Transcendental Idealism: 
An Original Interpretation

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Introduction

As Paul Guyer and Allen Wood note in the preface to their translation of Kant’s *Critique of Pure Reason*, “within a few years of the publication of his *Critique of Pure Reason* in 1781, Immanuel Kant (1724-1804) was recognized by his contemporaries as one of the seminal philosophers of modern times – indeed as one of the great philosophers of all time.”¹ As Guyer and Wood also note, “to tell the whole story of the book’s influence would be to write the history of philosophy since Kant.”² However, in spite of (or perhaps because of) this fact, Kant’s philosophy is also highly controversial, especially his doctrine of *transcendental idealism* (hereafter abbreviated as ‘TI’). Indeed, as Henry Allison notes in his seminal work, *Kant’s Transcendental Idealism*, “in spite of some sympathy shown in recent years for a vaguely Kantian sort of idealism or, better, anti-realism … Kant’s transcendental idealism proper, with its distinction between appearances and things in themselves, remains highly unpopular.”³ I hold that this is a great injustice. It is the goal of this essay to go beyond the immediate historical interpretation of what Kant believed his theory to be, in order to present an interpretation of TI that not only accomplishes the goals Kant set for his theory, but is also both philosophically plausible and relevant to contemporary discussion.

The interpretation of TI that I offer is a theory of the ontological reduction of empirical reality (the reality of appearances) to transcendental reality (the reality of things-in-themselves). In other words, under my interpretation, TI entails a dual aspect theory of reality; we know that the empirical world has its basis in transcendental reality, but we do not know how the things within it reduce to things-in-themselves, or if they even do at a one to one level (as I shall explain later). I shall argue that this metaphysical explanation of TI takes vast steps in clarifying Kant’s position, even if it did not occur to Kant himself.
In the work that follows, I shall largely use Henry Allison’s work as a point of comparison with my own. I will attempt not only to offer an interpretation of TI that serves the epistemic purpose on which Allison is focused, but also to justify and explain the metaphysical elements of TI in ways Allison cannot. However, unlike Allison, I am not concerned with trying to interpret the position Kant actually held. I am rather concerned with deriving an interpretation of TI that preserves the thrust of Kant’s system, while providing a more acceptable metaphysical account than is usually derived by interpreters of Kant. Thus while Kant himself might not (hypothetically speaking) agree with my interpretation of TI as representing his intentions, this does not concern me. For I am not concerned with what he might have intended as a historical figure, but rather with how his theory can be best interpreted philosophically, while still maintaining the primary characteristics that distinguish it. In doing so I shall limit my focus to the *Critique of Pure Reason* (especially the second edition thereof), because this is the most complete exposition of Kant’s system.

The thesis shall proceed as follows. In §1 I shall present a basic overview of TI and its terminology (§1-1.3) before proceeding to explain the various standard interpretations of TI (§1.4-1.4.1). I shall conclude the chapter by considering objections to these interpretations (§1.4.2). In §2 I shall continue by expositing my proposed interpretation of TI (§2-2.1). I shall explain its founding principle (§2.2) before explaining my theory of ontological reductionism (§2.3). I shall conclude the chapter by supporting my theory with the problem of subjectivity (§2.4). In §3 I shall demonstrate the superiority of my theory by applying it to one of the supposed ‘weak points’ in Kant’s system: the problem of Affection. I shall first explain the problem (§3) then argue why transcendental affection is impossible for Kant (§3.1) and conclude the chapter by explaining why affection must on my view be a mundane empirical process (§3.2). I shall conclude the thesis by offering some implications of TI as I have presented it.
§1
The Theory and its Standard Interpretations

Kant defines *Transcendental Idealism* as the claim that “everything intuited in space or in time, hence 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.”\(^4\) This is contrasted to *Transcendental Realism*, which, briefly put, is the doctrine that “outer appearances (if their reality is conceded)” are “things in themselves, which would exist independently of us and our sensibility.”\(^5\) Without going into the potential metaphysical implications of these two theories (for this cannot be done superficially without doing injustice to the competing interpretations thereof), the most important difference is that the Transcendental Realist believes that our minds passively represent reality *as it truly is*, whereas the Transcendental Idealist believes that the nature of our minds limit what we can know about reality. Thus the interpretations of TI that I shall give below are all concerned with *how* TI establishes that our knowledge is dependent upon the nature of our minds.

For Kant, TI is characterized by the sharp distinction between *appearances* and *things-in-themselves*.\(^6\) Without oversimplifying the issue, TI can be very broadly understood as the theory that we cannot know whether reality as we understand it (empirical reality) is the way reality truly or ultimately is (transcendental reality).\(^7\) This is contrasted with *transcendental realism*, which claims that reality as we understand it *is* the true reality. In other words the transcendental realist holds that empirical reality *simply is* transcendental reality, and that all the mundane objects in empirical reality (tables, chairs, lanterns, etc.) are things-in-themselves.\(^8\) In opposition to this, the Transcendental Idealist holds that we cannot know that the normal objects of empirical reality are things-in-themselves. Thus one may define TI and TR in terms of the claims
each theory makes as to the certainty with which we can claim to know that things in empirical reality exist. The Transcendental Realist believes that we know that these objects exist absolutely, whereas the Transcendental Idealist is more skeptical in his or her claims.

However, although the Transcendental Idealist holds that we cannot know that empirical objects exist in a *transcendental sense*, he or she *does* maintain that they exist in empirical reality. It is for this reason that Kant argues that *empirical realism* is necessarily entailed by TI. Briefly put, Empirical Realism is the theory that the objects we perceive are not illusions. In opposition to this, Kant argues that Transcendental Realists will always be forced to conclude some form of empirical idealism, in which the objects in empirical reality are somehow dependent upon the mind that perceives them. Thus, although TI stipulates that we can only know things as filtered by the nature of our own minds, it does *not* thereby say that our minds *create* empirical reality, for this would deny Kant’s theory the empirical realism that he himself claimed it to expound. Thus the reason, as I shall show, that these typical interpretations of Kant fail is that they interpret Kant as maintaining some form of idealism *at the empirical level*, while Kant himself is committed to *realism* at the empirical level and thus is at pains to deny this reading of his philosophy. But furthermore, I hold that this kind of empirical idealism is unacceptable *as a philosophical theory in general*. Since this runs contrary to the goal of this essay, I must therefore show how Kant’s theory is capable of escaping this form of idealism whilst still upholding the revolutionary intentions of his original work. In order to establish how I shall perform the latter function, I must now clarify the two basic tenets that an interpretation must uphold in order to truly be considered *Kantian*. 
§1.1: The Two Kantian Tenets

The first of these tenets is that things-in-themselves are unknowable. I dub this the *unknowability thesis*.\textsuperscript{10} Kant holds that knowledge (or as he terms it, ‘cognition’) is inherently empirical, and that we can only have meaningful *a priori* knowledge by using the general forms through which we perceive (or as he terms it, ‘intuit’) empirical objects.\textsuperscript{11} Although Kant states that “we can have cognition of no object as a thing in itself, but only insofar as it is an object of sensible intuition, i.e. as an appearance,” he also notes that “the reservation must also be well noted, that even if we cannot *cognize* these same objects as things in themselves, we at least must be able to *think* them as things in themselves.”\textsuperscript{12, 13} In other words, the unknowability thesis claims only that we cannot *know* about things-in-themselves; it does not claim that these things are impossible in an ontological sense (in fact that would be a positive claim about things-in-themselves, and would thus contradict the unknowability thesis). In fact, since Kant’s epistemology is empirical, the unknowability thesis does even claim that things-in-themselves are *unthinkable*; merely that although we might be able to think of them, we would not thereby have knowledge of them. The unknowability thesis thus deprives us of transcendental *knowledge*, but leaves us free for transcendental *speculation*.

The second tenet is that the forms of our sensibility make synthetic *a priori* knowledge possible (i.e. that we can know certain things about empirical objects without perceiving them, like the fact that they are extended in space).\textsuperscript{14} Thus I dub this the *A Priori Thesis*. As Kant

\textsuperscript{A} Once again, the reader should note the difference between *Kant’s* theory (the theory that Kant held himself), and a *Kant-ian* theory (a theory that abides by the basic principles derived from Kant’s theory). These two tenets serve the function of keeping a theory *Kantian* in the latter sense. Thus even if a theory may disagree with the particulars of Kant’s original theory, by abiding by these two tenets, their theory would still be *Kantian*. This is a very important point considering my interpretation of TI is trying to be both a convincing a metaphysical theory as possible, while still being *Kantian* in the sense described here.

It is also important to note that I will not only use these tenets to defend my own interpretation as *Kantian*, but also as an objection to interpretations that do not meet these two tenets. Those who are engaged in the task of interpreting Kant must surely meet these two tenets, for surely any interpretation of Kant must *at least* be *Kantian* (although this by itself is not sufficient to make such an interpretation *Kant’s* own understanding of his theory.)
himself notes, “the real problem of pure reason is now contained in the question: How are synthetic judgments a priori possible?” Thus the second tenet that defines Kant’s philosophy (i.e. the second tenet that one must abide by in order to even consider one’s interpretation Kantian) is that we can derive metaphysical knowledge (here taken in the literal sense of meta-physics, i.e. knowledge about the fundamental laws of the physical world that stand beyond those of the particular sciences) from the forms in which all physical objects must present themselves. However, as noted by Hoke Robinson in his essay on the interpretations of TI, “Kant's idealism (or lack thereof) is so bound up with his distinction between appearances and things in themselves that it is not possible to develop a position on the former without an analysis of the latter.” Thus before I continue I must briefly discuss the terminology of the Critique.

§1.2: Terminology

The controversy surrounding the interpretation of TI centers around three terms: ‘appearances,’ ‘representations’ and ‘things-in-themselves.’ The difficulty that arises in defining these terms is that their very definition is often what determines one’s interpretation of TI. As I shall show below, Kant uses these terms very loosely, often times as though they are cognate. However, since these different terms also seem to have distinct meanings, it is possible that when Kant uses them interchangeably, he does so out of his own lack of carefulness. In fact, Kant noted this propensity in other authors:

When we compare the thoughts that an author expresses about a subject, in ordinary speech as well as in writings, it is not at all unusual to find that we understand him even better than he understood himself, since he may not have determined his concept sufficiently and hence sometimes spoke, or even thought, contrary to his own intention.

While some interpreters see the conflation of certain terms as intentional, my own interpretation rests upon thoroughly distinguishing these terms. I shall not attempt to provide a thorough
argument as to why Kant tends to conflate these terms, for my project commits me to move beyond the text to a certain degree, as long as I abide by the basic tenets of Kant’s philosophy. Thus it is important to note that these are my definitions of the terms, not necessarily Kant’s, and they are certainly not the definitions that some interpreters would give.

§1.2.1: ‘Representation’

The term ‘representation’ (German: vorstellung, Latin: repraesentatio) is used broadly by Kant; however, it can be reasonably taken to be a mental event. Kant states that “objects are given to us by means of sensibility, and it alone affords us intuitions” and that “the capacity (receptivity) to acquire representations through the way in which we are affected by objects is called sensibility.”¹⁹ This clearly indicates that there is a distinction between objects and representations. Furthermore, Kant generates an order of representations that reinforces this interpretation:

The genus is representation in general (repraesentatio). Under it stands the representation with consciousness (perceptio). A perception that refers to the subject as a modification of its state is a sensation (sensatio); an objective perception is a cognition (cognitio).²⁰

First of all, these types of representation are all clearly mentalistic terms, i.e. they all describe particular types of mental states in the knowing subject. Furthermore, they are contrasted with the objects that they represent, for Kant states that a cognition is “the determinate relation of given representations to an object.”²¹ Thus a cognition is a representation of an object. In contrast to my account, the interpretations of Kant that assert his idealism at the empirical level often conflate ‘object’ with ‘representation’ and ‘appearance’.²²,²³

§1.2.2: ‘Appearance’

Kant states that “in whatever way and through whatever means a cognition may relate to objects, that through which it relates immediately to them, and at which all thought as a means is
directed as an end, is intuition." Kant states immediately after this that the process of intuition "takes place only insofar as the object is given to us; but this in turn, <at least for us humans,> is possible only if it affects the mind in a certain way." In addition to this Kant defines appearance (German: erscheinung) as "the undetermined object of an empirical intuition." Thus Kant provides us with a process (intuition) in which the mind is affected by some undetermined object (appearance) so that it has a mental representation of that object. I conclude from this that the term ‘appearance’, as Kant often uses it, is actually something altogether separate from the mind that represents it. In fact, a better term than ‘appearance’ would be ‘thing-as-it-appears’. However, this is a controversial move on my part, for many other interpreters disagree. I shall show below how I distinguish two different senses of the term ‘appearance’ in §1.2.4.

§1.2.3: ‘Thing-in-itself’

The thing-in-itself (German: ding-an-sich) is the most difficult of the terms involved for several reasons. The first of which is simply that it has two correlate terms: noumenon, transcendental object, and another variant reading as ‘thing-as-it-is-in-itself’. Allison follows Gerold Prauss’ philological analysis of the terminology. Prauss point out two different locutions of the term ‘thing-in-itself’: ‘Ding an sich’ and ‘Ding an sich selbst’. "The crucial point,” Allison argues, “is that both the short and long forms are to be construed as elliptical versions of the canonical ‘thing considered as it is in itself’." In other words, Allison believes that Kant is never referring to ‘things-in-themselves’ as ontologically posited entities, but only as a certain way of considering things in empirical reality.

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B It should be noted that one can not only refer to the process of intuition, but also to particular intuitions, which are intuitions of something, i.e. particular mental events.
However, I do not follow Allison in this. Although it is clear that the ‘thing-considered-as-it-is-in-itself’ (which I shall simply refer to as ‘thing-considered-in-itself’) has a role to play in Kant’s philosophy, it is also clear that we can think of a ‘thing-in-itself’ as a positive ontological entity, though we may have no knowledge of it. The conceptual difference between the two is subtle; however, it is best explained as follows: a thing-considered-in-itself is just an idea; it is not something we actually believe exists. It is a blank thought that is abstracted from our concepts, and we consider its ontological status to be just that: a thought in our minds. In contrast, a thing-in-itself is something we actually imagine as existing, though we have no idea what it would be like. It is not merely a thought of how some empirical object would be as abstracted from the empirical forms that define it. It is instead an actual entity that we speculate to exist in transcendental reality—though we cannot know anything about it. Thus when I use the term ‘thing-in-itself” I am using it in an ontological sense to describe some indeterminate thing taken to exist in absolute, transcendental reality, even though I can make no claims about this existing thing, or even stipulate how it exists transcendentally or what it means to say something exists transcendentally in a positive sense. In contrast to this, I shall use the term ‘thing-considered-in-itself” in a non-metaphysical, non-ontological sense to describe the idea of a thing-in-itself, i.e. an idea that is abstracted from our sensible conditions.

