Berichte und Diskussionen

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Kant's Multi-Layered Conception of Things in Themselves, Transcendental Objects, and Monads

Abstract: While Kant in the *Critique of Pure Reason* maintains that things in themselves cannot be known, he also seems to assert that they affect our senses and produce representations. Following Jacobi, many commentators have considered these claims to be contradictory. Instead of adding another artificial solution to the existing literature on this subject, I maintain that Kant's use of terms such as thing-in-itself, noumenon, and transcendental object becomes perfectly consistent if we take them to acquire a different meaning in the various parts of the work. Challenging the opposed interpretations of Allison and Langton, I argue that Kant's account of things in themselves is primarily relevant to the second-order reflection on the possibility and limits of a scientific metaphysics that the *Critique* undertakes.

Keywords: Kant, metaphysics, thing-in-itself, transcendental object, affection

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1 Introduction

One of the issues that has most troubled commentators is Kant's account of the thing in itself, for whereas the *Critique of Pure Reason* maintains that things in themselves cannot be known, Kant also seems to assert that they affect our senses and are the cause of representations. These assertions have often been said to violate Kant's claim that a pure concept such as causality can only be used with regard to objects of experience. His position is also considered problematic because it seems to entail a skepticism that is hard to reconcile with common sense as well as with Kant's effort to distinguish his position from Berkeleyan idealism. From Maimon and Fichte onward, many commentators have tried to save what they see as the viable elements of the first *Critique* by abolishing those parts of it that deal with the thing in itself qua cause of im-

pressions.¹ Many others, including Allison, have proposed ways of reconciling Kant's apparently contradictory claims on the subject.

Whereas I agree with Allison's criticism of Strawson and Guyer in *Kant's Transcendental Idealism*, I do not believe that the two-aspect approach he takes over from Prauss succeeds in solving the riddles that Kant's text presents.² In line with most commentators, Allison assumes that Kant conceives of the objects that affect our senses as things in themselves. Instead of adding another artificial solution to the confusion that this assumption entails, my aim in this article is to demonstrate that this assumption itself is not warranted. I will argue, more precisely, that when Kant states that objects affect the senses, he does not treat of the same issue as when he refers to the transcendental object as the ground or cause of appearances. Following Adickes, Allison and many other commentators conflate these two kinds of statements and substitute the term 'thing in itself' for both the object that is said to affect the senses and the transcendental object that is said to ground appearances.³ I will maintain, by contrast, that the term 'thing in itself' receives a dif-

1 Thus, Fichte, following Jacobi, opposes his Kantian contemporaries by arguing that Kant conceived of the thing in itself as a product of thought that cannot at the same time be considered to have an effect on the senses: "Ihr Ding an sich, daß ein bloßer Gedanke ist, soll auf das Ich einwirken! Haben Sie ihre erste Rede wieder vergessen; und ist Ihr Ding an sich, das noch soeben ein bloßer Gedanke war, jetzt etwas anderes als ein bloßer Gedanke?" Fichte, Johann Gottlieb: "Zweite Einleitung in die Wissenschaftslehre". In: *Werke* I, 4. Ed. by Reinhard Lauth and Hans Gliwitzky. Stuttgart-Bad Cannstatt 1970, 237. Fichte considers the passages that deal with the issue of affection not to belong to the Kantian system properly speaking, but to represent a merely empirical point of view, a point of view of which the system itself has to provide the true ground (241, cf. 236n). As I hope will become clear in what follows, I agree with the first part of Fichte's position, but not with the second. In my view, Kant's distinction between appearances and things in themselves serves a purpose that has very little to do with Fichte's distinction between I and non-I. For reasons of space this article largely abstracts from the vicissitudes of the problem of the thing in itself in post-Kantian philosophy.

2 Allison, Henry: *Kant's Transcendental Idealism: An Interpretation and Defense*. New Haven/London 2004, 50–57; hereafter abbreviated as KTI; Prauss, Gerold: *Kant und das Problem der Dinge an sich*. Bonn 1974, 13–43; hereafter abbreviated as KPD. Neither Prauss nor Allison refers to Herring's defense of a two-aspect approach in *Das Problem der Affektion bei Kant*, Köln 1953, 82f., hereafter abbreviated as PAK.

3 Allison, KTI 64, cf. 50. I discuss this point in Section 4. Most commentators take this identity for granted without considering the relevant texts in detail. For a typical example of a commentary that, after conflating the various senses of the thing in itself, attributes fundamental inconsistencies to Kant, see Schrader, George: "The Thing in itself in Kantian Philosophy". In: *Review of Metaphysics* 2, 1948/1949, 30–44. In line with Adickes, Schrader distinguishes between the critical core of the *Critique of Pure Reason* (32), Kant's "private view" concerning the reality of external objects (32), and the "dogmatic and rationalistic tendency" in his thought (39). Kant's philosophy can only be made consistent, according to Schrader, by abolishing the second and third

ferent meaning in the various parts of the *Critique of Pure Reason* and that these meanings cannot be reduced to a single one. Thus, rather than forcing Kant's divergent claims about things in themselves and related terms into a single mold, I intend to disentangle the various strands of the *Critique of Pure Reason* so as to clarify the function that the term 'thing in itself' acquires in each particular context.

The strand that I consider to be most relevant to Kant's employment of concepts such as 'thing in itself', 'noumenon' and 'transcendental object' is his second-order critique of Wolffian metaphysics and his intended transformation of this metaphysics into a true science.⁴ Accordingly, I do not take the pivotal passages about the thing in itself to be first-order claims about either cognition or certain entities. In this respect my approach differs substantially not only from Allison's *Kant's Transcendental Idealism*, but also from Langton's *Kantian Humility: Our Ignorance of Things in Themselves*.⁵ While I endorse Langton's focus on Kant's implicit and explicit discussion with Leibnizian metaphysics, I hold that her reading is flawed because she, no less than Allison, frames the problem of the thing in itself in terms of Kant's account of empirical cognition. By shifting the perspective to Kant's second-order reflection on the condition of possibility of metaphysics, I hope to move beyond the apparent opposition between Allison and Langton, to which I will come back at the end of this article.

2 Preliminaries

Allison's and Langton's work on Kant offer good examples of the 'epistemological' and 'metaphysical' readings of the *Critique of Pure Reason* that dominate current debates.⁶ Yet I would submit that the aim as well as the internal structure of

element. I will argue, by contrast, that there is no reason to distinguish between Kant's private and public views and that his allegedly dogmatic and rationalistic remarks on the thing in itself and related terms are precisely pivotal to his critique of rationalist metaphysics.

⁴ KrV, A XX–XXI, B XV–XVI, B XVIII–XIV, B XXII–XXIV. In the Preface to the second edition of the *Critique of Pure Reason* Kant considers the only defect of Wolff's philosophy to consist in the fact that it omitted a "Kritik des Organs, nämlich der reinen Vernunft selbst", a critique that in his view is required to prepare the domain within which a system of metaphysics might be established (B XXXVI–XXXVII). On this, see my "Transformations of Transcendental Philosophy: Wolff, Kant, and Hegel". In: *Bulletin of the Hegel Society of Great Britain* 32/1–2, 2011, 50–79.

⁵ Langton, Rae: *Kantian Humility: Our Ignorance of Things in Themselves*. Oxford 2001; hereafter abbreviated as KH.

⁶ Allison's reading is deeply indebted to Prauss and, through him, to neo-Kantianism. In line with this tradition, Prauss conceives of the *Critique of Pure Reason* as a theory of experience

the work defy the modern conceptions of these disciplines. The modern notion of epistemology is not well suited to denote Kant's investigation into the various elements of human cognition, it seems to me, because the *Critique of Pure Reason* primarily aims to determine the limits within which synthetic *a priori* knowledge – rather than empirical knowledge – is possible.⁷ On this account, Kant's purported epistemology is from the outset geared toward the question concerning the possibility and limit of metaphysics itself. Kant himself refers to this strand of the *Critique of Pure Reason* as transcendental critique.⁸ As he points out repeatedly, this transcendental critique is not an end in itself, but paves the way for the elaboration of a metaphysical system that abstains from dogmatic claims about things such as the soul, the world as a whole and God.⁹

As I see it, contemporary metaphysics, which deals with the existence, properties, and relations of various types of entities, corresponds neither to the critical nor to the constructive element of the *Critique of Pure Reason* and is therefore an equally unsuitable vantage point. Unlike contemporary metaphysics, Kant presupposes the distinction between general metaphysics, or ontology, and special metaphysics, a distinction that took shape in seventeenth-century school meta-

(KPD 9) or a non-empirical science of the empirical (11, cf. 62). In his view, this epistemological core of the work is sometimes difficult to discern because of Kant's alleged dependence on an outdated metaphysics (9f., 36, 175). Opposing the view that the term 'thing in itself' refers to some kind of metaphysical entity (26f.), Prauss rightly contends that Kant uses this term primarily to refer to a particular way in which philosophers can *consider* things (38). However, Prauss is mainly interested in Kant's claim about the "Subjektabhängigkeit der empirischen Dinge" (67), that is, in the necessity of considering things as appearances (96, cf. 68). Not only does he ignore part of Kant's own discussion of the thing in itself and related concepts, but he also attributes apparent inconsistencies to what he takes to be Kant's insufficient understanding of his own project (68f., 199). Although I do not share this latter view, I consider Prauss's account to contain valuable insights, for instance with regard to the issue of empirical affection (to which I come back in Section 4). The long-dominant epistemological approach to the *Critique of Pure Reason* has recently been challenged not only by Langton, but also by authors such as Watkins and Ameriks. See Watkins, Eric: *Kant and the Metaphysics of Causality*. Cambridge 2005, and Ameriks, Karl: "The Critique of Metaphysics: Kant and Traditional Ontology". In: Karl Ameriks, *Interpreting Kant's Critiques*. Oxford 2003, 110–156 (originally published in 1992).

⁷ What is at stake in the *Critique of Pure Reason*, according to Kant, is "mit gehöriger Allgemeinheit den Grund der Möglichkeit synthetischer Urtheile *a priori* aufzudecken, die Bedingungen, die eine jede Art derselben möglich machen, einzusehen, und diese ganze Erkenntniß [...] in einem System nach ihren ursprünglichen Quellen, Abtheilungen, Umfang und Grenzen [...] vollständig und zu jedem Gebrauch hinreichend zu bestimmen." (KrV, A 10, cf. Prol, AA 04: 274). See on this Grondin, Jean: *Kant et le problème de la philosophie: l'a priori*. Paris 1989.

⁸ Cf. KrV, A 12/B 26.

⁹ Cf. KrV, A 12–13/B 26–27, A 841/B 869, A 845–847/B 873–875, cf. Prol, AA 04: 257, 261, 371.

physics and was adopted by Kant from the Wolffian tradition.¹⁰ According to this tradition, ontology does not make claims about particular beings, but rather investigates the conceptual determinations that allow us to achieve knowledge of something at all.¹¹ Kant's preliminary account of the categories and the pure principles of the understanding can be considered to carry out a task formerly attributed to this part of metaphysics. Special metaphysics, by contrast, uses the concepts and principles treated within general metaphysics in order to achieve a priori knowledge of the soul, the world as such, and God. It goes without saying that Kant opposes the effort of former special metaphysics – in particular the tradition represented by Leibniz, Wolff, and their followers – to treat the soul, the world as such and God as things that can be known by means of reason alone, that is, as they are in themselves.

Neither Allison nor Langton takes into account that the concept of the thing in itself plays an important part in Kant's critique of Wolffian special metaphysics. It is perhaps no coincidence that Kant uses the example of the soul when he, in the second edition of the *Critique*, introduces the distinction between appearances and things in themselves. Without this distinction, he notes in its Preface,

[...] mußte der Grundsatz der Causalität [...] durchaus von allen Dingen überhaupt als wirkenden Ursachen gelten. Von eben demselben Wesen also, z.B. der menschlichen Seele,

¹⁰ In the Preface to the second edition of the *Critique of Pure Reason* Kant obliquely refers to these two parts as “Metaphysik in ihrem ersten Teile” and the “zweite Teil” of metaphysics. He holds that only former general metaphysics might be turned into a true science, namely, if the domain of the synthetic a priori principles of which it treats is limited to possible objects of experience (KrV, B XVIII–XIX). The first part of Wolff's Latin metaphysical system is titled *Philosophia prima sive ontologia*. The further parts deal with general cosmology, empirical psychology, rational psychology and natural theology. See on the development of this division Vollrath, Ernst: “Die Gliederung der Metaphysik in eine metaphysica generalis und eine metaphysica specialis”. In: *Zeitschrift für philosophische Forschung* 16/2, 1962, 258–284.

