

## **Chapter 1 An Introduction to the Problem**

In spite of some sympathy shown in recent years for a vaguely Kantian sort of idealism or, better, anti-realism, which argues for the dependence of our conception of reality on our concepts and/or linguistic practices, Kant's transcendental idealism proper, with its distinction between appearances and things in themselves, remains highly unpopular.<sup>1</sup> To be sure, there has arisen a lively dispute concerning the interpretation of this idealism, with some, myself included, arguing for a version of what is usually called a "two-aspect" view (to be discussed below). Nevertheless, many interpreters continue to attribute to Kant the traditional "two-object" or "two-world" view or some close facsimile thereof, and in most (though not all) cases this reading is combined with a summary dismissal of transcendental idealism as a viable philosophical position. In fact, the manifest untenability of transcendental idealism, as they understand it, has led some critics to attempt to save Kant from himself, by separating what they take to be a legitimate core of Kantian argument (usually of an anti-skeptical nature) from the excess baggage of transcendental idealism, with which they believe it to be encumbered.

The approach taken in the present work is diametrically opposed to this. Although not denying many of the difficulties pointed out by the critics, its main goal is to provide an overall interpretation and, where possible, a defense of transcendental idealism. This defense will not amount to an attempt to demonstrate the truth of transcendental idealism; that being much too ambitious a project. It will, however, argue that this idealism remains a viable philosophical option, still worthy of serious consideration. An underlying thesis, which is independent of the viability of transcendental idealism, is its intimate connection with virtually every aspect of the *Critique*. In short, the separability of Kant's fundamental claims in the *Critique* from transcendental idealism will be categorically denied. For better or worse, they stand or fall together.

The present chapter is intended as an introduction to the problem as a whole and is divided into two main parts. The first provides a brief sketch of what might be termed the “anti-idealistic” reading of Kant. The second begins the process of rehabilitation by outlining a conception of transcendental idealism quite different from the one dismissed by its critics. It argues that this idealism is more properly seen as epistemological or perhaps “metaepistemological” than as metaphysical in nature, since it is grounded in an analysis of the discursive nature of human cognition.<sup>2</sup> To this end, it introduces the concept of an “epistemic condition” as a key to the understanding not only of transcendental idealism but also of the argument of the *Critique* as a whole.

## I. KANTIAN ANTI-IDEALISM

As noted above, critics of transcendental idealism, who are nonetheless in some sense sympathetic to Kant, tend to interpret this idealism in an extremely uncharitable manner and then argue for its separability from some independently justifiable strand of Kantian argumentation. We shall briefly consider each of these moves in turn.

### A. The Idealism of Anti-Idealism

According to many of its critics, transcendental idealism is a metaphysical theory that affirms the uncognizability of the “real” (things in themselves) and relegates cognition to the purely subjective realm of representations (appearances). It thus combines a phenomenalist, essentially Berkeleyan, account of what is actually experienced by the mind, and therefore cognizable, namely, its own representations, with the postulation of an additional set of entities, which, in terms of the very theory, are uncognizable.<sup>3</sup> In spite of the obvious

paradox it involves, this postulation is deemed necessary to explain how the mind acquires its representations, or at least the materials for them (their form being “imposed” by the mind itself). The basic assumption is simply that the mind can acquire these materials only as a result of being “affected” by things in themselves. Thus, such things must be assumed to exist, even though the theory denies that we have the right to say anything about them, including the claims that they exist and affect us.

Although it has a long and reasonably distinguished lineage, traceable to Kant’s contemporaries,<sup>4</sup> the continued acceptance of this understanding of transcendental idealism in the Anglo-American philosophical community is largely due to the influence of P. F. Strawson, who brusquely defines this idealism as the doctrine that “reality is supersensible and that we can have no knowledge of it.”<sup>5</sup> Moreover, in the spirit of this reading, Strawson not only rejects transcendental idealism as incoherent; he also provides an account of what led Kant to this “disastrous” doctrine. As Strawson sees it, transcendental idealism is the direct consequence of Kant’s “perversion” of the “scientifically minded philosopher’s” contrast between a realm of physical objects composed of primary qualities and a mental realm consisting of the sensible appearances of these objects (including their secondary qualities). This mental realm, like its Kantian counterpart, is thought to be produced by means of an affection of the mind by physical objects. Kant allegedly perverts this model, however, by assigning the whole spatiotemporal framework (which according to the original model pertains to the “real,” that is to say, to physical objects) to the subjective constitution of the human mind. The resulting doctrine is judged to be incoherent because, among other reasons, it is only with reference to a spatiotemporal framework that one can talk intelligibly about “affection.”<sup>6</sup>

In addition to its unwarranted postulation of things in themselves that somehow affect the mind, transcendental idealism is often attacked on epistemological grounds for its complementary claim that we can know only appearances. Equating Kantian “appearances” with “mere representations,” critics take this to mean that we know only the contents of our own minds, that is, ideas in the Berkeleyan sense. This is then sometimes used as the basis for a critique of the doctrine of the ideality of space and time, which Kant presents in the Transcendental Aesthetic. Simply put, the claim is that Kant’s subjectivistic starting point confronts him with a stark dilemma: he must maintain either (1) that things only seem to us to be spatial, or (2) that appearances, that is to say, representations, really are spatial. The former, however, allegedly entails that our consciousness of a world of objects extended and located in space is some-

how illusory; whereas the latter is supposedly absurd on the face of it, since it requires us to regard mental items as extended and located in space.<sup>7</sup>

This line of criticism can likewise be traced back to Kant's contemporaries, and it certainly has echoes in Strawson.<sup>8</sup> Perhaps its sharpest twentieth-century formulation, however, is by H. A. Prichard, who concentrates much of his attack on the alleged incoherence of Kantian "appearance talk." According to Prichard, whose critique was highly influential in the earlier part of the century, Kant's whole conception of appearance is vitiated by a confusion of the claim that we know only things as they appear to us with the quite different claim that we know only a particular class of things, namely, appearances. Prichard also suggests that Kant only managed to avoid the above-mentioned dilemma by sliding from one of these claims to the other. Thus, on his reconstruction, what Kant really wished to hold is that we know things only as they appear to us; but since this supposedly entails that these things only *seem* to us to be spatial, in order to defend his cherished empirical realism, he was forced to shift to the doctrine that we know appearances and that they really are spatial.<sup>9</sup>

Underlying Prichard's critique is the assumption that the claim, that we know objects only as they appear, is to be understood to mean that we know only how they seem to us, not how they really are. In fact, he makes this quite explicit by construing Kant's distinction in terms of the classic example of perceptual illusion: the straight stick that appears bent to an observer when it is immersed in water. And, given this, he has little difficulty in reducing Kant's doctrine to absurdity. Although his analysis proceeds through various stages, Prichard's main point is linguistic. Specifically, he claims that Kant's account contradicts the clear meaning of 'knowledge'. Since to know something, according to Prichard, just means to know it as it really is, in contrast to how it may "seem to us," it follows that for Kant we cannot really know anything at all.<sup>10</sup> Thus, far from providing an antidote to skepticism, as was his intent, Kant, on this reading, is seen as a Cartesian skeptic *malgré lui*.

### B. The Separability Thesis

What is here termed the separability thesis is a response to this understanding of transcendental idealism and is likewise largely the work of P. F. Strawson, who set as his avowed task the separation of what he terms the "analytic argument" of the *Critique* from the transcendental idealism with which he believes Kant unfortunately and unnecessarily entangled it.<sup>11</sup> Central to the former, as Strawson conceives it, is the refutation of a Cartesian-type skepticism through the demonstration of a connection between self-consciousness (or the self-

ascription of experience) and the experience of a public, objective world. In this respect Strawson has been followed by numerous philosophers, who have tried to formulate and defend some vaguely Kantian anti-skeptical or “transcendental” arguments that are uncontaminated by any idealistic premises.<sup>12</sup>

Although for Strawson himself the project is more one of appropriating what is deemed valuable in Kant and discarding the rest than of proposing a radically new interpretation based on a careful consideration of the relevant texts, the latter has been attempted by two Kant scholars who appear to have been deeply influenced by Strawson’s work: Paul Guyer and Rae Langton. Accordingly, it may prove instructive to examine their views on transcendental idealism and the separability thesis at this point.

*Guyer.* In dismissing interpretations of transcendental idealism such as the one presented in the first edition of this book, which he characterizes as an “ano-dyne recommendation of epistemological modesty,”<sup>13</sup> Guyer insists on the dogmatic metaphysical character of this idealism. As he puts it, “Transcendental idealism is not a skeptical reminder that we *cannot be sure* that things as they are in themselves *are also* as we represent them to be; it is a harshly dogmatic insistence that we *can be quite sure* that things as they are in themselves *cannot be* as we represent them to be.”<sup>14</sup> And since space and time are the indispensable elements in our representations of things, he proceeds to identify this idealism with the thesis that “things in themselves, whatever else they may be, *are not* spatial and temporal.”<sup>15</sup>

Although we shall see that Guyer is correct to insist that Kant affirmed the strong thesis of the non-spatiotemporality of things as they are in themselves rather than the weaker thesis that we cannot be sure about the matter, this need not make Kant’s position “harshly dogmatic,” or even dogmatic at all, for that matter. Moreover, since Kant explicitly denies that we *represent* things as they are in themselves as spatial or temporal, Guyer’s claim that for Kant things as they are in themselves are not as we represent them to be is somewhat puzzling.

It is, however, possible to make some sense of this once one understands how Guyer views the concept of the thing in itself. Interestingly enough, this emerges from his dismissive treatment of the two-aspect view (to be discussed below). Although Guyer acknowledges that, except in the special cases of God and the soul, Kant does not “postulate a second set of ghostlike nonspatial and nontemporal objects in addition to the ordinary referents of empirical judgments,” he insists that this is of no avail to defenders of transcendental idealism, since “he does something just as unpleasant—namely, *degrade* ordinary objects

to mere representations of themselves, or identify objects possessing spatial and temporal properties with mere mental entities.”<sup>16</sup> Moreover, Guyer suggests that Kant has no need to postulate a distinct set of objects underlying appearances in order to affirm the non-spatial and non-temporal nature of things in themselves, “because the ontology from which he begins *already* includes two classes of objects, namely things like tables and chairs and our representations of them.”<sup>17</sup>

As Guyer proceeds to make clear, his view is that Kant’s idealism turns on (or consists in) the transference of spatial and temporal properties from the ordinary objects of human experience to appearances, understood as mere representations or mental entities.<sup>18</sup> In short, he accepts the gist of Strawson’s account of how Kant was (mis)led to this disastrous doctrine. Consequently, he thinks that Kant has no need to posit an additional set of objects that are not in space or time. But this suggests that by things in themselves Guyer must understand the ordinary objects of experience, such as tables and chairs, stripped of their spatial and temporal properties. And this is presumably why he claims that for Kant we can know with certainty that things in themselves are *not* as we represent them as being, that is, as in space and time.

Although this conception of the thing itself may seem to be suggested by certain passages in which Kant attempts to illustrate the ideality of appearances by extending the subjectivity of secondary qualities to include the primary ones as well (all of which involve some reference to space and the dynamical conditions of filling it),<sup>19</sup> the conception borders on incoherence if it is taken as anything more than a loose analogy. For it requires us to read Kant as *both* identifying the ordinary objects of human experience with things in themselves *and* denying that these things possess the properties that we supposedly experience them as having.

Guyer is unperturbed by any such incoherence, however, because he does not think it matters. At least he does not think it matters to what he terms Kant’s “transcendental theory of experience,” that is, the claims of the Analogies and especially the Refutation of Idealism, which is all that he finds worth preserving in the *Critique*. Thus, in response to Jacobi’s famous remark that “*without* the presupposition [of the thing in itself] I cannot enter the system, and with that presupposition I cannot remain in it”<sup>20</sup> (to which we shall return in chapter 3), Guyer comments:

One can enter the critical philosophy, or at least the transcendental theory of experience, without the presupposition of the thing in itself, because none of Kant’s argu-

ments for the nonspatiality and nontemporality of things in themselves, certainly none of his arguments from legitimate claims of the transcendental theory of experience, succeeds. Thus one can accept the transcendental theory of experience finally expounded in the analogies of experience and the refutation of idealism without any commitment to dogmatic transcendental idealism.<sup>21</sup>

Whether Kant's arguments for idealism fail, as Guyer suggests, can be decided only by their careful consideration. But it also remains to be seen whether Kant's transcendental theory of experience is really separable from this idealism, when the latter is interpreted in a more sympathetic manner than Guyer is prepared to countenance.<sup>22</sup> As already noted, one of the major concerns of this work is to show that it is not.

*Langton.* Whereas Guyer concedes that there is an idealistic strand in Kant's thought, which he believes to be separable from its defensible core, Rae Langton depicts a Kant who is in all essential respects a robust realist, indeed, a scientific realist in the contemporary sense, suitably equipped with a causal theory of knowledge.<sup>23</sup> Naturally, she does not deny that there are some passages that are not readily amenable to such a reading, but she endeavors to minimize them and to argue that they do not commit Kant to idealism in any significant way.<sup>24</sup> Nevertheless, in sharp contrast to Guyer, she is not dismissive of Kant's distinction between appearances and things in themselves and the denial of the possibility of cognizing the latter. On the contrary, she insists that Kant's "humility" about the cognition of things in themselves is not only compatible with, but actually required by, his realism. Accordingly, in spite of significant differences, Langton is at one with Guyer in rejecting any "anodyne" reading or, as she terms it, "deflationary proposal," regarding such humility.<sup>25</sup>

The starting point of Langton's unabashedly realistic reconstruction of Kant's contrast between appearances and things in themselves, and of the limitation of knowledge to the former, is Strawson's exegetical thesis that humility supposedly follows from receptivity, that is, that the reason things in themselves are unknowable by the human mind is that our cognition is receptive and, therefore, dependent on being affected by the object cognized.<sup>26</sup> But whereas Strawson treats this as a fundamental and unargued premise of the *Critique*, Langton, recognizing that humility does not follow directly from receptivity, acknowledges the need for an additional premise linking the two. In fact, the major aim of her book appears to be to provide such a premise.

This need would be readily acknowledged by more orthodox Kantians, who

tend to locate the required premise in Kant's conception of human sensibility and of space and time as forms thereof. Langton denies, however, that Kant's humility regarding the cognition of things in themselves has anything to do with his views about space and time and their connection with human sensibility.<sup>27</sup> Instead, she locates the missing premise in an anti-Leibnizian metaphysical thesis concerning the irreducibility of relations, which is traceable to some of Kant's earliest writings and which supposedly survives in the *Critique*.

Reduced to its essentials, Langton's reconstruction of Kant's humility argument consists of three steps. The first is the characterization of things in themselves as substances having intrinsic properties and phenomena as relational properties of these substances. The second is the claim that the relations and relational properties of such substances are not reducible to their intrinsic properties. In the more contemporary terms Langton prefers, this means that the relational properties of things do not supervene on their intrinsic properties. The third and final step is just the appeal to receptivity emphasized by Strawson. Since the properties through which things affect us (their causal powers) are merely relational and, as such, do not supervene on their intrinsic properties, and since we must be affected by an object in order to cognize it, it follows that we cannot know its intrinsic properties, which is just the doctrine of humility.<sup>28</sup>

An essential feature of Langton's account is the virtual identification of Kantian things in themselves with Leibnizian monads (substances with intrinsic properties). Moreover, this is certainly a controversial thesis, to say the least. For though, as we shall see, the "critical" Kant has good reasons for characterizing the *concept* of a thing as it is in itself in such a manner, it hardly follows that Kant remained committed to the substantive metaphysical view that reality is composed of such substances. Indeed, this invites the obvious question: How is such a thesis, which is necessary to ground Kantian humility on Langton's reading, compatible with this very humility?

