Chapter 1
Kant’s Idealism: The Current Debate
An Introductory Essay

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In the last century much has been written about Kant’s idealism and the problems surrounding the distinction between appearance and thing in itself. Notably, the great Kant scholar Erich Adickes dedicated a whole book to the topic, entitled *Kant und das Ding an sich*, published in 1924, in which all relevant passages in Kant’s entire work were canvassed that dealt, implicitly or explicitly, with idealism or the transcendental distinction between appearance and thing in itself so as to clarify the meaning of Kant’s often ambiguous language. For Adickes it was in any case beyond doubt that the notion of things in themselves referred to Kant’s commitment to a thoroughgoing realism and the mind-independence of the things that we cognize.¹ Fifty years on, in 1974, came the seminal work by Gerold Prauss, *Kant und das Problem der Dinge an sich*, whose specifically non-metaphysical reading of the distinction between appearances and things in themselves, and the apparent solving of a few riddles that such a reading yields (e.g., the problem of noumenal causality), has found, in the Anglophone world, an ally of sorts in Henry Allison, who with his already classic *Kant’s Transcendental Idealism. An Interpretation and Defense* (1983, 2004) defended the idea, against the predominant view that existed previously in English language Kant scholarship, that the nature of Kant’s idealism should be seen in the light of his epistemology.

According to Allison, drawing on Prauss’s work, Kant’s idealism doesn’t commit Kant to any speculative metaphysics or ontology that lies beyond the limits of knowledge. This view of Kant’s idealism has since come to be known as the epistemological or methodological reading,² which emphasizes the perspectival change

¹See for an excellent critical account of Adickes’ position Bird (2006: 554ff.). See also Chapter 9 by Schulting in this volume.
²The sense of ‘methodological’ here is nicely put by Michelle Grier, who states that it represents the position which “is very generally characterized by the claim that the representation of the thing as it is in itself is one that is methodologically entailed by the critical procedure of reflecting on objects in relation to our cognitive faculties” (2001: 89).
brought about by the transcendental turn and thus the way that issues of realism, and a fortiori the status of things *an sich*, should henceforth be regarded. Allison emphasizes the thought that to regard objects from the perspective of their necessary conceptual or, as he initially put it, epistemic conditions is precisely *not to regard* them from the perspective of their being qua things in themselves, from which the appearance/thing-in-itself distinction must be understood. Allison has been accused of presenting an anodyne interpretation of the appearance/thing-in-itself distinction (Langton 1998, 9), as it ostensibly yields a mere tautology that can’t be what Kant had intended by making the distinction. 3 But, although the way Allison presented his views in the first edition of *Kant’s Transcendental Idealism* could be seen as vulnerable to this criticism, he later clarified his position as having to do with Kant’s discursivity thesis, which includes the dual theory of the necessary constraints of sensibility and thought, not any mere notion of an epistemic condition (see Allison 1996, 4–8; 2006, 10ff.; Wood et al. 2007, 34ff.). This might still strike one as too thin a characterization of Kant’s idealism—for such a reading remains distinctively non-ontological, but it at least shows that the distinction itself is not to be taken as a *mere* conceptual one.

On Allison’s view, the distinction that idealism draws between appearances and things in themselves rests on the difference between two types of concept of an object rather than two kinds of object, one of which would have greater ontological status. The one concept (the object as appearance) includes a reference to the necessary conditions for the perception, and cognition, of an object whilst the other (object as thing in itself) includes no such reference, that is to say, it abstracts from the human cognitive perspective. 4 And so the distinction drawn between appearance and thing in itself has no ontological import. As Allison says, the transcendental distinction has been “deontologized” (1996: 18). It merely indicates the importance of the transcendental turn regarding how to consider things, and the way we cognize them, at all. Appearances are the things as they appear to us, and things in themselves are the very same things as they do not appear to us, i.e., as they would be in abstraction from the way we experience them.

Allison’s reading has sometimes been characterized in terms of a two-aspect reading so as to differentiate it from the ontological two-object or two-world interpretation. However, as Allison has subsequently pointed out (2004: 16), this description is somewhat confusing since aspect theories are usually associated with *metaphysical* conceptions of the distinction. Two-aspect views can either be a form of “property dualism” or, as Allison sees it, a methodological view regarding a “contrast between two ways in which [….] objects can be considered in a philosophical reflection on the conditions of their cognition” (2006: 1). But, as Lucy Allais has pointed out (see below), this last characterization can also again be seen in terms of a metaphysical interpretation. I return to Allison in Section 1 below.

3 Cf. Quarfood’s comments on Langton’s critique in Quarfood (2004: 31–34); interestingly, Quarfood points out how also Langton’s own reading can be construed in a way that yields nothing but a tautology.

4 See also Quarfood (2004: 22–23).
Against the backdrop of the major work carried out by Karl Ameriks in the 1980s and 1990s and afterwards, in which he showed, in sharp contrast to Allison, that Kant was far more metaphysically committed and hence that his idealism must be seen as a thesis regarding the ontologically non-ultimate nature of appearances, a return to a more metaphysical approach to Kantian idealism can be discerned in the Kant scholarship of the last ten years. Prime examples of this approach are Langton (1998), Van Cleve (1999) and Allais (2006, 2007). Notwithstanding the possibility that, as Marcel Quarfood has suggested, the potential of methodological or epistemological readings hasn’t been fully realized, I shall focus here on these more metaphysically informed readings (in Sections 2 and 3).

In the space of a single paper it is impossible to do full justice to the richness of the articles discussed below, or to exhaustively address all the minutely or not so minutely different avenues that are being pursued (or could be pursued). The sheer quality of the papers, and in one case monograph, of the last decade indicates that the debate surrounding Kant’s doctrine of idealism is very much alive, notwithstanding the lasting influence on Kant commentators in the English speaking world of the early dismissive approach to idealism propagated by the likes of P.F. Strawson and Jonathan Bennett (one detects this continuing influence in the work of Arthur Collins, Paul Guyer, Robert Hanna, Kenneth Westphal and others). What I shall be able to do in the following is merely scratch the surface of the various new lines of reasoning that are opened up, in these recent articles, by reconsidering certain ingrained approaches to Kant’s idealism from the last three decades or so. I want to mainly focus on discussions of the distinction between two types of reading of the idealism thesis, which are roughly known as the two-aspect and the two-world view respectively, in particular how this distinction has become blurred again in recent approaches, which makes interpretive issues even more complex than they already were. This is indicative of the problematic nature of that earlier distinction but, of course, also of the very distinction those interpretations were supposed to clarify, i.e., Kant’s own distinction between appearances and things in themselves. It seems—and this becomes apparent also in these most recent interpretations—that there are grounds in Kant which show, or suggest, that he was a ‘two-aspecter’ (see e.g., Bxxxvii), and there are equally grounds in the text that indicate, or at least suggest, his commitment to ‘two-worldism’ (e.g., A288=B344; A372; A249). Without in any way trying to solve that riddle in the space of this article, I attempt in the following to paint a clearer picture of the landscape of interpretive routes that very recently are being taken in Kant scholarship concerning his doctrine of idealism.

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5 Quarfood writes: “[T]he resources of the methodological two-aspect view are currently underrated, and [...] the motivations for a robustly metaphysical reading of the notion of the thing in itself, to the extent that they rest on legitimate desiderata, can be met also on this interpretation.” (2004: 16–17) Quarfood looks at a version of a two-aspect reading of idealism provided by Gerd Buchdahl, which is loosely based on a Husserlian procedure, which charts the possible realizations of the concept of ‘object’. (2004: 39ff.) See also Caropreso (2003: 143ff.) for an interpretation in a Praussian vein.

