

KANT ON THE NUMBER OF WORLDS

[ABSTRACT: It has long been disputed whether Kant's transcendental idealism requires two worlds – one of appearances and one of things in themselves – or only one. The one-world view must be wrong if it claims that individual spatio-temporal things can be identified with particular things in themselves, and if it fails to take seriously the doctrine of double affection. The two-world view must be wrong if it denies Kant's empirical realism, or offers a phenomenalist interpretation of it. On moral grounds Kant "identifies" each human person with a particular thing in itself, but the relationship here cannot be strict identity; instead its closeness may warrant regarding the two distinct entities as part of a composite whole. Perhaps up to the first edition of the Critique Kant thought that empirical knowledge required a particular kind of close correspondence between appearances and things in themselves, one that would make it appropriate to speak of composite wholes here also. By the time of the second edition he saw there could be no good grounds for thinking that. In this respect something a bit like the one-world theory might make more sense for the first edition than for the second. But in both cases there is room to speak of two worlds as well. Talk of the number of worlds is metaphorical, and both metaphors have their dangers.]

There has long been much interest in what Kant's transcendental idealism amounts to, partly because the pressures that led Kant to it have remained strong. Trying to understand it properly, with its weaknesses as well as its strengths, can help us in thinking about some fundamental philosophical problems. I want to look at a question that is often taken to be central to understanding Kant. Does transcendental idealism require two worlds, a world of appearances and a world of things in themselves, or just a single world that can be considered under two different aspects? He often talks of two worlds, but he also talks of the same thing appearing to us as phenomenon and existing in its own right as thing in itself, or as noumenon. So texts support both views, and for centuries his interpreters have divided over which to adopt. At present the one-world interpretation seems to be in the ascendant. To a large extent this is due to the work of Henry Allison.¹

The one-world view tends to represent transcendental idealism as harmless and acceptable; the two-worlds view makes it a radical and perhaps incoherent precursor of 19th-century idealism. Both can be, and often are, expressed in extreme versions that would if taken seriously deprive them of any philosophical interest, and if ascribed to Kant would render baffling his continuing philosophical influence. The one-world view is

¹ Allison (1983, 1996, 2004, 2006). A similar position was however put forward earlier by Bird (1962) and by Prauss (1971, 1974). Recent supporters of the one-world view include Allais (2004), Savile (2005) and Rosenberg (2005).

References to Kant's work in the text and footnotes are in the standard A/B form for the first/second editions of the *Critique of Pure Reason*; all other references are to the Akademie edition of Kant's work, abbreviated Ak. Titles of other works are abbreviated as follows: Prol, *Prolegomena*; Gr, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*; MAdN, *Metaphysical Foundations of Natural Science*; KdpV, *Critique of Practical Reason*; Discovery, *On a Discovery*; Progress, *What real progress has metaphysics made?* All translations are taken from the Cambridge Edition of Kant's Works, which carries the A/B and Ak. pagination in its margins.

sometimes expressed as the thesis that things can appear to us only in the ways that they can appear to us; the two-worlds view, as the thesis that there is one world created by our minds, together with a separate Ultimate Reality which cannot be for us anything at all. Fortunately there are more sensible versions of both views. What is not so clear is how far they differ once the elements that are not sensible have been got rid of.

One suggestion might be that there are really no differences, and that the dispute is only verbal. A mirror might seem to provide a natural parallel. A distorting mirror reflects reality in a distorted way, but it does not much matter whether we identify things in the real world with their distorted reflections, or draw a distinction between the mirror world and the world it reflects. But this cannot be quite right either; the analogy oversimplifies things. I think the suggestion comes closer to the truth than either of the extreme formulations just given, but none of them really comes very close. Seeing why raises a number of important issues.

I

In his own lifetime and since, many have been puzzled by Kant's commitment to things in themselves. Committed he certainly was.² The one-world interpretation does not deny this, but it seeks to remove the seeming extravagance of a separate realm of entities, by arguing that for Kant things in themselves are nothing distinct from the ordinary things that we know through our own observations or through science. We can know about these things only in ways that are mediated by the conditions – sensible conditions and intellectual conditions – which Kant shows to be required for human cognition. Thus, in his terminology, we can know them only as appearances, phenomena. What these same things are like in themselves, independently of these conditions, we can never know.

Those who hold the one-world view see themselves as defending Kant's empirical realism about these "phenomena". They object vigorously to any reading that would assimilate transcendental idealism to empirical idealism, and they point out that Kant's account of the knowable world of things in space and time is emphatically realistic. Although words like "appearances" and "representations" could suggest otherwise, the familiar objective/subjective contrast lies within the empirical realm. That realm thus includes vast numbers of objects that we do not observe and scientific truths that we do not know about.

It is true that some who prefer the two-worlds interpretation do so because they underestimate the strength of Kant's commitment to empirical realism. But the real difference between the two views cannot lie here, for one can talk of two worlds while taking empirical realism entirely seriously - recognizing that much of the first *Critique* is concerned to show how knowledge of a genuinely objective empirical reality, spatio-temporally ordered and systematically governed by causal laws, is both possible and

² Kant to J.S. Beck, 20 Jan. 1792, Ak. XI:315; to J.H. Tieftrunk, 11 Dec. 1797, Ak. XII:224; cf. *Discovery*, Ak. VIII: 209, 219f.; *Progress*, Ak. XX:267, 308. These all date from the period in which Kant was aware that his commitment to things in themselves was under attack. Cf. also the battery of references in Adickes (1924).

necessary for human experience. One can recognize that, while still holding that there is a sense in which empirical reality, though satisfying all ordinary criteria for objectivity, is ontologically secondary to the reality of things in themselves.

One-world theorists object to this. For them there can be no question of ontological primacy, because everyday spatio-temporal objects just *are* things in themselves. On their view, these same things can be considered in two different ways. To call them spatio-temporal is to describe them under the aspect in which they are knowable by us. To call them things in themselves is to refer to them as they are independently of those cognitive conditions. The one-world view can therefore affirm without any qualification the reality of these objects. The things we perceive are perfectly real, it is just that what we know about them is conditioned by our cognitive capacities.

The real difficulty for the one-world interpretation is over identity. There are no identity criteria that would allow us to match ordinary things with things in themselves. Nor could there be. Kant has a clear view about the identity of things in the world of appearances: their spatial and temporal positions are key determinants of their identity and individuation. He is equally clear that things in themselves are not spatial and not temporal.³ So their identity conditions must be different from those of ordinary things.

