

Things in Themselves and Appearances: Intentionality and Reality in Kant

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Kant seems to affirm incompatible views concerning “things in themselves” and “appearances”. Sometimes he suggests these are two sorts of particulars. One sort comprises what exists only insofar as it appears, or is capable of appearing, according to a perceiver’s modes of sensibility; the other comprises particulars which are not subject to these conditions:

[A]s sensible intuition does not extend to all things without distinction, a place remains open for other and different objects (*mehr und andere Gegenstände*); and consequently . . . these latter must not be absolutely denied . . . [Accordingly,] in the process of warning [sensibility] that it may not presume to claim applicability to things-in-themselves but only to appearances, [understanding] does indeed think for itself an object in itself, but only as transcendental object, which is the cause of appearance and therefore not itself appearance (A 288 / B 344).¹

Elsewhere Kant suggests that the distinction is only between two ways in which one sort of particular may be *regarded*:

In dealing with those *concepts* or *principles* which we adopt *a priori*, all that we can do is to contrive that they be used for viewing the same objects from two different points of view – on the one hand, in connection with experience, as objects of the senses and of the understanding, and on the other hand, for the isolated reason that strives to transcend all limits of experience, as objects which are thought merely. (B xviii, n.)²

¹ Kemp Smith translation. Cf. also A 30 / B 45, A 287–88 / B 344, A 566 / B 594, A 695–696 / B 723–724, A 697 / B 725; *Prolegomena*, p. 314 (Akademie edition, vol. 4); *Grundlegung*, p. 451 (Ak. ed., vol. 4); *Metaph. Anf. d. Naturw.*, p. 508 (Ak. ed., vol. 4); “Contra Eberhard,” p. 215 (Ak. ed., vol. 8); letter of August 16, 1783, to Moses Mendelssohn, tr. by Arnulf Zweig, *Kant: Philosophical Correspondence* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1967), p. 107. I ignore passages occurring in the first but eliminated from the second edition of the first *Critique*.

² Cf. Bxviii, n., Bxvii, A 38 / B 55, A 42 / 59, B 69, A 538 / B 566. There are also numerous passages in Kant’s ethical writings, which I consider in sec. IV. See also

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This might be called the “double-aspect” view. It admits two variations. The “noumenalistic” version maintains that while things in themselves and appearances are the same things spoken of from two points of view, one of these is ontologically privileged. The former are things as they *really* are; the latter simply involve the ways in which those things *appear*, or are capable of appearing (to a suitably ideal observer), in perception³. On a non-noumenalistic version, things are as really characterized by what they present in perception as by what they are “in themselves”⁴. The non-noumenalistic version also admits

letter to Garve of August 7, 1783 (Zweig, p. 103): “all objects that are given to us can be interpreted in two ways: on the one hand, as appearances; on the other hand, as things in themselves.” However, this passage is not as clear as Zweig (p. 16) assumes. It says only that “objects that are given to us” might be viewed in (either? both? of) two ways. But this is ambiguous in ways that Kant himself was unclear about. It might mean (a) entities playing a certain sort of *causal* role in perception; or (b) objects of *intentional references* constituted in *response* to (a). Things in themselves may satisfy (a) but not (b), while appearances satisfy both for Kant. These, I shall argue, may be viewed as two *distinct* entities, though both may be described as “given to us” in perception. The letter to Mendelssohn of the following week explicitly speaks of things in themselves as “other objects” (p. 107).

³ Erich Adickes, *Kant und das Ding an sich* (Berlin: Pan Verlag, 1924), pp. 20ff.; H. J. Paton, *Kant's Metaphysic of Experience* (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1936), vol. 1, pp. 61–62. Cf. also M. Westphal, “In Defense of the Thing in Itself,” *Kant-Studien*, 59 (1968), pp. 118–41.

On S. F. Barker's view, Kant himself vacillates between a noumenalistic double-aspect view and a two-object view: “Appearing and Appearances in Kant,” *The Monist*, vol. 51 (July, 1967), pp. 426–41.

⁴ D. P. Dryer, *Kant's Solution for Verification in Metaphysics* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1966), p. 514: “When we think of a thing in so far as it presents itself to the senses, we are thinking of a relation in which it may stand. When we then think of that thing in itself, we are thinking of it apart from that relation.” (There is, of course, no reason to deny that things are “really characterized” by their relations to other things.)

Sometimes it is difficult to be clear whether a noumenalistic or non-noumenalistic view is involved. Thus Henry Allison suggests the former when he says that “consideration of things in this transcendental manner is a consideration of things as they *really are*”: “The Non-Spatiality of Things in Themselves for Kant,” *Journal of the History of Philosophy*, XIV (July, 1976), p. 320. Yet by things “as they really are” he seems to mean things “considered apart from their relation to the human mind and its cognitive forms.”