¹¹ “Es gibt auch einiges, was allem Seienden gemeinsam ist, was sowohl von den Seelen als auch von den körperlichen Dingen, sei es von den natürlichen oder den künstlichen, *ausgesagt wird*. Jener Teil der Philosophie, der von dem Seienden im allgemeinen und den allgemeinen Eigenschaften des Seienden handelt, heißt Ontologie. [...] Derartige allgemeine Begriffe sind der Begriff des Wesens, der Existenz, der Eigenschaft, des Modus, der Notwendigkeit, der Kontingenz, des Ortes, der Zeit, usw., [...] die weder in der Psychologie noch in der Physik angemessen erklärt werden, weil wir in beiden Wissenschaften ebenso wie in allen anderen Teilen der Philosophie diese allgemeine Begriffe und die davon abhängenden Grundsätze benötigen.” Wolff, Christian: *Discursus praeliminaris de philosophia in genere / Einleitende Abhandlung über Philosophie im allgemeinen* [1728]. Translated and edited by Günter Gawlick and Lothar Kreimendahl. Stuttgart-Bad Cannstatt 1996, § 73, my emphasis.

würde ich nicht sagen können, ihr Wille sei frei, und er sei doch zugleich der Naturnothwendigkeit unterworfen, d.i. nicht frei, ohne in einen offenbaren Widerspruch zu geraten; weil ich die Seele in beiden Sätzen in *eben derselben Bedeutung*, nämlich *als Ding überhaupt (als Sache an sich selbst)* genommen habe, und, ohne vorhergehende Kritik, auch nicht anders nehmen konnte.¹²

Kant here suggests that philosophy should distinguish between the soul qua thing in itself and the soul such as it is given to the inner sense in order to be able to attribute the possibility of a free will to the former. It does not seem plausible to maintain that the soul, qua thing in itself, affects our senses. By contrast, things like roses do so abundantly. It may well be, therefore, that Kant had ordinary things like roses in mind when he refers to objects that affect our senses. Before turning to Kant's cursory remarks on affection, however, I will briefly consider Jacobi's extremely influential criticism of Kant's account of affecting objects.

3 Jacobi's Dilemma

One of the most quoted phrases concerning Kant's allegedly paradoxical notion of the thing in itself is Jacobi's remark in the appendix to his book on David Hume, titled "Über den Transscendentalen Idealismus", that he could not enter the system without presupposing the thing in itself, but could not remain in it by adhering to that presupposition.¹³ At least, this is the way in which the phrase is usually quoted. Jacobi argues indeed that "die Kantische Philosophie" contradicts itself by maintaining at once that objects, qua appearances, do not exist outside of us and "von den Gegenständen zu sagen, daß sie Eindrücke auf die Sinne machen, [...] und auf diese Weise Vorstellungen zuwege bringen".¹⁴ By presupposing the latter, Kant is said to have completely abandoned the spirit of his system (108), which in Jacobi's view precludes the assumption of things that exist outside of us (111). Repeatedly, he writes, he had to start reading the *Critique* all over again, "weil ich unaufhörlich darüber irre würde, daß ich *ohne* jene Voraussetzung in das System nicht hineinkommen, und *mit* jener Voraussetzung darin nicht

¹² KrV, B XXVII, my emphasis, cf. B XVIII–B XIX, note.

¹³ Jacobi, Friedrich Heinrich: "Über den Transscendentalen Idealismus". In: *David Hume über den Glauben oder Idealismus und Realismus: ein Gespräch* [1787]. Schriften zum Transscendentalen Idealismus. Werke, Band 2,1. Ed. by Walter Jaeschke and Irmgard-Maria Piske. Hamburg/Stuttgart-Bad Cannstatt 2004; hereafter abbreviated as DHG.

¹⁴ DHG 109. Jacobi here refers to KrV, A 126–127.

bleiben konnte.”¹⁵ In *Kant's Transcendental Idealism*, Allison renders this passage as follows: “[W]ithout the presupposition [of the thing in itself] I cannot enter the [critical] system, and with that presupposition I cannot remain in it.”¹⁶ Yet in Jacobi's text, the presupposition that he attributes to Kant does not concern a claim about things in themselves, but the assertion that *objects* (*Gegenstände*) affect the senses. What worries Jacobi is simply Kant's alleged failure to account for “was wir Realisten wirkliche Gegenstände, von unseren Vorstellungen unabhängige Dinge nennen” (106), because he takes Kant to conceive of these actual objects as mere representations. In a word, he attributes to Kant a Berkeleian brand of idealism.¹⁷ Yet what a realist would call an actual object does not have to refer to the same thing as that which Kant calls a thing in itself. Kant never denied the existence of material things.¹⁸ He refers to his philosophy as transcendental idealism, however, because it brackets the existence of these things for the purpose of clarifying the way in which the human mind turns sense impressions into objects of knowledge by means of a priori principles.

Evidently, this is not how Jacobi sees it. But even though he occasionally uses the term ‘thing in itself’ to refer to that which Kant calls affecting objects,¹⁹ what he has in mind is simply the alleged incapacity of Kant's system to account for the fact that our representations are caused by material things. I will argue in what follows that Jacobi was mistaken in attributing this task to the *Critique of Pure Reason* at all. Treating this work as a system comparable to that of Spinoza, Jacobi ignores the fact that Kant intended this work as a preliminary investigation into the very possibility of synthetic a priori knowledge rather than as a system consisting of such knowledge.²⁰ Moreover, even such a metaphysical system would

¹⁵ Jacobi, DHG 109, cf. 111.

¹⁶ Allison, KTI 64. Allison also disregards the past tense of the sentence. Rolf-Peter Horstmann, in *Die Grenzen der Vernunft: eine Untersuchung zu Zielen und Motiven des Deutschen Idealismus*, Frankfurt am Main 1991, 57, also adds “des Dinges an sich” between brackets. Other commentators do not even use brackets; see Beiser, Frederick: *The Fate of Reason: German Philosophy from Kant to Fichte*. Cambridge 1987, 124. Herring takes the passage to be concerned with the “Voraussetzung der Realität der Dinge an sich” (PAK 12).

¹⁷ Allison also makes this point (KTA 67). He in the same context considers Jacobi to have correctly ruled out, albeit for the wrong reason, empirical affection as the source of the content of sensible intuition (67). However, Jacobi's point is rather that Kant's affirmation of the role of empirical affection contradicts what he takes to be Kant's idealism. Kant himself repeatedly opposes his transcendental idealism to Berkeleian idealism (cf. KrV, B 274, Prol, AA 04: 293).

¹⁸ Cf. KrV, A 491/B 520.

¹⁹ Thus, Jacobi refers to “unsere Wahrnehmung von Gegenständen ausser uns als Dingen an sich, und nicht als bloß subjektiver Erscheinungen” (DHG 109, cf. 111).

²⁰ See for a similar view Prauss, KPD 196.

not have to be able to explain how impressions are actually brought about. Jacobi's highly influential essay also put readers on the wrong track, it seems to me, by connecting the problem of affecting objects to a variety of passages where Kant discusses concepts such as the transcendental object.²¹ Apart from this, however, Jacobi may well have been closer to the truth than commentators who present him as a witness in their case against Kant or, conversely, attempt to solve the problems that arise when the term 'object' is substituted for the term 'thing in itself' and the latter is taken to refer to a non-sensible cause of appearances.

4 Affecting Objects

While references to affecting objects occur throughout the *Critique of Pure Reason*, Kant never seems to care about a proper treatment of the issue. Thus, at the very beginning of the Transcendental Aesthetic he mentions affection while introducing the concepts of intuition and sensibility. Objects can only be given to us, he notes, if they affect the mind in a certain way:

Die Fähigkeit [...] Vorstellungen durch die Art, wie wir von Gegenständen afficirt werden, zu bekommen, heißt *Sinnlichkeit*. Vermittelst der Sinnlichkeit also werden uns Gegenstände *gegeben*, und sie allein liefert uns *Anschaungen*; [...] Die Wirkung eines Gegenstandes auf die Vorstellungsfähigkeit, sofern wir von demselben [Gegenstand] afficirt werden, ist *Empfindung*. (KrV, A 19/B 33–34)

²¹ Jacobi, DHG 110. Jacobi implicitly identifies both the terms 'transcendental object' and 'thing in itself' with material objects that exist independently of the subject, something that in my view is not warranted. Evidently, Jacobi's criticism of Kant has had an enormous impact on the development of German Idealism. But this is not to say that we should not take a critical stance toward the tradition that relied on decisions that were taken by Jacobi and his contemporaries. See for a clear and detailed account of Jacobi's criticism of Kant and its influence on Fichte, Sandkaulen, Birgit: "Das "leidige Ding an sich". Kant – Jacobi – Fichte". In: *Kant und der Frühidealismus*. Ed. by Jürgen Stolzenberg. Hamburg 2007, 175–201. Sandkaulen convincingly shows that Jacobi's argument against Kant, contrary to what is commonly assumed, does not hinge on the latter's view that pure concepts such as causality can be used with regard to appearances alone. Jacobi's main point, she argues, is the impossibility of Kant's transcendental philosophy to recuperate the presupposition of affecting objects by its own means (190, cf. 196). Yet whereas she accepts Jacobi's view that Kant's position is self-contradictory for this reason (cf. 187), I argue in Section 4 that Kant was perfectly right not to fuse his account of affecting objects with his transcendental account of the process of cognition.

Generally, Kant refers to the entities that affect our sensibility as 'objects' (*Gegenstände*).²² In line with many other commentators, Allison assumes that the term 'object' in this context can only refer to things in themselves. He basically advances two arguments for this position. Following Jacobi, he rightly maintains, first, that this term cannot refer to appearances, which, qua representations, are themselves produced by the mind on the basis of impressions.²³ Drawing on Adickes's *Kant und das Ding an sich* (1924), he claims, second, that Kant in numerous passages of the *Critique of Pure Reason* regards things in themselves or the transcendental object "as affecting the mind or as the non-sensible 'cause' or 'ground' of appearances".²⁴ Yet this purported textual evidence is based on

²² Cf. KrV, B 1, A 26/B 42, A 35/B 51, A 51/B 75, A 372. I hold that Kant, in this context, uses the term *Gegenstand* in the common sense of material thing, that is to say, not in the sense of the object of experience or of cognition brought about by the human mind (cf. A 56/B 81, A 120). Somewhat confusingly, Kant occasionally also uses the term 'Objekt' to denote the things that affect the senses (B 72, A 358). He sometimes draws an analogy between the way in which we are affected by external objects and the way in which our inner sense is affected by feelings, thoughts, and so on, that is, the way in which we affect ourselves (cf. B 156).

²³ KTI 65, cf. 67. This is in agreement with the following remark by Kant, according to which "es niemanden einfallen wird, das, was er einmal als bloße Vorstellung anerkannt hat, für eine äußere Ursache zu halten" (KrV, A 390).

²⁴ "There are numerous passages in which [Kant] refers to one or the other [things as they are in themselves and the transcendental object] as affecting the mind or as the non-sensible 'cause' or 'ground' of appearances." (Allison, KTI 64). "Kant does speak of the transcendental object (or its equivalent) as affecting the mind, and he further seems to equate this with its serving as a non-sensible cause or ground of appearances." (65). The corresponding note states that "the affection by things in themselves is unambiguously asserted [...] in the *Critique*" (460, note 24). Of the passages to which Allison in this note refers to support his reading – which he takes over from Adickes – some deal with that which affects the senses (cf. KrV, B 72), some with the transcendental object (cf. A 380, A 393, A 494/B 522) and some with both (cf. A 44/B 61, A 190–191/B 235–236, A 358). I will argue in Section 5 that even the latter do not warrant an identification of either the transcendental object or the thing in itself with that which affects our sensibility. Most commentators assume that Kant considers things in themselves to affect the senses without distinguishing between the various meanings of this term and/or without reference to specific passages. See among many other examples: Kroner, Richard: *Von Kant bis Hegel*. Tübingen 1961, (2th ed.), 102; Herring, PAK 13f., 78–82; Rescher, Nicholas: "Noumenal Causality". In: *Kant's Theory of Knowledge*. Ed. by Lewis White Beck. Dordrecht/Boston 1974, 175–183. Rescher rightly distinguishes between causality in the common sense of the term and a form of grounding that concerns the relation between noumena and phenomena (176). He is also right in connecting the 'unconditioned' to the necessity of thinking the ground of that which appears. However, he does not take into account that Kant here has in mind the ideas of reason rather than affecting objects (as is clear from B XX, quoted by Rescher). As I hope will become clear in what follows, there is no need to attribute what Rescher calls "noumenal causality" to these objects (cf. 178). If the various contexts in which Kant uses terms such as 'thing in itself' are taken into account, then it is also unnecessary to

Adickes's and Allison's tacit identification of the terms 'object', 'thing in itself' and 'transcendental object' in passages such as the following:

Die Fähigkeit [...] Vorstellungen durch die Art, wie wir von Gegenständen afficirt werden, zu bekommen, heißt *Sinnlichkeit*. (KrV, A 19/B 33)

Das *transscendentale Object*, welches den äußeren Erscheinungen, imgleichen das, was der innern Anschauung zum Grunde liegt, ist weder Materie, noch ein denkend Wesen an sich selbst, sondern ein uns unbekannter Grund der Erscheinungen. (KrV, A 379–380)

Kant here and elsewhere indeed conceives of the transcendental object as the ground or cause of appearances. But do we have to assume that Kant's remarks about objects that affect our senses and his remarks about the transcendental object qua ground or cause of appearances concern the same issue? And do we have to accept the view that the term 'object' must refer to either appearances or things in themselves?

