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ARTICLE

Appearances as Representations: An 'Analytic' Reading

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Abstract

Kant frequently states that 'appearances' (*Erscheinungen*) are mere 'representations' (*Vorstellungen*), a claim we can call AR. AR is typically understood as a substantive thesis. This paper argues for a claim that has not been explored at length elsewhere: that AR is an analytic truth, so it does not imply phenomenalism and can be affirmed by a moderate realist reader. I argue that appearances are mental contents directed towards things. Hence, appearances are not themselves the things our minds represent, which exist outside of minds. This reading permits us to accept insights from phenomenalists about Kant's philosophy of mind, while saving the realists' metaphysics.

Keywords: appearance; transcendental idealism; representation; intentionality; phenomenalism

1. Introduction

In terms of the sheer quantity and (apparent) clarity of textual evidence, there can hardly be many claims better founded in Kant's first *Critique* than that 'appearances' (*Erscheinungen*) are mere 'representations' (*Vorstellungen*). Let us label this claim 'AR'. Consider this small sample of the 'veritable flood' (Jauernig 2021: 30) of texts supporting AR:

> All that is intuited in space or time, thus 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 of our thoughts no existence grounded in themselves. (A490–1/B518–9, modified)[1]

> Space itself, however, together with time, and, with both, all appearances, are nevertheless in themselves **not things**, but rather nothing but representations, and they cannot at all exist outside our mind. (A492/B520)

> [A]ppearances are not things in themselves, but rather the mere play of our representations, which in the end come down to the determinations of inner sense. (A101)

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> A proposition which must of course sound peculiar is that a thing [*Sache*] exists only in the representation of it; but it loses its offensive character here, because the things [*Sachen*] with which we have to do are not things *per se* but only appearances, i.e., representations. (A374n)

> Only appearances are mere representations of things, which, as for what they may be in themselves, are there uncognized. (B164)

Despite the strong support for it in the texts, AR is not a claim that Kant interpreters tend to state loudly. As Rae Langton remarks on related textual evidence, 'This kind of talk is difficult to explain away' (1998: 206). But why is this the kind of talk that one feels *should* be explained away? I believe there is a simple reason; call it the *synthetic* reading of AR. The synthetic reading holds it to be a *surprising* theoretical claim that appearances are representations.[2] This is because appearances are typically thought of as a kind of *thing* or *object* (in a contemporary sense of the latter word): namely, 'things that appear' or 'physical objects'.[3] Appearances thus construed include entities like tables, chairs, molecules, and donkeys. For some readers, the 'things that appear' are supposed to be the same 'things' that are 'things in themselves'.[4] For others, appearances are things of a *sui generis* (perhaps phenomenally inexistent or mentally constructed) kind. But if appearances are first construed (analytically) as *things* in any thick sense, the further synthetic claim that appearances are representations then implies that *some things are mere representations*. And these 'things' are supposed to be *everything* of which we have empirical knowledge.[5]

Hence, given the synthetic reading, we have two options. First, we can take this statement at something like face value and accept a strong phenomenalist or idealist reading of Kant's metaphysics. This implies that tables, chairs, molecules, and donkeys *would not exist* without minds like ours, because these 'things' are in their essence representations. Second, we can look for some meaning of 'representation' that does not imply phenomenalism in this sense.

There is an alternative to the synthetic reading of AR: this is an *analytic* reading.[6] On this account, it is not a surprising claim that appearances are representations, since the latter is true by definition or as a mere clarification of the concept of an appearance. On this account, the passages supporting AR should not be alarming, because appearances should never have been understood as things in the first place. Appearances are not just any kind of representation: they are *private* mental representations, neither identical to external things nor an aspect of external things. Therefore, they are not supposed to be an entity that is both a thing and a representation. There is, strictly speaking, no such entity. Hence, it is not just that appearances are not 'things in themselves'; they are not things at all.

Because the synthetic reading of AR is the default in the literature, those who are most willing to acknowledge AR in a straightforward way tend to ascribe metaphysical phenomenalism to Kant: the view according to which the physical world is a mental construct or mind-dependent.[7] If this were true, appearances could only 'represent' things outside the mind in an attenuated sense. My aim in this paper is to show that, far from the analytic reading of AR turning Kant's view into a metaphysical phenomenalism, it serves to underwrite his (meta)physical realism.[8] Thus, in addition to defending the view that AR is analytic, I aim to show that it is

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compatible with Kant's view that appearances are a *veridical* representation of things outside the mind.

My goal in this essay is not to provide a detailed account of what Kantian appearances are in terms of their precise role in the economy of the mind, and questions concerning the division of labour between sensibility and the understanding are left aside. These issues require a deeper investigation into Kant's philosophy of mind and perception than I will pursue here. Instead, the basic outline of the view of appearances defended here coincides with a family of accounts already available: intentionalistic phenomenalist accounts.[9] However, these accounts of appearances tend also to lead to a metaphysical phenomenalism, precisely because they take a synthetic reading of <appearance> *and* because they assume a different reading of <thing> than I will work with. My main contribution is to show how an analytic reading of AR in Kant makes a phenomenalist philosophy of mind compatible with a realist metaphysic.

To be sure, it is common to assume that Kant simply uses 'appearance' in two fundamentally different senses: one in which an appearance is a mere representation, perhaps analytically so, and another in which appearances are physical things themselves. Though it is certainly possible that Kant uses the term ambiguously, such an interpretation should be accepted only as a last resort. It is especially dissatisfying to appeal to two fundamentally divergent senses of *Erscheinung*, given that the term is something of a technical one for Kant. If Kant introduces the term in a defined sense, basic charity should presume that he can stick to that sense.[10] At any rate, I will attempt to show that a reasonably uniform sense can be given.

Here is my plan for the paper. First, I present an explanation for the popularity of a synthetic reading of AR, which begins with Kant's very introduction of the concept of appearance. The synthetic reading of AR relies on a reading of 'object' that I will contest. Instead, there is a sense of 'object' in which it must belong to a representation. This leads to a positive proposal about the definition of appearances. I then consider how this proposal treats the difference between appearances and things.

2. The source of the synthetic reading

It is plausible that one of the central motivations for the synthetic reading of AR comes from the very passage in the Transcendental Aesthetic in which Kant introduces the concept of an appearance. He writes:

> The effect of an object [*Gegenstandes*] on the capacity for representation, so far as we are affected by the same, is **sensation**. That intuition which relates to the object through sensation is called **empirical**. The undetermined object of an intuition is called **appearance** [*Erscheinung*]. (A19–20/B34)

To understand the synthetic reading of AR, we can give a plausible reconstruction of this passage, which we will later reject. It can go something like the following:[11]

(1) There are objects which affect our capacity for representations.
(2) These objects must be something outside the capacity for representation.