Supporters of the one-world view attempt to put this objection aside by stating their position in a way they find more congenial. Allais puts it by saying that “the notion of things in themselves is not the notion of a separate kind of thing of which we do not have knowledge, but simply the idea that the things of which we have knowledge have a nature in themselves, that is entirely mind-independent” – an intrinsic nature that we cannot know.⁴ Similarly Allison says that familiar things like trees and rocks can be considered also as things in themselves; to consider them in that way is to consider them as they are independently of the conditions of human cognition.

This may sound harmless enough. But the conditions of human cognition include space and time, in terms of which the identities of particular trees and rocks are determined. So what is it to consider “them” independently of those conditions? Necessarily, it is to consider them without the conditions under which alone they are those particular things.

³ Bird (2006b) regards Kant as unwilling to commit himself on the non-spatio-temporal character of things in themselves, but as holding that on balance, so far as we can tell, they are not spatio-temporal (pp. 491, 496). Kant does however go much further than this; thus A 26/B 42, A 32/B 49, A 492/B 520, and Progress, Ak. XX:268. See also Guyer (1987) pp. 333-44. If things in themselves can be equated with noumena as objects of a potential non-discursive intuition it is clearly impossible for them to be spatio-temporal, spatio-temporal intuition being discursive. But in any case, the very possibility that things in themselves are not spatio-temporal makes it untenable simply to *identify* them with spatio-temporal things.

In the Amphiboly of Concepts of Reflection Kant says that Leibniz, who “*intellectualised* appearances” (A 271/B 327) and regarded them as “intelligibilia, i.e. objects of pure understanding” (A 264/B 320) was thereby committed to relying on the Leibnizian principle of the identity of indiscernibles, i.e. identifying them in terms of their “inner determinations” alone and not by spatio-temporal location. There cannot be much doubt that Kant thought this held for noumena. He tends to use the terms “noumenon” and “thing in itself” interchangeably in most contexts, but I shall return to the relation between them below.

⁴ Allais (2004), p.677; Prauss (1974) pp. 224f.

Nor is there anything to be gained by saying, as Allison often does, that the distinction between appearances and things in themselves is epistemic and not ontological. Of course it is epistemic. But it is an epistemic distinction that makes it impossible to talk of an *identity* between the spatio-temporal appearances and the non-spatial, non-temporal things in themselves.

Van Cleve argues that the one-world theory requires the same object both to be spatial and not to be spatial, and to have and not to have a great variety of sensible properties (since things in themselves do not have sensible properties). Allison's reply is that to consider something under the conditions of human cognition is to consider it as spatio-temporal, and that sensible properties, as well as the property of being spatial or temporal, should thus be understood as implicitly relative: "square-when-considered-under-the-conditions-of-human-cognition". To consider something as a thing in itself is to consider it in abstraction from the conditions of human cognition, in the way it could be known by an intellectual intuition such as God's, and there is no contradiction in saying that a thing is spatial relative to human cognition, non-spatial relative to God's.⁵ But the problem of identity blocks this move. The identity conditions of a physical object have essentially to do with space and time: its spatio-temporal path is an indispensable element in making a physical object the object that it is. Spatial location individuates two otherwise identical drops of water.⁶ For a thing in itself the identity conditions have to be different. So there is no *one* thing that can be considered from these two perspectives. They fall under conflicting sortal concepts; there is no common sortal under which they both can lie.⁷

It is different for Leibniz. For Leibniz the only genuine identity of things is determined by the internal, i.e. non-relational, properties of monads. The two drops of water at different places will indeed be distinct,⁸ but only because their different locations reflect inner differences in the underlying monads. For space and time themselves are well-founded phenomena, orders of appearances that are themselves grounded in the internal properties of monads. We see things spatio-temporally because our intellects are limited. A sufficiently powerful intelligence could see that these spatio-temporal differences are only our confused way of registering the real differences between the underlying monads. This is not how Kant regards the matter. For him sensibility and understanding are

⁵ Van Cleve (1999), pp. 146-50; Allison (2004), pp. 16, 42-5.

⁶ Thus A 263f/B 369f, A 272/B 328; Progress, Ak. XX:280, 282.

⁷ This point is consonant with the sortal essentialism defended by David Wiggins (1980), but it does not depend on it. For Kant it is a necessary truth that spatio-temporal properties have a key role in identifying spatio-temporal things, and it is equally necessary (analytic) that they cannot have such a role where things in themselves are concerned. Cf. A 281f/B 337f. The conclusion cannot be avoided by suggesting that the identity is similar to that of water and H₂O. The identity of water and H₂O is not a priori, but if it is an identity at all water and H₂O must share all their properties, and *a fortiori* the conditions for identifying something as water and for identifying something as H₂O must be exactly the same. Water is a natural kind, instantiated in space and time, and so (inevitably) is H₂O. The suggestion that a physical thing might be identical with a thing in itself is more like the suggestion that the number 17 is identical with a bottle of whisky.

⁸ Leibniz does not believe that we shall ever find "two drops of water perfectly alike", but that is not because there *could* not be such a similarity at the phenomenal level but because it is contrary to the divine wisdom that there should be. See his fifth paper to Clarke, para. 25.

radically distinct, and sensation is therefore not “confused thought”, as Leibniz held it to be.⁹ Our spatio-temporal intuition has an entirely different source: space and time are our forms of intuition. They are not the confused representations of anything.

Thus my coffee-cup *cannot* be identical with a thing in itself. It would not do to reply that the only identity-conditions we need are the familiar spatio-temporal ones, and that things in themselves can be identified indirectly through them – “whatever constitutes the intrinsic nature of this cup”. Things in themselves cannot exist without some sort of identity, which we know cannot be spatio-temporal; if we think of them as simply being things, characterized not by the properties we know of but by their intrinsic properties, their intrinsic properties must still somehow be such as to make them things. (And that there cannot be things without properties, or properties existing on their own without things, are certainly in Kant’s view logical truths.) No doubt, if things in themselves underlie all spatio-temporal things, something underlies the cup and my present observation of it. But whatever underlies the cup at one moment may very well not the next. And we can have no reason to think that the same thing in itself may not underlie physical objects that are radically different, like the cup and the moon.

