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Kantian Externalism from Riehl to Putnam

Abstract: In the first Critique, the object of cognition bears a double meaning, namely, appearance or something in itself. Kant limits our cognition to appearances only, leaving the thing in itself as something actual for itself but unknowable for us (B XX). I aim to understand these claims by analyzing Kant's references to the mind-independent reality, such as things-in-themselves, noumena, and transcendental objects, through Lehrer's definition of externalism. These references, I argue, have (a) a cognitive and/or (b) an ontological meaning, which the phenomenalist (e.g., Allison, Feder-Garve, Guyer, Van Cleve) and the non-phenomenalist (e.g., Strawson, Langton, Allais) readings, including Riehl's, fail to recognize. The (a)'s point of view implies one object and two aspects of it (e.g., phenomenon-noumenon), whose relation lies in the internal correspondence. The (b)'s point of view assumes two distinct objects (e.g., internal and external objects) and their causal relationship. Riehl corrects the assumption that the relations of sensations are not themselves sensed and thus argues (together with Kemp Smith) for an unrestricted version of Kantian externalism. He also proposes his version of realism, defending the existence and the knowability of things-in-themselves. Central to his proposal are the notions of (a) monad (Leibniz), which Riehl identifies with Kant's particulars, and (b) sensation, which allows for indirect knowledge of extramental things. Finally, I face the challenges of Putnam's internalism, which compares Kant's cognitive philosophy with the hypothesis of brains-in-a-vat. There, external correspondence or proper causation don't apply. Although the Kantian notion of truth departs from the classic correspondence and evolves into a coherentist account, Kant retains extramental input data (e.g., external references). Hence, I argue for indirect correspondence that could save a minimalist but irreducible version of Kantian externalism.

The Question

The question of Kantian externalism *prima facie* looks pointless. On the one hand, externalism lacks a clear definition. Instead, it labels a cluster of various

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theories that prioritize external elements for epistemic justification. On the other hand, Kant's scholars disagree on what externalism means (if anything) in his philosophy. For many of them, the first *Critique's* idealist framework can hardly yield realism at the empirical level. Their shared belief is quite the opposite. Abela perfectly describes the impasse. "Kantian appearances are mind-dependent in a way that effectively excludes empirical realism from being accepted as a genuine form of realism." (Abela 2000, p. 1). This belief is well-grounded for a variety of reasons. Two of them seem especially compelling.

First, Kant strictly limits our cognition to appearances. "The word "appearance" (Erscheinung) itself is usually enough to scare off even the most well-intentioned realist. Add to this the idea that space and time are mere forms of intuition, and the (apparently) constructivist character of Kant's account of synthesis, and the door seems firmly closed to any realism worthy of the designation." (Abela 2002: 1). Second, Kant¹ develops an account of truth based on internal coherence. He describes reason as a perfect unity (A XIII) that autonomously yields the principles of our cognition.

[The] pure speculative reason is, in respect of principles of cognition, a unity entirely separate and subsisting for itself, in which, as in an organized body, every part exists for the sake of all the others as all the others exist for its sake, and no principle can be taken with certainty in *one* relation unless it has at the same time been investigated in its *thoroughgoing* relation to the entire use of pure reason. (B XXIII)

Hence, the justification of cognition is an internal affair of our understanding. Kant clarifies that even sensibility has no external validity of any kind, including its forms of space and time (A 27/B 43). The bounds of sense are strictly normative. Sensibility is no condition of things, but only of their appearances. The sensible forms of our cognition (i.e., the spatiotemporal intuitions) have external ideality and only internal reality. The textual evidence is overwhelming (A 26–30/B 42–45; A 32–49/B 49–72).

If anyone can still doubt that Kant left no room for externalism, his conception of space and time will quickly resolve any dispute. Space and time are axiomatic sources for geometry and arithmetic (A 24/B 40–1; A 161/B 201–2). Kant's defense of internal coherentism cannot afford to exclude them. Roughly put, mathematics represents the reference model for apodictic and synthetic cognitions (e.g., the *a priori* knowledge), which Kant claims to be his final aim (B 19).

1 Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason* (Cambridge 1998). The A-edition appears in 1781, and the B-edition follows in 1787. The publisher of both the editions is Johann Friedrich Hartknoch (Riga).

Kant's solution is brilliant but antirealistic. He denies any absolute (and thus external) reality to space and time. In this way, space and time are neither self-subsisting entities (as Newton thought) nor entities inhering to things in themselves (e.g., relations among things, as Leibniz thought). On the contrary, Kant reduces them to internal forms of our sensible intuitions, which are entirely consistent with his internal coherentism (A 39–40/B 56–7).

Accordingly, space comprehends all things that may appear to us externally, but nothing in itself (*ibid.*). Space is real (and thus has objective validity) about everything that can come before us externally as an object, but concerning things when they are considered in themselves (i.e., dismissing our sensibility) space is only ideal (A 27–8/B 44). The same holds for time. If it's abstracted from our peculiar way of representing objects and turned to things in general, time is no longer objective (A34–5/B 51). Kant restricts the objective validity of time to appearances alone (e.g., the objects of our senses). The empirical reality of space and time strictly pertains to appearances and not things as they are in themselves, which consequentially remain unknown and their properties unknowable.

Is it already the end of the story? Perhaps, but Kant talks about external objects in a variety of ways. Most notable is his rejection of classic idealism in the *Aesthetic*. As Kant regards its general notion, idealism denies any strict proof of (a) the reality of outer objects, which are reduced to illusion. It exclusively grants (b) reality to the object of our inner sense (myself and my state) as immediately clear through consciousness. Kant counterargues that both (a) and (b) belong to appearance alone, which always has two sides, the object in itself and the object for us (A 38/B 55). His reasoning betrays a minimalist version of externalism, according to which every appearance performs a specific function from things in themselves to our mind. In a personal note added to the A-edition (1781), Kant claims, "The necessity of the relation of our propositions to something external is a proof of the real connection in which we stand with external things; against idealism." (A 24/B 38b = AK 23: 20). Another personal annotation clarifies, "Pure idealism concerns the existence of things outside us. Critical idealism leaves that undecided, and asserts only that the form of their intuition is merely in us." (A 29/B 44f. = AK 23: 23)

These notes, together with the changes in the B-edition, especially the *B-Deduction* (B 129–69) and the *Refutation of Idealism* (B 274–9), reveal Kant's ongoing distancing from any idealism after the criticism of the first readers, such as Garve (1782). Reduced to its essential, the *Refutation* argues that we must assume something persisting in all the changes of the same object. This thing is a theoretical entity that my mind postulates as an external reality to ascribe all alterations of

an object to that object. Otherwise, the different mental states of a single object would look like different objects, and the alteration itself would remain incomprehensible. The argument is perhaps weak and ultimately unconvincing but it nonetheless shows Kant's commitment to externalism, namely the existence of a thing in itself as the true correlate of appearance (A 30/B 45).

Some neo-Kantian readers (Fries, Beneke, Lange, Helmholtz, Herbart, Riehl, among others) proposed an empiricist, although heterogeneous, reading of the first *Critique*, which primarily relied on the B-edition. Recent scholars (Strawson, Langton, Allais, Abela) have similarly developed a realist-empiricist reading. They have adopted different strategies to defend an externalist account of Kant. All of them have tried to defend it, but none has attempted to emend it. Unlike them, Riehl believes that a defense of Kantian externalism must first disambiguate the notion of sensation, which Kant restricts to the content-matter of the object of our cognition. Riehl instead argues for an unrestricted version of affection that includes the specific content-form of the cognitive object.

The relations of sensations, their determined coexistence and sequence, impress consciousness, just as do the sensations. ... In these respects, there is no difference between the matter and the form of appearance. (Riehl 1879, p. 78)

Roughly put, Riehl argues that sensations deriving from things-in-themselves introduce irreducible particulars into our mind as the correlate of intuitions. These individualities afterward go through mental conceptualization that results in our cognition. However, Riehl objects that a bunch of scattered particulars provides no knowledge unless an individual intuition also grasps their unifying relationship.

Nevertheless, the first *Critique's* B-edition doesn't solve but rather opens the dispute over Kantian externalism. In the *B-Preface*, Kant states the question with these claims, "the object [of cognition] should be taken in a *twofold meaning*, namely as appearance or as thing in itself" (B XXVII). Moreover, our "cognition reaches appearances only, leaving the thing in itself as something actual for itself but uncognized by us." (B XX) As Kemp Smith comments, "If the *a priori* concepts have a mental origin, they can have no validity for the independently real." (Kemp Smith 2003, p. 19). The supersensible remains uncognizable. However, it must be somehow admitted as something actual, "otherwise there would follow the absurd proposition that there is an appearance without anything that appears" (B XXVI). Things-in-themselves must at least be thinkable.²

² For some readers, such as Riehl and Kemp Smith (among others), the reason for this ambiguity lies within Kant's moral motivations. To save religious faith, he postulated a noumenal realm

In what follows, I aim to understand these claims. First, I clarify the expression “externalism” and explain why the Kantian version falls within Lehrer’s definition (I). Second, I analyze Kant’s references to the mind-independent reality (i.e., things-in-themselves, noumena, and transcendental objects), which he employs throughout his transcendental idealism (II). These references have a (a) cognitive and/or (b) an ontological meaning, which the phenomenalist (e.g., Allison, Feder-Garve, Guyer, Van Cleve) and the non-phenomenalist (e.g., Strawson, Langton, Allais) readings, including Riehl’s, fail to recognize. The (a)’s point of view implies one object and two aspects of it (e.g., phenomenon-noumenon), whose relation lies in the internal correspondence. The (b)’s point of view assumes two distinct objects (e.g., internal and external objects) and their causal relationship (III). Then, I turn to Riehl’s criticism, which corrects the assumption that the relations of sensations are not themselves sensed and thus argues (together with Kemp Smith) for an unrestricted version of Kantian externalism (IV). Riehl also proposes his version of realism, defending the existence and the knowability of the things-in-themselves. Central to his proposal are the notions of monad (Leibniz) and sensation (Kant). Riehl identifies monads with Kant’s particulars (i.e., individual empirical intuitions) and analyzes their sensations to derive knowledge of extramental things (V). Finally, I face the challenges of Putnam’s internalism, which compares Kant’s cognitive philosophy with the hypothesis of brains-in-a-vat. There, external correspondence or proper causation don’t apply (VI). Although the Kantian notion of truth departs from the classic correspondence and evolves into a coherentist account, Kant retains extramental input data (i.e., external references). Hence, I argue for indirect correspondence that could save a minimalist but irreducible version of Kantian externalism (VII).

Before I start, two brief premises are necessary. First, with the expression *Kantian externalism*, I don’t mean that Kant’s first *Critique* represents an instance of epistemic externalism. That would be a mistake. Quite the contrary, Kant’s coherentism offers perhaps the first valid alternative to the theory of truth as correspondence since Aristotle (Putnam 1981, p. 56). Nevertheless, his internalism harbors, so I argue, a minimalist version of externalism. This latter alone is at issue here. Coherentism and correspondence might not be at odds in Kant. After all, even a brain-in-a-vat has inputs. Second, externalism exclusively pertains to empirical cognition. Since parts of the first *Critique* are about mathematical know-

completely distinct from phenomena. Although this reading is consistent with Kant’s arguments, I believe it’s ultimately misleading. Kant’s most reliable motivations are cognitive. Sharing them doesn’t necessarily imply religious views.

ledge, which is strictly constructivist and thus internalist, externalism doesn't entirely concern the Kantian notion of cognition.

1 Two Shades of Externalism

Throughout this paper, I restrict *externalism and internalism* to justification alone. Hence, I exclude other relevant contexts, such as moral motivation, reasons, mental content, and semantics. Further, I assume *knowledge as justified true belief* and suspend Gettier-like cases. As one restricts the question to justification alone, the knowledge of x implies that one is justified to believe the propositional content of that knowledge (i.e., x). However, what does justify my (true) belief? My belief relies on some justification (justified thing). All of the justified things form my *knowledge base*. The epistemic status of my beliefs depends on it. How do I form such a knowledge base?