Some commentators seem to offer a double-aspect view which grants ontological priority to one of the terms in question, but this time to the *phenomenal* term. Cf. Graham Bird, *Kant's Theory of Knowledge* (New York: Humanity Press, 1962), p. 29: “[the double-aspect view] may mislead by suggesting that appearances and noumena are simply two sides of the same coin, or equal partners in the same joint enterprise. The truth seems to be, however, that these are two ways of looking at the

of two varieties. The view states that (a) talk about “things in themselves” is not talk about any other *individual* than what is characterized by the terms applied to objects in perception; and (b) these terms are no less “really” applicable to the objects in question than any others. This is compatible with a *phenomenalistic* view according to which the objects in question are real only in the sense that they are *perceivable* (or would be perceived by an appropriately ideal observer), and also with a *denial* of that view.

After commenting on a recent defense of the double-aspect interpretation, I shall elaborate a defense of the two-object approach which brings out more clearly than other versions the role of *intentionality* in Kant’s theory of experience⁵.

I.

Gerold Prauss makes three claims in support of the “double-aspect” interpretation⁶. (1) The expression ‘*Ding an sich*’ is rare in Kant, in comparison with the more complete ‘*Ding an sich selbst*’. (2) The latter functions *adverbially*, modifying not the name or description of a sort of object, but a *verb* used (or implied) in connection therewith. Thus we do not think of a thing *an sich selbst* as a distinctive sort of *thing*, but of an *ordinary* thing capable of doing something, or having something done to it, in a distinctive way. (3) Though Kant often omits the relevant verb, “the passages in which he retains it are yet numerous enough to reveal the expression ‘*Ding an sich selbst betrachtet*’ [“thing considered in itself”] as the complete expression and its meaning as the originally and properly intended one”⁷.

same thing only because, on Kant’s view, there is only one thing at which to look, namely appearance.”

⁵ Some approaches are of course *neutral* with respect to the debate in question. Arthur Melnick says that “the concept of a thing in itself is the idea of a concept of a thing or an object that would not require for its sense any reference back to a subject; it would not require the notion of a subject to complete its content”: *Kant’s Analogies of Experience* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1973), p. 155. In some ways this comes close to the view I suggest in this paper, though it also differs in some crucial respects. (On my view, but not Melnick’s as I understand it, Kant is a *phenomenalist* with respect to the existence of appearances.) In any case, it leaves open the question whether, if there are objects characterizable by terms not containing “reference back to a subject,” they are the same as those otherwise characterizable. My own view is also similar to that of Wilfrid Sellars, *Science and Metaphysics: Variations on Kantian Themes* (New York: Humanities Press, 1968), Ch. Two.

⁶ Gerold Prauss, *Kant und das Problem der Dinge an sich* (Bonn: Bouvier, 1974), pp. 13–23.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 20.

Prauss confirms the first point by enumeration of passages in which the longer rather than the shorter form ('*Ding an sich selbst*') occurs. Unfortunately, the *third* claim does not receive equal support. In contrast with 104 passages in the second edition of the first *Critique* where the expression '*Ding [Gegenstand, Sache, Objekt] an sich [an sich selbst]*' occurs, Prauss cites only five in which '*Ding an sich selbst betrachtet*' occurs.

There are in fact more numerous passages in which '*an sich*' and '*an sich selbst*' modify some *other* expression. Thus Kant says that Antinomies arise because we attempt to see the world "*als an sich selbst bestimmt*" with respect to size – either as finite or as infinite – thereby illegitimately attaching one of these determinations to it "*als einem an sich selbst wirklichen Dinge*" (A 504 / B 532). Here the problematic expression modifies a form of the verb '*bestimmen*' and the adjective '*wirklich*'. We cannot avoid this supposition by introducing '*betrachtet*' into these contexts. We cannot say that the error consists in viewing the world, *regarded in itself*, as determined (*als an sich selbst betrachtet bestimmt*) with respect to 'infinite' or 'finite'. On Prauss's own assumption, Kant should grant that the world "*regarded in itself*" is either finite or infinite. For that would just be the sum total of all objects as *things in themselves*, or as *existing in themselves*, and it is a necessary truth that "If the world is a whole existing in itself, it is either finite or infinite" (A 506 / B 534). Of course Kant argues that the "world" (as "sum of all appearances") is *not* a whole existing in itself. Thus, Prauss might argue, Kant's point is that by 'world' I mean the sum total of things *considered as they appear*; hence it is impossible to attribute finitude or infinitude to the world *considered in itself*. This would involve considering the world, considered as it appears, *not* as it appears. If this were the point, however, then the claim that the world is not a whole existing in itself would be trivial, whereas Kant presents it as a significant consequence of the antithetic arguments (A 506 / B 534).

