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Kant's Transcendental Idealism and Contemporary Anti-Realism

Lucy Allais

Abstract

This paper compares Kant's transcendental idealism with three main groups of contemporary anti-realism, associated with Wittgenstein, Putnam, and Dummett, respectively. The kind of anti-realism associated with Wittgenstein has it that there is no deep sense in which our concepts are answerable to reality. Associated with Putnam is the rejection of four main ideas: theory-independent reality, the idea of a uniquely true theory, a correspondence theory of truth, and bivalence. While there are superficial similarities between both views and Kant's, I find more significant differences. Dummettian anti-realism, too, clearly differs from Kant's position: Kant believes in verification-transcendent reality, and transcendental idealism is not a theory of meaning or truth. However, I argue that part of the Dummettian position is extremely useful for understanding part of Kant's position – his idealism about the appearances of things. I argue that Kant's idealism about appearances can be expressed as the rejection of experience-transcendent reality with respect to appearances.

Keywords: Kant; transcendental idealism; anti-realism; Dummett; Putnam; Wittgenstein

1

Kant's transcendental idealism has recently been compared with a number of versions of contemporary anti-realism.¹ The aim of this paper is to assess this comparison. While the comparison between Kant's position and contemporary positions may reflect the tendency of each age to reinterpret transcendental idealism in the light of its own concerns and fashions, it may also be that contemporary positions shed light on some of Kant's insights that have yet to be fully digested. The fact that there is not, and never has been, an agreed interpretation of transcendental idealism – there is not even a dominant consensus² – should make us particularly open to this possibility.

Kant's transcendental idealism can be divided into three claims: (1) Kant distinguishes between things as they are in themselves and the

appearances of things. (2) Kant claims that we do not and cannot have knowledge of things as they are in themselves. (3) Kant claims that the appearances of things are mind-dependent, in some sense and to some extent. The comparison with anti-realism is most often intended to illuminate only *part* of Kant's position – his idealism about the appearances of things – and some anti-realist commentators simply do not comment on his claims about things as they are in themselves, while others argue that his account is better off without them (see, for example, Putnam, 1987, 1981). While this paper is mostly concerned with the extent to which anti-realism is useful for understanding Kant's idealism about the appearances of things (claim (3) above), my starting point is Kant's account as a whole, which means that anti-realism can only help us understand Kant's claims about the mind-dependence of appearances to the extent that this is compatible with his views about things as they are in themselves.

There are many different types of anti-realism, which I have divided into three main groups, each of which I name, for convenience, for a particular person associated with them – Dummettian anti-realism, Putnam's anti-realism, and Wittgensteinian anti-realism. However, at no point is my concern with interpreting the work of these three philosophers, and the labels are intended to cover a broad family of positions, associated with the philosopher in question, rather than to indicate that each claim made about the position should be attributed to that person. Kant's idealism about appearances has been compared to these three kinds of positions, but I argue that there are profound differences between the Kantian position and these versions of anti-realism. However, I argue that there is an element of the Dummettian position that is helpful for understanding Kant's position – the rejection of experience-transcendence. The position called 'anti-realist' in contemporary philosophy of science (see, for example, Papineau, 1996) is completely different from these positions, and is more likely to be compared with Kant's denial of knowledge of things as they are in themselves than to his idealism about the appearances of things, and this is not discussed here.

2 Wittgensteinian Anti-Realism

The first kind of anti-realism or idealism that has been seen as Kant's is a kind of conceptual idealism associated with Wittgenstein, which I will call Wittgensteinian idealism, without any commitment as to whether it was in fact Wittgenstein's. Roughly put, the idea is that because we must conceptualize to have knowledge, and our concepts are only our concepts, we cannot have knowledge of the world as it is apart from us and our concepts, or our conceptual scheme.³ It is easy to associate this kind of view with Kant, and it may be something like Kant's thoughts about concept

application that leads to this kind of idealism. An advantage of this kind of position is that as well as accounting for the mind-dependence of appearances – and doing this in a way which does not involve the Berkeleyan idealism Kant rejects – it does seem to allow for the *existence* of things as they are in themselves, but an immediate objection is that it rules out our having *coherent thought* about mind-independent reality, as our concepts, *per hypothesi* only apply to the appearances of things. In contrast, it is clear that for Kant, coherent thought about mind-independent reality is not only possible, but is crucial to his views on freedom, morality, and God. A further immediate objection to this kind of position is that it is based on a *general* consideration about concept application, but Kant does not give this kind of argument for his idealism – his argument is based on synthetic *a priori* knowledge and *a priori* concepts, not on the nature of concept application in general. Arguments based on concept application in general are examples of what Ameriks (1992, 1990) has called ‘short’ arguments for idealism, and it is clear that Kant’s main direct argument for his position is not based on general considerations about knowledge or concepts, but on the specific feature of *a prioricity*. This casts some doubt on the comparison between Kant’s idealism and this kind of anti-realism, and I will suggest that one of Kant’s concerns was in fact to oppose this kind of view.

What makes interpreting Kant’s idealism in terms of Wittgensteinian anti-realism seem compelling is that this kind of conceptual idealism is often based on thoughts which are very similar to Kant’s thoughts about concept application. For Kant, concepts are not images but rules (A106, A126, A141 = B180), and as rules, go beyond what is given, and involve spontaneity. Kant famously shows the problems with a radical empiricist account of concept application in terms of abstraction from the given, and argues that all concept application involves interpreting what is given, or pre-conceptual synthesis⁴ – a tendency to group in certain ways. Kant thinks that all concepts involve synthesis, and that all concept application involves consciousness of a unity which has been synthesised (A68/B93, A77/B103, A103).⁵ The reason why concepts, for Kant, involve spontaneity and require synthesis is that, he claims, combination, or grouping, is never given: ‘Combination does not lie in the objects, however, and cannot as it were be borrowed from them’ (B134). I agree with Walker in seeing Kant’s claim that combination cannot be given as anticipating Goodman:⁶ Kant thinks that the way we form concepts from experience is not determined by the way things in the world are – it is up to us how we classify things. There are indefinitely many ways in which we could group things, and in which we could derive empirical concepts from experience: applying a concepts involves regarding the things to which it applies as relevantly similar in respect of the concept, but any group of things could be grouped together by someone, and would then be similar to each other, for him. This means

that while radically different forms of classification, such as Goodman's grue,⁷ seem unnatural to us, there is nothing logically wrong with them. Even if

God had decided to mark out certain similarities as 'right' this would still have placed no logical constraint on the making of classifications which cut across them, nor would it have made it more likely that the similarities we find so natural are the same as these 'right' ones.