Langton is well aware of this objection, and she attempts to deflect it by appealing to what she takes to be required for the cognition of a thing as it is in itself (if we could have it). In addition she assigns a cognitive function to the pure (as opposed to the schematized) concept of substance. Such cognition, she suggests, would require a capacity to determine a substance by ascribing intrinsic predicates to it, which the human mind is incapable of doing in virtue of the receptive nature of its cognition. Nevertheless, she maintains that this is perfectly consonant with the application to such a thing of the pure concept of substance. As she puts it:

It is compatible with this [the impossibility of knowledge of its intrinsic properties] that one can use the pure concept in a manner which will allow one to assert the existence of substances, and to assert that they must have intrinsic properties: for this use falls short of a use that attempts to determine a thing by ascribing to it particular distinctive and intrinsic predicates.<sup>29</sup>

Although Langton is certainly correct to point out that such a use falls short of the attempt to determine what intrinsic properties a substance possesses, this does not suffice to legitimize the minimal, yet nonetheless metaphysical, use that she wants to allow.<sup>30</sup> In fact, we shall see that Kant explicitly disallows any such use on the grounds that it involves what he terms a “transcendental misemployment” of the categories. But in order to appreciate this, we must first understand the function of the categories as epistemic conditions, which, in turn, rests on a prior understanding of the general concept of such a condition as it relates to discursive cognition.

## II. EPISTEMIC CONDITIONS, DISCURSIVITY, AND TRANSCENDENTAL IDEALITY

By an epistemic condition is here understood a necessary condition for the representation of objects, that is, a condition without which our representations would not relate to objects or, equivalently, possess objective reality. As such, it could also be termed an “objectivating condition,” since it fulfills an objectivating function. As conditions of the possibility of representing objects, epistemic conditions are distinguished from both psychological and ontological conditions. By the former is meant a propensity or mechanism of the mind, which governs belief and belief acquisition. Hume’s custom or habit is a prime example of such a condition. By the latter is meant a condition of the possibility of the existence of things, which conditions these things quite independently of their relation to the human (or any other) mind. Newton’s absolute space and time are conditions in this sense. Epistemic conditions share with the former the property of being “subjective,” that is, they reflect the structure and operations of the human mind. They differ from them with respect to their objectivating function. Correlatively, they share with the latter the property of being objective or objectivating. They differ in that they condition the objectivity of our *representations* of things rather than the very existence of the things themselves. As we shall see, the fundamental problem confronting transcendental idealism is to explain how such conditions can be both subjective and objective or objectivating at once.

This emphasis on an objectivating function is crucial, since not everything that one could regard as a condition of cognition counts as an epistemic condition in the intended sense. Thus, critics intent on denying any link between conditions of cognition and Kant's idealism point to empirical examples, such as the fact that our eyes can perceive things only if they reflect light of a certain wavelength. As a fact about our visual capacities, this is arguably a "condition" of a significant subset of the perceptual cognition of sighted human beings; but this hardly brings with it any idealistic implications. And the same may be said about the other sensory modalities, each of which involves built-in restrictions on the range of data that can be received and processed.<sup>31</sup>

All of this is certainly true, but beside the point. Conditions of this sort are not epistemic in the relevant sense, because they have no objective validity or objectivating function. On the contrary, as with the Humean psychological conditions, an appeal to them presupposes the existence of an objective, spatiotemporal world, the representation of which is supposedly to be explained. Accordingly, it hardly follows from the fact that such conditions do not entail any sort of idealism, that properly epistemic conditions, if there are such, do not do so either.

In fact, the concept of an epistemic condition brings with it an idealistic commitment of at least the indeterminate sort noted at the beginning of this chapter, because it involves the relativization of the *concept* of an object to human cognition and the conditions of its representation of objects. In other words, the claim is not that *things* transcending the conditions of human cognition cannot exist (this would make these conditions ontological rather than epistemic) but merely that such things cannot count as *objects* for us. This also appears to be the sense of Kant's famous "Copernican hypothesis" that objects must "conform to our cognition" (*sich nach unserem Erkenntniss richten*) (Bxvi). As we shall see in chapter 2, this means that objects must conform to the conditions of their representation; not that they exist in the mind in the manner of Berkeleyan ideas or the sense data of phenomenologists.

Nevertheless, this broad concept of an epistemic condition is not sufficient to capture what is distinctive in Kant's transcendental idealism.<sup>32</sup> The latter does not merely relativize the concept of an object to the conditions (whatever they may be) of the representation of objects, it also specifies these conditions by means of an analysis of the discursive nature of human cognition. Consequently, Kant's idealism depends crucially on his conception of human cognition as discursive, what we shall henceforth call the *discursivity thesis*.

Since this thesis will be discussed in some detail in subsequent chapters, it

the discursivity thesis

must here suffice to note that to claim that human cognition is discursive is to claim that it requires both concepts and *sensible* intuition. Without the former there would be no thought and, therefore, no cognition; without the latter there would be nothing to be thought. As Kant puts it in an oft-cited phrase, “Thoughts without content are empty, intuitions without concepts are blind” (A51 / B76).

Although some of Kant’s idealistic successors challenged this thesis, at least insofar as it concerns philosophical knowledge,<sup>33</sup> the reaction of many modern-day analytical commentators, such as Strawson, is quite different. Indeed, for Strawson, the discursivity thesis reduces to the inescapable necessity in any philosophical thinking about experience or empirical knowledge to assume a “duality of general concepts, on the one hand, and particular instances of general concepts, encountered in experience, on the other.”<sup>34</sup> Accordingly, for him the problem lies in the fact that Kant did not rest content with this plain truth; instead, interpreting it psychologically (or at least expressing it in a psychological idiom), he linked each condition to a distinct cognitive faculty. But with this he was led to that “disastrous model” in which the mind is viewed as imposing its forms on things.<sup>35</sup>

We shall see, however, that this dismissive treatment ignores certain essential features of Kant’s account. In particular, it ignores the fact (to be explored in chapter 2) that since the discursivity thesis was denied (at least as an account of adequate cognition) by Kant’s predecessors, both rationalist and empiricist, it cannot be the innocuous, non-controversial thesis that Strawson takes it to be.<sup>36</sup>

Admittedly, Kant himself is not completely innocent on this score. At least part of the problem is that he tends to argue from rather than for the discursivity thesis, thereby suggesting that he viewed it as an unquestioned presupposition or starting point rather than as something that itself stands in need of justification. Nevertheless, at least the outline of an argument for this thesis is implicit in the *Critique*.<sup>37</sup>

The underlying assumption of this argument, which can be sketched here only in the baldest terms, is that cognition requires that an object somehow be given to the mind. In Kant’s terminology, this means that it must be present (or presentable) in intuition, by which he understands a singular representation that is immediately related to its object (A320 / B377).<sup>38</sup> Although Kant never says so explicitly, this appears to be a general claim, applicable to both divine or intuitive and human or discursive cognition. Kant further assumes that there are only two conceivable types of intuition: sensible and non-sensible or intellectual. But since the latter, as Kant conceives of it, requires the actual genera-

tion of the object through the act of intuiting, that is, a creative intuition, it is ruled out for human cognizers as incompatible with our finitude.<sup>39</sup>

It follows from this that our intuition and, more generally, that of any finite cognizer, must be sensible, that is, receptive, resulting from an affection of the mind by objects. This is still not sufficient to establish the discursivity thesis, however, since the latter explicitly affirms the active, *conceptual* nature of cognition, not merely its dependence on receptivity. In fact, empiricists like Berkeley and Hume, with their basically imagistic account of thinking, would readily grant receptivity, while denying discursivity. Consequently, the full argument for this thesis requires the additional premise that sensible intuition alone is not *sufficient* to yield cognition of objects, that it provides the data for such cognition but does not itself amount to cognition.

Since this anti-empiricist premise regarding the constitutive role of the understanding is the central claim of the Transcendental Analytic, it cannot be examined here. Nevertheless, it is important to note that it carries with it a twofold lesson for the understanding of Kant's theory of sensibility. On the one hand, as we have just seen, it entails that sensibility is merely receptive and, therefore, capable only of providing the raw data for cognition (otherwise the spontaneity of the understanding would not be required). On the other hand, and somewhat surprisingly, it also means that the very possibility of discursive cognition requires that the data be presented by sensibility in a manner suitable for conceptualization. Accordingly, even though sensibility does not itself order the given data, that being the task of the understanding, or, more properly, the imagination, it must present them in such a way that they are "capable of being ordered" (A29 / B34).<sup>40</sup> And the latter, it will be argued, provides the basis for Kant's idealism.

The crucial point is that for Kant this original orderability, as well as the actual ordering, is a contribution of the cognitive subject and that this marks his decisive break with empiricistic (as well as rationalistic) accounts of sensibility. Kant already hints at this in his initial account of receptivity in the Transcendental Aesthetic, where he defines it or sensibility (he equates the two) as "the capacity [*Fähigkeit*] to acquire representations through the way [*die Art*] in which we are affected by objects" (A19 / B33). As this definition clearly indicates, sensibility involves not merely a capacity for being affected by objects, and, therefore, for receiving sensory data, but also for being affected in a "certain way" or "manner" (*Art*). This means that the way in which sensibility presents its data to the understanding for its conceptualization already reflects a particular manner of receiving it, that is, a certain form of sensibly intuiting,

which is determined by the nature of human sensibility rather than by the affecting objects. Moreover, as we shall see later, this form of sensibly intuiting conditions the possibility of its ordering by the understanding.

Admittedly, the connection of this account of sensibility with the discursivity thesis is not immediately apparent. For it might very well seem that the spontaneity of the understanding could operate on raw sensible data, which are unencumbered by any *a priori* forms or conditions. Nevertheless, a closer consideration suggests that this is not the case, at least not if we understand discursivity in the Kantian sense, as requiring the joint contribution of sensibility and understanding.

There appear to be two possible ways in which such a scenario might be understood, neither of which yields a viable account of discursivity. One is to view sensibility as presenting to the understanding objects as they are in themselves (not as they appear in virtue of subjective conditions of sensibility). This is the traditional pre-Kantian view, and the problem is that under this scenario thought would have to be viewed either with Leibniz as exercising merely a clarificatory function (bringing conceptual clarity and distinctness to what the senses present obscurely), with Locke as creating its own “nominal essences” (the “workmanship of the understanding”), which are of pragmatic value but do not provide genuine cognition, or with Hume as copying lively impressions in the dimmer medium of ideas. But in none of these cases is there room for any genuine spontaneity or, as Kant sometimes put it, a “real use of the understanding.”

Alternatively, in order to find room for the latter, one might assume that what is given “in itself” are not objects but the data for the thought of objects that must still be unified by the understanding to yield full-fledged cognition. In short, we would have the Transcendental Analytic without the Transcendental Aesthetic (a prospect that might seem attractive to many Kant interpreters, including Strawson and Guyer). But, in spite of its superficial attractiveness, it seems clear that Kant would not find it appealing. For the only sense that could be made of the idea that the sensible data for the thought of objects (as contrasted with the objects thought) present themselves as they are in themselves is that the successive temporal order of their appearing is one that pertains to them as they are in themselves (independently of their relation to human sensibility). In that case, however, it is difficult to see how thought could gain any purchase on the world or any claim to objectivity. To anticipate the argument of the Analogies, there would be no room for an objective ordering of states and events as distinct from a subjective ordering of perceptions. Either the two or-

ders would simply coincide, which amounts to phenomenism, or there would be no way, short of metaphysical assumptions, such as a pre-established harmony, for getting from the one to the other, which leads either to skepticism or to an ungrounded dogmatism. Thus, paradoxically enough, it is precisely the *denial* that sensibility makes an autonomous *a priori* contribution to cognition that entails these unattractive options.

Like much else in this preliminary discussion, the above is a substantive and controversial thesis that will be further explored in the body of this work. What must be emphasized at present is simply that, assuming the correctness of the preceding analysis, we have the basis for an understanding of transcendental idealism that is rooted in Kantian epistemology rather than a pre-critical metaphysics, and that is for this reason far more philosophically attractive than the dismissive criticisms of it lead one to believe.

As I shall argue at greater length, this epistemologically based understanding of transcendental idealism requires that the transcendental distinction between appearances and things in themselves be understood as holding between two ways of *considering* things (as they appear and as they are in themselves) rather than as, on the more traditional reading, between two ontologically distinct sets of entities (appearances and things in themselves). In this regard, it may be characterized as a “two-aspect” reading. Nevertheless, this label requires careful qualification in order to avoid serious misunderstanding. The basic problem is that dual- (or multi-) aspect theories are themselves usually metaphysical in nature. In fact, they typically arise in connection with treatments of the mind-body problem, where some version of “dual aspectism” is sometimes proposed as a viable alternative to both dualism and materialism.<sup>41</sup> The classical example of such a metaphysical dual-aspect theory is Spinoza’s account of the mind as constituting one and the same thing as the body.<sup>42</sup> Perhaps the best known contemporary version of it is Davidson’s “anomalous monism,” which because of its assertion of a token-token identity between physical and mental states has been suggested as a model for interpreting Kant’s transcendental idealism.<sup>43</sup>

The main problem with attempting to interpret transcendental idealism on the basis of such a metaphysical model is that it loses sight of its fundamentally epistemological thrust, which is itself the result of approaching it independently of the discursivity thesis. As was argued above, this thesis entails that sensibility must have *some a priori* forms (though not that they be space and time). Accordingly, in considering things as they appear, we are considering them in the way in which they are presented to discursive knowers with our forms of sensibility. Conversely, to consider them as they are in themselves is to

consider them apart from their epistemic relation to these forms or epistemic conditions, which, if it is to have any content, must be equivalent to considering them qua objects for some pure intelligence or “mere understanding.”<sup>44</sup> It is the qualitative (transcendental) distinction between the sensible and the intellectual conditions of discursive cognition that makes this dual manner of consideration possible, just as it is the dependence of thought on sensibility for its content that prevents the latter mode of consideration from amounting to cognition.

When Kant’s distinction is understood in this way, the claim that we can cognize things only as they appear, not as they are themselves, need not be taken (as it was, for example, by Prichard) to mean that we can know only how things seem to us under certain conditions or through a “veil of perception.” Rather, such cognition is fully objective, since it is governed by *a priori* epistemic conditions. It is only that, as discursive, human knowledge differs in kind, not merely in degree, from that which might be had by a putative pure understanding.