Thus it is not possible to follow Prauss in reading Kant's claim that we can't view the world "*als an sich selbst bestimmt*" with respect to size as the claim that we can't view is "*als an sich selbst betrachtet bestimmt*" with respect to size. Nothing in the Antinomies requires denying that the world, "*regarded in itself*" (as "*thing in itself*"), is either finite or infinite. Kant denies only that the sum total of *appearances* is *an sich selbst bestimmt* with respect to one of these predicates. Similarly, nothing in the Antinomies shows that it is illegitimate to regard the world (at least in bare thought) as a *real* thing considered in itself (*als einem an sich selbst betrachtet wirklichen Dinge*); we err not when we speak of the world *considered in itself* as *real*, but only when we speak of the world of *appearances as real in itself*. In these cases '*an sich selbst*' seems to modify a verb and an adjective (*bestimmen* and *wirklich*) unrelated to '*betrachten*' and its synonyms.

There are in fact as many cases in which these expressions are completed by terms related to *existence* as cases in which '*betrachten*' and its associates appear. Consider the claim that appearances "do not exist in themselves" (*nicht an sich existieren*), but only relatively to the subject of perceptions (B 164). Kant could not mean that appearances do not, *considered in themselves*, exist. The most natural reading is that appearances do not *exist "in themselves"*: they lack a certain sort of *existence*, though they also possess some other sort. Similarly for the claim that '*Erscheinung nichts an sich selbst Existierendes ist*' (A 505 / B 533) and that a series of appearances "can have no existence in

itself as a self-subsistent series of things” (‘*als für sich bestehende Reihe von Dingen, an sich selbst gar nicht existieren kann*’ (A 506 / B 534)⁸.

II.

To exist, qua appearance, on Kant’s view is to be “perceivable” – the object *would* be perceived under the appropriately described conditions:

For the appearances, as mere representations, are in themselves real only in perception . . . To call an appearance a real thing prior to our perceiving it, either means that in the advance of experience we must meet with such a perception, or it means nothing at all. For if we were speaking of a thing in itself, we could indeed say that it exists in itself apart from all relation to our senses and possible experiences (A 493 / B 521–22; cf. A 225 / B 272, A 601 / B 629).

If we suppose, therefore, that the distinction between things in themselves and appearances primarily contrasts two ways in which the same particulars are regarded, then to say that something exists “apart from all relation to our senses and possible experiences” – i.e., “in itself” – must just mean that, in addition to being considered as object of possible perceptions, an object might also be regarded (though possibly not by *us*) in *abstraction* from the conditions of perception. But the distinction between two kinds of *existence* requires a somewhat different approach. In that case, we would have to say, an object considered “qua appearance” is one which, if it actually exists (and is not, e.g., merely hallucinated), must exist in the (phenomenalistic) sense specified above; an object existing “in itself” must “exist” in a radically different sense of the word. It must exist in a sense which does not include any conception of a relation to possible experience. On the view, then, that it is the *same* entities which are considered both as appearances and things in themselves, the same entity must be capable of existing in both senses.

⁸ Cf. A 42 / B 59, A 289 / B 346, A 505–506 / B 533–534, as well as several others between A 491 / B 519 and A 494 / B 522. Cf. also A 740 / B 768: “appearances, in respect of their existence (as appearances), are *in themselves* nothing at all” (*nach ihrem Dasein (als Erscheinungen) an sich selbst gar nichts . . . sind*). Cf. also the use of *für sich* at B xx, A 35 / B 42, B 412, B 413, B 417, A 506 / B 534, A 797–B 825; *Prolegomena*, p. 354.

It is not in fact contradictory to suppose that the same entity might exist in both a phenomenalist and a non-phenomenalist sense, hence both as appearance and thing in itself. Existing as thing in itself would be existing in a sense which requires no appeal to the possibility of experience. This does not imply that the thing does not *also* exist in a sense which does require such appeal. However, the conjunction of the following two points shows that on Kant's view it would be disastrous to suppose that it is the same thing that exists in both senses. First, things considered as existing in themselves, contrasted with appearances, are things considered as they *really are* for Kant. Some passages make this clear simply by collapsing the notion of a thing considered *in itself* into that of a thing *simpliciter*. Things "in themselves" are just *things* while everything else is appearance:

Space does not represent any property of things in themselves . . . That is to say, space does not represent any determination that attaches to objects themselves [*die an Gegenständen selbst haftete*] . . . (A 26 / B 42; cf. B xxvii, A 27 / B 43, B 67, A 492 / B 520, A 793 / B 821).

The same point is also *explicitly* formulated in a number of places:

If the conditioned as well as its condition are things in themselves, then . . . [t]he synthesis of the conditioned with its condition is here a synthesis of the mere understanding, which represents things *as they are* [*wie sie sind*: Kant's emphasis], without considering whether and how we can obtain knowledge of them (A 498 / B 526–27; cf. A 30 / B 45, *Proleg.* 290).

