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Navigating towards a Moderate Metaphysical Interpretation of Transcendental Idealism

I Introduction to Part One

At the heart of Immanuel Kant's critical philosophy is an epistemological and metaphysical position he calls transcendental idealism; the aim of this book is to understand this position. Kant sees transcendental idealism as a major philosophical revolution which will enable us to solve problems that have troubled philosophers for centuries. It is supposed to solve what he takes to be the unavoidable conflicts in which reason becomes ensnared concerning such questions as freedom of the will, and to avoid problems to which, he thinks, other philosophical systems lead, such as scepticism about the external world. He thinks that it explains the possibility and limits of metaphysics as well as the necessary foundations of empirical knowledge. As the key to Kant's resolution of the free will problem, transcendental idealism is at the intersection between his metaphysics and ethics, and his central argument for the validity of morality turns on an appeal to transcendental idealism.¹ Making sense of transcendental idealism is central to understanding Kant's philosophy across a wide range of areas.

Despite the centrality of transcendental idealism in Kant's thinking, in over two hundred years since the publication of the first *Critique* there is still no agreement on how to interpret the position. As Karl Ameriks dryly notes, 'Kant scholarship has yet to have been overcome by consensus' (1992: 329). Not only is there still dispute, there is not even a tendency towards convergence, and recent publications continue to represent such a wide spectrum of views that it sometimes scarcely seems possible that they are all interpretations of a single position, put forward by a single philosopher, primarily in a single book. Dominant interpretations pendulum between two extremes, both of which seem to have textual and philosophical support. Here are two examples. First, Arthur Collins:

¹ *Groundwork* Part III.

Kant is not an idealist. (1999: 2)

[A]n interpretation that finds a kind of idealism in Kant, that ascribes to him a reduction of objects to mental representations . . . fails to capture the originality, profundity, and merit of his thought. (1999: 3)

Second, James Van Cleve:

As I interpret him, then, Kant's transcendental idealism is idealism indeed, at least regarding everything in space and time. (1999: 4)

[O]bjects in space and time are logical constructions out of perceivers and their states. That makes Kant a phenomenalist. (1999: 11)

Not only is there disagreement about whether Kant is an idealist, there even is disagreement about whether transcendental idealism is a metaphysical position at all, as opposed to an epistemological project involving a rejection of metaphysics. It is difficult to state the basic position in uncontested terms. As I understand it, transcendental idealism has three central parts:

- (1) Kant distinguishes between things in themselves (*Dinge an sich*), on the one hand, and things as they appear to us, or appearances (*Erscheinungen*), on the other. This is closely related to, but not exactly the same as, his distinction between noumena and phenomena.
- (2) Kant argues that the spatio-temporal objects of our experience (things as they appear to us, appearances) are *mere* appearances or *mere* representations that do not exist apart from a connection to possible perceptions.
- (3) Kant claims that we do not and cannot have cognition (*Erkenntnis*) of things as they are in themselves.

There is controversy surrounding the interpretation of all three claims. There is disagreement as to how to understand Kant's distinction between things as they are in themselves and things as they appear to us, and about whether it is supposed to be epistemological or metaphysical. There is dispute about whether Kant's claim that appearances are mere representations commits him to being an idealist and, if so, of what sort. To make things more complicated, these distinctions cut across each other, because the commentators who deny that Kant is an idealist include both some of those who see transcendental idealism as a metaphysical position and some of those who deny this.² There is dispute about whether he is actually committed to the existence of things in themselves or whether he merely thinks that the concept of things in themselves is one to which our reason naturally leads us, without having a commitment to there existing anything corresponding to the concept. Among those

² For example, Paul Abela (2002) argues that transcendental idealism does not involve idealism because it is an epistemological position involving the rejection of the so-called given, while Rae Langton (1998), in contrast, does see the position as metaphysical, but also claims that it does not involve idealism, and instead concerns a distinction between extrinsic and intrinsic properties.

who agree that he is committed to the existence of things in themselves, there is disagreement about what this commitment amounts to, why he thinks we cannot have knowledge of them, and whether we can say anything about them. For example, there is dispute about whether he is committed to the existence of non-sensible non-spatio-temporal objects in addition to the spatial objects of our knowledge, or whether his position is that the objects of our knowledge have unknowable intrinsic natures.

There are good textual reasons for seeing Kant as centrally concerned with metaphysics—and good textual reasons for denying this. Kant introduces his position as a revolution and compares it to the Copernican Revolution in astronomy and, in a rough parallel with the way Copernicus explained the apparent movement of the heavens as really being due to the movement of the earth, Kant says that he is going to ascribe to the knowing subject some of what we normally think of as mind-independent features of the spatio-temporal world. Famously, he suggests that, in some respects, objects ‘conform’ to our knowledge rather than our knowledge ‘conforming’ to objects. This sounds like idealism. But some commentators have argued that it is instead a move away from metaphysics in favour of epistemological and meta-philosophical concerns. Kant clearly has such concerns. The *Critique* is centrally addressed to the problem of how metaphysics is possible. Metaphysics, Kant thinks, is neither an empirical science nor merely logic: its claims, he thinks, are synthetic and a priori. Kant opens the *Critique* with the claim that synthetic a priori judgments are mysterious and he addresses the book to the question: how are synthetic a priori judgments possible? A large part of Kant’s answer is that traditional (transcendent) metaphysics, which he sees as concerned with God, freedom, and immortality (A3/B7), deals with topics with respect to which knowledge is not possible for us. Rather than attempting, in vain, to answer these metaphysical questions, he wants to diagnose the errors that lead us to think we can answer them, and to argue that the only possible substantial a priori knowledge we can have is knowledge of the a priori conditions of empirical cognition. This might seem to support the view that Kant’s concern is to reject metaphysics in favour of epistemological concerns, an impression that is strengthened by such statements as the following:

[T]he understanding can never accomplish *a priori* anything more than to anticipate the form of a possible experience in general, and, since that which is not appearance cannot be an object of experience, it can never overstep the limits of sensibility, within which alone objects are given to us. Its principles are merely principles of the exposition of appearances, and the proud name of an ontology, which presumes to offer synthetic *a priori* cognition of things in general in a systematic doctrine (e.g., the principle of causality), must give way to the modest one of a mere analytic of the pure understanding. (A247/B303)

This passage has been taken to support an interpretation of Kant’s transcendental idealism as an alternative to ontology, and a number of commentators think that to

interpret transcendental idealism as any kind of metaphysical position would be to miss the point of Kant's revolutionary programme.³

Though epistemological concerns are clearly an important part of it, I will argue that Kant's position also involves some metaphysics. At least some of the time when Kant talks of 'metaphysics' or 'ontology' it is with the aim of criticising and rejecting these subjects as conceived by his predecessors, but he also speaks of metaphysics in other ways. On the one hand, he says that his 'Copernican' experiment seems to be disadvantageous 'to the whole purpose with which the second part of metaphysics concerns itself', because it shows that 'we can never get beyond the boundaries of possible experience' (Bxix). On the other hand, he also says that it 'promises to *metaphysics* the secure course of a science in its first part where it concerns itself with concepts *a priori* to which the corresponding objects appropriate to them can be given in experience' (Bxviii, my italics; see also A845/B873).⁴ While he wants to show that we cannot have knowledge of non-spatial, non-sensible objects like God and Cartesian souls—the kind of knowledge, he thinks, to which metaphysics has traditionally aspired—Kant also argues that we can have knowledge of a priori conditions of the possibility of experience or empirical knowledge, which, he thinks, are expressed in synthetic a priori claims. Kant wants to show, for example, that we can know a priori that the spatial objects of our experience are in necessary causal connections with each other and that they are made up of stuff which exists before and after they exist (that substance is conserved). Despite his rejection of transcendent metaphysics, it is not unreasonable to see this as giving us an account of metaphysical claims that we can establish: a metaphysics of experience, as opposed to a transcendent metaphysics. There are, therefore, some general reasons for thinking both that Kant is rejecting one kind of metaphysics and also that he is doing metaphysics, in another sense.

Even if Kant himself did use the term 'metaphysics' exclusively to refer to the traditional metaphysics he is rejecting (the attempt to have a priori knowledge of God, freedom of the will, and the soul), since this is clearly not what philosophers generally mean by the term today, his rejection of metaphysics in this particular sense would not be a reason to think that no aspect of his position is metaphysical in our

³ Allison (2004), Bird (2006).

⁴ In his *Lectures on Metaphysics* we find the same thing: sometimes Kant defines metaphysics and ontology in terms of the kind of questions he is arguing that it is not possible for us to answer, but sometimes he seems to see his project as part of metaphysics in another sense, for example when he speaks of metaphysics as the science of a priori principles of cognition (LM 29: 749–54). He distinguishes between different ways in which we can think of metaphysics, saying that 'in cosmology and also in ontology there are propositions which have objects in experience, and also those which do not—hence the critique of reason must assume quite different basic propositions with respect to its immanent as opposed to its transcendent use. We have classified metaphysics into the part which contains the immanent use of reason and that which contains the transcendent' (LM 29: 768; see also 29: 749–50, 29: 793, 29: 794, 29: 776, and 4: 274). And he also says that 'All the despisers of metaphysics, who wanted to give themselves the appearances of having clearer heads, also had their own metaphysics, even Voltaire. For everyone still thinks something about his own soul' (LM 29: 765).

current sense of the term. His account is partly concerned with such epistemological questions as determining what kinds of things we can cognize and the a priori conditions of empirical cognition, but it is also concerned with the nature of reality—whether, for example, every event has a cause, and with the extent to which spatio-temporal objects are independent of our minds or are dependent on us. I will argue that while some of Kant’s central concerns are epistemological, his transcendental idealism must be understood as containing substantial metaphysical commitments: to the mind-dependence of things as they appear to us, and to the existence of an aspect of reality that grounds the appearances of things, and which we cannot cognize. And I will show how he takes this position to explain the possibility of the kind of metaphysics that is possible for us: synthetic a priori claims about spatio-temporal objects. However, I will also argue that transcendental idealism is not the extreme idealist position it is sometimes taken to be. Further, I will argue that understanding transcendental idealism as a (partly) metaphysical position is compatible with reading some of Kant’s key arguments, such as central parts of the Transcendental Deduction of the categories, as epistemological.