6 See Ameriks in this volume for a critique of Hanna.
1 The Epistemological Reading Reconsidered: Allison Meets His Critics Again

In a recent article on Kant’s idealism, Allison (2006) seeks to defend again his earlier thesis that Kantian idealism is best interpreted as a thesis related to the theory concerning the epistemological constraints of human knowledge. Allison (2006: 2) maintains the view that, since transcendental realism isn’t a really existing ontological position, its counterpart transcendental idealism isn’t a real ontological position either but rather a replacement of ontology altogether (alluding to Kant’s famous phrase at A247=B303). As in the revised version of Kant’s Transcendental Idealism and in a later contribution to a debate with Guyer and Wood (Wood et al., 2007), Allison here reaffirms the starting point in explaining transcendental idealism in terms of it being the exclusionary contrast of transcendental realism. This is an important aspect of Allison’s interpretation of Kant’s idealism, and not without its problems, as is pointed out by Allen Wood in a reply to Allison (Wood et al., 2007). I’m here not concerned with that argument in particular, as it would lead us too far astray in intricate discussions concerning the role of the Antinomies in establishing the doctrine of transcendental idealism. It is at any rate clear that Wood for one isn’t at all convinced of the plausibility of seeing transcendental idealism in the light of it being the contrasting theory of transcendental realism (he speaks of an all too “Manichean” opposition [2007: 9]), nor he is convinced that on the basis of the apagogic proofs contained in the Antinomies Kant can conclude to the truth of transcendental idealism. But I leave that complicated discussion for another occasion.

An important, apparently new aspect that Allison introduces is the difference between two types of contrast, one between transcendental and a priori cognition, being “a matter of level”, and one between a transcendental and empirical use, which “is a matter of scope”.7 One of the implications for the topic of idealism is that the difference between transcendental realism and empirical realism lies in the “scope assigned to spatiotemporal predicates rather than the degree or kind of reality attributed to them”. “In other words”, as Allison writes, “it is not that empirical realism assigns a lesser degree of reality to such predicates, but merely that it restricts their applicability to the domain of possible experience”. All in all, “transcendental idealism, even as it appears in the Aesthetic, is best seen as a deflationary proposal rather than as an ontological thesis in direct competition with the various forms of transcendentalism” (Allison 2006, 6). Allison talks even of transcendental idealism being “therapeutic” (2006: 17). (Notice, as Paul Guyer already pointed out early on in his criticism of Allison’s approach [Guyer 1987, 333], that however deflationary the interpretation might be, it still commits Kant to an ontological thesis, namely that things in themselves are not spatiotemporal; Allison accepts this insofar as he now appears to acknowledge that the epistemological reading doesn’t ultimately establish the restriction thesis.) According to Allison, Kant’s critical position on spatiotemporality is not an ontological variant among others but a “radical

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alternative to ontology” and not “a novel move within ontology” (2006: 6, 7). What Kant believes is required, on Allison’s reading, is “the abandonment of the unwarranted presumption that the spatiotemporal structure of our experience is projectible onto things in general” (2006: 12). Kant ‘curbs this tendency’ of transcendental realism, by first arguing that representations of space and time are forms of sensibility, and not concepts of the understanding, which undercuts the understanding’s tendency “to project its ‘pure’ (a priori) concepts onto things in general” (2006: 13). Subsequently, Kant introduces the concept of the noumenon as a limiting concept, which sets limits to sensibility (A255=B311). Allison makes the ostensibly crucial distinction between the concept of a thing in general, which Kant took over from the ontological tradition, and the concept of a thing in itself, which he invented himself according to Allison (2006: 9). Now the transcendental realist “inflates spatiotemporal predicates into predicates of things in general” and thus “unavoidably attributes them to things in themselves as well” (2006: 9). By disentangling these concepts, in Allison’s view, it becomes clear that what the understanding determines to be the characteristics of the concept of a thing in general can’t eo ipso be taken to map on things in themselves.

In his critique of Allison, Guyer reiterates his earlier critique of Allison’s claim that Kant’s restriction thesis follows from the epistemological condition claim rather than being a substantive claim about ontology. Guyer, about whom Allison, in his reply to Guyer, dryly notes that he isn’t “a fan of transcendental idealism” (Wood et al. 2007, 31), still thinks that it is clear that Kant “does offer arguments that are intended to show that spatiality and temporality in particular are not and cannot be properties of things that exist independently of our representations of those things and which for that reason must be omitted from our conception of things as they are in themselves” (Wood et al. 2007, 13). He also still believes Allison is not capable of showing that “Kant excludes spatiality and temporality only from the concepts of things as they are and does not ever himself assert that things really are not spatial and temporal” (ibid.). Guyer reasserts his earlier statements that Kant in fact “formulates a conception of things in themselves that does not abstract from but denies their spatiality and/or temporality because of this account [i.e., ‘an account of the conditions of the possibility of a priori cognition of the spatiality and/or temporality of the objects of our cognition’]” (Wood et al. 2007, 14). Allison protests against such an abstractionist reading, which wrongly suggests that the objects from which the spatiotemporal properties are abstracted are the same objects that have those properties. He accuses Guyer, with some right, of assuming the transcendental-realist position that things in themselves are the real objects that are being intuited. According to Allison, Guyer “takes the idealism to consist in the relocation of [spatiotemporal] properties [of real things] to the subjective domain of ‘mere representations’” (Wood et al. 2007, 33).

But Guyer is correct in pointing out that seeing, as Allison does, a claim regarding epistemic conditions (suitably amended) as saying that they reflect “the structure

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of the mind rather than the nature of the object as it is in itself” still amounts to “an obviously ontological claim” (Wood et al. 2007, 16). Moreover, it is “a non sequitur to infer that the properties in virtue of which objects satisfy our conditions of access to them must be contributed by the mind, unless there is some specific reason why those properties could only be contributed by the mind”. And that there is such a “specific reason”, Guyer observes, Kant tries to argue precisely in his argument for transcendental idealism, on account of which it is held that spatiality is denied of things in themselves “because of his assumption that the contrary would be incompatible with our a priori knowledge of spatiality” (Wood et al. 2007, 17). Kant thus “believes the denial of the spatiality of things as they are in themselves to follow from the apriority of our knowledge of that spatiality.” Nevertheless, as before, Guyer still firmly thinks that because it is based on a conflation of conditional and absolute necessity, “Kant’s transcendental idealism therefore rests on a rotten foundation” (Wood et al. 2007, 18).

It is further interesting to note that Guyer insists that, although his reading has been lumped together with two-world readings, he himself has actually “never held that Kant posits a second set of things that are ontologically distinct from ordinary things or appearances, except again of course in the cases of the soul and God […].” Guyer continues: “I have attributed to Kant not a two-world view, but an alternative version of a two-aspect view, on which Kant holds that spatiality and temporality are not aspects of things as they are in themselves but are a necessary aspect of our representations of them” (Wood et al. 2007, 12). This clarification makes the interpretive landscape even less easily classifiable than it already seemed. It appears that, if we allow for the notion that (putative) objects such as soul and God are distinct entities for almost any commentator (how could they not!), almost no commentator holds explicitly the two-world view. The two-worlder appears to be a straw man. The pertinent question is what ontological status Guyer assigns to ‘representation’, given that as alluded earlier representation is meant in a merely subjective, i.e. psychological, sense. From his comparison of Kant’s account of space and time to the modernists’ account of secondary qualities, Guyer seems to suggest some sort of phenomenalist take on Kant’s theory of space and time, which in some respect at least brings him in close company with another two-worlder who also says he isn’t actually one, namely James Van Cleve, who presents a strongly phenomenalist reading of Kant’s idealism (see Section 3.1 below).

9See further Ameriks (2003a) for a possible mediating of Allison’s and Guyer’s positions, and specifically on Kant’s apparent confusion of absolute and conditional necessity in the context of the doctrine of transcendental idealism.