(Walker, 1978: pp. 129)

These points about concept application are sometimes thought to lead to Wittgensteinian anti-realism: the idea is that there is no deep sense in which our concepts are answerable to reality, or no set of rules that is metaphysically privileged,⁸ or that since thought of an object, or demonstrative identification of an object, or both, can take place only in the context of a theory or conceptual scheme, we can give no sense to the idea of an object's existing apart from us and our theories about it.⁹ According to this kind of view, the concepts we use determine the structure of reality (which particulars there are and what particulars are like, or even that there are particulars), but it is open to such views to think that, given the concepts we use, mind-independent reality is responsible for how the course of experience turns out, and Kant's position has been interpreted in this way.¹⁰ For example, it could be 'up to us' whether we use the concept of green or that of grue, but not up to us whether grass continues to be green or grue. There are a variety of possible positions here, some more strongly idealist than others, and a possible view could be that although mind-independent reality does not contain particulars corresponding to the concepts in terms of which our judgements are framed, it is responsible for determining whether our judgements so framed are true or false.

It is often thought that this kind of conceptual idealism is similar to Kant's, and it may partly originate with Kant, but there are obvious differences between these kinds of positions and Kant's. Kant clearly does not think that reality as it is in itself needs our activity of concept application to divide it, as this involves illegitimate claims about reality as it is in itself. While some may think that Kant should have denied that there is theory-independent reality (Putnam, 1987, 1981), he did not do so – things as they are in themselves are, of course, theory-independent. More importantly, it is not just with respect to things in themselves that Kant's account differs from this kind of conceptual idealism – there are also differences between this kind of position and Kant's account of the mind-dependence of appearances.

As already noted, unlike these forms of conceptual idealism, if Kant's argument for idealism is based on a thought about concept application, this is *not* concept application in general, but the specific question of *a priori*

concepts. Crucially, for Kant, it is not the fact that concept application, in general, involves spontaneity and combination on our part that leads to idealism, but the specific claim that experience is based on *a priori* concepts and principles. In the Transcendental Deduction, Kant tries to legitimate our right to use certain *a priori* concepts – the categories – and in fact, it is not his idealism but the need for concepts containing necessity and universality that, Kant thinks, follows from the fact that combination cannot be given. Arguably, far from the above-mentioned arguments for Wittgensteinian anti-realism being Kant's, the Deduction is actually a response to the thoughts on which they are grounded: Kant thinks that empirical concept application is based on subjective association, and that this creates a problem for the idea that empirical concepts alone can give us knowledge of objects – subjective association cannot be all there is. The above forms of anti-realism move from the thought that our concepts are, in a sense, up to us, to the thought that there is no single conceptual scheme that matches reality. On the contrary, in the Deduction Kant argues that it cannot be the case that *all* our concepts are like this, and that if this were the case, we would have no knowledge of an objective world – the thoughts that these anti-realists embrace, Kant thinks, constitute an obstacle to knowledge of the world.

Clearly, the details of the argument of the Deduction are beyond the scope of this discussion, and anyway are not necessary for our purposes. What is important is that in the Deduction Kant argues for the need for *a priori* concepts at least partly because he thinks that the fact that combination cannot be given creates a problem with the objectivity of concept application (and therefore empirical knowledge) – a problem which Wittgensteinian anti-realists embrace, but Kant believes must be removed. Kant thinks that empirical concept application requires us to associate things in ways that are determined by empirical imagination, which is entirely subjective, and that this creates a problem with the objectivity of our empirical knowledge, or with the idea that our empirical knowledge is knowledge of an objective world. He says that for empirical knowledge to give us knowledge of objects

there must be something that itself makes possible this reproduction [empirical association] of the appearances by being the *a priori* ground of a necessary synthetic unity of them.

(A101)

Without a transcendental ground of the unity of appearances

it would be possible for a swarm of appearances to fill up our soul without experience ever being able to arise from it.

(A111, also A122)

He argues for the need for an objective ground of synthesis, or objective affinity of the manifold, to ground the subjective association of empirical concept application, and says that without this, empirical concept application would not constitute knowledge of an objective world. It is not necessary that we see whether Kant has a good argument for this claim in the Deduction, or that we see how the argument is supposed to go: what is important is simply that although Kant does present the thoughts about concept application on which Wittgensteinian anti-realism can be grounded, he does not argue on the basis of these thoughts for idealism, but rather, argues for the necessity of the categories in response to them. Rather than embracing these thoughts, he sees them as a problem which requires the categories as a solution.

There is plenty of room for confusion concerning the relation between Kant's Transcendental Deduction and his transcendental idealism. Because Kant places so much emphasis on the notion of synthesis it is easy to think that his idea is that it is because we must synthesize to have experience, and because synthesis is an activity on our part that is not determined by what is given, that the product of synthesis is something mind-dependent, but this cannot be right. Kant thinks that experience requires synthesis of what is given (active imaginative interpretation and grouping of the input of the senses) at every level, from mere perception to empirical concept application, *but does not argue on this basis for idealism*. On the contrary, it is only the application of the *a priori* concepts, and the synthesis corresponding to them, from which he argues for idealism. Some of Kant's claims about synthesis may be obscure (although his insights into the role of imagination in perception have largely been vindicated by perceptual psychology¹¹), but much of what he says is compatible with realism: it could be thought that even though its shape and colour are both properties of a thing, our experiencing them both *as* being properties of the same thing requires activity of synthesis on the part of our minds.