Epistemologists answer this question by placing all the justifying elements into two groups: the internal and external sources of justification. We can, therefore, analyze the concept of epistemic justification *internally* or *externally*. The externalist argues that somehow all reliable sources of knowledge are external. The internalist counterargues that all of them are rather internal. “The internalist,” explains Chisholm,

“assumes that merely reflecting upon his own conscious state, he can formulate a set of epistemic principles that will enable him to find out, with respect to any possible belief he has, whether he is *justified* in having that belief.” (Chisholm 1989, p. 76)

The externalist might well accept the internalist perspective, but she would further it. For example, although it can very well be the case that P is true, a fortune-teller who exclusively relies on tarots,³ has, strictly speaking, no knowledge of P .

³ A fortune-teller believes the tarot cards because they always predicted future events successfully. However, is she justified in believing that these events are also the case? Externalists would contend so. Internalists would disagree. The foreteller fails to have access to the reasons that justify her belief. Why are the tarots reliable? She has no evidence (justification) for it. The act of justifying (accessing the reasons) is missing. A belief is justified through a justifying act, which is unavailable to the tarot-reader. Imagine that the tarots say, “Franz is a murderer” (P). Our foreteller has (a) *the propositional justification* for believing P , i.e., the cards are her reason. Nevertheless, she lacks (b) *the doxastic justification* for P , namely relevant reasons for a proper justification.

(a) If you have any reason(s) to believe *P*, you are *propositionally* justified in believing *P*.

Therefore, you have a *justified belief*.

(b) If you have relevant reason(s) to believe *P*, you are *doxastically* justified in believing *P*.

Therefore, you have a *justifiable belief*.

The (a) case includes the (b) case since, among all reasons, are the relevant or intrinsic ones. *P* is, therefore, *propositionally justified* for both (a) and (b). But it's *doxastically justified (well-founded)* only for (b). Internalists accept only doxastic justification, according to which the believing itself is coherently (i.e., intrinsically) justified, whereas externalists have no such restriction.

Some externalists accept a justification only if it prevents beliefs from being *accidentally* true. For them, justification is *truth-conducive*. The access to your (internal) *knowledge base* doesn't prevent a belief justified on that base from being accidentally true. Two definitions of externalism follow. Here is Chisholm's version of them.

S is externally justified in believing *p*

(A) if the process by means of which *S* was led to believe *p* is reliable (Reliability Definition)

(B) if *S* believes *p*; and *p*'s being true is *the cause* of *S*'s believing *p* (Causation Definition)⁴

Objections to (A) and (B), including their replies, are not my current purpose.⁵ Reliability and causation, in the broader sense of Chisholm, are, on the contrary, central to the notion of Kantian externalism that I examine here. As Lehrer remarks, externalism represents a very plausible sort of account of perceptual knowledge. The history of my belief could certainly be “a matter of external causation, rather than coherence with some internal system, that yields knowledge” (Lehrer 2000, p. 177). Throughout the paper, I hold that Kantian externalism (whatever it means) fits within Lehrer's definition of externalism, as stated below.

⁴ Chisholm further identifies two kinds of causation. “The locution, ‘A causes B,’ may be taken in two quite different ways – (1) as telling us that A is *the cause* of B or (2) as telling us that A *contributes causally* to B (that A is one of the *causal factors* that lead to B).” (Chisholm 1989, p. 82).

⁵ See Goldman 1967, Putnam 1982, Chisholm 1989; Cruz/Pollock 1999, Williamson 2000, Lehrer 2000.

The central tenet of externalism is that some relationship to the external world accounting for the truth of our belief suffices to convert true belief to knowledge without our having any idea of that relationship. It is not our conception of how we are related to a fact that yields knowledge but simply our being so related to it. (Lehrer 2000, p. 177)

There are two shades of externalism. The paler shade contends that at least one element of justification is external. The brighter shade maintains that the external element(s) is(are) the most relevant. Disagreements about Kant concern precisely the relevance of externalist elements in his cognitive philosophy, which Riehl has furthered beyond Kant's restrictions. The paler shade of externalism characterizes Kant's cognitive perspective, recognizing one object of cognition and two aspects of it. The brighter shade suits better his metaphysical perspective, which assumes two kinds of things, namely the mind-dependent and the mind-independent reality.

2 Kantian Externalism

We have a human reading of reality, which we like to take for reality itself. Other readings are certainly possible, but not available to us. Kant even suggests that whoever looks like us mirrors our reading, precisely as we reflect hers. Our reading represents our reality. We publicly believe and share it. We can also justify our beliefs, which we often doubt and correct according to a better theory or a fairer morality. What's so troublesome about this story? Our reading is obviously *ours*. It represents reality for us, not for itself.

Nevertheless, this conclusion puzzles readers because Kant defends it in the A-edition of the first *Critique* (1781). Roughly put, his defense argues that (a) during the experience, something affects our senses and thus appears in our sensation; (b) the objects of our experience are, accordingly, *appearances*; (c) beyond the boundaries of our sensible experience we suppose unknowable *things in themselves*; (d) we can, therefore, cognize mind-dependent objects alone, namely objects for us; (e) however, we can think of things as they are in themselves in terms of *noumena*. Further, space and time are *a priori* forms of our sensible intuitions,⁶ which impose spatiotemporal (i.e., structural) properties on the objects of

⁶ Notice that space and time are not only forms of sensible intuitions, but also representations of an infinite magnitude (see A 25/B 40 and A 32/B 48).

our cognition. These claims support Kant's cognitive view, also known as "transcendental idealism" (hereafter, TI). Here is an accurate definition of it.⁷

I understand by the transcendental idealism of all appearances the doctrine that they are all together to be regarded as mere representations and not as things in themselves, and accordingly that space and time are only sensible forms of our intuition, but not determinations given for themselves or conditions of objects as things in themselves. (A 369)

The question of Kantian externalism pertains to the distinction and relationship between appearances (*Erscheinungen*) and things in themselves (*Dinge an sich selbst*), which characterizes TI. How should we understand this latter then?

First, TI opposes to *transcendental realism*, which "regards space and time as something given in themselves (independent of our sensibility)" (A 369). This latter represents outer appearances as things in themselves. It mistakenly concedes reality (i.e., existence) to mind-independent things. Second, TI also differs from *empirical idealism* (hereafter, EI), which assumes the internal reality of space and time but rejects (see Berkeley's dogmatic EI) or, at least, doubts (see Descartes's problematic EI) the existence of mind-independent objects. EI holds that we can immediately (i.e., non-inferentially) derive the real existence of objects in themselves from their temporal appearances in us (A 491/B 519). However, as Stang warns us, "Since the inference from a known effect to an unknown cause is always uncertain, the empirical idealist concludes we cannot know that objects exist outside us in space." (Stang 2018).

TI and EI are close views, especially Berkeley's version of it (see Harper 1992). Kant misreads Berkeley's idealism and never clearly distinguishes his TI from it (see *Prolegomena*, AK 4: 289). TI and EI entail a non-inferential and certain knowledge of objects in us. However, unlike Descartes's EI, Kant's TI also grants external (i.e., mind-independent) objects existence, and only denies their knowledge. TI, therefore, endorses a dualist account of existence.

However, why is Kant so reluctant to mention externality explicitly? He acknowledges the notion, but he might be thinking of an unprecedented variation of it, for which he struggles to find words. With the expression "external objects", Kant means internal representations of objects that our mind starts building from outer sense data (i.e., inputs). The data our mind perceives are already

⁷ A similar definition also occurs later in the *Critique*. "We have sufficiently proved in the Transcendental Aesthetic that everything intuited in space or in time, hence all objects of an experience possible for us, are nothing but appearances, i.e., mere representations, which, as they are represented, as extended beings or series of alterations, have outside our thoughts no existence grounded in itself. This doctrine I call transcendental idealism." (A 491/B 519).

internal; namely, they are sensations. Strictly speaking, there are no external objects. The sensation internalizes mind-independent things (i.e., things in themselves) as the matter of the object of our cognition; however, this matter

is only a species of representations (intuition), which are called external, not as if they related to objects that are external in themselves but because they relate perceptions to space, where all things are external to one another, but that space itself is in us. (A 370)

As Kant clarifies,

external objects (bodies) are merely appearances, hence also nothing other than a species of my representations, whose objects are something only through these representations, but are nothing separated from them. (A 370)

Therefore, the same inference that captures “the reality of external objects” also grasps “the reality of the objects of my inner sense (my thoughts)” (A371). Why? Because it ultimately refers to one and the same reality, “for in both cases they [i.e., the two kinds of objects] are nothing but representations, the immediate perception (consciousness) of which is at the same time a sufficient proof of their reality.” (A 371). Hence, TI differs from EI.

As far as TI acknowledges the reality of things in themselves, it resembles empirical realism. Unlike this latter, though, EI cannot establish what kind of reality is here at issue. It is, for instance, not the case that things in themselves have empirical existence.

... even with our best consciousness of our representation of these things, it is obviously far from certain that if the representation exists, then the object corresponding to it would also exist; but in our system, on the contrary, these external things – namely, matter in all its forms and alterations – are nothing but mere representations, i.e., representations in us, of whose reality we are immediately conscious. (A 371–72)

This passage also makes clear that no correspondence holds between appearances and things in themselves. A correspondence could justify an inference from effect to cause. From appearances that were effected in us by their outer objects, we could wrongly derive things in themselves outside of us as legitimate causes. However, the relation cause-effect requires similarity, which is missing here. For Kant, causation (i.e., the second category of relation, causality and dependency; see A80/B106) works internally but not externally, namely among appearances

alone. Hence, things in themselves cannot, strictly speaking, be the cause of appearances.⁸

Now one can indeed admit that something that may be outside us in the transcendental sense is the cause of our outer intuitions, but this is not the object we understand by the representation of matter and corporeal things; for these are merely appearances, i.e., mere modes of representation, which are always found only in us, and their reality, just as much as that of my own thoughts, rests on immediate consciousness. (A 372)

If we understand things in themselves as a transcendental object (see A 191/B 236), we must admit that the latter is as unknown as the former. However, like a thing in itself, a transcendental object is at least conceivable. Kant warns us to avoid mischaracterizing it as external, namely as an object found first in space and then in time. Space and time are, so to speak, only in us. Nevertheless, “the expression *outside us* carries with it an unavoidable ambiguity” (A 373). It can mean “something that, *as a thing in itself*, exists distinct from us” and “something that belongs to outer *appearance*” (Ibid). TI denies the existence of the former (i.e., empirically external objects), but allows the latter (i.e., external objects in the transcendental sense).

How should we correctly understand a transcendental object (hereafter, TO)? The notion of TO appears amidst two versions of the internalist-externalist dualism that characterizes TI. We can look at this cognitive dualism from two perspectives. For our sensibility, *appearances* (i.e., things in/for me) contrapose *things in themselves*. For our understanding, *phenomena* imply *noumena*. The sensible perspective also carries metaphysical connotations and better answers the question of externalism. The notion of TO lies in between the notions of thing in itself and noumenon, but all three notions represent perspective variations on the same subject, namely externality.

Appearances, to the extent that as objects they are thought in accordance with the unity of the categories, are called *phaenomena*. If, however, I suppose there to be things that are merely objects of the understanding and that, nevertheless, can be given to an intuition, although not to sensible intuition (as *coram intuitu intellectuali*), then such things would be called *noumena (intelligibilia)*. (A 249)

⁸ This view represents a pre-critical argument. In *Dissertation* (1770), Kant holds that things-in-themselves have a causal relation to our senses. This causality belongs in their (not our) nature and thus qualifies their form as intelligible or cognizable (AK 2, p. 398; AK 2, p. 406–10). We can cognize intelligible beings through their causal relationship with our senses.

For Kant, appearance means “something that appears”. That which appears is knowable only as a thing in/for us but not in itself. Unknowable “things in themselves” is, at least, a conceivable notion. Kant calls this notion *noumenon* and contraposes it to the *phenomenon*.

For if the senses merely represent something to us *as it appears*, then this something must also be in itself a thing, and an object of a non-sensible intuition, i.e., of the understanding, i.e., a cognition must be possible in which no sensibility is encountered, and which alone has absolutely objective reality, through which, namely, objects are represented to us *as they are*, in contrast to the empirical use of our understanding, in which things are only cognized *as they appear*. (A 249–250)

A non-sensible intuition (i.e., an intuition in general) guarantees no cognition. According to TI, a noumenon is, therefore, only thinkable. Nevertheless, the notion of it has objective reality since it refers *a priori* to something that affects our senses. Kant holds that everything that pertains to the possible construction of an object of cognition has objective reality, noumena included. Hence, noumena characterize the negative aspect of the object of cognition, whereas phenomena represent the positive aspect. The object of cognition invariably presents these two aspects.