Interpretations of Kant’s distinction between things in themselves and appearances have tended to veer between two extremes. At one extreme are those metaphysical interpretations which understand the distinction as one between non-sensible, non-spatio-temporal things and appearances which exist merely as constructions out of mental states. Understood literally, the term ‘noumena’ refers to objects which are known by the intellect alone and which are not known through sense experience. We can also call such objects *intelligibilia*. Kant thinks that objects which could be known by an intellect alone would be non-spatio-temporal and non-sensible things, such as Cartesian souls and Leibnizian monads, a fundamentally different kind of thing than the spatio-temporal objects of our knowledge. The extreme metaphysical reading of transcendental idealism takes Kant to be committed to the existence of noumena in this sense (a position I call noumenalism), as well as to the claim that we cannot know such objects, and also sees him as a phenomenalist idealist with respect to the objects of experience—things as they appear to us. At the other extreme are proponents of deflationary views which deny that Kant’s transcendental distinction is an ontological one, seeing it instead as an epistemological or methodological distinction between two ways of considering the same things.⁵ Although it precedes them, the dispute between extreme metaphysical and deflationary or epistemological interpretations is exemplified by the interpretations of P. F. Strawson (1966) and Henry Allison (1983), respectively.⁶ The extreme idealist interpretation of Kantian

⁵ This kind of position is associated most prominently with Allison (1983; 2004) and Prauss (1971; 1974). There is some controversy with respect to both Allison and Prauss as to whether they really have deflationary readings, but they are widely assumed to do so. See Westphal (2001) for the dispute with respect to Allison, and Pippin (1974; 1976) and Ameriks (1982b) for discussion of Prauss.

⁶ See Ameriks (1982a) for a summary of the dispute and the allegiances of the disputants.

appearances has a long and distinguished history, dating to the very first review of the *Critique*—the notorious Göttingen Review.⁷ At one point it was called standard,⁸ often by its opponents, and it may be dominant historically, but in the last fifty years deflationary interpretations have proliferated⁹ and may be dominant among contemporary interpreters. In keeping with the historical pattern of oscillation between the two extremes, there has recently been a resurgence of traditional phenomenalist and noumenalist readings.¹⁰ I will present a position that avoids both extremes: a moderate metaphysical interpretation.

The dispute between phenomenalist and noumenalist versus deflationary interpretations is sometimes presented as a dispute between ‘two-world’ and ‘one-world’ interpretations.¹¹ The idea is that interpretations of the first type are committed to an ontological distinction between different kinds of entities (constituting different worlds: the noumenal and the phenomenal worlds), whereas interpretations of the latter type are concerned with a distinction between two ways of considering one set of things (and therefore one world of entities). However, there are problems with this terminology. Some of those who see Kant as an extreme, phenomenalist idealist deny that the term ‘two-world’ is appropriately applied to their views.¹² On the other hand, those who see transcendental idealism as an epistemological or methodological thesis might argue that the characterisation of the debate as one between two- and one-world interpretations illegitimately assumes an ontological starting point, which, they maintain, Kant rejects. There is a great deal of variety among views that reject the idea that Kant’s distinction is one between two kinds of objects: they include, for example, Allison’s (1983) methodological reading, which sees Kant as concerned with the conditions of cognition; Abela’s (2002) epistemological reading, which sees Kant as concerned with the rejection of the ‘given’; and Langton’s (1998) metaphysical distinction between intrinsic and extrinsic properties. Some commentators deny that Kant is committed to there being a way things are in themselves¹³ and read him as committed to only ‘one world’ in virtue of seeing appearances as all that exists, rather than in virtue of seeing appearances as one ‘aspect’ of a single set of entities which also have a way they are in themselves. And although talk of ‘two aspects’ of objects (as opposed to two objects or two worlds) is associated with deflationary interpretations, it is also possible to have metaphysical two-aspect views; such views can even be introduced by talking about two

⁷ Garve and Feder (1782).

⁸ See, for example, Hoke Robinson (1994: 415) and Allison (1983: Ch. 1).

⁹ For example, Bird (1962), and Prauss (1971; 1974), Allison (1973; 1983; 1996), Matthews (1982), and Pippin (1982).

¹⁰ See for example Jauernig (forthcoming), Stang (forthcoming), and Hogan (2009a; 2009b).

¹¹ I discuss it in these terms in Allais (2004). See Walker (2010) for criticism of this terminology.

¹² Guyer provides an example of this. He says: ‘I have never held that Kant posits a second set of things that are ontologically distinct from ordinary things or appearances’ (Guyer 2007: 12). He continues to make explicit the fact that, on his view, Kant reduces ordinary empirical objects to mental representations.

¹³ See Hanna (2001), Senderowicz (2005), Bird (2006), and Hanna (2006: 15, 197–8).

different ways of considering objects.¹⁴ With this messy terminological background, I will avoid talk of ‘one-world’ and ‘two-world’ interpretations. My aim is to reject two kinds of extreme views: on the one hand, deflationary interpretations which don’t see Kant’s position as containing idealism and which don’t see him as committed to there being a way things are in themselves and, on the other hand, extreme metaphysical interpretations which see him as a noumenalist and a phenomenalist. I argue for a moderate metaphysical interpretation which sees Kant as holding that the things of which we have knowledge have a way they are in themselves that is not cognizable by us, and that the appearances of these things are genuinely mind-dependent, while not existing merely in the mind.

There is an abundance of apparent textual evidence as well as philosophical considerations that can be appealed to in support of both extremes. At the same time, both views have serious problems. Kant says that the spatio-temporal, physical objects of our experience are appearances, that they are mere representations, that they do not exist apart from their connection to a possible perception, and that they do not give us insight into what things are like as they are in themselves. This sounds like idealism. But Kant also vehemently asserts that his position is nothing like Berkeley’s, distances himself from idealism, and even regrets having called his position ‘transcendental idealism’.¹⁵ He insists that his transcendental idealism is also an empirical realism. He foregrounds epistemological concerns by saying that by ‘transcendental’ he means an account of how a priori knowledge is possible: his position is supposed to give us an explanation of the possibility of a priori knowledge of the objects of experience, and to rule out the possibility of any other kind of a priori knowledge. He characterises the idealism he rejects as one that sees the immediate objects of perception as mental items on the basis of which external objects are inferred; against this, he argues that external objects in space are the immediate objects of perception. And he also says that his position enables him to demonstrate the reality of the very spatial objects which Descartes doubts and Berkeley denies, and that experience of these objects is immediate and primary, not inferred from our awareness of our inner states.

¹⁴ For example, assuming that there is a metaphysical difference between intrinsic properties and relational properties, or between primary and secondary qualities, we could introduce such a distinction by talking about considering an object in two different ways. We could introduce the notion of a thing’s intrinsic properties by considering the thing as it is apart from its possible relations with us and other things. Similarly, someone who holds colour to be dependent on visual experience might introduce a distinction between primary and secondary qualities by considering objects as they are in our perceptual experience and objects as they are apart from their being perceived by us. Starting with these two ways of considering objects may lead to a genuine metaphysical distinction. For discussion of the point that two-aspect interpretations can be metaphysical, see Westphal (2001: 594–5; 1997a: 232) and Rosefeldt (2007).

¹⁵ He suggests, in the *Prolegomena*, that he should have called it ‘formal idealism’ or ‘critical idealism’ (*Proleg.* 4:337: 375).

The existence of strong considerations in favour of both sides as well as serious problems with both sides seems to keep the literature in a state of oscillation.¹⁶ Problems with one extreme view are often taken as support for the other extreme.¹⁷ Many extreme idealist interpreters are rightly dissatisfied with deflationary readings that cannot do justice to the parts of the text in which Kant expresses his idealism; they frequently seem to assume that the only way to do justice to these texts is through seeing Kant as a phenomenalist. On the other hand, many deflationary and bare empirical realist interpreters are rightly dissatisfied with interpretations that see Kant as a phenomenalist, and from this they conclude that he is not an idealist. Similarly, noumenalist interpretations point out that Kant clearly expresses a commitment to there being a way things are in themselves, independently of us. However, they wrongly conclude that he is committed to the existence of non-sensible, non-spatio-temporal entities which are distinct from the objects of our knowledge. Deflationary and mere empirical realist interpretations rightly point out the problems with seeing Kant as committed to intelligibilia; they argue that it follows that the idea of things in themselves does not commit him to an existing feature of reality at all. To reach a stable interpretation we need an account of idealism that is not phenomenalist and that does justice to Kant's empirical realism, and we need an account of what it means to say that things have a way they are in themselves which does not involve a commitment to intelligibilia.

In my view, part of what makes Kant's transcendental idealism so complex and difficult to pin down, as well as so compelling, is that it is a position which aims to accommodate competing philosophical concerns. This aspect of Kant's thought is captured by Lorne Falkenstein's diagnosis of the impetus of Kant's intellectual development:

Kant was not the sort of person who had the intellectual courage to face up to a dilemma and reject one alternative in favour of the other. Instead, when he felt himself pulled in opposite directions by conflicting imperatives, his preference was to try to work out some way of satisfying them both. This intellectual cowardice... is the characteristic that lead Kant to his most brilliant discoveries (Falkenstein 1995: 19).

Setting aside the character judgment, it seems to me that this captures one of the most interesting features of Kant's thought: his attempt to incorporate and mediate between competing philosophical pressures. Similarly, in my view, a compelling interpretation of Kant's position will be one which does justice to the undeniable interpretative pressures in both directions. There are strong grounds for thinking

¹⁶ This can be seen in a single author: McDowell (1994) has a 'two-world' view which appears to switch to a deflationary view without a commitment to the existence of things in themselves in his later (1998a) work.

¹⁷ For example, Allison aims his arguments against those who see Kant as a noumenalist or a phenomenalist, or both (2004: 4; also 5–9, 46, 51, 54; and 2006: 112), while Van Cleve (1999) seems to take Allison's two- aspect view as his only real target; it is also the main object of Guyer's criticisms.

that Kant is an idealist who is also committed to the existence of an aspect of reality that we cannot know. There are also strong grounds for thinking Kant is neither a phenomenalist nor a noumenalist.¹⁸ My interpretation accommodates both these sides of Kant's thought.

The continual pendulum swing between the extreme readings might support the idea that there is no single view unambiguously presented in the *Critique*—Kant is simply inconsistent. Given the centrality of the position in Kant's philosophy, an agreed interpretation is clearly desirable. The aim of this book is to argue that there is an interpretation of transcendental idealism that is unambiguously supported in the first *Critique*, that accommodates the textual evidence that seems to support the extreme views, and that is a coherent position. As I see it, the challenge is to give an interpretation which does not undermine or trivialise Kant's claims that we know only mind-dependent appearances and that we cannot know things as they are in themselves, without involving phenomenalist idealism about appearances, or committing Kant to the noumenalism that he denies. Deflationary interpreters do not see transcendental idealism as an ontological position at all, which, of course, the strongly idealist interpreters do. On my reading, Kant's distinction is based on epistemological considerations, and has epistemological consequences, but it also involves metaphysical claims about what exists and about the mind-dependence of the aspect of reality of which we can have knowledge. Kant's position is a careful combination of realism and idealism, and of metaphysical and epistemological claims. In my view, this is part of the broader philosophical interest of understanding transcendental idealism: Kant attempts to accommodate as far as possible both philosophical concerns that lead to idealism and those that lead to realism.