As said, most of the passages that concern the issue of affection use the term 'object' to refer to that which affects the senses.²⁵ As I see it, Kant had a good reason to avoid the term 'thing in itself' in this context, because strictly speaking his discussion of affection belongs to the domain of the sciences rather than to that of transcendental philosophy. At one point in the *Transcendental Aesthetic*, Kant notes that colors are modifications of our eyesight, a sense "welches vom Lichte auf gewisse Weise afficirt wird".²⁶ Even if light is a phenomenon less easy to grasp than a rock or a rose, it seems quite far-fetched to regard light as an unknowable thing in itself. Kant, I would contend, here and elsewhere deliberately conforms to the language of the scientist, who considers the world to consist of causally interconnected material things.²⁷

argue, as Rosefeldt does, that Kant changed his view on this matter in the second edition of the *Critique*. See Rosefeldt, Tobias: "Dinge an sich und der Außenweltskeptizismus. Über ein Missverständnis der frühen Kant-Rezeption". In: *Selbst, Welt, Kunst*. Ed. by Dina Emundts. Berlin 2013. Contrary to Rosefeldt, I hold that Kant from the very outset accepts that we are affected by material things that are not themselves representations. Following Jacobi, Rosefeldt argues that Kant in his discussion of the fourth Paralogism (cf. KrV, A 370) asserts the contrary. As I see it, however, this discussion, whatever its flaws, does not contradict Kant's remarks on affecting objects (qua plain material things) that can be found in both editions. The apparent tension between this section and other passages might as well be due to the specific context of Kant's argument here, namely, his effort to refute skepticism regarding the existence of objects of the outer sense from within the perspective of transcendental philosophy.

²⁵ Cf. KrV, B 1, A 26/B 42, A 35/B 51, A 51/B 75.

²⁶ KrV, A 28, cf. A 213/B 260; cf. Allison, KTI 67, 461, note 37.

²⁷ Elsewhere in the *Critique of Pure Reason* Kant occasionally refers to things in a non-philosophical sense as well (cf. KrV, A 42/B59, B 275, A 373).

It might be argued that the domain of scientific knowledge reaches its limit at the point where the light rays that affect our sense of sight produce sensations of color. Evidently, whatever goes on in our brain from that point onward could be treated from a scientific perspective as well. Yet Kant maintains that a completely different perspective is required to investigate the way in which the mind turns impressions into objects of knowledge. Seen from the perspective of transcendental philosophy, natural scientists deal with appearances, that is, with representations that can be transformed into objects of experience on the basis of a priori principles. For the scientists themselves, however, it does not make sense to treat something like a rose or a raindrop as an appearance rather than as a thing in itself. According to Kant, a scientist is perfectly justified to treat a raindrop as a thing in itself in the *physical* sense of the term, as he notes in the following passages:

So werden wir zwar den Regenbogen eine bloße Erscheinung bei einem Sonnregen nennen, diesen Regen aber die Sache an sich selbst, welches auch richtig ist, sofern wir den letzteren Begriff nur physisch verstehen, als das, was in der allgemeinen Erfahrung, unter allen verschiedenen Lagen zu den Sinnen, doch in der Anschauung so und nicht anders bestimmt ist. Nehmen wir aber dieses Empirische überhaupt, und fragen [...] ob auch dieses einen Gegenstand an sich selbst [...] vorstelle, so ist die Frage von der Beziehung der Vorstellung auf den Gegenstand transscendental, und nicht allein diese Tropfen sind bloße Erscheinungen, sondern selbst ihre runde Gestalt, ja sogar der Raum, in welchen sie fallen, sind nichts an sich selbst, sondern bloße Modifikationen, oder Grundlagen unserer sinnlichen Anschauung.²⁸

28 KrV, A 45–46/B 63, my emphasis. I take it that the first ‘we’ in this passage refers to the scientists and the second to the philosophers. The ‘we’ in the following passage also seems to concern the position of the scientists: “In allen Aufgaben, die im Felde der Erfahrung vorkommen mögen, behandeln wir jene Erscheinungen als Gegenstände an sich selbst, ohne uns um den ersten Grund ihrer Möglichkeit (als Erscheinungen) zu bekümmern.” (KrV, A 393). Opposing Adickes’ *Kant und das Ding an sich*, Prauss is one of the very few commentators to maintain that the process of affection belongs to the domain of the sciences rather than to that of philosophy (KPD 207, cf. 223). He points out, with reference to the examples of the rose and the raindrop, that Kant in this context often uses the term ‘object’, but occasionally the term ‘thing in itself’ in a merely empirical sense (44f., 200). Whereas I agree with Prauss that Kant attributes the process of affection to empirical objects alone (192–197), I disagree with his view that Kant sometimes uses the term ‘thing in itself’ to indicate that transcendental philosophy has to consider these very empirical objects not just as appearances, but also as they are in themselves (200). Allison likewise maintains that the passages in the *Critique* that offer a “merely empirical account of affection” cannot be the whole story (KTA 67). That which affects the mind cannot merely refer to spatio-temporal entities, he holds, because if we conceive of Kant’s account of the conditions of cognition as “a grand narrative” then “something considered as it is in itself [...] and therefore, as a merely transcendental object, must constitute the material condition of this cognition” (KTA 68). My point is

Denn in diesem Falle gilt das, was ursprünglich selbst nur Erscheinung ist, z. B. eine Rose, im empirischen Verstande für ein Ding an sich selbst, welches doch jedem Auge in Ansehung der Farbe anders erscheinen kann. Dagegen ist der transscendentale Begriff der Erscheinungen im Raume eine kritische Erinnerung, [...] daß uns die Gegenstände an sich gar nicht bekannt sind, und, was wir äußere Gegenstände nennen, nichts anderes als bloße Vorstellungen unserer Sinnlichkeit sind. (KrV, A 29–30/B 45)

Scientists may investigate the exact way in which certain light frequencies produced by material things affect the optic nerve so as to cause mental images, and similarly with regard to the other senses. By contrast, the philosopher who inquires into “das Empirische überhaupt” has to abstract from the fact that things exist outside of us, for otherwise it would be impossible to analyze the various elements involved in the constitution of objects of knowledge. This latter investigation requires, among other things, that things such as raindrops be considered as mere appearances, that is, as representations to be unified by the imagination and further determined by the understanding. In other words, Kant has to bracket the things that present themselves to the scientist as mind-independent entities.²⁹

that the problem of affection that Prauss and Allison attempt to solve arises from their assumption that the ‘narrative’ of the *Critique of Pure Reason* is a one-dimensional treatise on the conditions of empirical cognition. I consider the solutions they propose in Section 8. Even though Kant does not use the term ‘transcendental affection’ a single time, the myth of transcendental affection persists. Assuming that Kant attributes affection to things in themselves considered as noumena, Ameriks notes that “Kant clearly asserts [...] that for him there is transcendental affection”, yet without giving any reference. He goes on to note that “[in] desperation, one might contend that Kant ought not to have spoken about this kind of affection”. See Ameriks, Karl: “Kant and Short Arguments to Humility”. In: *Interpreting Kant’s Critiques*, 156f. Westphal considers transcendental affection to consist in “the causal affection of our sensibility by nonspatiotemporal things in themselves”. See Westphal, Kenneth: *Kant’s Transcendental Proof of Realism*. Cambridge 2004, 41. Since Westphal seems to assume that Kant, in this context, refers to material things such as stones and tables, there is no need, in my opinion, to call the mode of affection at stake ‘transcendental’.

29 The transcendental idealist, Kant notes, does not go beyond “das bloße Selbstbewußtsein” and does not take for granted “etwas mehr, als die Gewißheit der Vorstellungen in mir” (KrV, A 370, cf. A 371). However, Kant’s immanent reflection is not a matter of psychological introspection, for he starts from given representations only in order to single out the essential characteristics of any kind of cognition. For this reason I do not think it helpful to frame Kant’s reflection on the activities carried out by the human mind as transcendental psychology, as Patricia Kitcher proposes to do in *Kant’s Transcendental Psychology*, Oxford 1990. Kant does not deny the existence of things outside the mind, for the ‘bracketing’ of the existence of things has a merely methodological purpose. This is brought out clearly by the following passage in the *Prolegomena*: “Da ich also den Sachen, die wir uns durch Sinne vorstellen, ihre Wirklichkeit lasse und nur unsre sinnliche Anschauung von diesen Sachen *dahin einschränke*, daß sie in gar keinem Stücke [...] die Beschaffenheit derselben an ihnen selbst vorstelle.” (Prol, AA 04: 292–293, my emphasis, cf. A 28/B 44,

Whereas scientists can do without the distinction between appearances and things in themselves, philosophers who ignore the radicality of this distinction entangle themselves in contradictions, as emerges from the metaphysical systems of Leibniz, Wolff, and their followers.³⁰ The transcendental distinction between appearances and things in themselves is lost, Kant notes, if empirical intuitions are considered to contain elements that pertain to “irgendeine Sache an sich selbst” (KrV, A 45/B 62), that is, if the redness that I perceive is regarded as a confused representation, reducible to a characteristic contained in the concept of the rose that I see.³¹ Thus, it is no coincidence that Kant in this context implicitly and explicitly criticizes the Leibnizian tradition.

So far I have argued that Kant is perfectly justified in considering plain material things, such as roses, to affect our senses because the process of affection falls outside the scope of transcendental philosophy. If, accordingly, the objects that are said to affect the senses do not have to be interpreted as either appearances or things in themselves, then most of the passages on affection quoted by Adickes and Allison become completely unproblematic and do not require an artificial solution. Yet other passages, to which I now turn, may well be considered to challenge the interpretation I have put forward so far, because they mention affection and things in themselves or the transcendental object as if in one breath.

A 491/B 520). Kant repeatedly points out that transcendental idealism is a matter of *considering* things in a certain way: “Ich verstehe aber unter dem transscendentalen Idealism aller Erscheinungen den Lehrbegriff, nach welchem wir sie insgesamt als bloße Vorstellungen, und nicht als Dinge an sich selbst, *ansehen*, und demgemäß Zeit und Raum nur sinnliche Formen unserer Anschauung, nicht aber für sich gegebene Bestimmungen, oder Bedingungen der Objecte, als Dinge an sich selbst sind.” (A 369, my emphasis). Unfortunately Kant does not always express himself well in this respect. He notes for instance that “in unserem System” external things are “nichts als bloße Erscheinungen, d.i. Vorstellungen in uns” (A 371–372, cf. A 490–491). However, in this case the expression ‘in our system’ can be considered to no less refer to the particular method employed by the transcendental philosopher. The term ‘transcendental idealism’ has given rise to much debate because it is often considered to imply first-order arguments and claims about the nature of either reality or empirical cognition. In my opinion, many of these discussions have very little to do with Kant’s own (sparse) use of the term as a title for his philosophical method.

30 Thus, Kant notes with regard to Leibniz that “Erscheinung ihm die Vorstellung des Dinges an sich selbst [war], obgleich von der Erkenntniß durch den Verstand, der logischen Form nach, unterschieden (KrV, A 270–271/B 326).