For our understanding, the noumenon is a TO (see A 358). A transcendent object is an object without intuition; we can perhaps think of it, but any cognition of it would be a misconception (i.e., a dialectical illusion). Whereas a TO is an object whose intuition is empty, our thought of it lacks cognition but entails no misconception (see A 257/B 304).⁹ Here is a definition of TO.¹⁰

All our representations are in fact related to some object through the understanding, and, since appearances are nothing but representations, the understanding thus relates them to a *something*, as the object of sensible intuition: but this something is to that extent only the transcendental object. This signifies, however a something = *X*, of which we know nothing at all nor can know anything in general (in accordance with the current constitution of our understanding), but is rather something that can serve only as a correlate of the unity of apperception for the unity of the manifold in sensible intuition, by means of which the understanding unifies that in the concept of an object. (A 250–51)

⁹ As Kant states, “Thinking is the action of relating given intuitions to an object. If the manner of this intuition is not given in any way, then the object is merely transcendental, and the concept of the understanding has none other than a transcendental use, namely the unity of thought of a manifold in general.” (A 257/B 304)

¹⁰ In the B-edition, Kant replaces A 249–53 with B 306–09. My next two paragraphs refer to the A-edition only.

The TO is “no object of cognition in itself, but only the representation of appearances under the concept of an object in general, which is determinable through the manifold of those appearances” (A 251). Hence, Kant defines TO as “the concept of something in general” (Ibid). The TO is, therefore, the mental representation of an external object (in a non-Kantian sense) before this object is given to us through sensations (and thought by us through concepts). As I said earlier, in order to think of things in themselves as noumena, we must first think of them as TO. “Now from this [TO] arises the concept of a *noumenon*, which, however, is not at all positive and does not signify a determinate cognition of any sort of thing, but rather only the thinking of something in general” (A 252). Kant here implies that the TO is precisely the object thought in the noumenon.

In TI, the notion of TO thus covers the *formal* materiality of our sensations. Roughly put, in the *Aesthetic*, Kant attributes the matter (given *a posteriori*) of sensation to the external object and its form (available in us *a priori*) to the subject (A 20/B 34). In the *Appendix of Phenomena and Noumena*, he wants to consider the notion of matter itself. The TO “might be the ground of this appearance that we call matter” (A 277/B 333), which Kant defines as *substantia phaenomenon* (i.e., phenomenal substance), and thus be “the cause of appearance (thus not itself appearance)” (A 288/B 344).

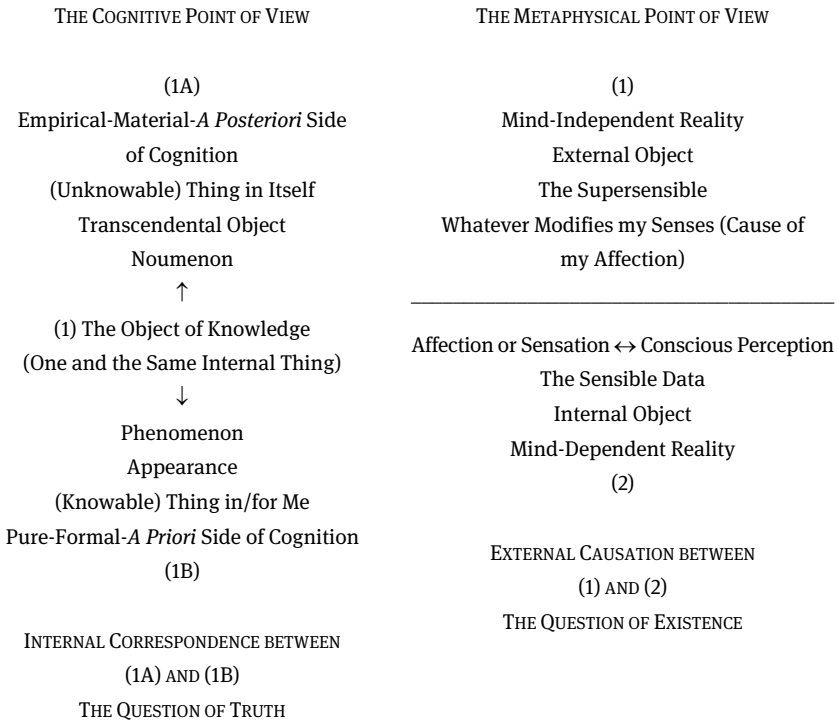
This notion of internal materiality is another reference to externality. With it, we have exhausted the description of the elements of Kantian externalism. Through the analysis of TI, we have established that the question of Kantian externalism pertains to (a) the relationship of appearances and things in themselves. Between the two lies (b) no correspondence or (c) proper causal relation. Further, Kant refers to a thing in itself as (d) TO (i.e., non-empirical external objects) or (e) noumena (i.e., the unknowable correlate of phenomena).

3 External and Internal Objects

If we identify appearances with things in themselves, we cannot distinguish between phenomena and noumena (as Kant, on the contrary, does). Nevertheless, if we separate appearances from things in themselves, we cannot have empirical cognitions (but Kant claims we do). The relationship between external and internal objects seems to be an extraordinarily difficult task for Kant’s cognitive philosophy.

A straightforward question might capture the entire issue: *How many things are there, one or two?* The answer depends on whether one assumes the knowledge first or the metaphysics first perspective. There is one and the same thing for our cognition, but two aspects of it (one knowable and another

unknowable). This cognitive dualism takes various forms (see the table below). The same object of cognition can be conceived as it is for me or supposed as it is in itself. Every phenomenon corresponds to a noumenon. All appearance and TO correlate. Whereas if we ontologically classify what is there, we can identify two kinds of things. One is whatever modifies my senses as the cause of my affection, i.e., the external object; the other is my perception of this affection, i.e., the internal object of experience. Otherwise, how could the passive sensation of something also be its active cause?



For Kant, the cognitive perspective justifies the metaphysical point of view, which follows consequentially. Nevertheless, the latter describes how things originally stand. This metaphysical view is internal to the cognitive perspective. The overlook of this interconnection leads to mistakes. I believe Allison (2004) holds a similar view. He says, “the claim is not that things transcending the conditions of human cognition cannot exist (this would make these conditions onto-

logical rather than epistemic) but merely that such things cannot count as objects for us” (p. 12). Our cognitive conditions establish only the boundaries of objectivity but implicitly assume ontological commitments.

Imagine someone throwing something into the calm lake water. The impact generates waves. For Kant, our sensibility behaves like water. It’s one (spatiotemporal) dimension sensitive to internal modifications (i.e., the waves), namely affections. Affections bring (spatiotemporal) data, namely sensations. Our awareness of data results in a corresponding perception, which our understanding further elaborates into a cognition. As Kant seems to suggest (A 249–250), we can move backward from our final cognition to the original state of affairs about the reality that has produced it, and thus legitimately think beyond the bounds of our sense (see B 166n.).

Phenomenalist readings of Kant’s first *Critique* favor the cognitive perspective and undermine the metaphysical. They all accept that TI’s arguments represent Kant’s account accurately. Some of them (e.g., Feder-Garve 1782, Guyer 1987, Van Cleve 1999, and others), though, use this conclusion to repudiate Kant, partially or entirely. Guyer, for example, finds only the *Analogies of Experience* and the *Refutation of Idealism* worth preserving in the first *Critique*. Others reject any separability thesis and believe that, for better or worse, Kant’s main claims and TI stand or fall together (Allison 2004). On the contrary, non-phenomenalist readings (e.g., Langton 1998, Abela 2002, Allais 2015, among others) sort out these claims to save Kant from his mistakes. They follow the influential criticism of Strawson (1966) and prioritize the elements of “empirical realism” (hereafter, ER), which surface throughout the first *Critique*. Strawson detaches “the analytical argument” (i.e., Kant’s internalist or scientific metaphysics), and thus saves “the principle of significance” (i.e., the meaningful relation of concepts to the experiential conditions of their application) from the psychological workings of our cognitive capacities (i.e., the mind-made nature and its unknowability). Hence, the non-phenomenalist perspective is primarily metaphysical. This “two-world view”, as Allison calls it, assumes the supersensible as corresponding to the sensible.

Reduced to its essential, the dispute pertains to two postulates of Kant’s TI, namely (a) the existence of things in themselves and their appearances in us, entailing a (likely causal) relationship between the two, and (b) the unknowable reality of things as they are in themselves, which also restricts our knowledge to appearances alone. These postulates qualify TI as *phenomenalism*, which has always been highly unpopular even among Kant’s most sympathetic readers. TI’s claims of knowledge seem utterly inconsistent with its cognitive weakness (see

Prichard 1909, p. 71–100), and even incoherent with one another (see Guyer 1987, p. 334–36; Allais 2015, p. 37).

Much of this discussion depends on what *phenomenalism* means. Allais exclusively considers Berkeley's version of it, which she dissociates from Kant's TI. (a) Kantian appearances imply the existence of the thing that appears, whereas Berkeley's ideas don't. As he argues, "because I can't possibly see or feel a thing without having an actual sensation of it, I also can't possibly conceive of a perceptible thing distinct from the sensation or perception of it." (Berkeley 1710, Section 5). From this primary reason, Allais derives the others, such as (b) the distinction between primary and secondary qualities, (c) the publicity of empirical objects, (d) the postulate of abstract entities for the sake of empirical explanations, and (e) *Analogies*'s claims about the unperceived existence and causal relationship of empirical objects. Less compelling are the last two of them: (f) the uncognizability of mental states as they are in themselves, and (g) Kant's self-distancing from Berkeley (see Allais 2015, p. 37–56). However, not all phenomenologists look at Berkeley. Allais deems contradictory textual evidence as "simply inconsistent" (p. 37).

As I see this issue, inconsistencies among parts of the first *Critique* are primarily due to perspective shifts, rather than contradictions. Allison's "two-aspects view" and "two-objects view" could perhaps be complementary. Despite irreconcilable differences between the *Aesthetic* and other parts of the first *Critique*, the notion of TO (as described above) is consistent with Kant's initial definition of appearance. According to the latter, before anything appears, an appearance in general is "the undetermined object of an empirical intuition" (A 20/B 34). Non-phenomenologists, on the contrary, use this and other similar passages to dismiss TI and replace it with an alternative reading centered on ER. If I am correct, though, we could read the undeniable instances of empirical realism as internal and not alternative to TI. Consider, for instance, the empirical and the transcendental sense of "outer". In the first case, "outer" refers to something outside us and describes this thing as a mind-independent object, which is therefore *external*. In the second case, "outer" refers to our sign of something outside of us and describes it as a mind-dependent object, which is therefore *internal*. The two senses of "outer" are consistent, and so are TI and ER.¹¹ As Putnam argues below,

¹¹ It is indeed not the case that appearances and mental representations float in our mind as separate entities. Everything in our mind is a mental representation. However, we can classify mental representations according to multiple criteria. A category without an empirical intuition or an intuition without sensation is, for instance, a mental representation of a certain kind, namely pure and *a priori*. How do they differ from the mental representation of something

the very possibility of being a brain-in-a-vat requires a point of view outside the vat; namely, someone from outside who can tell me that I'm trapped inside the vat. The internal cognition of my situation would thus commit to external reality. However, what if nobody is out there? My internal cognitive perspective would then presuppose an externality that, nevertheless, it cannot properly know.

Kant's reply to Eberhard's criticism in *Discovery* (1790), for instance, could derive from a metaphysical perspective, which doesn't necessarily conflict with other passages, such as those in the first *Critique* (especially the A-edition, 1781), that assume the cognitive point of view.

"Who (what) gives sensibility its matter, namely sensations?" ... Now that, of course, is the constant contention of the *Critique*; save that it posits this *ground* of the matter of sensory representations not once again in things, as objects of the senses, but in something supersensible, which grounds the latter, and of which we can have no cognition. It says that the objects as things-in-themselves *give* the matter to empirical intuitions ..., but they *are* not the matter thereof. (Kant, *Discovery*, AK 8: 215)

After the A-Edition of the first *Critique*, nevertheless, Kant's view shifts towards the metaphysical dualism that characterizes his ER (see *Prolegomena*, 1783). The same shift motivates the changes he introduces in the B-edition (1787).

