's. For Berkeley, space is an idea like any other and as such can have no formative capacity. As Berkeley explains it, "A little attention will discover to us that the very being of an idea implies passiveness and inertness in it ... it is impossible for any idea to do anything, or, strictly speaking, to be the cause of anything."³⁶ For Kant, by contrast, space as an a priori form of intuition makes possible the appearance of matter. In his words, "thought space renders possible the physical space, i.e., the extension of matter itself" (Ak. IV, 287).

Kant's discussion of Berkeley turns on two points on which Kant and Berkeley agree: the rejection of the primary-secondary quality distinction and the veracity entailed by the immediate perception of ideas. Both of these points require Kant's response insofar as he and Berkeley not only have a shared motivation for the denial of the primary-secondary distinction, but because the results of their solutions are at least superficially similar since in both cases it is the truth of an immediate perception that refutes the skeptic. Kant begins by explaining that although he has "for weighty reasons" denied that primary qualities have any other status than that of appearances, arguing that "the existence of the thing is not thereby destroyed, as in genuine idealism, but it is only shown that we cannot possibly know it by the senses as it is in itself"

(Ak. IV, 289). Kant distinguishes himself from Berkeley, in other words, by denying the immaterialist or ontological consequences of what, on Kant's part, is a simple epistemological limitation. Indeed, Kant declares, "I say that things as objects of our senses existing outside us are given, but we know nothing of what they may be in themselves, knowing only their appearances, i.e., the representations which they *cause* in us by affecting our senses" (Ak. IV, 289, my emphasis).

With respect to these statements two things must be noticed. First, true statements can be made with respect to the objectively real field of appearances only because this field can be said to lie within or be founded upon the transcendental conditions for the possibility of experience. The consequence of this is that Kant's descriptions of the "reality" of things is limited to an empirical rather than a transcendental realism. Second, the assertion that things in themselves are "causing" their representations in us could be taken as a positive statement regarding the source of sensation.³⁷ In the 1781 fourth Paralogism, *das Reale* was present in sensation as its material content. We may ascribe the source of sensation to a "transcendental object," but this object never transcends its status as a simple logical correlate or, as Kant describes it in his discussion of Noumena and Phenomena, a "limiting concept" of merely "negative employment" (A254/B310). The reason for such strictures against any such positive statements regarding the source of sensation is simple: if we argue that a given thing in itself is the source of our particular sensations, then all of our representations must conform to it. This, according to Kant, is Descartes' transcendently realist position and Kant is consistent in rejecting this particular framework for truth. Under such terms, the only possibility for knowledge of a thing in itself would be an intellectual intuition of the object, an intuition, as Kant has good reason to repeat, that would be impossible for an understanding limited in its empirical employment to sensible intuition. In spite of this, the statement that objects *cause* our representations lends itself well to anyone looking for a transcendently real source of sensation, and it was taken in precisely that manner by many of Kant's readers.

That this is a mistaken view, however, becomes obvious once we recall Kant's philosophical trajectory. Kant had been clear since the 1770's on the relationship between sense and empirical appearance; it was this form of relation that was cited in both the celebrated letter to Herz of 1772³⁸ and §14 of the 1781 *Critique* as essentially unproblematic. For this reason, Kant never considered himself an immaterialist. That things *exist*, in other words, was both obvious and taken for granted; the real problem was skepticism regarding knowledge of the object, hence the definition of the idealist as one denying *knowledge* of

the object's existence, not existence itself (A368). Kant's solution requires a skeptical move on his own part: concentrate on an account of the conditions for the possibility of knowledge and drop the veil of ignorance on things in themselves as sources of the specific, material content for particular sensations. Recall only the account of intensive magnitude and Kant's strategy becomes clear. *Realität*, described as the material content of sensation, is present only for an instant (*Augenblick*) before it is taken up synthetically and thematized under the category of quality. Our investigation of sensation, in other words, is always after the fact, taking place post synthetic production. The conditions of synthesis, therefore, ground meaning from the start, and it is only via concentration on them that we can avoid epistemic skepticism.