10Notice that also Allison, in an earlier reply to criticisms against his notion of epistemic condition, is ambiguous with regard to the connection of objectivity with representation, as opposed to “the existence of things in themselves” (1996: 5), which oddly makes him equally vulnerable to phenomenalism about appearances. Kant’s idealism can’t just have to do with how we epistemically represent things but must also be about how things are insofar as they are objects for us, lest Kant’s claims about the objectivity of appearances as empirically real objects are vacuous.

11And indeed Guyer does suggest this when he talks about Kant’s alleged “degrading” or “downgrading” of spatial objects to mere mental items (cf. respectively Guyer 1987, 335; Guyer 2006, 51).
Lastly, Guyer suggests that there is a further important, and I think rather problematic, reason which ostensibly undermines Allison’s thesis that Kant’s conception of things in themselves should be read in terms of abstracting from the very conditions for the cognition of things. This reason rests on the fact, Guyer says, that “the categories are also epistemic conditions for our cognition of objects, but [that] Kant never denies that we can use the categories in conceiving of things in themselves”. Since, according to Guyer, Kant “never denies that the categories enter into our conception of things in themselves”, the categories, being clearly epistemic conditions, cannot themselves “be a sufficient reason for exclusion from the concept of things in themselves” (Wood et al. 2007, 15) In other words, Guyer reasons, epistemic conditions can’t just by themselves be grounds for the unknowability thesis or the restriction thesis.

This might seem an apposite critique of Allison’s notion of epistemic conditions and of the way that by means of it Allison helps himself too quickly to the restriction thesis. However, Guyer’s belief that Kant “never denies that the categories enter into our conception of things in themselves” is seriously ambiguous. Although categories might be seen as playing a role in the conception of things in themselves, what they do not determine are the properties that make up the thing in itself. In other words, categories do not enter into the determination, by virtue of conceptual analysis, of the thing in itself proper, even quite apart from questions regarding sensible schematization of the categories. Guyer, as so many others, conflates the concept of a thing in itself (de dicto) and the thing in itself (de re). I tend to concur with Allison on this score, who replies to Guyer: “[I]s [Guyer] suggesting that for Kant things as they are in themselves satisfy these intellectual conditions [i.e., the categories, D.S.], which would mean that they are cognized through them? This can hardly be said of the Critical Kant; though he did seem to hold some such view in the Inaugural Dissertation and even in the Critique, he acknowledges that we can form analytic judgments regarding things so considered.” (Wood et al. 2007, 34–35; cf. Allison 1996, 18–19)

2 Novel Two-Aspect Readings

Lately, there has been aboom in literature on Kant which focuses—often with the not always so helpful help of current theorizing—on Kant’s idealism in terms of a two-aspect view that is ontological in outlook rather than methodological or epistemological (see among others Allais 2006, 2007, Friebe 2007, Westphal 2004 and Rosefeldt 2007, whose dispositionalist reading is presented as a variation on Allais’ interpretation; I discuss the first three authors below). This confirms Allison’s observation that his own epistemological/methodological approach isn’t in fact a two-aspect view (see above). Quarfood (2004) has helpfully characterized the difference between the metaphysical and methodological or epistemological approaches in terms of adopting a ‘transcendent’ and a ‘transcendental’ or ‘immanent’ point of view respectively. The “transcendent” point of view, which “takes a top-down approach” (2004: 36), accepts the limits that Kant imposes on our having cognitive access to things in themselves but nonetheless deems it legitimate to inquire
into the nature of things in themselves. Quarfood also points out that metaphysical two-aspect interpretations bear a deeper family resemblance to the two-world view than admitted, since both the two-world view and the metaphysical two-aspect view think it possible to establish, “by means of general metaphysical reasoning”, “the existence of unknowable properties belonging to the thing in itself”. That is to say, “both views take Kant’s distinction between appearance and thing in itself to be primarily ontological rather than epistemological. [...] What both [the metaphysical two-aspect and the two-world view] have in common is that Kant’s distinction is considered to involve the assumption of a realm of entities of different ontological status than objects on the empirical level have.” (Quarfood 2004, 35)

2.1 The Bold Metaphysical Two-Aspect View

It is perhaps more natural to regard aspect theories as ontological rather than as having to do with epistemological readings such as Allison’s. In the context of a realist interpretation of Kant’s transcendental philosophy, Kenneth Westphal (2004: 56–61) adumbrates such a metaphysical “dual aspect” reading of idealism, referring to Kant’s talk of a double perspective in the Bxviii note in the first Critique. Westphal writes: “[T]he double aspect view cannot simply be two ways of thinking about or describing objects. Rather, those two ways of thinking about objects must be based on, because they can only be justified by, the metaphysically distinct characteristics objects have as intuited by us and as not intuited.” (2004: 57) The classic example of a metaphysical dual-aspect theory is Spinoza’s view regarding mind and body, which as irreducible attributes both belong to, or more precisely express, one identical and unique substance. Associating Kant’s transcendental theory, as the extreme opposite of Spinoza’s naturalism, with aspect theory would then seem not so befitting.

It appears that Westphal, and perhaps metaphysical two-aspecters who approach Kant’s idealism in general, assumes the naturalist position that the objects as things in themselves are given, with all their determinate characteristics, to which we subsequently latch on by means of intuitoring these objects or aspects of these objects, or not as the case may be. This seems hardly Kantian, not even in spirit. Kant’s distinction between things in themselves and appearances appears to be relocated to the given object, the thing in itself, which is characterizable by two distinct types of state, so that the object itself has different states which are either intuited or not. Westphal affirms: “Kant holds that the distinction between phenomena and noumena is not simply one of description, but concerns objects intuited by us and as not intuited, or, more specifically, those states of an object that occur or are evident as we intuit them and the other, nonintuitable states of that object. On Kant’s view, the former are all spatiotemporal, though none of the latter are.” (2004: 57; italics mine)

Westphal thus believes that the “double aspect” character is not a matter of distinguishing between “two ways of describing” these two kinds of aspect, but rather of distinguishing between two kinds of properties that the thing itself has (2004: 58). The characteristics that things have, and thus the way they are described
subsequently, depends on Kant’s idealism with regard to the forms of intuition; so their characteristics depend on whether they are or aren’t intuited by us in the specific manner of our intuiting. The contrast, then, between two aspects is to do with the kinds of properties a thing has, either as intuited or as unintuited. Astoundingly, the metaphysical nature of this distinction that Westphal ascribes to Kant’s assumption of the ideal nature of the forms of intuition is described by him as a “metaphysical fact” (2004: 58).

2.2 Allais’ Middle Course

In her article ‘Kant’s Idealism and the Secondary Quality Analogy’, Lucy Allais aims to steer “a middle course” (2007: 460) between the phenomenalist and methodological readings of the distinction between appearances and things in themselves. Allais is concerned with refuting the phenomenalist reading of Kant’s idealism, which claims that appearances are (merely) mental representations. She emphasizes that phenomenalism conflicts with Kant’s metaphysics of experience, which takes empirical objects to be really existing things that exist unperceived. On her account, Kant is not a constructionist, for whom the necessary constraints of experience are “mere ways of organising sense-data” (ibid., 461; see further the references at 461n.9). Allais notes: “Kant is not concerned merely with how we construct experience, but also to argue that there must actually be substance that endures through time and is not created or destroyed” (461n.10). In other words, there must be a way that appearances are seen, not as mental representations, or as existing in the mind, or as sense data, but as publicly perceivable objects that endure unperceived and form part of causally governed empirical nature, but which also—and this marks the distinctiveness of Allais’ interpretation—allows appearances to be mind-dependent as opposed to things in themselves, which are mind-independent. In order to prop up her reading of appearances as both being of substantial existing things in themselves and mind-dependent, she alludes to Kant’s secondary quality analogy in the Prolegomena.12 She argues that once we have a proper account of Kant’s theory of perception in place (namely in terms of a direct theory of perception), and so not take Kant as a representationalist, and “once we have the appropriate account of secondary qualities” (460), this analogy is very useful in understanding the in-between status of appearances as of things in themselves and mind-dependent (see ibid., 463ff.; see for problems facing Allais’ analogy Rosefeldt 2007, 184ff.).