31 “Daß daher unsere ganze Sinnlichkeit nichts als die verworrene Vorstellung der Dinge sei, welche lediglich das enthält, was ihnen an sich selbst zukommt, aber nur unter einer Zusammenhäufung von Merkmalen und Theilvorstellungen, die wir nicht mit Bewußtsein auseinander setzen, ist eine Verfälschung des Begriffs von Sinnlichkeit und von Erscheinung, welche die ganze Lehre derselben unnütz und leer macht.” (KrV, A 43/B 60, cf. A 44/B 61, A 166/B 207, A 271/B 327).

5 Locke versus Leibniz

This is the case, for example, in the following passage from the Transcendental Aesthetic:

Dagegen enthält die Vorstellung eines *Körpers* in der Anschauung gar nichts, was einem Gegenstande an sich selbst zukommen könnte, sondern bloß die Erscheinung von Etwas, und die Art, wie wir *dadurch afficirt werden*; und diese Receptivität unserer Erkenntnißfähigkeit [...] bleibt von der Erkenntniß des *Gegenstandes an sich selbst*, ob man jene [Vorstellung] gleich bis auf den Grund durchschauen möchte, dennoch himmelweit unterschieden.³²

The immediate context makes it clear that Kant here takes issue with the “Leibniz-Wolfische Philosophie” (A 44/B 61), which, on his account, conflated appearances with things in themselves and alleged that the latter could be known. He contends that while we are necessarily affected by something, the representation which emerges from this affection by no means provides the understanding with the characteristics of – for instance – the rose *qua* thing in itself, that is, with the set of characteristics contained in the very concept of a rose.³³ Kant in this passage attributes the capacity to affect the mind to an unspecified ‘something’ and uses the term ‘object in itself’ only to reject the claim of the Wolffians that things can be known such as they are in themselves. There is no reason, therefore, to identify the purely formal term ‘something’ with the term ‘object in itself’.

Other passages also become less problematic if we take them to be concerned not so much with Kant’s own views of the conditions of possibility of experience as with the various ways in which philosophy can conceive of that which underlies appearances. The following passage, taken from the Paralogisms of Pure Reason, seems to be concerned primarily with Leibniz’s monadology:

[D]asjenige Etwas [...] was unseren Sinn so afficirt, daß er die Vorstellungen von Raum, Materie, Gestalt usw. bekommt, dieses Etwas, *als Noumenon* (oder besser, als transscendentaler Gegenstand) *betrachtet*, könnte doch auch zugleich das Subject der Gedanken sein,

³² KrV, A 44/B 61, my emphasis. The first three passages that I discuss in this section are among those that Allison, following Adickes, takes to support his view that Kant considers things in themselves to affect our sensibility (KTI, 460, note 24). Allison does not comment upon them.

³³ Cf. KrV, A 272/B 328, where Kant notes that, for Leibniz, to know a drop of water as a thing in itself is to know it with regard to “alle seine innere Bestimmungen”, something which is achieved by abstracting from the way in which individual drops present themselves to the senses, or, as Kant puts it elsewhere, “ohne Rücksicht auf Vorstellungen, dadurch sie uns afficiren” (A 190/B 235). In his view, this alleged knowledge, based on the distinction of a certain number of characteristics, is nothing but a dubious attempt at defining concepts, while achieving real knowledge of the properties of things such as water must rely on experiments (A 728/B 756).

wiewohl wir durch die Art, wie unser äußerer Sinn dadurch afficirt wird, keine Anschauung von Vorstellungen, Willen usw. [...] bekommen. Dieses Etwas aber ist nicht ausgedehnt, nicht undurchdringlich, nicht zusammengesetzt, weil alle diese Prädicate nur die Sinnlichkeit und deren Anschauung angehen, sofern wir von dergleichen (uns übrigens unbekannten) Objecten afficirt werden. [...] Allein die Prädicate des innern Sinnes, Vorstellungen und Denken, widersprechen ihm nicht.³⁴

By referring to the 'something' that affects our sensibility and, hence, produces representations, Kant follows what he elsewhere terms Locke's physiology of the human understanding (cf. A IX). Yet he goes on to note that we do not *have* to conceive of the 'something' that underlies appearances as a material object. It might as well be considered as something that is immaterial and can only be thought. If this thinkable 'something' is subsequently regarded as monad, as Leibniz had done, then nothing prevents metaphysics from conceiving of this monad as something that is capable of mental activity, whether in the form of perception (*Vorstellen*) or apperception (*Denken*). Kant in this passage merely notes that attributing such characteristics to monads is not self-contradictory. His point is, however, that rational psychology was wrong to regard this as a way of increasing our knowledge of the human soul (cf. A 361). As we will see, Kant accepts the Leibnizian view that a non-material something must be considered to underlie appearances. Yet he does not identify the latter with the 'something' that is said to affect our sensibility,³⁵ for the psychological account of affection that he attributes to Locke falls outside of transcendental philosophy.³⁶ Kant precisely juxtaposes the two perspectives in order to argue that we cannot move from the content of our representations to the thing as it is in itself so as to achieve knowledge of the latter.

In the context of the Second Analogy, Kant likewise remarks that philosophers should not treat a thing like a house as something of which the inner characteristics can be known. Unlike the passages discussed so far, Kant here attributes the capacity to affect the mind not to an undefined 'something', but to 'things' of which we do not know how they are in themselves:

³⁴ KrV, A 358–359, my emphasis. See Locke, John: *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*. Ed. by Peter Harold Nidditch. Oxford 1975, II.23.5.

³⁵ I take it that the term 'dadurch' in the clause "die Art, wie unser äußerer Sinn dadurch afficirt wird" refers back to the 'something' that affects the senses mentioned at the beginning of the passage and not to the 'something' that is being considered as noumenon.

³⁶ "Läge unserer reinen Vernunftkenntniß von denkenden Wesen überhaupt mehr, als das *cogito* zum Grunde; würden wir die Beobachtungen, über das Spiel unserer Gedanken und die daraus zu schöpfenden Naturgesetze des denkenden Selbst, auch zu Hilfe nehmen: so würde eine empirische Psychologie entspringen, welche eine Art der Physiologie des inneren Sinnes sein würde." (KrV, A 347/B 405, cf. A 86/B 118–119, B 152, Prol, AA 04: 304).

[W]ie *Dinge an sich selbst* (ohne Rücksicht auf Vorstellungen, dadurch sie uns *afficiren*,) sein mögen, ist gänzlich außer unsrer Erkenntnißsphäre. [...] Nun ist aber, sobald ich meine Begriffe von einem Gegenstande bis zur transscendentalen Bedeutung steigere, das Haus gar kein Ding an sich selbst, sondern nur eine Erscheinung, d.i. Vorstellung, *dessen transscendentaler Gegenstand* unbekannt ist. (KrV, A 190–191/B 235–236, my emphasis)

But do we therefore have to identify the things that are said to affect us with the transcendental object mentioned in the last sentence? This is unnecessary if we assume that the clause between brackets, once again, concerns a Lockean account of cognition. Seen from a Lockean perspective, the actual house that affects the mind by producing mental images can indiscriminately be called, in Kant's vocabulary, an object or a thing in itself in the physical sense of the term.³⁷ Yet Locke's account does not correspond to that of the scientists in all respects, because Locke, like Kant, abstracts from the question as to how "we come to have any sensations by our organs".³⁸ Moreover, Locke denies that the things that affect the senses can be known in all respects. There is no doubt, in his view, that the whiteness that I see originates in the thing by which I am affected.³⁹ But the things that are "really operating upon us" can be known only with regard to the manifold of simple ideas to which they give rise.⁴⁰ In order to be able to attribute a number of qualities to a single thing, the mind produces the idea of substance, an idea "which is nothing but the supposed, but unknown, support of those

37 Cf.: "Ich dagegen sage: es sind uns Dinge als außer uns befindliche Gegenstände unserer Sinne gegeben, allein von dem, was sie an sich selbst sein mögen, wissen wir nichts, sondern kennen nur [...] die Vorstellungen, die sie in uns wirken, indem sie unsere Sinne *afficiren*." (Prol, AA 04: 289). Whereas Kant accepts Locke's distinction between primary and secondary qualities, he does not consider it to be relevant to his own purposes: "Wir unterscheiden sonst wohl unter Erscheinungen das, was der Anschauung derselben wesentlich anhängt, und für jeden menschlichen Sinn überhaupt gilt, von demjenigen, was derselben nur zufälligerweise zukommt, indem es [...] nur auf eine besondere Stellung oder Organisation dieses oder jenes Sinnes gültig ist. Und da nennt man die erstere Erkenntniß eine solche, die den Gegenstand an sich selbst vorstellt, die zweite aber nur die Erscheinung desselben. Dieser Unterschied ist aber nur empirisch." (KrV, A 45/B 62). Seen from a transcendental perspective, by contrast, *all* properties of objects must be said to belong to appearances alone (Prol, AA 04: 289).

38 Locke, John: *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, I.2. For a recent 'Lockean' account of Kant's conception of the thing in itself, see Chignell, Andrew: "Real *Repugnance* and Our Ignorance of Things-in-Themselves: A Lockean Problem in Kant and Hegel". In: *Internationales Jahrbuch des deutschen Idealismus* 7, 2011, 135–159. Although Chignell does not ignore the differences between Kant and Locke, I hold that important aspects of Kant's view cannot be understood in terms of a Lockean model of cognition.

39 Locke, John: *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, IV.4.4.

40 Ibid., IV.4.5.

qualities we find existing”.⁴¹ Locke opposes not so much the positing of this support as the assumption, which he attributes to the rationalists, that the latter itself constitutes a knowable thing. In this respect, Locke's account anticipates Kant's criticism of Leibnizian metaphysics.

Yet Kant departs from Locke by arguing that his psychological approach does not allow us to adequately grasp the function of that which the mind must consider to underlie appearances. This requires the perspective of transcendental philosophy, to which Kant turns in the second part of the passage quoted above. If the house that features as a possible object of knowledge is treated from a *transcendental* perspective, then the issue of affection is no longer relevant. The only thing that matters, in this case, is the house that, qua appearance, can be turned into an object of knowledge by dint of a priori principles. Once philosophy has adopted this transcendental perspective, it can only reflect on the process of cognition from within the realm of thought itself. This reflection yields the insight that first-order metaphysics cannot move from the house qua appearance to the characteristics contained in its very concept, that is, to the house qua thing in itself in the metaphysical sense of the term. Kant also states, however, that we cannot *reduce* the house to its appearance, because the very concept of appearance implies a reference to something that itself does not appear:

[E]s folgt auch natürlicherweise aus dem Begriffe einer Erscheinung überhaupt: daß ihr etwas entsprechen müsse, was an sich nicht Erscheinung ist, weil Erscheinung nichts für sich selbst, und außer unserer Vorstellungsart sein, mithin [...] das Wort Erscheinung schon eine Beziehung auf etwas anzeigt, dessen unmittelbare Vorstellung zwar sinnlich ist, was aber an sich selbst, auch ohne diese Beschaffenheit unserer Sinnlichkeit, [...] *Etwas, d.i. ein von der Sinnlichkeit unabhängiger Gegenstand sein muß*.⁴²

⁴¹ Ibid., II.23.2, cf. II.23.15.

⁴² KrV, A 251–252, my emphasis, cf. B XXVI–XXVII. Cf. also the following passage from the *Prolegomena*: “In der That, wenn wir die Gegenstände der Sinne, wie billig, als bloße Erscheinungen ansehen, so gestehen wir hierdurch doch zugleich, daß ihnen ein Ding an sich selbst zum Grunde liege, ob wir [...] nur [...] die Art, wie unsere Sinne von diesem unbekannten Etwas afficirt werden, kennen. Der Verstand also, ebendadurch daß er Erscheinungen annimmt, gesteht auch das Dasein von Dingen an sich selbst zu, und sofern können wir sagen, daß die Vorstellung solcher Wesen, die den Erscheinungen zum Grunde liegen, mithin bloßer Verstandeswesen nicht allein zulässig, sondern auch unvermeidlich sei.” (Prol, AA 04: 314–315). On my reading, Kant here initially refers to things in themselves in the empirical sense of the term, because only these things can be said to affect the senses. Only if we consider Kant, here and elsewhere, to move from a Lockean to a Wolffian account of knowledge does it make sense, it seems to me, that he in the second part of the passage attributes to ‘the understanding’ the view that appearances are grounded in noumena. Allison discusses this passage without considering Kant to move from one perspective to another. He takes the things in themselves mentioned in the first line to refer to “the transcendental causes or grounds of appearances” (KTI 53f.).