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The reason for (2) is straightforward: something within our capacity for representation cannot have an effect on it, especially as to produce sensation. From here, synthetic readers will each say something like what follows:

(3) Appearances are the objects that affect our capacity for representations; they thus become contents of intuition.[12]

Since it is natural to assume that a mere representation cannot itself affect us from outside, the relevant 'objects' might seem to be external objects or physical things. If these are identical to appearances, it follows that appearances are physical things. I'll call this claim APT. The main difference among synthetic readers will be how they identify those objects vis-à-vis 'things in themselves'. Some two-world readers will say:

(3a) The objects that affect our senses are things distinct from 'things in themselves'.[13]

While one-world readers will say:

(3b) The objects that affect our senses are the same things as those that are some way 'in themselves'.

In either case, the key to understanding the synthetic reading is that the basic concept of appearances is that of the things that affect our senses. By any account, this makes appearances (or at least *outer* appearances) nearly equivalent to physical objects. The substantive differences between rival interpretations just concern the metaphysical status of mere physical objects.

Supposing, however, that synthetic readers could agree with this (very indeterminate) account of <appearance>, they should also agree that it is not an analytic or conceptual consequence of <appearance> thus defined that appearances are mere representations. For it is not an analytic claim that physical objects are representations. This could only be a substantive metaphysical thesis. Unsurprisingly, this is universally recognised among phenomenalist readers, each of whom accepts the definition of <appearance> as something like an ordinary physical object.[14] But it is equally agreed among non-phenomenalist readers that the 'objects' Kant speaks of in this passage are empirically real things. They tend to identify appearances with the 'things that appear'.[15] Hence, far from admitting that this identification of appearances and representations is analytic, they will deny it, at least when 'representation' is taken in a straightforward sense.

Realist readers want to avoid the apparent phenomenalist metaphysics in AR and so must offer some alternative explanation for what Kant means in AR passages. Here, for example, is Allais:

> While '*Vorstellungen*' is standardly translated as 'representation', it could just as well be translated as 'presentation'. Rather than saying that appearances are things which exist only in minds, or as constructions out of what exists only in minds, Kant can be read as saying that what counts as part of the empirically

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> real world is only what can be presented to us in (relational) perceptual experience. As I read him, Kant thinks that appearances are not just perceptible things, things which manifest themselves to us (as a realist might think); they are *essentially* perceptible or *essentially* manifestable. (Allais 2015: 13)

One can agree with Allais that the translation of *Vorstellung* does not need to be 'representation'; perhaps 'presentation' is a better and more neutral choice. But nothing much hangs on that, if one considers how many ways Kant formulates the fact that, without the mind, appearances would not exist at all.[16] Allais attempts to show how those passages can be accommodated, but they are clearly against the grain of her reading. Several other realist authors attempt a similar work-around with Kant's language of representation.[17] Though I do not find any of these solutions convincing, I so far only want to show why this move seems to be necessary, given a synthetic reading of AR. For it is impossible to maintain that physical objects are representations (in a normal sense) while being committed to a physical realism about them.

Interestingly, then, both phenomenalist readers and their opponents tend to agree on the basic *meaning* of 'appearance'. They only disagree about the substance of Kant's metaphysics. I conjecture that this agreement tends to arise from an admittedly plausible reading of the passage in which Kant first introduces the term 'appearance'.

3. The relative meaning of 'object'

Why is the synthetic reading of AR treated as the default one, even by readers who otherwise disagree about Kant's transcendental idealism? Pretty clearly, the explanation is Kant's use of the term 'object' (*Objekt*, *Gegenstand*)[18] to describe or define <appearance>. It is often thought that Kant introduces a use of the word 'object' in philosophy that is close to the standard contemporary one. For example, Kant is thought to invert the uses of 'subject' and 'object' that might be found in Descartes.[19] Unlike in Descartes, in Kant 'objects' were no longer something necessarily in the mind. In general, modern languages tend to use 'object' to refer to middle-sized concrete material things: roughly, *concrete particulars*.[20] This is not to say objects *must* be material things, but since that is the paradigm case, the use of 'object' to refer to (e.g.) numbers and other abstracta tends to generate puzzlement and philosophical controversy. Moreover, the contemporary sense of 'object' does not imply a connection to minds or representation. Something could be an 'object' (in this sense) even if it had no connection to us.

It may be true that Kant stands awkwardly on the cusp of a linguistic transformation in the use of 'object', one that would be in evidence in Frege and which Strawson calls 'objects in [the] weighty sense' (1966: 73). Nicholas Stang, for example, has argued that Kant has a 'quantificational' sense of 'object', which would make it both a count noun, as in the contemporary usage, and carry with it existential commitment.[21] That is, in my preferred terminology, there is some usage of 'object' in which it is an *absolute* term and means as much as 'thing'.[22] 'Thing' (*Ding*) is an absolute term with no relative usage; hence, it is always a more precise term when we want to make a claim without the suggestion of relativity. However, though there

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may be a use of 'object' in which it is nearly equivalent to 'thing', such usage evidently stands alongside one in which 'object' is explicitly or implicitly a *relational* term, not an absolute one that could be suitable to *classify* something in a stable way (i.e., so that the question, 'Is *x* an object or not?' would be a substantive one).[23] I mean that a large number of Kantian uses of the term are embedded in contexts like 'object of . . .' ('object of an intuition', 'object of experience', etc.) or imply such a context. In these cases, to speak of something as an object(-of-x) is to say something like this: it is the *target* of some representation or act of cognition.[24] This use of 'object' is a *role-relative* one. Just as targets in archery can be real, non-relative things outside of archery (e.g., a bale of hay), objects(-of-x) can be real, non-relative things outside of representation.[25] But to say that something is a target is only to specify its role relative to archery; to say that something is an object (in the relative sense) is only to specify its role relative to representation or cognition.[26] This of course does not mean that *what* is thus an object has an existence that is relative to representation or cognition.[27] But something would not be an object in this sense apart from this role.[28] This is, so far, merely a grammatical claim, not a metaphysical one.

To see that there must be a relative use of 'object' which is not equivalent to 'thing', consider a passage like the following one: 'Yet because all representations, whether they have outer things [*Dinge*] for their objects [*Gegenstände*] *or not*, yet in themselves, as determinations of the mind, belong to the inner state . . .' (A34/B50, emphasis added). In this passage, representations all have 'objects', but sometimes they are of 'things' and sometimes not. Clearly, we cannot substitute 'things'/*Dinge* for *Gegenstände* here, which would say that representations can have things for their things; nor could we make the converse substitution, that they have objects for their objects. 'Objects' must mean something closer to *targets* and be conceptually connected to representation.

Notice that if and when 'object' is a relative term, its grammar is closer to words like 'topic' or 'subject matter' than 'thing'. These words have an analogous relativity since a topic or subject matter belongs to that which *has* it as a topic or subject matter (say, a newspaper or magazine) while obviously referring to something outside as well. Further, it similarly makes little sense to ask whether something *is* a topic or not. But it is noteworthy that, in the context of a representational enterprise, it is not uncommon to substitute the relative term for the absolute one. Consider a pair of cynical journalists. They are following a lead to track down information about a group of suspected criminals. But, before they complete their investigation, the suspects are killed by an outside party. Now comes the morbid joke: 'Looks like our cover story just died'. The journalists are not idealists or phenomenalists. They don't think the suspects *are* their cover story full stop, but within the representational enterprise, the suspects are the cover story. Hence, the cover story meets the same fate as those people. In a similar way, we can refer to *things* as 'topics' or 'objects' (terms which may be conceptually connected to representation) without suggesting that the things exist in our representations of them.