The ‘noumenon’ and ‘transcendental object’ are closely related to one another, as the former seems to have been replaced by the latter in the second edition of the critique. The second edition “not only dropped all references to the transcendental object but also introduced the distinction between a positive and a negative sense of the noumenon.” Kant explains these senses in the following manner:

If by a noumenon we understand a thing insofar as it is not an object of our sensible intuition, because we abstract from the manner of our intuition of it, then this is a noumenon in the negative sense. But if we understand by that object
of a non-sensible intuition, then we assume a special kind of intuition, namely intellectual intuition, which, however, is not our own, and the possibility of which we cannot understand, and this would be the noumenon in a positive sense.\textsuperscript{31}

Thus the negative sense of noumenon is merely a ‘thing-considered-in-itself’ as I have described it above, and the positive sense is a ‘thing-in-itself’. Thus in my analysis I shall only use these two terms.\textsuperscript{32}

§1.2.4: ‘Appearance’ and ‘Phenomenon’

As noted above, ontological idealism inevitably arises in Kant’s theory when the terms ‘appearance’ and ‘representation’ are conflated. However, the term ‘appearance’ is used so indiscriminately by Kant, that such a conflation may arise quite easily. It is here that my nuanced distinction between ‘appearance’ and ‘phenomenon’ comes into play. Kant states that “appearances, to the extent that as objects they are thought in accordance with the unity of the categories, are called \textit{phaenomena}.\textsuperscript{33} He then goes on to say in contrast that if one supposes there to exist things that are objects of a purely intellectual understanding (i.e. God’s understanding), “then such things would be called noumena.”\textsuperscript{34} ‘Noumena’ can here be taken in its positive ontological sense of a ‘thing-in-itself’. Indeed, Allison agrees upon this point, stating that ‘phenomenon’ “appears to be an ontological concept, referring to a distinct kind of object.”\textsuperscript{35} Furthermore, a phenomenon is distinct from appearances in general because it is “a conceptually determined appearance.”\textsuperscript{36} Under my interpretation, I shall refer to a phenomenon as something that exists as a physical object in empirical reality (i.e. exists in space and time) and exists independently of the minds that may perceive it. However, it is very important to note that I do not mean that these things are transcendentally independent of the minds that perceive them, for this would entail that they would not have to conform to the limits of spatiotemporality. To the contrary, \textit{empirical reality} is a reality \textit{entirely defined and limited by} space and time, so it would
be a *logical contradiction* to talk about an empirically real object that was not extended in space and time.

§1.3: Transcendental Idealism and Ontological Idealism

The first question one is confronted with when one deals with TI is, “why and how is it different from standard idealism about objects?” I dub the general category that contains these common types of idealism *ontological idealism* (hereafter referred to as OI). A theory is a form of OI when it holds any of these three views: 1) that all things that exist are mental, 2) that the mind creates the objects it perceives, or 3) that objects only exist when they are being perceived (or any combination thereof). As mentioned above, Kant held himself to be a Transcendental Idealist and an Empirical Realist. Thus the interpretations of Kant that hold idealism at the empirical level of reality will violate Kant’s own understanding of his theory. My interpretation of TI shall attempt to escape a commitment to OI at either the transcendental or empirical level, for while OI at the empirical level is of immediate concern, OI at the transcendental level is also unacceptable, as I shall show in §2.4.

However, many of the existing interpretations of Kant do make such a commitment at the empirical level, which results in an unacceptable rendering of Kant’s theory. As Hoke Robinson points out in his exceptionally clear essay on the matter:

> On the one side is the view of Strawson and others: Kant *is* an idealist, unfortunately, since ‘the doctrines of transcendental idealism and the associated picture of the mind producing Nature are undoubtedly the chief obstacles to a sympathetic understanding of the Critique.’ On the other is that of interpreters such as Baum: Kant is not an idealist, fortunately, since otherwise he would be inconsistent with his own views. Some more recent commentators have been less intimidated by the idealism charge, among them Prauss, Allison, and Aquila.38

The question, then, is whether the objects of empirical reality really exist outside the mind that perceives them, or whether, “as Hegel charged already early on in his critique of Kant, that Kant’s objects are not genuinely, objectively real, but in fact only *subjectively* objective.”39
other words, many interpreters of Kant interpret his stance of ER as merely concerned with whether the entities in empirical reality behave according to a set of rules that is set up by the mind that intuits them. Thus under such an interpretation, all objects in empirical reality are still considered to be mental entities that exist only in the mind that perceives them. This, of course, still entails a form of OI at the empirical level.

The problem with this way of interpreting Kant is that Kant himself denies this kind of idealism:

Idealism (I mean material idealism\(^{40}\)) is the theory that declares the existence of objects in space outside us to be either merely doubtful and indemonstrable, or else false and impossible; the former is the problematic idealism of Descartes… the latter is the dogmatic idealism of Berkeley, who declares space, together with all the things to which it is attached as an inseparable condition, to be something that is impossible in itself, and who therefore also declares things in space to be merely imaginary. Dogmatic idealism is unavoidable if one regards space as a property that is to pertain to the things in themselves; for then it, along with everything for which it serves as a condition, is a non-entity. The ground for this idealism, however, has been undercut by us in the Transcendental Aesthetic.\(^{41,42}\)

Thus Kant holds that his philosophy necessarily precludes him from committing to the kind of idealism that denies the existence of objects in space as separate from the mind that perceives them.\(^{43}\)

Although Kant's negative claims against empirical idealism are clear, it is less clear how his positive philosophy avoids it. Kant maintains that “we can and must assume extended beings in space as real; and it is precisely the same with time.”\(^{44}\) Unfortunately right after this he backtracks by stating that “space itself, however, together with time, and, with both, all appearances, are not things, but rather nothing but representations, and they cannot exist at all outside our mind.”\(^{45}\) In fact, he continues to dig himself into an idealistic hole by stating that objects “are real when they stand in an empirical connection with my real consciousness, although they are not therefore real in themselves, i.e., outside this progress of experience.”\(^{46}\)
Thus it seems that although he may argue against the idealism of Berkeley and Descartes, he is himself committed to a form of empirical OI; for he seems to deny the existence of empirical objects outside of mental experience. However, this is a confused reading of Kant because not only does it contradict his own claims, but it conflates empirical ideality with transcendental ideality. It does this because Kant is calling space and time “mere representations” in order to establish that we cannot know whether they have transcendental reality; not because they are mental entities. Thus we must avoid conflating the purely epistemic meaning of TI as Kant understood it with a commitment to OI at the empirical level. Keeping this in mind, I will now turn to give a very brief summary of the different interpretations of TI.

§1.4: The Debate Thus Far

In the preface to the second edition of Kant’s Transcendental Idealism, Henry Allison states his purpose is to “not only defend Kant’s transcendental idealism and my particular interpretation of it but also to argue much more extensively and systematically than I originally did for its inseparability from virtually every facet of the Critique.” In short, Allison endeavors to provide a defense of TI as not only a workable doctrine for Kant, but a doctrine that the rest of Kant’s Critique of Pure Reason needs in order to function properly.

However, many of the major Kantian scholars have been openly dismissive of TI. In his seminal work, The Bounds of Sense, P.F. Strawson states that transcendental idealism is the doctrine that “reality is supersensible and that we can have no knowledge of it” and that “there are points in plenty at which the doctrine takes swift plunges into intelligibility.” Paul Guyer also argues against Allison that “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.” Thus, these two authors clearly wish to abandon any
attempt to rehabilitate TI. Since my project is to provide a coherent account of TI, it is prudent to now consider at greater length the various interpretations thereof. Thus I shall now proceed to give an account of the two main ways of interpreting Kant in which Allison and others are situated: ‘two aspect’ interpretations and ‘two world’ interpretations.\textsuperscript{c}

\textbf{§1.4.1: ‘Two Aspects’ vs. ‘Two Worlds’}

Allison argues “for a version of what is usually called a ‘two-aspect’ view,” while many of his opponents argue for a more traditional ‘two world’ or ‘two object’ view in their interpretations of transcendental idealism.\textsuperscript{50, 51} As Allison point out, “in most (though not all) cases this reading is combined with a summary dismissal of transcendental idealism as a viable position.”\textsuperscript{52} There are a great many variations on these views, so I will limit myself to their general form below.\textsuperscript{53}

The ‘two world’ view can also be considered an ontologically oriented interpretation of TI. This is because this view typically establishes appearances and things-in-themselves as ontologically distinct entities, usually with the latter being interpreted as somehow ‘causing’ the former. As Hoke\textsuperscript{D} puts it:

The two world view maps Kant's three entities—representation, appearance, and thing in itself—onto the two entities of the Lockean position by first separating appearance and thing in itself into two distinct worlds or realms; it then identifies, on the basis of ample textual evidence, the appearance with the representation. The fleeting nature of the representation is thus attributed to the appearance as well, with disastrous results for the Critical philosophy with respect to spatiality, phenomenality, and affection.\textsuperscript{54}

Thus the ‘two world’ view is a two world view because it holds that the world of appearance is ontologically distinct from the world of the thing-in-itself. Thus it is clear, as Hoke puts it, that

\textsuperscript{c} These two lines of interpretation are by no means exhaustive, as many have offered varied and nuanced approaches to the issue. However, since it would be a nearly impossible task to account for every interpretation, I shall settle with briefly describing the two main categories.

\textsuperscript{D} Although I object to Hoke’s particular interpretation of Kant because it still commits to an unacceptable form of idealism, I what follows, I shall largely rely upon Hoke Robinson’s analysis for the sake of simplicity.
“the difficulties stemming from the two world view are commonly seen as insoluble, so much so that, with a few notable exceptions, adoption of the two world view seems to derive from a prior antipathy to the transcendental philosophy, rather than the other way around.”\textsuperscript{55} Specifically, the ‘two world’ views claim that things-in-themselves somehow cause appearances, which is completely unacceptable given the unknowability thesis, for this would be a positive claim about things-in-themselves.

The ‘two aspect’ view, on the other hand, usually interprets appearances as being an ‘aspect’ of things-in-themselves, and thus not ontologically distinct from them. As Robinson explains it, the ‘two aspect’ view “separates the appearance from the representation and attaches it to the thing in itself: it takes the appearance as a ‘way of considering’ a thing, of which another ‘way of considering’ it is as thing in itself.”\textsuperscript{56} However, this does not mean that two aspect views cannot also be metaphysical, for as Schulting notes, “two-aspect views can either be of a form of ‘property dualism’ or, as Allison sees it, a methodological view.”\textsuperscript{57, 58} Allison offers an “epistemologically based understanding of transcendental idealism,” which “requires that the transcendental distinction between appearances and things in themselves be understood as holding between two ways of \textit{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).”\textsuperscript{59} In contrast, the ‘property dualism’ version of the ‘two aspect’ view holds that “the ‘double aspect’ character is not a matter of distinguishing between ‘two ways of describing’ these two kinds of aspect, but rather of distinguishing between two kinds of properties that the thing itself has.”\textsuperscript{60} But this latter form of the ‘two aspect’ view “seems hardly Kantian, not even in spirit.”\textsuperscript{61, 62} This is because it clearly violates the unknowability thesis by making positive claims about the properties of things-in-themselves.\textsuperscript{63}
Given the analysis above it seems that both the ‘two world’ and metaphysical ‘two aspect’ views violate the unknowability thesis. However, it is not yet clear that the methodological version of the theory given by Allison also fails to give a defensible version of TI. Considering that Allison is concerned with giving the most defensible interpretation of TI, I shall now focus upon his interpretation in order to show how even it fails to make TI an acceptable theory.

§1.4.2: Why Allison’s Theory Fails

While both the metaphysical and methodological ‘two aspect’ views are less dismissive of TI than the ‘two world’ views, they still involve “insurmountable problems.” The primary problem with the metaphysical version is that the ‘two aspects’ of the same thing have contradictory qualities: the appearance is spatial and the thing-in-itself is non-spatial. The question then is how can one thing have contradictory properties?

The primary problem with the methodological version of the ‘two aspect’ view is directly derived from this problem, for how can we even consider something to have two contradictory properties? As Robinson puts it, the “two considerations indeed must reduce to two aspects, if the considerations are not to be vacuous.” In other words, it doesn’t seem to help us at all that we are merely considering something to have two aspects, because it is just as difficult for us to consider something as having contradictory properties as it is for something to actually have those contradictory properties. This is why a thought of something like ‘round square’ is generally considered to be vacuous. As Robinson explains it:

a consideration of a thing under some aspect or respect A would be vacuous if there is no sense in which the thing has, or is, A: I can consider the Pietà as a great work of art, a lump of marble, an expression of religious faith, or a valuable commodity, but to consider it as a rocket or as a mathematical formula is just to be mistaken. Thus if the two considerations are to be nonvacuous, we must ultimately deal with the aspects to which the considerations are directed, and
hence with the original question, that of the sameness of the object having the two aspects.\textsuperscript{67}

Thus it seems almost impossible for even any methodological version of the ‘two aspect’ theory to account for the identity relation between the appearance and the thing-in-itself. Surely it is no more plausible to consider something as having contradictory properties than it is for the thing itself to have those contradictory properties. Kant himself notes: “I can think whatever I like, as long as I do not contradict myself, i.e., as long as my concept is a possible thought.”\textsuperscript{68} But since this is a contradictory thought, we cannot even think of things-considered-in-themselves in this way. Thus Allison’s methodological version of the ‘two-aspect’ view also fails, though not because it violates the unknowability thesis, but because it requires us to think contradictory things.