Kant's purely formal distinction between an appearance and a corresponding non-sensible 'something' leaves open whether the latter is conceived as idea (Plato), as material cause of ideas (Locke), as an unknowable support of qualities posited by the human mind (Locke), as monad (Leibniz), as essence that possesses a number of inner characteristics (Wolff) or in yet different ways. The term 'transcendental object' – to which I come back in the following section – can be used to denote the 'something' that is at stake in each of these theories. On this account, we do not have to assume that Kant, in the passage about the house, identifies the transcendental object with the thing in itself in the physical sense of the term, that is, with that which affects the senses. As I see it, he here rather opposes the transcendental object to the thing in itself in the *metaphysical* sense of the term in order to point out that the unity that I must posit in order to cognize the house in front of me cannot itself be turned into an object of – purely intellectual – cognition. If this is true, then any attempt to reconcile the seeming contradictions in Kant's system, for instance by taking recourse to the idea of double affection, is both unnecessary and doomed to fail.⁴³

6 Things in Themselves, Noumena, and the Transcendental Object

My aim in this section is to elucidate Kant's conception of the transcendental object and related terms in light of his intended reform of Wolffian general metaphysics or ontology. The next section examines Kant's conception of the transcendental object insofar as it pertains to his intended reform of former special metaphysics.

The terms 'things as such', 'thing in itself', 'noumenon' and 'transcendental object' figure most prominently in the concluding chapter of the *Transcendental Analytic*, which is devoted to the distinction between phenomena and noumena.

⁴³ This idea has been defended most famously by Erich Adickes in his *Kants Lehre von der doppelten Affektion unseres Ichs als Schlüssel zu seiner Erkenntnistheorie* (Tübingen 1929), which I will not consider for reasons of space. See for a critique of this doctrine Gram, Moltke: "The Myth of Double Affection". In: *Reflections on Kant's Philosophy*. Ed. by William Henry Werkmeister. Gainesville 1975, 29–63. Framing the problem in terms of what he takes to be Kant's theory of perception, Gram tries to solve the problem by arguing that the notion of a thing in itself does not exclude that it can be intuited (54). I agree that this is true of the thing in itself in the physical sense of the term. However, since Gram reduces his reading to this aspect of Kant's account, his arguments only partly touch on the theory put forward by Adickes and others.

As I see it, Kant here primarily aims to explain the crucial difference between his own philosophy and what he took to be the Leibnizian roots of Wolffian general metaphysics.⁴⁴ In accordance with Wolff and Baumgarten, Kant conceives of the subject matter of general metaphysics as things as such (*Dinge überhaupt*), a term that pertains indiscriminately to material things such as roses and to immaterial things such as the soul or God.⁴⁵ In his view, the Wolffians did not limit the use of categories to appearances, but assumed that concepts such as substance and cause could be used to achieve a priori knowledge of things as such, *regardless of the way they are given to us*. This is what Kant calls the transcendental use of categories:

Daß also der Verstand von allen seinen Grundsätzen *a priori*, ja von allen seinen Begriffen keinen anderen als empirischen, niemals aber einen transscendentalen Gebrauch machen könne, ist ein Satz, der, wenn er mit Überzeugung erkannt werden kann, in wichtige Folgen hinauszieht. Der transscendentale Gebrauch eines Begriffs in irgendeinem Grundsatz ist dieser: *daß er auf Dinge überhaupt und an sich selbst*, der empirische [Gebrauch] aber, wenn er bloß auf Erscheinungen, d.i. Gegenstände einer möglichen Erfahrung, bezogen wird.⁴⁶

But what does it mean to relate a category to things in themselves? Most passages in the *Critique of Pure Reason* that mention things in themselves state either that appearances should not be treated as things in themselves or that the latter cannot be known. In my view, these passages – no less than those about things as such – pertain to the way in which things *used to be conceived* by former metaphysics rather than to Kant's own views on the matter. Kant basically uses the concept 'thing in itself' in this metaphysical sense to refer to any object that is conceived independently of its spatial and temporal determinations, in other words, by means of the understanding alone. These things, Kant notes, are "Dinge die der Verstand sich ohne [...] Beziehung auf unsere Anschauungsart, mithin nicht bloß als Erscheinungen [...] denken muß."⁴⁷ This passage makes it

⁴⁴ This aim emerges explicitly in the Appendix that follows Kant's account of the distinction between phenomena and noumena. According to Hans Graubner, in: *Form und Wesen. Ein Beitrag zur Deutung des Formbegriffs in Kants "Kritik der reinen Vernunft"* (Bonn 1972, 15–24), Kant here primarily takes issue with Baumgarten.

⁴⁵ KrV, A 238/B 298, cf. A 242, A 246/B 303. Wolff's German metaphysics is titled *Vernünfftige Gedancken von Gott, der Welt und der Seele des Menschen, auch allen Dingen überhaupt*. See also Baumgarten, Alexander Gottlieb: *Metaphysica / Metaphysik* [1739]. Translated and edited by Günter Gawlick and Lothar Kreimendahl. Stuttgart-Bad Cannstatt 2011, § 63, § 811.

⁴⁶ KrV, A 238–239/B 297–298, cf. A 247–248/B 304, A 279/B 335.

⁴⁷ KrV, B 307. Cf.: "Unsere Erörterungen lehren demnach [...] die Idealität des Raumes in Ansehung der Dinge, wenn sie durch die Vernunft *an sich selbst erwogen werden*, d.i. ohne Rücksicht auf die Beschaffenheit unserer Sinnlichkeit zu nehmen." (A 27–28/B 44, my emphasis). The *In-*

clear that Kant, contrary to what is commonly assumed, considers the thing in itself in the metaphysical sense of the term to refer not to something that exists independently of the human mind, but rather to that which is conceived *by abstracting from the way in which it can be intuited*. Thus, things in themselves in this sense can be called ‘non-sensible’ not because they cannot be reached by the finite mind, but because they result from a reflective activity carried out by the understanding alone. The following passage also defines things in themselves in this manner. All appearances, Kant writes, possess

zwei Seiten, [...] die eine, da das Object an sich selbst betrachtet wird, (unangesehen der Art, dasselbe anzuschauen [...]) die andere, da auf die Form der Anschauung dieses Gegenstandes gesehen wird, welche nicht in dem Gegenstande an sich selbst, sondern im Subjecte, dem derselbe erscheint, gesucht werden muß. (KrV, A 38/B 55)

Both ways of conceiving things are carried out by philosophers alone. Thus, by considering the characteristics contained in the concept of a drop of water, philosophy treats the latter as a thing in itself in the metaphysical sense of the term. In this case it completely abstracts from the sensible differences between various drops of water:

Freilich, wenn ich einen Tropfen Wasser als ein Ding an sich selbst nach allen seinen inneren Bestimmungen kenne, so kann ich keinen derselben von dem anderen für verschieden gelten lassen, wenn der ganze Begriff desselben mit ihm einerlei ist. (KrV, A 272/B 328)

Kant considers Leibniz, Wolff and their followers to have treated things exactly in this way (cf. A 271/B 327). Drawing on the Scholastic tradition, they indeed maintained that things can be considered either as they are in themselves or in relation

augural Dissertation distinguishes between things as they appear and things as they are in a similar way (cf. MSI, AA 02: 392). Allison takes Kant to distinguish between things that are considered such as they present themselves to “discursive knowers with our forms of sensibility” and things that are considered “apart from their epistemic relation to these forms”, in which case they are considered “qua objects for some pure intelligence” (KTI 16f.). In “In Defense of the Thing in Itself” (*Kant-Studien* 59/1, 1968, 118–141), Merol Westphal likewise argues that for Kant the thing in itself is “the thing for God’s creative intellect” (124). This reference to a divine understanding is unnecessary, however, if one takes into account the alleged mode of cognition that Kant attributes to the Wolffian tradition. Moreover, according to Kant, a divine intellect would not have to use categories (KrV, B 145). Seen in this way, there is no need to attribute discursivity only to the form of cognition that treats things as appearances. Moreover, if Kant *defines* the thing in itself as that which is considered without taking into account the way it presents itself in intuition, then his position should not be viewed as the result of an argument concerning, for instance, the discursive nature of human cognition, as Allison does (KTI 12).

to something else. Thus, Baumgarten notes in his *Metaphysica* that something which is not considered in relation to something else is considered in itself (*spectatur in se*). Wolff and the early Kant use similar expressions.⁴⁸ In Kant's view, the Wolffians rightly claimed that things can be considered by means of the understanding alone, but wrongly assumed that this consideration could yield true knowledge.⁴⁹

48 “Quod spectatur, sed non in nexu cum iis, quae extra illud ponuntur, *spectatur in se*.” Baumgarten, *Metaphysica*, § 15. This passage is quoted by Prauss, KPD 20f., who rightly stresses that the expression ‘thing in itself’ is an abbreviation of ‘that which is considered such as it is in itself’. Cf. the following passage from Wolff’s *Philosophia prima sive ontologia*: “*Res in se aut absolute spectari dicitur, si non attendimus nisi ad essentiam ejus, seu, quae ejus loco est, definitionem ipsius; vel, quod perinde est, si nihil in ea supponimus nisi essentiam ejus, seu, quae ejus loco est, definitionem ipsius. Sub data autem conditione aut in hypothesi spectatur, ubi praeter essentiam simul praesupponuntur determinationes aliae, quae illa pofita nondum ponuntur, sed quas poni saltem non repugnat.*” [One says that a thing is considered in itself or absolutely if we pay attention to nothing but its essence or, instead of it, to its definition; or, what is the same, if we suppose in it nothing but its essence or, instead, its definition. But a thing is considered under a given condition or hypothetically when we presuppose, besides the essence, other determinations which are not posited with it yet, but that can at least be posited without contradiction.]. Wolff, Christian: *Philosophia prima, sive Ontologia* [1730]. Reprint of the 1736 edition by Jean École. Hildesheim 1962, § 301. In *Nova dilucidatio* (1755) Kant himself uses the expression “vel in se vel in nexu spectatum” (ND, AA 01: 389). In his 1770 Dissertation he distinguishes between a connection of things in themselves (*in se*) and the world considered as phenomenon (*spectatur ut phaenomenon*). Whereas Kant here suggests that the former connection – the *mundus intelligibilis* – is grasped by the understanding, he identifies considering the world as phenomenon with considering it in relation to the way in which it is perceived by the human soul (MSI, AA 02: 398). In a lecture on Baumgarten’s *Metaphysica* dating from 1782–1783, in connection to §§ 15–16, Kant explains the expression ‘spectatur per se’ as follows: “Wir werden in der Folge sehen, daß das criterium der Möglichkeit der Dinge dieses ist: Die Synthesis, die die Möglichkeit der Erfahrungs Bedingungen enthält, ist möglich, das geht aber nur auf die Objecte der Erfahrung. (Wird etwas außer dem nexu betrachtet, so sagt man: spectatur per se oder interne, in nexu sagt man: interne spectatur.) Etwas ist innerlich oder an und vor sich selbst möglich und relative in Beziehung und Verknüpfung mit andern Dingen.” (V-Met/Mron, AA 29: 813; ‘interne spectatur’ seems to be a mistake). Kant here suggests that philosophy ought to consider the possibility of things only with regard to their connection to other things, which means, for him, that the possibility of these things has to be considered with regard to them qua possible objects of experience. It seems to me that Kant both here and in the 1770 Dissertation gives a completely new twist to the expression ‘in nexu’.