Second, things in themselves are non-spatial (A 26 / B 42, A 28 / B 44, A 30 / B 45, *Proleg.*, 284–289). The conjunction of these points implies that things *as they really are* (at least in one important sense) are non-spatial. But from this it follows that, if appearances are the same *things* as those which we may also suppose to exist "in themselves," there is *no* object of experience of which we are entitled to predicate spatial characteristics. Though there is an object which we *appear* to be entitled to characterize spatially, this appearance is misleading. According to Kant, however, objects "presented" as in space *really are* spatial, though things in themselves are not (A 27–28 / B 43–44).

One might argue that conceding that objects "as they really are" are non-spatial does not require denying, even on the double-aspect view, that objects of experience are *also* "really" spatial. They would simply be spatial in a sense different from that in which they are *not*

spatial: objects of experience are spatial in the sense that they are *perceivable* as spatial. This, however, would commit Kant to the view that all propositions about what appearances “really are” (qua appearances) turn out, upon *analysis*, to make assertions about things in themselves and what *they* really are (qua things in themselves). To say that a perceived object is spatial would be to say that something existing “in itself” is *appearing* (or appearable) as spatial. But Kant could hardly grant that this results from the mere *analysis* of what it means for sensible objects to be characterizable⁹.

The conclusion that phenomenal propositions are really about the ways things in themselves are capable of appearing of course follows only from acceptance of a “noumenalistic” version of the double-aspect view. On that approach things in themselves and appearances are the same things regarded differently. But what these things really *are* are not appearances but things in themselves. On a “phenomenal” (though not necessarily phenomenalistc) version, objects of perception “really are” just the way they appear to be; considering them “as things in themselves” is simply regarding them as something *more*, not *other*, than what they appear to be. While on the noumenalistic double-aspect view, appearance-propositions are about the ways things in themselves are able to appear in perception, on the non-noumenalistic version they simply describe the *contents* of possible perception. Thus the double-aspect interpretation may seem to escape my objection simply by rejecting the noumenalistic *form* of that interpretation.

I have not simply *ignored* the possibility of a non-noumenalistic interpretation. Rather, a noumenalistic form is the *only* form of the double-aspect view compatible with the claim that the thing in itself/appearance distinction is a distinction between two kinds of *existential statements*. The notion of an “appearance” is of what exists in the sense of being perceptible; a “thing in itself” is whatever exists in a non-phenomenalistically reducible sense. Now on a phenomenalistc approach, there are only two possibilities concerning the analysis of

⁹ There are some passages in which Kant seems to say that it follows from the proposition *that there are appearances* that there are things in themselves (A 251–252, B 306). But (a) the context suggests Kant simply *means* that the *concept* of “appearance” is correlative with the *concept* of something which would not be mere appearance – if we possess the one we must in some way possess the other. (b) That an appearance is, analytically, an appearance *of* something is in any case compatible with the two-object view. A husband is, analytically, a husband *of* somebody, yet a husband and wife are distinct.

statements about “what is perceptible.” They might be regarded as statements about the *ways in which* things might appear in perception. These, then, could not themselves be regarded as “what is perceptible.” Hence on this approach propositions about the existence of phenomena would indeed be about the ways in which things in themselves are capable of appearing; hence we would be committed to an unKantian noumenalistic version of the double-aspect view. On the other hand, propositions about “what is perceptible” might not be reducible to propositions about the ways things might appear in perception; they may just be propositions about the *contents* of perception, propositions about perceptions *themselves*. In this case, however, there could be *no* (literal) sense in which “what is perceived” might be identical with something which exists in itself. The claim that what exists as perceptible is the “same thing” as what exists in itself could mean only that what exists in the latter sense is (at least an important) part of what *accounts* for the existence of what exists as perceptible, i.e., for its perceptibility.

We might call these the *metaphysical* and the *causal* approaches. Both say that appearances are merely the “ways in which things in themselves appear in perception.” But this might be taken in a stricter or a looser sense. The stricter metaphysical sense requires appearances to be “of” things in something more than the sense that the latter enter into an explanation of their *existence*. Rather all appearance-propositions must also be *propositions* about things in themselves. Much of what Kant says suggests at least a causal approach¹⁰, though some may also suggest the metaphysical approach. The double-aspect interpretation presumably requires something stronger than a merely causal approach. But if the thing in itself/appearance distinction is fundamentally between two kinds of existential statements, then *avoiding* a merely causal approach requires accepting a noumenalistic form of the double-aspect theory.

It should be noted that this argument does not depend on the view that things in themselves are non-spatial. It requires only the claims that knowledge about what appearances are is independent of knowledge about what things in themselves are and that the thing in itself/appearances distinction is fundamentally between two kinds of

¹⁰ At *Grundlegung*, p. 451, Kant argues from the *passivity* of perception to the need to assume “*hinter den Erscheinungen doch noch etwas anderes, was nicht Erscheinung ist, nämlich die Dinge an sich.*” It is, of course, important to be clear that this causal approach does not involve a properly causal relation between things in themselves and appearances, but rather between the former and the *existence* of the latter.

existential statements. That things in themselves are (if there *are* any) whatever could be referred to by means of phenomenalistcally irreducible statements is compatible with the proposition that things in themselves are spatial.