Whatever the connection between the relative and absolute uses of 'object', the moral of the story thus far is that textual evidence regarding Kant's use of 'object' will often, if not always, be inconclusive between the relative and (potentially) absolute uses. Yet, interpreters frequently put forward claims in which Kant calls appearances 'objects' as straightforward evidence in favour of APT.[29] I hold that these texts are

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rarely unambiguous pieces of evidence since Kant may be using 'object' in a role-relative way. In any case, I will argue in the next section that the sense in which appearances are objects is the role-relative sense; if there is an absolute use of 'object' in which 'object' means 'thing', appearances are not objects in that sense. This makes 'thing' (as a translation of *Ding*) a more precise word for the defender of the synthetic reading of APT to make their claim (and for me to challenge), since it has no comparable grammatical ambiguity to 'object'. The defender of APT should show that appearances are (ontologically) *things*.[30] Later, I will argue that the relationship between appearances and things is straightforward – and mutually exclusive. Hence, passages that speak of appearances as objects are systematically ambiguous.[31] If there is a use of 'object' that means 'thing', we can use 'thing' to paraphrase those passages. If there is another relative use of an object, which is in itself entirely neutral vis-à-vis ontology, we can disambiguate this explicitly. Henceforth, when I assume that 'object' should be understood in the relative sense, I will add an 'r-' prefix.[32]

4. The definition of appearance

We have so far established that Kant's use of 'object' is often relative, and so we cannot conclude from his description of appearances as objects that appearances are *things*. However, there is still further clarification needed once the relative use of 'object' has been granted. Recall that the starting piece of textual evidence that apparently favours APT is the definitional text from the Transcendental Aesthetic. Though that passage does contain an instance of 'object' that seems to be an absolute one (the 'effect of an object on the capacity for representation'),[33] the use of 'object' that falls within the definition of <appearance> seems to be a patently role-relative one: 'The undetermined[34] object of an intuition is called **appearance** [*Erscheinung*]' (A19–20/B34, underlining added). This passage seems to present us with a definition,[35] and since I am claiming that AR is analytic, or true by definition, it is my aim to draw out AR from this definition. The definition is:

Appearance $=_{\mathbf{def}}$ the r-object of an empirical intuition

But this definition can be disambiguated in two ways, each of which respects the lessons learned about 'object' in the previous section. A synthetic reader can acknowledge the frequent occurrence of the r-object and treat the definition as meaning:

Appearance (realist) $=_{\mathbf{def}}$ the thing which is the r-object of an empirical intuition

This definition takes into account the lessons learned above because, just as the target of archery can *be* a bale of hay, an r-object of intuition can *be* the thing that is supposed to be represented by the intuition. However, the analytic reading of AR requires the definition to be understood as follows:

Appearance (representationalist) $=_{\mathbf{def}}$ the r-object presented in an empirical intuition

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Briefly, the realist definition makes AR synthetic because it makes the genus of appearances <thing>, and it is not analytic that things are representations. The representationalist definition makes AR analytic because here 'r-object' is simply a term for what is *in* a representation. The analytic reading simply requires *some* sense of 'r-object' that makes it belong essentially to representation. This sense, of course, is akin to the (Brentanian) notion of an intentional object.[36]

It is worth distinguishing the two understandings of r-objects with an analogy, which, though it risks oversimplification, helps to illustrate this difference in stark terms. Suppose you are watching a documentary about JFK. If asked about what is presented in the film, it is natural to respond that it is simply *JFK*: JFK is the film's r-object. But this can mean two things. First, it could mean that *JFK himself* (the now-deceased US President) is presented in the film. But that is potentially misleading. Only images of him appear, and real people, even when they are living, do not exist in the screens that present their images. The second option is that the film presents a *JFK rendition* that is meant to stand for that deceased person. This *rendition of JFK* exists in the images, sound, and text that are actually available to the film's audience. The same would be true of a fictional film portraying someone who never existed, say Frodo Baggins. The *Lord of the Rings* films present a rendition of Frodo to their audience, even though there is nothing else this version *stands for*, outside of their own minds.

I need not belabour the distinction, for it is rather obvious. But it is important to make clear that the realist definition of <appearance> makes it out so that an appearance is a thing that *has become* the object of a representation. In the film analogy, that makes appearances analogous to the following description: *the actual US president who has become the subject matter of a film*. This conception still makes appearances *r-objects of representations*, but not representations themselves. On that view, appearances are things on their own account, but they become representations (or perhaps possible representations) through a relation to our intuition. But appearances on the representationalist reading are more akin, in the film analogy, to the actual images presented to the viewer of the film, rather than to any person. Let us say that the real JFK, or the person depicted in any documentary, is the *distal object* of the film.[37] By contrast, the JFK rendition that is constituted by the materials of filmmaking and presented to audiences is the *immanent object* of the film. For Kant, appearances are r-objects immanent in the contents presented in empirical intuitions.

Though the word 'object' (even taken in a relative sense) can be used for the distal object and for the immanent content of a representation, this does not mean that Kant's definition of <appearance> is ambiguous, for Kant's definition of appearance and his consistent use of the term are concerned only with the immanent content of the presentation, something that is intrinsically presentational.[38] Some will grate against the idea that 'object' for Kant can mean something completely immanent to presentations rather than their distal correlate. But Kant frequently speaks this way.[39] He says, 'For as appearances they amount to an object which is merely in us, because a mere modification of our sensibility cannot be encountered outside of us at all' (A 129). This passage presents appearances as if they exist in the very 'fabric' of sensibility, much as a JFK rendition exists in the materials of film. He also writes:

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> The sensuous faculty of intuition is really only a receptivity to being affected with representations in a certain way, whose relation to each other is a pure intuition of space and time, (mere forms of our sensibility) and which, so far as they are connected and determinable in these relations (to space and time) according to laws of the unity of experience are called *objects* [*Gegenstände*]. (A494/B522, underlining added)

In this passage, if we follow the connecting pronoun 'which', not every representation *is* an r-object, but some representations present r-objects, which (for Kant) makes those r-objects representations as well. To be sure, Kant is not identifying *all* representations as r-objects in the relevant sense. Here, the representations that are r-objects are also connected with the laws of the unity of experience. But he does not identify the r-objects of experience with distal things but with representations with which we are affected. He makes a related point in the Second Analogy:

> Now one can, to be sure, call everything, and even every representation, insofar as one is conscious of it, an object; only what this word is to mean in the case of appearances, not insofar as they are (as representations) objects, but rather only insofar as they designate an object, requires a deeper investigation. (A189–90/B234–5, underlining added)

Here, appearances *are* 'as representations' r-objects: I take this to mean that they are empirical contents presented in representation. But they also 'designate' a further (distal) object: their referential target is something outside the representation.[40] This is perhaps why 'appearance' also implies something (else) that appears (cf. B xxvi–xxvii; A249).