49 Kant takes his account to prove “die Nichtigkeit aller Schlüsse über Gegenstände, die man lediglich im Verstande miteinander vergleicht”, because, “obgleich Erscheinungen nicht als Dinge an sich selbst unter den Objecten des reinen Verstandes mit begriffen sind, sie doch die einzigen sind, an denen unsere Erkenntniß objective Realität haben kann, nämlich, wo den Begriffen Anschauung entspricht” (KrV, A 278–279/B 334–335). Kant here seems to oppose not only the Wolffians, but also his own earlier claim, in his 1770 Dissertation, that concepts of the understanding present things, qua noumena, such as they are (MSI, AA 02: 392). On the other hand, he in this

Yet it is not warranted, in my view, to maintain that Kant uses the term ‘thing in itself’ merely for the purpose of distinguishing two perspectives on the same things, as has been done by Prauss, Allison, and others. In line with their focus on empirical cognition, these commentators assume that the things of which Kant states that they can be considered as they are in themselves must be the same things as those that are said to affect the senses. I would submit, however, that Kant distinguishes between two possible approaches to things *as well as* between two kinds of things and that neither case concerns the issue of affection. This is to say that I do not accept the dichotomy between the ‘two-aspect view’ that Allison endorses and the ‘two-object view’ that he opposes. Seen from a Wolffian perspective, material things such as roses can be treated either as appearances or as they are in themselves. By contrast, immaterial things such as monads, the soul and God can *only* be treated in the latter way. In the following, crucial, passages Kant distinguishes obliquely between these two kinds of things:

Gleichwohl liegt es doch schon in unserem Begriffe, wenn wir gewisse Gegenstände, als Erscheinungen, Sinnenwesen (Phänomena) nennen, indem wir die Art, wie wir sie anschauen, von ihrer Beschaffenheit an sich selbst unterscheiden, daß wir *entweder* eben dieselbe [Gegenstände] nach dieser letzteren Beschaffenheit [...] *oder* auch andere mögliche Dinge, die gar nicht Objecte unserer Sinne sind, als Gegenstände *bloß durch den Verstand gedacht*, jenen gleichsam gegenüberstellen, und sie Verstandeswesen (Noumena) nennen.⁵⁰

Allein wir glauben auch a priori aus unsere Begriffe hinausgehen und unsere Erkenntniß erweitern zu können. Dieses versuchen wir *entweder* durch den reinen Verstand, in Ansehung desjenigen, was wenigstens ein Object der Erfahrung sein kann, *oder* sogar durch reine Vernunft, in Ansehung solcher Eigenschaften der Dinge, *oder* auch wohl des Daseins solcher Gegenstände, die in der Erfahrung niemals vorkommen können.⁵¹

text already states that knowledge of appearances is the most veritable form of knowledge (MSI, AA 02: 397). See KrV, A 249–250 and A 255–256/B 311 for articulations of this self-criticism.

50 KrV, B 306, my emphasis, cf. Prol, AA 04: 350. This passage may seem to be at odds with a note in the second Preface, where Kant refers to an experiment part of which consists in considering “dieselbe Gegenstände” as either objects of experience or as objects that can only be thought (B XIXn). Yet Kant here does not claim that this experiment can be carried out with regard to *all* things. The context suggests that he is thinking primarily of the Antinomy of Pure Reason.

51 KrV, A 764–765/B 792–793, my emphasis. In my view, these passages have not received the attention that they deserve. They undermine Prauss’s claim, taken over by Allison, that the objects that we “in transzendental-philosophischer Reflexion auch ‘an sich selbst betrachten’ müssen” are the very empirical things that affects us, in other words, his reduction of the concept ‘thing in itself’ to its physical sense (Prauss, KPD 200, cf. Allison, KTI 3, 16f.). Langton quotes the passage at B 306 (in her own translation), but since she, by means of ellipses, leaves out the ‘entweder’ – ‘oder’ she completely distorts its meaning (KH 12). To my knowledge, Robert M. Adams, in his

Once it has been accepted that *material* things such as roses can be known by means of the understanding alone, I take Kant to argue, nothing seems to prevent metaphysics from claiming that it can achieve true knowledge of *immaterial* things as well. Indeed, Kant throughout the *Critique of Pure Reason* aims to demonstrate why metaphysics – that is, a form of thought based on pure reason alone – cannot achieve a priori knowledge of things such as the soul, the world as such and God. This I consider to be his main reason for using the term ‘thing in itself’. However, Kant cannot abolish all of its characteristics, for he does not wish to reduce the domain of metaphysics to the totality of appearances. That is why he introduces various concepts that correspond to the metaphysical concept of a thing in itself but that, contrary to the latter, do not imply that that to which these terms refer can become an object of knowledge.

Thus, Kant seems to use the term ‘noumenon’ to indicate that which Wolffian metaphysics and his transcendental philosophy have in common, namely, the insight that philosophy cannot limit its scope to the sensible world qua totality of material objects.⁵² The Wolffians only went wrong, he argues, by conceiving of this ‘something’ not merely as something that can be thought, but as something that – by predicating categories of it – can itself be cognized. The understanding takes it for granted, he notes, that it can

sich auch von dergleichen Gegenstände *Begriffe* machen und, da der [...] Gegenstand in der letzteren Bedeutung wenigstens durch [...] reinen Verstandesbegriffe müsse gedacht werden können, [wird er] [...] verleitet, den ganz unbestimmten Begriff von einem Verstandeswesen, *als einem Etwas überhaupt* [...] für einen bestimmten Begriff von einem Wesen, welches wir durch den Verstand auf einige Art erkennen können, zu halten. (KrV, B 306–307, my emphasis).

“Things in Themselves” (in: *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 57/4, 1997, 801–825), is one of the very few commentators who, with reference to KrV, B 306, states that Kant “postulates both noumena that are definitely identical with some phenomena and noumena that definitely are not” (822). He rightly regards the human being as an example of something that can be considered in both ways (cf. B XXVII–XXVIII). Adams focuses on Kant’s conception of God in the *Critique of Practical Reason* and elsewhere, that is, on a noumenon that cannot as well be considered as a phenomenon. Since he deals with a notion that replaces the notion of a thing in itself in the *metaphysical* sense of the term, he is right to pass over the issue of affection.

⁵² “Hieraus entspringt nun der Begriff von einem Noumenon, der [...] nur das Denken von Etwas überhaupt bedeutet, bei welchem ich von aller Form der sinnlichen Anschauung abstrahire.” (KrV, A 252). This concept only serves the purpose of indicating “die Grenzen unserer sinnlichen Erkenntniß” and of leaving open a space that cannot be occupied by either possible experience or the pure understanding (KrV, A 288–289/B 345). Cf.: “Der Begriff eines Noumenon, d.i. eines Dinges, welches gar nicht als Gegenstand der Sinne, sondern als ein Ding an sich selbst, (lediglich durch einen reinen Verstand) gedacht werden soll, ist gar nicht widersprechend.” (KrV, A 254, cf. A 206).

I take it that Kant here has in mind immaterial things such as the soul and God rather than material things such as roses. Whereas the latter can also be treated as noumena, Kant uses the term ‘noumenon’ primarily to preserve a space for the ideas of reason.⁵³ By contrast, the term ‘transcendental object’, to which I now turn, is relevant to his intended reform of both general and special metaphysics.

The passages that treat of the transcendental object are among the most difficult of the *Critique of Pure Reason*. Perhaps this is why Kant in the second edition removed the term from the transcendental deduction and from his discussion of the distinction between phenomena and noumena.⁵⁴ Yet it seems to me that the term ‘transcendental object’ becomes much less obscure if we assume that Kant uses it sometimes in a sense that is indifferent to its various determinations in the philosophical tradition and sometimes in a sense that pertains to his own intended reform of Wolffian metaphysics. Taken in its formal sense, the term ‘transcendental object’ refers to the ‘something’ to which we must attribute the content of our representations in order to conceive of the latter as a unity (A 109). This ‘something’ itself does not exist independently of the human mind, but is posited by it.⁵⁵

Without positing a transcendental object it would be impossible, according to Kant, to attribute either redness to a rose or mental activities such as perceiving or thinking to monads, the soul or God (cf. A 265–266/B 321–322). In the following passage, which clearly pertains to the Wolffians, Kant disregards the difference between these two cases:

Das Denken ist die Handlung, gegebene Anschauung auf einen Gegenstand zu beziehen. Ist die Art dieser Anschauung auf keinerlei Weise gegeben, *so ist der Gegenstand bloß transscendental*, und der Verstandesbegriff hat keinen andern, als transscendentalen Gebrauch, näm-

⁵³ Cf. KrV, A 541/B 569; *Critique of Practical Reason*, KpV, AA 05: 54. Kant here uses the terms ‘noumenon’ and ‘thing in itself’ indiscriminately with regard to the soul, qua ground of freedom, and God.

⁵⁴ However, Kant did not remove references to the transcendental object from the part of the chapter that he did not rework (cf. KrV, B 304) or from other parts of the *Critique*, including the Transcendental Dialectic (cf. KrV, A 191/B 236, A 478/B 506, A 698/B 726).

⁵⁵ On this account, the transcendental object cannot be identified with what I have called the thing in itself in the physical sense of the term. Contrary to most commentators, Prauss rightly considers the transcendental object to result from a projection by the subject and disconnects it from the issue of affection (KPD 108–112). In “On the Status of ‘Things in Themselves’ in Kant” (in: *Revue internationale de philosophie* 35/2, 1981, 346–357) Nicholas Rescher likewise stresses that the thing in itself is a product of the understanding rather than something ‘out there’ (349). Yet he maintains that the understanding conceives of the thing in itself in order to posit that our representations “are grounded in extra-phenomenal reality” (352), thus confusing the two senses of the thing in itself that I propose to distinguish.

lich die Einheit des Denkens eines Mannigfaltigen überhaupt. Durch eine reine Kategorie nun, in welcher von aller Bedingung der sinnlichen Anschauung, als der einzigen, die uns möglich ist, *abstrahirt wird*, wird also kein Object bestimmt, sondern nur das Denken *eines Objects überhaupt*, nach verschiedenen modis, ausgedrückt. (KrV, A 247/B 304, my emphasis)

On Kant's reading, the Wolffians did not realize that the concept of a thing refers precisely to that which allows the human mind to unify its representations. They ought to have conceived of categories such as substance or causality as possible ways of unifying given representations rather than as predicates that can be attributed to material as well as to immaterial things.⁵⁶ The Transcendental Analytic seeks to prove that categories only yield a priori knowledge of possible objects of experience. Kant therefore takes issue with the purely intellectual determination of the transcendental object that he attributes to former general metaphysics. Yet this is not to say that he rejects other ways in which philosophy might employ the concept of a transcendental object.

In the context of his own projected reform of general metaphysics, Kant in the first edition of the *Critique of Pure Reason* puts forward a determination of the transcendental object that pertains to the a priori conditions of *empirical* knowledge alone:

Der reine Begriff von diesem transscendentalen Gegenstande, (der wirklich bei allen unsern Erkenntnissen immer einerlei = X ist,) ist das, was in allen unseren empirischen Begriffen überhaupt Beziehung auf einen Gegenstand, d.i. objective Realität verschaffen kann. (KrV, A 109)

Das Object, worauf ich die Erscheinung überhaupt beziehe, ist der transscendentale Gegenstand, d.i. der gänzlich unbestimmte Gedanke von Etwas überhaupt. (KrV, A 253)

The determination of the transcendental object presented in these passages can be squared with a Lockean account of the way in which we posit something for the purpose of unifying the content of our simple ideas. Kant's position differs from Locke's, however, because he is concerned with the way in which the pure understanding attributes categories to objects of experience *as such* rather than with the way in which the mind attributes colors and shapes to *particular* substrates. On the other hand, Kant turns against the Wolffians by limiting the function of this transcendental 'something' to the process of unifying sensible representations:

⁵⁶ The principles of the understanding, Kant writes, are "bloß Principien der Exposition der Erscheinungen, und der stolze Name einer Ontologie, welche sich anmaßt, von Dingen überhaupt synthetische Erkenntnisse *a priori* [...] zu geben [...] muß dem bescheidenen, einer bloßen Analytik des reinen Verstandes, Platz machen" (KrV, A 247/B 303, cf. Prol, AA 04: 332).

Alle unsere Vorstellungen werden in der That durch den Verstand auf irgendein Object bezogen, und, da Erscheinungen nichts als Vorstellungen sind, so bezieht sich der Verstand auf ein Etwas, als *den Gegenstand der sinnlichen Anschauung*: aber dieses Etwas ist insofern nur das transscendentale Object. Dieses bedeutet aber ein Etwas = x, wovon wir gar nichts wissen, noch überhaupt (nach der jetzigen Einrichtung unseres Verstandes) wissen können, sondern, welcher *nur* als ein Correlatum der Einheit der Apperception zur Einheit des Mannigfaltigen *in der sinnlichen Anschauung* dienen kann, vermittelt deren der Verstand dasselbe [Mannigfaltige] in den Begriff eines Gegenstandes vereinigt.⁵⁷

Kant's conception of the transcendental object seems to be based on an analogy with a Lockean account of empirical cognition. By attributing redness to an x that I call a rose I turn my sensible representations into an object of experience. Similarly, in order to attribute a category such as causality or substance to something at all, the understanding must have a representation of that to which schematized categories can be attributed. Seen in this way, the concept of a transcendental object performs the same function as the concept of a thing in former general metaphysics: it has to be posited in order to achieve knowledge of something because otherwise there would be nothing to attribute representations to. Yet since Kant wishes to limit the function of this a priori element to possible objects of experience, he implicitly distinguishes between a purely intellectual determination of the transcendental object, which he attributes to Wolffian general metaphysics, and a determination that *cannot be divorced from the element of sensible intuition* and, hence, cannot itself be turned into an object of purely intellectual cognition. At one point, Kant refers to the transcendental object in *this* sense as “Gegenstand einer sinnlichen Anschauung überhaupt” (A 253) or as “transscendentaler Gegenstand der Erfahrung” (A 495/B 523). According to this new conception of the transcendental object, the latter

*läßt sich gar nicht von den sinnlichen Datis absondern, weil alsdann nichts übrig bleibt, wodurch es gedacht würde. Es ist also kein Gegenstand der Erkenntniß an sich selbst, sondern nur die Vorstellung der Erscheinungen, unter dem Begriffe eines Gegenstandes überhaupt, der durch das Mannigfaltige derselben [Erscheinungen] bestimmbar ist.*⁵⁸

⁵⁷ KrV, A 250, my emphasis. Categories, Kant adds, “dienen nur dazu, *das transscendentale Object* (den Begriff von etwas überhaupt) durch das, was in der Sinnlichkeit gegeben wird, zu bestimmen, dadurch Erscheinungen unter Begriffen von Gegenständen empirisch zu erkennen.” (KrV, A 251).