It has been argued that the characterization of things in themselves as standing in a relation of "affection" to perceptions of objects, together with the Kantian assumption that they are never objects of sensory awareness, implies that things in themselves could *not* be characterized by features involved in our "forms of intuition." If they were, then they *would* be "objects of perception"¹¹. This argument assumes that if perception of an object of some description is produced by *means* of an object of that description, then the latter must itself be an object of perception. But we need to distinguish two *senses* of "object of perception": (a) an entity which plays a certain causal role in perceptions of objects; (b) an object of *intentional reference* involved in the perceiver's *response* to the causality involved in (a). Not everything satisfying (a) need satisfy (b), even if the entities in question have properties in common. Now it is, I think, clear that the Kantian theory of "forms of intuition" was meant *not only* to account for our characterization of objects of perception in spatial (and temporal) terms. More generally, it concerns the very possibility of awareness of *any* intentional objects in the first place. This is a problem because we are initially "given" only "sensations," and these are *not* properly characterizable as "objects of perception." Hence awareness of objects requires a response by which the subject refers to or intends such objects *through* the sensation in question¹². This problem is independent of the description of whatever produces sensations in the first place. Even if they were spatio-temporal things in themselves, it does not follow that they would be "intended" in the perceiver's response to the sensations they produce.

The notion of "intentionality" can also explain a further point. This is that reduction of the thing in itself/appearance distinction to a dis-

¹¹ M. S. Gram, "How to Dispense with Things in Themselves (1)," *Ratio*, XVIII (June, 1976), pp. 2–4, 10–11. Allison argues, p. 319, that the non-spatiality of things in themselves follows from their status as things "considered apart from all relation to the conditions of human sensibility," (together with the proposition that space is a condition of human sensibility). But this might simply mean that things in themselves are considered as *existing* in a sense which makes no reference to sensibility.

¹² I discuss this aspect of the Transcendental Aesthetic in "The Relationship Between Pure and Empirical Intuition in Kant," *Kant-Studien*, 68 (1977), pp. 275–289, and "Two Lines of Argument in Kant's Transcendental Aesthetic," *International Studies in Philosophy*, 10 (1978), pp. 85–100.

tinction between two kinds of existential statements not only shows the untenability of a double-aspect interpretation, but also why Kant might have preferred formulations apparently *requiring* that interpretation. For “appearances,” though regarded as *distinct* from whatever things in themselves might be “presenting” them to us, are, in an important sense, *merely intentional objects*. They do not “really exist” (in the sense in question), but “exist” only as objects of actual or possible mental acts. Insofar as appearances – even “actually existing” ones – are regarded as merely *intentionally* existing, they are, of course, not regarded as anything *at all* existing over and above things in themselves. And insofar as apprehension of such merely intentional objects is thought to be *accounted* for by appeal to things which possess *more* than a merely intentional existence, there would even be a point in saying that what we apprehend as appearances are merely the various ways in which things in themselves appear to us, hence *are* those very things *as we apprehend them*. This may have a point even if, strictly speaking, the bodies we apprehend through sense are not the same particulars as those things of which they are the appearances. The appearance to the contrary may be motivated by desire to avoid suggesting that insofar as they are *not* identical with those particulars, then they must be identical with some *other* sort of transcendentally real particular (for example, with sensations or “ideas in the mind”). Kant avoids this supposition by suggesting that they are, in an important sense, not existing objects of *any* sort. They are merely *intentional objects*. A “thing in itself,” on the other hand, is simply what would possess something *more* than a merely intentional existence¹³.

III.

One may argue that this is incompatible with Kantian principles, which deny that we can speak intelligibly of anything other than phenomenal objects as “really existing

¹³ The following seems to indicate that Kant regarded double-aspect terminology as compatible with a two-object view.

[I]f we entitle certain objects, as appearances, sensible entities (phenomena), then since we thus distinguish the mode in which we intuit them from the nature that belongs to them in themselves (*von ihrer Beschaffenheit an sich selbst*), it is implied in this distinction that we place the latter, considered in their own nature, although we do not so intuit them, *or that we place other possible things (oder auch andere mögliche Dinge)*, which are not objects of our senses but are thought as objects merely through the understanding, in opposition to the former (B 306; emphasis added).

particulars." To do more would demand use of unschematized categories. Yet Kant himself maintains that, apart from schematization, we remain only with "pure forms of the understanding's employment through which alone no object can be thought" (*ohne doch durch sie allein irgendein Objekt denken . . . zu können*: A 248 / B 305).