Turning back to the *Prolegomena*, we see that Kant's reference to Berkeley's account of "immediate perception" appears almost as a casual aside. He writes,

I should be glad to know what my assertions must be in order to avoid all idealism. Undoubtedly, I should say that the representation of space is not only perfectly conformable to the relation which our sensibility has to objects—that I have said—but that it is completely like the object—an assertion in which I can find as little meaning as if I said that the sensation of red has a similarity to the property of cinnabar which excites this sensation in me. (Ak. IV, 289–290)

Kant's comment here points to one of the central difficulties facing Berkeley's account. For Berkeley, "immediate perception" refers to the fact that our ideas do not represent other things apart from them. The problem with this arises from the impossibility of seeing how, on Berkeley's terms, immediate perception does not entail that the ideas constitute the act of attention itself such that when perceiving red, for example, the perception is itself red. Without the concept of a mediating "representation," in other words, it is unclear how any distinction between subject and object can be drawn. Nevertheless, Berkeley rejects inherence, writing that "those sensible qualities are in the mind only as they're perceived by it, that is, not by way of mode or attribute" insisting therefore upon the possibility of immediate perception—regardless of whatever ontological difficulties that may present—because it is immediacy in the epistemic sense that combats skepticism.³⁹ Similarly, while Kant believes that we have immediate perception of appearances, he neatly avoids Berkeley's problem by arguing that epistemic immediacy follows from the material isomorphism of appearances and representations. To put this in Berkeley's language, while ideas have a representational role with respect to other ideas, qua "idea" we have immediate access to both of them.

Kant's final remark on Berkeley concerns the distinction between an idealism based upon "dogmatic" versus "critical" principles. Here Kant argues that since truth rests on "universal and necessary laws as its criteria" only that idealism which is itself founded on such laws could distinguish truth from illusion.⁴⁰ Now the problem of error would seem to present Berkeley with a special difficulty: if all ideas are in the mind, how is it possible for us to have "the same" ideas (about) things, and by what criterion can we discern these subjective ideas to be true? Berkeley's first response was that the idea of "sameness" is an artifact of language: strictly speaking, all ideas are different. As for the distinction between truth and falsity, Berkeley had a three-fold response: first, ideas of the imagination can be distinguished from ideas of sense because imagined representations are "faint and indistinct" and display "an entire dependence on the will"; second, ideas of sense demonstrate a greater order and coherence than those ideas simply imagined; and third, while we can never be deceived about the reality of the ideas we perceive, we can identify false inferences. Taking an oar in water as his example, Berkeley concluded that, "what [we] immediately perceive by sight is certainly crooked; and so far [we are] in the right"; the error arises from the inference that these ideas of crookedness will be the same ideas met with when the oar is taken out of the water.⁴¹ What must be noticed here is that under the terms of immediate perception we have no ability, strictly speaking, to discern errors in judgment: the idea of the oar being crooked is true and the idea of the oar being straight is equally true. The possibility of adjudication is only achieved, for Berkeley, via the world's "good Author." Our experience of a uniform working of events, that is, that oars are generally straight when we take them out of water, allows us to make correct inferences and, as Berkeley puts it, "displays the goodness and wisdom of that Governing Spirit whose Will constitutes the laws of nature."⁴² Kant, by contrast, rejects such a foundation as illegitimate and sees his own appeal to a priori principles as the only possible basis for a universal standard of truth. It is this appeal to the transcendental a priori that ultimately grounds the distinction between critical and dogmatic idealism.