Allison holds this methodological ‘two aspect’ view because he wishes to avoid an interpretation of TI that makes any ontological claims whatsoever. He does this because such ontological claims usually lead to either the dismissive ‘two world’ or otherwise idealistic interpretations of TI, both of which are unacceptable for a sympathetic reading of Kant.\textsuperscript{69} Instead, Allison wishes read TI as simply making “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.”\textsuperscript{70, 71} While the other theories fail to be Kantian because they violate the unknowability thesis, it is also important for my purposes in this paper to establish an interpretation of TI that is philosophically acceptable in general. Thus aside from the above objection that we cannot even consider the same thing to be both an appearance and a thing-considered-in-itself, there is a further question Allison’s account must answer: how can it function without any ontological claims whatsoever?
To phrase the question differently: of what epistemological use is it to think of something as abstracted from one’s own mental conditions if one does not also believe in the possibility that at least a part of reality could lie beyond those conditions? For if one did not believe that this was at least possible then one would thereby believe that our knowledge is absolute. Why should we even bother considering something as ‘in-itself’ if it can’t actually be ‘in-itself’? As Guyer and Wood put it, it is “a non sequitur to infer that the properties in virtue of which objects satisfy our conditions of access to them must be contributed by the mind, unless there is some specific reason why those properties could only be contributed by the mind.”72 In other words, what is the point of referring to things as being appearances if they couldn’t be anything else? Doesn’t the very concept of ‘things-as-they-appear’ imply that the thing could actually be different from how it appears? In order to use the idea of objects as abstracted from the conditions of our sensibility as an epistemologically meaningful consideration, we must at least consider the possibility that the way we perceive objects is different from how these objects truly are. But within this latter consideration is at least one implicit ontological claim: anything that truly exists, exists in-itself. I shall return to this axiom below.

It is for these reasons that I believe Allison's account is lacking. While it is clear that Allison wishes to skirt ontological issues, it is equally clear that no epistemological account can be truly fleshed out without giving some reference to the ontological status of that which knows and that which is known.

§2

The Proposed Theory

I began this essay by laying out the fundamentals of Kant’s theory. I then defined the vital terminology, introduced the two main schools of interpretation, and voiced objections to
these interpretations. Although Allison’s theory is the most defensible version offered hitherto, I have also shown that even it fails. Thus I shall now move on to my own interpretation of TI.

As the title would suggest, Kant’s *Critique of Pure Reason* is largely an epistemological work: Kant does not spend much time explaining the metaphysical aspect of his theory. Allison argues that Kant’s transcendental idealism is “grounded in a reflection on the *a priori* conditions of human cognition (what I term ‘epistemic conditions’) rather than, as in other forms of idealism (for example, Berkeley’s), on the ontological status of what is known.”73 However, even if someone like Allison wishes to interpret Kant as largely making epistemological claims (which is reasonable considering Kant’s goals and terminology), that person must still provide a convincing account of how to resolve the metaphysical issues of TI.

§2.1: The Obstacles of TI and My Solution

As stated above, the objective of this essay is to establish an interpretation of TI that not only upholds the fundamental tenets of the theory but also escapes a commitment to OI. However, this last objective is difficult because much of what Kant says can be seen as just such a commitment. Recall from above the definition of OI in §1.3. I dub the main objection to TI that I am attempting to overcome *The Idealist Objection*. The objection is that TI is committed to a form of OI, because it either:

1) Claims that all things that exist are mental,

2) Claims that the mind creates the objects it perceives, or

3) Claims that objects only exist when they are being perceived.

As Strawson puts it, “the doctrines of transcendental idealism, and the associated picture of the receiving and ordering apparatus of the mind producing Nature as we know it out of the unknowable reality of things as they are in themselves, are undoubtedly the chief obstacles to a sympathetic understanding of the *Critique*.”74
It is in response to this line of objection that I have formulated my interpretation of TI. Although this interpretation may be more textually questionable than those presented by Allison and his contemporaries, the goal of my project is to present the most acceptable form of TI that still abides by the two tenets laid out in §1.1. It is not a project of hermeneutics so much as it is a stipulation of the best possible version of Kant’s theory. Thus I shall now proceed to explain my interpretation.

In my reading of Kant I propose an ontological dichotomy between *empirical* reality and *transcendental* reality. Although this may at first seem like a form of the ‘two world’ interpretation discussed above, this theory does *not* propose two ontologically separate worlds or realities. Instead it is a *one world* interpretation of TI. However, my interpretation also differs from both versions of the ‘two aspect’ view as well. At first it may appear to be a metaphysical dual aspect view, but this would be mistaken as the metaphysical dual aspect views stipulate that the ‘as-it-appears’ property and the ‘in-itself’ property both inhere in *the same object*. This of course produces a dilemma; for one has to either admit that things-in-themselves are spatial (thus violating the unknowability thesis) or that they are both spatial and non-spatial (thus committing to a logical contradiction). Instead, I propose that the dual aspects do not apply to individual things, but rather to *reality* itself. I shall explain this in further detail below, but I shall first briefly explain how my view differs from Allison’s.

§2.1.1: *How I Differ from Allison*

Recall that Allison understands his dual aspect theory in a purely methodological sense. Allison believes that a thing-in-itself is just a thing-as-it-appears considered-as-it-is-in-itself. However, as I have shown in §1.4.2 above, we cannot do this without contradicting ourselves. In contrast, my theory implies two aspects of *reality* (i.e. empirical and transcendental), rather than two aspects of *things*. By doing so, my interpretation avoids positing contradictory properties
onto the same objects. Instead, my interpretation claims that we cannot know whether empirical objects are things-in-themselves or that transcendental reality is even composed of discreet objects like empirical reality is. Furthermore, my interpretation can avoid objections similar to those leveled against Allison by not admitting a strong sense of identity between empirical reality and transcendental reality. While empirical reality is defined by space and time, this does not mean that transcendental reality is also, for we could imagine that empirical reality is merely contained in transcendental reality, and that transcendental reality is somehow beyond being merely spatiotemporal. The question then is how empirical reality (and the objects therein) reduces to transcendental reality. The objects in empirical reality cannot be known to be things-in-themselves, but rather we can only know that empirical reality in general has its basis in transcendental reality. In other words, empirical reality ultimately reduces to transcendental reality, though we can not know exactly how it does so in regard to the discrete objects in either level of reality. I shall take this up in §2.3 below.

Allison is committed to interpreting ‘thing-in-itself” as ‘thing-considered-in-itself” in order to avoid giving Kant’s theory any ontological assumptions. But as I have already argued, a ‘thing-considered-in-itself” can have no meaning whatsoever unless we actually stipulate the existence of things-in-themselves (though we have no knowledge of them). I differ from Allison in that my interpretation of this dual aspect theory does contain ontological connotations. However, I avoid violating the unknowability thesis by making this one ontological supposition very general: anything that truly exists, exists in-itself. In order to avoid OI at the empirical level, I propose that we grant ontological status to phenomena, but only tentatively. On my reading the objects in empirical reality can be said to exist outside of the mind that intuits them, because the mind itself is merely another phenomenal object in empirical reality.

§2.2: The Ontological Supposition
As alluded to in my objection to Allison, for TI to make sense there must be one ontological supposition: **anything that truly exists, exists in-itself.** That is to say, the true existence of an object is independent of our perception of it. According to my interpretation we need the concept of a thing-in-itself not only in order to negatively describe the limits of our sensibility (i.e. the ‘thing-considered-in-itself’), but also because the *only* way for a thing to *truly* exist *is in itself.* Now to deny that the only way for a thing to exist is in-itself would entail an obvious absurdity: that a thing can exist *outside-of-itself.* But moving beyond the semantics of the claim, one may ask whether this ontological supposition violates the *unknowability thesis,* for it seems to be making a claim about things-in-themselves.

Fortunately, this is not the case. The ontological supposition I propose is purely hypothetical because it does not *assert* anything about things-in-themselves. Instead, it is merely an implication: it states that for any thing that truly exists, that thing exists *in-itself.* In fact, this supposition is essentially a tautology (for ‘having true existence’ is defined as ‘existing in-itself’ and viceversa), and would thus be considered merely *analytic* (i.e. already being implicit in the concepts considered) by Kant. In other words, it *can’t even be considered knowledge* (in the stronger sense of the term), for all knowledge, according to Kant, is *synthetic* (i.e. involving sensibility). In contrast, analytic judgments merely clarify our conceptions for us. Thus this supposition (taken by itself) does not violate the unknowability thesis because the unknowability thesis is denying that we can have *cognition* of things-in-themselves, not that we can think about and clarify our concepts of them, for this would merely be non-substantive knowledge.  

However, since it is a tautology, I must show how the ontological supposition is necessary for TI. Allison only wishes to explain TI as an epistemological theory, without committing Kant to *any* ontological claims whatsoever. However, I hold that Kant *must* make
some sort of ontological commitment, even if his primary concern is epistemology. The objection I pose to Allison is, “how can one give an adequate account of knowledge without referencing what is?” Surely in order to even talk about knowledge, one must at least posit the existence of a knower, if not also the existence of what is known. Allison wishes to only refer to ‘thing-in-itself’ as ‘thing-considered-in-itself’ because he believes Kant is merely describing the epistemological limitations placed upon us by our sensibility. But why would it be at all helpful to speak of these limitations unless we actually thought that things actually exist in-themselves. It is only once we admit the ontological supposition that we can even begin to speak about things-considered-in-themselves. It is from this ontological supposition that I derive my interpretation of TI, which I shall now turn to below.

§2.3: Ontological Reductionism

When the ontological supposition that anything that truly exists, exists in-itself is added to the stipulation that we cannot claim to know anything about things-in-themselves, we come to the conclusion that we cannot be sure whether anything in empirical reality is a thing-in-itself. I take this to be the thrust of TI. However, many of the other interpretations of TI view it as a sort of Cartesian skepticism about the external world, and even a form of OI at the empirical level. In response to this tendency I have formed my theory in such a way that it escapes any sort of commitment to OI at the empirical level. I do this by treating the minds of observers as empirical objects (phenomenon). By doing this I am claiming that we are unsure about whether our own minds will reduce to things-in-themselves, just as we are unsure whether any other empirical object will reduce in this manner. However, before I explain how my theory accomplishes this latter point, I will first lay out the general theory itself.

As mentioned above, I propose a modification to the typical dual aspect interpretations of Kant by moving the dual-aspectism from applying to individual objects (as things-as-they-
appear/things-in-themselves) to applying only in general to reality itself (as empirical/transcendental). Under my interpretation empirical objects (phenomena) do not, properly speaking, have transcendental reality, but must have their basis in transcendental reality. The problem with metaphysical dual aspect views is that they want to apply an identity between phenomena and things-in-themselves. In contrast, my interpretation wishes to reduce empirical reality to transcendental reality. Rather than a determinate phenomenon reducing to a determinate thing-in-itself, I shall instead argue that, due to Kant’s own restraints, we are permitted only to say that things-as-they-appear-in-general reduce to things-in-themselves-in-general. The point of this nuance is that we can never know whether a phenomenon is directly associated with a thing-in-itself. For example: what we think is just one empirical object could turn out to be a conglomerate of different things at the transcendental level, or it may even turn out that the entire talk of ‘things’ that we use to describe phenomena is insufficient to describe transcendental reality, which is completely beyond all human comprehension. We may speculate as to how things in empirical reality might reduce, but we can never know how they reduce.

However, it could not be the case that an empirical object (phenomenon) has no basis in transcendental reality, because this would be to say that it has no existence whatsoever, not even as an illusion. This is the case because even illusions have some form of existence; a hallucination might not exist in the world, but it does at least exist as an event in my mind. I could imagine that transcendental reality is a solipsistic idealism where only my mind exists and the world is just some grand hallucination, but even then it would be my hallucination, and would thus still have existence.\(^E\)

\(^E\) However, I can only imagine this scenario because I have no certainty that my mind will reduce to a transcendentally real object, as I will show in the section on subjectivity below.
To grasp my point about reductionism, let us consider three possible ways of reducing the appearance of an apple in normal scientific terms, and then consider how this can work analogously for ontological reduction.

**Example 1: A hologram of an apple.**

**Example 2: A hallucination of an apple.**

**Example 3: An apple.**

**Ex. 1:** In this example the hologram is an image (an appearance, if you will) that is comprised of reflected light. If one were to take the holographic apple as a material object, one would be mistaken because it is actually a composite of reflections; there is no *one* material object that the appearance reduces to. I use this example because the hologram is still a physical phenomenon in the external world (not just a mental image or hallucination), but it still does not reduce neatly. Thus everything in empirical reality could be analogous to the hologram example: it could be the case that transcendental reality is something akin to Spinoza’s monist theory, wherein there is really only one substance that differentiates itself through different properties.

**Ex. 2:** In this example I am merely hallucinating that an apple is in front of me. Like the hologram example above, a pure mental hallucination also would not reduce neatly to a physical entity. However, once again, this does not mean that it doesn’t reduce to any physical entity at all. In fact, the scientific realist would say that a mental appearance *does* reduce to a physical phenomenon, e.g. my sensation of redness could just be nothing more than the firing of my neurons. Thus even the hallucination still *exists*, but only as a *mental entity*. Thus in the case of the hallucination there is no entity that we posit outside of our own experience.

Thus the transcendental analogy that we may draw from this example is that *transcendental reality* may be a version of the situation entertained by Descartes in his *Meditations*. In this scenario, *transcendental reality* is comprised of only one mind and its
experiences, and thus space and time would merely be delusions. However, this analogy is speculation about a transcendentally existing mind, and cannot be applied to our own minds. In other words, we cannot doubt the existence of the external world around us by entertaining this possibility.80

Ex. 3: The actual apple is the only example that reduces the way we want it to. The scientific realist perspective states that in the case where we actually perceive an apple, there is a separate thing in the world that corresponds to my mental image of the apple, i.e. the physical apple. The apple and my mental image of the apple are two different ontological entities. The transcendental realist approach says that there is one thing that holds the properties we attribute to the apple: the apple itself. In other words, the apple is just a thing-in-itself.

But this is just one possibility, and we could never know whether everything reduces so neatly, thus the transcendental realist is quite wrong to claim that we know that all empirical objects are transcendentally real. We may extend our sensibility through advanced scientific instruments such as particle accelerators, but all of the data we get from this information must still be comprehensible to us. The point of TI is that in order for any information about reality to be accessible to us this information must be constricted to the limitations of our own minds. It may well be the case that we are right, and that everything matches up in-itself to the way it appears to us, but this itself is a piece of transcendental knowledge that we are forever denied.