It is easy to assimilate Kant's attack on the given to his transcendental idealism, and this is done by commentators who see transcendental idealism as a purely epistemological revolution involving the death of the given,¹² as well as by those who see it as similar to the Wittgensteinian conceptual idealism presented here. However, we will have a clearer understanding of Kant's position by seeing that not all his insights are necessarily part of the same revolution. There are a number of revolutionary aspects to Kant's philosophy: his rejection of the myth of the given, his rejection of the Cartesian assumption that we are primarily in contact with the contents of our own minds,¹³ his understanding of objectivity in his accounts of conditions of the possibility of experience, and his transcendental idealism. That these may be separable can be seen in the fact that philosophers such as McDowell have wanted to develop all of the above Kantian insights except transcendental idealism (McDowell, 1994, 1998).

In his account of the need for synthesis Kant was surely the father of the attack on the given, and this was *one* of the revolutionary aspects of his philosophy, but his argument for the need for synthesis in empirical knowledge can be accepted by a realist. Kant thinks that objects must affect us in order for us to have knowledge of them, but the way the input of the senses is ordered is not constrained by the way objects are, and according to Kant's argument, even a realist should think that objects do not constrain our thought in this way.

Wittgensteinian conceptual anti-realism is not compatible with Kant's view that we have coherent thought about things as they are in themselves, and is not based on specific considerations about *a prioricity* which concerned Kant. Further, I have suggested that one of Kant's aims in the Deduction was in fact to respond to the thoughts on which this kind of idealism is often based, rather than to embrace them. I conclude that Kant's transcendental idealism is not like Wittgensteinian anti-realism.

3 Putnam's Anti-Realism

Kant's transcendental idealism has been compared with another kind of anti-realism, associated with Putnam, and once again, I argue that there are crucial differences between these positions. Putnam certainly does not present his work as Kant scholarship – particularly not with respect to transcendental idealism – and his views have changed over the years. Nevertheless, Putnam has invoked Kant as a forerunner of his own views: 'Putnam has regularly explicated his pluralist and holist alternative (originally called "internal realism") to metaphysical and scientific realism by invoking comparisons with Kant' (Moran, 2000: pp. 65).¹⁴ Ideas of Putnam's that have at various stages been associated with Kant include rejection of what he calls theory-independent reality, rejection of the idea of a uniquely true theory of the world, rejection of the correspondence theory of truth, and rejection of bivalence. I argue that with respect to the first three of these ideas, the differences between Putnam and Kant are greater than the similarities.

The rejection of 'theory-independent reality' has been important to Putnam, but Kant clearly believes in theory-independent reality, in his views about things as they are in themselves: the way things are as they are in themselves is entirely independent of us and our knowledge of them. Putnam, in contrast, says that the very notion of the thing in itself is incoherent (Putnam, 1987: p. 41). This is the most obvious respect in which Putnam's views are different from Kant's, and in which he sees himself as improving on Kant; for Putnam's Kant, the notion of things in themselves is meaningless.

As Van Cleve (1999) and Moran (2000) argue, there is no reason to think that Kant would reject the idea of the possibility of one true theory, the

second important idea associated with Putnam, and Kant does not connect the mind-dependence of phenomena with theory relativity or conceptual relativity (Van Cleve, 1999: p. 214). Of course, while Kant would not agree with Putnam's rejection of one true theory, he does not allow that there could be a true *complete* scientific theory, as he thinks that while a systematically unified account of everything in the world is a goal of science, it is one that is in principle unobtainable in the world of appearances (A642/B671–A668/B696). However, the differences between his position and Putnam's in this respect are more significant: there is no reason to see Kant as denying the possibility, or even the actuality, of a unique theory, but simply that it could ever be completed.

The third aspect of Putnam's view that is associated with Kant is his rejection of the correspondence theory of truth, and this might be thought to be less straightforward. Among those who compare Kant's position to various types of anti-realism, a number have seen him as having a coherence theory of truth (for example, Stevenson, 1983: p. 141). However, as Walker points out, Kant clearly does not have a pure coherence theory of truth, as if he did, there would be no role for things in themselves. Kant's position cannot be a pure coherence theory, 'for it is anchored to facts about our beliefs and experiences whose truth is more than coherence' (Walker, 1983: p. 175, also 1989). Coherence is certainly extremely important for Kant, for the 'intersubjective determination of truth value' (Stevenson, 1983: p. 143, see A104–6), but equally clearly it is not sufficient. Kant does not think that our organizing our experience using the categories is *sufficient* for knowledge.

A final aspect of Putnam's anti-realism that has been compared with Kant's transcendental idealism is his rejection of bivalence, but as this is also a feature of Dummettian anti-realism, I will discuss it in the next section. Apart from this, I conclude that Kant's position is different from Putnam's in terms of Putnam's key concerns of rejecting a correspondence theory of truth, rejecting the idea of theory-independent reality, and rejecting the idea of one unique true theory.

4 Dummettian Anti-Realism

In Kant's transcendental idealism the appearances of things – things as they appear to us – have a curious status: they are partly mind-dependent and partly mind-independent, and the way Kant expresses this status is by saying that the appearances of things do not exist apart from our possible experience of them. The relation between what is empirically real and the extent of possible experience has led a number of recent commentators to compare Kant's idealism about appearances to the Dummettian anti-realist rejection of verification-transcendence;¹⁵ I argue that while there are profound differences between Kant's position and Dummett's, the compar-

ison is of some use in explaining Kant's idealism – the rejection of experience-transcendence is a helpful way of expressing the mind-dependence of appearances in Kant's position. Kant does not think that objects depend for their existence on particular acts of apprehension by particular subjects (he is not a Berkeleian idealist about appearances), but he thinks that if an object exists, then we can, in principle, have experience of it. In other words, Kant rejects experience-transcendence for the appearances of things.