Now, in the case of a film, it is easy to distinguish the *immanent r-object* (i.e., the lively JFK rendition of the documentary) from the *distal r-object* (i.e., the deceased JFK). But appearances are *empirical* representations, and moreover, they are *perceptual* representations.[41] The unavoidable difficulty with this account in perceptual contexts is that the presented r-object and the designated distal (or 'transcendental') object seem to the perceiver to coincide: actual perceptual representations announce their distal objects to us, but they do not typically announce themselves as representations.[42] If I am (foolishly) looking at the Sun, it is natural to say that *the Sun* is the r-object of my intuition. But, if we follow standard phenomenalist accounts, to say that the Sun is my r-object involves a great simplification. What I call perceiving or intuiting the Sun means that there is for me a Sun-shaped image in my field of view. The *appearance* is precisely that *immanent* rendition of the Sun contained in my sensory intuition. But the Sun itself – the distal object, or the thing – is something that exists apart from this immanent rendition. At least upon reflection, I take the Sun-as-it-appears-to-me (a content in my empirical intuition) to 'stand for' a Sun that would exist outside all my representations. This is what Kant seems to have in mind when he alludes to the *Critique's* teaching us 'to take the object in a *twofold significance*, namely, as an appearance [sc. as immanent to the representation] and as a thing in its own right [sc. as what is ultimately signified, i.e., the transcendental object]' (Bxxvii). This 'twofold significance' does not seem to be a special ambiguity with *Kant's* use of the term 'object', but rather something bound up with

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representation as such: taking something as a representation implies taking it to stand for something. What is important, on my account, is that though appearances both *are* an r-object and *designate* an object, the r-object that they *are* is purely immanent to representation.

Thus, when Kant says, for example, that a *house* is an appearance (A190/B236), he can only mean – and I think in the context he does mean – a house that is currently being targeted (or pretended to be, for the sake of an example) in an empirical intuition (= 'which stands before me' [*das vor mich steht*]) and *for that reason is the immanent content of a perceptual representation*. That house (the distal object) is a real thing outside the intuition, but, since our access to it is only via a perceptual representation of the house – imbued with colour, touch, and perspective – we must acknowledge that the 'house' available to us is a represented house, and thus that it is a representation. This does not mean that (distal) houses are mere representations.[43] For part of what it means to take the house-representation as an appearance is precisely to see it designating something that does not appear otherwise than in the representation.[44]

The present account overlaps in significant ways with Tolley's (2022) recent 'Fregean' interpretation of appearances. Tolley argues that appearances should be understood on the model of Fregean *object-dependent senses*. On this model, an indexical expression like 'this house' has a distal referent, presumably a particular house. But the expression has a publicly identifiable meaning – its *sense* – that can be understood by anyone who uses the expression correctly. Though the senses of these expressions are not identical to objects, following Fregeans like McDowell and Evans, Tolley notes that the sense of such indexicals is object-dependent in the following way: we could not understand the expression as having the meaning it has except insofar as its referent exists and is present to the mind (Tolley 2022: 217). The reference is not included in the sense (*à la* Russell), but the sense could not be the sense it is apart from the actual (distal) object referred to. Moreover, everyone who understands the expression understands precisely that 'one' public sense.

Tolley understands appearances as object-dependent senses in this latter way. This permits him, like the present account, to preserve the way in which appearances are akin to *images* and not identical to the objects they (distally) designate (Tolley 2022: 225–6). However, just as Frege introduces the notion of sense to help de-psychologise the concept of meaning, insisting as he does that senses are not private mental representations (precisely Kant's *Vorstellungen*), Tolley argues that Kantian appearances are similarly *public* and not mental, constituting something like a more concrete version of Frege's 'third realm' (2022: 234–5).

Thus, if the Fregean could acknowledge that AR is analytic, he differs on the meaning of 'representation', for an appearance would no longer be a *mental* representation.[45] Tolley, along with many others, seems to think that it is a desideratum of an interpretation of appearances that they be public entities by some description. By contrast, the above account makes appearances decidedly *private*. To speak crudely, my own appearances are in my own mind, and yours are in yours. Recall:

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> Space itself, however, together with time, and, with both, all appearances, are nevertheless in themselves **not things**, but rather nothing but representations, and they cannot at all exist outside our mind. (A492/B520)[46]

We take these appearances to 'designate' common distal objects of experience, but this does not alter the merely mental existence of the appearances.

Now, is it a desideratum that appearances are *not* private in this way? It is clear that just about everyone will have to acknowledge that there is *something* mentally private for Kant. If not appearances, certainly our empirical intuitions (the acts, at the very least) are private to each of us. But I am claiming merely that Kant uses 'appearance' to refer to contents bound up with private acts of empirical intuition.[47] Unless a view aims to deny that *there are* such private mental contents,[48] everyone will need a concept for them, whether they are phenomenalists or not. In my view, <appearance> is Kant's concept for them.

It is only problematic that appearances are private, I believe, if we accept the synthetic reading of AR. For then appearances are first understood as 'objects' (read as 'things'), and it is imperative that (physical) things are not merely private mental entities. But if appearances are not supposed to be things, it is not a problem that they are not public. That is, so long as we have some *other* concept to describe the entities that are supposed to be public in that way. Now, one might think that, without the concept of appearance, the important role for ordinary things is left vacant in Kant's account (since by common agreement it cannot be played by 'things in themselves'). I will address this concern in the following section. If it can be addressed adequately, perhaps the main obstacle to acknowledging AR as analytic can fall away.

5. Realism or phenomenalism?

Though on the reading I have offered, AR is analytic and does not present a metaphysical view at all, there is a more traditional reason for supposing that AR leads to a version of metaphysical phenomenalism or subjective idealism and hence against reading it as merely analytic. For if 'appearance' is a term *wholly* reserved for representational contents, then we seem to have no term left for the distal thing other than the 'thing in itself'.[49] And this looks like a problem because 'things in themselves' are supposed to be non-spatio-temporal entities, or things which have only non-appearing properties, or something like that. It is hard to see how we could say that the perception of a cube is *of* a distal cube outside the representation if nothing outside representations is cubical at all.[50] If phenomenalists claim that the 'thing in itself' plays some causal or affectional role with respect to the appearances, this must be a very indirect role, because that 'cube' won't be cubical (not to mention the ancient problem of attributing causality to it). But it might be said that this is at least a consistent option. Realists, by contrast, have tended to think that they are required to identify the 'thing in itself' as the same thing as the appearance. This creates notorious difficulties about how one and the same thing could share properties that are taken to be in conflict.

Should we simply concede metaphysical phenomenalism? To be sure, the above view is *compatible* with a stronger version of phenomenalism than I endorse, though not without raising new difficulties for it. For, as I suggested above, metaphysical

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phenomenalists typically endorse APT: appearances are physical things. A phenomenalist who also accepts the analytic reading of AR must reject APT, considered as a definition. For APT cannot be analytic if AR is (it cannot be analytically true that things are representations), and, as we saw above, it is the conjunction of APT with the *synthetic* reading of AR that typically gets phenomenalism off the ground. The view available to metaphysical phenomenalists, in place of APT, is apparently to *deny* the existence of physical things that are not representations. This is a step I cannot take and one that I think Kant did not.