Thus I have shown three brief examples of how empirical reality could reduce to transcendental reality. It is important to note that my theory is not a dual aspect theory in the proper sense of the term, for it does not stipulate that empirical reality shares an identity with transcendental reality. Rather, it could be the case that empirical reality merely emerges out of transcendental reality, or is merely a limited aspect of transcendental reality. In Ex. 1, we could see how space and time could exist as a part of transcendental reality, but transcendental reality
could (aptly enough) *transcend* space and time. We may see this in certain theories in physics which describes space and time as dimensions that are merely subsumed by higher dimensions. However, it could also be the case that space and time don’t even exist in this limited sense, but are perhaps just a hallucination of some transcendental mind. By contrast, if my theory held that there *was* an identity between empirical reality and transcendental reality it might be committed to limiting the possible natures of transcendental reality by empirical reality, which would violate the unknowability thesis. Whatever the case may be, what *is* clear is that this is all speculation: we cannot *know* whether any of these theories are the actual case.\(^\text{81}\)

My interpretation of TI attempts to escape a commitment to OI by allowing for us to tentatively consider *all* physical phenomena (empirical objects) as still having equally independent existence, while also maintaining the *unknowability* and *a priori* theses that are central to TI. However, neither one of these conditions has been met by my arguments thus far. I shall now prove the second claim by establishing how this theory keeps to the two tenets laid out in §1.1.

§2.3.1: Ontological Reductionism and the Two Tenets

There are two tenets that my theory must not transgress in order to be considered Kantian: the *unknowability* thesis, and the *a priori* thesis. It is already clear from my exposition above that I do not violate the unknowability thesis, for my claim is that although we may speculate about the nature of transcendental reality, we cannot *know* whether our speculations are the case. In fact, my interpretation does far less to upset the unknowability thesis than many of the other popular interpretations, for my interpretation acknowledges that transcendental reality *could be* spatiotemporal, and merely rests with the fact that we cannot *know* whether it is or isn’t so. In addition to this, the one ontological claim that my theory *does* make is so general that it cannot count as knowledge in any positive sense.\(^\text{82}\) Since this is the case, I need now only prove
how my theory abides by the *a priori thesis*. In other words, I must now show how my theory allows us to form *a priori synthetic judgments*.\(^{83}\)

Unlike other interpretations, my interpretation allows for *a priori* synthetic judgments while also avoiding a commitment to OI at the empirical level. Kant states that we form such *a priori* synthetic judgments through the “pure *a priori* intuitions” of space and time.\(^{84}\) Kant gives some rather convoluted arguments about why space and time must be regarded as pure intuitions that I shall not delve into here.\(^{85}\) However, for our purposes we may note that even if we do not have a *sensible* intuition (i.e. an intuition that encounters an object that we perceive) of space and time, we still, according to Kant, have a *pure* intuition (i.e. an intuition that occurs entirely in our heads) of space and time.\(^{86}\) Kant’s stance seems to suggest that we are given our ability to derive such *a priori* synthetic judgments merely from the constitution of our own mind. This in turn suggests to many interpreters that space and time are *only* in the mind of the perceiver, which itself suggests that Kant commits to OI at the empirical level. My interpretation differs insomuch as it claims that not only do we have the pure intuitions of space and time that allow us to form these *a priori* synthetic judgments, but that space and time also exist as the *meta-*physical\(^{87}\) bounds of empirical reality.

My interpretation upholds the *a priori* thesis because space and time as the *meta-*physical bounds of empirical reality are perfectly aligned with our a priori intuitions of space and time. Thus whenever I derive an *a priori* synthetic judgment from my pure intuitions of space and time, that judgment will necessarily hold true of empirical reality. However, my pure *intuitions* of space and time are in my head and are separate from the *actual* space and time that encompass the empirical reality that I myself am a part of.\(^{88}\) By doing this my theory avoids saying that our minds *cause* empirical reality to operate under space and time.
An objector will inevitably question how I can be certain that my a priori synthetic judgments will line up with empirical reality in this way. Thus it may seem that my interpretation of TI will violate the a priori thesis by allowing for cases in which my a priori synthetic judgments will not be true. Thus I must show how empirical reality must abide by the forms of our sensibility while also existing as a reality in which our minds themselves exist.

My theory manages to uphold the a priori thesis through its reductionism. My interpretation holds that empirical reality is filtered by the limits of our own minds. Although this talk of ‘filtering reality’ may seem strange, it is really just another way of describing the theory of ontological reductionism that I have explained above. The question of how things reduce to the transcendental level is mirrored by the question of how transcendental reality filters down to the empirical level. Thus filtration is just the same as reduction, but in the opposite direction. Just as we cannot know how empirical reality reduces to transcendental reality, we also cannot know how transcendental reality filters down into empirical reality. But just as we know that empirical reality must reduce to transcendental reality somehow, we also know that transcendental reality must filter down into empirical reality somehow. But as opposed to transcendental reality, we do know the bounds of empirical reality (i.e. space and time).

The reason why this concept of filtration is relevant to maintaining the a priori thesis is that it displays how the objects within empirical reality are merely given tentative ontological status. If we discover that our forms of sensibility allow for knowledge of things outside of space and time empirical reality would thus extend beyond space and time. However, this does not entail that there is some actual change in transcendental reality when we make this discovery. Nothing has actually changed in a physical sense for transcendental reality remains the same. This is why we only grant the objects in empirical reality tentative ontological status, for if we gave them absolute ontological status (i.e. treated them as things-in-themselves) then such a
discovery about our sensibility would actually change reality itself. Empirical objects are defined by their ability to be known sensibly, and in order to be known sensibly, they must adhere to the laws of our sensibility. Thus empirical reality is defined as a reality that is wholly circumscribed by the limits of our sensibility. In other words, empirical reality must, by its very nature, abide by the forms of our sensibility. Thus any judgments we may derive from the form of our sensibility must necessarily apply to the objects of empirical reality, prior to our experience of them. It is in this manner that my interpretation upholds the a priori thesis.

While it is clear from the above analysis that my interpretation upholds both the unknowability thesis and the a priori thesis, there is one final objection that I must deal with. In order to function, my interpretation must consider the objects minds perceive as having an equal ontological status with the minds that perceive them. Otherwise it would fall into a form of empirical idealism in which space, time and the objects therein do not exist outside of the minds that perceive them and empirical reality would be composed entirely of minds perceiving ideas, much like Berkeley’s idealism. While my objective is to avoid a commitment to such a form of idealism, the standard interpretations of TI fall directly into this trap by construing space and time as existing only in the minds of the subjects as their forms of sensibility.

The reason why these interpreters treat Kant in this way may be because they believe that the Critique of Pure Reason is following the same method as Descartes did in his Meditations. If one holds that Kant is establishing the existence of space and time through the nature of our own minds, then one may easily conclude that he is an idealist. However, I interpret the Critique as merely giving an explanation of how we are able to form a priori synthetic judgments. In fact, under my interpretation Kant must already presuppose that space and time exist independently of any given mind in order to even engage in the Critique. This is the case because we can only talk determinedly about our own minds as phenomena inside of empirical reality. We cannot even
reference space and time as the forms of our sensibility without first acknowledging them as the meta-physical bounds of empirical reality itself. My interpretation rests upon my ability to show both how space and time are derived from the forms of our sensibility in general while also maintaining the independence of space and time from any individual mind. Since thus far I have only shown how the former is true through the concept of filtration, I shall now turn to prove the independence of space and time from any particular mind.⁹²

§2.4: The Problem of Subjectivity

The point of this essay is to derive an interpretation of TI that not only upholds the fundamental tenets of Kant’s philosophy, but also escapes a commitment to OI at the level of empirical reality. In order to accomplish the latter goal, I must show that the objects in empirical reality are taken to exist separately from the minds that perceive them. However, as stated above, many interpreters may see Kant as denying objects any existence independent of the minds that perceive them. Thus such an interpretation commits Kant to a form of Cartesian skepticism in regard to the external world by questioning the existence of the things that I perceive outside of my mental representation of them. However, in order to adopt this Cartesian skepticism, I must treat my mind as transcendentally real while questioning the transcendental reality of the empirical world that I perceive.⁹³ As I shall show, this reading of Kant is impossible given what he says in his section on the “Refutation of Idealism.”⁹⁴

The problem with positing this kind of Cartesian skepticism to Kant is that it ontologically privileges our own minds over other empirical objects, and to do this would be to give our minds transcendental reality. Kant gives an argument against this kind of skepticism in which he denies the coherence of doubting the empirical world while affirming that ones self is a thing-in-itself. In fact, Kant clearly states that we cannot even know our own sensibility except through intuition:
It is never given to us to observe our own mind with any other intuition than that of our inner sense. For in that lies the mystery of the origin of our sensibility. Its relation to an object, and what might be the transcendental ground of this unity, undoubtedly lie too hidden for us, who know even ourselves only through inner sense, thus as appearance, to be able to use such an unsuitable tool of investigation to find out anything except always more appearances, even though we would gladly investigate their non-sensible cause. \(^95\)

In order to know (have cognition of) my self I need to intuit it, but in order for me to do that, I would have to be both subject and object at the same time. Kant explains that any notion of a self that I can have must presuppose the existence of the external world:

Consciousness in time is necessarily combined with the consciousness of the possibility of this time-determination: Therefore it is also necessarily combined with the existence of the things outside me, as the condition of time-determination; i.e., the consciousness of my own existence is at the same time an immediate consciousness of the existence of other things outside me. \(^96\)

While the interpretations of Kant’s Refutation are debatable,\(^97\) it will suffice to say that Kant is arguing something to the effect that since we have no immediate intuition of our selves, we must construct our representations of our selves from our experiences of our selves in the world. Thus if we are to question the existence of the external world, we must equally question the existence of our self. Any time we talk about our determinate ‘self’ we must really be talking about our self as it exists as a phenomenon in empirical reality. But if we do this, then how can we doubt empirical reality while also affirming the existence of our self as an empirical object?

In order for me to consider the world outside of me with skepticism, I must consider my own mind as a thing-in-itself. The problem is that I have no right to do this. Kant argues that “the consciousness of myself in the representation I is no intuition at all, but a merely intellectual representation of the self-activity of a thinking subject.”\(^98\) In other words, I have no cognition of a transcendental self (i.e. a soul): I merely imagine that I have a transcendental self. I can imagine that my self exists while empirical reality does not, but in doing so, I am engaging in an exercise of pure transcendental speculation: the transcendental self that I’m imagining is in no
way related to my self as I experience it in empirical reality. As Kant puts it, “the deception of substituting the logical possibility of the concept (since it does not contradict itself) for the transcendental possibility of things (where an object corresponds to the concept) can deceive and satisfy only the inexperienced.” In other words, although I can imagine transcendental reality as a solipsistic idealism wherein only my mind exists and that I only imagine space and time, I would be speaking about my mind as a transcendently real object. But I have no proof that my mind as I perceive it (i.e. as an empirical object) could possibly be that same transcendental object that I am imagining.

It is for this reason that we must take space and time to be the meta-physical bounds of empirical reality before we can even talk about them being the forms of our sensibility. We cannot think of our own minds as creating space and time because we must already presuppose the existence of space and time in order to talk about our minds. However, this is not to say that we are incapable of imagining a version of transcendental reality in which space and time only exist in the mind of some thinking thing. We must merely be aware of the fact that any such imagining is nothing more than transcendentally speculation, and that any such transcendental thinking entity has no real link to our own minds. If there really is some transcendental mind that imagines empirical reality, it is a matter of coincidence and is not a resultant claim of TI itself.

§3
The Problem of Affection

Now that I have laid out my interpretation of Kant, I shall proceed by applying this interpretation to one of the major problems of the Critique: the problem of affection. In order to show how my interpretation provides a superior alternative to the other interpretations, I shall compare it to the accounts of Henry Allison and Lorne Falkenstein. The problem at hand is quite
nicely summed up by Lorne Falkenstein in chapter ten of *Kant’s Intuitionism: A Commentary on the Transcendental Aesthetic*

Kant defines sensation as that in our experience that results from our being affected by objects (A/19-20/B34). This definition makes no explicit reference to things in themselves. But how else is it to be understood? What could ‘afflicting objects’ responsible for our sensations be if they are not things in themselves? The only other candidate in the Kantian ontology would seem to provide is appearance. But, regardless of whether one takes appearances to be mental representations, logical constructs on mental representations, or the intentional objects of certain acts of mind induced in us as a result of the cognitive process, this much is clear: appearances are objects as they come to be known by us through the process of cognition, and so as a result of our being affected. How could that which emerges only through the process of cognition be the very same thing that does the affecting or determines the form of what is thought through being affected?\(^{100,101}\)

The dilemma, as Falkenstein explains it, is this: an appearance is something that has *already* been subjected to the knower’s sensibility, and thus it would be circular for it to stand as its own cause. But if the affecting objects are *things-in-themselves* and we cannot know anything about *things-in-themselves* Kant runs into self contradiction. To claim that *things-in-themselves* must be the objects of intuitions is a positive claim about *things-in-themselves* and thus contradicts the principle of the unknowability of *things-in-themselves*. As Jacobi (the first person to point out the dilemma) puts it, we “seem to be in the predicament of not being able to enter the Kantian philosophy without the concept of thing in itself and unable to stay there with that concept.”\(^{103}\)

However, this dilemma (like all other dilemmas) only works if we are presented with two options: either 1) the affecting object is the *thing-in-itself*, or 2) the affecting object is also the mental representation of the object (thus entailing an infinite regression). I shall examine each of these options respectively and offer my solution to the problem utilizing the interpretation of TI that I have explained above. In short, I shall argue that empirical affection is not only acceptable under my reading of TI, but is the only real way we can understand affection without committing Kant to contradictions.
§3.1: Transcendental Affection

The problem with the first option in the dilemma is that, as Falkenstein points out, “in the notion of an affecting object, the thing in itself is not merely an empty concept about which no knowledge claim is made; something very specific is claimed about it: that it exists outside the subject and causes the sensation that the mind experiences.”

Kant states that “in whatever way and through whatever means a cognition may relate to objects, that through which it relates immediately to them, and at which all thought as a means is directed as an end, is intuition.”

Kant states immediately after this that the process of intuition “takes place only insofar as the object is given to us; but this in turn, <at least for us humans,> is possible only if it affects the mind in a certain way.”