But while Kant does in fact insist that unschematized categories are in *some* sense "meaningless," he often grants that they possess a meaning sufficient for the formation of thoughts, if not for the pursuit of *knowledge*. Having originally written that "The pure concepts can find no object, and can acquire no meaning which might yield a concept of some object," (A 147 / B 186), Kant later *altered* this claim to assert merely that pure (unschematized) concepts "can acquire no meaning which might yield a *knowledge* [my emphasis] of some object." And on the same page which contains the assertion that "the merely transcendental employment of the categories is, therefore, really no employment at all, and has no determinate object, not even one that is determinable in its mere form" (A 247 / B 304), Kant also maintains that a "pure category in which abstraction is made of every condition of sensible intuition . . . then expresses only the thought of an object in general, according to different modes." In addition, Kant later *altered* the first of these passages so as to say merely that a purely "transcendental employment" of categories is no employment "for the *knowing* [my emphasis] of anything": *kein Gebrauch, um etwas zu erkennen*¹⁴.

Apart from the distinction between *knowledge* and thought, the claim that pure concepts do not suffice for judgments "about objects" is also ambiguous. It might simply mean that apart from a conception of conditions determining reference to objects of experience, there is no object of any sort such that we would be able to form thought about *that object* (or about any particular members of the class of objects of that sort). But this does not imply that pure concepts yield no thoughts about objects *simpliciter*. In a "*de dicto*" sense, one might be able to "think about" things in themselves; it is only that there would be no such things that one would be able to think about *in particular*.

Nor, I think, does Kant's position *require* (regardless of his own claims) denial of the possibility of judgments about things in themselves. The belief that it does stems from failure to see that the thing in itself/appearance distinction is fundamentally between two kinds of *existence* claims. The employment of concepts in judgments "about" things in themselves would simply be the employment of concepts in judgments asserting something "about" things thought either actually or at least possibly to exist in a non-phenomenalistically reducible sense. The fact that "*determinate* reference" to and knowledge of such objects is impossible does not imply that such judgments are unintelligible. The supposition that they are may be due to Kant's insistence that such judgments would have to be about entities of a non-spatial and non-temporal sort. But it is not part of the *concept* of a thing in itself that it lack spatiality and temporality.

This interpretation may also seem incompatible with Kant's view that modal concepts are not concepts of any sort of object *at all*: "Even when the concept of a thing is quite complete, I can still enquire whether this object is merely possible or is also actual . . . No additional determinations are thereby thought in the object itself; the question is

¹⁴ Cf. Kemp Smith's note to the passage; also Raymund Schmidt's edition in the "Philosophische Bibliothek" (Hamburg: Felix Meiner, 1930).

only how the object, together with all its determinations, is related to understanding and its empirical employment [in the case of schematized categories] . . ." (A 219 / B 266). If modal concepts merely express *relations* of objects to the faculty of knowledge, it might seem that on my own view, the concept of a "thing in itself" should precisely *not* be the concept of any distinct sort of particular. However, my interpretation is not incompatible with Kant's claims. For the assertion that some sort of object is merely an "appearance" does *not*, in the relevant sense, "enlarge the concept" of that object. It merely asserts that *perceptions* of that sort of object are obtainable, hence what it asserts is something about the *concept* of the object in question (that the concept is capable of "subsuming" possible "intuitions" under it). The view is thus compatible with the claim that the concept of existence is a "second order" concept.

Kant himself tries to explain the idea of non-phenomenal existence in terms derived from descriptions of the logical forms of *judgment*:

'Being' [*Sein*] is obviously not a real predicate . . . It is merely the positing of a thing, or of certain determinations, as existing in themselves [*die Position eines Dinges, oder gewisser Bestimmungen an sich selbst*]. Logically, it is merely the copula of a judgment . . . [W]e attach no new predicate to the concept of God, but only posit the subject in itself with all its predicates [*setze ich kein neues Prädikat zum Begriffe von Gott, sondern nur das Subjekt an sich selbst mit allen seinen Prädikaten*], and indeed posit it as being an *object* that stands in relation to my *concept* (A 598–9 / B 626–627).

Yet it is not possible to say just *what* it is to "posit" a thing as instantiating a concept:

Were we dealing with an object of the senses, we could not confound the existence of the thing with the mere concept of it. For through the concept the object is thought only as conforming to the *universal condition* of possible empirical knowledge in general, whereas through its existence it is thought as belonging to the context of experience as a whole . . . It is not, therefore, surprising that, if we attempt to think existence through the pure category alone, we cannot specify a single mark distinguishing it from mere possibility (A 601 / B 629).