That being so, any talk of identity between particular appearances and particular things in themselves is quite unjustified, and the advantage that the one-world interpretation may seem to gain by trading on such talk is an illusion. The analogy of the distorting mirror may be helpful here. It is only if it does not distort *too* badly that there is a temptation to identify the items in the mirror with the items in the world it reflects. But it might distort radically. One physical object might be causally responsible for hundreds of separate items in the reflection; or hundreds of physical objects, in very different places, might be causally responsible for one undifferentiated blob in the reflection. Then there would no longer be anything to be said for identifying particular items in the reflection with things in the world.

Although proponents of the one-world interpretation typically do claim that particular things in the phenomenal world can be identified with individual things in themselves, they might concede that this was only a loose way of talking. Allison himself seems to say this at times.¹⁰ The aims of defending empirical realism and avoiding ontological extravagance could be met by saying just that there is only one *world*, without claiming to identify particular appearances with particular things in themselves. In the mirror example, however great the distortion one can say there is still just one *world*, since every element in the reflection still relates back to its causal source in the reality reflected.

But then the same state of affairs can equally be described in terms of two worlds. “One world” and “two worlds” are metaphors here. There are no well-defined criteria for counting worlds. One could describe the mirror example in either way; the point of saying “there is just one world” is to emphasise that there is a close, though complex, relationship between the reflection and the things it reflects. The former is causally dependent on the latter. But without denying that, one could equally choose to talk of two

⁹ A 43f/B 60ff; A 270/B 326; Progress, Ak. XX:282.

¹⁰ Thus Allison (1996), p. 15, though Allison (2004), ch. 2, e.g. p. 43, would seem inconsistent with that.

worlds, because of the lack of a closer correspondence between them. Each metaphor may have its uses in different contexts. In the case of transcendental idealism, if the one-world view claims only that reality in itself is what is presented to human cognition as the spatio-temporal realm of objects, we can grant that the one-world metaphor may be appropriate to capture the systematic though perhaps very complex (and unknowable) relationship between the two. The two-worlds metaphor has its place as well, for by distinguishing “worlds” it recognizes the different identity-conditions governing appearances and things in themselves. The set of appearances cannot be the same *set* as the set of things in themselves. The most one can say is that appearances are grounded in things in themselves, but there is no way for us to know what is grounded in what, or how any particular appearance can be based in some underlying configuration of the in-itself reality.

II

Those who prefer the one-world interpretation may not like this talk of “grounding”, though certainly Kant does write of things in themselves as grounding or underlying appearances. But once it is agreed that there is no identity between particular things in themselves and particular appearances, it is difficult to avoid it. One strategy, certainly, would be to deny that things in themselves have anything to do with the objective world as we can know it, and to reserve for them a place only within the realm of practical reason.¹¹ But since holders of the one-world view do talk of things in themselves as being in some sense identical with spatio-temporal things, they cannot deny that things in themselves, whether individually or collectively, must somehow provide the input that is the basis of our knowledge of the empirical world.

There are really two questions here. One is about how this input can be provided. The other is about the nature of the in-itself reality. Since both questions are, of course, clearly said to be unanswerable by us, it would perhaps be unwise to attempt to provide answers. But we need at least to be clear that there is logical space for answers to be given.

Taking the second question first, does Kant equate things in themselves with noumena? If so how is that to be reconciled with his caution to us against jumping to the conclusion that there are any such things as noumena, at least when the term is taken in “its positive sense” (B307)? In the relevant passage Kant says that “the doctrine of sensibility is at the same time the doctrine of the noumenon in the negative sense, i.e. of things which the understanding must think without reference to our kind of intuition [i.e. sensibility], thus not merely as appearances but as things in themselves” (*ibid.*). So we are committed to using the concept in that negative way, and the noumenon so understood just is the thing in itself. What then is the positive sense? To conceive of a noumenon positively is to conceive of it as the object of a non-sensible intuition, and we are not entitled to do that unless and until we are entitled to assume (*annehmen*) that there really is a being with

¹¹ This is the position taken by Paul Abela (2002), essentially on the grounds that there is no coherent place for a purely given element in sensation.

non-sensible intuition (A 252).¹² Some of Kant's lack of clarity in this section must be due to the fact that he does think we are entitled to assume that there is such a being, God, but only on moral grounds, which are not under consideration here. No such assumption is needed to admit that there are things in themselves, so there is no need to read Kant as equivocating on that matter.¹³

In the same passage Kant says that in relation to things in themselves the understanding cannot make "any use of its categories, since they have significance (*Bedeutung*) only in relation to the unity of intuitions in space and time" (B 308). This might reinforce concern over the nature of the "grounding" relation. Is it not an application of the category of cause? And since causality must be a temporal relationship, how could things in themselves cause appearances, since things in themselves are not in time? However, when Kant describes the categories as having "significance" what he means is that they can yield knowledge about the way things are, and it is only the schematised categories, the categories applied in the ways that are required within spatio-temporal intuition, that can yield such knowledge. The *pure* categories are available for thought even though they give rise to no such knowledge. The pure concept of cause is the concept of the "purely logical" relationship of if-then dependence. In applying it to relationships within experience we have to schematize it, "restricting" the concept to the spatio-temporal conditions that govern the nature of any experience that is possible for us (A 148f/B 186).

Adickes must therefore be right to ascribe to Kant a "doctrine of double affection".¹⁴ On one level, empirical realism requires the recognition that I am causally affected by the tree that I see outside my window; or to put more scientifically, I am causally affected by those sub-atomic particles (Kant would say, complexes of forces) that scientifically constitute that structure I call a tree. This is a causal relation within the field of appearances, whether one takes the everyday description or the scientific one. On another level, the level of things in themselves, the raw manifold that I order and synthesise into the perception of a tree is the result of my being causally affected (in the non-empirical sense of "cause") by the way things are in themselves, though I can never know how that affection takes place or what disposition of things in themselves is responsible for it. So I cannot be consciously aware of it.

Recent defenders of the one-world view have generally repudiated the doctrine of double affection,¹⁵ saying that we are empirically affected by familiar things, and construing

¹² One can agree with Allais' comment that Kant holds that there *may* be noumena in the positive sense, and that there *must* be noumena in the negative sense, these just being things in themselves (Allais (2004) p.659). She is not entitled to infer that noumena in the positive sense "are a special kind of object" (ibid.) – it is just that we cannot affirm their existence in the positive sense unless (until) we can affirm the existence of God. It would be strange indeed to envisage two different kinds of object both called "noumena."