4.1

Dummettian anti-realism is associated with two central claims: that to grasp an assertoric sentence is to know under what conditions it would be warrantably assertable, and that there is no verification-transcendent truth, or verification-transcendent reality.¹⁶ The later is explained in terms of the rejection of bivalence: where there is no way for us to know which of two contradictory statements is true, there is no fact of the matter as to which is true. Cumbersome terms such as 'warranted assertability' and 'verification-transcendent' simply indicate the idea that we have no genuine notion of truth for statements that goes beyond the grounds we could give for asserting them. We cannot understand statements for which we have no idea what would count as evidence for them; grasp of a statement involves grasp of such evidence. The notion of verification-transcendent reality is the notion of a state of affairs of which we could have no evidence, or no reason for thinking that it was the case, so the claim that there is no verification-transcendent reality amounts to saying that there is nothing of which we could not, in principle, have knowledge (or evidence, or grounds for asserting, etc.). The position says of everything there is that we could, in principle, have knowledge of it. Another way of expressing the point is to say that facts are evidence-dependent (Van Cleve, 1999): for any fact there is something which could, in principle, be recognized by us as evidence for it, or would give us grounds for thinking that it is the case. The realism to which this view is opposed involves a commitment to a notion of truth under which a statement can be true even if we *could not* know this. On a realist view a statement is true, false, or has whatever intermediate status there may be, in virtue of a reality existing independently of us, *regardless of whether we do or could possibly have any knowledge of this*. This anti-realist view is expressed by Wright as follows:

The world is independent of us, having the properties and organisations which it does irrespective of whether or not we ever choose to investigate them, or even from the concepts in terms of which a particular investigation might be possible. The only modifications required to the realist picture is that we must now think of the world

as in a certain sense *epistemically transparent*: that is, all the variety which it can display is in principle conceptualisable by human beings, and all the statements which there are to be made about it are by human beings (in principle) recognisably true. We thus excise from the realist picture all objectionable play with transcendent notions, but our assertions remain answerable to reality in exactly the traditional spirit of realism.

(Wright, 1996: p. 119)

While the external world does not exist in our minds, and our statements are answerable to the world, the world is not independent of our possibly having knowledge of it. Realism, here, holds that:

the range of states of affairs for whose description our concept forming powers are adequate at best *contingently coincides with*, and may well be more inclusive than, the range which is subject to our knowledge acquiring powers – i.e., some true statements which are fully intelligible to us may be evidence-transcendent

(Wright, 1996: p. 2 my italics)

This kind of anti-realism is primarily concerned with the theory of meaning, and some of those commentators who see Kant's idealism as a form of anti-realism also see it as a theory of meaning, such as Hanna (1993) and Posy (1984, 1983). Kant's idealism has also been seen as, or as closely connected to, a theory of meaning of a more straightforwardly verificationist type by earlier commentators, such as Bennett (1966) and perhaps P. F. Strawson (1966).¹⁷ These interpretations are based on passages such as:

If a cognition is to have objective reality, i.e., to be related to an object, the object must be able to be given in some way. Without that the concepts are empty, and through them one has, to be sure, thought but not in fact cognized anything through this thinking, but rather merely played with representations.

(A155/B194)

However, while Kant certainly thinks that there is something illegitimate about the use of concepts beyond the bounds of experience, the problem is not that they are meaningless, but that we can have no *knowledge* or cognition of objects with respect to them: he certainly does not think that God, freedom, immortality etc. are meaningless notions. Transcendental idealism is not a theory of meaning, and to this extent, it is clearly *not* like Dummettian anti-realism; this is a problem for Posy and Hanna's interpretations. It also means that from the point of view of Dummettian

anti-realism, my use of the position here will no doubt seem somewhat oblique: Dummettian anti-realists think that these issues cannot be fruitfully discussed apart from a theory of meaning; my approach (and Kant's) assumes that this is not true. The Dummettian position makes two claims, the first concerning the theory of meaning, and the second about the world – that there is no verification-transcendent reality. Dummettian anti-realists usually present claims of the first sort as an argument for claims of the second sort. Since Kant's doctrine is not a theory of meaning, his motivation for his position is also different from Dummett's.

An obvious further fundamental disagreement between transcendental idealism and Dummettian anti-realism is that Kant believes in verification-transcendent reality: things as they are in themselves are completely verification-transcendent. Unlike most idealists, Kant is not an idealist *tout court*; an integral part of his position is the realist thesis that there is reality that is independent of us in terms of both its existence and its nature, and which is, in a sense, the origin of our experience. Transcendental idealism could not be like anti-realism as a whole, because Kant's position is not idealist as a whole: Kant is a transcendental realist with respect to things as they are in themselves. This fundamental difference between Kant's position and anti-realism might raise further doubts about the usefulness of comparing the two positions, but Kant *is*, of course, an idealist about appearances, so although his position as a whole cannot be like anti-realism, I suggest that comparison with Dummettian anti-realism is helpful in understanding his idealism. Just as most realists do, Kant thinks that the claim that there is nothing of which *we* cannot have knowledge, *in general*, is inexplicable and arrogant; on the contrary, he says that transcendent ideas 'serve, in part, to restrain the understanding's arrogant claims, namely, that (since it can state *a priori* the conditions of the possibility of all things it can cognise) it has thereby circumscribed the area within which all things are possible' (CJ168, also B167). Kant does not agree, *in general*, with the claim that we can have experience of everything that exists, but he thinks that this claim *is* true of appearances, things as they appear to us. There is nothing in the empirically real world of which we cannot have experience; the empirically real world does not extend beyond our possible knowledge and experience of it; if something is (empirically real), we could have experience of it. As a whole, Kant's position is profoundly different from that of Dummettian anti-realists, but it does not follow from this that Dummettian anti-realism has no use for understanding *part* of Kant's position – his idealism with respect to appearances.