We can *say* what is involved in phenomenal existence (perceivability in accordance with the demands of categorically structured experience); we cannot say what would be involved in existence "in itself." But we have some comprehension of it, insomuch as we are able to perform the requisite ("logical") acts of "positing." Hence Kant by no means concludes that there is no distinction between two sorts of existence claims. He merely observes that we lack criteria for determining the *truth* of one of these sorts of claims:

Whatever, therefore, and however much, our concept of an object may contain, we must go outside it, if we are to ascribe existence to the object. In the case of objects of the senses, this takes place through their connection with some one of our perceptions, in accordance with empirical laws. But in dealing with objects of pure thought, we have no means whatsoever of knowing their existence, since it would have to be known in a completely *a priori* manner . . . Any existence outside this field, while not indeed such as we can declare to be absolutely impossible, is of the nature of an assumption which we can never be in a position to justify (A 601 / B 629).

A thorough-going phenomenalist, of course, would maintain that the only intelligible notion of existential “positing” involves purely phenomenal existence. But Kant was a phenomenalist only with respect to the existence of objects of which *knowledge* is possible. He fails, admittedly, to define any *other* notion of existence; but so has anyone who is not a phenomenalist¹⁵.

IV.

I earlier postponed some difficulties presented by Kant’s views concerning the phenomena of moral agency. A number of passages concerning these phenomena do seem to require the conception of a *single entity* which may be regarded both phenomenally and as thing in itself¹⁶. Furthermore, it might be argued, if such were *not* in fact Kant’s view, then Kant’s attempt to employ the phenomenal/noumenal distinction in order to account for certain facts of moral experience would fail. Kant employs that distinction to explain how a person could be subject to determination by sensuous inclination and yet regard itself as constrained by purely rational (“intelligible”) principles¹⁷. In addition Kant employs the distinction to explain how a person could be sensuously determined in its actions and yet *free* in them¹⁸. If phenomena and things in themselves are not the same entities, then we must apparently deny that the same person could satisfy both kinds of descriptions.

Unfortunately space permits only an indication of the way out of this difficulty. The objection, I would suggest, rests on the erroneous

¹⁵ It might be argued that while the thing in itself/appearance distinction is a distinction between two sorts of existence claims, *neither* is conceptually independent of the notion of mental activity. Thus Westphal maintains (p. 124) that passages as A 249, B 310 and B 312 show the definitional equivalence of “thing in itself” and “noumenon,” where the latter is defined in terms of a hypothetical faculty of “intellectual intuition.” But (a) even if it *is* an analytic truth that things in themselves are possible objects of an “intellectual intuition,” this may simply be due to the definition of the *faculty* in question, not to that of a “thing in itself.” (b) If the existence of things in themselves is “reducible” to facts concerning actual or possible intuitions, then Kant could not regard things in themselves as more “real” than phenomena, as he often does. (c) In any case, the view that “existence in itself” is just as much a “merely intentional” existence as that of phenomena is of no help to the double-aspect interpretation. For on that view there simply *is* no single object which, regarded by us, is a phenomenal reality and, regarded by intellectual intuition, would be a noumenal reality.

¹⁶ Cf. *Grundlegung*, p. 451, *Kritik der praktischen Vernunft*, p. 97 (Ak. ed., vol. 5)

¹⁷ *Grundlegung*, p. 454.

¹⁸ *Kritik d. prak. Vernunft*, p. 95.

supposition that a phenomenal being, *qua* phenomenal, can be regarded as a *person*. If the “phenomenal self,” *qua* phenomenal, were a personal agent, then we are indeed dealing, on a two-object interpretation, with *two* personal agents. But it is compatible with the two-object interpretation to maintain that a “phenomenal *person*” is to be identified *not* with a particular phenomenal object, but rather with a *noumenal* entity regarded as “ground” of at least some of the behavior exhibited by some phenomenal object. This may seem a covert acceptance of the double-aspect view. For it seems to grant the *identity* of the phenomenal with the noumenal subject. But the suggestion is rather that a phenomenal person is a certain sort of *composite*: a composite of a noumenal subject and a phenomenal object¹⁹. The latter is not, *qua* phenomenon, a person. The former is a person, but not a phenomenal one.

It may seem a category mistake to speak of the “composite” of an object which is merely “intentional” from one point of view and an object which is *real* from that same point of view. Further, my proposal may seem to imply, contrary to Kant’s intent, that a phenomenal person does not really engage in phenomenal activities at all. For what that person *really* is, it seems, is just the noumenal subject in question, and what it really does is just what the latter does. But these objections may be met, I think, simply by interpreting the claim in question as the claim that all propositions about phenomenal persons (*qua* persons) are *analyzable* into propositions about both a noumenal subject and a phenomenal object. Thus to say that a phenomenal person has performed a certain action would just be to say that a decision made by some noumenal subject was manifested (in an appropriate manner) through certain phenomenal behavior²⁰.