¹³ KdpV, Ak. V:142ff. His ambivalence with the word "noumenon" is perhaps understandable; since "noumenon", or more properly "nooumenon", means "object of intellection", it is natural to think that in one sense there can be a noumenon only if there is a suitable intellect to cognize it, and that in another there can be noumena if there are the things (in themselves) that such an intellect could cognize.

¹⁴ Adickes (1929). For useful history of the problem of affection, see Herring (1953). Herring defends the one-world interpretation and the double affection thesis.

¹⁵ Though Adickes held the one-world view himself: Adickes (1924), ch. 2.

Kant's frequent statements about the role of the in-itself as reflecting an aspect of this causal relationship that is fundamental in rendering human knowledge possible. However it is hard to see how Adickes' position can be avoided, and Allison comes very close to it, if not in so many words.¹⁶ If the tree and the percipient can both be "considered independently of the conditions of human sensibility", there must be some causal relationship between them that is itself independent of those conditions. Only so can the raw material for perception be provided, material that must be ordered by the forms of intuition and the categories in order to become cognition. The one-world view goes wrong in suggesting that we should *identify* the tree, or perhaps its sub-atomic components, with that particular thing in itself that grounds my present perception of the tree, since for all we know some different thing in itself, or set of things in themselves, may ground every other perception of the tree. Nor should we identify with one another the two entirely different causal relationships. Those who hold the one-world view will prefer to say that there is only one causal relationship, between the thing and the perceiver, and that this causal relationship has an empirical character knowable to us and a non-empirical character that we cannot know. But the very same questions can be raised about the identity of the causal relationship as were raised about the identity of the thing.

Allison might still object to words like "grounding". He does use them himself, but he also says that things in themselves do not have a "superior ontological status" to the phenomenal world.¹⁷ This looks like a denial that in talking about things in themselves Kant means to talk about things *in themselves*.¹⁸ In one or two places Allison makes it clear he does want to deny this, saying that there are no context-independent facts, and that Kant's contrast is between two different ways of considering things. To consider them as appearances is to consider them under those conditions on which human cognition depends; "to consider things as they are in themselves just is to consider them as some pure understanding might think them, that is, in a way that bypasses the conditions of sensibility"; for "there is no context-independent truth or fact of the matter".¹⁹ But this seems most strange. It would be very surprising if Kant were to distinguish between God's way of seeing things and the way they really are. And if the relationship is not one of grounding – grounding in some fact of the matter, however unknowable – it is very unclear what it could be.

Problems remain, of course. It was only in their application to experience that the categories were said to give us knowledge. In saying that there are things in themselves, and that they ground appearances, Kant seems to be claiming knowledge to which by his own rules he is not entitled. But in the present context these matters need not concern us, since they are problems on either interpretation. The one-world interpretation does not

¹⁶ Allison (2004), pp. 64-73.

¹⁷ Allison (2006), p. 121.

¹⁸ It is worth noticing here that Prauss (1974), pp. 13ff., shows how very frequently Kant uses the expression "*Ding an sich selbst*"; "*Ding an sich*" alone is comparatively rare. Prauss believes that both are short forms of "*Ding an sich selbst betrachtet*", something one could accept without drawing the conclusion that appearances and things in themselves are just the same things considered in different ways.

¹⁹ Allison (2006) p. 119; Allison (2004), p. 48. Cf. also Allison (2006) pp. 121-2. A similar view is put forward by H.E. Matthews (1969).

really remove any of the difficulties people may feel about things in themselves. It may redescribe them, but it does not redescribe them very helpfully. In so far as there are problems for transcendental idealism on the two-worlds view, they remain problems if we prefer to talk about one world instead.

III

Some supporters of the two-worlds interpretation think Kant was a phenomenalist so far as empirical reality is concerned. People who hold the one-world view sometimes do so partly because they repudiate this idea, as reducing Kant's empirical realism to a kind of idealism that he repeatedly dismissed. But the two-worlds account is by no means committed to a phenomenalist understanding of the physical world, though if Kant were a phenomenalist it would certainly be natural for him to distinguish between two worlds – the phenomenalist construction on the one hand, and on the other the reality to which belong the items out of which the construction is made, and the entities that do the constructing.

Phenomenalists hold that physical objects and states of affairs are logical constructions out of sense-impressions, or something analogous to sense-impressions.²⁰ Their account could come in any of three versions, with three different views about the status of the units that form the building blocks for the logical construction.

On the first version, they are temporal sense-impressions, and they stand on their own: they do not derive their character from an underlying reality (unless within the knowing subject). This theory is interesting in its own right, but it cannot be Kant's, because it leaves no place for things in themselves to “give the matter to empirical intuition” and thus provide the raw material for experience.²¹ It certainly leaves no room for his claim that “the world of understanding contains the ground of the world of sense and so too of its laws” (Gr, Ak. IV:453). This is the version that encourages the erroneous thought that Kant believed in two worlds with no connection between them (except perhaps in that the knowing subject might belong to both).

The second version also holds that the building-blocks are temporal sense-impressions, but it recognizes that they have a noumenal ground, and one that is not internal to the knowing subject itself. The knowing subject must *be* a thing in itself, for as Kant says, “the subject of the categories cannot, by thinking them, obtain a concept of itself as an object of the categories” (B 422).²² But it is not the knowing subject that supplies the raw material for experience.

²⁰ I take this to amount to saying that statements about physical objects and states of affairs are logically equivalent to, and so reducible to, sets of statements about sense-impressions or something analogous to them. The thesis that physical objects and states of affairs can be equated with collections of such items entails this, so any objection to it will be an objection to that thesis also. Phenomenalist accounts are offered e.g. by Bennett (1996), pp. 23ff, 197, and by Van Cleve (1999), ch. 1.

²¹ Discovery, Ak. VIII:215 (quoted below); cf. also Discovery, Ak. VIII:219f, A 251f, A 358, A 494/B 522, Prol, Ak.IV:314f, etc.

²² Cf. Berkeley's recognition of the need for spirits that have ideas and are not ideas themselves.

The third version holds that the building-blocks of the logical construction are not temporal, but themselves noumenal, and hence never known to us as such, though manipulated by the knowing subject – not of course consciously - in such a way as to produce the phenomenalist construction both of conscious sense-impressions and of the rest of the phenomenal world. On this version it would be wrong to call the building-blocks “sense-impressions”, though they are the raw material of the sensory given as presented to the subject.