Of course, such a pure understanding, which is usually identified with the divine or intuitive intellect, is a mere fiction for Kant, or as he puts it, a “problematic concept.” Nevertheless, this does not render reference to it otiose, since Kant’s real point is that the human understanding proceeds *as if* it were such a pure understanding, whenever its thought outreaches the limits imposed by sensibility. And it can do this because understanding and sensibility make distinct contributions to cognition, each being governed by its own conditions. Thus, in spite of what some of Kant’s formulations suggest, the thought (by the pure understanding) of things as they are in themselves is not *completely* empty; it has a certain content. At the same time, however, this content is of a merely logical nature, since it is derived from a use of the categories apart from the sensible conditions (schemata) that realize them; and such a use for Kant is itself merely logical (rather than real). Otherwise expressed, a consideration of things by means of pure categories (as some putative pure understanding might think them) is capable of yielding analytic judgments concerning the implications of the concepts of things so considered, but not synthetic *a priori* knowledge of the things themselves.<sup>45</sup>

Moreover, from this we can see a bit more concretely just what is wrong with Langton’s proposed route to humility via receptivity, without any appeal to idealism. The basic problem is her neglect of the discursivity thesis, in terms of which the specific contribution of human sensibility is to be understood. First, in neglecting this thesis, she is inevitably led to misconstrue the epistemic role

of receptivity or affection for Kant. Instead, interpreting the latter in strictly causal (rather than epistemic) terms, she fails to see how for Kant (in contrast to the empiricists) receptivity brings along its own form or manner of being affected. Second, as a result of neglecting the same thesis, she mistakenly takes the *thought* of things as they are in themselves, by the pure (unschematized) concept of substance, to be at least minimally informative about the *nature* of such things. Thus, on her view we can know *that* things as they are in themselves are genuine substances consisting of merely intrinsic properties, with the humility consisting only in our inability to know what these properties are. But this is to ignore completely the purely analytic nature of such claims, which, as such, are capable of illuminating how a discursive intelligence is constrained to conceive of things so considered, but not their real nature (the latter requiring intuition as well as thought).

Conversely, focusing on the discursivity thesis makes it clear that true Kantian humility cannot bypass transcendental idealism, because it is a consequence of this thesis that the thought of things as they are in themselves abstracts from an essential condition of human cognition. Since thought can abstract from this condition, it can *consider* things as they are in themselves, that is, form a concept of things so considered. But for the very same reason, such thought does not amount to genuine (synthetic) knowledge, though it is not thereby necessarily trivial or tautologous.

The next two chapters will expand upon these claims, first approaching transcendental idealism obliquely by considering it in relation to the transcendental realism to which Kant opposes it, and then analyzing in some detail such central concepts as the thing in itself (or as it is in itself), the noumenon, the transcendental object, and affection. Before we turn to these topics, however, it may prove instructive to consider the objection that an “anodyne” interpretation of transcendental idealism amounts to a trivialization of it.

Although this criticism has been raised by both Guyer and Langton, it will suffice to consider the latter’s version, which is more directly related to the issues that have been discussed here. Her major complaint seems to be that, on my reading, Kantian humility is trivialized, because it is reduced to an analytic consequence of the definition of “a thing considered as it is in itself.” Since to consider a thing in this way is just to consider it in abstraction from the conditions of our cognition, it becomes trivially true that we can have no knowledge of things so considered. But she also thinks that this cannot be correct as an interpretation of Kant, since he viewed the humility thesis as a major philosophical discovery (not a trivial inference), and a “depressing” one at that.<sup>46</sup>

That Kant viewed the transcendental distinction between things as they appear and the same things as they are in themselves as a major philosophical discovery is undeniable. It is likewise undeniable that he regarded the limitation of cognition to the former as a consequence of this distinction. Nevertheless, it would be more accurate to say that he viewed this limitation as liberating or therapeutic rather than as depressing. As we shall see in connection with the discussion of the Transcendental Dialectic, Kant thought that this limitation provides the only means to avoid being deceived by an illusion that is inherent in the very nature of human reason (transcendental illusion). More to the present point, however, that a conclusion follows analytically, once a distinction is in place, does not render it trivial. This would follow only if the distinction in question were itself obvious or trivial. But this is far from the case with the transcendental distinction, which, it will be argued, rests upon a radical reconceptualization of human knowledge as based on *a priori* conditions (epistemic conditions).

In sum, rather than being, in Guyer's dismissive phrase, "an anodyne recommendation of epistemological modesty," transcendental idealism, as here understood, is a bold, even revolutionary, theory of epistemic conditions. This, of course, is not to prejudge either the validity of this interpretation or the viability of transcendental idealism so understood. It is, however, to claim, pace both Guyer and Langton, that there is nothing trivial about it.

## **Chapter 2 Transcendental Realism and Transcendental Idealism**

The previous chapter approached transcendental idealism more or less directly. The goal was to define this idealism, at least in a preliminary fashion, by locating its foundations in the specific conditions of discursive cognition. It was claimed that this location both provided a warrant for drawing the transcendental distinction between things considered as they appear and as they are thought in themselves, and justified the limitation of knowledge to the former (what Langton calls “Kantian humility”). The present chapter takes a more indirect route to the same end. The strategy is to interpret transcendental idealism by means of the transcendental realism that Kant opposes to it. This approach is based on the hermeneutical principle that often the best way to understand a philosophical position is to become clear about what it denies. It derives added justification from the fact that Kant appears to regard these two forms of transcendentalism as mutually exclusive and exhaustive metaphysical alternatives.<sup>1</sup> The chapter is divided into three parts: the first considers transcendental realism in its various guises; the second investigates the nature of tran-

scendental idealism, viewed as the single alternative to this realism; and the third considers two objections to this interpretation of transcendental idealism.

### I. THE NATURE OF TRANSCENDENTAL REALISM

The first difficulty confronting the strategy adopted here is that the significance attributed to transcendental realism seems to be belied by the relative paucity of references to it in the text. One would normally expect to find a conception of such alleged importance analyzed in great detail and subjected to a searching critique. But, apart from the bald claim that such a realism would undermine the possibility of both nature and freedom (A543 / B571), it is explicitly referred to in only two other places in the *Critique*. Both are in the Transcendental Dialectic, and in each case Kant contrasts it with transcendental idealism. The first is in the first-edition version of the Fourth Paralogism. Kant's concern there is to refute empirical idealism, which he contrasts with his own transcendental version. In this context he writes:

I understand by the **transcendental idealism** of all appearances the doctrine that they are all together to be regarded as mere representations and not as things in themselves, and accordingly that time and space are only sensible forms of our intuition, but not determinations given for themselves or conditions of objects as things in themselves. To this idealism is opposed **transcendental realism**, which regards space and time as something given in themselves (independent of our sensibility). The transcendental realist therefore interprets outer appearances (if their reality is conceded) as things in themselves, which would exist independently of us and of our sensibility and thus would also be outside us according to pure concepts of the understanding. It is really this transcendental realist who afterwards plays the empirical idealist; and after he has falsely presupposed about objects of the senses that if they are to exist they must have their existence in themselves even apart from sense, he finds that from this point of view all our representations of sense are insufficient to make their reality certain. [A369]

Kant is here arguing that transcendental realism leads to empirical idealism, which is the doctrine that the mind can have immediate access only to its own ideas or representations, that is, the familiar Cartesian-Lockean theory of ideas. His basic point is that, because this form of realism regards "outer appearances" (spatial objects) as things in themselves, it is forced to concede that the existence of such objects is problematic, since the mind has no immediate access to them. Transcendental realism is thus presented as the source of the pseudo-

problem of the external world and of the typically Cartesian version of skepticism associated with it.

The second passage is from the Antinomy of Pure Reason. There Kant defines transcendental idealism as the doctrine that “all objects of an experience possible for us are nothing but appearances, i.e., mere representations, which, as they are represented, as extended beings or series of alterations, have outside our thoughts no existence grounded in itself.” In contrast to this, the transcendental realist is said to make “these modifications of our sensibility into things subsisting in themselves, and hence makes mere representations into things in themselves” (A490–91 / B518–19).

Both of these passages indicate that the defining characteristic of transcendental realism is its confusion of appearances, or “mere representations,” with things in themselves. The first limits this charge to objects of “outer perception” (empirically external, spatial objects), although it does connect this realism with the conception of time as well as space as given in themselves, independently of our sensibility. This emphasis on space and outer experience no doubt reflects Kant’s concern at that point with empirical idealism and its connection with transcendental realism. The second passage, which does not reflect this particular concern, goes somewhat further by presenting transcendental realism as the view that considers *all appearances*, those of inner sense as well as those of outer sense, as if they were things in themselves. Clearly, the latter passage expresses Kant’s considered view on the subject. Since it is a central tenet of the *Critique* that inner as well as outer sense present us with objects as they appear, not as they are in themselves, transcendental realism manifests itself as much in a confused view of the former as of the latter.

This of itself should make it clear that the usual interpretation of transcendental realism as equivalent to the scientific realism of the Cartesians and Newtonians (roughly what Berkeley meant by “materialism”) is far too narrow.<sup>2</sup> Although Kant only infrequently makes use of the expression, he repeatedly accuses philosophers of a variety of stripes of treating appearances as if they were things in themselves or, equivalently, of granting “absolute” or “transcendental” reality to appearances.<sup>3</sup> Indeed, at one place in the *Critique* he terms this confusion the “common prejudice” (A740 / B768), while at another he refers to the “common but fallacious presupposition of the absolute reality of appearances” (A536 / B564). Moreover, this claim is found in even stronger form in other texts. In fact, he goes so far as to assert that prior to the *Critique* the confusion was unavoidable (Fort 20: 287; 377) and even that “until the crit-

ical philosophy all philosophies are not distinguished in their essentials" (Fort 20: 335; 413).

Such statements support the contention that the transcendental distinction between appearances and things in themselves or, more properly, between things as they appear and the same things as they are in themselves, functions as the great divide in the Kantian conception of philosophy. Only the "critical philosophy" has succeeded in getting this distinction right. As a result, despite their many interesting differences, all of the others are at bottom nothing more than variant expressions of the same underlying confusion.

Admittedly, such a sweeping claim, by which all previous and most succeeding philosophies are painted with one brush, seems highly suspicious on the face of it. Accordingly, before considering it in detail, it may be useful to keep in mind that Kant explicitly made a parallel claim regarding the significance of his contribution to the subject in the area of moral philosophy. Thus, in both the *Groundwork* and the *Critique of Practical Reason*, in introducing autonomy as the supreme principle of the possibility of the categorical imperative, Kant contrasts the principle of autonomy with that of heteronomy and maintains that all previous moral theories were committed to the latter.<sup>4</sup> The present suggestion, then, is that transcendental realism, understood as the point of view that systematically identifies appearances with things in themselves, be assigned the same role in Kant's theoretical philosophy that he assigned to heteronomy in his moral philosophy. In other words, it constitutes the common assumption, standpoint, prejudice, or confusion shared by all philosophers who do not adhere to the critical view.<sup>5</sup>

#### A. Some Varieties of Transcendental Realism

The best way to test this suggestion is to see the extent to which it is applicable to various "noncritical" philosophies. It should be noted, however, that in so doing we shall explicitly be viewing these philosophies through Kantian spectacles. The question is not whether the charge that they confuse appearances with things in themselves is "fair" according to some independent standard of evaluation. It is rather whether, given Kant's assumptions, it is reasonable to view these philosophies in such a manner.

To begin with, we have already seen that Kant maintains that empirical idealism is a form of transcendental realism, which arises from the recognition of the fact that the human mind has no direct access to the putatively "real" things, that is, to physical objects construed as things in themselves. This recog-

nition, in turn, leads to the claim of Descartes and his followers that the only objects of which we are immediately aware are ideas in the mind. Such idealism, together with its skeptical consequences, is, therefore, the result of an implicit commitment to transcendental realism. Kant's first-edition version of the *Refutation of Idealism* turns on this point. As he succinctly puts the matter:

If we let outer objects count as things in themselves, then it is absolutely impossible to comprehend how we are to acquire cognition of their reality outside us [*ausser uns*], since we base this merely on the representation, which is in us [*in uns*]. For one cannot have sensation outside oneself, but only in oneself, and the whole of self-consciousness therefore provides nothing other than merely our own determinations. [A378]

At first glance this seems reminiscent of Berkeley's critique of "materialism," and it has frequently been taken in just this way.<sup>6</sup> On this reading, Kant, like Berkeley, succeeds in avoiding skepticism only by identifying the "real" with the immediate objects of consciousness. It should be apparent from our preliminary discussion in the previous chapter, however, that such a reading constitutes a gross distortion of Kant's position, since it ignores its explicitly transcendental thrust.

This thrust is most clearly evident in Kant's disambiguation of the key terms '*in uns*' and '*ausser uns*'. As he points out, these can be taken in either an empirical or a transcendental sense (A373). Taken in the former way, they mark a contrast between how objects are experienced: either as temporally located objects of inner sense or as extended, spatially located objects of outer sense. Taken in the latter way, they contrast two manners in which objects can be considered in relation to the conditions of human sensibility. From this transcendental standpoint, things may be viewed as *in uns* (or even as "mere representations") insofar as they are regarded as subject to the sensible conditions of cognition (space and time) or, equivalently, as phenomena or objects of possible experience. They are regarded as *ausser uns* insofar as they are thought independently of these conditions "as they are in themselves."<sup>7</sup>

Viewed in the light of this distinction, the form of transcendental realism that results in empirical or skeptical idealism is guilty of a kind of category mistake. Specifically, it takes the merely empirically external (spatial) objects to be *ausser uns* in the transcendental sense. Or, more properly, it fails to distinguish between these two senses of being *ausser uns*. And from this the transcendental realist concludes correctly that the human mind has no direct cognitive access to objects so considered. The mistake here is not in assuming that things exist

independently of their relation to the conditions of human sensibility (Kant likewise assumes this); it is rather in assuming that things existing in this way retain their spatiotemporal properties and relations. Thus, by linking Cartesian skeptical idealism to transcendental realism, Kant shows not only how transcendental idealism provides the solution, but also how it supplies the means for diagnosing the problem.

Nevertheless, not all forms of transcendental realism are committed to empirical idealism and the skepticism it engenders. A prime example of a transcendently realistic mode of thought that is not is that of the Newtonians or “mathematical students of nature.” As I have already suggested, their conception of absolute space and time amounts to treating the latter as ontological (rather than epistemic) conditions, which is equivalent to viewing them (as well as the things in them) as *ausser uns* in the transcendental sense.

We shall see that similar considerations apply also to Leibniz, whom Kant explicitly accuses of taking appearances as things in themselves (A264 / B320). In order to test the thesis that the label “transcendental realism” is applicable to all noncritical philosophies, however, the most pertinent examples are obviously the phenomenalist views of Berkeley and Hume.<sup>8</sup> For if even these thinkers can be shown to have confused appearances with things in themselves, it can be claimed with some justice that the confusion is virtually universal.

To begin with, Kant views Berkeley’s “dogmatic idealism” as in a certain sense the logical outcome of the absurdities inherent in the Newtonian conceptions of absolute space and time as ontological conditions.<sup>9</sup> As he puts it in a second-edition addendum to the Transcendental Aesthetic:

For if one regards space and time as properties that, as far as their possibility is concerned, must be encountered in things in themselves, and reflects on the absurdities in which one then becomes entangled, because two infinite things that are neither substances nor anything really inhering in substances must nevertheless be something existing, indeed the necessary condition of the existence of all things, which also remain even if all existing things are removed; then one cannot well blame the good Berkeley if he demotes bodies to mere illusion; indeed even our own existence, which would be made dependent in such a way on the self-subsisting reality of a non-entity such as time, would be transformed along with this into mere illusion; an absurdity of which no one has yet allowed himself to be guilty. [B70–71]<sup>10</sup>

Since we have seen that the Newtonian conception is itself transcendently realistic, it follows that Berkeley’s denial of material substance, which Kant dismissively glosses as “demot[ing] bodies to mere illusion,” should be viewed as at

least an indirect offshoot of such realism. As such, it stands to Newtonian absolute space and time roughly as empirical idealism stands to Cartesian *res extensa*. In other words, it is a form of subjectivism or idealism to which one is driven on the basis of certain transcendently realistic assumptions.