However, in addition to this Kant defines appearance as “the undetermined object of an empirical intuition.” The reason why this might entail transcendental affection is that the term ‘undetermined object’ seems to imply an object that is not conceptually determined. In other words, an ‘undetermined object’ can easily be interpreted as a ‘thing-considered-in-itself.’

Indeed, this interpretation of ‘undetermined object’ is backed almost explicitly by other statements Kant makes. Kant states that “objects are given to us by means of sensibility, and it alone affords us intuitions” and that “the capacity (receptivity) to acquire representations through the way in which we are affected by objects is called sensibility.” In addition to this, Kant goes on to state that

we can call the merely intelligible cause of appearances in general the transcendental object, merely so that we may have something corresponding to sensibility as a receptivity. To this transcendental object we can ascribe the whole extent and connection of our possible perceptions, and say that it is given in itself prior to all experience… Thus one can say: The real things of past time are given in the transcendental object of experience.
By stating that the transcendental object is the “merely intelligible cause of appearances in general” Kant is essentially stating that we can at least think of some undetermined thing-considered-in-itself as ‘causing’ our appearances in general, and is thus giving further credence to the textual possibility of transcendental affection.

However, as Falkenstein notes, “the concept of cause, as Kant presents is, involves a reference to time,” and “if things in themselves are not in time, then they cannot even be thought as causes of our experiences.”\textsuperscript{111} Thus if we are to speak of affection it cannot be a derivation of Kant’s category of ‘cause,’ but must rather be some sort of extremely general concept of causality, which would be better thought of as a ‘source’ than ‘cause’\textsuperscript{112}. However, even if Kant permits us to use such a term, there is no positive outcome in assuming transcendental affection, for “we are merely naming something of which we have no knowledge, and our concepts of things in themselves thus remain purely negative.”\textsuperscript{113} Nevertheless, Allison believes that the proper answer to the dilemma lies in transcendental affection.

\textit{§3.1.1: Allison’s Account}

Allison believes that the affecting object must in fact be a ‘transcendental object’. The reason why Allison believes this is because he holds that:

a merely empirical account of affection, which reduces it to a causal relation between an affecting object and the mind of our sensory apparatus, cannot provide what Kant’s transcendental account requires, namely, an \textit{epistemic} relation between a discursive intelligence and the source of the matter or content of its sensible intuition.\textsuperscript{114}

However, Allison also maintains that “no entities are assumed (in the account of affection) other than the spatiotemporal objects of human experience.”\textsuperscript{115} Instead, the transcendental object is merely the same as these spatiotemporal objects, but “insofar as these are to function in a transcendental account as material conditions of human cognition, they cannot, without contradiction, be taken under their empirical description.”\textsuperscript{116} In other words, Allison believes that
transcendental affection is not transcendental in the ontological sense of the term. Rather, he holds that it is just regular phenomena that are affecting our minds, but since we are giving a “transcendental account” of affection, we must consider these phenomena as abstracted from our conceptual representation of them.

The idea in the context of the dilemma we are considering is that the affecting object must, under Allison’s interpretation of Kant, be a *transcendental object*, because a representation must be of objective reality (the reality of *things-in-themselves*) in order to be a true or epistemically valid representation. However, Allison is not arguing that the transcendental object truly be a thing-in-itself, but rather a thing-considered-as-in-itself. He believes that this allows Kant to escape the contradiction posed by the unknowability thesis because in this scenario Kant is not really claiming something about things in themselves, but instead is just talking about some unknown affecting object.

§3.1.2: Objections to Allison’s Account

One problem with Allison’s account is that even if the transcendental object is just a thing ‘considered-as-it-is-in-itself’, does it not still fall under Kant’s unknowability thesis? By its very definition, a ‘thing-considered-in-itself’ must be considered as abstracted from anything we can say about it. Taken as such, even if it is some empirical thing that we are merely considering as transcending our concepts, we still cannot say that it affects our minds, for does that not involve our concepts? In other words, if we are saying that this object is affecting our minds, then we are saying something determinate about this object. However, this is a more general problem for transcendental affection that I shall discuss more fully in the following subsection.

Allison’s reason for advocating transcendental affection is that he thinks it provides some sort of epistemic ‘objectivating’ action that he believes is essential to Kant’s theory. However, as I have already pointed out, the ‘epistemic condition’ that Allison touts as the center of
transcendental idealism does not actually give us a clear metaphysical account of affection. In fact, all it does is allow us to predict our future sensations with accuracy. Given that this is the case, Allison really has *no* reason to accept transcendental affection. After all, what purpose is there in abstracting the cause of our sensations unless we think that that cause can actually be something that we can’t understand? If the affecting object is really just a phenomenal object after all, then why bother considering it in the abstract?

If Allison’s reason for accepting transcendental affection is that we need to ground intuition in objective reality, then he is misguided. As Falkenstein puts it:

> though Kant on occasion describes things in themselves as the objects that cause our sensations, there is nothing in the critical theory that forces him to do so. He can draw the distinction between the a priori and the a posteriori independently of reference to affection. Having drawn this distinction, he can provide for the possibility of distinguishing reality from illusion by reference to collections of thoughts that can or cannot be successfully or completely synthesized under the a priori forms of our experience.\(^{118}\)

In other words, Kant’s system offers us a complete account of empirical knowledge, truth, illusion and other relevant epistemic factors without even making reference to things-in-themselves. How empirical reality relates to transcendent reality only affects an absolute or transcendent epistemology, which, according to Kant himself, we cannot have. It is clear from this that Allison’s main argument in favor of transcendental affection falls flat.

**§3.1.3: My Objections to Transcendental Affection**

Even given Allison’s account, it is dubious whether a transcendental account of affection is at all possible. Even if we are to admit a non-schematic concept of a affection as a ‘source’ rather than a ‘cause,’ are we not still speaking of the transcendental object determinately by relating it to some determinate thing? Since we are speaking about our faculty of sensibility determinately it doesn’t matter how empty our relational concept is; we are still relating
something on one ontological level to something on a higher ontological level (i.e., the empirical to the transcendental).

The primary counter to my objection would be that one can, in fact, think very generally of a thing-in-itself affecting the mind. Yet at this point both I and my objector would simply be begging the question against one another. So it is prudent to consider whether we can have a general notion of affection that does not claim anything about the affecting object. The problem with any such interpretation of affection is that it would treat a relation as something substantive outside of the things it relates. How else could it claim that the ontological status of the related objects is irrelevant? If this is the case, then an infinite regress quickly follows; for if a relation is something substantive in itself, would it not need another relation in order to relate to the things it relates (and so on *ad infinitum*)?

In the case of transcendental affection we are inherently relating two things, the affecting object and the affected subject. The question is whether we are saying something determinate about the affecting object (which we cannot do if it is a thing-considered-in-itself) if we say that it affects the mind. Falkenstein points out that “in addition to the ‘schematized’ concept of causality that figures in the Second Analogy, according to which a cause is an event that must be taken to precede another event in time in accord with a rule, Kant recognizes that there is a purely logical employment of this concept, that can figure in any thinking whatsoever.”\footnote{119} However, as Falkenstein himself acknowledges, Kant is very restrictive in the way one can use such a concept:

> from the concept of a cause as a pure category (if I leave out the time in which something follows something else in accordance with a rule), I will not find out anything more than that it is something that allows an inference to the existence of something else; and in that case not only would there be nothing through which cause and effect could be distinguished, but further, since the possibility of drawing this inference also requires conditions about which I would know
nothing, the concept would not even have any determination through which to apply to any object.\textsuperscript{120}

It is from this that Kant considers it an impossibility to use some ‘pure’ conception of cause to describe affection because once one has begun to use such a concept of cause, one cannot even distinguish between what is the cause and what is the effect. This is because Kant considers space and time themselves to be empirical and thus one cannot use the concepts to distinguish things-considered-in-themselves because in order to consider them as in-themselves, one must abstract from spatiotemporal conditions. The question Kant poses is this: how then could one possibly distinguish between things except through notions dependent upon spatiotemporality?

The final thing that makes transcendental affection impossible is that the mind is affected in the internal sense (i.e. time). Thus when we have an intuition of something, our mind is performing an action in time. But since a transcendental entity must be considered outside of time, how could such an object be truly said to produce a temporal effect in our minds without being temporal itself? We could perhaps say that a transcendental object affects the mind as a thing-in-itself, but we don’t know what the mind is like as a thing-in-itself, or even if it reduces to a thing-in-itself. If I am going to consider my mind as in-itself, then how am I able to draw on my experiences?\textsuperscript{121}

\textbf{§3.2: Empirical Affection}

Although we have properly rejected transcendental affection, the dilemma seems to persist. It makes no sense to say that a conscious experience affects the mind because a conscious experience is already a part of the mind. However, I shall show that empirical affection is, in fact, the proper alternative and that the seeming contradiction it imposes is derived from a misappropriation of the term ‘appearance’. The sense of appearance that is assumed in the formulation of the dilemma is that of appearance as a mental entity. In other
words, as posed, the dilemma seems to conflate ‘appearance’ with ‘representation.’ In this sense the appearance of a table would be my mental image of a table, and not the table itself. The objector who poses the dilemma is quite right to say that my mental image of the table couldn’t be the object that affects my mind in order to cause my mental image of the table, for this entails an obvious circularity. When we speak of affection, we wish to say that there is some object outside of us that causes our minds to represent said object in a mental image, and this is impossible under the first definition of the term ‘appearance.’

However, there is a second definition available to us given my interpretation of TI. It is precisely for this reason that I have introduced the concept of ‘phenomena’ in my account of idealism. Under my interpretation the affecting ‘object’ is something extended in time and space that exist independently of the minds of observers (i.e., the phenomenon). If I see the image of a table, I will go on to say that it is the table (as a phenomenon) that causes me to have this vision. As Kant states it:

> perception is empirical consciousness, i.e., one in which there is at the same time sensation. Appearances, as objects of perception, are not pure (merely formal) intuitions, like space and time (for these cannot be perceived in themselves). They therefore also contain in addition to the intuition the materials for some object in general (through which something existing in space or time is represented), i.e., the real of the sensation, as merely subjective representation, by which one relates to an object in general.¹²²

The underlined portion indicates that the affecting object (‘appearance’ here taken as ‘phenomenon’) is distinct from the mental representation of said object (‘appearance’ taken as ‘mental image’).¹²³ Thus “the undetermined object of an empirical intuition” must actually be a phenomenon.¹²⁴

However, it is also important to note that according to my account the phenomenon is not associated with the ‘thing-in-itself.’ We give phenomena ontologically separate status, but this status is not ultimate, it is merely hypothetical. In fact, given the account of subjectivity above,
we can only speak of affection as a causal interaction at the empirical level because we can only treat our own minds as phenomena. The empirical account of affection that I offer is nothing more than a relatively mundane account of physics, psychology and biology, and needn’t involve things-in-themselves at all. As Allison puts it before he rejects the option out-of-hand: “Kant can perfectly well speak of a causal (as opposed to an affective) relation between phenomena and the human mind, because at an empirical level the mind is itself part of the phenomenal world and subject to its conditions.”¹²⁵ In fact, this is what we actually do. When we speak about the effect of an object on our subjectivity, we are treating our subjectivity itself as a phenomenon (i.e., something extended in space). Falkenstein also agrees upon this point, and in fact favors the empirical account of affection.¹²⁶

The reason why the dilemma is posed in the first place is simply a misunderstanding arising from the phenomenalistic language that Kant uses throughout the critique. Under my interpretation, Kant refers to the objects of empirical reality as ‘appearances’ because he is acknowledging their ontological tenuousness, not because he wishes to commit to ontological idealism either at the empirical or transcendental level. The reason why interpreters think it is necessary to include a transcendental account of affection is because they have assumed that Kant’s system is operating under a Cartesian skepticism of the external world. In other words, they believe Kant is worried about the existence of the external world, and has assumed the certainty of his own mind. However, as I have argued in §2.4 above, this skepticism seems untenable for Kant on any interpretation due to his arguments given in his ‘Refutation of Idealism.’

Recall that Kant states that “in whatever way and through whatever means a cognition may relate to objects, that through which it relates immediately to them, and at which all thought as a means is directed as an end, is intuition.”¹²⁷ This may seem to imply that there is some
idealistic relation between an object and the mind. Under an ontological form of idealism, intuition could simply be the process by which a mental object comes before the mind. The term ‘immediately’ can seem to imply this because the actual physical process of perception seems to be mediated by nearly infinite steps (i.e. the process by which light reflects off of an object, travels to the eye, is refracted through the lens, hits the rods and cones, etc.). An immediate relation might seem to imply that there is no actual physical process between an object and the perception of that object. However, this is just another example of how Kant’s phenomenological (or indeed, cognitive) tone allows readers to misrepresent him as making metaphysical claims.

The alternative meaning of the term ‘immediate’ in the quote above is that intuition is cognitively immediate. Falkenstein elaborates upon this point extensively, arguing that beginning with Critique Kant “now starts to refer to the products of the lower cognitive faculty as ‘intuitions’ — they are, after all, what is given to us prior to all processing” and “thus, in the Critique and all later works, it is the distinction between receiving and processing that defines the separation between the faculties,” thus “intuition just means ‘immediate reception.’”¹²⁸ In other words, intuitions are cognitively immediate because they just relate pure sensory data from objects to the mind without cognitively processing the information. This account escapes any commitment to ontological idealism because the actual physical interaction between a phenomenon and the body of the person who perceives said object is perfectly allowed under this definition of cognitive immediacy. The immediacy only pertains to mental processes; not to the physical processes that cause the processes to take place.

To reiterate, on my interpretation, affection is a rather mundane and un-philosophical account of biology and physics. In other words, affection, for Kant, describes a process that takes place entirely within the realm of empirical reality. As Falkenstein puts it, “a purely empirical account of affection” is “restricted to claiming that objects, as they appear to us in space and
time, affect the body, as it appears to us in space and time, and so bring about the physiological intensity values corresponding to the sensations or matters of intuition that figure at the origin of our cognition.”\textsuperscript{129} In other words, affection is merely the process by which the body is affected by other objects in empirical reality. I shall now explain Falkenstein’s account, and how it differs from mine.