A related objection concerns the claim that the noumenal subject is capable of acting only in a purely *rational* manner. This would seem to imply that a *phenomenal person* is capable of acting only in a purely

¹⁹ Kant emphasizes the two-fold use of ‘I’. It expresses an awareness not merely of one’s identity as “empirically determinate” self, but also of a spontaneously active power which *becomes* “determined” as object of that awareness (cf. B 157–59). In this sense the same person might be viewed both “as appearance” and as “thing in itself.” But this allows the two “aspects” to be no more *ontologically* united than, e.g. an object and its reflection in a mirror or its shadow on some wall. It would simply be that self-awareness always involves *awareness* of both “aspects.”

²⁰ This of course is compatible with granting the existence of properly *noumenal* behavior which stands in relation to phenomenal behavior as *any* thing in itself (as opposed to a “*decision* in itself”) stands to certain phenomenal objects.

rational manner. There is, however, an ambiguity here. A purely rational decision might be one which is motivated by a “categorical imperative”; or it might be one which is motivated either by a categorical or a *hypothetical* imperative. Kant’s position is, I believe, that in order to regard the behavior of some phenomenal object as *willed*, and hence as something for which a phenomenal person is responsible, we must at least be able to regard that behavior in one or the other of these ways. And a condition for *either* is that we regard it as determined not *merely* by natural necessity, but also by a decision of a noumenal subject. Thus a condition for regarding behavior as *action*, and hence the object *exhibiting* it as the body of a *person*, we must indeed regard that behavior as determined by a purely “rational” decision. This seems to contradict Kant’s claims only because of the ambiguity in the notion of a “purely rational” being²¹.

V.

I have tried to show in this paper that the notion of a “thing in itself” is not the philosophical nightmare that many commentators on Kant have taken it to be. It is a notion which all who are not phenomenologists regard as perfectly intelligible. But the more fundamental significance of my argument concerns the notion of an *appearance*. If I have been correct, appearances (in the “transcendental” sense) are *intentional objects of perception*. The point of making this clear, I think, is precisely that it calls attention to Kant’s insights concerning the intentionality of sensory awareness. The intentionality of awareness concerns the ability of consciousness to apprehend objects which do not really exist (except precisely as objects of the apprehension in question). The history of philosophy has witnessed varied attempts to deny the intentionality of sensory awareness by maintaining that putative awareness of objects which do not exist in any more than a merely intentional sense is *really* awareness of certain sorts of entities that *do* really exist in the sense in question. This would be

²¹ This leads to a further problem. The interpretation requires that a noumenal self have both purely rational and also sensuous desires. Lacking the latter, it could never decide to satisfy one of its sensuous desires; hence there would be no case in which a phenomenal self so decided. But Kant seems to deny that noumenal selves have sensuous desires, *Grundlegung*, p. 451. However, this provides no more difficulty for the two-object view than it does for the double-aspect approach.

undertaken by any view according to which, for example, the proper objects of sensory awareness are really just certain of one's own *sensations*, or certain "ideas" in one's mind.

The double-aspect view of appearances is, I think, bound to miss the force of Kant's claims concerning the intentionality of sensory awareness. On any non-phenomenalistic version of that view, appearances (in the transcendental sense) are, of course, real in the only legitimate sense of that term. (What, on such a view, one then maintains concerning "appearances" in the *empirical* sense — namely in the sense in which not "real" tables and chairs, but various empirical illusions or hallucinations, may be described as "appearances" — is a further question). On the other hand, on a version of the double-aspect view which is phenomenalistic with respect to the existence of appearances, the awareness of "appearances" in sense perception is merely the awareness of possible ways in which things in themselves are capable of *appearing* in perception. This would seem to imply that the awareness of appearances in perception is merely either (a) the awareness of certain *sensations* which things in themselves are capable of producing in a perceiver, or (b) the formation (or an awareness of the *tendency* to form) certain *judgments* concerning those things which are affecting a perceiver in sensation. In either case we appear to have substituted for an awareness of certain merely intentionally existing *objects* in space and time the awareness of some other sort of entity altogether. Though either of these approaches might, I think, apply to Kant's conception of "appearance" in the *empirical* sense, they cannot fail to distort his conception of the transcendental notion in question. Thereby they cannot fail to distort the importance that Kant attributed to the creative function of human "sensibility" — a capacity for apprehending objects through the senses which are neither "given" by mere *sensation* nor merely *conceived* by means of the faculty of judgment²².

²² Not all versions of the two-object view succeed any better than the double-aspect view in this respect. On some versions phenomenal objects are bundles of sensations, transformed by "forms of intuition" into spatially extended object: Hans Vaihinger, *Commentar zu Kants Kritik der reinen Vernunft* (Stuttgart: Union Deutsche Verlagsgesellschaft, 1892), vol. II, p. 165. This distorts the conception of forms of intuition, which are not means for the transformation of sensations *into* objects, but rather for their transformation into awareness *of* objects (or at least of *potential* objects, i.e., possible regions of space).