Further consideration, however, suggests that Berkeley's position is not merely an indirect offshoot of transcendental realism; it is also itself transcendently realistic, because, like other forms of such realism, it regards Kantian appearances as *ausser uns* in the transcendental sense. Admittedly, this may seem paradoxical in the extreme, since on Kant's scheme Berkeleyan ideas are *in uns* in the empirical sense. But the paradox disappears if one keeps in mind that to be *ausser uns* in the transcendental sense just means to exist independently of the conditions of human sensibility. Accordingly, there is no incompatibility between being *in uns* in the empirical and *ausser uns* in the transcendental sense. In fact, this is precisely the status that Kant assigns to inner appearances or objects of inner sense. The problem, though, is that Berkeley's idealism inverts the true order of things by attributing this status to *outer* appearances.

Although this analysis goes beyond what Kant says about Berkeley, it finds strong confirmation in a similar claim that he makes about Hume (which seems equally applicable to Berkeley). The crucial passage occurs in the *Critique of Practical Reason*, where, by way of summarizing some of the essential tenets of the first *Critique*, Kant reflects:

When Hume took objects of experience as things in themselves (as is done almost everywhere), he was quite correct in declaring the concept of cause to be deceptive and a false illusion; for, as to things in themselves and the determinations of them as such, it cannot be seen why, because something, A, is posited, something else, B, must necessarily be posited also, and thus he could certainly not admit such an *a priori* cognition of things in themselves. (KpV 5: 53; 182)

Since Kant was well aware that Hume characterized the objects of human awareness as "impressions," we are led to ask why he should claim that Hume viewed them as things in themselves. Kant's point, of course, is not that Hume thought he was doing anything of the sort but, rather, that this is what his position amounts to, when considered from a transcendental perspective. Moreover, for Kant this is the consequence of Hume's failure to recognize the existence of *a priori* forms of sensibility through which the mind receives its impressions.<sup>11</sup> Since, as the passage goes on to suggest, Hume did not recognize any such *a priori* forms, he could not acknowledge the possibility of any *a priori* rules of synthesis through which impressions are brought to the unity of

consciousness. In the absence of such rules, however, there is no reason why, given object (or impression) A, something else, object (or impression) B, must likewise be given; and this, as Kant sees it, is the source of Hume's skeptical doubts concerning causality.<sup>12</sup>

Although this raises important questions concerning Kant's critique of Hume, with which we shall be concerned later, our present focus must be limited to the implications of Kant's analysis for the understanding of transcendental realism. Moreover, here the implication is clear. Notwithstanding their subjectivist accounts of the objects of human awareness, both Berkeley and Hume may be said to view appearances *as if* they were things in themselves, because they deny any *a priori* contribution of sensibility to the cognition of these appearances. Accordingly, they regard spatiotemporal objects (Kantian appearances) as *ausser uns* in the transcendental sense, while at the same time treating them (erroneously from Kant's point of view) as *in uns* in the empirical sense. Thus, they are both transcendental realists.

### **B. Transcendental Realism and the Theocentric Model of Knowledge**

When we combine this result with that of the previous chapter, it seems clear that what all forms of transcendental realism have in common may be negatively expressed as a failure or, to put it less tendentiously, a refusal, to recognize that human cognition rests on *a priori* conditions of sensibility, which structure the way in which the mind receives its sensory data. Moreover, if the earlier analysis is correct, this is tantamount to a failure to acknowledge the discursive nature of human cognition. Thus, transcendental realism goes hand in hand with the rejection of the discursivity thesis.

This rejection is reflected in the downgrading of conceptual representation by both rationalism and empiricism. The underlying complaint is that, in virtue of its generality, such representation is at best partial and abstract; and, as such, it fails to grasp objects in their full concreteness.<sup>13</sup> From the rationalist side, this is expressed in the contrast drawn by Spinoza between the second and third kinds of cognition (discursive cognition or *ratio* and intuitive cognition or *scientia intuitiva*), of which only the latter is judged capable of grasping the essence of individual things.<sup>14</sup> Among the empiricists, it largely takes the form of a worry about abstract ideas, which, quite apart from the psychological question of the possibility of forming them, are likewise deemed inadequate to apprehend an object as it is in itself.<sup>15</sup>

Nevertheless, it will not suffice to define transcendental realism in purely

negative terms, since it fails to indicate the sense in which this realism constitutes a consistent standpoint, shared by a wide variety of distinct philosophical positions. Thus, for all that we have seen so far, it might seem that it is nothing more than a label invented by Kant to encompass everything to which he was opposed. But if this is the case, it further seems that the project of attempting to understand transcendental idealism in terms of its contrast to such realism is doomed to failure.

Consequently, it is crucial to characterize transcendental realism in a positive manner, and the suggestion is that this is best accomplished by defining it in terms of a commitment to a theocentric paradigm or model of cognition.<sup>16</sup> To reiterate a point made previously, since cognition (of whatever sort) requires that its object somehow be “given” to the mind, the denial of discursivity requires the assumption that the objects themselves (and as they are in themselves), not merely the data for thinking them, be so given. Thus, if, as empirical idealism avers, objects are not given (but only inferred), skepticism inevitably ensues. But since the only kind of intuition that could supply the objects themselves is intellectual, which is traditionally thought to characterize a divine or infinite intellect, it follows that transcendental realism is committed to a theocentric paradigm in virtue of its denial of discursivity. In fact, these are merely two sides of the same coin.

This claim, however, must be qualified in at least two essential respects. First, the point is not that Kant either thought that transcendental realism is committed to the existence of an intuitive intellect or that he assumed that all such realists assert the cognizability of things as they in themselves in the sense in which he understands the notion. It is rather that the idea of such an intellect functions as an implicit norm in the light of which human cognition is analyzed and measured. Since, *ex hypothesi*, such an intellect cognizes things as they are in themselves, it follows that any account of human cognition that appeals to this model (even if only implicitly) also assumes that its proper objects are things as they are in themselves. Second, Kant is not suggesting that the transcendental realist must hold that human beings actually possess intellectual intuition, or even some pale imitation thereof. Although there may be hints of such a view in certain rationalists, it is totally antithetical to empiricism in any form. The main point is rather that this realism considers our *sensible* intuition as if it were *intellectual*, because it tacitly assumes that, insofar as our intuition acquaints us with objects at all, it acquaints us with them as they are in themselves.

The theocentric model, with its ideal of an eternalistic, God's-eye view of

things, is the common heritage of the Platonic tradition, but it is particularly evident in the great rationalists of the seventeenth century.<sup>17</sup> One thinks in this connection of Malebranche, who claimed that we “see all things in God,” and again of Spinoza, who maintained that the goal of human cognition is to view things *sub specie aeternitatis*.<sup>18</sup> It is also central to Leibniz, however, and, as I shall argue, provides the key to understanding both his form of transcendental realism and Kant’s critique thereof.

Moreover, in spite of their essentially psychological orientation, it is clear from their views on conceptual representation that the empiricists were also committed to this model. Although most apparent in Berkeley, who was something of a Platonist, it is also equally true of Locke and Hume. But since the transcendently realistic dimension of Hume’s thought has already been noted, the discussion will focus on Locke, in whom the connection between this model and his views on conceptuality is particularly perspicuous. Finally, in an effort to underscore the prevalence of this model and to provide a further basis for understanding the nature of Kant’s “Copernican revolution,” it will be shown that it also underlies Kant’s own pre-critical thought.

*Leibniz.* Leibniz’s appeal to the theocentric model is quite explicit and has often been noted in the literature.<sup>19</sup> Following Augustine and Malebranche, Leibniz depicts the divine understanding as the realm of eternal truths, and he claims that it is there that one finds “the pattern of the ideas and truths which are engraved in our souls.”<sup>20</sup> This is not to say that the human mind for Leibniz is infinite, or that it is somehow capable of thinking “God’s thoughts.” On the contrary, he constantly emphasizes the insurmountable limits of human knowledge and explains these in terms of the confusedness of our representations, which is itself seen as a consequence of our finitude. The point, however, is not that human knowledge is infinite, or even often adequate, for Leibniz; it is rather that it approaches adequacy as it approaches divine knowledge. Thus, despite the infinite difference in degree or scope, Leibnizian rationalism assumes a commensurability or similarity in kind between human and divine knowledge.<sup>21</sup>

This assumption underlies Leibniz’s claim that in any true proposition the predicate is contained in the concept of the subject. Leibniz’s adherence to this principle leads him to regard demonstration as requiring reduction to identity. He thinks that this is quite possible for arithmetical propositions and possible, at least in principle, for the axioms of Euclidean geometry. Moreover, he holds that this principle is applicable not only to necessary truths or “truths of reason,” which are true in all possible worlds, but also to contingent truths or

“truths of fact,” which hold only in the actual world. As Leibniz puts it at one point, this is because “it is the nature of an individual substance or complete being to have a concept so complete that it is sufficient to make us understand and deduce from it all the predicates of the subject to which the concept is attached.”<sup>22</sup> Since the complete concept of an individual substance involves an infinity of elements, and since a finite mind is incapable of infinite analysis, the human intellect can never arrive at such a conception. As a result, it cannot demonstrate or deduce truths of fact. Nevertheless, such truths remain cognizable in principle, that is, for God, who is capable of an intuitive grasp of the infinite. Expressed in Kantian terms, this means that all propositions are ultimately analytic and that the syntheticity of truths of fact is merely a function of the limits of analysis, not of the nature of the propositions themselves.

These considerations better enable us to grasp the main outlines of Kant’s critique of Leibniz and to understand the claim that the latter took appearances for things in themselves. Much of Kant’s quarrel with Leibniz and his followers turns on the closely related conceptions of sensibility and appearance. By and large, Kant defines his philosophy vis à vis Leibniz’s in terms of their different understanding of these conceptions. He claims that Leibniz and his followers “falsified” both conceptions, and he sees this as the direct result of their understanding of the distinction between the “sensible” and the “intelligible.” Instead of viewing the difference between these two elements of human cognition as “transcendental,” that is, as a difference of origin, content, and kind, they regard it as merely “logical,” that is, as a difference of degree of clarity and distinctness of the representations.<sup>23</sup> All of this is captured by the claim that Leibniz (here contrasted with Locke), “intellectualized appearances” (A271 / B327). To “intellectualize appearances” for Kant is to abstract from their irreducibly sensible (spatiotemporal) character. But since this character is a defining feature of a Kantian appearance, while independence of it is a defining feature of a thing as it is in itself, it can easily be seen that this is equivalent to mistaking the former for the latter.

In his response to Eberhard, Kant makes it clear that the heart of the difficulty with Leibnizianism is that it fails to recognize that human sensibility has its own *a priori* forms or conditions (space and time), which serve to determine positively the nature and relations of the objects of human experience.<sup>24</sup> That is why Leibnizians regard sensible (perceptual) knowledge of appearances merely as a confused version of the purely intellectual knowledge obtained by God. Consequently, all of the sensible components of human experience, including spatiotemporal relations, are deemed reducible (for God) to the purely intellectual

(logical) determinations that pertain to things in themselves (monads). This view of sensible cognition is, however, the logical consequence of Leibniz's appeal to the theocentric model of knowledge and thus of his transcendental realism. It is, therefore, the latter that is the real object of Kant's critique.<sup>25</sup>

*Locke.* Although not as prominent, Locke's appeal to the theocentric model is just as real as Leibniz's. Perhaps the best example of this is his much discussed distinction between nominal and real essence. By the nominal essence of a substance, really of a "sort," Locke understands the complex idea of that sort. This idea, like all general ideas for Locke, is due to the "workmanship of the understanding," which forms it on the basis of the experience of a number of resembling particulars. Such ideas therefore constitute the senses of sortal terms. The real essence, by contrast, is the inner nature or "real constitution" of a thing. Locke uses the example of gold to illustrate this distinction. "The nominal essence of gold," he tells us, "is that complex idea the word gold stands for, let it be, for instance, a body yellow of a certain weight, malleable, fusible and fixed;" whereas its real essence is characterized as "the constitution of the insensible parts of that body, on which those qualities and all other properties of gold depend."<sup>26</sup>

As products of the human understanding, sortal concepts or nominal essences are clear exemplars of conceptual representations. But what makes this particularly interesting for our purposes is that Locke correlates the distinction between the two kinds of essence with the distinction between divine and human knowledge. A nice illustration of this is his analysis of the "essence" of man. After briefly categorizing those features that are contained in the complex ideas constituting the nominal essence of man, Locke writes in a memorable passage:

The foundation of all those qualities which are the ingredients of our complex idea, is something quite different: and had we such a knowledge of that constitution of man, from which his faculties of moving, sensation, and reasoning, and other powers flow, and on which his so regular shape depends, as it is possible angels have, and it is certain his Maker has, we should have a quite other idea of his essence than what now is contained in our definition of that species, be it what it will: and our idea of any individual man would be as far different from what it is now, as is his who knows all the springs and wheels and other contrivances within the famous clock at Strasburg, from that which a gazing countryman has of it, who barely sees the motion of the hand, and hears the clock strike, and observes only some of the outward appearances.<sup>27</sup>

Knowledge of real essence is here explicitly equated with the knowledge that our "Maker has." Human cognition, by contrast, is limited to "some of the outward appearances of things." Clearly, then, the latter is judged by the ideal standard of divine knowledge and found wanting. Moreover, what makes it inferior is precisely its conceptual nature, which limits its scope to manifest resemblances, the surface, rather than the deep structure, of things. Locke's agnosticism is mitigated, however, by his characteristic insistence that the nominal essences produced by the understanding and the classifications based upon them are sufficient for our needs. As he eloquently expresses it in the Introduction to the *Essay*, "The candle that is set up in us shines bright enough for all our purposes."<sup>28</sup> These purposes include not only knowledge of God and of our duty, but also what Locke calls "the conveniences of life."<sup>29</sup> His point is that our classification of things into sorts and, more generally, our empirical cognition, suffices to attain these "conveniences," even though it does not acquaint us with the true nature of things. Locke, therefore, combines his appeal to the theocentric model with an essentially pragmatic account of empirically based conceptual cognition. In this respect his position is not far from that of rationalists like Descartes and Malebranche.

The primary difference between Locke and the rationalists on this score is that Locke tends to conceive of fully adequate or divine knowledge as basically more of the same; that is to say, he regards it as if it were perceptual in nature, albeit an idealized perception, liberated from any need to rely on general ideas because of greatly expanded powers, for example, "microscopical eyes."<sup>30</sup> This is presumably what Kant had in mind, when, in contrasting Locke with Leibniz, he remarks that Locke "sensitivized the concepts of understanding," and that he viewed sensibility "as immediately related to things in themselves" (A271 / B327).