It is worth exploring whether a realist interpretation of Kant can better embrace the analytic reading of AR. I believe it can. What must be shown is that Kant leaves room for a kind of entity that is on the one hand not an appearance (since these are only representations) but could have the properties that appearances present their distal objects as having: shape and size, for example. The latter requirement is what must be the case for our talk of physical things to have anything like a standard meaning.

In recent work (Wolf 2023, 2026), I have tried to show how mere *things* (*Dinge*) can satisfy these demands. Whereas it is commonly thought that 'thing' in Kant is ambiguous between 'thing in itself' and 'appearance', I argue that Kant's use of the term *Ding* is basic and fundamental; it does not require a disambiguation between 'appearance' and 'thing in itself'. *Dinge* are the mind-independent units of reality, and we do not need the expression 'in itself' to specify their mind-independence. On this view, if Kant describes something as a 'thing that appears' or a 'thing that affects our sensibility', it is a thing, full stop, and (by assumption) mind-independently real. Yet, in contrast to other views, we should not equate 'thing that appears' with 'appearance', or say that appearances are things in some aspect, since appearances are solely on the representational side of the divide. And mere things do not have to be or contain appearances to be represented by them.

This proposal is well illustrated by the following passage from the *Prolegomena*:

> I say in opposition: There are things [*Dinge*] 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 [*Dinge*] 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 body ... (4: 289)

In this passage, mere *Dinge* are given to us as objects of our senses. They are the distal targets of our representations. We are tempted to ask: are these things appearances or 'things in themselves'? But we should resist this question, for 'things' is a sufficient answer to the question 'What exists outside of us?' As other one-world interpretations imply, Kant simply tells us that we do not know what these things are like 'as they may be in themselves'. For now, we can set aside what kind of ignorance this entails.

The present interpretation of the *Prolegomena* passage is quite consonant with a moderate metaphysical reading of Kant.[51] The only modification that must be pressed is what the passage says about appearances, which is just what the analytic reading of AR requires: they are 'the representations that [things] produce in us because they

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affect our senses'. Since appearances are produced in us *by* things, appearances are not identical to things. A thing does not have any 'aspect' that *is* an appearance.[52]

Yet, we are still left wondering what a (mere) *Ding* could be like on a Kantian view. In particular, we may well worry about the *spatio-temporality* of mere *Dinge*. For suppose appearances represent things as being spatio-temporal, but nothing outside of representations is spatio-temporal. Since I can make no sense of the coffee cup in front of me if it has no spatio-temporal properties, any view that says there *is* no spatio-temporal coffee cup *might as well* say that the coffee cup is a mere 'virtual object',[53] if it exists at all. Phenomenalism strikes back.

However, I believe that when we recognise <thing> as a distinct and unambiguous concept, we are also led to modify our conception of what it means to deny knowledge of things 'in themselves'. The second part of my proposal is that the expression 'in itself' (*an sich selbst*) is often better translated as '*per se*' and that a grammatical analysis shows that it does not combine with nouns to create more complex nouns.[54] The expression must be understood in the context of some predicative attribution. For example, attributing a property to an *F* per se is attributing it to *F* without qualification, and so in virtue of being a mere *F*. In this way, '*per se*' (or in itself) is syntactically comparable to modal operators like 'possibly' and 'necessarily'. This implies that the collocation 'thing in itself' is not a noun phrase, since it includes a predicative adverb. As a result, it cannot designate a *kind of thing*. Instead, statements that use 'things in themselves' can be analysed into statements about mere things, without being equivalent to them.

From this analysis, it follows that claims that are supposed to be true when we use 'thing in itself' are not obviously true when we substitute 'thing'. If it is true that 'things in themselves' are not in space (or 'things are not *per se* in space'), is it also true that things (with no modification) are not spatial?[55] This inference does not follow immediately. For compare the claims:

(1) Guns are not dangerous *per se*
(2) Guns are not dangerous

(1) might well be true, but (2) is not, and it does not follow from (1). Just so, the interpretative tradition has focused on the analogue of (1) for the spatiality of things. And since the unmodified concept <thing> has received little attention in the literature,[56] the question about the spatiality of mere things (the analogue of [2]) has hardly been asked. I have argued elsewhere (Wolf 2026) that if we consider what Kant's views imply for mere *Dinge*, his arguments in the Transcendental Aesthetic do not mean to establish that no *Dinge* have properties that we call spatial, such as size and shape; they establish the weaker claim that space, since it belongs essentially to human sensory representation, does not belong to the nature of things as such, what things are qua things.[57] If Kant's denial about what things are *per se* is not directly a denial that some things are spatial,[58] there is logical room in Kant's view for *Dinge* that have the characteristics they appear to have. So long as things of some such kind are available, we can grant Kant a robust picture of the contents of the mind without detracting from a robust account of reality outside the mind. Appearances can be *wholly* representational, because we can permit the existence of things that are (at least possibly) veridically represented by the appearances.

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To be sure, I have not said enough to make my account of mere things wholly convincing, and further alternatives are worth exploring. But I believe the analytic reading of AR makes available new interpretative possibilities, as it enables a greater logical independence between <appearance> and <thing> than has typically been appreciated.

To take a significant example, in light of our proposal, it is illuminating to examine a passage that has been puzzling in itself, but especially so on a realist construal of appearances. The passage is one in which Kant discusses secondary qualities in the *Prolegomena*. He writes:

> That one could, without detracting from the actual existence of outer things, say of a great many of their predicates: they belong not to these things in themselves, but only to their appearances and have no existence of their own outside our representation, is something that was generally accepted and acknowledged long before *Locke's* time, though more commonly thereafter. To these predicates belong warmth, color, taste, etc. That I, however, even beyond these, include (for weighty reasons) also among mere appearances the remaining qualities of bodies, which are called *primarias*: extension, place, and more generally space along with everything that depends on it (impenetrability or materiality, shape, etc.), is something against which not the least ground for uncertainty can be raised; and as little as someone can be called an idealist because he wants to admit colors as properties that attach not to the object in itself, but only to the sense of vision as modifications, just as little can my system be called idealist simply because I find that even more of, *nay, all of the properties that make up the intuition of a body* belong merely to its appearance: for 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. (4: 289)

This passage is supposed to convince Kant's early readers that he is *not* a Berkeleyan idealist, but, on the surface, it might look to be proof positive that he *is* one.[59] At first glance, it may look as if Kant is arguing something like this:

> L1. Lockeans say that there are *some* mind-dependent properties of physical things
> L2. And they are not idealists
> K1. I am saying *all* the properties of physical things are mind-dependent
> K2. So, (by analogy) I am not an idealist

Thus conceived, the argument is doomed. For it is hard to see what could be more idealist than claiming that *all* the properties of bodies are mind-dependent. It was precisely the 'some' that made it plausible that Lockeans were hanging on to realism in some form. 'All' makes all the difference.