Since Kant’s phenomenal world includes not just physical objects but also mental states, and in general everything that is in time, the second view cannot properly represent his position. Temporal sense-impressions must themselves be constructed, and so cannot be the basis for the construction. The building-blocks must belong in the realm of the non-constructed, and so – if this is to be an account of Kant’s position – they cannot themselves be in time. Hence the case for the third view. It allows a place for the synopsis of the raw data that is required for their spatio-temporal ordering, as well as the basic synthesis that is a precondition for the apprehension of anything (A 94, A 97, B 160-1); an element of “construction” must take place prior to any talk of temporal sense-impressions.

But we need not consider this issue further here. There is a major objection to all three versions.²³ For they all hold that the construction needed is a *logical* construction. Any statement about a physical object is logically equivalent to some complex statement about the building-blocks, the complexity being produced by the linking together of atomic building-block statements by using the standard apparatus of logic. And this is the problem. For Kant the synthesis is much more sophisticated than this.

It is not confined to putting elements together with the aid of logical constants. It makes use of logical concepts, the categories, for these determine the twelve ways in which synthesis is possible for us. But because all our intuition is necessarily spatio-temporal, the categories require to be schematized, yielding concepts that are by no means straightforwardly logical: including the concepts of cause as necessary connection in time, substance as (at least) that which exists through time independently of perceivers, extensive and intensive magnitude, and so on. The concept of substance is (or includes) that of a thing that is fully objective in any ordinary or scientific sense; the concept of cause is thoroughly non-Humean, and goes beyond any concatenation however regular. If I judge that striking the match caused the flame, my judgement involves a synthesis that uses the schematised category of cause, but the fact that I make the synthesis does not of course make the judgement true. It depends on whether the data of experience as a whole support the general claim that striking matches causes them to light, and on whether a more thorough investigation of the present case might show, again empirically, that it was not the striking of the match that caused it to light (the emery paper was wet), but its coming into contact with another flame that I had not at first noticed.

²³ For a clear and comprehensive refutation of the idea that Kant is a phenomenalist see Allison (2004) pp. 38-42, or Allais (2004) pp. 660-65.

Thus Kant's "construction", if that is the word for it, is much more complex than the phenomenalist's. "Construction" is another metaphor, of course, and it is not one he uses himself in this context. It can mislead by suggesting that the mind somehow creates the world by its constructive efforts, implying a degree of freedom in constructing that Kant could not accept. If he had, he would have faced a serious problem over how it is that we share a common world. The forms of human cognition – space, time, and the categories – he can claim to have shown to be inevitably common to all of us, as conditioning the possibility of experience for us. But there is nothing in that to guarantee, or even to suggest, that the particular content of one person's experience should so closely relate to that of every other's as we constantly find to be the case. The only possible explanation for that is that the raw data different people receive are systematically similar.

These raw data constrain the "construction"; they provide the matter for experience. They are the result of our being affected by elements of the noumenal world. The facts about them are thus facts that we can never know, for to become aware of them (to bring them to the unity of apperception) we must already synthesise them. As Kant puts it, "the objects as things in themselves *give* the matter to empirical intuition (they contain the ground by which to determine the faculty of representation in according to its sensibility), but they *are* not the matter thereof" (Discovery, Ak. VIII:215).

So Kant is not a phenomenalist. But the considerations that made it plausible to adopt the two-worlds metaphor do still apply. The world as we can know it is the spatio-temporal world, whose nature is determined by the synthesis of what is given within the forms of space and time and in accordance with the schematised categories. Things in themselves underlie all this, but they are not spatial, not temporal, and not ordered by the schematized categories, which only apply to what is in space and time (or time at any rate). The fact that they underlie it does not make the empirical world any less real than anyone ordinarily believes. The world around us is the object not just of our perceptual experience but also of scientific discovery. It satisfies all the criteria of reality that any normal person, or any scientist, could require.²⁴ The same applies not just to empirical objects, but to their properties – those that we can know and those we can discover; though that may involve discovering, as Kant himself believed, that colours and sounds are not really the properties of things that we naively take them to be²⁵. The true nature of the world of appearances is what science tells us about things.

This empirical reality is at the same time transcendently ideal, and the two-worlds interpretation can stress the importance for Kant of the contrast with an underlying reality that is alone ultimately real. It is this ontological ultimacy of things in themselves that

²⁴ This would be compatible with offering an anti-realist account of it, as suggested by a number of people, including Putnam (1981) ch.3, and Walker (1983) and (1998) ch.4. Anti-realism in this sense is not in conflict with the everyday realism of common sense. Anti-realism about a particular class of statements is "the view that statements of the disputed class are to be understood only by reference to the sort of thing which we count as evidence for a statement of that class" (Dummett (1978), p.146). Kant's position as set out would be compatible also with an interpretation that is realist in the sense to which anti-realism is opposed, i.e. as holding that statements about the empirical world are not to be understood only by reference to the sort of thing we count as evidence for them.

²⁵ A 29/B 45; Progress, Ak. XX:268f.

warrants describing the empirically real world as the world of “appearances”.²⁶ That description can mislead, since the world of appearances is the scientifically real world, which can itself be contrasted with the way things appear when we view them in a superficial and pre-scientific way. That in turn can be contrasted with the pure illusions that we sometimes suffer. Kant draws these distinctions within the world of appearances, though he does not emphasize them sufficiently, which is why the nature of the world of appearances has sometimes been misunderstood. He marks off mere illusion as *Schein*, rather than *Erscheinung* (appearance), and Adickes finds in him the basis for another terminological distinction, marking the contrast between things as we ordinarily view them and things as science shows them to be by using the term “*Erscheinungen an sich*” for the latter. The sharp contrast would then be between the *Erscheinungen an sich* that constitute reality within the empirical world (the world of *Erscheinungen*) and the *Dinge an sich*, the things in themselves that constitute the ultimate reality that lies beyond science and beyond human cognition. This terminological distinction does not perfectly reflect Kant’s usage, though, since he does not use the words in an entirely consistent way.²⁷

To describe this in terms of two worlds seems quite natural. All the same, it is important not to lose sight of the metaphorical character of this talk about worlds. We can perhaps say that for most purposes the two-worlds metaphor is less misleading than the one-worlds metaphor. But it can mislead too, and it does if it is taken to suggest two unconnected realms of reality. They are by no means unconnected; they are intimately related. But we need to be cautious about going further and claiming detailed identity relations between them.