There are two central parts to my approach to transcendental idealism. One is emphasising Kant's concern with cognition rather than knowledge, and, as central to this, paying detailed attention to the role of what he calls intuition in cognition. In my view, the nature of Kant's idealism, his argument for his idealism, and his reasons for thinking that we cannot cognize things as they are in themselves all crucially turn on his notion of intuition. I argue that Kantian intuitions are representations that give us acquaintance with objects, and that since he thinks cognition requires intuition, he thinks our cognition is limited to that with which we can have acquaintance: what can be presented to us in a conscious experience. The other central part of my strategy is to show that Kant's position looks very different depending on the

¹⁸ A similar dispute between interpretative extremes is exemplified by those who, like P. F. Strawson, think that everything that is of value in the *Critique* can be entirely separated off from Kant's transcendental idealism, and those who think that seeing *any* aspect of Kant's arguments as not dependent on, leading to, or otherwise intimately embedded in his idealism is to fail to take transcendental idealism seriously and to miss the coherence of Kant's work. I think we should take transcendental idealism seriously, and it is clearly the key to many of Kant's arguments and positions in the *Critique*, but it is compatible with this that Kant may have some arguments and epistemological insights which are separable from his idealism.

assumptions we bring to reading it, in particular assumptions about the nature of perception. Like a number of other commentators, I argue that it is crucial to see that Kant rejects what I will call a Cartesian picture of perception. This is a view according to which perception is indirect in the following sense: perception centrally involves having or being in a mental state which the subject could be in whether or not an object were being perceived, and which counts as perceptual when it is caused by the object in the right way. This makes perception 'indirect', because the object itself is not a constituent of the mental state a subject is in when perceiving; rather, the object is merely the cause of the mental state. According to this view, a subject could be in the same mental state when perceiving an object as when hallucinating an object; the fact that the former state is one of perception and the latter is not is a function of the different causes of the states in the two cases, and not of their content. According to an alternative to the Cartesian account of perception, a perceptual mental state is a state which involves the presence to consciousness of the object perceived. The idea is that the presence to consciousness of the object is part of what makes the mental state the state that it is. Such views used to be called 'direct realist' accounts, but are now often, following John Campbell, called relational accounts of perception: the term 'relational' marks the idea that 'the object perceived is a constituent of the conscious experience itself' (Campbell 2002a: 117). I argue that we should approach transcendental idealism with a relational view as a starting point.

Indirect or representationalist theories of perception were dominant in the early modern period (at least in the standard reading of the early modern period).¹⁹ Kant claims that the spatio-temporal objects of our experience are mere appearances or mere representations. Since the term 'representations' suggests mental intermediaries, it is often taken to support a reading of Kant as a phenomenalist idealist. However, as I will argue in detail in Chapter 2, it is extremely difficult to make sense of Kant's position as a phenomenalist idealism. A Berkeleyan idealist or a phenomenalist starts with a conception of mental states (ideas, sense data, or mental contents) as things of which we have direct awareness, and then argues that these are all that exist and that physical objects are constructions out of them, or supervene on them, or exist simply as a matter of certain truths about these mental states. But Kant has no such starting point. He thinks that cognition of our own mental lives is not primary, but rather requires immediate experience of things outside us, and that we would not even be able to be aware of the temporal determination of our own mental lives without this.²⁰ He thinks that we do not know what our minds are as they are in themselves and that we do not understand the essence of either mind or matter sufficiently well to know whether they are really different kinds of things. One of my

¹⁹ See Yolton (1996; 2000) for an alternative view. Note also that 'representational' accounts of perception, today, are not always understood as indirect; I ignore this, as it is typically taken to refer to indirect accounts of perception in relation to the early modern period.

²⁰ This is his argument in the Refutation of Idealism (B274–9).

aims is to show how fruitful it is for the interpretation of transcendental idealism if we do not approach Kant with a representationalist or indirect account of perception as a starting assumption.²¹ I argue that if we approach transcendental idealism with a direct realist or relational, rather than an indirect or Cartesian, account of perception, we can find a non-phenomenalist kind of mind-dependence which makes sense of the way Kant expresses both his idealism and his claims about things in themselves, and which is compatible with far more of his text than are phenomenalist readings. On this view, restricting what is empirically real to what can feature in a possible perception is not restricting it to what exists in the mind, but instead to what can be directly or immediately presented to minds like ours. While ‘*Vorstellungen*’ is standardly translated as ‘representation’, it could just as well be translated as ‘presentation’.²² Rather than saying that appearances are things which exist only in minds, or as constructions out of what exists only in minds, Kant can be read as saying that what counts as part of the empirically real world is only what can be presented to us in (relational) perceptual experience. As I read him, Kant thinks that appearances are not just perceptible things, things which manifest themselves to us (as a realist might think); they are *essentially* perceptible or *essentially* manifestable. Here, we have a kind of idealism or anti-realism which holds that spatio-temporal reality does not transcend what is essentially manifestable to finite receptive creatures like us. Empirical reality is restricted to what can be presented to consciousnesses like ours, but what can be presented to consciousness is not something which exists merely in the mind.

Approaching transcendental idealism with a relational view of perception is closely related to the other central strand of my approach—emphasising Kant’s notion of intuition and the role of intuition in cognition. Increasing attention is being paid by scholars to the fact that Kant’s central term *Erkenntnis*, now standardly translated as cognition, is not the same as knowledge. Cognition, unlike knowledge, can be false (B83), and what is relevant to whether or not something qualifies as cognition is not whether it has some specified kind of justification or warrant, but rather the kind of representation of objects with which it is able to provide us.²³ Both at the empirical and the a priori level, Kant’s primary concern is with what it takes for us to achieve a certain kind of objective representation of the world (cognition), rather than with what kind of warrant is required for knowledge. He thinks that cognition requires general, conceptual thought, but he also thinks that concepts never uniquely individuate objects and never put us directly in touch with objects. This means, he thinks, that it is never the case that merely having a concept enables us to know that there exists something that corresponds to the concept, and that the use of concepts alone is not enough to enable us to have a thought that succeeds in being about some

²¹ A number of philosophers have argued that one of Kant’s central achievements is the rejection of the Cartesian conception of experience. Allison (1973), Guyer (1987), Willaschek (1997), McDowell (1998a), Collins (1999), Abela (2002), Ameriks (2003: 5; 2006: Ch. 6), and Bird (2006).

²² As it is in the Pluhart (1996) translation.

²³ See Schafer (forthcoming).

particular object. It follows that concepts on their own do not succeed in relating to objects in the way that is necessary for cognition. Cognition requires, in addition to conceptual thought, the possibility of acquaintance with the objects of cognition. Acquaintance (unlike merely having a concept) is a relation to an object that guarantees the existence of the object and which individuates a specific particular. Kant thinks that we cannot have acquaintance with the objects of traditional metaphysics (God, Cartesian souls, and Leibnizian monads), and that we cannot have acquaintance with things as they are in themselves, and therefore that we cannot recognize them. Not only do we not have knowledge of them, we do not even really succeed in representing them. Our thoughts about them are merely coherent thoughts, and not properly objective representations, or cognition.

My reading of intuition as giving us acquaintance with objects goes against an interpretative trend of assimilating intuitions to sensations. This trend is associated with the widespread reading that attributes to Kant the idea that it is the application of concepts that organises the sensory input to give us presentations of individual objects. This leads to seeing intuition as mere sensory input, and to paying insufficient attention to the role of intuition in Kant's account of cognition: that of giving us objects. Seeing intuition as presenting us with objects—giving us acquaintance with objects—enables us to understand Kant's idealism and his empirical realism. We are directly presented (in intuition) with objects outside us in space; but spatio-temporal reality does not transcend what can be given to us in intuition. I show that this reading of intuition makes sense of Kant's central argument for his idealism, the argument in the *Transcendental Aesthetic*, which entirely turns on the notion of intuition, rather than on an explanation of synthetic a priori cognition in general, as it is sometimes read.

My account of intuition has implications for how we understand Kant's answer to his question about cognition of synthetic a priori metaphysical claims. Notably, Kant's question is not about how such judgments are *justified*, but how they are *possible*. I will argue that Kant's primary question is how it is possible for such judgments to qualify as cognition. Their being cognition requires that they concern objects that are given to us in intuition—objects with which we have acquaintance—but Kant thinks that we can have acquaintance with objects that are independent of us only if they affect our senses. This makes it hard to see how synthetic a priori claims could concern objects with which we have acquaintance (because they are a priori), and therefore hard to see how they could qualify as cognition. I will argue that understanding Kant's question about the possibility of cognition of synthetic a priori claims in this way is key to understanding his argument for his idealism in the *Transcendental Aesthetic*, as well as to his explanation of the possibility of metaphysics.

Focusing on cognition helps with a traditional concern about whether Kant can be entitled to assert both that we cannot know things as they are in themselves and to assert that there is a way things are in themselves. Kant's claim is not that we cannot

know that there is a way things are in themselves but rather that we cannot cognize things as they are in themselves. It may also help with some meta-philosophical concerns about the status of Kant's theory. If transcendental idealism is both a metaphysical theory and an explanation of metaphysical knowledge, this raises questions about our knowledge of the theory itself. If, in contrast, we start with an account of empirical cognition and its conditions, and argue that these conditions include certain a priori representations, and also that these conditions have implications for the extent of reality that we can cognize, the meta-philosophical problems become less severe.

It should be noted that my concern here is with the first *Critique*.²⁴ While Kant argues that we cannot have what he calls theoretical cognition of things as they are in themselves, he does also think that we can achieve some kind of cognition of them through practical reason. I do not discuss this, and when I talk about our being unable to have cognition of things in themselves, this should be taken throughout to refer to theoretical cognition.

This book is longer than I would have liked it to be, but many chapters can be read independently. In Part One I look at the textual evidence for the various interpretations of transcendental idealism and present arguments against the two traditional extremes. The arguments in this section are negative arguments against other people's views, and readers whose interests do not include tracing the interpretative debates in the literature about Kant can easily skip this part of the book. Despite the length of the book, the enormous amount of writing there is on Kant means that there is much that I leave out, and my use of the literature is necessarily selective: my aim is simply to represent philosophical and textual motivation for the competing positions, and not to give a comprehensive account of everything written on the topic.

In Chapter 2, I argue against a phenomenalist interpretation of Kantian appearances.

In Chapter 3, I argue against two extreme interpretations of Kant's notion of things in themselves: on the one hand, a reading which sees things in themselves as non-spatio-temporal, non-sensible things, objects of a distinct kind from those of which we have experience (noumenalism), and, on the other hand, a reading which holds that Kant's only ontological commitment is to empirically real, spatio-temporal objects (empirical realism alone). I argue that Kant is committed to there being an aspect of reality of which we cannot have knowledge, but that he is not a noumenalist.