Although it is not always crystal clear where Allais effectively positions herself in regard to adopting the one or two object or world view, she does appear to go for the one-world view (2006: 146; most clearly at p. 163; see also the title of her 2004 article). She wants also to chart a middle course between what she calls “the extremes of seeing Kant as committed to the existence of supersensible,

12In the earlier literature, Arthur Collins has suggested a similar comparison (see Collins 1999, 11–12, 17).
non-spatiotemporal objects distinct from the things of which we have experience (noumena in the positive sense), and denying that Kant has any real metaphysical commitment to the existence of things in themselves.” (2007: 462n.17) Allais wants to stress that Kant is committed to the existence of really mind-independent things, which as mind-independent exist independently from us, and so are not appearances, but which have another side to them, for which they are dependent on us to the extent in which they appear to us. Allais sees her view (and that of Langton 1998) as a correction of methodological one-world views (2006: 146), but stopping short of what she intimates is extreme noumenalism about supersensible entities (148). It seems that for Allais the only things that would have a distinct existence as supersensible entities, were they to exist, would be noumena in the positive sense, and things in themselves are not these. But, against Allais, one could argue that to say that things in themselves aren’t such positive distinct entities, i.e., noumena, doesn’t imply that there is no way in which an ontological distinction can be upheld between things in themselves and appearances as two kinds of object.

In general, Allais’ view is an attractive one, as it enables us to make sense of the very term that Kant adopts, ‘Erscheinung’, to denote the object of experience. An appearance is not a mere mental item, but a genuine way or mode in which a mind-independent thing or object exists for us, apart from the way it exists in itself as mind-independent. On the other hand, at one point in the A-Deduction Kant famously says that “appearances themselves are nothing but sensible representations [sinnliche Vorstellungen]”, which “in themselves [an sich] [...] must not be seen as objects (outside the power of representation)” (A104; translation Guyer and Wood altered). At A127 Kant is even clearer: “[A]ppearances, as such, cannot occur outside us, but exist only in our sensibility”.13 And to be sure, it’s not just their formal possibility, which appearances receive from the understanding, but “as they lie in the sensibility as mere intuitions” (A127; emphasis added). By contrast, Allais’ account of appearances would seem to affirm their being mind-external objects, against Kant’s claim here, not mere representations or items in our sensibility. It seems to me that Allais’ account can’t fully exorcize the phenomenalist specter by explaining the mentalist language that Kant clearly adopts. Furthermore, her view creates a problem if an appearance were always a mind-dependent aspect of a thing that as it is in itself is mind-independent, for the question then arises as to how there can be purely subjective appearances, i.e., appearances which are not objectively determinable and so not aspects of real things (that is, aspects of publicly perceivable objects such as bent sticks [see her account at 471ff.])—sometimes Kant seems to use the notion ‘appearance’ synonymously with a mere mental representation, a Praussian empirical-subjective object say. In other words, an appearance is not eo

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ipso a representation of an object. However, in Allais’ favor it could be argued that to the extent that mental representations and hence illusions etc. are also, as ‘inner appearances’ (A386), possible objects of experience, they belong to the same realm of appearances as any other that are transcendentally ideal, i.e., dependent on minds such as ours for being cognized as genuine empirical objects of experience (albeit not as purely subjective).

The biggest problem facing Allais’ interpretation, however, is that on her one-world view there only seem to exist empirical objects, which have both an in-itself nature and an appearance nature, and not things in themselves, which only have an in-itself nature and no appearance nature (e.g., God, the soul). Allais may rightly point out that Kant is not committed to the (theoretically determinable) actual existence of God and other such noumenal objects (although this is more difficult to maintain regarding Kant’s view on the soul, more specifically, the immaterial nature of the human mind). However, her position goes further than that: it in fact disallows even the possibility of God’s existence, for on her one-world reading no room is left for objects that are effectively numerically distinct from appearances, and which have no phenomenal counterpart (or noumenal objects that would affect beings with a different intuitional capacity than ours). This is a general problem for two-aspect readings of idealism: no sense can be made of the different numerical identities of things in themselves and appearances, whose difference isn’t just the difference in the set of properties of one and the same thing.

Allais is right to query two-world views, if such views are to mean that Kant’s pre-critical stance, in the Inaugural Dissertation, namely that we distinguish between a mundus sensibilis and a mundus intelligibilis as mapping two kinds of theoretically accessible objects or worlds of objects (and she quotes B311, B274 [it’s unclear in what sense the Refutation of Idealism refutes the two-world view], and Prol. AA 4: 293), still somehow informs Kant’s position in the Critique. However, Kant’s denial of theoretical knowledge of positive noumena doesn’t mean he denies

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14 See e.g. A101; B234–235=A189–190; B243=A198; A248–249; cf. Prauss (1971: 16–18). Prauss (1971: 19) also rightly points out that, in the Dissertation and afterwards, Kant made a distinction between ‘apparentia’ (Erscheinung) and ‘phaenomenon’, the former being mere appearance and the latter appearance as determinate object.

15 She sees this as one of the advantages of Langton’s interpretation, because Langton “says that the same things which we know as they appear to us have an unknown intrinsic nature, specifically, the same things whose causal powers we know have an unknown intrinsic nature” (2006: 146).


17 Interestingly, the passage in the Prolegomena that Allais quotes in support of her view that Kant is committed to denying two-worldism appears to invite the phenomenalist interpretation. Kant says that appearances are not things, nor determinations of things in themselves, but rather modes of representation. Kant obviously cannot mean that appearances are not objects of experience. The passage cannot be used to dispute two-object views of the distinction appearance/thing-in-itself, as it is clear that appearance as object is not a thing in itself, but more importantly, not even “determinations belonging to things in themselves”. So appearance must be a distinct entity from the thing in itself.
their existence tout court (nor of course can he affirm it). In fact, Kant is committed to finding a proper way to be able to claim something positive about the noumenal, e.g., in the *Groundworks* (cf. Wagner 2008, 76, 77), where Kant proposes the idea of human beings being part of the intelligible world as well as of the sensible world (see also in the second *Critique*, concerning the practical objectively-real nature of God, soul, etc. [AA 5: 135.2–9; cf. AA 5: 56.18–27]). Generally, things in themselves are not noumena in a positive sense (theoretically or speculatively determinable), but some noumena are real things in themselves and not mere thought entities (e.g., the soul). Also all appearances have things in themselves underlying them, but some things in themselves have no appearances somehow supervening upon them (e.g., God).

Lastly, and perhaps most distinctively of her reading, Allais proposes—so as to show that she pursues a middle way between extreme noumenalism and mere methodological readings as well as to indicate her differences with Langton on intrinsicness—to see the distinction between things in themselves and appearances in terms of “distinguish[ing] between two ways of knowing things”: “We can know things in terms of the ways in which they affect other things, and we can know things as they are apart from this” (2006: 159ff.). Allais uses the terminology of specifying something opaquely and specifying something transparently. Both ways of specifying refer to the same thing; describing opaquely doesn’t give us knowledge of the intrinsic nature of the thing, but gives us knowledge of it as appearance. Our way of cognizing things is by way of opaque specification, for we never know what things are intrinsically. We can only know outer relations, as Kant says (A277=B333). It’s not so much a distinction between sets of properties of the thing, as on Westphal’s reading (see above Section 2.1), but “between two ways of knowing the same things—knowing things intrinsically, or as they are apart from other things (including ourselves), and knowing things in terms of other things” (Allais 2006, 160). Knowing things intrinsically would be knowing them by transparent description, but we don’t actually know things that way.