Yet, that is not Kant's argument. Instead, in my view, he is making a simple point about the relation between representation and mind-independent reality. It is something like this: When Lockeans attribute colour to 'appearances' or to the content of empirical representations, they do not detract from the reality of the

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things that appear. Lockeans are not idealists, because this *addition* to our representations is not necessarily a *subtraction* from the things (after all, Lockeans have to posit mind-independent dispositions in things to account for so-called secondary qualities). Accordingly, I, Kant, claim that representation by itself contains more than even a Lockean would countenance: the a priori forms of space and time belong to representation *whether or not* they belong to things. Still, in the same way, by adding this content *to* appearances, I am subtracting nothing from the things that are thus represented. Hence, I cannot be an idealist.

On this reading, Kant is an *epistemic* phenomenalist: he believes that we have no cognition of anything apart from the sensory conditions of our representations. As he writes in the Second Analogy, '[W]e have only to do with our representations; how things in themselves may be (without regard to representations through which they affect us) is entirely beyond our cognitive sphere' (A190/B235; cf. A108–9). This is why Kant is sometimes willing to say, for example, that the bodies we perceive are only representations: because the properties we can perceive them to have depend wholly on our representational powers. Yet, in the *Prolegomena* passage, Kant rightly recognises that this epistemic phenomenalism is itself simply innocent of metaphysical theses.[60] A more complete epistemic phenomenalism than Locke's says nothing against an equally complete physical realism. Hence, this passage *relies* on the representationality of appearances or the contents of sensible intuitions, precisely to demonstrate Kant's realism about the things that appear.

6. Conclusion

Kant seems to tell us that appearances are mental representations, but this is not readily accepted by contemporary Kantians. I have tried to show that the reticence to accept Kant's repeated affirmation of AR stems from an implicit assumption that appearances are in some way *things*, and thus not *by definition* representations. If we assume, in contrast, that AR is analytic, then appearances are wholly mental items. Yet, restricting the definition of appearances to mental items turns out to liberate what is at least arguably Kant's metaphysical realism. For it cannot be an offence to metaphysical realism simply to claim that *there are* private mental representations, or even that we are restricted in our cognition to what private mental representations afford us. We are free to affirm the existence of things outside our minds which, as far as we know, may, in many respects, be nearly as we intuit them to be.

This interpretation breaks with the popular view that Kant must be as anti-Cartesian as possible: that he must not posit representations 'between' us and the world. But this contemporary philosophical predilection – which, of course, is not so secure as to be beyond doubt – need not be an *idée fixe* in our interpretation of Kant. Not to mention, much of what is wanted from the anti-Cartesian interpretation, namely, a realism about the physical world, can still be had, even if we *do* suppose that our access to that world is fully mediated by our representations. For such an account to be satisfying, however, we must also admit a possibility that is not standardly recognised by interpreters: that Kant leaves room for mind-independent things that are not (at least by definition) utterly unlike the way they appear to us in representation. We can then grant that <appearance> is a concept that concerns representations alone without denying Kant's realism about what appears.

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Notes

1 Kant's texts are cited in the typical way, according to the Cambridge Edition of the Works of Immanuel Kant (Kant 1998, 2002), though occasionally modified, with page numbers linked to the *Akademie Ausgabe* (Kant 1900ff). The *Critique of Pure Reason* is cited according to the A/B versions.

2 I will be relying on a rather loose and simple version of Kant's analytic/synthetic distinction here, since the distinction is operative rather than thematic in this paper. Roughly, analytic claims are clarifications of concepts; synthetic claims are those that go beyond the concepts and thus 'amplify' their objects. Hence, a synthetic claim is more likely to be surprising and non-obvious even for a competent user of a concept.

3 E.g., Collins (1999: 45): appearances are 'nonmental spatial objects'. For Marshall (2013: 533–4), 'appearances' is 'elliptical' for 'things as they appear to us'. See also Bird (2006: 179). In this paper, I occasionally gloss 'object' as 'physical object' when I intend to pick out the public things that interpreters sometimes take appearances to be. The phrase is problematic if pressed too far.

4 There is a substantive reason I have to use 'things in themselves' in scare quotes; see Section 5 below.

5 See Collins (1999: 32): 'But appearances are the constituents of nature. They are the only subject matter for science and the only objects we ever get to know in experience. Empirical realities *are* appearances for Kant. If all appearances are modifications of the mind, then empirical objects must be modifications of the mind too. If that is Kant's thesis, he is, of course, an idealist by any standard'.

6 This claim should not be confused with what James van Cleve calls 'analytic phenomenalism', 'according to which truths purportedly about material things are necessarily equivalent to truths solely about our perceptions' (1999: 71). As far as I know, only a few suggestions that AR is analytical have been made, none developed at length. At one point, Henry Allison explicitly suggests that AR might be taken to be analytic (2004: 389). However, he seems to reject this claim when 'appearances' are glossed as 'spatiotemporal objects'. I take Longuenesse (1998: 20–1) to endorse an analytic reading; however, see Longuenesse 2005: 156, 168–70, where this would seem not to be the case. Stang (2016/2024) briefly considers a reading of AR that he calls the *identity* reading; he considers it to be implausible (and suggests that almost no one holds it). Though AR implies an identity, I do not prefer the identity characterisation. Identities could be surprising, and indeed synthetic. It could be a discovery, i.e., that Clark Kent is Superman or that water is H_2O. I do not want to leave room for the conceptual relation between <appearance> and <representation> to be a discovery in that sense.

7 See Jankowiak (2017) for a detailed treatment of the varieties of phenomenalism on offer for interpreters.

8 I do not use 'empirical realism' to denote Kant's view that physical things exist outside the mind. In my view, commentators frequently neglect that 'empirical' is *only* an epistemic adjective. It describes something that is represented empirically and hence carries with it a reference to representation, cognition, or thought which includes sensation. Hence, 'empirical realism' is not a good term to describe Kant's belief in the real existence of things outside our representations that affect our senses.

9 See, e.g., Aquila (1983), Jankowiak (2017), Jauernig (2021). Roughly, these are the accounts that Allais (2015) has called 'sophisticated phenomenalist' readings. The account is similar in some ways to Tolley (2022), which rightly emphasises both the *imagistic* and *representational* nature of appearances. However, for Tolley, appearances are not mental. See below, section 4, for discussion.

10 As we'll see, there are both intrinsic and accidental reasons for ambiguity in the term 'object' for Kant. So it is not unlikely that Kant would use some words in multiple senses. But there are good reasons to think that 'object' is not a technical term in the same way that 'appearance' is.

11 Cf. Rosefeldt (2022: 19) for a comparable reconstruction.

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12 In this paper, I will deal with *outer* appearances by default, ignoring special complications that pertain to inner appearances. It is worth noting, though, that the interpretation of 'object' as 'physical object' makes it extremely difficult to see how there could be any inner appearances. An advantage of the representational reading of appearances is that it easily accommodates the common nature of both inner and outer appearances. If appearances *just are* representations, then inner and outer representations differ simply in the respective content of those representations.