\textbf{§3.2.1: Falkenstein’s Account}

While Falkenstein also favors empirical affection, he makes a nuanced qualification to his account:

\begin{quote}
though these affecting objects are, one and all, mere appearances, that have been ‘constituted’ through the cognitive process, not things in themselves existing independently of it, there is no absurdity in this affection relation, because what empirical affecting objects are supposed to produce is itself merely an appearance – a physiological state in the body of the subject of varying intensity – and so something that is likewise constituted and not something that is paradoxically supposed to exist prior to the affecting object as the material out of which it was itself constituted.\textsuperscript{130}
\end{quote}

What Falkenstein is claiming here is that there is no contradiction in empirical affection because the affecting objects do not in fact produce the ‘appearance’ in the sense of a mental event, but rather in terms of a phenomenon, i.e. a physiological change in the body that perceives the object. In other words, one must already admit the existence of the body and then associate the brain states caused by the perception of the affecting object with the phenomenological sensations that represent said object.\textsuperscript{131}

\textbf{§3.2.2: Objections to Falkenstein’s Account}

The problem with Falkenstein’s account is that he still insists that the affecting objects are “mere appearances, that have been ‘constituted’ through the cognitive process.”\textsuperscript{132} This still seems to commit him to a form of OI at the empirical level because in this case objects are still dependent upon the individual mind that perceives them. Furthermore, it is unclear how
Falkenstein accounts for a truly objective ‘inter-subjective’ reality. An affecting object cannot both be “‘constituted’ through the cognitive process” and also somehow mind-independent. Thus since Falkenstein has not given phenomena ontological status of their own, it seems that he commits to the idea that objects only exist when they are affecting a mind, which is a form of OI.

It is for these reasons that my own interpretation of TI is superior to those I have presented, for by granting ontological status equally to all objects in empirical reality I have thereby rid TI of the problem of affection. Instead, this problem has been replaced by the more general (and I believe far more reasonable) question as to how empirical reality reduces to transcendental reality.

**Conclusion**

In this limited essay I have tried to lay forth an interpretation of Kant’s theory of *Transcendental Idealism* that not only upholds the original intentions of Kant’s theory, but is itself also defensible as a philosophical theory. However, while my arguments for the former have been positive and have some basis in the text, I have only been able to accomplish the latter goal through negative arguments against less defensible interpretations of Kant. I shall not here try to defend this thesis in the contemporary fields of metaphysics and epistemology, for that would be a different and far more ambitious project. Instead, I will in conclusion suggest some possible implications of the interpretation laid out in this essay. I shall not elaborate much upon or try to defend these possible implications. I offer them instead to place my work in a larger context.

The problem that many people have with the standard interpretations of TI is that it may seem far too skeptical about the physical world. As Strawson puts it:

The scientifically minded philosopher does not deny us empirical knowledge of those things, as they are in themselves, which affect us to produce sensible
appearances. He only denies that the properties which, under normal conditions, those things sensibly appear to us to have are included (or are all included) among the properties which they have, and which we know them to have, as they are in themselves. But Kant denies the possibility of any empirical knowledge at all of those things, as they are in themselves, which affect us to produce sensible experience. It is evidently consistent with, indeed required by, this denial to deny also that the physical objects of science are those things, as they are in themselves, which affect us to produce sensible experience.\footnote{135}

The common sense theory Strawson is describing here seems to be some form of scientific realism, which although tending to be popular, is itself open to objections.\footnote{134}

Scientific realism is popular because it is an intuitively appealing interpretation of modern scientific discovery: it holds that through physics and the other sciences we are actually gaining knowledge about the ultimate nature of reality. As Boyd puts it in his article on the topic, “scientific realists hold that the characteristic product of successful scientific research is knowledge of largely theory-independent phenomena and that such knowledge is possible (indeed actual) even in those cases in which the relevant phenomena are not, in any non-question-begging sense, observable.”\footnote{135}

However, it is exactly in response to scientific realism that TI becomes important as a theory, for it offers a skeptical challenge to a dogmatized epistemology. It is interesting to contemplate what my interpretation of TI has to say about knowledge, specifically scientific knowledge. I believe that the version of TI that I have expounded here is best taken as a call for humility in response to the somewhat bold claims of contemporary physics. Specifically, TI (as I have interpreted it) claims that knowledge is empirical, and that it does not extend beyond space and time. While this can (and most likely will) be debated, it does offer a cut off point for when we can truly say we know something. We have begun to make greater and great claims to knowledge about things that we seem to have little to no ability to test. If my interpretation of TI
has any merit, it is that we should be very skeptical about such non-empirical claims, especially when they apply to things that lie outside of space and time.

I have hitherto given an exposition of TI as abstracted from the specific claims about what \textit{a priori} synthetic judgments we may actually derive. Instead my account merely establishes that however empirical reality may be formed, we must still acknowledge that transcendental reality may be entirely different. In fact, I have done this intentionally because the specific \textit{a priori} synthetic judgments that Kant originally claimed are now no longer favored:

In the current state of the sciences, however, we no longer believe that Kant's specific examples of synthetic a priori knowledge are even true, much less that they are a priori and necessarily true. For the Einsteinian revolution in physics has resulted in both an essentially non-Newtonian conception of space, time, and motion, in which the Newtonian laws of mechanics are no longer universally valid, and the application to nature of a non-Euclidean geometry of variable curvature, wherein bodies affected only by gravitation follow straightest possible paths or geodesics. And this has led to a situation, in turn, in which we are no longer convinced that there are any real examples of scientific a priori knowledge at all. If Euclidean geometry, at one time the very model of rational or a priori knowledge of nature, can be empirically revised, so the argument goes, then everything is in principle empirically revisable.\textsuperscript{136}

However, while I acknowledge that such \textit{a priori} principles are disputable, it is not as clear to me that there may never be absolute \textit{a priori} principles, although neither shall I attempt to defend the possibility of such absolute \textit{a priori} principles.

What makes my account of TI important is that it allows us to question whether we can truly have any knowledge of something that does not conform to our sensibility. Quantum mechanics proposes things that seem to contradict the forms of sensibility, but can we truly \textit{know} that subatomic particles are not extended in space and time? How do we prove this except intermediately through the implications of our more mundane observations? How do we draw the line between \textit{speculation} about alternative universes and \textit{knowledge} of these universes? Whenever we represent dimensions higher than the third, must we not do it through a two or
three dimensional representation? Although I cannot even attempt to answer these questions, the interpretation of TI as I have derived it drives me to ask them.
ENDNOTES


(Hereafter any direct quote from the translated text shall be cited with the standard A#/B# format instead of page number.)

2 Kant, *CPR*, 1.


(Hereafter I shall cite this work as “Allison, KTI, pg. #”)


5 Kant, *CPR*, A369.


As Schulting observes,

> the question surrounding that somewhat nebulous notion of a ‘thing-in-itself’ is one of those perennial questions for Kant commentators, who after more than 200 years of Kant scholarship haven’t been overcome by consensus as to how even to interpret Kantian idealism and the attendant distinction between appearance and thing-in-itself, let alone weigh its philosophical merits. (Schulting and Verburgt ed., “Kant’s Idealism,” V.)

In other words, the very definitions of these terms are up for debate. It is for this reason that I cannot yet define these terms in this introduction without already presupposing my own interpretation of transcendental idealism. I must thus wait until I can define these and other terms (and their various interpretations) in §1.2.

7 Kant holds that space and time are *empirically real* but *transcendently ideal*. While he uses these terms as adjectives, we can also tentatively derive the nouns *empirical reality* and *transcendental reality*. Although Kant does not use these terms, I shall do so because they provide a way of describing Kant’s system in metaphysical terms. An object that exists in empirical reality is thus an object that exists in space and time that we can perceive. The question is whether this object is also *transcendently real*. In other words: is it a thing-in-itself? Thus we may describe *transcendental reality* as the reality in which things-in-themselves exist. I shall explain the relation between the two realities when I describe my theory in full below (see §2). For now it is sufficient to note that we can at least speak of these two realities in a hypothetical sense, even if, as some would argue, Kant is either unconcerned with using them or would downright deny the metaphysical distinction (Allison holds this last stance in his methodological ‘dual aspect’ interpretation of Kant discussed in §1.4).

8 Kant explains transcendental idealism as follows,

> To this [transcendental] idealism is opposed transcendental realism, which regards space and time as something given in themselves (independent of our sensibility). The transcendental realist therefore represents outer appearances (if their reality is conceded) as things in themselves, which would exist independently of us and our sensibility and thus would also be outside us according to pure concepts of the understanding. (Kant, *CPR*, A369)
One may note here that this explanation seems to commit TI to a form of empirical idealism. However, as I shall attempt to prove later in this paper, Kant cannot be interpreted as committing to empirical idealism. In fact, Kant continues on after this to say,

It is really this transcendental realist who afterward 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. (Ibid)

In opposition to this he continues to argue that,

The transcendental idealist, on the contrary, can be an empirical realist, hence as he is called, a dualist, i.e., he can concede the existence of matter without going beyond mere self-consciousness and assuming something more than the certainty of representations in me. (Kant, CPR, A370.)

Thus, according to Kant, the transcendental idealist is an empirical realist, while the transcendental realist is an empirical idealist.

Kant draws the distinction between an appearance and an illusion in the following manner. He states that “in the appearance the objects, indeed even properties that we attribute to them, are always regarded as something really given” (B69). In other words, empirical objects are considered real. He continues on to explain,

Thus I do not say that bodies merely seem to exist outside me or that my soul only seems to be given if I assert that the quality of space and time—in accordance with which, as condition of their existence, I posit both of these—lies in my kind of intuition and not in these objects in themselves. It would be my own fault if I made that which I should count as appearance into mere illusion. (Kant, CPR, B69).

Here Kant is essentially summing up the doctrine of empirical realism, which asserts that the objects that we perceive are real when they actually persist in space and time. Although space and time themselves might not be transcendentally real.

Allison puts it thusly: “human knowledge differs in kind, not merely in degree, from that which might be had by a putative pure understanding” (Allison, KTI, 17). In other words, our knowledge is mediated by the nature of our own minds. A pure understanding doesn’t even represent the object that it knows: its objects and representations are one in the same.

This is the meaning of the beginning of the Transcendental Aesthetic,

Through whatever means a cognition may relate to objects, that through which it relates immediately to them, and at which all thought as a means is directed as an end, is intuition. This, however, takes place only insofar as the object is given to us; but this is, in turn, <at least for us humans,> is possible only if it affects the mind in a certain way. The capacity (receptivity) to acquire representations through the way in which we are affected by objects is called sensibility. Objects are therefore given to us by means of sensibility, and it alone affords us intuitions; but they are thought through the understanding, and from it arise concepts. But all thought, whether straightforward (directe) or through a detour (indirecte), must, <by means of certain marks,> ultimately be related to intuitions, thus, in our case, to sensibility, since there is no other way in which objects can be given to us. (Kant, CPR, A19/B33.)

Essentially, what Kant is saying here is that knowledge only occurs through correspondence between our mental representations and their objects, and that this can only occur when we perceive these objects. In essence, Kant is saying that all knowledge is empirical. However, there is an exception to this rule: a priori synthetic judgments (See endnote #14 and #16 below).

Kant, CPR, BXXVI.
Kant explains the distinction between thought and cognition as follows,

To **cognize** an object, it is required that I be able to prove its possibility (whether by the testimony of experience from its actuality or *a priori* through reason). But I can **think** whatever I like, as long as I do not contradict myself, i.e., as long as my concept is a possible thought, even if I cannot give any assurance whether or not there is a corresponding object somewhere within the sum total of all possibilities. But in order to ascribe objective validity to such a concept (real possibility, for the first sort of possibility was merely logical) something more is required. (Kant, *CPR*, BXXVI.)

(For background also see endnote #11 above and endnote #16 below.) Kant acknowledges that there can be knowledge constituted of *a priori* synthetic judgments, such as those of mathematics. However, these judgments are still, in a sense, empirical because they are based upon the form of our sensibility. According to Kant, “there are two pure forms of sensible intuition as principles of *a priori* cognition, namely space and time.” (Kant, *CPR*, A22/B36.) However, Kant states that this is still only knowledge in a limited sense because such knowledge is only universally valid under certain limitations.

If we add the limitation of a judgment to the concept of the subject, then the judgment is unconditionally valid. The proposition: “All things are next to one another in space,” is valid under the limitation that these things be taken as objects of our sensible intuition. If here I add the condition to the concept and say “All things, as outer intuitions, are next to one another in space,” then this rule is valid universally and without limitation. Our expositions accordingly teach the **reality** (i.e., objective validity) of space in regard to everything that can come before us externally as an object, but at the same time the **ideality** of space in regard to things when they are considered in themselves through reason, i.e., without taking account of the constitution of our sensibility. We therefore assert the **empirical reality** of space (with respect to all possible outer experience), though to be sure its **transcendental ideality**, i.e., that it is nothing as soon as we leave aside the condition of the possibility of all experience, and take it as something that grounds the things in themselves. (Kant, *CPR*, A27-8/B43-4.)

Without touching upon the meaning of **transcendental ideality** vs. **empirical reality** (which shall be covered later), we may simply note that the quote above establishes that these *a priori* judgments are valid only because they apply to all perceptions we can have. In fact, Kant holds that “the original representation of space is an *a priori* intuition, not a concept,” and is thus empirical despite the fact that it is *a priori*. (Kant, *CPR*, B40) This is problematic, but I do not have the space to deal with this claim here.

15 Kant, *CPR*, B19.

16 One of the most important goals of Kant’s philosophy is to show that, although knowledge is empirical, we may know certain things *a priori*, i.e. prior to experience. In keeping with his empiricist stance, Kant states that in order for such *a priori* judgments to be considered true knowledge, they mustn’t simply be **analytic**, but must instead be **synthetic**. Kant himself explains this distinction in the following manner:

In all judgments in which the relation of a subject to the predicate is thought (if I consider only affirmative judgments, since the application to negative ones is easy) this relation is possible in two different ways. Either the predicate *B* belongs to the subject *A* as something that is (covertly) contained in this concept *A*; of *B* lies entirely outside the concept *A*, though to be sure it stands in connection with it. In the first case I call the judgment **analytic**, in the second **synthetic**. Analytic judgments (affirmative ones) are thus those in which the connection of the predicate is thought through identity, but those in which this connection is thought without identity are to be called synthetic judgments. One could also call the former **judgments of clarification**, and the latter **judgments of amplification**, since through the predicate the former do not add anything to the concept of the subject, but only break it up by means of analysis into its component concepts, which were already thought in it (though confusedly); while the latter, on the contrary, add to the concept of the subject a predicate that was not thought in it at all, and could not have been extracted from it through any analysis. (Kant, *CPR*, A6-7/B10-11.)
In other words, one cannot arrive at true knowledge of the world by simply manipulating the definition of terms. For example: say that I know that Bob is a bachelor, given this fact, I can also draw the conclusion that Bob is an unmarried man. However, this last movement has not added anything new to my knowledge about Bob, but is rather a mere restatement of the facts. In contrast to this, a synthetic judgment is that which adds new knowledge, and can only do so through intuition (in other words, empirically).


