

Chapter 2 Transcendental Realism and Transcendental Idealism

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

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

I. THE NATURE OF TRANSCENDENTAL REALISM

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

A. Some Varieties of Transcendental Realism

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

B. Transcendental Realism and the Theocentric Model of Knowledge

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

II. THE TRANSCENDENTAL NATURE OF KANT'S IDEALISM

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

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

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

A. Transcendental Idealism as Formal Idealism and the So-Called “Copernican Revolution”: Two Attempts at Clarification

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

B. Transcendental Idealism and Phenomenalism

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

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

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

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

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

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

Moreover, Kant continues,

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

III. A REPLY TO TWO OBJECTIONS

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

A. Van Cleve: One World or Two?

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

B. Ameriks: Epistemology or Metaphysics?

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

reality of things in themselves with substantive non-spatio-temporal characteristics.”⁵⁵

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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