Although such a reading might strike one as epistemological, Allais still means it to be nontrivial in that it says something of the thing in itself that exists (2006: 164). To make a complex interpretation even more complex, Allais also says that “[o]ur representation of space and time is not an opaque presentation of something which has a way it is in itself, but rather belongs only to appearances. [...] We cognise space and spatial relations, time and temporal relations, intrinsically and directly” (2006: 165). But, regarding this last remark, i.e., that space is represented directly and not opaquely, if the purpose of the distinction of ways of describing the same things, either transparently or opaquely, was to capture the transcendental distinction between, respectively, things in themselves that have an intrinsic nature and appearances that are merely relational, and given that one of the fundamental features of appearances in contrast to things in themselves is their spatiotemporality, then Allais’ proposal turns out not to be very useful. It could be argued though on Allais’ behalf that Kant does allow talk of knowing (directly) the inner nature of things,
if by inner is meant comparatively inner determinations, which for phenomena are nothing but relations.18

2.3 Two-Aspect Readings and Cross-Boundary Identity

A further apparent problem for Allais is that Allais, and perhaps Langton and others who espouse similar views, such as recently Cord Friebe (see below), already at the outset appear to assume token-identity between phenomena or appearances and things in themselves.19 However, this can’t be determined beforehand, i.e., before an object for judgment has effectively been determined (by virtue of the categories, specifically those of quality). And quite probably there is no correspondence between a thing in itself and an appearance (even its appearance), so that for every element of a thing in itself there would be an isomorphically conforming element in an appearance. As Kjosavik (2008: 385) rightly asserts, “there is no one-to-one correlation between appearances and things in themselves”. An appearance and the underlying thing in itself share properties, but their equivalence in a certain respect doesn’t imply their numerical identity.20 Passages which are usually quoted by two-aspecters to support the identity reading of appearances and things in themselves (see Rosefeldt 2007, 170) must, I believe, not be read as if Kant suggests a claim to strict numerical identity in those places. Importantly, a thing in itself is not the starting point of Kant’s transcendental analysis, it’s what we are left with after an account of judgment (which is not to deny the de facto given existence of the thing, the something, that appears, and of which one judges that it is so and so). This means, incidentally, that criticizing two-aspect theories as to problems regarding identity needn’t be based on the requirement that there is a, to use Quarfood’s words, “neutral designation of the thing reflected upon” (2004: 27).21 At

19This is a general problem with two-aspect interpretations, which had already been pointed out by Hoke Robinson’s (1994) critique of Allison (see e.g. Robinson 1994, 422). As Willaschek (1998: 349–350) has argued, for Kant it is the case that, whilst he distinguishes various types of ‘object’, phenomena and noumena in a negative sense are distinguished only qua intension; the terms point to two aspects indeed of the same object of experience. Noumena in a positive sense, however, have a greater extension, and can mean things that are not objects of experience. Willaschek notes that the two-aspect theory falls short of clarifying these distinctions.
20This is precisely contrary to what Prauss (1971: 22) asserts, namely that “Erscheinungen und Dinge an sich, transzendentale-philosophisch verstanden, numerisch-existenzial identisch [sind]”.
any rate, to start with the thing in itself would be to reaffirm the very problematic, transcendental-realist position that Kant’s subjective turn is supposed to supplant as it can’t account for the problems surrounding a priori knowledge (cf. Heimsoeth 1956, 192–193).

That Allais’s position does seem to fall victim to a fallacy regarding numerical identity seems confirmed by her assertion that supposedly Kant’s idealism hasn’t got to do with his view of things in themselves but only with appearances (2006: 149n.23; in 2007 she frequently speaks of “Kant’s idealism about appearances”22). Surely, though, transcendental idealism concerns the distinction between things in themselves and appearances, not just appearances. That appearances are transcendentally ideal and not metaphysically ultimately real has to do precisely with the fact that they aren’t things in themselves; at the same time, a thing in itself signifies some ulterior metaphysical status, precisely because it is the contrary concept of appearance. Appearance and thing in itself come together as a set, called transcendental idealism. To disentangle the notion of ‘thing in itself’ from the idealism is to misapprehend Kant’s very motivation behind proposing the transcendental distinction (see B-preface at Bxviii-xix note). At one point, Allais acknowledges as much by asserting that “[o]ne part of transcendental idealism is the claim that we cannot know the intrinsic nature of things” (2006: 166), which isn’t just a claim about appearances but implies an ontological position regarding how things are constituted in themselves such that we cannot know them.

Friebe’s recent two-aspect account nicely brings out this major problem regarding numerical identity that, as I hinted at the start of this section, is faced by all two-aspect readings. According to Friebe, and in a way similar to Allais’ reading, the empirical object has two aspects: an aspect of subject-dependence and one of subject-independence, both of which it has “zugleich” (2007: 231). The empirical object is not an appearance, nor thing in itself, but it is subject-dependent in that it appears and it is subject-independent in that it also is a thing in itself. The terms ‘appearance’ and ‘thing in itself’ refer to subject-dependency and subject-independency respectively, not to the object. Friebe, however, correctly notes the obvious problem with this reading: “Dass nämlich etwas zugleich subjektabhängig wie auch subjektunabhängig sein soll, klingt widersprüchlich; dieser Interpretationsrichtung gemäß scheint ein identischer Gegenstand zwei entgegengesetzte Aspekte zu haben.” (2007: 231) Friebe’s apparent solution that subject-independency is analytically implied by subject-dependency isn’t entirely clear nor convincing. It doesn’t remove the doubts concerning the two-aspect view

22Collins does the same by asserting that “in any case [Kant] is plainly not an idealist when it comes to things in themselves” (1999: 27–28) and “Kant’s is an idealist view about appearances and a realist view about things-in-themselves” (ibid., 29). This is an odd view to hold, as Kant would on this view be both a transcendental idealist and a transcendental realist. Allais’ claim that idealism only concerns appearances, not things-in-themselves, is in fact begging the question in favor of her own dual-aspect reading; it already assumes a realist conception of the thing in itself, which is supposedly given and is then said to have two ways of being considered, namely as appearing, which is the ideal aspect of the thing, and as being in-itself, which is its real aspect.
raised by my previous observation about identity problems. Friebe asserts: “Dass etwas erscheint, impliziert, dass es auch an sich betrachtet werden kann, da es sonst nur Schein wäre.” (2007: 231) This is obviously true, but this is rather different from claiming—and this is the pivotal issue here—that the same thing that is subject-dependent is also not subject-dependent. Friebe’s explanation of the noted problem doesn’t address a real contradiction between aspects.

Now, one could argue that one and the same thing could still have two (seemingly) contradictory aspects at different times. Or one could say that it has these aspects in different respects, considered from various standpoints, as thing in itself and as appearance, say; but then it must be clarified what the sense of respect is here. However, these possible rejoinders don’t allay the worry, first, that Kant means the phenomenal and noumenal aspects or properties of things to be exclusionary properties, if we allow for them being called properties; and secondly, that according to Kant spatiotemporal properties are not properties of things in themselves, not that they are non-noumenal or subject-dependent properties that things in themselves also have, as Friebe and other two-aspecters, including Allais, suggest. But the most pressing problem here is: how can one and the same thing have two exclusionary properties, the property of being spatial and the property of not being spatial, say? Either the thing is spatial or it isn’t—it can’t both be spatial and not be spatial.23

If it is the case that the thing that has extrinsic properties, spatial properties say, is the very same (numerically identical) thing that also has intrinsic properties, non-spatial properties say, then it seems that the thing in itself as such is in space, which conflicts with Kant’s official doctrine that things in themselves are not spatiotemporal.24 If it is only part of the thing that is in space (by virtue of its having extrinsic properties), then one can’t say that it is the thing in itself as such, i.e., as an individuated mereological whole (qua having all of its properties, both extrinsic and intrinsic), which is in space, but only part of the thing (only qua its having extrinsic properties). But then the thing as it appears in the spatial realm can’t be the same (numerically identical) thing that is not in space (the thing qua its having intrinsic properties), and so appearance and thing in itself would appear to be two different objects (as on the two-world view). The crucial problem here is that absolutely different, exclusionary properties can’t be attributed to one and the same thing (stricte dicta) on pain of contradiction.

