

skeptic *malgré lui*. Some version of this line of objection is advanced by virtually every proponent of the standard picture, including Strawson.¹⁰ Once again, however, the sharpest formulation is provided by Prichard, whose account can be taken as paradigmatic for the standard picture.¹¹ Prichard construes Kant's distinction between appearances and things in themselves in terms of the classic example of perceptual illusion: the straight stick that appears bent to an observer when it is immersed in water. Given this analogy, he has little difficulty in reducing to absurdity Kant's doctrine that we know only appearances. His analysis proceeds through various stages, but the main point is simply that this claim is taken to mean that we can know things only as they "are for us" or "seem to us" (in virtue of the distortion imposed by our perceptual forms), not as they "really are." Since to know something, according to Prichard, just means to know it as it really is, it follows that for Kant we cannot really know anything at all. Clearly, such a conclusion amounts to a *reductio* of the Kantian theory.

It seems obvious that, if this is how Kant's transcendental idealism is really to be understood, the Strawsonian project of trying to locate in the *Critique* a philosophical core that can be neatly separated from the idealistic trappings is very attractive. Indeed, it presents itself as the only philosophically fruitful way of dealing with Kant's thought. Nevertheless, in spite of the fact that it does seem to have some textual support, one can raise serious doubts about the adequacy of this interpretation, which is so frequently accepted as a matter of course. The root of the problem is that it tends to neglect altogether, or at the very least to minimize, certain distinctions that are central to Kant's whole transcendental enterprise.

Specifically, it fails to distinguish sharply between the empirical and the transcendental versions of two generally acknowledged and closely related distinctions. These are the distinctions between ideality and reality and between appearances and things in themselves. The issues here are complex, and at this point I can only attempt to provide a rough sketch of what these distinctions involve. I believe, however, that even this rough sketch should suffice to demonstrate the inadequacies of the standard picture as an interpretation of Kant's actual teaching.¹²

'Ideality', in the most general sense in which Kant uses the term, signifies mind dependence or being in the mind (*in uns*); while 'reality' (*Realität*), in the sense in which it is opposed to 'ideality', signifies independence of mind or being external to the mind (*ausser uns*).¹³ In both the Transcendental Aesthetic and the Transcendental Dialectic, Kant distinguishes between an empirical and a transcendental sense of 'ideality', and, by implication at least, of 'reality'. Taken in its empirical sense, 'ideality' characterizes the private data of an individual mind. This includes ideas in the Cartesian-Lockean sense or, more generally, any mental content in the ordinary sense of 'mental'. 'Reality', construed in the

empirical sense, refers to the intersubjectively accessible, spatiotemporally ordered realm of objects of human experience. At the empirical level, then, the ideality-reality distinction is essentially between the subjective and the objective aspects of human experience. When Kant claims that he is an empirical realist and denies that he is an empirical idealist, he is really affirming that our experience is not limited to the private domain of our own representations, but includes an encounter with "empirically real" spatiotemporal objects.

The transcendental version of the distinction is quite another matter. At the transcendental level, which is the level of philosophical reflection upon experience (transcendental reflection), 'ideality' is used to characterize the universal, necessary, and, therefore, a priori conditions of human knowledge.¹⁴ In the Transcendental Aesthetic, Kant affirms the transcendental ideality of space and time on the grounds that they function as a priori conditions of human sensibility, that is, as subjective conditions in terms of which alone the human mind is capable of receiving the data for thought or experience.¹⁵ He terms these conditions "forms of sensibility." Things in space and time (empirical objects) are ideal in the same sense because they cannot be experienced or described independently of these sensible conditions. Correlatively, something is real in the transcendental sense if and only if it can be characterized and referred to independently of any appeal to these same sensible conditions. In the transcendental sense, then, mind independence or being external to the mind (*ausser uns*) means independence of sensibility and its conditions. A transcendently real object is thus, by definition, a nonsensible object or noumenon.¹⁶

The transcendental conception of ideality provides the basis for the transcendental conception of appearance and for the transcendental version of the contrast between appearances and things in themselves. Thus, to speak of appearances in the transcendental sense is simply to speak of spatiotemporal entities (phenomena), that is, of things insofar as they are viewed as subject to the conditions of human sensibility. Correlatively, to speak of things in themselves transcendently is to speak of things insofar as they are independent of these conditions. In several places Kant insists upon the importance of not confusing this distinction with its empirical counterpart. One of the clearest of these is in "On the Progress of Metaphysics," where, in a discussion of the transcendental ideality of space and time, Kant writes:

Furthermore, it is to be noted that appearance, taken in the transcendental sense, wherein it is said of things that they are appearances (phenomena), means something completely different than when I say, this thing appears to me in some manner or other, which should designate appearance in the physical sense, and which can be called semblance [*Apparenz*] and illusion [*Schein*]. For although these objects of the senses are mere appearances, since I can only compare them with other sensible objects . . . by the lan-

guage of experience they are nevertheless thought as things in themselves. Thus, if it is said of such a thing that it has the look [*Anschein*] of an arch, in this context the seeming refers to the subjective aspect of the representation of a thing, which can be a cause for it to be falsely taken in a judgment as objective. And, therefore, the proposition that all sensible representations only yield knowledge of appearances is not at all to be equated with the claim that they contain only the illusion [*Schein*] of objects, as the idealist will have it.¹⁷

The “language of experience,” of which Kant speaks here, includes both ordinary and scientific experience. Both involve a distinction between those properties that a given object actually possesses and those it merely seems to possess for a particular observer under certain empirically specifiable conditions. The object as it “really is” (with its actual properties) is the thing in itself in the physical or empirical sense, while the representation of the object possessed by a particular observer under given conditions is what is meant by the appearance or semblance of the object. The main point here is simply that at the empirical level, or in “the language of experience,” ‘appearances’ and ‘things in themselves’ designate two distinct classes of entity with two distinct modes of being. The members of the former class are “mental” in the ordinary (Cartesian) sense and the members of the latter are “nonmental” or “physical” in the same sense. At the transcendental level, however, things are quite different. There the distinction between appearances and things in themselves refers primarily to two distinct ways in which things (empirical objects) can be “considered”: either in relation to the subjective conditions of human sensibility (space and time), and thus as they “appear,” or independently of these conditions, and thus as they are “in themselves.” Indeed, as Gerold Prauss has pointed out, when Kant is concerned with articulating the transcendental sense of his distinction, he usually does not use such expressions as *Ding an sich*, *Ding an sich selbst*, or *Sache an sich*; rather, he uses locutions, such as *Ding* or *Sache an sich selbst betrachtet*.¹⁸

It is certainly possible to detect a dim grasp of the distinction between the transcendental and the empirical conceptions of appearance in Prichard’s contrast between things as appearing and appearances. Transcendental-level talk about appearances can be described as talk about things as appearing. Similarly, talk about appearances belongs naturally to the “language of experience.” The problem here lies in Prichard’s contention that Kant slides from one notion to the other. Given the preceding analysis, this is equivalent to the claim that Kant systematically confuses the transcendental and the empirical versions of his basic distinction. This is itself highly implausible, especially in light of Kant’s frequent efforts to distinguish between these two senses of ‘appearance’. Even apart from this, however, it can easily be shown that Prichard is guilty of the very

confusion of which he accuses Kant. We have seen that part of Prichard’s basic objection to what he views as Kant’s empirical realism is that it involves the absurd notion that appearances (mental contents) are spatial (extended). Kant is thus judged guilty of spatializing sensations, a charge that with much greater propriety can be directed against Hume. But obviously this “absurdity” arises only if Kant’s claim about the spatiality of appearances is taken in the empirical sense. If, as Kant clearly wishes us to do, we construe claims about the spatiality of appearances in the transcendental sense, the absurdity disappears; for then spatiality (together with temporality) can be seen as a defining characteristic of things considered as they appear, not as a property mysteriously attributed to sensations.

The objection to Kant’s alleged skepticism can be dealt with in a similar fashion.¹⁹ It is clear from his use of the bent stick analogy that Prichard construes the distinction between appearances and things in themselves in the empirical sense. This, in turn, enables him to take Kant to be claiming that we can know only how things seem (appear) to us, which entails the skeptical conclusion. It is by no means certain, however, that this follows if we construe Kant’s claim about the limitation of knowledge to appearances in the transcendental rather than in the empirical sense. Understood in this sense, which is the sense in which Kant intended it, it is an epistemological claim about the dependence of human knowledge on certain a priori conditions which reflect the structure of the human cognitive apparatus. These conditions do not determine how objects “seem” to us or “appear” in the empirical sense; rather, they express the universal and necessary conditions in terms of which alone the human mind is capable of recognizing something as an object at all. Thus the doctrine that we can know things only as they appear, not as they are in themselves, can be regarded as equivalent to the claim that human knowledge is governed by such conditions. If, in fact, there are such conditions, and if they function in the ways in which Kant contends, then it hardly makes sense to accuse him of being a skeptic because he denies the possibility of knowledge of things as they are independently of them, that is, of things as they are in themselves.

To say this is not, of course, to endorse Kant’s account. We will not be in a position to evaluate Kant’s claims regarding the a priori conditions of human knowledge until we have examined the arguments of the Transcendental Aesthetic and Transcendental Analytic. Nevertheless, it is not necessary to do so in order to realize the inappropriateness of the skepticism objection as formulated by Prichard and other proponents of the standard picture. The problem with this objection is that it fails completely to come to grips with Kant’s intent, and thus to see what his transcendental claims actually involve. Instead, these claims are routinely interpreted as empirical or quasi-empirical. Similarly, Kant’s talk about