Feder's charge that Kant was incapable of distinguishing dreamt representations from "actual" representations guides all discussion of Descartes in the *Prolegomena*. Kant responds by repeating what had been said about the possibility of illusion in the fourth Paralogism of 1781: the distinction between truth and dreaming cannot be determined from the relation representation has with its object because that relation is the same in each case. What distinguishes them, rather, is "their connection according to those rules which determine the coherence of the representations in the concept of an object, and by ascertaining

whether they can subsist together in experience or not" (Ak. IV, 290). From this Kant moves to a consideration of error. Real error is not the result of inadequate sense data but the manner in which the data are put to use by judgment. Sensation is only dependent upon the proper functioning of the senses but judgment, according to Kant, depends upon the correct employment of the understanding. As Kant puts it, "it is not the senses which must be charged with illusion, but the understanding, whose province alone it is to make an objective judgment on appearances" (Ak. IV, 291).

Kant's point with respect to all this is different than it might at first seem. Descartes, like Berkeley, considers error to be ultimately a result of improper inference or judgment. In this one respect, at least, they both agree with Kant. With this in mind, we see that Kant's real target here is neither Descartes nor Berkeley but Feder, and recognizing this is key to avoiding misinterpretations of Kant's intentions. Feder had written that upon "sensations as mere modifications of ourselves (on which *Berkeley* too chiefly builds his idealism) and of space and time rests the one basic pillar of the Kantian system."⁴³ The conclusion to be drawn from Feder's review was thus that if the source of these "modifications of ourselves," is so unclear, and if "the understanding *makes* objects," then there can be no distinguishing between true and false judgments. It is only to this, then, that we can understand Kant's reply that "even if we did not at all reflect on the origin of our representations, whenever we connect our intuitions of sense (whatever they may contain) in space and in time, according to the rules of the coherence of all cognition in experience, illusion or truth will arise according as we are negligent or careful" (Ak. IV, 291). Illusion does not, as Feder argues, arise from the fact that the origin of our sensations is unknown to us, it arises as a result of sensations being used in a "negligent" manner, in a manner inconsistent with the overarching coherence guaranteed by the synthetic transcendental conditions for a unified experience.

While this response was no doubt dissatisfying to Feder or anyone else seeking a transcendently real object as the sole guarantor of truth, it does say something important about Kant's final stance in the *Prolegomena*. At every point in his discussion of truth in relation to dreams or error, Kant is consistent with the position held by the *Critique*. Only in those places where Kant confronts the charge of immaterialism by asserting objects as the *cause* (*wirken*) of their representations in us is it at least possible (if not plausible) to argue that he shifts his position with respect to the role of the transcendental object. If, however, Kant had really decided on a positive employment for the transcendental object, why was it absent in the *Prolegomena*'s discussion of truth? It is absent for precisely the same reason that we cannot assume transcendental realism

to have been Kant's final position either: once we appeal to a thing in itself as the criterion for truth we will be left in the position of Cartesian skepticism. Kant's transcendental solution to the problem of relating concepts to objects is designed to close just that gap between subject and object left open by the transcendental realist's account of objectivity. At the same time, however, we can see that Kant himself must adopt the position of skeptic as the only means by which he can maintain transcendental idealism without positively commenting on the thing in itself. He adopts a kind of mitigated skepticism, in other words, as the only means of defeating its more pernicious appearance under the guise of transcendental realism. Thus while the influence of the Göttingen review was clearly at work in Kant's additions to the *Prolegomena*, that influence did not entail a shift toward realism in the critical position. Kant did not nor would he ever publish anything amounting to a retraction of his commitment to the rigors of transcendental idealism-cum-skeptical doctrine. Indeed, from letters dated as late as December 1797, we not only see that commitment still firmly in place, we can be well warned-off any suggestions concerning Kant's final turn toward realism. In words familiar to anyone acquainted with the *Critique*, Kant writes:

We can never know objects of sense (of outer sense and of inner sense) except as they appear to us, not as they are in themselves. Similarly, supersensible objects are not objects of theoretical knowledge for us. But since it is unavoidable that we regard the idea of such supersensible objects as at least problematic, an open question (since otherwise the sensible would lack a non-sensible counterpart, and this would evidence a logical defect in our classification), the idea belongs to pure practical knowledge, which is detached from all empirical conditions.⁴⁴

Theoretical knowledge of things in themselves, for Kant, is impossible for an understanding bound to a merely empirical employment and while this limitation would prove as disappointing for Feder and the commonsense philosophers as it would for Fichte and the German Idealists, it was a position from which Kant would never budge.