Friebe’s talk of two cases of a thing in itself, one of which is the ‘appearance’ along with its spatial properties, strikes me as wrong. To read Kant’s implication at B332=A276 that ‘appearances are not things in themselves’ as confirming such a two-aspect view, as Friebe alleges (2007: 233), strikes me as obstinate. How does one square an interpretation as Friebe’s with Kant’s own intentions, when Friebe

24This last fact is not a worry for interpreters who dismiss the doctrine, but it is for Allais since she endorses it; notice that Allais also says that space and time “are merely the subjective form of our intuition, and represent no property of things in themselves at all” (2006: 165); hence, they “are not the way something unknown as to what it may be in itself appears to us” (ibid.) and so space and time are not the way to describe, to put it in Allais’ terms, things in themselvesopaquely.
writes that above implication of Kant’s can be construed as saying that “Erscheinung als der eine Fall von Ding an sich ist natürlich kein bloßes Ding an sich als der andere Fall von Ding an sich”? (2007: 234) Friebe wants to circumvent the problems associated with Kant’s denial of spatiotemporal properties to things in themselves by simply, but confusingly, asserting that an appearance is “eine Fall von Ding an sich”, which as thing in itself has the forms appropriate to an appearance. He writes: “[W]enn Kant nun sagt, […] dass Raum und Zeit keine Formen der Dinge an sich selbst seien […] , so bedeutet dies nicht dass Raum und Zeit bloß subjektive Formen der Anschauung wären, sondern nur dass sie keine Formen desjenigen Falls von Ding an sich sind, den allein die naive Realisten kennen. Dass sie als Formen der Erscheinung auch Formen des Dings an sich sind […] ist damit nicht nur nicht ausgeschlossen, sondern geboten [!] . Denn die Subjektabhängigkeit (Räumlichkeit) der empirischen Objekte ist ein Fall von Subjekt-Unabhängigkeit (Raumartigkeit)” (2007: 234). I think it is safe to say that the analytical reconstruction so often inappropriately imposed on Kant has gone horribly awry in this particular case.

Another problem for Allais’ variant of the aspects reading of Kantian idealism is that, in a way similar to Friebe’s talk of subject-dependence, she speaks about appearances in terms of mind-dependent properties of objects, that is, of things in themselves (Allais 2007), but it is unclear to me how a property of a mind-independent object, i.e., a thing in itself, can be seen to have the feature of mind-dependence or to have a disposition such that it is knowable by us. The key point here is that one wants to know what it is that attributes a property that is essentially foreign to the thing (as it is in itself) and thus constitutes the mind-dependence relation and a fortiori a priori knowledge thereof. It would seem that although it might be said to have a disposition to dependency on the mind a thing can’t all by itself produce this relation, not at any rate if the mind-dependence must be necessary and such that we, as minds, have a priori insight into it. Mind-dependence as a relation suggests that at the very least two relata are constitutive of that relation.

3 Continuing Issues with the Ontological Approach to Idealism

3.1 Phenomenalism Revisited

Ever since the Garve-Feder review of Kant’s first Critique, there has been a strong temptation to see Kant’s idealism in terms of Berkeley’s. In a recent essay on this topic, Ameriks aptly compares this continuing tendency with “a stray dog that refuses to go home” (Ameriks 2006, 67). There is of course a certain correspondence between Berkeley and Kant, not least in regard to the fact that both their forms of idealism are characterized by a metaphysical, negative aspect. Both hold that something of the object is not real. Also, both Kant and Berkeley want to leave room for existence claims regarding God, the soul etc. But there is much that distinguishes Kant from Berkeley, something which phenomonalist interpreters of Kant have always tended to disregard. Recently, a phenomenalist reading has been offered by James Van Cleve (1999). Ameriks, who is otherwise sympathetic to
Van Cleve’s account of the metaphysical/ontological side of Kant and who like Van Cleve dismisses epistemological readings, takes issue with Van Cleve’s phenomenalist interpretation of Kant’s idealism. Ameriks (2006: 69) believes that Van Cleve pulls Kant much too close in the direction of Berkeley.

Ameriks frames his criticism in the familiar terms of his general critique of idealist strategies in post-Kantian philosophy and afterwards, as offering ‘short arguments’ towards their conclusions. “The heart of the idea of a 'short' argument is simply this: the conclusion of ideality is to be drawn directly from the most general features of representation, for example, the mere fact that we use representations at all, or that we are passive or active with respect to them, or simply that we require intuitions or concepts or their combination. [. . .] It bypasses the strategy of arguing [. . .] that the first and most crucial stage on the way to any conclusions about ideality has to do with features distinctive of our specific nature as spatiotemporal knowers.” (Ameriks 2006, 69) In short, Berkeley’s argument for idealism can be considered such a short argument for idealism (69). What would Kant’s “non-short argument” be? Ameriks calls this his “species argument”, “because it concerns our species of intuition” (70).

Famously, Berkeley holds that there is Being only where there is representing. For Berkeley, being is in some sense reducible to representation and so ideal, but since active spirits are in fact at the foundation of reality, in a sense reality and representation also go together (Ameriks 2006, 71). For Kant, on the other hand, reality and representation are not so closely linked, and neither do ideality and representation overlap. Some of the aspects of reality are not represented or representable. To make the connection between ideality and representation, Kant introduces his what Ameriks calls species argument. To illustrate the difference between Kant’s and Berkeley’s idealism, Ameriks quotes from a letter from Kant to J. S. Beck, in which Kant differentiates his own position, which concerns “ideality in reference to the form of representation”, from the one ascribed to him by Garve and Eberhard who “construe it as ideality with respect to the matter, i.e., ideality of the object and its existence itself” (as quoted by Ameriks from Kant’s correspondence in Ameriks 2006, 73). This distinction between ideality as to form and ideality as to matter, between formal and material idealism, is crucial for Kant. It is clear that Kant repudiates material idealism as a form of ‘crude idealism’.

Van Cleve appears to read Kant’s idealism precisely in terms of material idealism. Two-worlders or quasi-two-worlders tend to reduce objects of experience to representations as mental states, whereby they take Kant’s talk of ‘mere representations’ literally in terms of their material content (cf. Strawson 1966, 237, 238, 245). Van Cleve makes the prima facie implausible claim that “objects owe their very existence to being cognized by us” (Van Cleve 1999, 5), which seems to clearly express the Berkeleyan being=representation principle. Ameriks notes that such a view in fact conflicts with a two-world view, which takes non-empirical things in themselves seriously, as does Van Cleve. Now to concede, Ameriks (2006: 77) argues,

25See Kant, AA 11: 395.
that things in themselves exist which are non-empirical means to concede that these things are not dependent on our representations or minds; ergo their existence is not owed to us. However, Van Cleve might also be taken to argue that it is not the things in themselves, or Being in general, that are dependent on our representation, but rather the object as appearance that is dependent on our representation for its existence as object (so not as thing in itself). This would be in line with Kant’s main claim in the Transcendental Deduction that it is not just our experience of an object that is constrained by certain subjective conditions, but the very fact that there is an object for me (B137). This need not conflict with the aforementioned distinction between form and matter that Kant alludes to in his letter to Beck, since what is dependent on our representation is the fact of the existence of the object as object (for me), not all of the object’s underlying existential characteristics, so only formally and not materially. To the extent that objects are strictly speaking always objects for us, it could thus well be that Van Cleve is right about empirical objects being but “clusters of empirical determinations” (Ameriks 2006, 79). This appears to be borne out by Kant’s assertion at B527 = A499 that “the appearances, in their apprehension, are themselves nothing other than an empirical synthesis (in space and time) and thus are given only in this synthesis” (Kant’s emphasis).