IV

There is something that makes it difficult to avoid going further and doing just that, though it is to be found in Kant’s moral rather than his theoretical philosophy. Moral responsibility matters greatly to Kant. Moral responsibility requires properly free choice, and properly free choice can be exercised only in the intelligible world. In part this is because Kant believes he has shown the world of appearances to be thoroughly deterministic, so that if we had enough empirical information “there would be no human action that we could not predict with certainty, and recognize as necessary given its preceding conditions”.²⁸ Such determinism would only leave room for the sort of freedom that would content the compatibilist: we could make choices and act accordingly, but our choices would be thoroughly predictable themselves. Kant dismisses this as “the freedom of the turnspit” (KdpV, Ak. V:97), and as wholly inadequate for moral responsibility. Even if he had not held such strong views about the deterministic character of the empirical world and about compatibilist “freedom”, he could not have admitted the source of moral responsibility to lie in the phenomenal world: it requires responsiveness to pure practical reason itself, and pure practical reason cannot be equated with any empirical cause.

²⁶ This point has been emphasized by Karl Ameriks against Allison, e.g. in Ameriks (1982, 1992).

²⁷ Adickes (1929), pp. 22-24, 36.

²⁸ A 550/B 578, cf. KdpV, Ak. V:99.

The same applies to reason generally: if as knowing and judging subjects we are to be genuinely influenced by reason our judgement cannot be due to an empirical impulse (Gr, Ak. IV:448). As acting and knowing subjects we must belong to the world of things in themselves, the reality of which is ultimate – and has to be for transcendental idealism, since the self could be involved in no kind of “constructing” if it had to construct itself and its own constructing (cf. B 422). Of course, “I have no *cognition* of myself as *I am* but only as *I appear* to myself”.²⁹ “The *I think* expresses the act of determining my existence”, and “the existence is thereby already given” antecedently to any intuition (B 157n). As he puts it later, “That I am conscious of myself is a thought that already contains a twofold self, the self as subject and the self as object. How it should be possible that I, who think, can be an object (of intuition) to myself, and thus distinguish myself *from* myself, is absolutely impossible to explain, although it is an undoubted fact”.³⁰

This sounds like an identification, if a somewhat equivocal one, of the knowing subject that constructs experience with myself as known within experience. But caution is needed here. Transcendental idealism requires a subject of experience that exists as a thing in itself. But there is no reason why that transcendental subject of experience should be coterminous with the phenomenal entity we call the human being. This is one message of the Paralogisms, particularly the Third: I must think of myself as a unity, but there are no grounds for equating this unity with a particular physical being that lasts through a period of time.³¹ Thus so far as theoretical reason is concerned – or speculative reason, as Kant also calls it – the identification is one we are not entitled to make.

Things are different where moral responsibility is concerned. Responsibility requires freedom; “no other path remains than to ascribe the existence of a thing so far as it is determinable in time”, i.e. the human being, “*only to appearance, and to ascribe freedom to the same being as a thing in itself*”. “The acting subject as appearance” stands under the conditions of time and causality, but “the very same subject” is also “conscious of himself as a thing in itself ... and himself as determinable only through laws that he gives himself by reason”. This is certainly an identification, and a quite unequivocal one.³²

It appears to give limited support to the one-world view that identifies appearances and things in themselves. It does not provide any reason for supposing an identity between a coffee-cup and an individual thing in itself, but the ascription of moral responsibility to human beings – which Kant takes to be integral to what morality itself requires – demands that there be an identity, or something very like an identity, between a human being and a single noumenal agent. A human being, here, is a person whose continuing existence in time is an empirically observable matter; so the objection raised above to identifying a thing in itself with something in space and time would seem bound to apply. But unless there is something very like an identity there will be in Kant’s view no basis

²⁹ B 158, cf. A 350f.

³⁰ Progress, Ak. XX:270; cf. B 155.

³¹ A 362f and footnote.

³² KdpV, Ak. V: 95; 97.

for blaming people for acts they performed some time ago, since there would be no reason to think the same noumenal agent was involved. “The *sensible* life has, with respect to the *intelligible* consciousness of its existence (consciousness of freedom), the absolute unity of a phenomenon, which ... must be appraised not in accordance with the natural necessity that belongs to it as appearance but in accordance with the absolute spontaneity of freedom”. It is wholly appropriate, according to Kant, to blame others or ourselves for acts we performed a long time ago. “The judicial sentences of that wonderful capacity in us which we call conscience are in perfect agreement with this”.³³

Kant writes in terms of identity: the same entity belongs in both the noumenal realm and the phenomenal realm. It remains impossible to see there could be a literal *identity*, here or anywhere else, between an entity whose identity conditions are inevitably spatio-temporal and an entity outside space and time. Kant may be writing loosely or metaphorically, feeling the closeness of the relationship to warrant the metaphor. But another model suggests itself. The moral requirement must be for a relationship that is very tight. We might here have something like (though not of course the same as) Descartes’ “intimate union” between body and soul. For Descartes these are two substances which can on no account be identified with one another, but which are closely enough related to be considered as forming a composite unit: the embodied person, made up of the two distinct things. In the same way there is no need for it to be Kant’s view that the human being and the noumenal self should be identical with one another. But given the relationship between them it is perhaps legitimate to think of them as parts of a single unit that is composed of both.

Whether or not that model seems appropriate, there can still be a very close and morally important connection, and that is what Kant is really concerned about. The important thing is that the free choice or choices of the noumenal subject determine the empirical character of the empirical human being, from which all of that person’s actions flow. That is what matters for Kant’s purposes.³⁴

This relationship must hold in the case of every rational being, every being to which moral responsibility can properly be ascribed. It cannot be “known” to hold in the sense of the first Critique, or from the standpoint of speculative reason, for it takes us beyond the limits of possible experience: such things can only be known, if known at all, “from a practical point of view”. Exactly what that means is not very clear, but it must at least mean that it is rational for us to believe them – they are things practical reason requires us to believe. It requires us to “presuppose” (*voraussetzen*) that they are true, and to assent

³³ KdpV, Ak. V: 99; 98.