There are things given to us as objects of our senses existing outside us, yet we know nothing of them as they may be in themselves, but are acquainted only with their appearances, i.e., with the representations that they produce in us because they affect our senses. Accordingly, I by all means avow that there are bodies outside us, i.e., things which, though completely unknown to us as to what they may be in themselves, we know through the representations which their influence on our sensibility provides for us, and to which we give the name of a body – which word therefore merely signifies the appearance of this object that is unknown to us but is nonetheless real. (*Prolegomena*, AK 4: 289)

Langton's deflationary proposal of TI relies on this metaphysical change of perspective. She builds on Strawson's suggestion that cognitive humility comes from receptivity. Our cognition depends on being affected by the objects cognized.

empirical, such as glass? Is a glass a kind of object? To some extent, a "glass" is not a "kind of object" because "kind of objects" and "glass" have no metaphysical correspondence or similarity. This is the case if we take the first as an abstract concept and the second as a concrete object. To some other extent, "a glass," though, is a "kind of object" because "kind of object" is the designate classifier for anything like "glass." Why this ambiguity then? One uncharitable answer could be that Kant carelessly switches perspective. However, a charitable answer could be that he doesn't find it essential to remind us of the different perspectives in every single argument of the first *Critique*.

However, she also recognizes an anti-Leibnizian instance of Kant. The relational properties of substances (i.e., things in themselves), which we grasp in their phenomena, don't supervene on (i.e., are not reducible to) the intrinsic properties of substances. They instead remain independent and thus uncognizable for us. The causal powers things have on our sense bar our access to their intrinsic knowledge. If Langton is correct, though, Kant implicitly equals things in themselves to Leibniz's monads and their intrinsic properties, which isn't too humble as a view (as Allison remarks, 2004, p. 10), but a fascinating one.

Whatever things in themselves are, sensations relate to them. Our received data depend on their existence. Kant repeatedly claims that our representations alone do not ground the existence of their objects. As he puts it, "representation in itself does not produce its objects in so far as existence is concerned" (A 92/B 125). In a 1792 letter to J. S. Beck, Kant dismisses the Feder-Garve interpretation with one line, "I speak of ideality in respect of the form of representation, while they construe it as ideality in respect of the matter, i.e., ideality of the object and its existence." (AK 11: 395).

[Therefore,] this postulation [i.e., the existence of external things] is deemed necessary to explain how the mind acquires its representations, or at least the materials for them (their form being "imposed" by the mind itself). The basic assumption is simply that the mind can acquire these materials only as a result of being "affected" by things in themselves. Thus, such things must be assumed to exist, even though the theory denies that we have the right to say anything about them, including the claims that they exist and affect us. (Allison 2004, p. 5)

This cognitive relationship between mind-dependent and mind-independent things implies some internal presence of external things. Their presence reveals itself in our affections, the material part of the object of our cognition. This mental content seems a suitable place where we can lay the foundations of Kantian externalism. Whatever belongs in the material content refers to external objects (i.e., things in themselves). Strawson's principle of significance shows that Kant commits to a certain kind of mental-content externalism, "and therefore to the realist view that the objects involved in experience and empirical knowledge are mind-independent particulars." (Mueller 2011, p. 449). The bounds of sense constrain us to experiencing only spatiotemporally structured entities. Nevertheless, within these bounds, each modification results from the affections of extra-mental things, which impose their reality upon us through these affections. Hence, our sensible receptivity grants us cognitive access to extra-mental reality, which Kant understands in terms of particulars (i.e., individualities immediately given in intuition).

The identification of sense impressions with concrete particulars is a precise instance of realism (see Sellars 1968, p. 172). Only the cognitive reference to extra-mental particulars can allow us to order our mental contents according to the difference and sameness that characterize their relations. A sort of indirect correspondence, therefore, connects the internal and the external object.

Differences in cognitive content, according to Kant, can be retraced to possible differences in the subject matter of judgment, and differences in subject matter require ultimately differences in intuition-based or referential relations established by demonstrative or other indexical means that involve sensations. The latter, in turn, only occur as a consequence of contacts between cognizers and extra-mental environs, so that differences in subject matter ultimately require cognitive contact via sensations to extra-mental particulars. (Mueller 2011, p. 453)

All differences in the cognitive content of our judgments ultimately depend on the differences in referential relations that our mental representations entertain with extra-mental particulars¹² (see Rowlands/Lau/Deutsch 2020). It follows that (a) these particulars must not only exist but also be mind-independent; (b) appearances are composite entities consisting of mental and extra-mental elements. Kantian externalism relies on these two consequences.

In conclusion, the Kantian references to externality have (a) a cognitive and/or (b) an ontological meaning. This twofold perspective smooths the inconsistencies between parts of the first *Critique*, as discussed by phenomenalist (Alison, Feder-Garve, Guyer, Mueller, Van Cleve) and realist (Strawson, Sellars, Langton, Abela, Allais) readings. The (a)'s point of view implies one object and two aspects of it (e.g., phenomenon-noumenon or appearance-TO), whose relationship lies in the internal correspondence. The (b)'s point of view assumes two distinct objects (e.g., internal and external objects, mind-dependent and mind-independent realities) and their causal relationship.

4 Riehl's Criticism

Riehl criticizes the incompleteness of Kantian externalism and offers a more realistic solution. Several parts of his main work, *Philosophical Criticism and Its Meaning for the Positive Science*, address the question of the external reference for Kantian representations. The work has two editions. Each edition contains

¹² See Rolf (1981) and Westphal (2006) on Kant's *sensationism*.

three volumes corresponding to book one¹³ on *History and Method of Philosophical Criticism* (1876a/1908b) and book two, which is further separated in part one¹⁴ on *The Sensible and Logical Foundations of Knowledge* (1879a/1925b) and part two¹⁵ on *Philosophy of Science and Metaphysics* (1887a/1926b).

Riehl focuses on the notions of space and time, through which mental representations have a matching reference (i.e., meaning). In his view, the Kantian framework of spacetime contains the sum of all possible relations among things. In this sense, this framework anticipates all actual relations among things. Nevertheless, it actualizes none of these relations. On the contrary, the anticipation remains at the level of possibility. It thus gains universality and generality at the expense of individuality and particularity.

The concepts of coexistence and succession, which we abstract from the multitude of sensations by disregarding their quality, degree, and number, differ from the determinate representations of spatial coexistence and temporal succession. (Riehl 1879, p. 78)

The arrangement of individual things that coexist in space and succeed in time is a particular representation. Individualities belong in spacetime but differ from the general representation of the latter because they form a particular spatiotemporal arrangement, which can be anticipated but not *a priori* identified. Consider two examples of Riehl's argument. (a) The Euclidean space allows for three kinds of triangular shape (isosceles, equilateral, scalene) alone. Nevertheless, it contains an infinite number of possible triangles, each characterized by a specific area and perimeter. In this sense, the Euclidean space anticipates (because it contains) all possible triangles, but it identifies none of them without further specification. (b) Let A be a subset of \mathbf{N}^+ (positive integers), and let A contain the series 3, 4, 7, such that $A \subset \mathbf{N}^+$ and $A = \{3, 4, 7\}$. Clearly, since $\mathbf{N}^+ = \{1, 2, 3, 4, \dots, n\}$, \mathbf{N}^+ already contains A . Notwithstanding, the identification of $\{3, 4, 7\}$ within $\{1, 2, 3, 4, \dots, n\}$ requires a selection, i.e., a choice. We already know that $x \in A \rightarrow x \in \mathbf{N}^+$ because $\mathbf{N}^+ = \{x: 1 \leq x \leq n\}$, but we don't know the value of x yet. In both (a) and (b), the sum of all possibilities is necessary but insufficient for actuality.

13 Alois Riehl, *Der Philosophische Kriticismus und seine Bedeutung für die positive Wissenschaft*, book one: *Geschichte des Philosophischen Kriticismus*, Leipzig: Engelmann 1876a and 1908b.

14 Alois Riehl, *Der Philosophische Kriticismus und seine Bedeutung für die positive Wissenschaft*, book two, part one: *Die Sinnlichen und Logischen Grundlagen der Erkenntnis*, Leipzig: Engelmann 1879a and 1925b.

15 Alois Riehl, *Der Philosophische Kriticismus und seine Bedeutung für die positive Wissenschaft*, book two, part two: *Zur Wissenschaftstheorie und Metaphysik*, Leipzig: Engelmann 1887a and 1926b.

The same holds for sensations and complexes of sensations. We cannot order them without a specific experience of their spatial form. Therefore, the characterization of a particular group of sensations requires (a) that they are spatially representable *a priori*, and (b) that they are spatially represented *a posteriori*. Similarly, Riehl distinguishes (a) the abstracted relations (*Verhältnisse*) of succession from (b) the concrete representation of a sequence (*Folge*) within a uniform and continuous time. Kantian sensations satisfy (a) but not (b).

Through sensations, external things are internalized and become appearances. As Kant notoriously argues, all our cognition begins with experience, but not all derive from experience. Part of it derives from our mind. Therefore, “our experiential cognition is a composite” (B 1). Objects affect our mind by modifying our senses. This affection introduces a sensation into the mind; this sensation is initially received as a blind impression. Affections take place through intuition. Sensibility is “the way in which we are affected by objects” (A 19/B 33) through intuition. Objects are therefore given to us through our sensibility but are solely thought through our understanding. Both sensibility and understanding ultimately relate to intuitions (directly and indirectly, respectively), and thus represent the sources of all our cognition. The former is passive and provides “the conditions under which objects are given to us” (A 15/B 30). The latter is thereafter activated “to compare” objective sensations, “to connect or separate them, and thus to work up the raw material of sensible impressions into a cognition of objects that is called experience” (B 1). Sensibility and understanding thus rely on sensible intuitions, the former directly and the latter indirectly. “That intuition which is related to the object through sensation is called empirical.” (A 20/B 34). The same intuition without any sensation is pure. “The undetermined object of an empirical intuition is called appearance.” (Ibid.). Hence, Kant characterizes the internalization of external objects as follows.

I call that in the appearance which corresponds to sensation its matter, but that which allows the manifold of appearance to be intuited as ordered in certain relations I call the form of appearance. Since that within which the sensations can alone be ordered and placed in a certain form cannot itself be in turn sensation, the matter of all appearance is only given to us *a posteriori*, but its form must all lie ready for it in the mind *a priori*, and can therefore be considered separately from all sensation. (A 20/B 34)

Kant draws a consequential conclusion. “Accordingly, the pure form of sensible intuitions in general is to be encountered in the mind *a priori*, wherein all of the manifold of appearances is intuited in certain relations.” (Ibid.). The form of our cognitive experience seems undeniably mind-dependent.

How should we understand our cognitive relation to the thing (*Ding*) then? If we follow Kant, we must understand it as dependent on the subjective form of

our sensibility, namely as a mind-dependent relation. However, this mental dependency prevents us from knowing the form of the external object as such. For example, “consider a sequence whose space is only [reducible to] the form of our sensible intuition of the thing, but has no determination attached to itself” (Riehl 1879, p. 82). How can we locate it in space and time? Consider, for instance, a temporal process that involves succession.

We must, though, admit that the pure change of sensations and [corresponding] thoughts builds the content of the temporal representation, but cannot justify its unity and continuity, [which are] determinations of its form. (Riehl 1879, p. 79)

An amended theory of knowledge should, therefore, recognize the independence of this particular form. In contrast, Kant insists on mental dependency.