Notes

I would like to thank Eckart Förster and Manfred Kuehn for their helpful comments on an earlier version of this essay.

¹ For somewhat lengthier considerations of the Göttingen review see James C. Morrison's Introduction to *Exposition of Kant's Critique of Pure Reason* by Johann Schultz [1784], ed. and trans. James C. Morrison (Ottawa: University of Ottawa Press, 1995), xviii, and Manfred Kuehn, *Kant: A Biography* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 250 and following; see also Frederick C. Beiser, *The Fate*

of Reason (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1987), 175–7, and Brigitte Sassen, “Critical Idealism in the Eyes of Kant’s Contemporaries,” *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 35 (1997): 421–55. My essay differs from these discussions in its offering a point by point examination of the review. With this as my main focus, I only note the many recent interpretive discussions of Kant’s transcendental idealism in relation to realism including, most prominently, Henry Allison’s *Kant’s Transcendental Idealism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983 [revised ed., 2004]), and Paul Guyer’s *Kant and the Claims of Knowledge* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987).

² The review originally appeared anonymously as “Kritik der reinen Vernunft von Immanuel Kant. 1781. 856 Seiten im Octavo” in the *Zugabe zu den Göttingischen Anzeigen von gelehrten Sachen*, 1782, Vol. I, pp. 40–8. Reprinted in *Immanuel Kant: Prolegomena zu einer jeden künftigen Metaphysik, die als Wissenschaft wird auftreten können*, ed. Karl Vorländer (Hamburg: Felix Meiner Verlag, 1957), 167–74, and *Rezensionen zur Kantischen Philosophie 1781–87*, ed. Albert Landau (Bebra: Albert Landau Verlag, 1991), 10–17. In English see the translations by Morrison in Schultz, *Exposition of Kant’s Critique of Pure Reason*, Appendix C, 171–7; by R. C. S. Walker in *The Real in the Ideal*, ed. R. C. S. Walker (New York: Garland Press, 1989), xv–xxiv; and by Brigitte Sassen in *Kant’s Early Critics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 53–8.

³ “To Marcus Herz. After May 11, 1781,” in *Immanuel Kant: Correspondence*, ed. and trans. Arnulf Zweig (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 180–2, corresponding to the Prussian Academy edition of Kant’s collected writings (cited as “Ak.” with volume in Roman and page in Arabic numerals), Ak. X, 268–70. Kant was interested in a “popular” version as early as 1779; see his “Letter to Herz,” Jan. 1779, Ak. X, 247.

⁴ Benno Erdmann was the first to note the *Prolegomena*’s “two-fold” origin, see *Kant’s Prolegomena zu einer jeden künftigen Metaphysik*, ed. by Benno Erdmann (Leipzig: Leopold Voss, 1878), iii.

⁵ Immanuel Kant, *Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics That Will Be Able To Come Forward as a Science*, trans. James W. Ellington (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Co., 1985), 119, corresponding to Ak. IV, 379. All *Prolegomena* references are hereafter cited in-text according to the Prussian Academy pagination.

⁶ “Brief Garves an Kant, 13. Juli 1783,” Ak. X, 328–33, Zweig trans., 191–5.

⁷ Ak. X, Zweig trans., 330.

⁸ “To Christian Garve, August 7, 1783,” Ak. X, 337, Zweig trans., 196. That Kant decided the anonymous reviewer to be Feder is clear from his complaint to Reinhold regarding Eberhardt’s review: “Feder is with all his limitations at least honest, a property totally absent from Eberhardt’s thinking” (Kant, “Letter to K. L. Reinhold,” May 19, 1789, Ak. XI, 48, Zweig trans., 310).

⁹ For an account of the influence wielded by Scottish philosophy in Göttingen see Manfred Kuehn, *Scottish Common Sense in Germany, 1768–1800* (Kingston and Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1987), 70–85.