To underline the strong reading of phenomenalism that Van Cleve seems to ascribe to, Ameriks elaborates on Van Cleve’s informative distinction between ontological phenomenalism, which is Van Cleve’s own preferred route, and analytical phenomenalism.27 The ontological, strong version of phenomenalism asserts that, to take Ameriks’ example, the existence of a tree “is just the existence of a set of actual tree representings in some subject” (2006: 80). On the other hand, analytical phenomenalism merely asserts that “it is true that a tree exists even if there are no such actual representings as long as it is still the case that some subject would have appropriate tree representings if its experience were simply extended in various natural ways” (80). As Ameriks points out, Van Cleve believes that Kant, in most cases, confirms ontological phenomenalism: for example, at A191 = B236, Kant suggests that a house, being “only an appearance, i.e., a representation”, is “nothing but a sum of [...] representations”.28 Ameriks’ response to Van Cleve’s use of the example isn’t entirely adequate, for it seems to me that sum (Inbegriff) just means sum or totality here, not ‘quintessence’ or purport as Ameriks suggests (what could Kant mean on that reading?).29 In a way, Van Cleve is right to infer from the above passage that an empirical object is nothing but the whole of representations unified by the unity of consciousness (cf. numerous passages in the

26Cf. Van Cleve (1999: 134): “[Things in themselves] do not depend on human beings either for their existence or for their being the way they are.” Van Cleve is thus, rightly, careful to distinguish between the notions ‘object’ and ‘thing in itself’.


29Cf. A114. See also Kant in the same letter to J.S. Beck quoted earlier, where he quotes Beck: “The union [Inbegriff] of representations is itself the object, and the activity of the mind whereby this union [Inbegriff] of representations is represented is what we mean by ‘relating them to the
A-Deduction). It is important to note, however, that this need not be worrisome for Ameriks’ interpretation, as this sum of representations still only means the whole of possible experience, governed by transcendental apperception, which is a general feature of experience (not an act of a psychological subject), and so not the (arbitrary or even objectively determined) sum of someone’s actual psychological mental states. Nevertheless, Van Cleve’s ungainly talk of “virtual objects” (1999: 8) doesn’t make his reading of Kant’s idealism any more appealing, as it undermines Kant’s emphatic empirical realism about objects. Overall, then, Van Cleve’s interpretation does indeed seem to be vulnerable to the psychological reductionism that Ameriks rightly criticizes.

But instead of arguing that Kant could be seen as an analytical phenomenalist of sorts, rather than as an ontological phenomenalist, Ameriks himself wishes to stress that Kant’s talk of representations must always be “understood epistemically rather than merely psychologically” (2006: 81). Ameriks convincingly argues that in some way Kant could more profitably be seen as an evidentialist regarding experience, than as a phenomenalist at all. “What always matters to Kant is not what mere inner sense series of primitive representations is occurring, but what kinds of judgments and epistemic activities we have or are capable of having” (81–82). A good example, adduced by Ameriks, that shows that Kant is not concerned with the psychological capacity for experience or perception tout court but with a higher order experience is magnetic matter, which is something that we can’t perceive, but is nonetheless determinable by extrapolating its existence from law-governed experience (A226=B273). Kant’s term ‘experience’ must be seen in terms of ‘empirical knowledge’, which excludes states for which there is no evidence, but which are not thereby denied existence, as reality itself is not “tied down by the limits of our knowledge” (Ameriks 2006, 82). Experience for which there is evidence would certainly be phenomenal, but on this account there would still be “evidence-transcendent truths” that are “non-phenomenal” (82).

### 3.2 Metaphysical Short Arguments to Idealism

Karl Ameriks has in the past staunchly defended a moderately metaphysical stance on Kant’s idealism in criticizing views which see in his idealism a claim that makes things in themselves not only unknowable but literally unthinkable. This tendency, still common among many traditional readers of Kant—but fortunately less so among the very recent crop of Kant interpreters—goes back to the earliest appropriations of Kant’s philosophy (Reinhold among others) and has been prevalent ever since Hegel’s trenchant criticisms (see Ameriks 1991, 2000; cf. Hegel’s critique of Kant’s notion of ‘thing in itself’ in Hegel 1985, 108ff. and also object’. “ (AA 11: 314 [Kant 2007, 399]). ‘Inbegriff’ is translated here as ‘union’, but the translator’s use of ‘uniting’ for ‘Zusammensetzung’, to which Kant adds ‘synthesis’ in brackets, indicates that what is meant here by Kant is composition or synthesis (see Kant 2007, 399 note).
Hegel, Encyclopedia, §§44–45). Ameriks has, quite usefully, labeled this strategy for reading Kant’s idealism a ‘short argument to idealism’.

Short arguments to idealism move “to idealism relatively quickly and directly by beginning not with our specific form of sensibility, but with some much more general or ‘global’ feature of human cognition” (2003b: 137), e.g., the fact that everything that we think and know is something that we represent, and so in abstraction from our way of representing it cannot be known. This was the course Reinhold adopted in his Versuch einer neuen Theorie des menschlichen Vorstellungsvermögens (1789). The arguments that, for Kant himself, establish idealism are ‘long’ arguments specifying the details of our forms of sensibility, carried out by Kant in the Transcendental Aesthetic. Kant’s own argument always circles round the specificity of our spatiotemporal intuitions (hence, Ameriks now labels it Kant’s ‘species’ argument; see above Section 3.1), and is never solely about, more globally defined, sensibility, conceivable or representability tout court. The import of Ameriks’ ‘short argument’ label is to show that some interpreters want to extract a simpler argument from Kant’s argument for idealism than is in fact allowed on the basis of the specifics regarding the forms of intuition (space and time), by starting from a simpler premise, without of course the exposition for such a short argument necessarily also being short.

The short route to idealism has always been very popular, from Reinhold onwards. It is, as Ameriks points out, also very common to associate such strategies for reading idealism with the common view that Kant, once and for all, made all attempts to theorize about ultimate reality futile. A recent interpreter of Kant, Rae Langton, is an exception to this tendency, but, as Ameriks (2003b) ably demonstrates, in her book Kantian Humility: Our Ignorance of Things in Themselves (1998) she appears still a victim of the short-argument-to-idealism strategy.

As the subtitle of her work makes clear, Langton focuses on the unknowability thesis. Basically, her claim is that since things in themselves are characterizable by intrinsic qualities, which by their nature are not relational, and knowledge is based on the way things relate to us, we can’t have knowledge of these qualities and thus of things in themselves. Langton argues that things in themselves are substances qua bearers of intrinsic properties (1998: 20), whereas phenomena are their relational or extrinsic properties, thereby circumventing any reference to the conditions of sensibility or cognition, which on Langton’s reading are only indirectly related to the unknowability thesis. Interestingly, Langton’s take on the issue of unknowability does not appear related to the topic of idealism: she starts from the assumption of there being things with intrinsic qualities together with the epistemological reflection that such qualities cannot be known by us human cognizers, and hence that humility is required on our part. However, as Ameriks points out, this realist reading of unknowability still involves idealism, because “it also involves the metaphysical claim that certain features are such that we cannot know them as inhering in things precisely because they cannot ever belong to things in themselves as such. Hence they must be ‘merely phenomenal’ or ‘ideal’ [...]” (Ameriks 2003b, 140).

Ignorance or unknowability about things in themselves thus follows, according to Langton, not from specific arguments about spatiotemporality or the categories,
but from the simple fact that our human knowledge is receptive (Langton 1998, 3). This looks like a very short argument, but Langton looks to find additional premises in Kant’s early work, especially Living Forces (1747) and the Physical Monadology (1756) to prop up this argument. It is hardly evident that arguments for unknowability can be gleaned from considerations about receptivity, as this latter concerns our empirically receiving data, whereas concerns about the ideality of our representations for Kant always have to do with the possibility of a priori knowledge (cf. Heimsoeth 1956, 191–192). Importantly, Langton allows that unknowability is not a trivial consequence of the notion of ‘thing in itself’ itself, but concerns the fact that we don’t know what there is in terms of an ulterior reality with its own “distinguishing [unterscheidende] and inner predicates” (A565=B593). Thus, although we can’t know things with such predicates, or how they are like, we can neither deny that things in themselves have such predicates (what is meant by Kant are absolutely inner determinations). The notion of a ‘thing in itself’ is not vacuous (notice that for Kant, in aforementioned passage, the fact that we can’t effectively determine the thing’s inner predicates, means that we aren’t justified in assuming its existence and hence it remains a “mere thought-entity [Gedankending]”).