³⁴ How far he can actually sustain this closeness is not clear, for if the phenomenal world is causally determined, there will be causes for everything within it, including the birth of a child with this particular empirical character. He recognizes this, to the extent of saying that what the noumenal self determines is not just the empirical character but “all the past which determines it” (KdpV, Ak. V: 98). We might feel that filling out the implications of this thought would lead him into difficult territory, and the complications might be such as to make the connection look a lot weaker than it does when he simply says that the empirical character is “determined in the intelligible character” (A 551/B 579). For the empirical conditions that brought about my birth included a lot of conditions involving choices ascribable to other people than myself; my parents, for example, and their parents, and so on.

to them as true. But we cannot understand *how* they can be true, because we can never have insight into the underlying nature of things in themselves.³⁵

Kant holds this, then, because his moral philosophy requires it. Speculative reason can establish no such close relationship at all between a particular noumenal subject and a phenomenal person, but morality requires us to accept, as true, claims that go beyond the limits of speculative reason. It would seem that the relationship between person and noumenal self would have to be one to one (at least in normal cases within this present life; perhaps radical changes of personality might constitute exceptions, and further questions are raised by Kant's views on immortality). But if there is an identity here, it is not an identity between an appearance and a thing in itself, it is at best the identity of a composite whole combining the intimately related pair. This is not what the one-world view set out to maintain, and the moral argument only allows such an identification where rational beings are concerned. Still, it might be enough to encourage the question whether a similarly close relationship might hold for other things as well, though there seems no prospect of extending the moral argument to cover ordinary physical things.

V

What would be needed for this suggestion to work would be some ground for thinking that Kant held there must be a close structural correspondence between the world of appearances and the world of things in themselves: close enough for him to think that for every physical thing there must be some noumenal entity or set of entities that matched it, allowing an "identification" of the same sort as Kant makes between the noumenal self and its spatio-temporally extended counterpart. One problem is that it is not very clear what could be meant here by "every physical thing", since on any view the boundaries between macroscopic physical objects are largely arbitrary and adopted because we find them convenient. For Kant the physical reality is a complex of fields of force, and the matter thus constituted is infinitely divisible though not made up of an infinite number of parts, nor of a finite number of simple parts either.³⁶ On the other hand noumena, when composite, are made up of simple parts. To make things worse the universal quantifier in "every physical thing" implies that there is a totality of physical things, but the First Antinomy shows that there is no such totality.³⁷

I think this is a serious problem. But since we are considering what Kant's transcendental idealism amounts to, and so asking what he thought rather than what he ought to have thought, there may be a case for suspending it and for taking seriously the suggestion that there is enough of a structural correspondence to allow "identifications" in a wide range of cases between physical things or features on the one hand and noumenal counterparts on the other. It does seem that at least in the *Inaugural Dissertation* he may have thought

³⁵ KdpV, Ak. V: 132-4; 142-3; 133.

³⁶ MAdN, Ak. IV:503ff.

³⁷ Van Cleve (1999), pp. 160f., notes the point about divisibility as a difficulty for any contentful claim of isomorphism between the noumenal and the phenomenal, but the point applies to the Antinomies as a whole. This is hardly surprising since Kant thinks they would all be genuine contradictions if appearances were things in themselves.

a close structural correspondence to be required, and it can be argued that he continued to think that at the time of the first edition of the *Critique* (though his position there may not be fully consistent). The second edition is another matter, but we shall come to that shortly.³⁸

This question about structural correspondence is not the same as the question whether there is an isomorphism between appearances and things in themselves. As Van Cleve points out,³⁹ if one could suppose that there were the same number of phenomenal states of affairs as of noumenal states of affairs, then obviously an isomorphism could be set up between them, as that is only to say that there is some function that will effect a one-to-one mapping from the one to the other. If one cannot suppose the sets of states of affairs are of the same size, then there will be many-one relationships that will yield ways of mapping from the one set to the other set. What matters is not whether such functions exist; of course they do. What matters is whether they are of the right kind for the subject to use in the conversion it must make from the raw data that noumenally affect it to elements of which we can be spatio-temporally aware.

A natural thought, initially at least, is that to be of the right kind the mapping would need to be simple in a certain way. There would seem to be a limited number of salient features we can be phenomenally aware of, like greenness or hardness, though each feature may have numerous instances. The same will be true at the noumenal level, for though instances of a feature will not there be distinguished by place or time, they will be distinguished by the ways they combine with other features. Then the right kind of mapping would be one which takes instances of a particular noumenal feature always into instances of an equivalent phenomenal feature, and allows for no instances of the phenomenal feature that do not track back to instances of the same noumenal feature.⁴⁰ That there is a mapping that will do this systematically for the various phenomenal features we distinguish is not trivial, for we are not dealing with set-membership but with properties or relations that strike us as representing similarities at the phenomenal level, and with properties or relations that again represent similarities at the noumenal level –

³⁸ The case for ascribing such a position to Kant in A depends on how we are to understand what he says about empirical synthesis there, and what he says about affinity. Affinity at least *seems* to be a requirement that things in themselves should display certain patterned features if knowledge is to be possible; empirical synthesis seems to involve somehow reading empirical concepts off from the world, in a way that would ensure that the similarities we empirically recognize match intrinsic similarities amongst things in themselves. That seems to be the sort of thing he is rejecting at B 134f when he says that “combination does not lie in the objects ... and cannot as it were be borrowed from them through perception and by that means taken up into the understanding”. On these matters, and for an attempt to defend a similar view of the *Inaugural Dissertation*, see Walker (1985).

The account of space and time given by Rosenberg (2005), pp. 77-87, would provide an alternative or complementary basis for thinking there must be such a structural correspondence; he understands Kant’s “space” and “time” (very plausibly) as indexical, and supposes an underlying an-sich order that they match. Interesting though this idea is, it is hard to see that it can reflect Kant’s own position, since it would undermine his case for the a priori status of arithmetic and geometry. It would also make it difficult for him to repudiate the Leibnizian claim that sensation is confused thought.

³⁹ Van Cleve (1999), pp. 155-61.

⁴⁰ The phenomenal features here had better not include spatio-temporal relations, or not every kind of spatio-temporal relation, otherwise Kant’s case for the special a priori status of space and time would be unsustainable: cf. footnote 38 above. This seriously threatens the coherence of the present suggestion.

noumenal similarities that are objective and real in themselves, amounting to very much more than shared membership of an arbitrarily determined set. That there must be such properties and relations at the level of things in themselves is of course something we must admit if we admit things in themselves at all, for there cannot be things without properties.