¹⁰ “The Göttingen Review,” in Schultz, *Exposition of Kant’s Critique of Pure Reason*, 176.

¹¹ Hans Vaihinger, "Excurs. Kant und Berkeley," in *Commentar zur Kritik der reinen Vernunft*, 2 vols. (Stuttgart: Spemann, 1881), Vol. II, p. 502.

¹² Erdmann, *Kant's Prolegomena zu einer jeden künftigen Metaphysik*, 71.

¹³ See Erich Adickes, *Kants Opus Postumum, dargestellt und beurteilt* (Berlin, 1920), 18.

¹⁴ Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. Norman Kemp Smith (Bedford: St. Martins, 1929), 345, corresponding to Ak. III, 368. All subsequent quotations from the *Critique* will be cited in-text according to its 1781 "A" or 1787 "B" edition followed by the Prussian Academy pagination.

¹⁵ See A391.

¹⁶ Kemp Smith, for his part, seems to have been insensitive to this in connection with the fourth Paralogism since he remarks there in a footnote, "In this section, as elsewhere, Kant uses *Wirklichkeit* and *Realität* as synonymous terms," thus choosing between using "actuality" and "reality" on the basis, I take it, primarily of flow. See Kemp Smith, *Critique of Pure Reason*, 349n. The Guyer/Wood translation is consistent in translating both terms as "reality," though this, of course, equally misses any technical distinction Kant may have been carrying over from the Principles. See Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. and ed. Paul Guyer and Alan Wood (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), A367–A380. Hans Seigfried specifically discusses this distinction in connection with Kant's use of existence as a predicate in "Kant's 'Spanish Bank Account': Realität and Wirklichkeit" in *Interpreting Kant*, ed. Moltke Gram (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1982), 115–32.

¹⁷ See A143/B182f.

¹⁸ Cf. A166/B207.

¹⁹ See B201 n.

²⁰ Thomas Reid, *Thomas Reid's Inquiry and Essays*, ed. Ronald E. Beanblossom (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Co., 1983), 111, 115 respectively.

²¹ H. M. Bracken, *The Early Reception of Berkeley's Immaterialism 1710–1733* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1965), 6, 39, respectively.

²² Thomas Reid, *Thomas Reid's Inquiry and Essays*, 175.

²³ For a discussion of these reviews see Kuehn, *Scottish Common Sense in Germany, 1768–1800*, 74–85.

²⁴ Christian Wolff, *Psychologia Rationalis* (Halle, 1734), §944.

²⁵ J. G. H. Feder, *Logik und Metaphysik nebst der philosophischen Geschichte im Grundrisse* (Göttingen, 1769), 232.

²⁶ George Berkeley, *The Principles of Human Knowledge*, in *The Works of George Berkeley, Bishop of Cloyne*, 9 vols., ed. A. A. Luce and T. E. Jessop (London: Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1948–57), Vol. II, §15.

²⁷ Kant never responded to Christian Garve's original review in the kind of systematic fashion in which Feder's criticisms were dealt with in the *Prolegomena*. In the lengthy original review Garve had prepared a summary of each of the *Critique's* main sections; he included none of the references to Berkeley and Hume added by Feder, and, although he mentioned the "common" use of language, it was not in the form of a sermon on the virtues of commonsense philosophy as a whole. Garve's only two critical remarks asked, first, whether anything is really gained by Kant's system, and, second, how we can finally

arrive at the conviction of something existing. See "Christian Garve's Review of the *Critique*," in Schultz, *Exposition of Kant's Critique of Pure Reason*, 199, 198 respectively.

²⁸ "The Göttingen Review," in Schultz, *Exposition of Kant's Critique of Pure Reason*, 171.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 173.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 176.