About the pure apriority of the spatiotemporal representation, Kant knew, however, another argument on which he seemed to give importance since it is repeated in his writings. Space and time build the form of appearances, whereas sensation corresponds to its matter. Now, “Since that within which the sensations can alone be ordered and placed in a certain form cannot itself be in turn sensation, the matter of all appearance is only given to us *a posteriori*, but its form must all lie ready for it in the mind *a priori*, and can, therefore, be considered separately from all sensation.” [Kant’s first *Critique*, A 20/B 34] Were the remark correct that the relations of sensations are not themselves sensed, the inference to the pure apriority of the form of our perception would be inevitable. For sensation is the sole form of interaction between consciousness and reality. Further, were the form of perception not the form of reality, the form of reality could not be perceived. However, that remark is false. The relations of sensations, their determined coexistence and sequence, make an impression upon consciousness, just as do the sensations themselves. We feel this impression in the compulsion that the empirical manifolds’ determinateness lays upon the perceiving consciousness. The mere affection of consciousness [produced] by these relations doesn’t suffice alone for their apprehension, but neither does the affection suffice for the apprehension of the sensation itself. In these respects, there is no difference between the matter and the form of appearance. Under the influence of the Aristotelian dualism of these two concepts, separable only through arbitrary abstraction, it seems that Kant thought form to be a creative *eidōs* that remains independent and opposite to matter. (Riehl 1879, p. 104)

Riehl corrects Kant’s erroneous assumption that the relations of sensations are not themselves sensed. Our mind interacts with the world (i.e., external reality) through sensation alone. We must, therefore, be able to perceive both the matter and form of extramental reality. If the relations of sensations (i.e., their form) would not affect our sensibility, just as the matter of these sensations does, we could never know any determinate coexistence and sequence of things. External objects would thus remain unknowable. Hence, concludes Riehl, “In these respects, there is no difference between the matter and the form of appearance.” (Ibid.). We perceive both.

Kemp-Smith holds a similar view. Unlike Riehl, he believes that Kant's externalism needs no emendation but interpretation (obviously, Kemp-Smith's). Kant claims, "The effect of an object on the capacity for representation, insofar as we are affected by it, is sensation." (A 20/B 34). Further, "The undetermined object of an empirical intuition is called appearance" (Ibid.). Kemp-Smith warns us against the subjectivist reading of these claims that prevents an externalist account of cognition. Sensations are appearances, namely internal objects, but how do we form sensations in the first place? "The given sensations as such constitute a manifold; as objects in space they are *already* ordered." (Kemp Smith 2003, p. 84, *my italics*). Kemp Smith thus proposes that the manifold of appearance determines its unity together with the spatiotemporal relations that we accordingly assign to it. Therefore, the relations (form) of our sensations (matter) are also sensuous, as Riehl suggests. "The manifold of appearance (*das Mannichfaltige der Erscheinung*)", argues Kemp-Smith,

does not mean ... the chaotic or disordered. The emphasis is on manifoldness or plurality, as calling for reduction to unity and system. The unity has to be *found* in it, not introduced into it forcibly from the outside. (Kemp Smith 2003, p. 84)

Though, for instance, the manifold as given is not in space and time, the specific space and time relations assigned by us are determined for us by the inherent nature of the manifold itself. (Kemp Smith 2003, p. 85)

As I tried to make sense of Riehl's criticism above, I see that the possibility of all actual relations among things never actualizes any of these relations. In Kemp Smith's words, "The manifold has to be *interpreted*, even though the principles of interpretation may originate independently of it." (2003, p. 84).

Unfortunately for Kemp-Smith, little evidence appears in the first *Critique* for his reading. Kant hints at it in the *Aesthetic*. "For neither absolute nor relative determinations can be intuited prior to the existence of the things to which they pertain, thus be intuited *a priori*." (A 26/B 42) Further, Kant compares space with colors and sounds (A 28/B 44). Although they don't exist outside my mind either, they nonetheless represent passive affections that are ultimately due to the objects themselves. This comparison might have betrayed doubts about the mental unity of sensations. Kant might have at least pondered a Riehl-like solution for external objects.

These issues ultimately pertain to the unity of the sensible manifold. Where does the unity of sensations come from? Wherever it does, for Kant, it's ultimately a mind-dependent *a priori* form. It, therefore, belongs in our mind (in Riehl's terms, consciousness). (a) More likely, the logical category unifies our

sensations; *(b)* less likely, the intuition itself already gathers the manifold of sensations together. The *(a)* solution represents Kant's view after the *Aesthetic*.

All intuitions, as sensible, rest on affections, concepts ... on functions. By a function ... I understand the unity of the action of ordering different representations under a common one. (A 68/B 93)

Hereafter, the unity of the manifold of sensations pertains to logical functions alone (especially, categories and apperception). See both the editions of the transcendental deduction, A 64–83 and B 89–116. The *(b)* solution echoes the early view of the *Dissertation* (1770), where the spatiotemporal form unifies and orders the manifold of appearances without involving the understanding. In the *Aesthetic* (first *Critique*), the form of all appearances similarly lies in our mind prior to all actual perceptions and contains principles of the relations of appearances prior to all experience (see A 26/B 43). The same argument recurs later, “everything in our cognition that belongs to intuition” contains “relations of places in one intuition (extension), alteration of places (motion), and laws” ruling over such alteration (B 66–7).¹⁶

Although Kant fully endorses *(a)* only after the *Aesthetic* and thus leaves room for speculations (as he always does), both *(a)* and *(b)* are internalist solutions. In contrast, Riehl's solution is a full-fledged externalist one. The unity of sensations comes from the things-in-themselves that, through sensation, impose not only the matter but also the form of the external object upon our mind. Only Riehl's view supports a complete cognition of the external world, which Kant's *(a)* and *(b)* can justify only partially. The incompleteness of Kantian externalism seems thus to be overcome.

5 Developments from Riehl

Riehl's criticism of Kantian externalism develops into a realist philosophy of its own. Riehl changes his account through time, but central to it is the defense of the existence and knowability of things-in-themselves. Here I survey some of Riehl's claims on these matters.

¹⁶ Kant notoriously presents conflicting arguments even about his most basic assumptions. Later, in the first *Critique*, he feels compelled to emend the *(b)* view. “In the *Aesthetic* I ascribed this unity merely to sensibility, only in order to note that it precedes all concepts, though to be sure it presupposes a synthesis, which does not belong to the senses but through which all concepts of space and time first become possible.” (B 160–61, note).

In *Realistische Grundzüge* (1870), Riehl believes that we can reach Kant's supersensible through "accurate inferences from the order of our sensations to the order of things-in-themselves" (Beiser 2014, p. 541). For this purpose, he combines Kant's transcendental idealism with Leibniz's monadology and Herbart's nominalism and naturalism. Things-in-themselves stand for the real (das Reale), whose knowledge is achievable "through its sensible appearance and disguise" (Riehl 1870, p. 6). Nevertheless, Riehl aims to provide a positive account of things-in-themselves, and he thus glances at the reality beyond the bounds of sense.

As Herbart taught Riehl, Kant sharply divides the forms of possible experience and the given content of sensation. The forms are idealist since they derive from the self-conscious subject, but the sensory content represents a realist instance in Kant's critical philosophy. This content entails particularities and determinate relations between sensations that are given to us. The particularities and their relations are independent of our conscious activity. Riehl understands these particularities as Leibniz's "monads" or Herbart's "reals", namely, the world's most fundamental entities. Hence, he anticipates Langton's view (see above). Since things-in-themselves ground a multitude of different appearances in us, Riehl derives the existence of a variety of simple basic entities outside us. He describes them as "being" (Sein), i.e., the simplest notion we can apply to reality in itself. For Riehl, "being in itself" means something absolute and simple,¹⁷ namely an independent reality that he assumes as an indivisible unity.

Hence, Riehl fully endorses Leibniz's monadology, but he rejects the physicalist reading of the monads. On the contrary, he contends that these atoms are

¹⁷ As Beiser notices (see 2014, p. 533), Heidegger's reading of Kant closely recalls Riehl's. In Freiburg, Heidegger wrote his doctoral dissertation (*Die Lehre vom Urteil im Psychologismus*, 1914) directed by Arthur Schneider and habilitation thesis (*Die Kategorien- und Bedeutungslehre des Duns Scotus*, 1916) directed by Riehl's scholar Heinrich Rickert. Like Riehl, Heidegger argues that our (finite) "intuition depends upon the intuitable as a being which exists in its own right." (Heidegger 1990, p. 18). This "intuition of the being cannot give the object from out of itself"; on the contrary, it "must allow the object to be given." (Ibid.). In Heidegger's words, because our Dasein exists "in the midst of beings that already are, beings to which it has been delivered over – therefore it must necessarily take this already-existing being in stride," and thus "it must offer it the possibility of announcing itself." (1990, p. 19). This possibility (or the lack of it) characterizes Heidegger's notion of phenomenon, which is central to his *Being and Time* (Heidegger 2008, p. 51–54). Nevertheless, Heidegger retains Riehl's view, the "being "in the appearance" is the same being as the being in itself, and this alone." (1990, p. 22). The Kantian expression "appearance" has a twofold meaning. In a wider sense, appearances are a kind of objects (i.e., phenomena or the being itself); in a narrower sense, they mean that which is the exclusive correlate of the affection (i.e., the content of empirical intuition).

non-physical and non-spatial beings. Riehl accordingly rethinks the Kantian notion of space. Although space retains a subjective rather than an objective character, it ultimately mirrors the interrelations among things-in-themselves. Without the existence of these things, we would have no cognition of any space. Herbart's notion of "intelligible space" (Herbart 1806, p. 198–99) sets the example for Riehl.

We do not perceive this intelligible space directly, but we know it through pure thinking, by inferring it from the correspondence between the order of things in our sensible space and their causes. (Beiser 2014, p. 539)

Riehl struggles with the normative restrictions of Kant's first *Critique*, which prohibit us from venturing into the supersensible. As Kant before him, he postulates particular entities to explain the objective component of sensation, which always remains mind-independent. Although we cannot directly know this being, we can still know it indirectly. We access it through its appearances, from which we can infer knowledge of it. However, this negative approach dissatisfies Riehl. He recognizes that sensations depending on our sense organs are qualitatively different from their stimuli, but he also realizes that the particular relations between our sensations depend on things-in-themselves. "Beginning from the assumption", that these things "are the causes of the content of experience, we can begin to develop an entire theory about them" (Beiser 2014, p. 17). If "sensations correspond to their stimuli in a law-like manner", then "from the constant determinate relations between particular sensations, we can infer constant determinate relations between things themselves." (Ibid.). In theory, we could apply Kant's categories beyond appearances and thus learn much about things in themselves. As Biagioli clarifies, for Riehl "it should be possible to correctly individuate a priori concepts and prove that these concepts, despite their being subjective, determine objective features of the things we experience" (Biagioli 2016, p. 68).

Riehl, accordingly, suggests comparing the relation of things-in-themselves to appearances with the relation of simple things to their composite products. As Beiser notices, Riehl's suggestion sounds Leibnizian.

Although what exists are masses of independent substances, what we perceive is joined together by the senses to form a single appearance. This analogy brought Riehl's theory very close to Leibniz's, who understood appearances as confused representations of things-in-themselves. (Beiser 2014, p. 540)

Nevertheless, Riehl's realism remains primarily Kantian. It represents the realist reply to Jacobi, who famously says, "without the presupposition of the [thing in itself] I cannot enter the [critical] system, and with that presupposition, I cannot

remain in it.” (1812, p. 304). Nevertheless, Riehl carefully describes the critical philosophy as “an idealism of appearances on a realistic foundation” (1876, p. 10). Therefore, he expects to reach things-in-themselves through Kant’s system.

In *Der philosophische Kritizismus* (I, 1876a), Riehl dismiss non-realist readings of Kant. The psychological interpretation, for instance, is misleading because it reduces knowledge to mental faculties alone. The idealist interpretation conflates Kant’s idealism with Berkeley’s and thus neglects the relevance of mind-independent reality, which Kant never denies. Consistently, Riehl finds the origins of Kant’s cognitive philosophy in the empiricist tradition of Locke and Hume. Kant derives from them the notion of the content of cognition, but entirely rethinks the form of cognition. Strawson (1966) holds a similar view. According to this latter, Kant tries to solve the central problem of classic empiricism, namely how we can supply a rational justification of our ordinary picture of the world from the separate and fleeting sense-impressions that experience offers us. Like Riehl, Strawson believes that Kant retains this “minimal empiricist conception of experience” (p. 19) and makes sense of it within a broader formal framework (i.e., his internal metaphysics).