18 Kant, *CPR*, A314/B371.

19 Kant, *CPR*, A19/B33.

20 Kant, *CPR*, A320/B376.

21 Kant, *CPR*, B137.

22 See: Robinson, Hoke, "Two Perspectives on Kant's Appearances and Things in Themselves," 411-441 for a full discussion of how different theories conflate these two terms. In general, Jacobi’s dilemma (see §3 below) is based upon this conflation, for the horn of the dilemma that rejects empirical affection essentially does so by pointing out the seeming impossibility that a representation can be its own object. Hoke nicely points out passages in which Strawson and Guyer both conflate these terms: see Strawson, *The Bounds of Sense*, 238, 236, 246 and Guyer, *Kant and the Claims of Knowledge*, 335 (Robinson H., “Two Perspectives, 415). Hoke explains it thus:

The standard or "textbook" interpretation is the two world view. Perhaps the earliest version, that of Jacobi in 1787, is in many ways typical. Jacobi reduces the three Kantian entities to the two Lockean ones by simply identifying representation and appearance; he cites a number of passages in support of this identification. The assimilation of appearance to representation is also a central element of contemporary two world theories. According to Strawson, e.g., the world of appearance is one that "only appears to exist, is really nothing apart from perceptions." It is especially striking in Guyer: on his view, what Kant has done is to "degrade ordinary objects to mere representations of themselves . . . ." Kant does not have to add a third set of objects to [things in themselves and representations]; all he has to do is transfer spatiality and temporality from objects [i.e., things in themselves] to our representations of them. (Robinson H., “Two Perspectives,” 415 [his brackets and discontinuations (…)].)

See §1.4 below for the discussion of the ‘two world’ vs. ‘two aspect’ views.

23 Indeed, these interpretations are not without evidence, as these terms do seem to overlap as Kant uses them. As Schulting notes,

Sometimes Kant seems to use the notion ‘appearance’ synonymously with a mere mental representation, a Praussian empirical-subjective object say. In other words, an appearance is not eo ipso a representation of an object (Schulting and Verburgt ed., “Kant’s Idealism,” 10-11).

Schulting cites examples of when Kant does this: “see e.g. A101; B234-235=A189-190; B243=A198; A248-249” (ibid). Here Schulting is responding to Lucy Allais’ metaphysical version of the ‘two aspect’ interpretation (see §1.4 below). While Allais does try to distinguish an object from its representation, her theory falls into incoherence as described below in §1.4.

24 Kant, *CPR*, A19/B33.

25 Ibid.

26 Kant, *CPR*, A20/B34.
See the two notes directly above.

Allison, *KTI*, 52.

Ibid.

Allison, *KTI*, 63.

Kant, *CPR*, B307.


Kant, *CPR*, A248-9/B305.

Kant, *CPR*, A249/B305.

Allison, *KTI*, 57.

Allison, *KTI*, 58.

Schulting and Verburgt, ed., “Kant’s Idealism” V.


Schulting and Verburgt ed., “Kant's Idealism,” V.

‘Material idealism’ here can be taken to mean OI as I have construed it with very little controversy.

Kant, *CPR*, B274 [endnote added].


Allison shows in his article “Kant’s Critique of Berkeley” that Kant presents an unfair caricature of Berkeley’s philosophy.

In contra-distinction to Kant’s own critical or transcendental idealism, which explains the possibility of synthetic a priori knowledge within the realm of possible experience, Berkeley is characterized as a "dogmatic" or "visionary idealist." He is judged guilty of "degrading bodies to mere illusion" (B69), of regarding things in space as "merely imaginary entities" (B274), and of holding with all "genuine idealists" that: "all knowledge through the senses and experience is nothing but sheer illusion, and only in the ideas of pure understanding is there truth" (374). (Allison, *Kant's Critique of Berkeley*, 43-44 [his in-text citations].)

Thus we cannot dismiss the possibility that objects are both mental and objective based upon Kant’s critique of Berkeley alone. Indeed, we must still show how things exist separately from the mind that perceives them. Berkeley’s philosophy allows this because God provides the objective reality for objects even when no other mind perceives them. Kant has not qualified how objects exist; merely that they do.

Another argument against this is the simple fact that Kant rejects what he terms ‘material idealism’ As Allison notes, there is an argument commonly leveled “against linguistic versions of phenomenalism, that ‘sense-data’ language cannot replace ‘material-object language,’ because a reference to sense data is intelligible only if they are contrasted with material objects” (*KTI*, 55).
I have attributed to Kant not a two-world view, but an alternative version of a two-aspect view, on which Kant holds that spatiality and temporality are not aspects of things as they are in themselves but are a necessary aspect of our representations of them (Wood, Guyer and Allison, “Debating Allison,” 12).

However, this matters very little because Guyer’s interpretation still violates the unknowability thesis because he claims that Kant holds “the dogmatic assertion that things in themselves are not spatial and temporal,” which is clearly a positive knowledge claim about things-in-themselves. By contrast, under my interpretation Kant merely claims that we cannot know whether things-in-themselves are spatial or not. In fact, my theory can deal with the passages of Kant that suggest Guyer’s interpretation as merely stating that things-considered-in-themselves cannot be spatial or temporal. This is obviously the case because to consider something in-itself is, for Kant, to consider it as abstracted from the conditions of space and time. But this is just because we cannot know whether these conditions will ultimately apply to things-in-themselves. It is NOT because we know that things-in-themselves do not have these properties. (See §2.3 below).

Guyer and Strawson are traditionally considered to belong to the ‘two world’ school (see endnote #22 above). However, Guyer himself actually rejects this, stating that

Allison, KTI, 3.

51

52 Allison, KTI, 3 [my brackets].

53 For a fuller discussion of the most contemporary versions of these views, see Schulting and Verburgt ed., “Kant’s Idealism: New Interpretations of a Controversial Doctrine,” especially Ch. 1, “Kant’s Idealism: The Current Debate.”

54 Robinson H., “Two Perspectives,” 438.

55 Robinson H., “Two Perspectives,” 416.


58 For an example of such metaphysical versions of the ‘two aspect’ view and the problems these views entail, see Schulting, 8-16. Of particular note is Lucy Allais’ version: see Allais (2003), (2004), (2007) and (2010) in bibliography. However, her version also falls prey to the general objections to metaphysical dual aspect theories covered below.

59 Allison, KTI, 16.

As Hoke notes, “critics of the two aspect view point to a prima facie implausibility in the claim that structures as opposed as appearance and thing in itself—the first spatial, temporal, substantial, causal and interactive, the second none of these—could serve as aspects of the same underlying thing” (Robinson H., 420-421).

To see a full account of the objection to the metaphysical version of the ‘two aspect’ view, see Robinson H., “Two Perspectives,” 419-428.


See endnote # 22 above.


Robinson H., “Two Perspectives,” 421.

Kant, CPR, BXXVI.

As Schulting puts it, “two-worlders or quasi two-worlders tend to reduce objects of experience to representations as mental states, whereby they take Kant’s talk of ‘mere representations’ literally in terms of their material content” (Schulting and Verburgt ed., “Kant’s Idealism,” 17). Remember that this form of empirical idealism is not only unacceptable for my purposes in this essay, but is in express contradiction to how Kant understood himself as an empirical realist.

Allison does this by centering Kant’s philosophy on the idea of an ‘epistemic condition’, which he understands as “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” (KTI, 11). He states that this “could also be termed an ‘objectivating condition,’ since it fulfils an objectivating function” (ibid). These ‘epistemic conditions’ only “condition the objectivity of our representations of things rather than the very existence of the things themselves” (ibid). According to Allison, “the fundamental problem confronting transcendental idealism is to explain how such conditions can be both subjective and objective or objectivating at once” (ibid). In other words, though the ‘epistemic conditions’ allow us to predict the behavior of our representations accurately, Allison has yet to establish from this that there is anything outside of the mind that corresponds to these representations.


Allison, KTI, XV.

Strawson, The Bounds of Sense, 22.

See endnote #22 above.

See §1.4 above. Allison explains his theory in the following manner:

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. (KTI, 17)
While Kant usually restricts himself to his epistemological objective, he does speak as though he admits the existence of things-in-themselves, even though we can have no knowledge of them. Here is one such suggestive passage:

What may be the case with objects in themselves and abstracted from all this receptivity of our sensibility remains entirely unknown to us. We are acquainted with nothing except our way of perceiving them, which is peculiar to us, and which therefore does not necessarily pertain to every being, though to be sure it pertains to every human being. We are concerned solely with this. (A42/B59)

Here Kant speaks of objects-in-themselves in a very positive sense, which seems to suggest that he admits of their existence in-general.

I say that we cannot claim to know anything about things-in-themselves because even if transcendental reality just happens to be empirical reality, we would know about things-in-themselves because they would just be ordinary empirical objects. The problem is that even if this was the case, we still cannot know that we know. In other words, our reality could just be the ultimate reality, but even then we couldn’t know that this was the case because we can at least imagine that it isn’t, and have no way of verifying whether it is.

However, it is important to note that although we may entertain this speculation about the transcendental nature of reality, it is only that: speculation. As I shall show in the sections below, we cannot show this transcendental theory any bias because of our own phenomenalistic perspectives, because this is a speculation about a transcendental mind, and we can only speak about our minds empirically. In other words, we cannot doubt the existence of the empirical reality around us by entertaining this notion because we would be treating our own mind as a thing-in-itself, which we cannot do. (See §2.4)

Some interpreters of Kant (such as Guyer and Strawson) believe that Kant does make the claim that things-in-themselves cannot be spatiotemporal (see endnote #22 above). However, this is merely due to a conflation on the part of these interpreters between the terms ‘thing-in-itself’ and ‘thing-considered-in-itself’. Although a ‘thing-considered-in-itself’ must, by its very nature, be considered as abstracted from the conditions of spatiotemporality, this by no means entails that the actual things-in-themselves must also be non-spatiotemporal. Indeed, in the first instance we are merely acknowledging that we cannot ascribe spatiotemporality to things-in-themselves, because to do so would violate the unknowability thesis. Once again, by admitting both the term ‘thing-in-itself’ and ‘thing-considered-in-itself’, my interpretation of Kant if flexible enough to deal with the problematic passages that inspire the skeptical readers of Kant, while also maintaining the certain broad ontological claims needed to ground the theory (which Allison lacks).

See §2.2 above.

See §1.1 above. Specifically, see endnotes #11, 14 and 16 above.

Kant, CPR, B73.

For one discussion of this see:


And

I shall give my analysis below. Understand that I do not wish to defend this analysis, but merely include it for the benefit of clarification for the reader.

Kant seems to, on my reading, be claiming that we must register everything visually in a three dimensional spatial grid, and on a two dimensional timeline. When Kant refers to our “pure a priori intuition” of space, he is saying that we have an ability to visualize objects in space before we perceive them. It is pure because we can do it solely by means of the contents of our own minds, without the interference of outside objects.

However, the question remains as to how this is an intuition. Intuitions are, for Kant, largely distinguished by their quality of spontaneity, i.e. it does not occur at our whim. Thus visualization seems to be disqualified from being an intuition because we have control over it. But this is not necessarily true, for we do not have complete control over our faculty of visualization: our visualizations must be possible objects. For example, we cannot, no matter how hard we try, visualize a square circle, though we can have the empty thought of one. In fact, the thought of a square circle is empty and vacuous precisely because we cannot visualize it. Under my interpretation, thoughts are always empty until we connect them semantically with something. The more specific the particular sensory image a thought is connected with, the more meaning that thought has.

Another argument for why visualizations are intuitions is that they are of the same mental character as the mental images that are given to us through sensibility: our visualizations actually appear to us visually, though not as strongly as actual objects do.

86 (Continuing from footnote #85, immediately above):

However, on top of this there is another objection to considering visualizations as intuitions. Recall that for Kant, all intuitions are immediately related to their objects. Thus we may ask: “what is the object of any particular visualization?” At first, there seems as though there is none, for visualizations are distinct from perceptions precisely due to the fact that they are not related to an object through the faculty of sensibility. However, it is here that we may note Kant’s following statement:

The pure form of sensible intuitions in general is to be encountered in the mind a priori, wherein all of the manifold of appearances is intuited in certain relations. This pure form of sensibility itself is also called pure intuition. So if I separate from the representation of a body that which the understanding thinks about it, such as substance, force, divisibility, etc., as well as that which belongs to sensation, such as impenetrability, hardness, color, etc., something from this empirical intuition is still left for me, namely extension and form. These belong to the pure intuition, which occurs a priori, even without an actual object of the senses or sensation, as a mere form of sensibility in the mind. (A20-21/B34-35)

In this quote Kant demonstrates that there is a pure intuition that can exist without empirical objects.

There are two possibilities that we can entertain as to how it does this: either 1) this pure intuition’s object is the mind itself, or 2) the object is space and time themselves. The option one may seem plausible at first, but if we took it in this manner, it would soon become clear that we are lead into an infinite regress. This occurs because this pure intuition also just is the form of sensibility. But if this pure intuition is to take the nature of its mind as its object, what else could it take other than the form of our sensibility? After all, that seems to be what it is representing. Thus this leads us into an infinite regress, because the intuition would have to intuit itself.

Given that this is the case, I opt for the latter answer. However, the objection to space and time themselves being objects of this pure intuition is that space and time themselves seem incapable of being empirical objects. As Kant himself argues, space and time cannot be intuited because they are the form of intuition itself, and thus must already be given prior to any intuition. I do not dispute this fact, for I wholly acknowledge that space and time cannot be empirical intuitions.

However, I am not interpreting them as such. Rather, when I say that space and time are the objects of our pure intuitions, I am using the term ‘object’ in a weaker way than it is normally used by Kant. Specifically, I am saying that space and time themselves correspond to our representations of them, although they are not immediately linked to these representations through our sensibility. Thus when we use our pure intuitions of space and time, we are not intuiting space and time themselves, but are merely using our forms of sensibility in a manner that corresponds to the way space and time behave.