In Chapter 4 I argue against deflationary interpretations according to which Kant's distinction between things as they are in themselves and things as they appear to us is concerned merely with conditions of knowledge. I argue that although Kant is concerned with a priori conditions of empirical knowledge, this is not all there is to his distinction between things in themselves and appearances. And I argue

²⁴ I take seriously Kant's claim that his revisions in the second edition of the *Critique* alter the presentation but not the substance of his account (Bxxxvii), and therefore draw on both editions.

that the philosophical work for which he invokes transcendental idealism—the resolution of those conflicts to which he thinks traditional metaphysics leads—requires genuine metaphysical commitments.

The upshot of Part One is that there are serious textual reasons as well as philosophical considerations that have led interpreters to extreme positions, both of which are unstable and unable to accommodate the evidence for the alternative position. To make sense of Kant's position we need an account of mind-dependence that does not involve existence in the mind, and which is compatible with thinking that mind-dependent appearances are grounded in the way things are in themselves. The rest of the book presents my positive account of this.

In Part Two, I present my account of the kind of mind-dependence had by Kantian appearances and the way this relates to Kant's account of things as they are in themselves. I argue that Kant's view is that spatio-temporal reality is essentially manifestable: it does not transcend what can be presented in a conscious experience to creatures like us.

In Chapter 5, I present a relational account of perception which allows that we can directly perceive things without perceiving them entirely as they are in themselves, apart from their perceptual appearing. My concern in this chapter is neither with Kant's account of perception nor with making the philosophical case for a particular account of perception; rather, I simply want to present the possibility of a relational view in sufficient detail to show how fruitful it is to approach Kant with this view in mind, rather than starting with a representationalist or indirect view. Within this account, I present the idea of *manifest qualities*—qualities which are presented to us in perception—and then the idea of *essentially manifest qualities*—qualities which are presented to us in perception and which do not present us with features that objects have independently of their being presented to us in perception. I then present a possible view of colour according to which colour is an essentially manifest quality. The idea is that colour is a directly presented feature of external objects and also that it is a property the existence of which does not transcend our possible perceptual experience of it.

In Chapter 6, I use this account of essentially manifest qualities to explain Kant's idealism about appearances. In the *Prolegomena*, Kant explains his idealism about appearances by comparing them with so-called secondary qualities such as colour. How the secondary quality analogy enables us to interpret Kant's idealism will of course depend on what account of secondary qualities we draw on: I argue that the account of colour as essentially manifest presented in the previous chapter enables us to understand Kant's idealism in a way that fits the texts very well. As I understand it, Kant's view is that we can cognize only essentially manifest features of reality.²⁵

²⁵ Other commentators have read Kant in a fashion similar to mine, most notably Paton (1936), Dryer (1966), Collins (1999), and Rosefeldt (2007). I see my argument here as part of a common project with theirs, but there are some differences between our positions. My biggest disagreement is with Dryer, as he

I argue that this gives us a robust and radical, but non-phenomenalist, form of idealism which can do complete justice to all the ways Kant expresses his idealism, to the philosophical work he wants it to do, to the way he talks about the relation between things in themselves and appearances, and to the considerations which count against viewing him as a phenomenalist—his empirical realism.

Chapters 7 and 8 concern the role of intuition in Kant's idealism. This is crucial, because he limits empirical reality to what could possibly be presented to us in an intuition, and because his central argument for idealism is based on the role of a priori intuition. Chapter 7 is a detailed argument for my reading of intuition: the claim that intuitions are representations that give us acquaintance with the objects of thought. Much of this chapter consists in engaging with debates in the literature. Kant has often been taken, incorrectly, in my view, to hold that it is the application of concepts that enables us to be presented with particulars; this view is widespread, and therefore requires thorough refutation. In Chapter 8 I use my account of intuition to explain Kant's central argument for his idealism in the *Transcendental Aesthetic*, the first part of the *Critique*, in which he presents his account of space and time. There is much dispute about how this argument is supposed to work. I argue that understanding intuitions as giving us acquaintance with objects enables us to see why Kant takes his conclusion to follow at the point at which he does, without the need for any extra premisses. I then argue that the kind of idealism which follows from the argument fits better with my essential manifestness form of anti-realism than it does with a phenomenalist interpretation.

Part Three of the book completes my account of the tightrope Kant walks between realism and idealism, of the metaphysical and epistemological components of his position, and of the relation between his idealism and his explanation of the possibility of metaphysics.

Chapter 9 is concerned with Kant's account of empirical reality. I argue that, according to Kant, the spatio-temporal objects that constitute empirical reality are essentially sensory and are relational or non-categorical (though not merely in minds, or properties of something merely mental, or merely mental results of mind-independent dispositions). In explaining Kant's position I compare it to three contemporary views. Like a certain form of contemporary anti-realism in philosophy of

sometimes implies that there is no idealism, or no mind-dependence, in Kant's position at all. Both Paton and Collins can be read as using the secondary quality analogy in a way similar to that in which I use it. Understanding Paton in this way is controversial, however, and Collins attributes to him a phenomenalist reading of appearances (Collins 1999: 162), as does Bird (1962: 1). It could be that Paton is sometimes inconsistent; Barker claims this about Paton's use of the language of appearing, since he sometimes calls appearances ideas (Barker 1969: 282; see Paton 1936: 442). Collins's position might seem different from mine in that he denies that Kant is an idealist while I argue that there is a significant sense in which Kant is an idealist, but it seems to me that this difference may be terminological. My position is closest to that of Rosefeldt (2007), although the sense in which he sees secondary qualities as dispositional is not entirely clear to me. Although Ameriks (2000; 2003; 2006) does not spend much time on the secondary quality analogy in specific, my approach is also in line with his moderate metaphysical interpretation.

language, I argue that Kant's idealism can be understood as rejecting experience-transcendent reality, rather than asserting that objects exist as ideas in our minds. Like anti-realism in philosophy of science, Kant can be understood as limiting scientific knowledge to what is (in some sense) observable. On Kant's account, as I understand it, there is no conflict between the so-called manifest and scientific images: science studies manifest reality, and scientific knowledge is limited to manifest reality. Finally, like structural realism in contemporary philosophy of science, Kant argues that science gives us knowledge only of structural or relational features of reality.

In Chapter 10, I show that Kant does not think that a coherent ontology could contain only essentially manifest, essentially relational features. I argue that Kant's position includes the claim that we cannot have knowledge of non-relational features of reality but that he also thinks there must be something non-relational which grounds relational appearances.

Chapter 11 is concerned with the Transcendental Deduction of the Categories. Kant's idealism is sometimes associated with forms of conceptual idealism which hold that our concepts shape our reality. Against this, I argue that the central concerns of the Deduction are epistemological. The aim of the Deduction is to show that a priori concepts (the categories) apply to spatio-temporal objects. As I see it, Kant's strategy in the Deduction is to argue that without applying a priori concepts to objects we would not be able to apply empirical concepts to them: the categories are the conditions of empirical concept application. This shows that the categories can be used, as Kant puts it, to think empirical objects—because they are conditions of such thoughts.

Finally, in Chapter 12, I evaluate the implications of the previous three chapters for the interpretation of transcendental idealism and I examine the delicate relation between transcendental idealism and Kant's explanation of the possibility of metaphysics. I examine the different roles a priori concepts and a priori intuitions play in Kant's account: I argue that the idealism is a function of the role and nature of a priori intuition, and that the categories need not be seen as introducing further mind-structuring to the world. Rather, their legitimate use (use for cognition) is limited to the mind-dependence of what can be given to us in intuition. However, I still see transcendental idealism as playing a central role in Kant's explanation of the possibility of metaphysics, and in establishing the Deduction's final conclusion. As I read Kant, we must distinguish between the argument that shows that the categories have relation to an object (objective validity) and the argument which shows that all spatio-temporal objects are subject to the categories. The former, as I argue in Chapter 11, is an epistemological argument about the conditions of empirical concept application. The latter is a result of combining the conclusion of the epistemological argument with an idealism that limits spatio-temporal objects to the conditions of our cognizing them. Similarly, Kant's synthetic a priori principles are established as conditional claims (claims about the conditions of empirical cognition); they are converted into unconditional claims about spatio-temporal objects once we grant that spatio-temporal

objects do not exist independent of the possibility of our cognizing them. On this account, we can take seriously the role of the idealism in explaining the possibility of metaphysics without taking the explanation to be that it is because our minds 'make' objects in certain ways that we can know a priori claims about objects. Finally, I briefly sketch features of my view which I think may be helpful for understanding Kant's account of free will.

There are many questions about Kant's transcendental idealism that this book does not tackle, most obviously the role the position plays in Kant's attempt to resolve the free will problem. However, by showing that the text is not full of contradictions and by providing a coherent interpretation that makes sense of the texts that seem to pull in different directions, my interpretation lays the groundwork for understanding these further questions.

The remainder of this chapter presents the basic textual evidence for my moderate metaphysical reading. I start by showing that there is a strong textual basis for attributing to Kant the idea that empirically real, spatio-temporal objects depend on our minds in some sense. I argue, in Section II, that the text does not force us to read Kant as a phenomenalist (or extreme idealist who takes physical objects to exist literally in minds), but that there are overwhelming textual grounds for thinking that he is an idealist in the broad sense in which this term covers a commitment to physical objects being mind-dependent in some way. In Section III I present textual evidence for three points concerning Kant's notion of things in themselves. One, Kant speaks of appearances and things in themselves as aspects of the same things. Two, he is committed to there actually being an aspect of reality which we cannot cognize. And three, he holds that this uncognizable reality grounds the mind-dependent objects of our cognition. Many commentators have given reasons for not taking the text at face value; I respond to these arguments in Chapters 2 to 4.

II Textual Evidence for Idealism

Kant refers to the spatio-temporal objects of our cognition as appearances, which is a short hand for things as they appear to us. I argue that his use of the word 'appearance' is not, on its own, decisive with respect to the question of whether he is an idealist. However, there are very many prominent passages in the *Critique* which support a broadly idealist reading of Kantian spatio-temporal appearances.²⁶ There are three striking common features of these passages: first, Kant claims that spatio-temporal objects are appearances 'in us'; second, he calls appearances *representations*; and third, he says that the *existence* of appearances requires *a connection with actual perception*. I will comment on each of these. In my view, they provide such strong evidence of Kant's being an idealist of some sort that in the absence of an

²⁶ See A42/B59, B45, A46/B63, A104–5, A127, A376, A383, A490/B518, A492–3/B521, A494–6/B522–4, A505–6/B533–4, and A514–15/B542–3.

alternative account of the sense in which appearances depend on our minds, phenomenalist interpretations would have strong textual support. However, I contend that none of these features of the text provides conclusive reason for seeing Kant as a phenomenalist, and I argue in the next chapter that phenomenism is inconsistent with many of Kant's core philosophical concerns. In Parts Two and Three I give an alternative account of the mind-dependence of appearances. In my view, it may often be due to alternative forms of idealism not being considered (rather, the alternatives to phenomenalist interpretations are assumed to be realist interpretations) that the strong textual evidence for Kant's being an idealist is taken to show him to be a phenomenalist, despite the serious textual cost of this reading. Once we have an alternative account of the mind-dependence Kant invokes, we need not see the textual evidence that shows him to be an idealist as requiring an interpretation of him as a phenomenalist.