4.2

There is controversy as to whether Dummettian anti-realism is a form of idealism – whether it holds that the world is mind-dependent in some sense

– and some who call themselves anti-realists deny that their position is idealist (for example, Wright, 1996: pp. 54–5).¹⁸ Wright argues that whether anti-realism is idealist depends on the *reason* for thinking that there is no verification-transcendent truth.¹⁹ According to what he calls a *projectivist* position, truth is *determined* by what there are grounds for asserting, but for his *detectivist* view, there are no verification-transcendent truths: all truths are, at best, superassertable, but what makes them superassertable is not that some actual, possible, or ideal community would take them to be so, but that, in fact, they are so. (A statement is superassertable if it is warrantably assertable, and is, as a matter of fact, destined to remain so, no matter how our state of information is improved (Wright, 1992: pp. 86–7).) Van Cleve argues along similar lines that the view that facts are evidence-dependent is not necessarily idealist: he says that Dummett’s position would be idealist ‘if he insisted that nothing is ever true unless there is a truthmaker for it that someone *actually recognises*But he requires only that truthmakers be recognisable – not that anyone actually takes cognisance of them’ (Van Cleve, 1999: p. 219).

In response the realist might say that the claim ‘if something is true we could have grounds for thinking that it is true’ would be acceptable to the realist if it were supposed to be *contingently* true, but, crucially, this is not the anti-realist position: the anti-realist rejects verification-transcendent reality *in principle*. The position is not that as a matter of contingent fact, there is nothing which is such that we could not have knowledge of it, but that, in principle, there could not be anything of which we could not have knowledge. It seems that an essential or necessary relation is asserted between something’s being true and our being able to have evidence for it. However, the anti-realist could respond that they have an explanation for the claim that if something is true we could have grounds for thinking that it is true, and this is their theory of meaning. Some think that, on the contrary, they have a theory of meaning which leads to idealism (Walker, 1995), but this dispute need not be resolved here: we are not concerned with the Dummettian anti-realist theory of meaning, and therefore are not concerned with the Dummettian anti-realist reasons for dismissing verification-transcendent reality. It is not necessary to decide whether Dummettian anti-realism is a form of idealism, because the point is simply that the idea of rejecting experience-transcendence can be a way of expressing a kind of mind-dependence, and this means that despite the differences between the two positions, the rejection of verification-transcendent reality is extremely useful in formulating Kant’s idealism about appearances.

The idea of rejecting experience-transcendence gives us a way of formulating a kind of mind-dependence that does not involve the mind-dependent items in question existing in the mind. For example, a possible view of colour is that it is a real but mind-dependent property of objects:

the point of calling colour 'real' is to stress that it is a property of objects, and not, for example, a property of mental states, despite the fact that it is a mind-dependent property of objects. Even if it is accepted that colour is a mind-dependent property of objects, it is notoriously difficult to spell out exactly what this mind-dependence comes to. We want to do justice to two features of colour: the first is that we think that there is a perfectly respectable sense in which grass is green whether anyone is looking at it or not, and that long before sentient creatures evolved on earth, earth was coloured. At the same time, there is a sense in which it is only in relation to perceivers like us that grass is green, and it is only because of the possibility of perceivers having perceived early states of the earth that it makes sense to say that it had colour. Of course, grass, and early states of the earth, have whatever mind-independent surface properties they have independently of the possibility of perceivers, but the (visual) colour of these properties is something which should only be attributed to grass and the earth from the point of view of perceivers like us. We want to say that grass remains green when no one is looking at it – it certainly does not change colour when no one is looking at it – so we do not want to say that greenness is a property whose *esse* is *percipi*. It is not that when we look at grass it *becomes* green. At the same time, its greenness does not exist apart from our possibly seeing it as green: the greenness of grass does not consist in anything other than the fact that, if creatures like us look at it, they see it as green – it appears green. If there was grass before there were sentient creatures, grass was green then too, because if sentient creatures like us *had* seen it, they *would* have seen it as green. The greenness of grass in visual experience, on this account, tells us nothing about the mind-independent properties of objects that are experienced as green, and cannot be attributed to objects, apart from their possible relation to visual experience. So we could say that green is not an experience-transcendent property: it is a property which exists only in the possible experiences of sentient creatures like us. The fact that green does not exist apart from possible experience means that it is mind-dependent; at the same time it is a property of objects, and not a property of mental items – it is not dependent on minds in the sense of actually existing in the mind, as thoughts do. This peculiar kind of mind-dependence, which involves a property that exists publicly (and is partly a result of the way things mind-independently are, so it is partly mind-independent), can be expressed by saying that green is not experience-transcendent. Note, our reasons for thinking that green is mind-dependent do not come from a theory of meaning; nevertheless, the rejection of experience-transcendence gives a way of formulating the mind-dependence of greenness.

Another example often discussed in this regard is fiction: it is said that we should reject bivalence for fiction because in fictional discourse there is nothing to make a statement about a particular character true or false

beyond the information given in the text, which underdetermines the facts; for example, there is no determinate number of hairs that Hamlet has on his head. Where we could not have evidence concerning a fictional statement there is simply no fact of the matter. Where there is no way of knowing something about Hamlet, there is no fact of the matter – there is no verification-transcendence with respect to Hamlet. Another example of things which do not transcend our possible knowledge and experience of them is artefacts, such as Fodor's doorknobs: there could not be facts about doorknobs (*qua* doorknobs) which we could not know (Fodor, 1998). Fodor explains this in terms of the claim that something's being a doorknob is a matter of how it strikes us, so while doorknobs do not exist in our minds, they exist, *qua* doorknobs, in relation to us and our minds. Not only does this show that mind-dependence need not mean existence in the mind, but we can see that mind-dependence does not apply only to *sensory* properties (traditional secondary qualities), such as colour, as shown by the examples of Hamlet and doorknobs.