⁵⁸ KrV, A 251, my emphasis. Since the transcendental object in *this* sense merely allows the understanding to conceive of appearances as objects of possible experience, it cannot even be treated as a noumenon in the sense of a particular object that can be thought (such as the soul or God) (cf. A 253). Kant notes at one point that there is nothing against using the term ‘noumenon’ with regard to the transcendental object if we take the latter to refer merely to that which cannot

In sum, whereas the transcendental object performs the same function as things as such within the discipline formerly called general metaphysics, Kant distances himself from the tradition by defining it as that which must be posited in order to turn impressions into an object of knowledge (see figure 1). If Kant's scattered remarks on the transcendental object are considered from the perspective of his implicit and explicit discussion with the Wolffian tradition, there is no reason to interpret the latter as an unknowable entity capable of causing representations, in other words, to identify it with the thing in itself in the physical sense of the term. Yet Kant also discusses the transcendental object in the context of the Transcendental Dialectic, that is, in the part of the *Critique* that corresponds to former special metaphysics. It is notably within this context, I will argue in the next section, that he refers to the transcendental object as ground or cause of appearances.

Figure 1

be intuited (cf. KrV, A 288–289/B 345). However, this sense should still be distinguished from what Kant in the second edition calls the noumenon in the negative sense of the term (cf. B 307), because the latter refers to particular objects of thought rather than to the object of possible experience as such.

7 The Transcendental Object as Ground or Cause of Appearances

The preceding section argued that Kant's discussion of the transcendental object in the *Transcendental Analytic* is concerned with the 'something' that we have to posit in order to unify our representations according to a priori rules expressed by the categories. The transcendental object in this sense can be said to replace the concept of a thing as such in former *general* metaphysics. By contrast, Kant's remarks on the transcendental object in the *Transcendental Dialectic* pertain to the 'things' that former *special* metaphysics considered to correspond to what Kant calls ideas of reason. In agreement with the tradition, Kant holds that transcendental objects in *this* sense, now referred to in the plural, have to be completely divorced from the element of sensibility. Whereas Kant considers them to allow the understanding to unify its representations to the highest possible extent, he argues once again, but now in more specific terms, that they cannot themselves be turned into objects of cognition, in other words, that they have to be treated as noumena in the negative sense of the term. Thus, he refers to the cosmological ideas that pertain to the world as such – qua transcendental object – as follows:

Dergleichen transscendente Ideen haben einen *bloß intelligiblen Gegenstand*, welchen als *ein transscendentales Object*, von dem man übrigens nichts weiß, zuzulassen, es allerdings erlaubt ist, wozu aber, um es als *ein durch seine unterscheidenden und inneren Prädicate bestimmbares Ding zu denken*, wir weder Gründe der Möglichkeit [...] noch die mindeste Rechtfertigung, einen solchen Gegenstand anzunehmen, auf unserer Seite haben. (KrV, A 565–566/B 593–594)

In the following passage, already quoted, Kant refers to that which grounds appearances as well as the intuitions of ourselves as transcendental objects:

Das transscendentale Object, welches den äußeren Erscheinungen, imgleichen das, was der inneren Anschauung zum Grunde liegt, ist weder Materie, noch ein denkend Wesen an sich selbst, sondern ein uns unbekannter Grund der Erscheinungen. (KrV, A 379–380)

Before considering each of the transcendental objects in detail, however, Kant must already have accounted in *general terms* for the necessity of conceiving appearances in light of something that itself does not appear. This is done in the chapter devoted to the difference between phenomena and noumena, part of which has already been discussed. Now Kant notes in the Appendix to this chapter that the transcendental object might be conceived as the ground of the appearance “die wir Materie nennen” (A 277) and as “the Ursache der Erschei-

nung”.⁵⁹ As we have seen, Adickes and Allison infer from such passages that Kant considers things in themselves to affect our senses. Yet in this context Kant is not concerned with the issue of affection at all. He merely states that the transcendental object conceived as ground or cause defines the limits within which empirical knowledge is possible. The transcendental object refers to a space beyond these limits, a space “den wir weder durch mögliche Erfahrung, noch durch den reinen Verstand ausfüllen können” (A 288–289/B 345).

Kant's main reason to preserve such a space, I would submit, is to account for the possibility of human freedom and morality. To this end he seeks to establish a metaphysics that treats appearances *as such* in light of a dimension that itself cannot be grasped in materialistic or deterministic terms:

Denn, sind Erscheinungen Dinge an sich selbst, so ist Freiheit nicht zu retten. Alsdann ist Natur die vollständige und an sich hinreichend bestimmende Ursache jeder Begebenheit. [...] Wenn dagegen Erscheinungen für nichts mehr gelten, als [...] bloße Vorstellungen [...], so müssen sie selbst noch Gründe haben, die nicht Erscheinungen sind. Eine solche *intelligible Ursache* aber wird in Ansehung ihrer Causalität nicht durch Erscheinungen bestimmt, obzwar ihre Wirkungen erscheinen, und so durch andere Erscheinungen bestimmt werden können. [...] Die Wirkung kann also in Ansehung ihrer intelligiblen Ursache als frei, und doch zugleich in Ansehung der Erscheinungen als Erfolg aus denselben nach der Nothwendigkeit der Natur, angesehen werden.⁶⁰

Passages from the Transcendental Dialectic such as this one bring out that Kant's more abstract references to the transcendental object as ground or cause of appearances have very little to do with a Lockean view of cognition, let alone with the issue of affection. The only feature that Kant's account, in this context, shares with Locke's is the purely formal notion of appearances, qua representations, that are caused by something that itself does not appear. Yet, unlike Locke, Kant

⁵⁹ KrV, A 288/B 344. Cf.: “Das den Erscheinungen zum Grunde liegende transscendentale Object, und mit demselben der Grund, warum unsere Sinnlichkeit diese vielmehr als andere oberste Bedingungen habe, sind und bleiben für uns unerforschlich.” (KrV, A 613–614/B 641–642). This is one of the passages that Allison considers to prove that Kant took things in themselves to affect the senses (cf. KTI 460, note 24).

⁶⁰ KrV, A 536–537/B 564–565, my emphasis. This passage corresponds to the passage at B XXVII quoted in Section 2. Cf. KrV, A 538–539/B 566–567, A 541/B 569, A 544–546/B 572–574; Prol., AA 04: 345–346. The *Critique of Pure Reason* explicitly opposes materialism (cf. A 383, B 420–421). A metaphysics that considers certain appearances – human actions – in light of their merely intelligible cause must do so by means of an unschematized category. For that reason it cannot *determine* the ‘something’ that it thinks. According to Kant, these noumena can only be determined through practical reason. Cf. B XXVIII–XXIX, B 166, note; *Critique of Practical Reason*: KpV, AA 05: 05–06, 54–56, 68, 114. In what follows I will limit myself to Kant's theoretical philosophy.

is concerned with the possibility of attributing freedom to the source of mental activity that used to be called the soul. Insofar as Kant opposes a materialistic account of the world, he shares common ground with Leibniz and the Wolffians. However, he takes the latter to have unduly filled the space designated by the ideas of reason with purported knowledge of ‘things’ such as the soul, the world as such and God and, hence, to have succumbed to a metaphysical brand of determinism.⁶¹ In order to oppose the latter, Kant in the Transcendental Dialectic applies his basic distinction between appearances and their merely intelligible ground to each of the domains of former special metaphysics, that is to say, to rational psychology, cosmology and theology.⁶²

It is only in this part of the *Critique* that Kant points out which particular objects have to be treated as intelligible, yet unknowable transcendental objects. According to his division of what used to be called special metaphysics, these objects are matter, the soul, the world as such, and God. In order to clarify the meaning of the term ‘transcendental object’ within the context of former special metaphysics I will briefly discuss Kant’s remarks on the transcendental objects of rational psychology and rational physics, that is to say, soul and matter.⁶³

61 Obviously, Spinoza’s *Ethics* was considered to represent this threat in a pre-eminent way. Cf. KpV, AA 05: 102. See on Kant and Spinoza: Lord, Beth: *Kant and Spinozism: Transcendental Idealism and Immanence from Jacobi to Deleuze*. Basingstoke 2011; Boehm, Omri: “The First Antinomy and Spinoza”. In: *British Journal for the History of Philosophy* 19/4, 2011, 683–710.

62 See KpV, A 846–847/B 874–875 for Kant’s discussion of these disciplines qua parts of the metaphysical system he intended to elaborate. This division does not completely correspond to his critique of former special metaphysics in the Transcendental Dialectic, which does not include a systematic discussion of what Kant calls rational physics. This latter discipline is elaborated in the *Metaphysical Foundations of the Natural Sciences* [1786], cf. MAN, AA 04: 478. This work deals with the conceptual determinations that can be attributed to matter (472f.).

63 As already noted, Kant considers the world as such, qua subject matter of cosmology, as a transcendental object because we a priori conceive of the world as a totality which “nichts Empirisches mehr ist, indem sie in keiner Erfahrung gegeben werden kann” (KpV, A 479). Implicitly referring to the world as such, qua “bloß intelligibele Ursache der Erscheinungen überhaupt”, Kant notes that we can attribute “allen Umfang und Zusammenhang unserer möglichen Wahrnehmungen” to this transcendental object (KpV, A 494–495/B 522–523). Clearly, the term ‘cause’ in this context refers to ground or reason rather than to mechanistic causality. Without taking into account the context of this passage (cosmology), Allison (KTI, 68–70, cf. 460, note 24) considers it to “stipulate how the affecting object must be conceived of in the transcendental account of affection” (72). Neither Allison nor Prauss addresses Kant’s conception of particular transcendental objects in the Transcendental Dialectic. Kant also considers the idea of God, traditionally defined as the necessary cause of all things, to refer to a transcendental object: “Ist der Gegenstand transscendental und also selbst unbekannt, z.B. [...] ob es eine Ursache aller Dinge insgesamt gebe, die schlechthin nothwendig ist, usw., so sollen wir zu unserer Idee einen Gegenstand

By positing the soul as a transcendental object, the discipline formerly called rational psychology can consider the activities carried out by the human mind to refer to an undefined 'something' which itself does not appear:

[S]o mag man immer zu wissen vorgeben: das denkende Ich, die Seele, (ein Name für *den transscendentalen Gegenstand des inneren Sinnes*) sei einfach; dieser Ausdruck hat deshalb doch gar keinen auf wirkliche Gegenstände sich erstreckenden Gebrauch und kann daher unsere Erkenntniß nicht im mindesten erweitern.⁶⁴

Ist der Gegenstand transscendental und also selbst unbekannt, z.B. ob das Etwas, dessen Erscheinung (in uns selbst) das Denken ist, (Seele) ein an sich einfaches Wesen sei, [...] so sollen wir zu unserer Idee einen Gegenstand suchen, von welchem wir gestehen können, daß er uns unbekannt, aber deswegen doch nicht unmöglich sei. (KrV, A 478/B 506)

Kant here suggests that we are allowed to conceive of the soul as simple as long as we keep in mind that we thereby do not determine an actual object. Time and again, he emphasizes that the transcendental object to which the ideas of reason refer should not be conceived as a thing of which the inner determinations can be known, which is precisely what he reproaches Leibniz and the Wolffians for.