The fact that Kant calls spatio-temporal objects appearances²⁷ (*Erscheinungen*) need not, on its own, be taken to imply their mind-dependence. There are a number of different ways the term 'appearance' can be used, including neutral realist uses. It can be used to imply a mere *seeming*, as in 'the straight stick *appears* bent in water'; here, appearance is opposed to the way things *really* are. It is clear that this is not Kant's usage. He explicitly denies that his view makes objects 'a mere **illusion**' (*Schein*), or that bodies only '*seem* to exist outside of me' (B69).²⁸ 'Appearance' has also been used to refer to sense data which are understood as merely mental representations of reality. For example, Russell says that 'what we directly see and feel is merely "appearance", which we believe to be a sign of some "reality" behind' (Russell 1912: 6).²⁹ Understood in this way, Kant's use of 'appearance' would correspond to the extreme idealist interpretation of transcendental idealism according to which the existence of the empirical world consists in the existence of actual and possible sense data or mental states. However, there is also a neutral use of 'appearance', in which appears means 'is manifest', or 'becomes manifest', and has no implication of mind-dependence, as in 'when you come over the hill, the church appears'.³⁰ If we understand Kant's use of appearance in this way, calling spatio-temporal objects appearances need not have any idealist implications. It simply implies that they are things of which we have sense experience—things which are presented to us. Kant has been read in this neutral way. Dryer, for example, says that 'when Kant is translated as asserting that empirical knowledge can be got only of

²⁷ For example A20/B34, A42/B59, and A46/B53.

²⁸ Similarly, he says that 'when appearances are in question, and this term is taken to have the same meaning as semblance, one is always poorly understood' (MFNS 4: 555).

²⁹ He says that 'what the senses tell us *immediately* is not the truth about the object as it is apart from us, but only the truth about certain sense-data', 'the various sensations due to various pressures of various parts of the body cannot be supposed to reveal *directly* any definite property of the table, but at most to be *signs* of some property which perhaps *causes* all the sensations' (Russell 1912: 6).

³⁰ Kant's initial explanation of appearance is that it is the undetermined (unconceptualised) object of an empirical intuition; this has no implication of mind-dependence (A20/B34).

“appearances”, what he is saying is that it can be got only of what presents itself to empirical intuition’ (Dryer 1966: 506³¹). Similarly, Bird says that Kant ‘is a transcendental idealist because [he thinks] it is quite unwarranted to make claims about objects which are not open to any sort of perceptual inspection. Kant’s empirically neutral term “appearance” was thus designed to limit the range of our possible experience to the objects that can be presented to our senses’ (Bird 1962: 50). On this reading, the significance of saying that the objects of our knowledge are appearances lies in restricting our cognition to things that we can, in principle, perceive and thereby rejecting the claim that we have knowledge of any non-sensible objects, such as Leibnizian monads, God, or immortal souls.³² I do not rest my interpretation on any reading of ‘appearances.’ In my view, even though the neutral realist use of appearance is defensible (at least some of the time), there are sufficient other reasons to see Kant as an idealist. It is certainly a central part of his position that we can cognize only things which we can, in principle, perceive (which can be presented to us in sensible intuition, which can appear to us). However, Kant makes further, specific claims about the status of appearances: throughout the *Critique* he says that spatio-temporal appearances exist ‘in us’, that they are representations (*Vorstellungen*), or mere representations (*bloße Vorstellungen*), and that their existence requires a connection to possible perception.³³ These claims strongly support seeing Kant as an idealist about appearances; I discuss each of them in turn, and look at some of the texts in which they feature.

The first feature of the text that supports seeing Kant as an idealist is his repeated claim that appearances exist ‘in us’. For example, he says:

We have therefore wanted to say that...if we remove our own subject or even only the subjective constitution of the senses in general, then all the constitution, all relations of objects in space and time, indeed space and time themselves would disappear, and as appearances they cannot exist in themselves, but only *in us*. (A42/B59, my italics)

The transcendental idealist... allows this matter and even its inner possibility to be valid only for appearance—which, separated from our sensibility, is nothing—matter for him is only a species of representations (intuition), which are called external, not as if they are related to objects that are **external in themselves** but because they relate perceptions to space, where all things are external to one another, but that space itself is in us. (A370)

We have sufficiently proved in the Transcendental Aesthetic that everything intuited in space or 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. (A490–1/B518–19)

³¹ See also Bird (1962: 46, 50, 148).

³² See also Bxxvi, A20/B34, A26/B42, and A239/B298. Against the neutral reading of ‘appearance’, see A490–1/B518–19.

³³ B45; A98; A101; A104; A109; A113; B164; A190/B235; A197/B242; A369; A370; A372; A383; A385; A386; A490–1/B518–19; A493/B521; A494/B522; A499/B527; A507/B535; A563/B591; A793/B821; *Proleg.* 5: 288, 289, 319, 341, 342.

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. (A492/B520)

It is not hard to see why such passages have led many commentators to see Kant as a phenomenalist or Berkeleyan idealist who thinks that appearances exist literally in our minds or as constructions out of ideas which exist in our minds. Berkeley, as he is standardly read, thinks that physical objects are collections of ideas which exist in our minds; in these passages Kant might be thought to be expressing exactly this view.

However, Kant clearly distinguishes between what he calls empirical and transcendental senses in which objects can be ‘in us’ (*in uns*) and ‘outside us’ (*ausser uns*) (A373); it is crucial to read the above claims with this disambiguation in mind.³⁴ In the passage in which Kant describes his disambiguation he says that:

[T]he expression **outside us** carries with it an unavoidable ambiguity, since it sometimes signifies something that, **as a thing in itself**, exists distinct from us and sometimes merely something that belongs to outer **appearance**, then in order to escape uncertainty and use this concept in the latter significance—in which it is taken in the proper psychological question about the reality of our outer intuition—we will distinguish **empirically external** objects from those that might be called “external” in the transcendental sense, by directly calling them “**things that are to be encountered in space**”. (A373)

Kant says that what is outside us in the empirical sense are things which exist in space whereas what is transcendently external is ‘something that, **as a thing in itself**, exists *distinct* from us’ (*von uns unterschieden existiert*, my italics). The transcendental sense of ‘outside us’ (to which appearances being ‘in us’ is opposed) is the idea of things which exist distinct from us. A straightforward way of understanding Kant’s point here is that he is distinguishing the thought of a thing’s being outside us in space from the thought of a thing’s existing independently of us: what is transcendently ideal can be empirically outside us (can exist in space), but is not independent of us. Although Kant’s disambiguation does not give a particular account of what this latter dependence amounts to, it sets some constraints on understanding it. A non-phenomenalist kind of idealism will make more sense of his contrast between what is transcendently in us (dependent on us) and what is empirically in us (what is inside our minds, rather than outside us in space) than will phenomenism. Phenomenism, broadly, holds that the existence of objects in

³⁴ This is forcefully argued by Henry Allison (2004: 24) and Karl Ameriks (2000: 111–12). Allison’s interpretation of this distinction is that, understood empirically, the terms ‘in us’ and ‘outside us’ mark a distinction between objects of inner and outer sense, respectively, but understood transcendently, they mark a distinction between ‘two manners in which objects can be considered in relation to the conditions of human sensibility’ (Allison 2004: 24). Allison is clearly right to point out the significance of the disambiguation between the empirical and transcendental senses of ‘in us’, but this does not settle the interpretative question, or establish any particular account of the latter. Notably, Kant’s disambiguation of the empirical and transcendental senses of ‘in us’ and ‘outside us’ says nothing about two ways in which objects can be considered in relation to the conditions of human sensibility, as Allison’s interpretation requires. Allison’s interpretation is discussed in Ch. 4.

space does not amount to anything more than the existence of certain actual and possible mental states (and what can be constructed out of these).³⁵ Kant says here, in contrast, that objects do *not* exist in our minds, yet their existence is not independent of our minds. Against merely empirical realist and deflationary interpretations, however, it is clear that his account of what it means to be transcendently ‘in us’ involves some kind of mind-dependence: he says that spatial objects do not exist distinct from us. This means that to make sense of Kant’s saying that appearances are ‘in us’, our aim should be to look for an account of mind-dependence that does not involve existence in the mind.

Another way of responding to the apparent support provided for phenomenalist interpretations by Kant’s assertion that objects are ‘in us’ is to say that the expression ‘in us’ is metaphorical. It has been argued that some early modern writers talk of objects being in the mind as a way of expressing the idea of their being understood, known, or apprehended.³⁶ This is an important point. In light of Kant’s disambiguation of the transcendental and empirical senses of ‘in us’, it is reasonable to think that the expression is not meant to refer to what is literally or merely in our minds. The point of the disambiguation, after all, is to say that objects which are *not* literally in our minds (since they are outside us in space) might still not exist distinct from us. However, the fact that ‘in us’ can be read metaphorically does not show that Kant’s position is not idealist. The expression is clearly meant to express some kind of relation to mind, and Kant says that this relation to mind is a condition of the existence of appearances: he says not just that empirical objects are in us, but that they are *merely* in us and that they *exist only in us*. In other words, even if ‘in us’ can mean apprehended by us or cognized by us, Kant is saying not just that objects *are* apprehended or cognized by us, but that their existence *depends* on the possibility of their being apprehended or cognized by us (A490–1/B518–19). This is an idealist claim. However, it need not be understood in a phenomenalist sense if we can give some other account of the way in which they are dependent on being cognizable by us.

The second and most prevalent feature of the passages that seem to support a phenomenalist interpretation is the fact that in them Kant calls spatio-temporal, empirically real objects, ‘representations’ (*Vorstellungen*) or ‘mere representations’ (*bloße Vorstellungen*). For example, he says that:

[W]hat we call outer objects are nothing other than *mere representations of our sensibility*. (B45, my italics)

³⁵ It is worth noting that despite the many features of the text which indicate the mind-dependence of appearances, Kant in fact never says that appearances are *constructions* out of mental states: phenomenalist interpretations explain Kantian appearances as constructions, but Kant himself never does.

³⁶ See Yolton (1984). Similarly, Aquila argues that for Brentano, “To say that actual objects of sense are “in” one’s sensory awareness is *just* to say that there is some awareness of them, not that those objects are, in any literal sense, in the mind at all” (Aquila 1974a).