It is by no means trivial that there is a mapping that meets these requirements. Even if there is, it is far from obvious that it is this kind of mapping that we use, or have to use. Nevertheless, arguably at the time of the first edition of the *Critique* Kant thought that only in this way can the spatio-temporal phenomena we are aware of be appearances of an underlying intelligible world; for only so can the intelligible world provide the given content to our experience, blocking off the suggestion that everything we are aware of is simply the product of the mind's own activity.

There seem to be two problems with that idea. First, there is no real argument to show that we do have to use this kind of mapping, or anything akin to it. Secondly, the resultant position would make us directly responsive to features of the in-itself, directly deriving our empirical concepts from them. That is hard to reconcile with the contention that things in themselves are altogether unknowable. Of course the idea is not that we are *conscious* of features of things in themselves, but rather that the subject effects a mapping from the features of things-in-themselves into features of appearances, a mapping which has the systematic character just described - matching instances of a given noumenal feature with instances of the same phenomenal feature. That still requires us to know a good deal more about things in themselves than Kant should be comfortable with. It requires us to know that this quite substantial correspondence obtains.

So it is not surprising to find him moving in B to the view that "combination does not lie in the objects", or to put it another way that there is simply no reason at all to suppose that the mapping should take this simple form. So long as the subject operates with some determinate function, however complex it is, the nature of the intelligible world will still determine the nature of appearances; there will still be input that is derived from things in themselves and not from us, to give us the a posteriori content of experience. As Kant says, they can give the matter to empirical intuition, but they *are* not the matter of it (Discovery, Ak. VIII:215).

There are bound to be many more complicated ways in which noumenal features could be mapped onto what we are aware of empirically. Thus if α is some feature at the in-itself level, it could be mapped directly into the empirical feature A, but it could equally be mapped into A at s_1 and t_1 , B at s_1 and t_2 , F at s_2 and t_1 , R at S_2 and t_2 , etc., where A, B, F and R are very dissimilar empirically. The alternative possibilities are endless. Likewise what appears to us as the same feature on different occasions could be mapped into very different elements at the level of things in themselves. The function that specifies the relationship could be indefinitely complex. Perhaps we could concede that there must be some limit on the complexity that the subject could operate with, since Kant regards its capacities as finite, but that would still leave a large variety of ways in which the mapping could be done. And so long as there is one single *function* employed, however

complex it may be, that function will sustain a determinate relationship between appearances and things in themselves; and that determinate relationship will ensure that what is given to us empirically is fixed by the in-itself, and is not under the arbitrary control of the subject. Of course, if the subject had an absolutely free hand with the function itself then it could so manipulate it that every sensory experience was an experience of pink blamange. It is true that statements like “combination ... is not given through objects but can be executed only by the subject itself” (B 130), and “combination does not lie in the objects ... and cannot as it were be borrowed from them” (B 134) have sometimes been read as implying that the subject does have an absolutely free hand.⁴¹ But they do not say that, and Kant cannot mean it. If the subject has an absolutely free hand with the function then there really is no role for the thing in itself. If transcendental idealism were to give so free a hand to the subject it would no longer be Kant’s transcendental idealism, but more like the idealism of Fichte.

Only if one thought that the function *had* to be very simple, to provide experience with its content, would there be anything compelling in the thought that there *has* to be a close correspondence between appearances and the underlying things in themselves. The nature of the function must lie beyond the limits of possible experience, since it is itself the determinant of a relationship between what is non-empirical and what is empirically available. There is thus no way in which we could ever know that it had to be one-one, or that it had to take some particular form rather than another. So if there were some very close relationship, we could never know about it. And that means we cannot have grounds for extending more generally the “identification” that seemed plausible for the self and for rational beings.

So a variant of the one-world interpretation that relied on such an “identification” between appearances and things in themselves would not be harmless. It would be committed to claims that are (by the standards of the second edition) groundless and unwarrantable, postulating a degree of correspondence that we could never know to obtain. The same would apply to the interpretation that simply *identifies* appearances and things in themselves, so here we have an additional objection to that view. If the suggested reading of the first edition is correct then something like the one-world view is more defensible there, for Kant himself is committed to a close correspondence at that stage. But he changed his mind for good reason. The nature of the function itself lies beyond what is knowable, since it takes things in themselves or their features as arguments, and nothing can entitle us to any assumptions about its character.

Talk of there being just one world is harmless if it only makes the point that appearances are related to things in themselves, as the reflection in the mirror was related to the objects reflected however much the mirror distorted things. If the claim is that appearances and things in themselves are the very same things, that must be rejected. But if the claim is that the two stand in a close enough correspondence to allow us to see them as distinct elements in an “intimate union”, then we can say that although the second edition of the *Critique* cannot support it, perhaps the first edition can. So we might say that there is a form of the one-world interpretation that fits A but not B, and

⁴¹ Cf. Van Cleve (1999), p. 161f.

that a corresponding form of the two-worlds interpretation is more appropriate for B. But “one world” and “two worlds” remain metaphors. The danger is in taking them as more than metaphors, for then they can be seriously misleading. The greatest danger of the two-worlds metaphor is to suggest the sort of divorce between the knower and the thing in itself that makes the latter irrelevant, while also undermining confidence in the empirical reality that we know. The greatest danger of the one-world metaphor is to encourage the thought that serious philosophical problems can be smoothed away by the assertion that we are just dealing with different aspects of the same reality.

This matters, because the pressures towards something like transcendental idealism are strong. It is a commonplace that our conceptual capacities are determined by various factors including our common human nature, and it is not implausible that our human cognitive capacities may be subject to conditions of sensibility as well as of a conceptual kind. Familiar, and often rather vague, thoughts about conceptual schemes and an underlying reality, or a common world viewed from different aspects, arise out of this. But there is no point in talking about an underlying reality unless one can specify with some precision what its function is, and no point in talking about a common world unless one can say what one means by that. Kant wrestled with these problems. It may very well be (as I believe) that his attempts to deal with them are neither complete nor wholly consistent, and that his transcendental idealism is ultimately unsuccessful. It remains worth trying to understand what his contribution amounts to. But it is not really very helpful to ask whether he believed in one world or two.

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