³¹ *Ibid.*

³² Norman Kemp Smith, *Commentary to Kant's "Critique of Pure Reason"* (New Jersey: Humanities Press, 1996), 304. Interest in Kant's relation to Berkeley was renewed by Colin Turbayne's important essay, "Kant's Refutation of Dogmatic Idealism" in *The Philosophical Quarterly* 5 (1955): 225–43, an essay agreeing essentially with Kemp Smith's point of view. The best defense of Kant on this point comes from Henry Allison's "Kant's Critique of Berkeley" *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 11 (1973): 43–63. Recent work by R. C. S. Walker is especially helpful in taking up the debate while also incorporating other less historically minded discussions. Walker's central contention follows Erdmann's, however, arguing that Kant can only be successfully distinguished from Berkeley by embracing a positive conception of the thing in itself. See Walker's, "Idealism: Kant and Berkeley" in *Essays on Berkeley*, edited by J. Foster and H. Robinson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), 109–29, and his anthology, *The Real in the Ideal*.

³³ Even without the capacity to read Berkeley in English there was much available to Kant in languages he knew. In 1721 *De Motu* appeared in Latin; in 1745 a translation of *Siris* appeared in French with two separate translations of the medical portions being published in German that same year; the *Dialogues* were translated into French in 1750 and by 1756 Eschenbach had translated them into German from the French. None of which is to say that Kant did have first-hand knowledge of Berkeley; however, Kant's library contained a volume of Berkeley's *Philosophische Werke* including a second German translation of the *Dialogues* published in 1781. Furthermore, in notes taken by Herder during Kant's lectures, 1762–1764, Berkeley is cited in connection with the usefulness of Tar-water (Herder's "Nachschrift," *Vorlesung über Metaphysik*, Ak. XXVIII, 42). See Eugen Stäbler, *George Berkeley's Auffassung und Wirkung in der Deutschen Philosophie bis Hegel* (Zeulenroda: Bernhard Sporn, 1935).

³⁴ Garve's original review appeared in the *Allgemeine deutsche Bibliothek*, Appendix to vols. 37–52, 2nd Div., 1783, pp. 838–62. Reprinted in Landau, *Rezensionen*, 34–55. Translated by Sassen in *Kant's Early Critics*, 59–77. For this reference see page 198 of the English translation by Morrison in Schultz, *Exposition of Kant's Critique of Pure Reason*, Appendix D, 179–99.

³⁵ Immanuel Kant, *De mundi sensibilis atque intelligibilis forma et principiis* [Inaugural Dissertation (1770)], Ak. II, §14, 404. Translated in English as *On the form and principles of the sensible and intelligible world* by Lewis White Beck in *Kant's Latin Writings* (New York: Peter Lang, 1992), 119–60, and reprinted in *Immanuel Kant. Theoretical Philosophy 1755–1770*, trans. and ed. David Walford (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 373–416.

³⁶ Berkeley, *The Principles of Human Knowledge*, Vol. II, §25.

³⁷ It is worth noting that this sounds stronger in the English

translation. Kant uses “*wirken*” here rather than “*verursachen*,” and while the difference in English between “to effect” and “to cause” is negligible, the sense of *wirken* is weaker in German insofar as *verursachen* tends to be reserved for “cause” in the natural science sense. Kant, for obvious reasons, would be mindful of this since, qua category, “*Kausalität*” is expressly confined to things as they appear.

³⁸ Ak. X, 129–35, Zweig trans., 132–8.

³⁹ Berkeley, *The Principles of Human Knowledge*, Vol. II, §49.

⁴⁰ See Ak. IV, 374.

⁴¹ All Berkeley citations in this paragraph are from George Berkeley, *Dialogue III*, in *The Works of George Berkeley, Bishop of Cloyne*, 9 vols., ed. A. A. Luce and T. E. Jessop (London: Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1948–57), Vol. II, pp. 235, 238 respectively. Cf. Berkeley’s *The Principles of Human Knowledge*, Vol. II, §30.

⁴² Berkeley, *The Principles of Human Knowledge*, Vol. II, §30.

⁴³ “The Göttingen Review,” in Schultz, *Exposition of Kant’s Critique of Pure Reason*, 172.

⁴⁴ Ak. XII, 224, Zweig trans., 247.