In *Der philosophische Kritizismus* (II/1, 1879a; II/2, 1887a), Riehl resumes most of the realist arguments presented in 1870, especially the question of sensation. He is now aware of the thin line that separates realistic dogmatism (which assumes that things are in themselves just as they appear to us) and extreme idealism (which reduces appearances to mental representations). The world exists independently of us, but it remains to establish how much we can know about it. Hence, “Under what presuppositions”, asks Riehl, “does knowledge have real significance?” (1879a, p. 4). As Beiser clarifies,

The “real significance” (*reale Bedeutung*) of knowledge means that it is true not only of our representations about the world but of the world itself, that is, the world as it exists independent from these representations. (Beiser 2014, p. 552)

With this question, Riehl anticipates Strawson’s principle of significance (described above). The answer he proposes comes from an accurate analysis of the interface between things-in-themselves and appearances, namely our sensation (see II/1, 1 and 3; II/2, 2).

We reach things in themselves through immediate sensations, which ultimately ground all our knowledge. Although we know only the appearances of things, these appearances tell us how real things exist relative to us. Appearances, therefore, present relative properties of real existing things-in-themselves.

However, their presentation must conform to our cognitive faculties. Hence, all the appearances of things exist only relative to our consciousness.

Riehl's version of realism resembles a *qualified* idealism. From the ontological point of view, Riehl insists on the real existence of things independent of our consciousness; he believes that "there must be something real independently of the way we describe it." (Biagioli 2016, p. 67). From the cognitive point of view, he maintains that these things are "unobservable bearers of properties that are accessible to us" (Biagioli 2016, p. 66); especially their spatiotemporal relations present us the objective properties of mind-independent realities through our sensations. The knowledge of things-in-themselves is, therefore, achievable from Kantian premises.¹⁸

6 Putnam and the Internalist Challenge

A deep affinity connects Kant and Putnam, beyond apparent differences. Putnam's internal realism (internalism) has *prima facie* similarities with the Kantian notion of transcendental idealism, whereas his view of external realism (externalism or metaphysical realism) resembles the Kantian notion of transcendental realism. Putnam himself draws the comparison (1981b, p. 49–74). But is he right? Is Kant an internalist? Are Riehl's externalist and Putnam's internalist view of Kant at odds with each other?

Much depends on Putnam's account of internalism (and externalism), which he changed over time. I focus here on his famous hypothesis of being "brains in a vat" (hereafter, BIV), which supposedly defends a Kant-like perspective (1981a, p. 1–21).

I discuss an abridged version of BIV. Imagine all human beings had the brain "removed from the body and placed in a vat of nutrients which keeps the brain alive" (1981, p. 5–6), and all the memories erased. The nerve endings are connected to a computer that causes the brain to have the illusion that everything is perfectly normal; but all you are experiencing is "the result of electronic impulses travelling from the computer to the nerve endings" (p. 6). From the externalist point of view, if we were BIV, we could not say or think that we were; and the reason for this is that the correspondence to the world, on which the externalist view relies, is successfully illusory. The externalist believes in a sort of magical reference to reality, one where "some representations (in particular, *names*) have a necessary connection with their bearers" (p. 3). From the internalist point of

¹⁸ Kant defends the same conclusion in his *Dissertation* (1770, see AK 2: 398; AK 2: 406–10).

view, mental representations have no such connection. Names, in particular, only have a conventional connection with their bearers. Under these internalist constraints, the BIV hypothesis makes no sense.

Suppose, for instance, human beings, although otherwise like us, have never seen trees. One day, a tree-like picture, casually resulted from spilled paints, accidentally falls on their planet from a spaceship. Their mental representation of a tree would look exactly like mine, but it couldn't represent any tree since these humans have never experienced one. This case suggests to Putnam that all the business of mental representations is about internal referring rather than the external corresponding. The same thing is true of words, which do not intrinsically represent what they are about. In this (internalist) sense, the hypothesis of being BIV cannot possibly be correct. Being BIV is thus a self-refuting statement, namely one whose truth implies its falsity. Another statement of the same kind is Descartes's *cogito ergo sum*, which relies on the modus tollens (the cogito argument cannot possibly be false because if I'm not, I cannot possibly think). Similarly, the BIV argument cannot possibly be true.¹⁹ It has the semantic form of a conditional proof (CP) that informally says, "I'm a brain-in-a-vat; therefore, I'm not a brain-a-vat".

Definition	"A brain-in-a-vat" has no real reference
Assumption for CP	If I say, I'm "a brain-in-a-vat"
Conditional Statement	Then what I say (i.e., being "a brain-in-a-vat") has no real reference
Conclusion	Therefore, I'm not "a brain-in-a-vat"

If I were a brain-in-a-vat, my mental contents (representations or words) would have neither appropriate causal connection to nor memory of the external world, which would remain a mere fiction, i.e., an input of a supercomputer, but nothing real. Therefore, being a brain-in-a-vat implies that there is no such thing as a real vat that contains a real brain.

However, I could never realize that I'm a brain-in-a-vat from an externalist perspective. In this case, all of my mental representations would correspond to external objects, and external correspondence (or the lack of it) would establish the truth and falsity of my sentences. If I were a brain-in-a-vat, I could not

¹⁹ However, the BIV and the cogito argument differ from other self-refuting statements, such as Russell's "I'm lying". If it's true that I'm lying, then the statement is false (because I'm not lying); and if it's false that I'm lying, then the statement is true (because I'm lying). The statement "I'm lying" is self-contradictory for both its truth-values.

convincingly argue for that. How could I ever prove it? The BIV hypothesis assumes that all my mental representations have no external correspondence (hereafter, EC), including the representation of the BIV hypothesis itself. I am thus supposed to have “the mental representation” (i.e., the sentence P) that “all of my mental representations have no EC”, and to establish the positive truth-value of P . Nevertheless, if P is true, then P is false because P is true if and only if P implies and thus affirms EC, which falsifies P . I cannot, therefore, affirm P without denying P , and thus contradict myself.

The way out of the vat, so to speak, is internalism. Let p stand for the object BIV, q for a representation of any object whatsoever, and r for any referent of reality. The internalist could then argue, “if I represent BIV, then I have no real referent; therefore, I don’t really represent anything, including BIV”. I can prove the validity of it as follows.²⁰

1	$(q \supset r) \bullet (p \supset \sim r)$	
2	p	/ $\sim q$
3	$q \supset r$	1, Simp
4	$p \supset \sim r$	1, Simp
5	$\sim r$	2, 4, MP
6	$\sim q$	3, 5, MT

Hence, the BIV hypothesis challenges externalism, and thus all our beliefs about the external world, which very well could all be false. If I were a brain-in-a-vat, I could not prove it. The internalist can, on the contrary, consistently falsify the BIV hypothesis.²¹ If I were a brain-in-a-vat, I could prove that it’s not the case that I really am a brain-in-a-vat. Brueckner correctly remarks that Putnam doesn’t show the proposition “I’m a brain-in-a-vat” is necessarily false (see McKinsey 2018). If I am a brain-in-a-vat, nevertheless, the externalist correspondence

20 We can also say that under p , q is not related to r . The function $p: q \rightarrow r$ has no matches.

21 Putnam reduces the differences between externalism (E) and internalism (I) to three antinomies. The externalist believes that ($E-1$) “the world consists of some fixed totality of mind-independent objects”; ($E-2$) “there is exactly one true and complete description of ‘the way the world is’”; and ($E-3$) “truth involves some sort of correspondence relation between words or thought-signs and external things and sets of things.” (Putnam 1981b, p. 49). On the contrary, for the internalist ($I-1$) “*what objects does the world consists of?* is a question that it only makes sense to ask *within* a theory of description”; ($I-2$) “there is more than one ‘true’ theory or description of the world”; and truth “is some sort of (idealized) rational acceptability – some sort of ideal coherence of our beliefs with each other and with our experiences *as those experiences are themselves represented in our belief system* – and not correspondence with mind-independent or discourse-independent ‘states of affairs’.” (Putnam 1981b, p. 49–50).

cannot logically prove my statement, “I’m a brain-in-a-vat”. In contrast, the internalist perspective moves from an entirely different approach to truth²² (see Van Cleve 1999, p. 217).

Putnam’s BIV hypothesis shares three *prima facie* Kantian assumptions (see Van Cleve, 1999: 214-16), which Riehl has emphasized in his criticism.

(a) Truth is mind-dependent and thus doesn’t rely on correspondence. BIV’s story cannot be told from the point of view of any of the sentient creatures in the world. If an observer were present, then not all of the sentient beings would be brains-in-a-vat. So, the BIV hypothesis “presupposes from the outset a God’s Eye view of truth, or, more accurately, a No Eye view of truth” (Putnam 1981b, p. 50) since here truth remains independent of observers altogether. The BIV argument questions the correspondence. So, “the very relation of correspondence on which truth and reference depend (on his [externalist] view) cannot logically be available to him if he is a Brain in a Vat” (Ibid.). Therefore, “if we are Brains in a Vat, we cannot think that we are, except in the bracketed sense [we are Brains in a Vat]; and this bracketed thought does not have reference conditions that would make it *true*.” (Putnam 1981b, p. 50–51).

(b) It follows that, for an externalist, truth consists “in its corresponding to the world as it is in itself”, rather than “in its fitting the world as the world presents itself to some observer or observers” (Putnam 1981b, p. 50). In short, correspondence to, and not the relationship with, things in themselves defines the nature of externalist truth. On the contrary, Putnam’s internal realism assumes that “the mind has no access to external things or properties apart from that provided by the senses” (Putnam 1981a, p. 16).

(c) A causal constraint characterizes internalization. In fact, “one cannot refer to certain kinds of things, e.g., *trees*, if one has no causal interaction at all with them” (1981: 16). Nevertheless, even causation doesn’t guarantee correspondence. “The objects which are the dominant cause of my beliefs containing a certain sign may not be the referents of that sign.” (Putnam 1981b, p. 51). For example, although the dominant cause of one’s beliefs about electrons is probably textbooks, one doesn’t refer the word “electron” to textbooks. The same impasse occurs with words such as “extraterrestrial”, where no experience can cause one’s belief. How does the causal constraint work then? For Putnam, it instead

²² Brueckner’s reading differs from mine. His view develops a compelling counterpossible argument. “Let us say that if *Q* is a logically possible proposition that is incompatible with *P* and *P* is a logically possible proposition, then *Q* is a counterpossibility to *P*. Let us also state a counterpossibility principle: (CP) If I know that *P* and that *Q* is a counterpossibility to *P*, then I know that *Q* is not the case.” (Brueckner 1986, p. 148).

has a semantic connotation. Our talk of trees, for instance, is intimately connected with our non-verbal transactions with trees. “Language entry rules” take us from experiences of trees to the utterances “I see trees”, and “language exit rules” take us from decisions expressed in linguistic form, such as “I’ll look for shelter under some trees”, to actions other than speaking (see Putnam 1981a, p. 11).

Now, (b) and (c) are genuine Kantian assumptions. About (b), it’s enough to recall that appearances (i.e., mind-dependent objects) differ from things-in-themselves (i.e., mind-independent objects, such as external objects). For Kant, our cognitive capacities legitimately apply to the former, but not to the latter. Senses and understanding provide the formal properties of knowable objects, meaning that we structure appearances.

In (c), Putnam touches on the Kantian question of affection. Roughly put, Kant “distinguishes the form of experience, which is determined by the subject’s mind, from the matter of experience, which is determined by how the subject is causally affected by objects” (Stang 2015, p. 1).²³ However, the inference from a known effect allows for no positive characterization of the unknown cause (A 371–72). Appearances don’t directly correspond to things in themselves or share similarities with them. Nevertheless, we envision this inference as causal, and consistently attribute causal powers to things in themselves. Why? Because these things are, notwithstanding our ignorance of them, the input data source of our cognition.

But what about (a)? Does Kant honestly give up on correspondence? The answer depends on Putnam’s and Kant’s notions of ‘concept’, which closely mirror each other. In any case, Putnam’s view seems closer to Riehl’s than Kant’s.