13 This view would hold for those who accept some form of 'double affection': that appearances *as well as* 'things in themselves' affect us. Other two-world readers might take the meaning of 'object' to shift and so would hold that appearances do not, strictly speaking, affect our senses. Thanks to Tim Jankowiak for clarification on this point.

14 Guyer takes appearances to be 'ordinary objects' (1987: 335). Oberst: 'Spatiotemporal things are outer appearances, i.e., empirically outer things' (2018: 177). Jauernig says outer appearances 'populate the public empirical world that we all share' (2021: 51); they make up the 'empirical level of reality' (ibid.). See also Pickering 2023: 249ff.

15 For Allais, appearances are the 'perceptible things' (2015: 13), which are the 'same things' as the things as they are in themselves (2015: 27–30). Rosefeldt seems to acknowledge that 'appearance' can have a meaning which is (in my terms) analytically representational, but for him this is *not* the sense in which appearances are called objects: 'Note that when we call these sensible mental contents 'appearances', then this notion of an appearance must not be confused with the notion of an appearance as an empirical object. It has often been noted in the literature that Kant's use of the term 'appearance' (*Erscheinung*) wavers between two meanings' (2022: 31).

16 Cf. Jauernig (2021: 30 n. 12)

17 See, e.g., Collins: 'We must try to understand Kant's claim that enduring things in space are representations without supposing that he takes such things to be mental' (1999: 46–7; cf. 43–5). Marshall: 'When Kant says that objects are 'mere representations', we can read him as saying that they are merely 'things-qua-represented'' (2013: 542). See also Langton (1998: 159), Gomes (2017: 541–3), and Allison (2020: 252).

18 Despite many attempts to hang a substantive conceptual distinction on this verbal one between *Objekte* and *Gegenstände*, to my knowledge, nothing has been established; my account will not assume an important difference here. See de Boer's (2023: 16 n. 4) comments on the lack of convincing evidence for this distinction.

19 For Descartes, the 'subject' is the substance, whereas an 'object' is an idea. See Aquila (1983: Ch. 1) for a good account of this history. See, likewise, Anscombe's (1965: 3) remarks in the opening pages of her 'The Intentionality of Sensation'.

20 This can be seen clearly in the way that psychologists speak of the 'object concept' in the study of infant cognition. See, e.g., the work of Elizabeth Spelke (1990).

21 Stang's appeal to a 'quantificational sense' suggests that there is a well-understood concept of an object connected to the use of the existential quantifier. I find this disputable. Below I use the simpler characterisation of that sense as one in which 'object' means 'thing'. Admittedly, according to some philosophers (e.g., Williamson 2003), this is precisely how we should interpret the (unrestricted) logical quantifiers.

22 A rather unambiguous use along these lines comes in the Refutation of Idealism: '*The mere, but empirically determined, consciousness of my own existence proves the existence of objects in space outside me*' (B275). But I take this as unambiguous because Kant later uses *things* to make the same point.

23 Stang (2021, 2022) gives a good account of the relational sense of object. This is also defended in detail by de Boer (2023).

24 I am so far studiously avoiding the divisive term 'intentional object'. Used in the Bretananian way, the intentional object is theorised to 'in-exist' in the mind. See especially Aquila (2003). In the next section, I will argue that appearances should be construed roughly in this way. But one does not have to agree with this claim to acknowledge the role- or representation-relativity of 'object'.

25 For a nice use of the target/archery analogy to explain intentionalistic locutions, see Descombes (2001: 23–4).

26 E.g., 'The central object of investigation of the present volume is capitalism itself' (Shaikh 2016: xxxv).

27 Though I am sympathetic to much in de Boer's (2023) account of the 'object of', she claims that Kant is relatively indifferent to the mind-independent existence of the things that he calls objects of cognition,

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and she thinks these 'objects' are *produced* by the mind. This seems far too strong. It seems fair to say that the fact that something is a target for me is a fact that depends on me and my intentions, but not that my intentions thus *produce* targets, since that would imply the production of the thing that is a target. De Boer does not, apparently, wish to subscribe to a phenomenalist reading of Kant, but her formulations can seem to suggest such a reading.

28 The ambiguity of 'object' was well recognised by Crusius prior to Kant (see Crusius 1766: 125 [§ 65]) and by Kant himself. See Van Cleve (1999: 90–8).

29 E.g., Pickering 2023.

30 See note 52 below for an account of expressions like 'things, as appearances' in Kant.

31 I will note that the ambiguity here is *not* the famous 'ing/ed' ambiguity sometimes attributed to Kant's use of 'appearance'. (Indeed, I propose that this term does not bear this ambiguity in Kant: he does not use *Erscheinung* to describe the *act* or *event* of appearing.) This ambiguity is supposed to help say that if appearances are represent*eds*, they can be the things that get represented, rather than the content of representational states (which would apparently be the represent*ings*). I'll argue that 'appearance' only designates the content of representational states.

32 Following Stang 2021.

33 Though see below (note 44), and consider the journalist example above for a way to understand this absolute *use* as being consistent with a relative *meaning* of 'object'.

34 I will make no significant remarks about the meaning of 'undetermined' (*unbestimmt*) in the definition. This term has become contentious, as it has been interpreted as bearing on the conceptualism/non-conceptualism debate: many take 'undetermined' to mean 'not *conceptually* determined'. I take no stance on this issue here, as it would needlessly complicate the topic. Even if my view implied one reading over the other, it would only specify the *kind* of representation that appearance must be, not *whether* appearances are representations. For a classic discussion, see Vaihinger (1892/1881: vol. 2, 31 ff.).

35 Cf., e.g., Aquila (1983: 132), Longuenesse (1998: 24 n. 13), Allison (2004: 57), Jauernig (2021: 34 n. 23).

36 Cf. Aquila (2003).

37 In Kant's terminology, JFK himself would presumably be the 'transcendental object' of the film, where the transcendental object is something like the actual thing presumed to be targeted by a representation but which is not independently available to the representer. Though this conception of the transcendental object operates in the background of what follows, the transcendental object raises numerous exegetical difficulties that are best sidelined for present purposes.

38 This means that appearances are very close to mental images. Tolley (2022: 225–6) also draws the connection to images, but for him, this is more of an analogy. In my view, appearances partly consist of mental images. Their distinction from mere mental images would require the kind of investigation into the distinction between sensibility and understanding that goes beyond my aim of merely showing that appearances are solely representations in some sense.

39 This interpretation is already discussed by Vaihinger (1892/1881: vol. 2, 34), including the older references he considers.

40 It should be insisted that it is not part of the *definition* of appearance that the 'designation' relation is successful: in the same way that we cannot say that a documentary about a US president is successful (in the sense of being veridical). By this I mean that since only the immanent r-object is presented, the fact that it designates something else is a feature of the immanent object's own intentionality, not a secured relation to an extra-mental thing. If Kant has an argument (perhaps in the Transcendental Deduction or the Refutation of Idealism) that appearances are non-inferentially related to their distal objects, this is not built in to the very *concept* of an appearance (cf., e.g., A90/B123, where Kant raises the possibility – which is at least conceptually coherent – that appearances are not subject to the unity of the understanding).