[A]ppearances are not things in themselves, but rather the mere play of our representations, which in the end come down to determinations of the inner sense. (A101)

[A]ppearances themselves are nothing but *sensible representations*, which must not be regarded in themselves, in the same way, as objects (outside the power of representation). (A104, my italics)

[A]ll 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. This doctrine I call **transcendental idealism**. (A490–1/B518–19, my italics)

I understand by the **transcendental idealism** of all appearances the doctrine that they are all together to be regarded as mere representations and not as things in themselves, and accordingly that space and time are only sensible forms of our intuition, but not determinations given for themselves or conditions of objects as things in themselves. (A369, see also A370, quoted earlier)

[I]f I were to take away the thinking subject, the whole corporeal world would have to disappear, as this is nothing but the appearance in the sensibility of our subject and one mode of its representations. (A383)

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. (A492/B520, my italics.)³⁷

Kant's use of the term 'representations' is seen by many commentators as providing strong support for a phenomenalist interpretation.³⁸ It is repeated many times throughout the *Critique*, and not only does Kant call appearances representations, he says that they are *mere representations*, and he frequently links calling appearances 'representations' to asserting their mind-dependence. For example, at

³⁷ See also A98, A109, A113, B164, A190/B235, A197/B242, A369, A372, A385, A386, A493/B521, A494/B522, A499/B527, A507/B535, A563/B591, A793/B821, *Proleg.* 288, 289, 319, 341, and 342. It should be noted that some of the most strongly phenomenalist sounding passages are in the fourth Paralogism in the A edition, a notoriously controversial section, which Kant dropped from the second edition. Also, although Kant consistently upheld the distinction between appearances and things in themselves in the theoretical philosophy published after the *Critique*, he seldom again used the phenomenalist-sounding language that features there. Here are some representative descriptions of transcendental idealism from later works: 'the world as appearance is merely the object of possible experience' (*Progress*: 20: 290); 'nature is . . . the sum total of all things, insofar as they can be *objects of our senses*, and thus also of experience. Nature, in this meaning, is therefore understood as the whole of all appearances, that is, the sensible world, excluding all non-sensible objects' (MFNS 4: 467; also 4: 477); 'The teaching of the *Critique* therefore stands firm: that no category can contain or bring forth the least cognition, if it cannot be given a corresponding intuition, which for us human beings is always sensory, so that the use of it in regard to the theoretical cognition of things can never extend beyond the limits of all possible experience' (*Discovery*: 8: 198); 'the *Critique* . . . shows that in the corporeal world, as the totality of all objects of outer sense, there are, indeed, everywhere composite things, but that the simple is not to be found *in it* at all. At the same time, however, it demonstrates that if reason thinks a composite of substances as thing-in-itself (without relating it to the special character of our senses), it must absolutely conceive of it as composed of simple substances' (*Discovery*: 8: 209); and 'This ideality of space and time is nevertheless, at the same time, a doctrine of their perfect reality in regard to objects of the senses (outer and inner) qua *appearances*, i.e., as intuitions so far as their *form* depends on the subjective constitution of the senses' (*Progress* 20: 268).

³⁸ See, for example, Van Cleve (1999: 123).

A492/B520, he says that space, time, and appearances are nothing but representations and cannot exist outside our minds.

The term ‘representations’ has a strong association with representational theories of perception and is easily read as referring to something which exists only in the mind. However, like the term ‘appearance’, it could also be read in a more metaphysically neutral way. ‘Appearance’ can be taken to refer merely to what appears to us: what manifests itself to us. Relatedly, ‘representation’ can be used to refer to that which is represented or presented to the mind. As already mentioned, an alternative translation of *Vorstellungen* is *presentation*.³⁹ To say that the objects of our knowledge are *Vorstellungen* is to say that they are things that are presented to us; it need not follow that they are mental intermediaries. In fact, as I will argue in the next chapter, one of Kant’s aims in the *Critique* is to reject a view of perception on which we are directly or immediately in touch only with mental intermediaries. This provides further reason for thinking that the connotations of the term ‘representation’—the suggestion of representational theories of perception—are unfortunate and misleading in this context. Since the term ‘*Vorstellung*’, despite its associations, need not be read as indicating mental intermediaries, Kant’s saying that appearances are *Vorstellungen* does not provide conclusive support for a phenomenalist reading. However, it does support thinking that he is an idealist of some sort. This is because he does not say simply that empirically real, spatio-temporal objects manifest themselves to us or are presented to us. He says that they are *mere* presentations which do not exist independently of the possibility of their being presented to our minds. While this may not mandate a phenomenalist reading, it strongly supports seeing Kant as asserting some kind of mind-dependence.

The third feature of the text which seems to support a phenomenalist reading is the fact that Kant repeatedly says that outer objects exist or are real in perception only (*wirklich nur in der Wahrnehmung*), and that the actuality of a thing requires ‘*its connection with some actual perception* in accordance with the analogies of experience’ (A225/B272, my italics). Some of these passages are strongly reminiscent of Berkeley’s claim that the being (*esse*) of empirical objects is perception (*percipi*).⁴⁰ Kant says that

The real in outer appearance *is thus actual only in perception*, and cannot be actual in any other way. (A376, my italics)

[T]he objects of experience are **never given in themselves**, but only in experience, and they do not exist at all outside it. 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; for everything is actual that stands in one context with a perception in accordance with the laws of the empirical progression. Thus

³⁹ It is translated this way in the Pluhar (1996) translation. See McLear (2013) for a defence of this reading.

⁴⁰ Berkeley (1710: 78).

they 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. (A493/B521, my italics)

[A]ppearances, as mere representations, are real only in perception, which in fact is nothing but the reality of an empirical representation, i.e. appearance. To call an appearance a real thing prior to perception means either that in the continuation of experience we must encounter such a perception, or it has no meaning at all. For that it should exist in itself without relation to our senses and possible experience, could of course be said if we were talking about a thing in itself. But what we are talking about is merely an appearance in space and time, neither of which is a determination of things in themselves, but only of our sensibility; hence what is in them (appearances) are not something in itself, but mere representations, which if they are not given in us (in perception) are encountered nowhere at all. (A493–4/B521–2)

Some merely empirical realist interpreters see Kant's claim about the link between the existence of appearances and our possible perception of them as simply expressing the thought that our cognition is limited to objects of which we can have sense experience. For example, Bird says that

Transcendental Idealism holds, then, that all our knowledge is based upon experiences, and that we have no knowledge of anything that cannot be experienced. . . . the force of Transcendental Idealism is only to suppose that we have experiences, and that these play an essential part in our knowledge. (Bird 1962: 148. See also Dryer 1966: 84–5, 500, 506)⁴¹

These views are acceptable to a certain sort of realist: to say that there are conditions under which objects can become objects of knowledge is not to make the objects of knowledge mind-dependent, and many straightforward empirical realists would agree that we can have knowledge only of objects which affect our senses. Restricting our cognition to spatio-temporal things which causally interact with our senses is clearly a crucial part of Kant's position and while this may not seem controversial from the point of view of contemporary empiricism and naturalism,⁴² in the context of the Leibnizian rationalism he is responding to, it is an important point. So these readings are right as far as they go: Kant does restrict our cognition to things which affect our senses. But he also argues that what is given to us in intuition, what appears to us, are only representations, which cannot exist 'outside us', and whose existence is dependent on a connection with actual perceptions. The way Kant often puts this is in terms of the idea of possible experience: he says that everything that is empirically real is part of the extent of possible experience. Kant says not just that empirically real objects are known only in experience (or that we can cognize only objects of which we can have sense experience), but that they *exist* only in the extent of possible

⁴¹ Similarly, Prauss says that to consider things as appearances is to consider them as objects of the intuition of our sensibility (Prauss 1974: 37).

⁴² Although, see Hanna (2006), who argues that much contemporary scientific realism is committed to noumenal realism, because it is committed to unobservable objects.

experience or in our representations. This claim goes beyond the limitation of our knowledge to objects which can be presented to our senses. In saying that appearances exist merely ‘in us’ and that they are merely representations, Kant expresses some kind of mind-dependence; he then explains this idealism through the claim that the existence of appearances requires a connection to actual perception (*wirkliche Wahrnehmung*). In order to establish a non-phenomenalist interpretation of transcendental idealism, we need an account of existence being linked to actual perception which does not involve existence in the mind. I present such an account in Chapters 6 and 9.

The fact that Kant says that empirically real objects are mere representations, which exist in us and which require a connection to possible perception, provides, as we have seen, strong reason for seeing him as an idealist in some sense. Much of the appeal of phenomenalist interpretations, despite what is, as we will see, a substantial list of serious objections to them, is due to the fact that many of the available alternatives do not give a satisfactory account of the mind-dependence of Kantian appearances.⁴³

III Things in Themselves

So far my concern has been with the textual evidence for transcendental idealism’s being a genuine form of *idealism*. In the remainder of this chapter I document textual evidence for the claim that Kant is genuinely committed to thinking that there is an aspect of reality that we cannot cognize: the way things are in themselves. I present three groups of texts, which exhibit three striking features of the way in which Kant talks about things as they are in themselves. First, Kant repeatedly speaks of things as they appear to us and *these same things* as they are in themselves. Second, he frequently and clearly talks as if he thinks that there actually is a way things are in themselves—that there exists an aspect of reality that is independent of us. Third, he frequently makes such claims as that things in themselves are the *ground* of appearances, and he also speaks of things in themselves as the *cause* of appearances and of their *affecting* us.

The most straightforward way of doing justice to all these texts is to see Kant as committed to thinking that the empirically real things that we experience are

⁴³ Many commentators argue for phenomenalist interpretations simply by arguing that Kant is an idealist, and without considering other possible accounts of the mind dependence in question. For example, Van Cleve argues that only phenomenism is compatible with the mind-dependence of appearances, because the only way it is possible for objects to owe any of their traits to our manner of cognizing them is if ‘the objects in question owe their very *existence* to being cognized by us’ (Van Cleve 1999: 5). He says that only a view which has it that the *esse* of appearances is *percipi* can make sense of their mind-dependence. Van Cleve’s argument is not compelling, because the claim that the only explanation of objects conforming to our cognition of them is phenomenism is disputable: positions such as the anti-realism of Dummett and Wright hold that objects must conform to our knowledge of them, without thereby thinking that they exist in the mind. See Wright (1992; 1996) and Dummett (1993).

grounded in, or are an aspect of (or something given under an aspect of⁴⁴), something that exists independent of us, which we cannot cognize, and which is ontologically fundamental in the sense that it is somehow responsible for what we experience.⁴⁵ However, each part of this claim has been denied by some Kant scholars. Some interpreters have denied that Kant's position is consistent with thinking that we can even think coherently about things in themselves.⁴⁶ Many interpreters deny that Kant is committed to a metaphysical position according to which there actually exists an aspect of reality that we cannot know.⁴⁷ This may be part of a generally deflationary approach, but it is also advanced by some who see transcendental idealism as an ontological position committed to empirically real things only.⁴⁸ Some argue that the notion of things in themselves is merely a limiting concept—a coherent concept which we cannot help using but which is such that we cannot have knowledge that there is actually something to which it applies. Both the notion of an actually existing aspect of reality which we cannot know and the idea of things in themselves as the ground or cause of things as they appear to us are claimed by some to be inconsistent with Kant's own account of the conditions of knowledge and the legitimate use of the categories.⁴⁹ At the other extreme (and against the first set of texts), some see Kant as committed to the existence of non-sensible, non-spatio-temporal things which are distinct from the things of which we have experience.⁵⁰ I argue in detail against each of these interpretations in Chapters 3 and 4; for the moment, my aim is simply to record a number of texts that challenge them.