The claim is that with respect to each of these areas of discourse, what there is and what we can have knowledge and experience of are not separate: Hamlet, green, and doorknobs do not exist apart from our possible knowledge and experience of them. In each of these cases the explanation of there being no experience-transcendence is not considerations concerning meaning or understanding, but rather the nature of the things involved. Despite this, the notion of verification-transcendence is still useful here, in expressing the mind-dependence of these properties. For the Dummettian anti-realist, the rejection of verification-transcendent truth, based on a theory of meaning, is the basis for asserting mind-dependence; on the contrary, in the above cases, the rejection of verification-transcendence is a description of a mind-dependent relation which is explained by consideration of the nature of the properties involved.

4.3

Despite the obvious differences between Kant's position and Dummett's, *part* of Dummett's position is useful for understanding *part* of Kant's: the Dummettian anti-realist rejection of verification-transcendence gives us a way of formulating the mind-dependence of appearances that is almost exactly Kant's – Kant says that appearances exist in the extent of possible experience and can exist in no other way. He thinks that what is empirically real, the appearances of things, does not extend beyond our possible experience and he expresses the mind-dependence of appearances in terms of the rejection of experience-transcendence. He says:

the objects of experience are **never** given **in themselves**, but only in experience, and they do not exist at all outside it. That there could be

inhabitants of the moon, even though no human being has ever perceived them, must of course be admitted; but this means only that in the possible progress of experience we could encounter them; for everything is actual that stands in one context with a perception in accordance with the laws of the empirical progression. *Thus they are real when they stand in an empirical connection with my real consciousness, although they are not therefore real in themselves, i.e., outside this progress of experience.*

Nothing is really given to us except perception and the empirical progress from this perception to other possible perceptions. . . . To call an appearance a real thing prior to perception means either that in the continuation of experience we must encounter such a perception, or it has no meaning at all.

(A492–3/B521, my italics)

Anti-realists can be understood as limiting the meaningfulness of propositions to the possibility of evidence; Kant the existence of appearances to our possible experience of them. His objection to the claims of transcendent metaphysics is that they use concepts for which no possible intuition can be given, so there are no knowable objects corresponding to them:

If a cognition is to have objective reality, i.e., to be related to an object, and is to have significance and sense in that object, the objects must be capable of being given in some way. . . . To give an object is nothing other than to relate its representation to experience (whether this be actual or still possible).

(A155–6/B194–5).

The extent of possible experience gives the extent of the (actual) empirically real world, the appearances of things.

Different accounts of anti-realism give different accounts of what counts as warrant, and who ‘we’ are, the details of which need not concern us here – Kant’s account of possible experience is given by his *a priori* categories and principles. Kant’s account of possible experience goes beyond what we can directly sense – he allows that magnetic force is empirically real, and would surely allow the same for electrons. The fact that Kant allows for the empirical reality of things which we cannot directly sense, which are too far away, or for which we do not have the appropriate perceptual apparatus, is an objection to seeing the mind-dependence of appearances in terms of Berkeleyan idealism or phenomenalism, but is compatible with seeing him as rejecting experience-transcendence for appearances. The crucial point, for Kant, is the way in which we are able to have experience of things which

are so small that we cannot see them: this always requires something that is directly given in perception (not, of course, the electrons), and a connection between this and the unseen entity via the categories and principles:

one can also cognize the existence of the thing prior to perception of it . . . if only it is connected with some perceptions in accordance with the principles of their empirical connection (the analogies). For in that case the existence of the thing is still connected with our perceptions in a possible experience, and with the guidance of the analogies we can get from our actual perceptions to the thing in a series of possible perceptions. Thus we cognize the existence of a magnetic material penetrating all bodies from the perception of attracted iron filings, although an immediate perception of this matter is impossible for us given the constitution of our organs. For in accordance with the laws of sensibility and the context of our perceptions we could also happen upon the immediate empirical intuition of it in an experience if our senses, the crudeness of which does not affect the form of possible experience in general, were finer. Thus wherever perception and whatever is appended to it in accordance with empirical laws reaches, there too reaches our cognition of the existence of things.

(A225–6/B273)

It might be thought that when Kant says that the crudeness of our senses does not affect the form of possible experience in general, he is giving up a strong connection between our actually experiencing something and its being empirically real. However, Kant says that if our senses were finer we would be able to see such things. The point could be put by saying that Kant is allowing an idealized extension of *receptivity*, something like Locke's microscopic eyes (Locke II.XXIII.12), but that he thinks that even idealized receptivity is still limited in only giving us knowledge of the appearances of things. Properties which could be directly perceived by an idealized receptivity, or creatures with finer senses than ours, can still be part of the extent of possible experience, for us, if they have causal implications for properties which we can directly perceive. We are able to have knowledge of things that extends beyond the crudeness of our receptivity because we can use the categories and principles to extend beyond what we directly perceive, and all such extensions count as part of the extent of possible experience. The conditions of the possibility of experience – space, time, the categories and principles – give Kant's version as what counts as a warranted extension of experience; however, crucially, possible experience always requires a connection

to something actually given in intuition, and without this connection to actual sensation there is nothing actual, and this is a denial of experience-transcendence. He says:

The postulate for cognizing the **actuality** of things requires **perception**, thus sensation of which one is conscious – not immediate perception of the object itself which is to be cognized, but still its connection with some actual perception in accordance with the analogies of experience, which exhibit all real connection in an experience in general.

(A225/B272)

That is actual which we do perceive, or which can be connected to what we do perceive using the categories and the principles. The appearances of things are what is empirically real, and the appearances of things exist in the extent of possible experience; since the appearances of things do not exist apart from the extent of possible experience, they are empirically real and transcendently ideal.