41 See: 'For in themselves appearances, as mere representations, *are only actual in perception*, which is in fact nothing other than the actuality of an empirical representation, i.e., appearance' (A493/B521, italics added).

42 This is not because of a mistake or special ambiguity on Kant's part, but because of the *transparency* of the language of appearance: in citing what appears in the representation, I cite what the representation is supposed to target (though this is not to say that all perceptual experiences are exhaustively transparent in the sense accepted by contemporary representationalists; cf. Jankowiak 2024).

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43 A similar analysis would need to be given to a statement like 'The human being is himself appearance' (A552/B580). I take this to mean: human beings are contents of empirical representations, and hence (the implication in the passage) their actions must be understood by observers according to laws of empirical causality. But of course, human beings are not 'in themselves' appearances, for in the same paragraph, Kant specifies that actions are perceived only as appearances, and yet reason is not an appearance (A553/B581).
44 The foregoing offers a way of explaining the combination of a relative use ('object of an intuition') with an apparently non-relative use ('effect of an object') in the passage that we considered the primary source of the synthetic reading of 'appearance' (i.e., A19–20/B34). Suppose for a moment that the relative and representation-immanent meaning of 'object' is primary in the definition of appearance, as I maintain. Then, just as it is possible to speak in absolute terms of a relative object in the example above ('the cover story just died'), it is very possible to speak in absolute terms of the r-object of intuition. Hence, in perception, I take *this house* to be the r-object of my intuition. In doing so, I also take the *distal house* (what is not in itself a representation) to be the cause of my sensations. But I have no way of citing it as the cause of my representation *except in representation-dependent terms*, i.e., what I am seeing now is also partly the cause of my seeing it. Hence, though Kant is not suggesting that the representational content of a sensation is the cause of its own sensory content, he is referring to the cause in terms that depend on the effect having already been accomplished. Compare Searle's account of the content (in his parentheses) of visual perception, which contains this dual register of the object: 'I have a visual experience (that there is a visual station wagon there and that there is a yellow station wagon there is causing this visual experience)' (1983: 48).
45 Hence, if Tolley could acknowledge that AR is analytic, it could not be from the apparent definition in A19–20/B34. For the reference to appearances as r-objects of *empirical* intuition requires, in my view, that appearances contain sensations, which Kant also says elsewhere (A20/B34). But it is absurd to think that public 'senses' contain sensations, which are (I believe) necessarily private.
46 To be sure, in this passage, one could find it congenial that Kant uses 'mind' in the singular and suppose that he is referring to a singular collective mind. I believe it is clear that 'our mind' is meant to refer to each of our minds respectively.
47 In an important passage from the A-Deduction, Kant writes: 'All representations have, as representations, their object, and could themselves in turn be objects of other representations. Appearances are the only objects which can be immediately given to us, and that which relates immediately to the object is called intuition. But these appearances are not things *per se*, but rather only representations, which in turn have their object . . . ' (A108–9, modified). If one follows the connections implicit in this passage, we can see that (1) appearances are 'objects' (what we call immanent r-objects), but that (2) intuitions are contained in the appearances, and that (3) intuitions themselves relate or refer to objects. It is, of course, very clear that intuitions themselves belong to minds, for Kant. Yet, if that is true, this passage implies that appearances belong to minds, for intuitions are 'in' the appearances. It makes no sense to say that intuitions are 'in' tables and chairs or even, it seems to me, in public senses. The appearances must *be* the mental contents that contain intuitions.
48 I need not say that they are only representational states in the sense of contemporary representationalism, i.e., deny that they contain qualia or 'mental paint' as well. See Jankowiak (2024) for a defence of the view that appearances include non-representational qualia.
49 For a classic formulation of the 'trilemma' regarding what the 'affecting object' could be, see Vaihinger (1892/1881, vol. 2: 35–55; esp. 53).
50 See Rosefeldt (2022) for an attempt to address this concern head-on. It is recently pressed by Jankowiak (forthcoming).
51 In particular, the above account of the passage is comparable to Allais's (2015), who also suggests that we should begin by understanding 'things' in a 'neutral' sense (2015: 35), prior to the distinction between appearances and 'things in themselves'.
52 Sometimes Kant speaks of 'things as appearances'. These and similar expressions do not need to be read as (e.g.) 'things *which are* appearances'. Instead, they would be referring to things which become contents of representations. Compare expressions like 'Criminals as cover stories' or 'Historical figures as topics of monographs'.
53 See Van Cleve (1999).
54 Rosefeldt's (2024) independent analysis comes to a similar, though not identical result. He observes that sometimes 'in itself' modifies the *copula*, rather than any noun.

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55 As I point out in the same piece, Kant never uses the term 'spatial' in the *Critique of Pure Reason* or the *Prolegomena*. In my view, Kant is interested in 'space' *qua* a singular term referring to a unified intuitive framework. Thus, when Kant says that space *is* such a representational framework, and not a property of things *per se*, this does not entail that what we normally think of as spatial features cannot belong to things. Kant's argument is not that things have no spatial properties, but rather that purely spatial properties can exist (in pure intuition) even without mind-independent things, and thus cannot be identified with the properties of existing individuals. I argue that this conclusion is silent on the question of whether things have shape or size as properties or relations. If they *can*, then nothing stops (distal) rounded coffee cups from causing representations that look rounded. Relatedly, in my view it is not the mere existence of spatial properties that leads to the contradictions of the Antinomy, but rather the stronger claim that the infinite (both large and small) magnitude of space is itself a real thing.

56 See Stang (2022) for a recent exception.

57 If space belonged to things qua things, it would be of the essence of a thing to be in space. Notice that this is precisely the implication that Kant mentions in the B-edition of the Aesthetic: that if space were a property of things qua things (i.e., a condition of the possibility of things as such), then things (including, e.g., God) would not be possible outside of space (cf. B71).

58 I say 'some' because it is important to Kant's picture that things are not *by definition* spatio-temporal. That falls out of the argument about 'things qua things'. As Kant says, '[O]ur manner of intuition does not pertain to all things, but only to objects of our senses, consequently that [the categories'] objective validity is bounded, and room thus remains for some other sort of intuition and therefore for things as its objects' (A286/B342–3).

59 See Allais (2015: 125–30) for an attempt to read the passage from a realist point of view. For her the solution depends on denying 'a Cartesian account of perception according to which mental representations are only in us' (128). Yet surely that is not a view unique to Cartesians. In any case, Kant seems to affirm the merely mental existence of mental representations in the passage itself.

60 The passage that most drives readers to interpret Kant as a direct realist (rather than an epistemic phenomenalist or 'indirect' realist) is the Refutation of Idealism. I cannot provide a convincing reading of that passage here. Though it is clear in that passage that Kant rejects any conception in which the representations of 'inner sense' become the basis for an inference to 'the existence of outer things', it is far from obvious that the only way to accommodate Kant's argument is by going direct realist. See, e.g., Oberst (2018) for a phenomenalist reading of that passage. Direct realism, in my view, is unsupported by the great majority of Kant's texts.

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