In the first group of texts, we see that Kant frequently presents his distinction as being between things as they are in themselves, and *those same things* as they appear. He says:

[T]he unconditioned must not be present in things *insofar as we are acquainted with them* (insofar as they are given to us), but rather in things *insofar as we are not acquainted with them*, as things in themselves. (Bxx, my italics)

⁴⁴ Talk of Kant as distinguishing between two 'aspects' of things has been strongly associated with Allison-style deflationary interpretations. However, there is nothing intrinsically deflationary about such talk, and it is possible to have metaphysical two-aspect views. See Westphal (2001), Allais (2004; 2006; 2007; 2010), and Rosefeldt (2007).

⁴⁵ See Willaschek (2001) for helpful discussion of this point.

⁴⁶ An example is Melnick's (1973) interpretation, according to which the notion of a thing in itself is the notion of an object quite literally incomprehensible to us and is a purely limiting concept (Melnick 1973: 152). Another example of this kind of position is Matthews's suggestion that 'we might contrast the world as we thus describe it, using our conceptual framework, with the world that we thus describe, the world to which our concepts are applied. The latter world would be *ex hypothesi* indescribable and, in a sense, unthinkable. Nothing could be said in detail about it' (Matthews 1982: 137). However, it is clear that Kant thinks that we can have coherent thoughts about things as they are in themselves. Keller argues that this is also a problem for Allison's view (Keller 1998: 226–8).

⁴⁷ For example, Bird (1962; 2006), Grier (2001), Allais (2004), Senderowicz (2005), and Hanna (2006).

⁴⁸ For example, Hanna (2006).

⁴⁹ See for example, Prauss (1974) and Senderowicz (2005).

⁵⁰ See P. F. Strawson (1966: 236), Jauernig (forthcoming), and Stang (forthcoming).

Now if we were to assume that the distinction between things as objects of experience and *the very same things as things in themselves*, [*eben denselben, als Dingen an sich selbst*] which our critique has made necessary, were not made at all, then the principle of causality and hence the mechanism of nature in determining causality, would be valid of all things in general as efficient causes. I would not be able to say of *one and the same thing*, e.g., the human soul, that its will is free and yet that it is simultaneously subject to natural necessity, i.e., that it is not free, without falling into contradiction; because in both propositions I would have taken the soul **in just the same meaning**, namely as a thing in general (as a thing in itself), and without prior critique I could not have taken it otherwise. But if the critique has not erred in teaching that the object should be taken in a twofold meaning, namely as appearance or as thing in itself; if its deduction of the pure concepts of the understanding is correct, and hence the principle of causality applies only to things taken in the first sense, namely insofar as they are object of experience, while things in the second meaning are not subject to it; then *just the same will* is thought of in the appearance (in visible actions) as necessarily subject to the laws of nature and to this extent **not free**, while yet on the other hand it is thought of as belonging to a thing in itself as not subject to that law, and hence **free**, without any contradiction hereby occurring. (Bxxvii–xxviii, my italics)⁵¹

[T]he same objects can be considered from two different sides, **on the one side** as objects of the senses and the understanding for experience, and **on the other side** as objects that are merely thought at most for isolated reason striving beyond the bounds of experience. If we now find that there is agreement with the principle of pure reason when things are considered from this twofold standpoint, but that an unavoidable conflict of reason with itself arises with a single standpoint, then the experiment decides for the correctness of that distinction. (Bxvii–xix, my italics)

[A]pppearance . . . always has two sides, one where the object is considered in itself (without regard to the way in which it is to be intuited, the constitution of which however must for that very reason always remain problematic), the other where the form of the intuition of this object is considered. (A38/B55)

[T]hese *a priori* sources of cognition determine their own boundaries by that very fact (that they are merely conditions of sensibility), namely that they apply to objects only *so far as they are considered* as appearances, but do not present things in themselves. (A39/B56, my italics) We have . . . wanted to say that all our intuition is nothing but the representation of appearance; that *the things* that we intuit are not in themselves what we intuit them to be, nor are their relations so constituted in themselves as they appear to us. (A42/B59, my italics)

[I]n the appearance the objects, indeed even the properties that we attribute to them, are always regarded as something really given, only insofar as this property depends only on the kind of intuition of the subject in the relation of the given object to it then this object as **appearance** (*dieser Gegenstand als Erscheinung*) is to be distinguished from itself (*von ihm selber*) as object **in itself**. (B69)

⁵¹ A possible view, suggested by Adams (1997), is that while Kant need not be seen as committed to thinking that empirical objects have a way they are in themselves, he does think that subjects have a way they are in themselves as well as a way they appear to us. See also Ameriks (1982a: 6). See Marshall (2013a) for a detailed argument that Kant's commitment to noumenal and phenomenal subjects being one thing provides a general reason for thinking that appearances and things in themselves are not distinct things (though this allows that there could also be distinct noumena which do not have a phenomenal nature).

[W]e call certain objects, as appearances, beings of sense (*phaenomena*), because we distinguish the way in which we intuit *them* from *their* constitution in itself. (B306, my italics)

[W]e do not understand through pure reason what *the things that appear to us might be in themselves*. (A277/B333, my italics)

[T]he human being . . . obviously is in one part phenomenon, but in another part, namely in regard to certain faculties, he is a merely intelligible object. (A546/B574)

What matter is, as a thing in itself (transcendental object) is of course, entirely unknown to us. (A366)

[T]he doctrine of sensibility is at the same time the doctrine of the noumenon in the negative sense, i.e., of things that the understanding must think without this relation to our kind of intuition, thus not merely as appearances but as things in themselves. (B307)

As deflationary interpreters have argued, these texts show that Kant's distinction is between two ways of considering the same objects, or two aspects of objects, rather than between supersensible noumena and ontologically distinct mental items. A phenomenistic idealism can regard appearances that exist only in our minds as representations of things which have a way they are in themselves, but it is hard to see how such phenomenistic appearances could be aspects of the very same things which have a way they are in themselves, so these passages strongly count against phenomenist readings of Kant's idealism. However, as will be discussed in more detail in subsequent chapters, the idea that Kant distinguishes between two aspects of things does not commit us to seeing his distinction as merely epistemological or methodological: there are metaphysical two-aspect readings. Further, as we will see, deflationary interpretations are threatened by the next two groups of texts.

Simply distinguishing between considering things as they appear to us and as they are in themselves might leave it open as to whether there actually is anything more to things than what we can know of them. One could draw this distinction and then argue that experience presents us with things as they are in themselves, or that the notion of things in themselves is coherent but there does not turn out to be in reality anything that falls under it. But in the second group of texts, Kant clearly indicates that he thinks that there actually is an aspect of reality which we cannot cognize.⁵² He says that

[O]ur . . . cognition reaches appearances only, leaving the thing in itself as something actual for itself, but uncognized by us. (Bxx)

Space represents no property at all of any things in themselves nor any relation of them to each other, i.e., no determinations of them that attaches to objects themselves and that would remain even if one were to abstract from all subjective conditions of intuition. (A26/B42)

⁵² Erich Adickes documents this point in detail. He says: '*Was Kant an zahlreichen Stellen als notwendig fordert und als selbstverständlich annimmt, ist nicht der Begriff des Dinges an sich, sondern die extramentale Existenz einer Vielheit uns affizierende Dinge an sich*' (What Kant assumes as self-evident and puts forward as necessary in many places, is not the concept of things in themselves, but the existence outside our minds of a multiplicity of things in themselves that affect us. Adickes 1924: 3, my translation). See also Willaschek (2001: 225).

[S]pace is not a form that is proper to anything in itself, but rather . . . objects in themselves are not known to us at all, and . . . what we call outer objects are nothing other than mere representations of our sensibility, whose form is space, but whose true correlate, i.e., the thing in itself, is not and cannot be cognized through them, but is also never asked after in experience. (A30/B45)

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. (A42/B59, my italics)

Even if we could bring this intuition of ours to the highest degree of distinctness we would not thereby come any closer to the constitution of objects in themselves; . . . what *objects may be in themselves* would still never be known through the most enlightened cognition of *their appearances*, which is alone given to us. (A43/B60, my italics)

[E]verything in our cognition that belongs to intuition . . . contains nothing but mere relations . . . But *what is present* in the place, or what *it* produces in the things themselves besides the alteration of place, is not given through these relations . . . outer sense can also contain in its representation only the relation of an object to the subject, and not *that which is internal to the object in itself*. (B66–7, my italics)

[the mind] intuitively itself . . . as it appears to itself, not as it is. (B68–9)

[A]pppearances are only representations of *things that exist* without cognition of what *they* might be in themselves. (B164, my italics)

[W]e have to do only with our representations; how things in themselves may be (without regard to representations through which they affect us) is entirely beyond our cognitive sphere. (A190/ B235)

[An appearance is] a representation, the transcendental object of which is unknown. (A191/B236)

What matter is, as a thing in itself (transcendental object) is of course, entirely unknown to us. (A366)

I grant by all means that there are bodies without us, that is, *things which, though quite unknown as to what they are in themselves*, we yet know through the representations which their influence on our sensibility procures us, and which we call bodies. (*Proleg.* 5: 289)

In fact, if we view the objects of the senses as mere appearances, as is fitting, then we thereby admit at the very same time that *a thing in itself underlies them*, although we are not acquainted with *this thing as it is in itself*, but only with *its appearance*, i.e., with the way in which our senses are affected by *this unknown something*. Therefore the understanding, just by the fact that it accepts appearances, also admits to the existence of things in themselves, and to that extent we can say that the representation of such beings as underlie the appearances, hence also of mere intelligible beings, is not merely permitted but also inevitable. (*Proleg.* 5: 314–15)⁵³

⁵³ See also *Discovery*, where Kant says ‘no recourse remains but to admit that bodies are not things-in-themselves at all, and that their sensory representation, which we denominate corporeal things, is nothing but the appearance of something, which as thing-in-itself can alone contain the simple, but which for us remains entirely unknowable’ (*Discovery* 8: 209). See also *Groundwork* 4: 451.

Opponents of the idea that Kant thinks there is some existing reality of which we cannot have knowledge say that his view is merely that we cannot do without the *concept* of a thing as it is in itself: the concept of things in themselves is an unavoidable posit of reason, but not a commitment to something actually existing. As the above quotations show, these commentators will have to discount some of Kant's texts, to explain them away, or to regard Kant as inconsistent.