As the connection between sensibility and things in themselves indicates, Locke's "sensitization" of the concepts of the understanding is not to be viewed as indicating an abandonment of the theocentric model with its cognitive ideal of intellectual intuition. On the contrary, what Kant regards as an intellectual intuition, that is, a direct and complete acquaintance with an object as it is in itself (unmediated by any conceptual representation) is construed by Locke as perceptual in nature.<sup>31</sup> Thus, even though they interpret it in radically different ways, both Locke and Leibniz assume that human cognition is to be analyzed in light of the theocentric model.<sup>32</sup>

*The Pre-critical Kant.* Perhaps the most instructive example of an appeal to the theocentric model is provided by Kant himself. Indications of this appeal can

be discerned in virtually all of his pre-critical writings, but for illustrative purposes we can limit our consideration to "A New Exposition of the First Principles of Metaphysical Cognition" (1755), a work that reflects a stage in his development at which Kant philosophized very much in a Leibnizian mold. Thus, in support of the claim that the principle of identity is the first principle of all truths, the young Kant writes:

[S]ince all our reasoning amounts to uncovering the identity between the predicate and the subject, either in itself or in relation to other things, as is apparent from the ultimate rule of truths, it can be seen that God has no need of reasoning, for, since all things are exposed in the clearest possible way to his gaze, it is the same act of representation which presents to his understanding the things which are in agreement and those which are not. Nor does God need the analysis which is made necessary for us by the night which darkens our intelligence. [ND 1: 391; 10]

Kant here expresses as clearly as one might wish his commitment to the theocentric model with its ideal of a non-conceptual, purely intuitive cognition. Being finite cognizers, we are forced to have recourse to analysis (and, therefore, conceptualization) in order to grasp the identities that the divine intellect recognizes immediately. Moreover, Kant's commitment to this model is revealed not only in this formulation of the ideal of cognition but also in some of the central arguments of the work. Two examples should suffice to make this clear. The first occurs within Kant's argument for the existence of God as the ground of the possibility and hence of the essence of things. In developing this argument, Kant appeals to the example of the essence of a triangle:

For the essence of a triangle, which consists in the joining together of three sides, is not in itself necessary. For what person of sound understanding would wish to maintain that it is in itself necessary that three sides should always be conceived as joined together? I admit, however, that this is necessary for a triangle. That is to say: if you think of a triangle, then you must necessarily think of three sides. And that is the same as saying: "If something is, it is". But how it comes about that the concepts of sides, of a space to be enclosed, and so forth, should be available for use by thought; how, in other words, it comes about that there is, in general, something which can be thought, from which there then arises, by means of combination, limitation and determination, any concept you please of a thinkable thing—how that should come about is something which cannot be conceived at all, unless it is the case that whatever is real in the concept exists in God, the source of all reality. [ND 1: 395–96; 16–17]

The second example occurs in connection with the claim that the principle of the coexistence of substances is to be located in the divine intellect. In support of this contention, Kant reflects:

[I]t has to be admitted that this relation depends on a community of cause, namely on God, the universal principle of beings. But it does not follow from the fact that God simply established the existence of things that there is also a reciprocal relation between these things, unless the self-same scheme of the divine understanding, which gives existence, also established the relations of things to each other, by conceiving their existences as correlated with each other. It is most clearly apparent from this that the universal interaction of all things is to be ascribed to the concept alone of this divine idea. [ND I: 413; 41]

The primary import of these passages lies in the light they shed on the elements of continuity and change in Kant's thought. Both the "pre-critical" and the "critical" Kant were concerned with the determination of the conditions of possibility, though these conditions are understood in quite different ways. In the first passage, the question at issue is the nature of the ground or the condition of the possibility of three straight lines enclosing a space. The answer of the young Kant is that it is grounded in its conceivability by the divine intellect. By contrast, in his account of mathematical possibility in the *Critique*, Kant argues that the impossibility of two straight lines enclosing a space is based upon the conditions of the constructability of figures in space (A221 / B268), with these conditions being themselves determined by the nature of human sensibility.

The second passage is even more striking, for Kant poses the very same problem that he later deals with in the Analogies, namely, the ground of the unity of experience. In the *Critique* this unity is explained in terms of certain principles (the Analogies), which, as we shall see, function as the conditions of the possibility of the experience of a unified time order and express the necessary conformity of appearances to the schemata of the pure concepts of the understanding. Here, by contrast, the objects (substances) are held to conform necessarily to the schema of the divine intellect. The appeal to the divine intellect in this early essay thus fulfills much the same function as does the appeal to the human intellect in the *Critique*, which further suggests that what is generally characterized as Kant's "transcendental turn" may be plausibly regarded as a shift from a theocentric to an anthropocentric paradigm.<sup>33</sup>

## II. THE TRANSCENDENTAL NATURE OF KANT'S IDEALISM

It was argued in the preceding section that all noncritical philosophies, including that of the young Kant, can be regarded as transcendently realistic and that, as such, they share a commitment to the theocentric paradigm, which

goes together with a degradation of the discursivity that is the hallmark of a finite intellect. Since this encompasses philosophies of widely different kinds, transcendental realism cannot itself be defined in straightforwardly ontological, or even epistemological, terms. Instead, it was suggested that it must be understood in broadly metaphilosophical or metaepistemological terms as a “standpoint” or normative model with reference to which human cognition is analyzed and evaluated.

The remainder of this section will explore the implications of this result for the interpretation of transcendental idealism. The most important of these is that, like its counterpart, transcendental idealism must also be characterized as a metaphilosophical “standpoint,” rather than, as is usually done, as a metaphysical doctrine about the nature or ontological status of the objects of human cognition. Since the basic import of the Kantian position is most clearly reflected in Kant’s characterization of transcendental idealism as “formal” or “critical” and in the comparison of his procedure with that of Copernicus, we shall begin with a brief consideration of these. This should then put us in position to specify the fundamental difference between transcendental idealism and phenomenism or an idealism of the Berkeleyan sort.

#### **A. Transcendental Idealism as Formal**

##### **Idealism and the So-Called “Copernican Revolution”: Two Attempts at Clarification**

In response to the pervasive misunderstanding and criticism of his idealism as it was formulated in the first edition of the *Critique*, Kant notes in the appendix to the *Prolegomena* that he now wishes transcendental idealism to be termed “‘formal’ or, better still, ‘critical’ idealism.” In so doing he hoped to distinguish it from both “the dogmatic idealism of Berkeley and the skeptical idealism of Descartes” (Pro 4: 375; 162–63). Moreover, in a note added in the second edition of the *Critique* to the previously cited definition of transcendental idealism, he remarks, “I have also occasionally called it formal idealism, to distinguish it from material idealism, i.e., the common idealism that itself doubts or denies the existence of external things” (B519).

Given the continued prominence of readings that interpret transcendental idealism as a version of the “common idealism,” Kant would have been well advised to follow more consistently his own terminological recommendation. This idealism is “formal” in the sense that it is a theory about the nature and the scope of the conditions under which objects can be cognized by the human mind.<sup>34</sup> It is “critical” because it is grounded in a reflection on the conditions

and limits of discursive cognition, not on the contents of consciousness or the nature of *an sich* reality. In both respects it differs radically from idealisms of the “common” sort, which are themselves forms of transcendental realism.

As I noted in the first chapter, the major source of the interpretive problem lies in Kant’s tendency to refer to the objects of human experience not only as “appearances” but also as “mere representations.” Nevertheless, even here careful attention to the text makes it possible to avoid the usual misunderstanding. Consider, for example, the characterization of transcendental idealism to which Kant appended the above-mentioned note. As we have seen, Kant there describes this idealism as the doctrine that “all objects of an experience possible for us, are nothing but appearances, i.e., mere representations, which, *as they are represented* [my emphasis], as extended beings or series of alterations, have outside our thoughts no existence grounded in itself” (A490–91 / B518–19). The apparent equation of appearances with “mere representations” in the main clause certainly suggests the common reading. The temptation to read it in this way disappears, however, once it is recognized that the italicized phrase in the subordinate clause refers back to the *objects* represented rather than to “appearances.” The claim, therefore, is not that these objects have no mind-independent existence (as one might maintain with regard to Berkeleyan ideas); it is rather that such existence cannot be attributed to them in *the way in which they are represented*, that is, as spatiotemporal entities.<sup>35</sup> In short, such objects are *in uns* in the transcendental but not the empirical sense. Kant’s idealism is formal (rather than material) precisely because it allows for this distinction.

Kant’s statement of what has come to be known as his “Copernican revolution” may be viewed as a second and closely related way in which he endeavored to clarify his idealism. This occurs in a famous passage from the Preface to the second edition of the *Critique*, in which Kant compares the “change in the way of thinking” [*Umänderung der Denkart*] that he has introduced into philosophy with the revolution in astronomy initiated by Copernicus (Bxvi). There is a considerable literature regarding the precise point of the comparison and the appropriateness of the Copernican analogy, the main point at issue being whether Kant has committed what is called the “anthropocentric fallacy” in his reading of Copernicus.<sup>36</sup> Fortunately, we need not concern ourselves with that issue here. The central question for us is rather how Kant’s own philosophical “revolution” is to be understood, which remains a question even if, as is frequently maintained, the analogy with Copernicus is not particularly apt. Kant describes his revolution thus:

Up to now it has been assumed that all our cognition must conform to the objects; but all attempts to find out something about them *a priori* through concepts that would extend our cognition have, on this presupposition, come to nothing. Hence let us once try whether we do not get farther with the problems of metaphysics by assuming that the objects must conform to our cognition. [Bxvi]

In view of the preceding analysis, it should be clear that Kant is here contrasting the “standpoints” of transcendental realism and transcendental idealism. To begin with, the assumption that “all our cognition must conform to the objects” is readily identifiable as the “common assumption” associated with transcendental realism. In consequence, the “objects” to which our cognition must conform are characterized as things in themselves. From this point of view, then, we can be said to know objects just to the extent to which our thought conforms to their “real” nature or, equivalently, to God’s thought of these same objects. On this model, Kant tells us, we cannot account for the possibility of [synthetic] *a priori* knowledge, because we cannot explain how the mind could “anticipate” any of the properties of objects so defined, which is required for *a priori* knowledge.<sup>37</sup> The problem is that this model assumes that all cognition rests ultimately upon a direct acquaintance with its object as it is in itself.

Although this is just what one would expect, given the normative idea of an intellectual intuition, in the case of finite, human cognition it entails that all knowledge must be *a posteriori*. In the *Prolegomena* Kant goes beyond this, however, suggesting that if the objects of human cognition were things as they are in themselves [*so wie sie an sich selbst sind*], it would not even be possible to account for *a posteriori* knowledge (Pro 4; 282; 78). Clearly, the latter represents Kant’s considered opinion, since his position is that transcendental realism, with its theocentric model, is incapable of explaining discursive cognition of any sort, not simply the *a priori* variety. That is why a philosophical revolution is necessary.

The contrary “Copernican” supposition that “objects must conform to our cognition” (*die Gegenstände müssen sich nach unseren Erkenntnis richten*), expresses the central tenet of transcendental idealism. In the previous chapter, this was taken to mean that objects must conform to the *conditions* under which we can alone represent them to ourselves as objects. This suggests both the notion of epistemic conditions, which was introduced as an expository device, and an anthropocentric model of cognition. Our present concern, however, is largely with the latter, which has been alluded to but not yet discussed.

Here everything depends on understanding the idea of such a model in a

normative sense. Otherwise Kant's position becomes essentially indistinguishable from that of the classical British empiricists, who, as the very titles of their major works indicate, likewise made a self-consciously anthropological turn. This is not to deny that Locke, Berkeley, and Hume were engaged, at least in part, in a normative enterprise. Clearly they were. As we have seen, however, in spite of their focus on the human understanding, human cognition, and human nature, these thinkers all analyzed cognition in the light of a theocentric norm. Thus, their central epistemological concern was to determine how human cognition stands with respect to such a norm, and in this they share common ground with the rationalists.

In sharp contrast to the procedure of the empiricists, to take the anthropological model in a normative sense is just to consider the human mind as the source of the rules or conditions through which and under which it can alone represent to itself an objective world. In Kant's terms, it is to say that the human understanding (suitably conditioned by sensibility) provides the "legislation [*Gesetzgebung*] for nature" (A126). Since our understanding is discursive (not intuitive), this entails that discursive cognition is elevated to the norm rather than degraded to a second-class form of cognition, as it inevitably is under the theocentric model.

### **B. Transcendental Idealism and Phenomenalism**

In light of the above, we are in a position to return to the question of the contrast between transcendental idealism and phenomenism in general and Berkeleyan idealism in particular. Jonathan Bennett's characterization of the nature of phenomenism and its distinction from idealism provides a convenient starting point for this discussion. According to Bennett, phenomenism is a theory about object language statements. It holds that all such statements are translatable into complex statements about sense data (including counterfactual hypotheticals). He further suggests that this is equivalent to the claim that "objects are logical constructs out of sense data." Idealism, by contrast, is characterized as the metaphysical view that "objects are collections of sense data." Bennett attributes the latter view to Berkeley.<sup>38</sup>

The first and most basic point to be made here is that phenomenism, as Bennett describes it, is transcendently realistic in the same sense and for the same reasons as Berkeleyan idealism. In spite of its conception of objects as "logical constructs," it treats the sensible data out of which "objects" are supposedly constructed as things in themselves. As a result, it is no more suitable for expli-

cating transcendental idealism than is Berkeleyan idealism. In short, transcendental idealism is neither a theory about the translatability of object language statements into some more precise or primitive sense-datum language nor a theory about the ontological type (material object or collection of sense data) of the objects of human experience. As has been emphasized repeatedly, it is rather a theory about the *a priori* conditions and bounds of discursive cognition.

The issue can be clarified further by means of a comparison of Berkeley's analysis of statements about unperceived objects in *The Principles of Human Knowledge* with Kant's treatment of the same topic in the *Critique*. Berkeley offers two distinct analyses of propositions of the form: *x* exists, although *x* is not currently being perceived by myself or by another "created spirit." On one of these, *x* can be said to exist, if it is being perceived by God.<sup>39</sup> On the other, which is much closer to contemporary phenomenism, *x* can be said to exist if statements about *x* can be translated into hypotheticals of the form: if one were in position or had the proper instruments, and so forth, one would perceive *x*.<sup>40</sup> Both of these analyses are based upon the correlation between existence and perception, which is the hallmark of Berkeley's philosophy.