Kant's understanding of the way in which appearances exist is not the really radical part of his position: to say that appearance properties – such as colour on the above account – do not exist apart from possible experience is not radical, and a realist might agree that colour properties have this status. What makes Kant's position radical is his claim that *all* the properties of which we have experience are like colour in this respect. Nevertheless, the understanding of the mind-dependence of appearances in terms of the rejection of experience-transcendence with respect to them is important, and is an enormous step forward from the indirect realist accounts which see the mind-dependence of appearance properties in terms of existence in the mind.

4.4

The rejection of bivalence is important in both Dummettian anti-realism and Putnam's anti-realism, and it might be thought that in his solution to the antinomies Kant comes close to the rejection of bivalence, in that he denies, for example, both that the world is infinite in size and that it is finite in size. However, while Kant's rejection of both of a pair of contradictory opposites may look like the rejection of bivalence, Kant does not deny that these propositions are either true or false, but rather says that, for the mathematical antinomies both theses and antitheses are false (of the world of appearances), and for the dynamical antinomies both are true (one of the world of appearances and one of the world as it is in itself). There is no reason to think that Kant rejects bivalence generally, and in fact the reverse is more plausible:

The proposition, **Everything existing is thoroughly determined** signifies not only that of every **given** pair of opposed predicates, but also of every pair of **possible** predicates, one of them must always apply to it.

(B601)

Another difference here between Kant's position and Dummett's is that while Dummett holds that where we could not have grounds for assertion, neither of two contradictory statements is true, he also thinks that no statement could be recognized as determinately neither true nor false – in other words, we could not have a determinate example of bivalence failing (Dummett, 1978e: p. 35). Kant, on the other hand, has clearly identified a number of pairs of contradictory statements both of which he thinks are unknowable and not true of appearances.

However, despite this, there are still grounds for saying that Kant is making a move that is similar to the rejection of bivalence, with respect to appearances, and this is helpful in understanding his idealism. He does not allow a third truth value because he does not allow that the truth about things in themselves is not completely determinate, and because his primary concern is not with a theory of meaning or truth. However, he does reject the idea that both of two opposed claims could be true, and the way he makes sense of this is by claiming that there is not a determinate totality of facts with respect to appearances – there is no fact of the matter as to whether the world is finite or infinite in space and time. Since transcendental idealism is not a theory of meaning, he does not think that statements which transcend the conditions of the possibility of experience have no meaning or have a third truth value, but he does think that the appearances of things do not transcend our possible experience of them, and that where a truth claim transcends the conditions of possible experience, it is not true with respect to appearances.

Like anti-realists, Kant thinks that the totality of (empirically real) facts is not determinate. For Kant, the world of appearances is never complete because we could not have possible experience of it as such: the world as a whole is not a possible object of experience, and neither is a boundary of the world. He says that the world as a whole is an object that can never come before you and cannot be given in any possible experience (A483/B511), and that 'in the empirical regress there can be encountered **no experience of an absolute boundary**' (A517/B545).

Assume that nature were completely exposed to you; that nothing were hidden from your senses and the consciousness of everything laid before your intuition: even then you could not, through any experience, cognize *in concreto* the object of your ideas (for besides this complete intuition, a completed synthesis and the consciousness

of its absolute totality would be required, but that is not possible through any empirical cognition.

(A482–3/B510–11).

Similarly,

The absolute whole of magnitude (the world-whole) of division, of descent of the conditions of existence in general, together with all the questions about whether these are to come about through a finite or an endlessly continuing synthesis, has nothing to do with any possible experience.

(A483/B511)

Appearances require to be explained only insofar as their conditions of explanation are given in perception, but everything that can be given in it, taken together as an **absolute whole**, is not itself any perception. But it is really this whole for which an explanation is being demanded in the transcendental problems of reason.

(A483–4/B511–12)

The world as a whole is not an object of possible experience, neither is a boundary of the world, a simple component of matter, or an infinite number of parts of matter. The empirically real world does not exist apart from the extent of experience: what is not a possible object of experience is not empirically real, and is not part of the appearances of things. The world of which we have experience does not exist apart from our possible experience of it, and this means that claims which transcend possible experience cannot be true of the world of experience. The fact that the empirically real world does not exist as a determinate totality enables us to make sense of the claim that its extent in space and time is not determinate – and therefore neither infinite nor finite. The theses and antitheses of the antinomies presume that we have knowledge of the world in itself, which must be determinate in extent; however, the regress of possible experience is not determinate in extent, and since appearances do not exist apart from the regress, appearances are not determinate in extent: ‘the world is thus not an unconditioned whole, and thus does not exist as such a whole, either with infinite or with finite magnitude’ and ‘the multiplicity of parts in a given appearances is in itself neither finite nor infinite’ (A505/B533). Thus, understanding Kant’s idealism in terms of the rejection of experience-transcendence enables us to make sense of the mathematical antinomies.

Abela has recently argued that Kant’s empirical realism is not a form of anti-realism; he argues that there is no reason to think that Kant rejects bivalence, and that Kant allows the validity of statements the truth of which

will never be known (Abela, 2002:Ch. 4). I have argued that while Kant did not reject bivalence, he does do something similar with respect to the empirically real world, in his solution to the antinomies. I will now discuss Abela's other objection: that Kant allows as part of what is empirically real things which will never be known. For example, even if at the end of inquiry we will still have no conclusive evidence about what colours the dinosaurs were, this does not mean, for Kant, that there are no truths about what colours they were. This is certainly a further important difference between Kant and some Dummettian anti-realist positions. Kant says that we can allow that distant stars 'are there to be encountered in world-space even if no human being has ever perceived them *or ever will perceive them*' (A496/B524, my italics). Abela argues that the only version of anti-realism which can accommodate, for example, truths about the colour of dinosaurs, even if we will never have evidence for such truths, is one which appeals to a divine idealization of what could count as evidence for belief, and such a view, for Abela, 'effectively forfeits its assertion-condition credentials' (Abela, 2002: p. 243). Whether or not Abela is right that divine idealization 'is truth-condition realism in all but name' (p. 244) is not the issue here,²⁰ but rather, what implications this has for Kant.