Ameriks lauds Langton for stressing that there is nothing paradoxical about claiming that things in themselves have inner predicates whilst also claiming unknowability, for a distinction between types of knowledge can be made. This is an obvious strategy, which Ameriks has always emphasized, but oddly the German Idealists (Hegel in particular) and their followers, even today, strangely continue claiming that Kant can’t make any claims as to the putative nature of things in themselves. For, supposedly, even stating that things in themselves have inner predicates would be a claim to knowledge, which on Kant’s restriction thesis is foreclosed. But, as both Ameriks and Langton point out, for Kant there is a definite distinction between thinking and knowing (see e.g., Ameriks 2003b, 156, 157; cf. Kant Bxxvi note). The knowledge that we do have of things is, Langton points out, knowledge of relations, and these are denied transcendental reality. However, we can still think things insofar as they have a putative transcendental reality to which we haven’t cognitive access.

Another important point of Langton’s interpretation, emphasized by Ameriks and potentially problematic for Allais’s take on intrinsic properties and things in themselves, is that, contra Leibniz, Kant held that relational claims are not reducible to intrinsic claims about individual substances (see Langton 1998, Chap. 5). If Kant held the opposite, Leibnizian view, he would be making a dogmatic claim as to the nature of things in themselves, for at least we would then know that phenomenal truths entail noumenal truths about things in themselves (see Ameriks 2003b, 144). Langton’s main claim is succinctly put by Ameriks in the following terms: “[A]ll we can know is relational, but the relational does not reveal the intrinsic (given the non-reducibility doctrine), so what we know is, in this sense, ‘mere phenomena’, not things in themselves.” (2003b: 144) It is clear, from an examination of Kant’s understanding of these notions, that the relationalism and the intrinsicism are in tension. Ameriks argues that the tension is resolved by Kant’s notion of a priori synthetic judgement, which is such that the content of the judgement is not reducible to the separate contents of the elements of the judgement. This is because the judgement is a synthesis of elements that are not reducible to each other.

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earliest concerns in the works quoted at length by Langton, that for Kant, also in the Critical period, a substance must have intrinsic properties, without at least some of which it wouldn’t exist as substance. Also, that some substances could exist without having any relational properties, which in turn need not entail the truth about the intrinsic nature of substances (cf. Ameriks 2003b, 146). The distinction between intrinsic and relational properties is fundamental for Kant. Now if our phenomenal knowledge equates with knowledge of what is relational and every knowledge claim concerns a determination of relational properties, it follows that we can only know relational properties and not intrinsic properties. If this is what the unknowability thesis is about, it seems fairly innocent, as Ameriks notes.  But is it true that, for Kant, the relational equates with the phenomenal and the intrinsic with the ‘in itself’?

As Quarfood points out (2004: 48ff.), in the *Critique* at A26=B42 Kant is clear as to the fact that “neither absolute nor relative determinations can be intuited prior to the existence of the things to which they pertain, thus be intuited a priori” (emphasis added). Thus, it’s not relationality that limits our knowledge but the a priori connection with our forms of intuition. On Langton’s account one would expect relative determinations to be phenomenal by default, and thus knowable, but Kant allows the possibility that these could not be cognized, i.e., because they are determinations of things in themselves. This is also indicated by an oft-cited passage in the Critique: “The things that we intuit are not in themselves what we intuit them to be, nor are their relations so constituted in themselves [ihre Verhältnisse so an sich selbst beschaffen sind] as they appear to us” (B59=A42; cf. B66–67). As Ameriks points out (2003b: 148–149), Langton’s view (“humility does follow from receptivity, given irreducibility” [Langton 1998, 126]) is vulnerable to the very stipulative, anodyne approach of which she accuses Allison. If relational means non-in-itself by stipulation, then we have ruled out that some relational properties could be had in terms of being inner properties of things in themselves. Ameriks points to one for Kant very important relational property which is non-phenomenal, and thus a property of a thing in itself: freedom, which involves a form of causal relation (2003b: 149). A clear-cut division between relational properties and properties that things in themselves have (intrinsically) is a mere definitional strategy that can’t account for one of the core tenets of Kant’s philosophy!

Ameriks also adduces an example from the Inaugural Dissertation, where Kant still held the view that we can, through the intellect, have knowledge of

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31Cf. Ameriks (2003b: 154–155, esp. 155n.42, 43) regarding Langton’s too strict “severing [of the] relations between things in themselves and phenomena”. Ameriks does not see why the line between relationality, that is inbuilt in e.g. causal power, and intrinsicality should be drawn so sharply as does Langton. There must be some grounding relations between things in themselves and phenomena, and also transcendental affection shows that there is something both non-phenomenal and relational (Ameriks 2003b, 156–157); cf. Westphal (2004: 38ff.) on noumenal causal affection.


33Cf. Westphal (2004: 56n.37). Westphal also asserts that noumena need not be non-relational, and more importantly, as he writes, “the alleged nonrelationality of noumena in any positive sense would thwart Kant’s account of moral agency *ab initio*”. See also Quarfood (2004: 61–65) and Wagner (2008).
the intelligible world, but also argued that knowledge concerned “interaction of substances and the unity of the world of finite beings”, clearly knowledge, then, that is “at once relational and concerning things in themselves” (2003b: 150) To underscore a similar point, Quarfood (2004: 45) refers to the Dissertation (Section IV; AA 2: 406ff.), where Kant discusses the “principle of the form of the intelligible world”, and addresses the issue how substances are related and how these can be known by the intellect. 34

So, to conclude this section, against Langton it must be argued that it is not relationality as such, the pure relationality involved in being sensibly affected (receptivity), but certain specifics of particular relations (such as space and time) that lead Kant to conclude to idealism. 35

4 Concluding Remarks

Other important and distinctive new interpretations of Kant’s idealism of the last ten years or so have been offered by Adams (1997), Collins (1999), Warren (2001), and more recently Wood (2005) and Rosefeldt (2007), whose dispositionalist reading of the appearance/thing-in-itself distinction is presented as a variation on Allais’ reading. As they could not, within the allocated space, be given the attention that is their due, an account of their versions of idealism is not included here. A central element of Adams’ approach is considered in the article by Schulting in this volume. The cardinal aspects of Wood’s identity interpretation are discussed in the articles by Schulting and Onof below (for an account of Wood on idealism see also Ameriks, forthcoming).

As may be clear from my account of the current debate, there is still much disagreement among Kant commentators as to how to interpret the doctrine of idealism and even whether idealism is relevant for an assessment of Kant’s thought in general or for all of its aspects. It is at any rate clear that debates surrounding Kant’s idealism are very much alive in today’s Kant scholarship, which gives one hope for the future of Kant studies, particularly his theoretical philosophy. There are promising signs that the same importance is accorded again to investigating an even more obscure part of Kant’s theoretical philosophy, and which despite many efforts by prominent brains has remained a closed book to most readers, namely the Transcendental Deduction of the categories.

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34 Incidentally, Quarfood suggests in a note that “Kant’s development from the Dissertation to the critical philosophy of CPR might be seen as the transition from a metaphysical to a methodological two-aspect view” (2004: 47, 48n.65), rather than from an ontological two-world view to a methodological two-aspect view.

35 See for an additional critique of Langton’s interpretation Falkenstein (2000).
References