Kant's account of propositions about unperceived entities and events bears a superficial resemblance to Berkeley's second version, and therefore to phenomenistic accounts. Thus, he allows that we can perfectly well speak of inhabitants on the moon, even though no one has even seen them. But he goes on to note,

[T]his means only that in the possible progress of experience we could encounter them; for everything is actual [*wirklich*] that stands in one context with a perception in accordance with the laws of empirical progression. Thus they are real [*wirklich*] when they stand in an empirical connection with my real [*wirklich*] consciousness, although they are not therefore real [*wirklich*] in themselves, i.e., outside this progress of experience. [A493 / B521]

Moreover, Kant continues,

To call an appearance a real [*wirkliches*] thing prior to perception, means either that in the continuation of experience we must encounter such a perception, or it has no meaning at all. For that it should exist in itself without relation to our senses and possible experience, could of course be said if we were talking about a thing in itself. But what we are talking about is merely an appearance in space and time, neither of which is a determination of things in themselves, but only of our sensibility; hence what is in them (appearances) are not something in itself, but mere representations, which if they are not given to us (in perception) are encountered nowhere at all. [A493–94 / B522–23]

We can see from this that Kant, like both Berkeley and contemporary phenomenism, translates first-order statements about unperceived entities or events into second-order statements about the possible perception thereof. But this superficial resemblance really masks the distinctive feature of the Kantian analysis, namely, the role given to *a priori* laws or principles. The “laws of the empirical progression,” or, as he calls them elsewhere, the “laws of the unity of experience” (A494 / B522), are nothing other than the Analogies of Experience. Without now entering into a discussion of these Analogies (this is the topic of chapter 9), the basic point is that, on a transcendently idealistic analysis, the claim that a certain entity or event is to be met with in the “progression of experience” is an elliptical way of affirming some lawful connection or “causal route” between the entity or event in question and present experience. It does not involve the postulation of a hypothetical mental episode in the history of some consciousness (whether human or divine).

The epistemic or transcendental thrust of Kant’s theory is brought out particularly clearly in the analysis of actuality [*Wirklichkeit*] in the Postulates of Empirical Thought. Kant there defines the actual as “that which is connected with the material conditions of experience (of sensation)” (A218 / B266). Because of the explicit reference to sensation, this definition seems to invite a phenomenalist or even an idealistic reading (in the Berkeleyan sense). Kant’s discussion of the postulate, however, suggests a different story. The claim that something is actual, we are told,

requires perception, thus sensation of which one is conscious—not immediate perception of the object itself the existence of which is to be cognized, but still its connection with some actual perception in accordance with the analogies of experience, which exhibit all real connection in an experience in general. (A225 / B272)

At first glance, this might suggest phenomenism as Bennett defines it. To be sure, it rules out the extreme idealistic requirement that for an empirical object to be actual (real) it must be perceived, but it does seem to require the supposition that the object *could* be perceived, which is just the thesis of phenomenism (with its appeal to counterfactuals). Nevertheless, this is not quite Kant’s position. Although he does hold that whatever is actual must be an object of possible perception, this is merely a consequence, not a criterion, of actuality. As the passage above indicates, the relevant criteria are provided by the Analogies of Experience, that is, by a set of *a priori* principles. The full critical position is that whatever can be connected with some given perception in accordance with these principles, or “laws of the empirical connection of appear-

ances," is to be deemed "actual." The appeal to perception or sensation here functions merely as the point of departure, which gives empirical content to the claim of actuality. The claim itself is not about any "subjective experiences."

Kant's illustration of this principle is also highly instructive. It concerns the hypothetical case of the perception of some magnetically attracted iron filings. Such a perception, he notes, would clearly justify the inference to the existence of some material responsible for this attraction. Moreover, it would do so even though our sensory apparatus is not adequate for the perception of this material. Admittedly, he then suggests that if our sense organs were more powerful or more refined we might be able to perceive it, which once again calls to mind phenomenalist's appeal to counterfactuals (as well as Locke's oblique reference to "microscopical eyes"). Kant, however, appeals neither to counterfactuals nor to the idea of a vastly improved sensory capacity. Instead, he remarks that "the crudeness [of our senses] . . . does not affect the form of possible experience in general. . . . Thus wherever perception and whatever is appended to it in accordance with empirical laws reaches, there too reaches our cognition of the existence of things" (A226 / B273). In other words, the meaningfulness of the reference to this magnetic material is not a function of the possibility of sufficiently improving our sensory apparatus, so as to enable us to have experiences that we are not at present able to have. It is rather a function of the connectibility of this material with our present experience in accordance with empirical laws and, ultimately, *a priori* principles.

The same point can be made with respect to the notion of a possible perception. As is already implicit in his *esse est percipi* principle, and as is perfectly manifest in his account of the *minimum sensibile*, Berkeley's account of possible perception is essentially psychological in nature. To be possible means to be actually perceptible. Accordingly, anything too small to be perceived, or below the *minimum sensibile*, can simply be dismissed as impossible.<sup>41</sup> In sharp contrast to this, Kant defines the possibility of perception in terms of the conformity to rules, that is, to *a priori* principles. Thus, he writes:

[W]hat is required is only the progress from appearances to appearances, even if they should not yield any actual perception (if this perception is too weak in degree to become an experience for our consciousness), because despite this they would still belong to possible experience. (A522 / B550)

This passage almost seems as if it were written with Berkeley (or Hume) in mind. In any event, it nicely illustrates the radical difference between Kant's transcendental or formal idealism and a phenomenalist or material idealism

of the Berkeleyan mold. The transcendental concept of appearance is linked here specifically to the notion of a possible experience. The latter notion, however, is defined in terms of conformity to a set of *a priori* conditions rather than in terms of the possibility of a perceptual state. Once again, then, we see that the appeal to such conditions, which are the conditions of discursive cognition, is the defining characteristic of transcendental idealism and that such idealism therefore has little in common with phenomenism.<sup>42</sup>

### III. A REPLY TO TWO OBJECTIONS

In addition to the trivialization charge mounted by Guyer, Langton, and others, the present interpretation of transcendental idealism has been subject to a number of criticisms.<sup>43</sup> In concluding this discussion, we shall explore two of the most important of these: one of a substantive philosophical nature, the other largely a matter of interpretation. As representative of these two lines of criticism, we shall consider those of Jay Van Cleve and Karl Ameriks, respectively.

#### A. Van Cleve: One World or Two?

Van Cleve's objection is directed at the understanding of the transcendental distinction as holding between two ways of considering the same thing rather than between two ontologically distinct things. Suggesting that the texts are inconclusive on the issue (a matter to be taken up in the next chapter), he claims that the former alternative is untenable. The basic problem it confronts is explaining how the same thing could be both spatial and non-spatial or, more precisely, how it could be "considered as such."<sup>44</sup> Behind this way of formulating the problem is the recognition that such interpretations as the one offered here, which focus on the modifying phrase, do so in order to avoid the obvious contradiction in claiming that the same thing might *be* both spatial and non-spatial. Thus, he contends that we owe, but fail to provide, a general account of how modifiers might be thought to remove such a contradiction.

Following David Lewis, Van Cleve suggests three possible models for understanding this: "Square on the third floor, round on the fourth"; "Honest according to the *News*, crooked according to the *Times*"; "Tall compared to Ed, short compared to Fred."<sup>45</sup> As he correctly notes, the first two are obviously inadequate to model the Kantian distinction as here understood, since the first effectively transforms it into a distinction between two things, while the second makes one of the ways of considering things erroneous. Thus, we are left with

the third model as the “best bet.”<sup>46</sup> Central to this model is the distinction between relative and intrinsic properties, which means that, applied to Kant, we are to conceive of spatial properties, such as shape, as relative rather than, as they usually taken to be, intrinsic. In other words, shapes and such are disguised relations. And ignoring the fact that such a relational view is found in Leibniz, Van Cleve summarily dismisses it as untenable.

Nevertheless, in order to do justice to the position he is criticizing, Van Cleve stops to consider a model that was suggested in the original version of this book. This model, which was intended as an empirical illustration of a transcendental claim, involves the Newtonian conception of weight. According to this conception, bodies may be said to have weight only insofar as they stand in a relation of attraction and repulsion to other bodies. Hence, only insofar as a given body is “considered” in such a relation is a description including a reference to weight applicable to it. The intelligibility of this claim is in no way affected by the fact that bodies are always found to be in a relation of interaction with other bodies, so that “body as such” can never be an object of experience. The point is simply that bodies can very well be *conceived of*, though not *experienced*, apart from their relation to other bodies (Newton’s First Law of Motion is precisely about bodies so conceived of). Making allowance for the shift from the empirical to the transcendental level, it was suggested that much the same can be said about the distinction between things as they appear and the same things as they are in themselves. In this case also what we have is the distinction between a thing considered in a certain relation, in virtue of which it falls under a certain description, and the same thing considered in abstraction from this relation, and therefore not falling under this description.

Although Van Cleve is skeptical about this suggested model on the grounds that it still requires us to regard properties that are normally thought of as monadic as really relational, he does not dismiss it outright. Moreover, this is a good thing, since, as I have already noted, it corresponds to the Leibnizian view. Instead, Van Cleve focuses on the *disanalogy* between the relational understandings of weight and shape. His point is that whereas in the case of weight we can clearly understand the relation in question roughly as “being-pulled-to-a-certain-extent-by,” there is no comparable relation available for understanding shape.<sup>47</sup>

Van Cleve considers the most plausible candidate for such a relation to be that of “*appearing to us to have such-and-such a shape*.”<sup>48</sup> As he proceeds to argue, however, this commits Kant to the illusionist view that objects only *seem* to us to have spatial properties, though in reality they do not, which reduces to

the already discredited second model.<sup>49</sup> Thus, we are led by default to the “qualified two-world” view Van Cleve prefers.<sup>50</sup>

The response to this line of objection is twofold. First, Van Cleve is quite correct to see a problem here, since the relation in question is epistemic and, as such, differs significantly from the physical relation between body and weight. Nevertheless, his characterization of this relation is tendentious and conceals an important ambiguity. “*Appearing to us to have such-and-such a shape*” may mean either merely *seeming* to us to have it, much as the stick seen in the water seems to us to be bent, or as justifiably claimed to have it, qua considered in relation to the conditions under which it appears to beings with our forms of sensibility.<sup>51</sup>

Van Cleve’s entire critique rests on the assumption that it must be taken in the first sense. The only options he recognizes are: *x* really has property *y* (may be judged from a God’s-eye view to have it) or *x* only seems to us to have it. Clearly, this is the natural way to take the matter, since it appeals to our ordinary use of such language. Nevertheless, it also reflects a transcendently realistic position, which is likewise “natural” but completely bypasses the *transcendental* concept of appearance. Moreover, this is evidenced by the fact that Van Cleve understands the epistemic relation as fundamentally empirical in nature. Thus he refers to an object as having “such-and-such-a-shape” (e.g., round as opposed to square), which is an empirical matter, rather than as having shape (size or spatial location) at all, which is not. As a result, he begs the question concerning transcendental idealism as here interpreted.

Since Van Cleve might well reply at this point that this alternative transcendental conception of appearance, which is not to be identified with a mere seeming, remains opaque, it will be useful to provide another example, the consideration of which constitutes the second part of our reply. Although this concerns time rather than space, it provides a clearer illustration of the nature and force of Kant’s ideality thesis.

As is well known, traditional philosophical theologians generally hold that, as omniscient, God must have complete foreknowledge. Rather than, like finite beings, having to await events, God grasps in a timeless manner (through an “intellectual intuition”) everything that will ever happen. Usually, this conception is appealed to in order to frame the problem of fatalism: If God knows what I shall do before I do it, how can I avoid doing it and, therefore, how can I be held responsible for my deeds? In light of the contrast between the theocentric and anthropocentric models of cognition sketched in this chapter, however, this conception may also be used to understand the Kantian doctrine of

the ideality of time. The point here is simply that, insofar as it recognizes this atemporal conception of divine cognition as normative (as it must, if it is to preserve omniscience), it is transcendental realism that is led to conclude that time is not fully real, that objects and events only *appear* to be temporally successive. In other words, transcendental realism is confronted with a dilemma: it must either deny divine foreknowledge, which is philosophically difficult (though not unheard of), or deny the reality of time—that is, it must admit that occurrences merely *seem* to be successive but in reality they are not, which is to reduce experience to illusion.

The interpretation of transcendental idealism offered here provides a ready escape from this dilemma, thereby making it possible to preserve the empirical reality of time at the modest cost of its transcendental ideality. This is because considering time as an epistemic condition ensures its “objective reality” with respect to appearances, while also leaving conceptual space for a radically distinct atemporal perspective representing the God’s-eye view of things. Moreover, this advantage adheres only to a “one-world” understanding of this idealism, since what is required is that one and the same set of events be conceivable from these two radically distinct points of view. On a “two-world” reading, even of the “qualified” sort advocated by Van Cleve, this is obviously impossible, with the consequence that the dilemma remains as intractable as it is for transcendental realism in all its forms. Of course, as some philosophers have done, the transcendental realist may choose to bite the bullet and deny the reality of time. But it seems doubtful that Van Cleve and others who pursue his line of criticism would find that option attractive.

#### B. Ameriks: Epistemology or Metaphysics?

The second basic objection to be considered here is a variant of the triviality charge, though it deserves a separate treatment because it has been raised by interpreters having more sympathy for transcendental idealism than either Guyer or Langton. A good representative of this approach is Karl Ameriks.<sup>52</sup> Ameriks’s objection is not that transcendental idealism on this interpretation is incoherent (though he may also believe that to be the case) but that it fails to do justice to Kant’s own understanding of his idealism. According to him, an epistemic interpretation simply ignores the ontological significance that Kant attaches to the transcendental distinction.<sup>53</sup> Thus, he claims, “On that [epistemic] reading there is still no reason to think the non-ideal has a greater ontological status than the ideal.”<sup>54</sup> But this, Ameriks thinks, is incompatible with Kant’s deepest philosophical commitments, which concern “the absolute

reality of things in themselves with substantive non-spatio-temporal characteristics.”<sup>55</sup>

Admittedly, there is much in Kant that suggests an ontological reading of the sort advocated by Ameriks. To begin with, it might be argued that “appearance talk” is only meaningful if it is contrasted with talk about things as they “really are.” Thus, even granting that the distinction is between two ways of considering things rather than between two kinds of thing, it would still seem that whatever can be said of things on the basis of the first way of considering them must have lesser ontological import than claims based on the second. In short, it seems that, under *any* interpretation, transcendental idealism must be seen as in some way incorporating the classical ontological contrast between appearance and reality.

Such a reading also seems to draw support from the fact that in the Inaugural Dissertation Kant explicitly contrasted sensible to intellectual cognition as a cognition of things as they appear to one of “things as they are” (Diss 2: 392; 384). Even though the “critical” Kant denied that we can have knowledge of the latter type, his continued adherence to the Dissertation’s doctrine of sensibility, and his equation of a consideration of things as they are in themselves with a consideration of things as some pure understanding might think them, certainly suggest that the ontological contrast of the earlier work is still operative.

Perhaps the strongest support for the ontological reading, however, appears to come from Kant’s moral philosophy, particularly his practical metaphysics of the supersensible. By affirming the primacy of practical reason or, what amounts to the same thing, denying knowledge in order to make room for faith (Bxxx), Kant is often taken as offering an entrée through practical reason to the very same ultimate reality that he had foreclosed to speculation. Accordingly, on this view we really are free, immaterial substances, and so forth, though we cannot demonstrate this theoretically.

Nevertheless, things are not that simple, since a straightforwardly ontological reading of the sort Ameriks (and many others) favor founders over the problem of empirical realism. As we have seen, once statements about things considered as they are in themselves are taken as claims about how they *really are*, it becomes difficult to avoid taking statements about appearances as claims about how they merely *seem to us* to be. And this, in turn, is hard to reconcile with any robust form of empirical realism. One obvious way of preserving this realism is Guyer’s proposal to jettison the idealism altogether. But this is to throw out the baby with the bath water. Short of that, however, there appears to be no solution available within the framework of Kant’s philosophy, save somehow deon-

tologizing the transcendental distinction. Whatever it may be, it *cannot* be a distinction between how things seem to be to beings like us and how they really are.