The objection to this is that if this is the case, then we cannot know whether our representations of space and time are accurate. Although this objection would usually stand, space and time are special circumstances. Kant’s line of
argument in the Transcendental Aesthetic is not following the example of Descartes’ Meditations. Kant is not, in fact, starting from absolute principles that are beyond doubt, but is instead describing how our minds normally work. Because of this, one should not therefore presume that his arguments about how we represent space and time are arguments about how we know space and time exist. I believe that this is a common mistake among Kant’s interpreters. In fact, under my interpretation Kant has actually presumed the existence of space and time as the objective laws that encompass empirical reality, before he can even talk about how we represent them. As I shall show in §2.4 below, this is because our minds, and all their contents are merely objects in empirical reality, and thus we must already assume the existence of empirical reality and its laws in order to talk about the faculties of our minds as Kant does in the Transcendental Aesthetic.

87 Once again, I use the term ‘meta-physical’ in the non-transcendental sense of laws that govern empirical reality, but may not hold at the transcendental level. I shall only use the term in this sense from now on unless otherwise explicitly stated.

88 See endnote #85-6 above.

89 The filtration theory I offer here is to be distinguished from those that Robinson critiques. Those theories posit a filtration of individual objects so that empirical objects do happen to be things-in-themselves. In contrast, my account only stipulates a very general filtration of transcendental reality to empirical reality, and thus does not run into the same problems. See: Robinson, H., “Two Perspectives,” 424-426.

90 To see how this is true we may merely imagine a thing that is not extended in space and time. How could we possibly have any knowledge of such a substance? As spatiotemporal creatures, we can only interact with things that exist in space and time. A good example of what I mean by this is dark matter. Dark matter is a substance postulated by theories in astrophysics in order to account for observable accumulations of matter that do not match up to expected values derived from observation of the light given off by galaxies and the orbits of bodies therein. In short, dark matter is said to interact with other spatiotemporal things only through certain fundamental forces, i.e. gravity and the Weak force. It does not interact with other matter through the force of electromagnetism. In other words, it can pass through ‘normal’ matter without any direct interaction. Unfortunately, we still have not ‘found’ dark matter, for its lack of interactivity makes it almost impossible to detect.

This example demonstrates how the physical nature of our existence limits our ability to cognize objects. If we say that something that only interacts with us very limitedly can exist, what is to stop us from saying that something that doesn’t interact with us at all exists? How do we even verify the existence of these things? Clearly the case of dark matter indicates that one does not need all of the fundamental forces in order to exist. But if this is the case, we could equally imagine other types of matter or energy that only possess another type of force. Furthermore, how can we really say that only substances that possess the forces that we interact with exist? Would not this definition of existence seem arbitrary? In fact, this definition of existence is not arbitrary: it is the definition of empirical reality, because empirical reality is defined by only containing objects that we may have cognition of. Thus dark matter would still exist in empirical reality because we are at least capable of knowing about it. However, it also demonstrates how space, time, and the fundamental forces of the universe can act as filters for what we are capable of cognizing.

[I’d like to thank my friend Benjamin Michlin for helping me with this particular note. Ben is a senior theoretical physics major at UC Santa Cruz, and I trust his understanding of theoretical physics far more than my own.]

91 See: Allison, “Kant’s Critique of Berkeley,” 43-63 for a comparison of Kant and Berkeley’s theories.

92 Thus far I have merely shown the possibility of my theory by showing that it upholds the unknowability thesis and the a priori thesis. The objection here is a hermeneutic one. This objection claims that these two tenets are not enough: Kant just is an idealist, and thus any theories that try to escape this idealism are not truly Kantian. Thus in order to lend further support to my theory I will now show that even if these two tenets are not enough, I can still deal with the idealistic language of the critique in a way that is hermeneutically plausible.

For the sake of time and space, I shall only focus on one particularly problematic passage. Kant states: “that there could be inhabitants of the moon, even though no human being has ever perceived them, must of course be admitted; but this means only that in the possible progress of experience we could encounter them” (A493/B521 [my underlining and emphasis]). At first this passage appears idealistic because it seems to imply that phenomena only
exist when there is a mind to perceive them. However, as I shall show, this is not the only way to interpret the passage.

The reason why this may appear confusing is that Kant is only denying that these objects are real in the *transcendental sense of the term*: he is not denying that they are real in an empirical sense. This becomes more evident when we analyze the passage in full:

To call an appearance [here meaning phenomenon] a real thing prior to perception means either that in the continuation of experience we must encounter such a perception [of the phenomenon] 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 are talking about a thing in itself. But what we are talking about is merely an appearance in space and time [here again meaning phenomenon], neither of which is a determination of things in themselves, but only of our sensibility; hence what is in them (appearances) [phenomena] are not something in itself, but mere representations, which if they are not given in us (in perception) are encountered nowhere at all. (A493-4/B521-2)

Notice that Kant says “without relation to our senses and possible experience,” although he at first says the phenomenon must be encountered in the “continuation of experience,” the phrase ‘possible experience’ has far different connotations. While the former limits the objectivity of phenomena to being perceived by minds, the latter implies that a phenomenon need not actually be perceived, but must merely be possibly perceived. One can thus escape this reading of Kant by stipulating that “in the possible progress of experience” is just another way of saying “epistemic possibility.” Thus this doesn’t just mean that we would eventually, given time, experience mental events; it means that there are *empirically real* objects in space and time that exist outside our minds, which we could (but perhaps won’t) eventually perceive.

In fact, this new reading makes perfect sense, for doesn’t this apply to all objects that are extended in space and time? Since this is an epistemic question and not a physical one, it doesn’t even matter whether it is physically impossible for us to perceive something (e.g. the inside of a black hole), all that matters is that it is at least epistemically possible, and there is no reason to say that it is epistemically impossible for us to perceive something extended in space and time. Thus this epistemic reading of Kant avoids idealism without also straying too far from the meaning of the text. Since I am not concerned with explaining Kant’s theory, but rather a *Kantian* theory, this is more than sufficient to deflect the hermeneutic objection mentioned above. Even though this should be sufficient to overturn the objection, there is another counter that can be leveled at this argument.

If one is to take an empirically idealistic interpretation of TI, one faces a serious problem in accounting for multiple subjects. The personal pronoun ‘we’ (I have put this in bold in the above quote) implies that these objects cannot be merely mental entities, because then there would be multiple entities, one for each mind. In other words, a mental representation exists within the mind of the observer, and if there are multiple observers, there would be multiple objects. But if this were the case then in what sense could one thing be an object for two different people? Indeed, how could different minds be part of the same reality? (This of course was the primary objection to Berkeley’s theory. I do not have the time or space to prove that it is problematic. Fortunately the theory is so unpopular that I feel no pressing need to do so.) The other alternative is to commit Kant to solipsism. However, Kant is clearly not concerned with proving the existence of other minds. Thus if he thought his theory might commit him to solipsism he would have most definitely devoted at least a section to disproving this. Thus, since both alternatives seem so implausible, we must conclude that Kant admitted both the existence of other minds and the objective reality that they shared.

93 The text does at least seem to support this view, for Kant speaks in almost entirely epistemological terms.

94 See the passage in Kant, *CPR*, B274-9.

95 Kant, *CPR*, A278/B334.

96 Kant, *CPR*, B276.

97 For just a few of these interpretations see:

I cannot here derive a full account of Kant’s critique, for it is a controversial topic upon which many people have written. Generally, Kant speaks about the inability to determine our inner sense (time) except through our outer sense (space). This terminology may be confusing to the reader, so I have constructed my own elaborated version of Kant’s argument as follows:

1) **Axiom:** The self is said to exist over time.

2) **Axiom:** Consciousness only exists in distinct moments of time, i.e. we are not conscious of both the past, present, and future at the same time, for this would mean that different times are the same time.

3) In order to represent the self, one must represent it as existing over time (from 1).

4) **Axiom:** In order to represent something extended over time, we must reference more than one temporal location.

5) In order to represent something extended over time, we cannot simply refer to the nature of our current consciousness (from 2 and 4).

6) At any given moment of consciousness, we are forced to presuppose more than our immediate conscious experience in order to represent something as existing in time (from 6).

7) **Axiom:** Anything that is outside of our immediate conscious experience is doubtful from the Cartesian perspective.

8) The existence of things that are extended in time is doubtful from the Cartesian perspective (from 5 and 7).

9) The existence of the self is doubtful from the Cartesian perspective (from 3 and 8).

10) **Axiom:** The Cartesian perspective is doubtful of everything besides the self.

11) The existence of the self is not doubtful from the Cartesian perspective (from 10).

Conclusion: The Cartesian perspective is absurd (from 9 and 11).

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98 Kant, *CPR*, B278.

99 Kant, *CPR*, A244/B302.


101 I use this example because it concisely states the point. Falkenstein is by no means the first to come up with this dilemma. Allison cites F.H. Jacobi amongst others, as well as a summary of a trilemma summarized by H. Vaihinger which includes the added option of ‘double affection’ by both appearance and things-in-themselves which was first developed by Erich Adickes (Allison, *KTI*, 65-66). There is no real need to go into the trilemma here as it uses the same metaphysical tone as the original dilemma and will thus be refuted along with the question.

103 Ibid.

104 Ibid.

105 Kant, *CPR*, A19/B33.

106 Ibid.

107 Kant, *CPR*, A20/B34.

108 Kant, *CPR*, A19/B33.

109 Kant, *CPR*, A495/B523.

110 Kant goes on to state:

but for me they [appearances] are objects and real in past time only insofar as I represent to myself that, in accordance with empirical laws, or in other words, the course of the world, a regressive series of possible perceptions (whether under the guidance of history or in the footsteps of causes and effects) leads to a time-series that has elapsed as the condition of the present time, which is then represented as real only in connection with a possible experience and not in itself; so that all those events which have elapsed from an inconceivable past time prior to my own existence signify nothing but the possibility of prolonging the chain of experience, starting with the present perception, upward to the conditions that determine it in time. (*Kant, CPR, A495/B523*)

This, however, is merely another reiteration of his verification theory. Here he is once again giving an explanation of how appearances are real “for him.” This is because he has once again adopted a phenomenological approach to explaining the objective empirical world in terms of what the individual is capable of experiencing. He does this because his ontological commitment prevents him from simply saying the objects exist outside of experience. But there can be no mistake: he does not consider an object to only exist in virtue of someone perceiving it; rather the objects only become ‘real’ for the person when they are presented to the subject’s consciousness. We may here distinguish the subjectively ‘real’ from the phenomenally ‘existent’ as long as we realize that phenomenally existent entities have only a putative kind of existence and may or may not correspond to things in themselves.


112 In fact Falkenstein argues that “Kant recognizes that there is a purely logical employment of this concept, that can figure in any thinking whatsoever” (*KI*, 331). Falkenstein goes on to state that although “Kant is concerned to claim that the thought of a transcendent cause would be completely empty... there is nothing to rule out thinking that things in themselves are such ‘causes’ (really, corresponding or concomitant grounds) of appearances” (*KI*, 332).

113 Falkenstein, *KI*, 333.


115 Allison, *KTI*, 68.

116 Ibid.

117 Allison argues that “what is crucial to this [Kant’s] account is that what is given to the mind as the result of its affection by external objects becomes part of the content of empirical cognition only by being subjected to the a
priori forms of sensibility” (KTI, 68). Since the object has not been filtered yet, Allison assumes that it cannot be 
put into empirical terms, for “to take it in this way requires assigning to the object, considered apart from its 
epistemic relation to human sensibility precisely those features that, according to the theory, it only possesses in 
virtue of standing in this relation” (ibid).

However, what Allison is essentially claiming here is that the affecting object must be considered as abstracted 
from its empirical qualities because it must be abstracted from its empirical qualities. He has already presupposed 
that the affecting object has to be transcendental because that is the only way to ground experience epistemically. He 
then proceeds from this to claim that it must be considered transcendentally because it is “considered apart from its 
epistemic relation to human sensibility.” This is a vicious circle.

118 Falkenstein, KI, 325.
119 Falkenstein, KI, 331.
120 Kant, CPR, A243/B301.
121 Here we run into the problem of subjectivity and the question of whether I know my own mental experience 
as-it-is-in-itself or merely as it appears to me. This is another related dilemma that I shall deal with later.
122 Kant, CPR, B207 [my underlining].
123 Also see section 1.
124 Kant, CPR, A20/B34.
125 Allison, KTI, 67.
126 Falkenstein, KI, 326-7.
127 Kant, CPR, A19/B33 [my underlining].
128 Falkenstein, KI, 60.
129 Falkenstein, KI, 326-327.
130 Falkenstein, KI, 327.
131 However, Falkenstein continues on to state that

the prior given matters out of which both empirically affecting objects and the representation of 
physiological states of the body are constituted, namely, sensations, are primitive, given data that merely 
correspond to physiological states and so, derivatively, to the affecting objects taken to cause them, but 
they are not properly described as the effects of those objects. To inquire after the cause of sensations (as 
opposed to the physiological intensity values to which they correspond) is to engage in transcendental 
metaphysics. (KI, 327)

It is in this last statement that Falkenstein commits to the Cartesian perspective. Although he gives an account of 
empirical affection, he somehow also stipulates that we cannot know the transcendental source of our sensations.

Falkenstein gives an account of empirical affection, but also says that we cannot know the transcendental source 
of our sensations. The problem with this approach is that Falkenstein is assuming that we can associate our bodies in 
empirical reality with our own phenomenalistic perspective. In other words, Falkenstein runs into the same problem 
of subjectivity that we have dealt with above. To reiterate, Kant denies our ability to question the external world 
from the Cartesian perspective because we cannot assume the transcendental certainty of our own selves. Since 
Falkenstein cannot say that the mental representation of the body is involved in the affection process and he admits 
that all the things involved in the affection process are merely themselves appearances, he cannot assume the 
Cartesian perspective. If he does so, then his entire account of empirical affection loses its meaning.
132 Falkenstein, *KI*, 327.


134 Many of these coming from the Neo-Kantians who, although I shall not deal with them in this work, derive objections to scientific realism from Kant’s philosophy, thus suggesting that Strawson’s objection is not as strong as he thought. (See Boyd, *Scientific Realism*)


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