There is *one* passage in which Kant might be thought to assert that we do not know whether there are things in themselves. Towards the end of the 'Amphiboly' section, he says that 'The understanding . . . thinks of an object in itself, but only as a transcendental object, which is the cause of appearance' and that it 'remains completely unknown whether such an object is to be encountered within or without us' (A288/B344). This passage occurs in the middle of a discussion in which Kant is arguing against supersensible objects. In contrast, as we have seen, there are very many passages in which Kant says that things in themselves ground appearances, and that we cannot know things as they are in themselves.

In the third group of texts, Kant indicates that the aspect of reality which we cannot know is in some sense metaphysically ultimate or more fundamental than the appearances we know, since it *grounds* the appearances we know, *causes* appearances, and, notoriously, 'affects' us. Kant says:

The representation of a **body** in intuition . . . contains nothing at all that could pertain to an *object in itself*, but merely the appearance of something and the way in which we are *affected by it*. (A44/B61, my italics)

[W]e have to do only with our representations; how things in themselves may be (without regard to representations through which *they affect us*) is entirely beyond our cognitive sphere. (A190/B235, my italics)

[I]t . . . follows naturally from the concept of an appearance in general that something must correspond to it which is not in itself appearance, for appearance can be nothing for itself and outside of our kind of representation; thus, if there is not to be a constant circle, the word "appearance" must already indicate a relation to something the immediate representation of which is, to be sure, sensible, but which in itself, without this constitution of our sensibility (on which the form of our intuition is grounded), must be something, i.e., an object independent of sensibility. (A251–2)

[T]he understanding . . . thinks of an object in itself, but only as a transcendental object, which is the *cause* of appearance (thus not itself appearance). (A288/B344, my italics)

[T]he **transcendental object** that *grounds* both outer appearances and inner intuitions is neither matter nor a thinking being in itself, but rather an *unknown ground* of those appearances that supply us with our empirical concepts of the former as well as the latter. (A379–80, my italics)

How is outer intuition . . . possible at all in a thinking subject? . . . it is not possible for any human being to find an answer to this question, and no one will ever fill this gap in our knowledge, but rather only indicate it, by ascribing outer appearances to a transcendental object that is the *cause* of this species of representations, with which cause, however, we have no acquaintance at all, nor will we ever get a concept of it. (A393, my italics)

The sensible faculty of intuition is really only a receptivity for being affected in a certain way with representations . . . which, insofar as they are connected and determinable in these

relations (in space and time) according to laws of the unity of experience, are called **objects**. The *non-sensible cause* of these representations is entirely unknown to us. (A494/B522)

The cause of the empirical conditions of this progress, the cause, therefore, of which members of it I might encounter, and also the extent to which I may encounter them in the regress, is transcendental, and hence necessarily unknown to me. (A496/B524)⁵⁴

As we will see, some commentators argue that Kant's talking as if there is a way things are in themselves and his talking of things in themselves as grounding or causing appearances are inconsistent with his own restrictions on what we can know, in particular, his restriction of the use of the categories, including that of causation, to empirical knowledge, or to appearances. I respond to this worry in Chapters 3 and 10. For now, we can simply note that Kant does in fact, frequently, say that things in themselves ground appearances. An interpretation which makes the texts maximally consistent will make sense of Kant's saying that the things that we cognize have a way that they are in themselves which grounds the way we appear to us, and which we cannot cognize.

In closing this chapter, I note a few points about Kant's claim that we cannot cognize things as they are in themselves. Kant seems to assert that there is a way things are in themselves and to deny that we can cognize things as they in themselves. This may be thought problematic. There is concern that asserting both these claims is inconsistent, or that the former is unmotivated if the latter is true: if we cannot know things in themselves, why think that any such things exist? In my experience, this worry quickly occurs even to undergraduate students when you introduce them to transcendental idealism.

In response to this worry, first, it is important to see that Kant does not both claim that there is a way things are in themselves and that we cannot know *that there* is a way things are in themselves. As I read him, he starts with the claim that there is a way things are in themselves: things have properties or natures which are independent of their relations to us and other things. He then argues that we are not able to have any specific cognition of what the intrinsic natures of things are like. This involves no contradiction.

Second, we should not exaggerate Kant's account of the lack of our knowledge. Kant does not deny that we can make any justified claims at all about things in themselves; he denies that we can cognize things as they are in themselves. He frequently asserts general or formal claims about things in themselves, such as the claim that they ground appearances, and his view allows analytic propositions to be

⁵⁴ In the *Metaphysics Mrongovius* Kant says 'When we look upon the appearances, they all fit together according to the laws of nature. But still all appearances also have a transcendental cause which we do not know', and that 'There must... be a transcendental cause that contains the ground from which this appearance arises. This cause is unknown to us; but because it... does not belong to the sensible world, it also cannot be determined by other causes in it, consequently it does not stand under the laws of nature or of the sensible world' (LM 29: 861).

true of things as they are in themselves.⁵⁵ Rather than insisting on attributing to him the view that we cannot make any knowledge claims at all with respect to things in themselves, in the face of the fact that he does make some general claims, we should take what Kant says about things in themselves to guide the way we understand his claim that we cannot cognize them. Cognition, for Kant, has specific conditions, including acquaintance, and cognition gives us a certain kind of specific, determinate representation of things. He thinks that we have no acquaintance with things as they are in themselves and no way of representing their specific natures. We do know some general claims about things as they are in themselves, but we cannot cognize the specific natures things have, as they are in themselves. As Ameriks explains, Kant means to exclude ‘only positive *determinate* theoretical knowledge of things in themselves’ (2003: 17 n25).

Third, Kant’s claim that there is a way things are in themselves appears unmotivated only if read a certain way: if we start with the empirically real objects of our knowledge and then postulate that there are, in addition to these, unknowable noumena. But this is not how Kant presents his position. A striking feature of the way in which Kant first starts discussing things in themselves is that he says virtually nothing to explain or introduce the notion or to indicate that it requires explanation, and he does not give any arguments for thinking that there are things in themselves. A simple explanation of this is that Kant does not take it to be a technical or unusual notion which requires introduction and definition: he simply starts with the idea that there are things and that things have a way that they are independent of their relations to other things, including us.⁵⁶ Similarly, Locke says of primary qualities ‘We have by these an idea of the thing as it is in itself’ (*Essay*, II, VIII, 23).⁵⁷ Locke opposes primary qualities to two kinds of relational qualities: qualities which are understood in relation to us and qualities of things which are understood as powers to affect other things. He assumes that things must have a way they are independent of their relations to us and their powers to affect other things and speaks of this as the way things are in themselves. It is possible to argue that at the most fundamental level reality contains nothing non-relational: contemporary ontological structural realists hold this. However, this is a position which requires argument, which some think to be incoherent, and which is not, in my view, an intuitive starting point. As I read them, both Kant and Locke do not take it to be an option—they simply assume that if a thing exists it has a non-relational nature, a way that it is independent of its

⁵⁵ There is reason to think that analytic propositions do not qualify as cognition, for Kant.

⁵⁶ Ameriks (2006: 74–5) and Adickes (1924: 9) argue that the most straightforward account of why Kant does not argue for things in themselves is precisely that he uses the notion in this way. As Ameriks says, Kant starts with, rather than argues towards, the reality of things in themselves, and that ‘the very lack of an argument by Kant shows his insight into the oddity of insisting that one must be had’ (2006: 74–5; cf. 127–8); Ameriks (2003: 23, 33). See also Willaschek (2001: 221).

⁵⁷ As we will see in Chs. 9 and 10, the matter is considerably more complicated for Kant, since his notion of things in themselves fills some of the traditional roles of primary qualities but not others.

relations to other things, including relations to perceiving subjects. They both use the expression ‘things as they are in themselves’ without introduction, to refer to this independent nature.⁵⁸ Kant does not give a complete account of empirical knowledge and then argue that, in addition, we need to posit non-spatio-temporal intelligibilia; rather, he starts with the thought that there are things and that these things have a way that they are, independently of their relations to other things, including their relations to us. To understand Kant in this way does not require us to take him as asserting that reality consists of unknowable, non-spatio-temporal noumena—a thesis which, as we will see, he maintains could not be known by us and which he explicitly says is not his view. At the same time, it does enable us to do justice to his claim that there is a way things are as they are in themselves and that this grounds the appearances of which we have knowledge.

Bird objects to the idea that a commitment to things in themselves could be a starting point, saying:

To deny knowledge of things in themselves is certainly compatible with a belief in their existence, but to deny such knowledge and assume that existence as a premise in a metaphysical system must be unsatisfactory. How can a system seriously both accept an essential premise and at the same time deny that we can have *any* knowledge of its truth? (Bird 2006: 553)

We can avoid the unsatisfactory position Bird describes if we see Kant’s starting point not as a commitment to things in themselves understood as mysterious supersensible entities but rather a commitment to things, understood neutrally,⁵⁹ as well as to the idea that things must have a nature that is independent of us. As I understand him, Kant’s central concern in the *Critique* is not to oppose the Cartesian sceptic;⁶⁰ he starts by assuming that there are things. He then argues that our cognition of these things is limited to mind-dependent appearances of them (to aspects of them which exist only in relation to us) and that we cannot know them as they are apart from their mind-dependent appearances—as they are in themselves. On this reading, what is radical in Kant’s position is not the claim that there is a way things are in themselves, but the claim that we cannot cognize this nature. Kant starts with the idea that there are things and that things have a nature, a way that they are independently of their relations to other things, including conscious subjects, and he never denies or questions this starting assumption. He goes on to argue that we cannot cognize their natures as they are independently of their appearing to us.

As we have seen, Kant repeatedly, throughout the *Critique*, presents his position in terms of a distinction between things as they are independently of us and these same

⁵⁸ This is compatible with there being relations between things as they are in themselves.

⁵⁹ I take it that Bird would not disagree with this; he simply disagrees that there is more to such things than what is presentable in experience. As I make clear in Chs. 2 and 3, I agree with his detailed rejection of interpretations which see Kant as a noumenalist and a phenomenalist as well as those which see Kant as centrally concerned with rejecting Cartesian scepticism.

⁶⁰ Bird (2006) gives detailed argument for this.

things as they appear to us. He says that the way things are in themselves grounds the way they appear and that we cannot cognize things as they are in themselves. We have also seen that Kant holds that what appear to us, spatio-temporal objects, are transcendently ideal, which means that although they are not literally in our minds (empirically in us), their existence is not distinct from the possibility of our cognizing them. My aim in the rest of this book is to present an interpretation which does justice to all these features of the text. We need an account of a form of mind-dependence which allows that the mind-dependent appearances given to us in intuition are things which also have a way they are in themselves which we cannot cognize. Before presenting my positive account of Kant's position, I first, in the next three chapters, discuss problems with the main competing interpretations.