The conception of an epistemic condition was introduced precisely to resolve this problem. As already noted, the discursivity thesis looms large in this reconstruction, since it makes it possible to understand how discursive cognizers, such as ourselves, could have two radically distinct epistemic relations to objects, neither of which is *ontologically* privileged.<sup>56</sup> Ameriks questions, however, the compatibility of this approach with the “deeper” noumenalistic strains of Kant’s thought. Accordingly, it is this issue that we must now consider.

The matter is best approached in connection with the concept of freedom. On a traditional ontological reading, Kant is committed to the thesis that we really are (transcendentally) free agents, even though, when considered as phenomena, we are also causally determined parts of nature. Setting aside the question of how we could know this to be the case, given the impossibility of any theoretical knowledge of such freedom, the problem is to understand what this doctrine says about our phenomenal selves. Is it the case that we only seem to be causally determined, whereas we really are free? Or is it rather that our phenomenal selves really are determined and our noumenal selves really free? Neither alternative seems acceptable: the former because it undermines Kant’s empirical realism and the latter because it saddles him with an incoherent doctrine of two selves.

When approached in this way, it becomes clear that the heart of the problem is the underlying assumption that there is a “fact of matter” that needs to be adjudicated. On this assumption, the freedom, which, according to Kant’s moral theory, we are required to assume, must be viewed either as a real property of a separate noumenal self or as a property of our single self as it really is in its inner constitution. It is, however, just the assumption that there must be some stand-point-independent fact of the matter, which is implicit in any ontological reading of transcendental idealism, that is called into question by the interpretation advocated here. In fact, on this interpretation, such an understanding of transcendental idealism (like Van Cleve’s) is itself a form of transcendental realism.

Admittedly, this sounds extremely paradoxical, since we naturally tend to think that there must be some fact of the matter here. Either we are really free or we are not. One of these alternatives must be the case, even if we are not in a position to determine which one. Moreover, this holds whether we understand freedom in the Kantian sense as a non-natural causal power or in the popular contemporary compatibilist sense as a purely natural power for self-direction

and action. Paradoxical as it may be, however, this is precisely the conclusion to which Kant's transcendental idealism leads.

The view here ascribed to Kant can be made clearer by an appeal to Michael Dummett's conception of "warranted assertibility," which has been applied to the interpretation of Kant.<sup>57</sup> Although it is usually used in theoretical contexts to provide an anti-realist alternative to the traditional view of truth as correspondence to an independent reality or realm of facts, this conception may be extended to the practical context in which Kant discusses freedom. What is crucial here is Kant's contention that freedom is only assertible from a "practical point of view," that is, only in connection with our conception of ourselves as accountable moral agents. Clearly, Kant held that we must assume our freedom from that point of view.

It also seems clear, however, though it is more controversial, that he *did not* hold that this point of view provides access to some higher realm of being (the "really real"). The point is rather that from the practical point of view we are rationally authorized or warranted to assume our freedom, with the warrant stemming from the moral law as the law of pure practical reason. Correlatively, from the theoretical point of view, where the concern is with explanation rather than action, we are authorized, indeed required, to subject every event to the principle of causality as a condition of the possibility of its cognition. The argument for the former is beyond the scope of this study.<sup>58</sup> The argument for the latter will be considered in chapter 9. Here we need only note that Kant held both to be the case.

On this reading, then, **transcendental idealism may be characterized as a doctrine of warranted assertibility relativized to a point of view.** The basic idea is that each point of view (the theoretical and the practical) has its own set of norms on the basis of which assertions are justified and each involves considering its objects in a certain manner (as they appear and as they are thought of in themselves). But there is no context-independent truth or fact of the matter. Otherwise expressed, Kantian dualism is normative rather than ontological.<sup>59</sup>

Admittedly, Kant does speak on occasion, particularly in *Groundwork III* and the *Critique of Practical Reason*, of the idea of freedom or the consciousness of the moral law as giving us an entrée to an intelligible world or higher order of things, quite distinct from the sensible world of experience. Nevertheless, it is clear from the context that the superiority of the former to the latter is to be construed in axiological rather than ontological terms. What we supposedly become aware of is a higher set of values and a vocation [*Bestimmung*] to pursue them, not of our membership in some higher order of being. Similarly, in the

second *Critique*, Kant speaks of the primacy of practical reason in relation to the speculative (5: 119–21; 236–38). But this means only that our practical interest (in morality and the conditions of its possibility) is entitled to override our speculative interest in avoiding ungrounded claims and that the latter must therefore submit to the former. Once again, then, there is no thought of any access (cognitive or otherwise) to an ontologically superior order of being.

Still, such an “anodyne” analysis does not seem satisfactory. The question: “Are we *really* free?” keeps returning. And the answer: “Yes, but only from a practical point of view” appears to be either a dodge or a confusion, because we cannot help assuming that there must be *some* fact of the matter. Although this is true, Kant has an explanation for it. Moreover, this explanation is an essential, though generally overlooked, aspect of his transcendental idealism. It is to be found in the doctrine of transcendental illusion, which will be the centerpiece of the fourth part of this book.<sup>60</sup> For the present, it must suffice to note that the illusion is not that we are free, or, for that matter, that we are causally determined. It lies rather in the assumption that we must *really be* one or the other in some ontologically privileged, context-independent sense. Such an assumption is unavoidable for transcendental realism with its theocentric paradigm, but it is precisely what is called into question by Kant’s “Copernican revolution.”

Finally, if there is a general lesson to be learned from all of this, it is that transcendental idealism cannot be properly interpreted from the standpoint of transcendental realism, since it consists precisely in the denial of the validity (though not the naturalness) of that standpoint. Unfortunately, however, the ongoing debate concerning the nature and significance of this idealism attests to the fact that this lesson has not been learned.

## Notes

### PREFACE

1. Strawson, *The Bounds of Sense*, esp. pp. 38–42, 253–73.
2. Guyer, *Kant and the Claims of Knowledge*, p. 336; Langton, *Kantian Humility*, pp. 8–12.
3. Grier, *Kant's Doctrine of Transcendental Illusion*.
4. These include those of Brandt, *The Table of Judgments: Critique of Pure Reason A 67–76; B 92–101*; Wolff, *Die Vollständigkeit der kantischen Urteilstafel*; Longuenesse, *Kant and the Capacity to Judge*. Prior to their work, virtually the only commentator to take seriously the supposed completeness of Kant's table of judgment forms was Klaus Reich in *The Completeness of Kant's Table of Judgments*. These recent writers take up Reich's project, while rejecting his analysis.
5. See Allison, *Kant's Theory of Freedom and Idealism and Freedom*.

### CHAPTER 1

1. For a useful discussion of these forms of anti-realism and their connection, or lack thereof, with Kant's idealism, see Karl Ameriks, "Kantian Idealism Today," *History of Philosophy Quarterly* 9 (1992), pp. 329–42.
2. Although I occasionally depart from the procedure, largely, though not entirely, for stylistic reasons, in contrast to the first edition, I here tend to use the

term ‘cognition’ rather than ‘knowledge’ to render Kant’s ‘*Erkenntnis*’. In addition to the fact that it correlates with the Latin ‘*cognitio*’, which Kant equates with ‘*Erkenntnis*’, this has two advantages, which more than compensate for a certain awkwardness: first, cognition, unlike knowledge, may either succeed or fail to attain its object and, second, it can be used in the plural. In using this term, I am here also following the Guyer and Wood as opposed to the Kemp Smith translation, which I used in the first edition.

3. In the first edition of *Kant’s Transcendental Idealism* I referred to this as the “standard picture.” Fortunately, this description is no longer accurate, though it remains a widely accepted reading.
4. These include Pistorius, Eberhard, Jacobi, Maimon, and Aenesidemus-Schulze. Perhaps the clearest contemporary expression of this kind of interpretation, however, is to be found in the notorious Garve-Feder review to which Kant himself replied in Pro 4: 372–80; 160–66. For an account of many of these interpretations and criticisms of Kant, see Vaihinger, *Commentar zu Kants Kritik der reinen Vernunft*, vol. 2, pp. 494–505.
5. Strawson, *The Bounds of Sense*, p. 16.
6. The above is admittedly an oversimplified account of Strawson’s position, based largely upon his introductory account in *The Bounds of Sense*, pp. 38–42. He also discusses transcendental idealism in several other places in the work, most notably on pp. 235–62, and he distinguishes among various possible interpretations. My present concern, however, is not to examine the details of Strawson’s interpretation and critique but merely to use it as illustrative of what remains a fairly common view of transcendental idealism. I have dealt specifically with Strawson’s views in my “Transcendental Idealism and Descriptive Metaphysics,” *Kant-Studien* 60 (1969), pp. 216–23. For a similar line of criticism, see H. E. Matthews, “Strawson on Transcendental Idealism,” *Philosophical Quarterly* 19 (1969), pp. 204–20.
7. It should be noted, however, that Hume explicitly affirmed such a doctrine in the *Treatise*, which may give one pause before dismissing it as incoherent; see Lorne Falkenstein, “Hume on Manners of Disposition and the Ideas of Space and Time,” *Archiv für Geschichte der Philosophie* 79 (1997), pp. 179–201. Nevertheless, I shall not discuss this issue here, since I can see little evidence that Kant actually held such a view.
8. Strawson, *Bounds of Sense*, pp. 235–39.
9. Prichard, *Kant’s Theory of Knowledge*, pp. 71–100. A rigorous and sensitive critique of Prichard’s Kant interpretation has been provided by Bird, *Kant’s Theory of Knowledge*, esp. pp. 1–17. Although I differ from Bird on a number of issues, the strategy of this chapter, and also the overall direction of my interpretation, owes much to his work. To my mind, he deserves credit for being the first English-language Kant commentator of this generation seriously to challenge the standard picture.
10. Prichard, *Kant’s Theory of Knowledge*, pp. 78–79.
11. Strawson, *The Bounds of Sense*, p. 240.
12. For a critical discussion of some of these attempts, see Walker, *Kant*, esp. pp. 14–23.
13. Guyer, *Kant and the Claims of Knowledge*, p. 336.
14. *Ibid.*, p. 333.
15. *Ibid.*
16. *Ibid.*, pp. 334–5.

17. Ibid., p. 335.
18. Ibid.
19. Cf. Pro 4: 289; 84; Gr 4: 451–52; 98–99.
20. Jacobi, *Werke*, vol. 2, p. 304.
21. Guyer, *Kant and the Claims of Knowledge*, p. 335.
22. As we shall see in chapter 10, Guyer does at times acknowledge that Kant held to something like a two-aspect view of transcendental idealism, but he sees this as an abandonment in 1787 of the original view of 1781 and claims that this later conception is likewise irrelevant to the central arguments of the Analytic.
23. Langton, *Kantian Humility*.
24. For Langton's views on idealism in Kant, see *Kantian Humility*, esp. p. 6 and her last chapter, "Realism or Idealism?" In the latter she acknowledges that Kant does claim that space (and presumably time) are ideal, while minimizing the significance of this concession by denying that the ideality thesis applies to things in space and time, that is, phenomena.
25. Ibid., p. 8.
26. Strawson, *The Bounds of Sense*, p. 250.
27. Langton virtually neglects time, and she has relatively little to say about space. Her justification for this is her conviction that Kant's views about humility are independent of his views about space and time. See especially *Kantian Humility*, p. 102, note 7, and p. 211. I shall challenge this claim in the sequel.
28. See Langton, *Kantian Humility*, pp. 124–25 and 139. For her discussion of supervenience see esp. pp. 79–88.
29. Ibid., p. 50.
30. As we shall subsequently see in more detail, Kant insists on a sharp distinction between a real and a merely logical use of the categories. The former is their use in synthetic judgments, whereas the latter involves merely analytic judgments. In my judgment, one of the underlying weaknesses of Langton's interpretation is her complete neglect of the analytic-synthetic distinction, which, whatever difficulties it may involve, is unquestionably central to Kant.
31. Malte Hossenfelder, "Allison's Defence of Kant's Transcendental Idealism," *Inquiry* 33 (1990), pp. 467–79, esp. pp. 468–69.
32. I am here attempting to correct a defect in my original analysis, where I suggested that transcendental idealism follows from the mere concept of an epistemic condition. In response to this, some critics charged me with ambiguity, noting that I sometimes present transcendental idealism in this way but at other times express the more orthodox view that it depends on Kant's conception of human sensibility as having *a priori* forms or conditions. A very useful contribution to the discussion has been made by Karl Ameriks, who distinguishes between "non-specific" and "specific" versions of transcendental idealism. The former attempts to define transcendental idealism in broad epistemological terms as affirming the dependence of objects on our conceptual schemes, cognitive capacities, theories, or the like. The latter locate the essence of Kantian idealism in his theory of sensibility. (See "Kantian Idealism Today," pp. 333–34.) Put in these terms, the view I am here advocating may be seen as a combination of both. It shares with the for-

mer versions a focus on the conditions of cognition, which results in an epistemologically rather than a metaphysically oriented idealism; it shares with the latter a focus on the sensible conditions of human knowledge, which it sees as a consequence of its discursive nature.

33. Perhaps the first to challenge this thesis was Salomon Maimon. Maimon's critique of Kant on discursivity is analyzed at length by Peter Thielke, "Discursivity and Its Discontents: Maimon's Challenge to Kant's Account of Cognition," Ph.D. dissertation, University of California, San Diego, 1999 (unpublished). More famously, it was rejected by Fichte with his doctrine of intellectual intuition and by Hegel, first in *Glauben und Wissen* with his own version of intellectual intuition, and later in the *Phenomenology* in connection with the conception of absolute knowledge.
34. Strawson, *The Bounds of Sense*, p. 20.
35. Ibid., pp. 20–21.
36. Here I am in general agreement with the analysis of this issue by M. Glouberman, "Conceptuality: An Essay in Retrieval," *Kant-Studien* 70 (1979), pp. 383–408. Nevertheless, I differ from Glouberman on some points and take the analysis in a somewhat different (though complementary) direction. Specifically, I explore the connection between the discursivity thesis and Kant's critique of transcendental realism (chapter 2) and the analytic-synthetic distinction (chapter 4), neither of which he mentions. Perhaps most important, I insist on the importance of this thesis for understanding Kant's idealism (something which he merely hints at near the end of his discussion).
37. Once again, this is to be seen as a modification of my earlier view that the discursivity of human cognition is treated by Kant as a kind of brute fact for which no argument is advanced. Although I still believe it true that Kant does not explicitly provide such an argument, I think that he gives us the requisite materials. The need for such an argument has been emphasized by Thielke, *Discursivity and Its Discontents*.
38. The connection between these two defining features of a Kantian sensible intuition will be explored in chapter 4.
39. Thus, for Kant the concept of an intuitive intellect is intended to model the divine mind. Although he considers the conception of such an intellect problematic, since we have no way to understand its possibility, Kant thinks that it serves an important regulative function, indicating the ineliminable limits of our discursive cognition. Kant's canonical discussion of the relations between these two forms of "intellect" (discursive and intuitive) is in §§ 76 and 77 of the *Critique of Judgment*. The issue will be explored further in chapter 2.
40. Kant makes this basic point in a number of different ways, suggesting the need for a synopsis attributed to sense as well as for a synthesis of the understanding (A94/B127 and A97) and that the senses are *determinable* (my emphasis) but not determining (B151–52).
41. See, for example, O'Shaughnessy, *The Will*.
42. I analyze Spinoza's account of the mind-body relation in my *Spinoza: An Introduction*, pp. 85–100.
43. This view has been advanced in a number of papers by Ralf Meerbote, including "Kant

- on the Nondeterminate Character of Human Actions,” in *Causality, Freedom, and Objectivity*, ed. by William A. Harper and Ralf Meerbote, pp. 138–63; “Space and Time and Objects in Space and Time: Another Aspect of Kant’s Transcendental Idealism,” in *Minds, Ideas, and Objects*, ed. by Phillip D. Cummins and Guenter Zoeller, pp. 275–90; “Wille and Willkür in Kant’s Theory of Action, in *Interpreting Kant*, ed. by Moltke S. Gram, pp. 69–80. See also Hudson, *Kant’s Compatibilism*.
44. For reasons to become clear in the course of this book, there is an important asymmetry here. The reason for this is that in considering objects as they appear or as appearances, one is actually considering them as subject to intellectual as well as sensible conditions (the schematized categories and the Principles), whereas in considering them as they are in themselves the converse does not hold.
45. Among the many places in which Kant explicitly restricts his denial of the use of the categories (or the pure understanding) with regard to things as they are in themselves or noumena to synthetic judgments are A 276 / B 273; A 286 / B 342–43; A 433 / B 461; A 609 / B 663.
46. Langton, *Kantian Humility*, pp. 9–10.