External things, or properties of these things, are internalized (introspected) through mental representations. Like Kant, Putnam identifies two kinds of mental representations, namely images (i.e., sensations or sensible intuitions) and

23 Here Stang defends the hypothesis of *double affection*. According to this latter, “the subject is affected by empirical objects and by things in themselves” (Stang 2015, p. 2). Hence, a double affection results from “the conjunction of the ‘empirical affection’ and the ‘noumenal affection’ views” (Ibid.). This hypothesis emphasizes the underrated relationship between *things-in-themselves* and *noumena*. Although they mean the same thing, they are not the same. Things in themselves positively account for the sensory matter. Noumena represent the formal structure of the sensory matter before any affection occurs, thus negatively referring to that matter. Roughly put, noumena are the form of things in themselves, a sort of formal materiality. For any affection to take place, a sense-modification needs to happen. Noumena cannot provide it without an actual thing in itself. There is, I believe, no double affection, but rather two aspects of the same affection, viewed as possible (i.e., a noumenon) or actual (i.e., a thing in itself).

concepts (i.e., categories). Images “do not necessarily refer” (Putnam 1981a, p. 17). Kant similarly says, “intuitions without concepts are blind” (A 51/B 75). What do they mean? For human beings who have never experienced a tree in their life, the picture of a tree coming from a paint-splash, which “gave rise to sense data qualitatively similar to our ‘visual images of trees’” (Putnam 1981a, p. 17), refers to nothing real. The mental image of a tree is just a *presentation*. It doesn’t necessarily refer to anything as far as it remains unaccompanied by any concept (i.e., *representation*) of a tree.

Suppose I have a sensation *E*. Suppose I *describe E*; say, by asserting “*E* is a sensation of *red*.” If “red” just means *like this*, then the whole assertion just means “*E* is *like this*” (attending to *E*), i.e., *E* is like *E* – and no judgment has really been made. ... On the other hand, if “red” is a true *classifier*, if I am claiming that this sensation *E* *belongs in the same class* as sensations I call “red” *at other times*, then my judgment goes beyond what is immediately given, beyond the “bare thatness”, and involves an implicit reference to other sensations, which I am not having at the present instant, and to *time* (which, according to Kant, is not something noumenal but rather a form in which we arrange the “things-for-us”). (Putnam 1981b, p. 62)

Kant’s view is remarkably similar. As long as sensations are responsible for the matter of our judgments, they *per se* have no cognitive relevance. To recognize a sensation as a partial (or, in the case of single concepts, a complete) representation of an object, the concept of this object is previously required. In this way alone, we can become aware of our sensations and thus have perceptions. Hence, the cognitive relevance of our mental representations begins with concepts, not sensations. Further, the matter of a sensation doesn’t even provide the entire content to the terms (concepts) of our judgments. Rather, it accounts for the content-matter alone, whereas the matching content-form derives from our spatiotemporal intuitions. In the appearance (i.e., the undetermined object of an empirical intuition), the matter corresponds to sensation, but only the form allows the sensible manifold to be (intuited as) ordered in certain relations (see A 20/B 34). Consequentially, “the matter of all appearance is only given to us *a posteriori*, but its form must all lie ready for it in the mind *a priori*” (Ibid.) and thus remains separate from all sensation. However, this initial formalization doesn’t suffice for a cognition. This latter requires that logical categories further synthesize the spatiotemporally formed individualities (i.e., sensible particulars) under the unity of a concept (see the *B-Deduction*, §15-§21). A conceptualization would also be necessary from Riehl’s point of view, according to which, the general form within (and by) which the sensations can be ordered and placed in a particular form stands for the extramental relationship of particulars with one another.

For Putnam, concepts (and not images) are the mental representations that refer to “external things”, and they do so with necessity. “Concepts are signs used in a certain way”, but “signs do not themselves intrinsically refer” (Putnam 1981a, p. 18). Signs “actually employed in a particular way by a particular community of users can correspond to particular objects within the conceptual scheme of those users” (p. 52). Objects, therefore, don’t exist independently of these conceptual schemes. “We cut up the world into objects when we introduce one or another scheme of description.” (Ibid.). Hence, the world doesn’t impose on us objects of the same kind (in themselves), i.e., self-identifying objects. Rather, it’s our categorical system that sorts them (i.e., their properties) into kinds. “In *some* ways, after all, anything is ‘of the same kind’ as anything else.” (1981, p. 53).

This conclusion undermines the very possibility of *external* correspondence. It nevertheless leaves room for an *internal* version of correspondence.²⁴ Putnam recognizes it. “Since the objects and the signs are alike internal to the scheme of description, it is possible to say what matches what.” (Ibid.). “Indeed, it is trivial to say what any word refers to within the language the word belongs to, by using the word itself. What does ‘rabbit’ refer to? Why, to rabbits, of course!” (Ibid.).

In similar fashion, Kant talks about the theory of truth as connecting mental representations (terms of judgments) but not external and internal objects. However, this isn’t all of the story. For Putnam, Kant’s cognitive philosophy qualifies as an internalist case of BIV, in which neither external correspondence nor proper causation applies. The Kantian notion of truth departs from the classic correspondence and evolves into a coherentist account. Nevertheless, most of the internalists (including Putnam) acknowledge the existence of extramental input data. Similarly, Kantian internalism maintains references to externality, which I’m going to reconsider according to Putnam’s constraints.

7 The Last Defense of Externalism

It’s unclear why Kant is suspicious of correspondence. He accepts it only with reservation.

²⁴ Van Cleve (1999) correctly defends internal correspondence. Although the BIV argument could successfully dismiss external correspondence, Putnam could hardly reject Kant’s internal correspondence between sensations and judgments. His internal realism has, in this regard, no affinity with Kant’s transcendental idealism. However, Putnam himself proposes an internal version of correspondence. His only target is the externalization of this correspondence.

What is truth? The nominal definition of truth, namely that it is the agreement of cognition with its object, is here granted and presupposed; but one demands to know what is the general and certain criterion of the truth of any cognition. (A 58/B 82)

For Kant, this classic definition has formal (i.e., semantic) but not real validity. The object agreed upon should indeed be distinguishable from others, but the generality required by the definition of truth prevents it. He thinks the same about the logical principle of non-contradiction, which he deems a merely negative condition of truth. “For although a cognition may be in complete accord with logical form, i.e., not contradict itself, yet it can still always contradict the object.” (A 59/B 84). General criteria of truth, such as correspondence or non-contradiction, must be valid of all cognitions. They therefore abstract from all content of cognition and thus have no relation to their object. However, “truth concerns precisely this content” (A 59/B 83; see also A 264–65/B 320–21).

For Kant, truth has logical but also metaphysical meaning. This latter pertains to the content alone. The content of our cognition combines extramental references to things in themselves and mental formalization, i.e., the spatiotemporal form that characterizes our intuitions. Judgment has, therefore, metaphysical constraints since its terms have reference to extra-logical elements. Consider the argument, “If Paris doesn’t exist, I’ll visit Paris on holiday / Paris doesn’t exist // therefore, I’ll visit Paris on holiday.” The reasoning has logical validity, but no metaphysical meaning. Two readings are possible. (a) Kant looks for a metaphysical coherence that ultimately involves, although indirectly, things in themselves (from A 58–59/B 82–84). (b) Kant dismisses extramental correspondence as metaphysically irrelevant (from A 371–72), though, if (b) were correct, Kantian externalism would be meaningless.

What kind of correspondence could remain for Kantian externalism? Putnam accepts (b) but rules out only *direct* correspondence. He holds that Kant’s objects of inner sense are not transcendently real things-in-themselves (noumenal) but ideal things-for-us. In this way, internal objects are “no more and no less directly knowable than so-called ‘external’ objects” (Putnam 1981, p. 62–63). Here is Putnam’s explanation for that:

The sensations I call “red” can no more be directly compared with noumenal objects to see if they have the same noumenal property than the objects I call “pieces of gold” can be directly compared with noumenal objects to see if they have the same noumenal property. (Putnam 1981, p. 63).

Direct correspondence is impossible because external and internal objects share no common properties. For Kant, all properties are secondary²⁵ and belong in our sensibility alone. Like Riehl and Langton, Putnam points to Leibniz, who “first assumed things (monads) and an internal power of representation in them” (A 267/B 323)

Thus, because he [i.e., Leibniz] represented them as *noumena*, taking away in thought everything that might signify outer relation, thus even *composition*, Leibniz made out of all substances, even the constituents of matter, simple subjects gifted with powers of representation, in a word, *monads*. (A 266/B 321–22)

Kant dismisses the notion of “monad”, including its consequences for the nature of space and time, which Leibniz reduces to relations of substances. Nevertheless, Kant maintains some of its features, especially the causal power. As he clarifies, the “understanding, namely, demands first that something be given (at least in the concept) in order to be able to determine it in a certain way” (A 267/B 323). In this way, “matter precedes form” (Ibid.).

However, the noumenal object's causal power has no consequences for Kant's denial of direct correspondence. For Putnam, it isn't the case of “one noumenal object corresponding to each thing-for-us”, or “a *one-to-one correspondence between things-for-us and things in themselves*” (1981b, p. 63). Hence,

²⁵ If all *properties are secondary*, everything we can say about an object is about how it affects us in a specific way (see Putnam 1983, p. 205–06. “*Nothing at all* we say about any object describes the object as it is ‘in itself’, independently of its effect on us” (Putnam 1981b, p. 61). “It also follows that we cannot assume any similarity”, continues Putnam, “between our idea of an object and whatever mind-independent reality may be ultimately responsible for our experience of that object. Our ideas of objects are not *copies* of mind-independent things.” (Ibid.). Putnam refers to the *Prolegomena*, where Kant dismisses Locke's notion of primary qualities. The same argument appears in the A-edition (A 28–29) but not in the B-edition. Without denying the actual existence of outer things, their predicates (e.g., heat, color, taste, among others) belong not to things in themselves, “but only to their appearances and have no existence of their own outside our representation.” (AK 4: 289). Kant also admits “the remaining qualities of bodies, which are called *primaries*: extension, place, and more generally space along with everything that depends on it (impenetrability or materiality, shape, etc.)” (Ibid.). Nevertheless, as much as colors are “properties that attach not to the object in itself, but only to the sense of vision as modifications”, argues Kant, “*all of the properties that make up the intuition of a body* belong merely to its appearance” (Ibid.). The “existence of the thing that appears is not thereby nullified, as with real idealism, but it is only shown that through the senses we cannot cognize it at all as it is in itself” (Ibid.). Hence, “even the notion of a noumenal world”, concludes Putnam, “is a kind of limit of thought (*Grenz-Begriff*) rather than a clear concept” (Putnam 1981b, p. 61).

you must *not* think that because there are chairs and horses and sensations in our representation, that there are correspondingly noumenal chairs and noumenal horses and noumenal sensations. (Putnam 1981b, p. 63)

On the contrary, the causal powers of things in themselves give us data, namely information that our sense organs construct according to our nature. Riehl warns us of the negative consequences of limiting the amount of these data, as Kant mistakenly did. Along with any notion of similitude between our ideas and the things in themselves, Kant gives up any notion of abstract isomorphism. Hence, Putnam concludes that “there is no correspondence theory of truth in his philosophy” (1981b, p. 64) “But what is truth if it is not correspondence to the way things are in themselves?” (Ibid.).

[The] only answer that one can extract from Kant’s writing is this: a piece of knowledge (i.e., a “true statement”) is a statement that a rational being would accept on sufficient experience of the kind that it is actually possible for beings with our nature to have. “Truth” in any other sense is inaccessible to us and inconceivable by us. *Truth is ultimate goodness of fit.* (Putnam 1981b, p. 64)

Some readers contest Putnam’s conclusion and search for different solutions. Van Cleve (1999, p. 216), for instance, emphasizes the metaphysical agreement that the reading (*a*) entails. The internal correspondence is a necessary but insufficient condition of truth (Kant never denies it). Hence, the agreement between judgments and mental representations (i.e., appearances) doesn’t exclude any possible reference to other truth-bearers. Kant doesn’t explicitly mention coherence as the ultimate criterion of truth, as we should expect from his alleged rejection of any kind of correspondence. Therefore, Van Cleve abandons the reading from Putnam’s *internal realism* and instead associates Kant’s TI to Dummett’s *antirealism*.²⁶ Externalism, therefore, could still have the last word. In fact, Putnam’s internalism seems consistent with Riehl’s version of Kantian externalism.

²⁶ Dummett opposes realism to antirealism. The realist holds “the belief that statements in the disputed class possess an objective truth-value, independently of our means of knowing it: they are true or false in virtue of a reality existing independently of us.” (1978, p. 164). On the contrary, the anti-realist insists “that the meanings of these statements are tied directly to what we count as evidence for them, in such a way that a statement of the disputed class, if true at all, can be true only in virtue of something of which we could know and which we should count as evidence for its truth.” (Ibid.). Disputed classes contain statements of mathematics or similar kinds. For the realist, the meanings of statements of that class aren’t directly tied to the evidence for them that we can have, “but consist in the manner of their determination as true or false by states of affairs whose existence is not dependent on our possession of evidence for them.” (Ibid.). Hence, Van Cleve identifies Kant with Dummett’s description of the antirealist.