Part of Abela's case involves pointing out the difference between Kant's position concerning appearances and an evidentially constrained theory of meaning – I certainly agree that Kant's position is not a theory of meaning. Abela is right to say that 'Kant's conception is in terms of "possible experience" rather than "use" – the conditions necessary for the possibility of determinate representation rather than Dummett's worry about the conditions necessary for learning' (Abela, 2002: p. 235). Similarly, Van Cleve argues that Kant does not have the semantic theory Posy attributes to him, and therefore is not an evidentialist. This shows that Kant's transcendental idealism is not a theory of meaning, something we have already seen to be a significant difference between Kant and Dummett's anti-realism, but it does not follow from this that the notion of rejecting experience-transcendence is not useful for understanding Kant's idealism. A Kantian can allow truths about the colour of the dinosaurs, even if we will never have sufficient evidence for them, because if we had seen the dinosaurs we would have seen them as coloured. The mind-independent properties of dinosaurs which would have been seen as coloured existed without us there to see them, but this does not mean that the *colour* of the dinosaurs is mind-independent. The (visual) colour which we would have seen them as having, had we been there to see them, has no existence apart from the fact that we could have seen it. Kant may have thought that we would not ever, in fact, go to the moon, and see whether there were any inhabitants there; nevertheless, he says that there being inhabitants of the moon is not separable from the fact that we could have experience of them.

Kant says that he is a transcendental idealist but an empirical realist with respect to the appearances of things, and both sides of this claim must be kept in mind when accounting for the appearances of things. As well as explaining the fact that the appearances of things are mind-dependent, we need to see the point of saying that they are empirically real. The parallel with Dummettian anti-realism is helpful here, in that it enables us to be realists with respect to appearances in a number of important respects – as noted in introducing Dummettian anti-realism, the rejection of verification-transcendence, or experience-transcendence, for a particular realm or kinds of entities, does not mean denying that the entities involved exist in the real, external world. Kant's idealism is very different both from the kinds of conceptual idealism associated with Wittgenstein and from the rejection of 'metaphysical realism' associated with Putnam. Kant does not reject the idea of theory-independent reality, he does not deny that there could be a uniquely correct theory of the world, it is not even clear that he rejects bivalence, even within appearances, and he does not have a pure coherence theory of truth. Kant's idealism is not based on a thought about concept application in general, and in fact, he thinks that if all concept application were based on empirical association (and there were no *a priori* concepts), we could not have knowledge of an objective world. I have argued that his idealism about appearances comes a lot closer to a kind of anti-realism associated with Dummett, although even here there are important differences. Kant's transcendental idealism is not a theory of meaning or truth, and Kant does believe in verification-transcendent reality. However, I argued that Kant's idealism about appearances could be expressed as the rejection of experience-transcendence for appearances, and in this respect the anti-realist rejection of verification-transcendence has given us a useful handle on Kant's idealism.

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Notes

- 1 See, for example, Hanna (1993), Kroon (2001), Moran (2000), Posy (1984, 1983), Putnam (1987, 1981), Walker (1983).
- 2 Ameriks (1982) roughly divides commentators into those who see Kant's distinction between things in themselves and appearances as between 'two worlds' and those who see it as being between 'two aspects'; not only is there no convergence in the literature as to which of these is correct, there is not even consensus within these groupings. To mention just a tiny, recent, sample, Langton (1998) has a 'one-world' interpretation, but still sees Kant's distinction as an ontological one (between different kinds of property), Collins (1999) rejects the two-world interpretation, and argues that Kant is not an idealist (he calls him a subjectivist), while Van Cleve (1999) argues for the two-world interpretation, and sees Kant as some kind of phenomenalist about the appearances of things.

- 3 See, for example, Matthews (1982); Matthews does not, himself, connect his interpretation with Wittgenstein.
- 4 I take it that this is at least part of the point of the Schematism. See Bell (1987) and Pendlebury (1995).
- 5 For detailed discussion see Longuenesse (1993: pp. 48–52).
- 6 See Goodman (1954: pp. 72–81), Walker (1989:115–18, 125–34), Wittgenstein (*RFM* VII-59).
- 7 Grue can be defined as follows: an object is grue iff it is green before time t and blue after time t , where t is some specified time in the future.
- 8 See Pears (1971: pp. 138–9), Hacker (1997: pp. 160, 164).
- 9 See Putnam (1983: pp. 177, 1981: pp. 52).
- 10 See Walker (1985).
- 11 ‘It was difficult to appreciate Kant’s insights into the nature and importance of preconceptual imagination prior to current intellectual trends which are connected with advances in cognitive studies, but . . . Kant was in fact a significant precursor of these developments’ (Pendlebury, 1996: p. 137).
- 12 See Abela (2002).
- 13 See Abela (2002), Collins (1999), Guyer (1987).
- 14 See Moran (2000) for a detailed analysis of differences and similarities between Putnam and Kant. See also Van Cleve (1999: pp. 212–17). See Long (1982) for the relation between Kant and American pragmatism.
- 15 See Hanna (1993), Posy (1984, 1983), Rogerson (1993), Stevenson (1983), Walker (1983).
- 16 See, for example, Dummett (1978c, 1978d, 1991, 1993a), Wright (1980, 1992, 1996).
- 17 P. F. Strawson sometimes formulates what he calls Kant’s principle of significance as a claim about meaning: ‘the principle that there can be no legitimate, or even meaningful, employment of ideas or concepts which does not relate them to empirical or experiential conditions of their application’ (Strawson, 1966: p. 16).
- 18 For a detailed, and to my mind convincing, argument that Dummettian anti-realism is a form of idealism, see Walker (1995).
- 19 See also Campbell, who argues that what matters for realism is how a statement could be true even though we could not tell that it is, and that everything depends on the *reason* why the modal claim is rejected (Campbell, 1994: p. 216).
- 20 A divine-idealization account of truth conditions might be *extensionally* the same as realism, but for very different reasons.

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