## CHAPTER 2

- What makes them both forms of transcendentalism is their complete generality, here understood as a concern with the empirical as such.
- Two interpreters who take this view are Colin Turbayne, “Kant’s Refutation of Dogmatic idealism,” *Philosophical Quarterly* 5 (1955), p. 228, and Sadik J. Al-Azm, *The Origins of Kant’s Argument in the Antinomies*, p. 148.
- In the *Critique of Pure Reason* (B 53) Kant seems to equate “absolute” with “transcendental” reality. The notion of absolute reality goes back at least as far as the Dissertation, where Kant criticizes the conception of time as something “posited in itself and absolutely” (*in se et absolute positum*) (Diss 2: 401–2; 395). For a discussion of some of these terminological points see Hinske, *Kants Weg zur Transzendentalphilosophie*, esp. p. 49.
- See Gr 4: 440–45; 89–93 and KrV 5: 39–40; 172–73.
- I analyze Kant’s systematic opposition between autonomy and heteronomy, conceived as alternative models of volition and the associated claim that other moral theories are committed to the latter model in my *Kant’s Theory of Freedom*, pp. 93–106. My claim there is that heteronomy should be seen as the moral equivalent of transcendental realism, whereas the present claim is just the inverse of this.
- Cf. Turbayne, “Kant’s Refutation,” and Norman Kemp Smith, *A Commentary to Kant’s Critique of Pure Reason*, pp. 301ff.
- At the previously cited A 369, Kant characterizes transcendental realism as holding that outer appearances (spatial objects) are “outside us [*ausser uns*] according to pure concepts of the understanding. Since to think in accordance with pure (unschematized) concepts is to make what Kant terms a transcendental (i.e., completely universal) use of the understanding, this is equivalent to viewing these appearances as *ausser uns* in the transcendental sense.

8. I am aware that classifying Hume as a phenomenalist is a controversial issue in Hume interpretation. Nevertheless, I believe myself justified in treating him as such for present purposes, since this is clearly how Kant understood Hume.
9. Once again, I would like to remind the reader that it is not a question of the fairness to Berkeley of Kant's reading but of what it reveals about Kant's own views. For my full account of Kant's interpretation of Berkeley, see Allison, "Kant's Critique of Berkeley," *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 11 (1973), pp. 43–63.
10. Kant also makes essentially the same point about Berkeley in connection with the Refutation of Idealism (B274–75).
11. This analysis is to be contrasted with a discussion of the same text by Glouberman, "Conceptuality: An Essay in Retrieval," pp. 391–92. Rather than focusing on the role of sensibility, Glouberman emphasizes Hume's rejection of conceptual representation as an adequate mode of cognition. Although this is no doubt true, I do not think that it captures Kant's emphasis in the passage in question. Moreover, here it is important to keep in mind that for Kant even the private data of inner sense are given to the mind under the form of time and hence count as appearances. In other words, these data are *in uns* in both the empirical and the transcendental sense.
12. The analysis of this passage is greatly indebted to the discussion of Beck, *A Commentary on Kant's Critique of Practical Reason*, pp. 181–82.
13. This is emphasized by Glouberman, "Conceptuality: An Essay in Retrieval," p. 390 and *passim*. He does not, however, connect this important point with transcendental realism and Kant's critique thereof.
14. See Spinoza, *Ethics*, 2, prop. 40, scholium 1. I discuss this contrast in my *Benedict de Spinoza: An Introduction*, pp. 116–19 and *passim*.
15. A good example of this (noted by Glouberman, "Conceptuality: An Essay in Retrieval," p. 368) is Hume's discussion of "distinctions of reason" (*A Treatise of Human Nature*, pp. 24–25). Hume takes these to be distinctions that the understanding draws between aspects of things that are inseparable in the original impressions, e.g., the distinction between shape and color. Although such distinctions turn out to be crucial for the purposes of communication and science, Hume's critical point is that they are *only* distinctions of reason and, therefore, have no real purchase on the nature of things.
16. Merold Westphal, "In Defense of the Thing in Itself," *Kant-Studien* 59 (1968), pp. 118–41, argues in a similar vein that things as they are in themselves are to be understood as things as they are for God. Although this is certainly correct, I do not believe that Westphal's attempt to anchor transcendental idealism in a theistic metaphysics is particularly illuminating. Kant presumably was a theist (of sorts), but this does not account for his transcendental distinction and limitation of cognition to things as they appear. Moreover, Westphal fails to discuss the issue of the commitment of Kant's predecessors to a theocentric model, and he explicitly downplays the significance of the discursivity thesis. (On the latter point, see loc. cit., p. 131).
17. Far closer to home, Hilary Putnam refers critically to such a model in arguing for his own, Kant-inspired, "internal realism." See *Reason, Truth and History*, pp. 60–64.
18. Cf. Spinoza, *Ethics*, II, prop. 54, corollary 2.
19. The fullest discussion of this point is by Gurwitsch, *Leibniz, Philosophie des Panlogismus*,

- esp. pp. 23–31, 142–51, 450–54. It is also brought out in connection with Kant by Gottfried Martin, who refers to it as the “theological foundation of truth.” *Kant's Metaphysics and Theory of Science*, p. 62.
20. Leibniz, *New Essays on Human Understanding*, p. 447.
  21. This is shown nicely by Gurwitsch in his discussion of the “Affinität des menschlichen und göttlichen Geistes” (*Leibniz*, pp. 142–44).
  22. Leibniz, *Discourse on Metaphysics*, p. 13.
  23. Cf. A43–44 / B61–62, Pro 4: 290–91; 85–86, UE 8: 219; 310.
  24. For a discussion of this see Allison, *The Kant-Eberhard Controversy*, pp. 75–92.
  25. This is to be contrasted with the account of Kant's interpretation and critique of Leibniz provided by Langton (*Kantian Humility*, pp. 197–203). According to Langton, Kant's claim in the *Critique* that Leibniz took appearances for things in themselves is to be understood in metaphysical terms as charging him with simply identifying natural appearances with monads. Kant then allegedly corrects this in his response to Eberhard by stating that Leibniz (in contrast to Eberhard) asserted merely that the monads are the grounds of appearances, which is close to the Kantian view. In my view, this completely neglects the essentially epistemic thrust of Kant's critique of Leibniz and suggests a non-existent conflict between his treatment of Leibniz in the *Critique* and *On a Discovery*.
  26. Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, p. 439.
  27. Ibid., p. 440.
  28. Ibid., p. 45.
  29. Ibid.
  30. Ibid., p. 303.
  31. Moltke Gram has suggested that Kant understands the notion of intellectual intuition in three senses: (1) an intellect that can be aware of objects independently of any forms of intuition whatsoever; (2) an intellect that could be aware of the sum total (*Inbegriff*) of appearances; and (3) a creative, archetypal intellect; see “Intellectual Intuition: The Continuity Thesis,” *Journal of the History of Ideas* 42 (1981), pp. 287–334, and *The Transcendental Turn*, p. 223, note 7. Unfortunately, he neglected a fourth sense (or perhaps an aspect of the first), namely, an intellect that can be aware of its object in its full concreteness and particularly, without any dependence on conceptualization. Empiricists like Locke may be said to appeal to intellectual intuition in at least the fourth sense (which, given the analysis in the first chapter, is really inseparable from the first).
  32. Consequently, both thinkers deny the discursivity thesis. As Kant puts it, “Instead of seeking two entirely different sources of representation in the understanding and the sensibility, which could judge about things with objective validity only in conjunction, each of these great men holds on only to one of them, which in his opinion is immediately related to things in themselves, while the one does nothing but confuse or order the representations of the first” (A271 / B327).
  33. A clear expression of this is to be found in Kant's positive yet critical remarks about Maimon in his well-known letter to Herz of May 26, 1789 (Herz had sent Kant the manuscript of Maimon's *Versuch über die Transzendentalphilosophie mit einem Anhang über die symbolische Erkenntnis*). Kant's basic complaint is that Maimon assumed that human reason is of the same kind as the divine and differs from it merely in degree. Significantly,

- Kant also suggests that the antinomies provide a good antidote to such a view. (See B II: 52–54; 316–18). We shall explore the latter point in chapter 13.
34. Implicit in all of this is the equivalence of ‘form’ and ‘condition’. This point is discussed in chapter 5 and elsewhere. For a detailed account of Kant’s conception of form, see Pipkin, *Kant’s Theory of Form*.
35. I discuss the philological side of this issue in more detail in response to Hoke Robinson’s criticism of my earlier accounts in *Idealism and Freedom*, pp. 12–13. For Robinson’s criticism, see “Two Perspectives on Kant’s Appearances and Things in Themselves,” esp. pp. 419–22.
36. For a discussion of the relevant literature on the topic see S. Morris Engel, “Kant’s Copernican Analogy: A Re-examination,” *Kant-Studien* 59 (1963), pp. 243–51; and especially Norwood Russell Hanson, “Copernicus’ Role in Kant’s Revolution,” *Journal of the History of Ideas* 20 (1959), pp. 274–81. The latter points out that Kant himself nowhere uses the expression “Copernican revolution” to characterize his own thought, and that the explicit comparison of his own procedure to that of Copernicus consists simply in noting that they both tried an alternative hypothesis when existing theories proved unsatisfactory. A more recent and nuanced treatment of the topic, which attempts to trace the connections between Kant’s philosophical views and his cosmological speculations, is provided by Pierre Kerszberg, “Two Senses of Kant’s Copernican Revolution,” *Kant-Studien* 80 (1989), pp. 63–80.
37. Although Kant does not refer to the synthetic *a priori* at this point, I take it as evident that this is what he had in mind, since the problem he points to does not arise in the case of analytic judgments. Presumably, the reason for this omission is that Kant viewed the analytic-synthetic distinction as a crucial discovery on his part, which he first presents in the Introduction. We shall deal with this distinction in chapter 4, in connection with Kant’s account of judgment.
38. Bennett, *Locke, Berkeley, Hume*, pp. 136–37.
39. Berkeley, *The Principles of Human Knowledge*, §6.
40. *Ibid.*, §3.
41. *Ibid.*, §132, and *An Essay Towards a New Theory of Vision*, §§79–87. There is a similar analysis in Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, bk. 1, Part 2.
42. The above analysis should be contrasted with the non-phenomenalist reading of many of the same texts, as well as some similar passages in *On a Discovery*, by Rae Langton (*Kantian Humility*, pp. 140–61 and 186–204). As already noted, Langton interprets Kant as a scientific realist and finds in the *Critique* rudiments of a causal theory of knowledge: empirical objects (composed of forces) are real because they can affect us. Thus, for her everything turns on the existence of a causal relation between the perceiver and the affecting entity, even if the entity (because of the limitations of our sensory apparatus) is not actually perceptible. By contrast, I have emphasized (as I believe Kant clearly does) the law-governedness of the connection between actual perceptions and unperceived (but inferred) entities. Accordingly, on my reading there is no need that something be able actually to affect us in order to count as empirically real or, equivalently, as an object of possible experience. Otherwise, Kant could not talk, for example, about the reality of objects in the distant past, as he certainly intended to do.

43. For a more detailed response to many of these criticisms, see Allison, *Idealism and Freedom*, pp. 3–26.
44. Van Cleve, *Problems from Kant*, pp. 143–50. Van Cleve provides essentially the same analysis in “The Argument from Geometry, Transcendental Idealism, and Kant’s Two Worlds,” in *Minds, Ideas, and Objects*, ed. by Cummins and Zoeller, pp. 296–300.
45. Van Cleve, *Problems from Kant*, p. 147.
46. Ibid.
47. Ibid., p. 148.
48. Ibid.
49. Ibid., pp. 148–49.
50. Van Cleve characterizes his dualistic interpretation of the thing in itself–appearance distinction as a “qualified two-world” view because it involves construing Kantian appearances as intentional objects or “logical constructions out of states of perceivers,” rather than as entities with a distinct existence. See “The Argument from Geometry,” pp. 295–96 and *Problems from Kant*, p. 142.
51. For reasons that will become clear in connection with the discussion of Ameriks’s objection, the locution ‘may be justifiably claimed to have x’ is intended to replace ‘really has x’.
52. Ameriks, “Kantian Idealism Today,” *History of Philosophy Quarterly* 9 (1992), esp. pp. 334–36. I initially responded to Ameriks’s critique in *Idealism and Freedom*, pp. 17–21. The present response is a significantly revised version of this earlier one.
53. More recently, a similar critique, with special focus on the problem of freedom and the mind-body problem, has been expressed by Rosas, *Kants Idealistische Reduktion*, pp. 117–133.
54. Ameriks, “Kantian Idealism Today,” p. 334.
55. Ibid.
56. Obviously, the relation involving sensibility, that is, to things considered as they appear, is epistemologically privileged, since it alone can yield cognition.
57. See Carl Posy, “Transcendental Idealism and Causality,” in *Kant on Causality, Freedom, and Objectivity*, ed. by William A. Harper and Ralf Meerbote, p. 38.
58. For my analysis of this issue, see Allison, *Kant’s Theory of Freedom*, pp. 201–49.
59. This is intended to characterize Kant’s critical position prior to the third *Critique*. The situation is complicated, though not radically changed, by the fact that in the latter work Kant introduces a third source of normativity, namely, judgment, to which he assigns an essential mediating role in providing a kind of bridge between the “realms” of freedom and of nature. For my discussion of this complex issue, see Allison, *Kant’s Theory of Taste*, pp. 195–218.
60. The central importance of this conception has been demonstrated by Grier, *Kant’s Doctrine of Transcendental Illusion*. Accordingly, I shall make substantial use of her work in my discussion of it.

### CHAPTER 3

1. The most interesting and informed discussion of the two senses in which Kant construes things in themselves is provided by Rousset, *La doctrine kantienne de l’objectivité*, pp. 167ff.