Like Kant, Putnam doesn't deny the import data of external elements, i.e., the experiential inputs to knowledge – “knowledge is not a story with no constraints except internal coherence” (Putnam 1981b, p. 54). Nevertheless, like Kant, Putnam denies

that there are any inputs which are not themselves to some extent shaped by our concepts, by the vocabulary we use to report and describe them, or any inputs which admit of only one description, independent of all conceptual choices. (Putnam 1981b, p. 54)

Even our description of our sensations (i.e., the starting point for knowledge) is profoundly affected (as are the sensations themselves) by a host of conceptual choices.

Kant reasons similarly. The object of the senses must conform to the constitution of our cognitive capacities (intuitions and concepts). For these intuitions to become cognitions, I also “must refer them as representations to something as their object and determine this object through them” (B XVII). Further, “the concepts through which I bring about this determination” don't conform to the objects; on the contrary, the objects and “the *experience* in which alone they can be cognized (as given objects)” (Ibid.) must conform to those concepts. Therefore, “experience itself is a kind of cognition requiring the understanding, whose rule[s] I have to presuppose in myself before any object is given to me, hence *a priori*,” and these rules find their expression “in concepts *a priori*, to which all objects of experience must therefore necessarily conform, and with which they must agree.” (B XVII–XVIII).

What if we rewrite the ending of the story? We could perhaps accept a minimalist version of externalism that doesn't let things-in-themselves shape our cognitions. We do need, after all, to justify our empirical knowledge, especially the non-trivial fact that we do learn from experience.

Putnam seems to share my concern. From Kant's premise, “sense data and physical [external] objects are interdependent constructions” is false to derive that “all we know is sense data” (Putnam 1988, p. 210). It means we do have cognition of external objects. It is perhaps trivial to add that we have an internal cognition of them, namely a human (i.e., filtered or mental) cognition. On the one hand, Putnam invokes the coherence of theoretical (less experiential) beliefs with one another and with more experiential beliefs. On the other hand, he also recognizes that our conceptions of *coherence* and *acceptability* are conceptions of something real. “They define a kind of objectivity, *objectivity for us*, even if it is not the metaphysical objectivity of the God's Eye view.” (Putnam 1981b, p. 55). Although internal objectivity and human rationality are all that we have, “they are better than nothing” (Ibid.).

However, I don't see how one can defend empirical cognitions by ignoring a minimalist sort of externalism and thus dismissing any correspondence. Either we abandon the notion of the outer world and all the cognitions that come with it, or we try to rescue it through a meaningful relationship. A possible defense of Kantian externalism might rely on (a) a theory of indirect correspondence that might also support (b) a non-objective similarity. An argument could be the following.

(a) As Putnam insists on Kant's giving up on correspondence, he perhaps undermines the nature of sensations. What differentiates the perception of an "apple" from the perception of "green"? These perceptions acknowledge different sensations that do correspond to different sense modifications, which are ultimately due to different things-in-themselves. Now, imagine I say, "the apple is green". The judgment combines two terms, *S*-term (apple) and *P*-term (green). No direct correspondence lies between internal (my judgment) and external (things-in-themselves) states of affairs. Nevertheless, an indirect correspondence holds between the two. My judgment must correspond to my sensations, which are passively received via affection from things-in-themselves. This final agreement resists the radical reduction to internal coherence (that holds only for mathematical propositions), which nevertheless operates independently of any affections.

Riehl's criticism is instrumental for this purpose. As we passively receive sense modifications, we internalize the matter and the form of external things (whatever they are) as sensations. Before I can see (i.e., perceive) a "green apple" and after that say, "the apple is green", for instance, our concepts have turned all of the sensations involved into the internal objects, "apple" and "green", and their relation, "green apple". My final statement, "the apple is green", is a question of internal correspondence alone. After I perceive a "green apple", my claim (i) "the apple is green" is true, and (ii) "the apple is not green" is false because (i) corresponds to my perception, whereas (ii) doesn't. Nevertheless, my perception derives from the initial sense modifications passively received by external things (whatever they are). My claims, therefore, indirectly correspond to these things.

(b) This indirect correspondence needs no objective similarity. As Putnam notices, a similitude theory of reference holds that "the relation between the representations in our minds and the external objects that they refer to is literally a similarity" (Putnam 1981, p. 57). A reference model for a non-literal similarity could be Wittgenstein's picture theory of meaning.

In the *Tractatus* (1961), the relation between words and things implies the conditions of "sense" (provided by the syntax) and "symbolic reference" (i.e., the meaning). "In order that a certain sentence should assert a certain fact there must", says Russell, "be something in common between the structure of the

sentence and the structure of the fact” (Russell 1961, p. X–XI). This thesis significantly differs from the Aristotelian likeness (ὁμοιωσις) that reduces truth to a relational property (*adaequatio* or *conformitas*). In contrast, Wittgenstein conceives a fact-based version of correspondence, which establishes that a belief is true when there is a corresponding fact and is false when there is no corresponding fact. However, a fact is not an object, but a state of affairs (i.e., a collection of objects).

For any language to represent reality, its sentences must stand for states of affairs. Wittgenstein argues that sentences picture states of affairs. The two have a structural similarity since the order of logical signs in a sentence (i.e., the sequences of names standing for things) must mirror the order of objects (i.e., things) in the fact. If language didn’t mirror reality in some way, it would be impossible for sentences to mean anything. Nevertheless, this structural similarity between fact and sentence is an instance of indirect correspondence, where the two orders must correspond, but not their dissimilar individual elements. Their final agreement lies between the relation of things among themselves and our logical syntax of their description.

Conclusions

In the *Preface* to the B-edition of his first *Critique* (1787), Kant notoriously claims that the object of cognition has a twofold meaning. It means appearance or thing in itself (B XXVII). He further clarifies that we cognize appearances only. The thing in itself is something actual for itself but unknowable for us (B XX). After that and throughout the first *Critique*, Kant refers to mind-independent reality in a variety of ways. Things-in-themselves, noumena, and transcendental objects show his commitment to externalism, which I identify with Lehrer’s definition. However, how should we make sense of all this?

Readers disagree about Kantian externalism. Two opposing views compete since the review of Feder-Garve (1782), the year after the A-edition of the first *Critique* (1781). Both of them recognize in Kant instances of phenomenalism and non-phenomenalism (also called empiricism or realism). Among its tenets, phenomenalism holds that appearances and things-in-themselves are one and the same object. All of its properties pertain to appearances alone (*Prolegomena* 1783, AK 4: 289). If this were the correct reading, then Kant would say that we are like trapped inside our mind without any access to the real. Nobody finds this conclusion charming, including Kant, who indeed tries to distance himself from it by changing the A-edition (see B 129–69 and B 274–79). Non-phenomenalist readings promote a realist agenda. Strawson (1966) leads the tendency to give up on

some parts of the first *Critique* and save its valuable contribution to Locke's and Hume's empiricism. Many readers follow his steps (Guyer, Langton, Abela, Allais, among others). Others don't, including Van Cleve (1999), Kemp Smith (2003), and Allison (2004). Instead, they strive for a comprehensive account and read inconsistent passages as internal tensions of Kant's thought that are, nevertheless, worth preserving.

My defense of Kantian externalism derives from Allison and Van Cleve but relies in large part on Riehl (1879) and Putnam (1981a, 1981b). As Stang (2018) suggests, phenomenologists reduce appearances and things in themselves to two aspects of one and the same object. In contrast, non-phenomenologists see two objects. However, I argue, the positions don't need to be inconsistent. The *cognitive perspective* (two aspects and one object) is compatible with the *ontological perspective* (two objects). Kant switches the points of view. (a) From the cognitive point of view, the object of knowledge presents two sides: noumenon and phenomenon, appearance and transcendental object, knowable thing for me and unknowable thing in itself, pure-formal *a priori* and empirical-material *a posteriori*. Internal correspondence lies between them. (b) From the ontological point of view, internal and external objects stand in a causal relationship. This dualism assumes various forms: cause of affection and sensation, the sensible data and the supersensible, mind-dependent and extramental reality. For instance, Kant might well share the cognitive principles of Berkeley's idealism (as Van Cleve and Putnam believe), but certainly not its correlate ontology. Berkeley's notion of the body significantly differs from Kant's notion of the thing-in-itself. Similarly, Kant might derive his notion of particulars from Leibniz's monads (as Riehl and Langton claim), but he doesn't need to accept the cognitive consequences of monadology.

Nevertheless, Riehl warns us about possible shortcomings. Any effective defense of Kantian externalism must overcome its incompleteness. For Riehl, the *a priori* form of space (i.e., our pure intuition) lacks any specification. If things-in-themselves provided only the matter of the object of cognition, we could never locate an object in space and thus have an empirical intuition of it. What could teach us how to relate one perception to another if their relationship couldn't also be perceived? Hence, Riehl argues for an unrestricted version of Kantian externalism, which he further develops in a realist account of his own. Central to this latter is the notion of sensation. Since relational properties supervene intrinsic properties (which Kant denies), accurate analysis of the structure of our sensation reveals a causal relationship among the two kinds of objective properties. Riehl, therefore, emphasizes the indirect knowability of things-in-themselves to bestow real significance on our knowledge. His realism thus attempts the non-

sensible employment of the categories and bypasses the normative bounds of sense. In this way, Riehl moves Kant's cognitive philosophy closer to logical positivism (see Heidelberger 2006).

Putnam reminds us that besides the ongoing relevance of his claims, Kant is also correct. As Lehrer defines its central tenet, externalism holds that "some relationship to the external world accounting for the truth of our belief suffices to convert true belief to knowledge" (2000, p. 177). Until Kant, this cognitive relationship has been described as correspondence between mental states and external objects. However, Kant breaks with this tradition and provides an internalist (i.e., coherentist) account of truth.

Like Putnam (1981b, p. 56), Strawson recognizes that "the character of our experience, the way things appear to us, is partially determined by our human constitution, by the nature of our sense organs and nervous system" (2001, p. 15). However, he rules this out as a misleading analogy because these matters pertain to empirical, or scientific, not philosophical investigation. It's unclear why, however. The question of Kantian externalism may not be settled by a neuroscientific examination of our perceptions, but neither can it contrast with this latter. Aristotelian realism maintains that a proposition is true if and only if it agrees with reality. Therefore, mental representations must correspond to external objects. But correspondence to what exactly?

What is real? How do you define real? If you're talking about what you can feel, what you can smell, what you can taste and see, then real is simply electrical signals interpreted by your brain. (*The Matrix*)²⁷

The highly unrealistic hypothesis of BIV is nonetheless physically possible.²⁸ It consistently portrays the case of Kant's cognitive mind. Our brains could very well be living in a vat and never leave it. Nevertheless, even if we were BIV, our input data would certainly be something real, and their referent would exist independently of our will. To this extent, inputs are mind-independent. "The very inputs", says Putnam, "upon which our knowledge is based are conceptually contaminated; but contaminated inputs are better than none" (Putnam 1981b, p. 54).

²⁷ Directed by Lana and Lilly Wachowski, Warner Bros. Pictures & Village Roadshow Pictures, 1999, 40:15–40:28.

²⁸ For a more sophisticated account of visual perception see Daniel Kolak, William Hirstein, Peter Mandik, Jonathan Waskan, *Cognitive Science. An Introduction to Mind and Brain* (Routledge 2006: 91-116).

Nevertheless, I disagree with Putnam's conclusion that Kant gave up on correspondence. Externalism requires it, as Lehrer's definition says. Not only do Kant's cognitive claims retain an internal agreement between perceptions and judgments (i.e., the nominal definition, which also Putnam recognizes), but they also presuppose indirect correspondence. My perceptions acknowledge different sensations corresponding to various sense modifications, which are ultimately due to things-in-themselves. According to the nominal definition, my judgment must correspond to these perceptions and agree with the material part of my sensations that refers to the extramental reality. This final agreement prevents empirical cognition from any reduction to internal coherence. Therefore, Kant's cognitive philosophy maintains a minimalist version of externalism.

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