However, Kant does not reject their conception of the soul as ground or cause of appearances altogether. Insofar as we treat appearances as representations, we must assume that they are caused by – or grounded in – the 'something' that rational psychology used to refer to as the soul.⁶⁵ Otherwise it would be impossible, first, to conceive of the activities carried out by the human mind as a unity and, second, to conceive of the possibility of human freedom. As far as the sphere of theoretical reason is concerned, philosophy only has to point out that it is not self-contradictory to conceive of the soul as the merely "intelligible Grund" of "Erscheinungen und deren Zusammenhänge".⁶⁶ What this means can only be under-

suchen, von welchem wir gestehen können, daß er uns unbekannt, aber deswegen doch nicht unmöglich sei." (KrV, A 478/B 506, cf. A 697–698/B 725–726).

⁶⁴ KrV, A 360–361, my emphasis, cf. A 682–683/B 710–711.

⁶⁵ Following Leibniz, Wolff maintains that the soul possesses "eine Kraft sich die Welt vorzustellen, nach dem Stande ihres Körpers in der Welt" and determines this power as "Grund [...] von allem demjenigen, was veränderliches in der Seele vorgehet". Wolff, Christian: *Vernünfftige Gedancken von Gott, der Welt und der Seele des Menschen, auch allen Dingen überhaupt* [1720]. In: *Gesammelte Werke*. Ed. By Charles Corr. Hildesheim 1983, §§ 753–755; hereafter abbreviated as GM. See on this Blackwell, Richard: "Christian Wolff's Doctrine of the Soul". In: *Journal of the History of Ideas* 22, 1961, 339–354. Unlike Wolff, Baumgarten does not avoid the term 'monad' in this respect. He refers to the human soul as a substance and, hence, a monad or power that represents the universe in a certain way (*Metaphysica*, §§ 741–742).

⁶⁶ KrV, A 545/B 573, cf. A 538/B 566. According to Kant, metaphysics is allowed to use unschematized categories to represent the soul as grammatical subject, but not to make synthetic a priori claims about the soul qua alleged object: "Wenn ich nun aber durch bloße Kategorie sage:

stood, in my view, if we consider Kant to conceive of that which used to be called the soul from a monadological perspective, albeit a modified one. In the following passage Kant notes that Leibniz considered representations to be grounded in a capacity to represent – or representative power – that he called ‘monad’ and attributed to all things: “Leibniz nahm [...] zuerst Dinge an (Monaden) und innerlich eine Vorstellungskraft derselben, um danach das äußere Verhältniß derselben und die Gemeinschaft ihrer Zustände (nämlich der Vorstellungen) darauf zu gründen.” (A 267/B 323) In an already quoted passage, Kant writes that it is by no means contradictory to attribute the capacity to produce representations to something:

[D]asjenige Etwas [...] als Noumenon (oder besser, als transscendentaler Gegenstand) betrachtet, könnte doch auch zugleich das Subject der Gedanken sein. [...] Dieses Etwas aber ist nicht ausgedehnt, nicht undurchdringlich, nicht zusammengesetzt, weil alle diese Prädicate nur die Sinnlichkeit und deren Anschauung angehen, sofern wir von dergleichen (uns übrigens unbekannten) Objecten afficirt werden. [...] Allein die Prädicate des innern Sinnes, Vorstellungen und Denken, widersprechen ihm nicht. (KrV, A 358–359, cf. A 265–266/B 321–322)

Thus, Kant seems to accept Leibniz’s conception of monads as the non-sensible ground of their representations at least insofar as the human soul is concerned – on the condition, of course, that the latter is not treated as an object of a priori cognition.

Seen from the perspective of transcendental philosophy, this non-sensible ground cannot be identified with the material cause of our representations, as Lockean psychologists would do. Whereas these psychologists, Kant notes, considered representations to be caused by “Gegenständen als an sich außer uns befindlichen Dingen” (A 372), Kant suggests that philosophy ought to distinguish between the object to which we refer our representation of matter and the ultimate ground of this representation. This brings us to his conception of matter.

In both the *Critique of Pure Reason* and the *Metaphysical Foundations of the Natural Sciences*, Kant seems to hold that rational physics, unlike rational psychology, does not relate to appearances as mere representations. Within this context, the concept of appearance rather refers to material objects such as they are treated within empirical physics. Bridging the gap between general metaphysics and empirical physics, rational physics deals with the determinations that must

die Seele ist eine einfache Substanz, so ist klar, daß, da der nackte Verstandesbegriff von Substanz nichts weiter enthält, als daß ein Ding, als Subject an sich, ohne wiederum Prädicat von einem andern zu sein, vorgestellt werden solle, daraus nichts von Beharrlichkeit folge.” (A 401).

be attributed a priori to all material objects.⁶⁷ As was to be expected, the critical Kant rejects efforts to specify the inner determinations of matter. Yet he continues to affirm the necessity to distinguish matter, considered as appearance, from the transcendental object that we have to consider as its unknowable ground. It is only by virtue of the appearance of matter, he writes, that we can represent matter as external to us:

Allein, das schlechthin, dem reinen Verstande nach, Innerliche der Materie ist auch eine bloße Grille; denn diese ist überall kein Gegenstand für den reinen Verstand, das transcendente Object aber, welches der Grund dieser Erscheinung sein mag, die wir Materie nennen, ist ein bloßes Etwas, wovon wir nicht einmal verstehen würden, was es sei, wenn es uns auch jemand sagen könnte. (KrV, A 277/B 333)

Was Materie für ein Ding an sich selbst (transscendentales Object) sei, ist uns zwar gänzlich unbekannt; gleichwohl kann doch die Beharrlichkeit derselben als Erscheinung, dieweil sie als etwas Äußerliches vorgestellt wird, beobachtet werden. (KrV, A 366).

But how should we conceive of the merely intelligible transcendental object such as it is treated within rational physics? Why does it not suffice to limit the scope of this discipline to appearances all the way down? The passages in the *Critique of Pure Reason* that refer to the merely intelligible cause of matter only make sense, it seems to me, if we assume – with Langton – that Kant did not completely reject Leibniz' monadology and his own early sketch of a physical monadology in this regard.⁶⁸ The monadologists assumed, Kant writes, that every thing contains an inner, simple substrate that grounds its external determinations. They assumed as well that each substrate must possess the capacity to produce representations, such that all things

eigentlich Monaden [wären], oder mit Vorstellungen begabte einfache Wesen. *Dieses würde auch alles seine Richtigkeit haben*, gehörte nicht etwa mehr, als der Begriff von einem Dinge überhaupt, zu den Bedingungen, unter denen allein uns Gegenstände der äußeren Anschauung gegeben werden können, und von denen der reine Begriff abstrahirt. Denn da zeigt sich, daß eine beharrliche Erscheinung im Raume [...] lauter Verhältnisse, und gar nichts schlechthin Innerliches enthalten, und dennoch das erste Substratum aller äußeren Wahrnehmung sein könne. (KrV, A 283–284/B 339–340, my emphasis, cf. A 266–267/B 322, A 274/B 330).

⁶⁷ MAN, AA 04: 469–473.

⁶⁸ Cf. Langton, KH 68–69. I completely agree with Langton that the “Leibnizian reduction of phenomena to things in themselves – with its reduction of physical relations to the intrinsic properties of monads – is a target of Kant's critique” (96). Focusing on Kant's quasi-monadological conception of matter, however, Langton does not take into account the ramifications of Kant's critique of metaphysics.

Clearly, Kant – following Wolff – rejects Leibniz’s conception of matter as grounded in substances capable of perception.⁶⁹ In his view, the ultimate subject matter of sense perception, a capacity that he attributes to the human mind alone, is the *substantia phaenomenon* that consists exclusively of relations (cf. A 265/B 321, A 442/B 470). Yet Kant in this context does not point out how the transcendental object that constitutes the ground of material objects has to be *thought*.

The *Critique of Pure Reason* does not offer any clue in this regard, which might be due to the fact that it does not include a systematic account of rational physics. By contrast, the *Metaphysical Foundations of the Natural Sciences* determines the merely intelligible ‘something’ that used to be called a monad in terms of forces. It is here that Kant clearly distinguishes what he takes to be Leibniz’s own intentions from those of his followers who confused physics and metaphysics. Leibniz’s monadology, he writes, offers an “an sich richtiger platonischer Begriff von der Welt [...], so fern sie gar nicht als Gegenstand der Sinne, sondern als Ding an sich selbst betrachtet, bloß ein Gegenstand des Verstandes ist, der aber doch den Erscheinungen der Sinne zum Grunde liegt.”⁷⁰ What Kant attributes to matter insofar as it can be thought, in other words, to its essence, is not the capacity to represent the universe, but merely the interplay of complementary forces that first brings about the material object qua something that occupies a space and has the capacity to resist other material objects: “Also gehört die Zurückstoßungskraft zum Wesen der Materie eben so wohl wie die Anziehungskraft, und keine kann von der anderen im Begriff der Materie getrennt werden.”⁷¹ The following passage neatly summarizes Kant’s position:

⁶⁹ Wolff only accepted substances, or things that exist for themselves, that possess an internal force. See C. Wolff, GM §§ 114–115. See for a clear and convincing account of the reception of Leibniz’s monadology up to the early Kant Watkins, Eric: “On the Necessity and Nature of Simples: Leibniz, Wolff, Baumgarten, and the pre-Critical Kant”. In: *Oxford Studies in Early Modern Philosophy* 3, 2006, 261–314, hereafter abbreviated as NNS. See for an equally clear discussion of Kant’s early physical monadology and his criticism of it in the Second Analogy Engelhard, Kristina: “Kants physische Monadologie und dynamische Materietheorie. Die vorkritische Theorie und ihre Kritik”. In: *Der Monadenbegriff zwischen Spätrenaissance und Aufklärung*. Ed. by Hanns-Peter Neumann Berlin/New York 2009, 301–338; see also Edwards, Jeffrey: *Substance, Force, and the Possibility of Knowledge: On Kant’s Philosophy of Material Nature*. Berkeley 2000, 118–123.

⁷⁰ MAN, AA 04: 507, cf. 504–505, 521. In “Über eine Entdeckung ...” Kant considers the *Critique of Pure Reason* to have proven that, first, the material world does not contain simple substances and, second, that “die Vernunft, wenn sie sich ein Zusammengesetztes aus Substanzen, als Ding an sich (ohne es auf die besondere Beschaffenheit unserer Sinne zu beziehen), denkt, [sie] es schlechterdings als aus einfachen Substanzen bestehend denken müsse” (ÜE, AA 08: 209).

⁷¹ MAN, AA 04: 511.

Der Begriff der Materie wird auf lauter bewegende Kräfte zurückgeführt. [...] Allein wer will die Möglichkeit der Grundkräfte einsehen? Sie können nur angenommen werden, wenn sie zu einem Begriff, von dem es erweislich ist, daß er ein Grundbegriff sei [...] (wie der der Erfüllung des Raums), unvermeidlich gehören, und dieses sind Zurückstoßungs- und ihnen entgegenwirkende Anziehungskräfte überhaupt.⁷²

As I see it, Kant continued to accept a monadological account of matter for at least two reasons. First, he saw it as the only way to ward off materialism. A materialist conception of matter would make it very hard, if not impossible, to account for the emergence of freedom in *human* beings. For even though Kant does not exactly conceive of the forces constitutive of material objects as immaterial, he considers them to precede and ground material objects, in other words, to be noumenal rather than phenomenal.⁷³ Accordingly, he can take them to be on a par with the forces that within the realm of rational psychology emerge as the ca-

72 MAN, AA 04: 524. Kant here partly draws on his so-called *Physical Monadology* from 1756. In this early text, however, he does not hesitate to use the term 'monad', to maintain that bodies consist of monads, and to attribute to the latter the capacity to exert an activity that results in their occupation of a certain space (MonPh, AA 01: 481, cf. 480). Even though Kant here already tries to disentangle the domains of geometry and metaphysics, his conception of physical monads seems to introduce metaphysical considerations into the domain of physics in a way that he would later reject.

73 By contrast, Watkins considers the early Kant to regard the forces he attributes to physical monads both as primitive and as physical in the sense of Newton (NNS 302–303). Yet the fact that Kant (1) maintains Leibniz' distinction between primitive and derivative forces and (2) uses Newton's terms to refer to the primitive forces constitutive of matter as such (rather than of the relation between material objects) does not necessarily entail that he considers these forces themselves to be physical, for he might have held that the derivative, physical forces with which Newtonian physics is concerned are merely analogous to (or derivative of) what he considers to be primitive forces. Seen in this way, one might apply to the early Kant the view that Watkins attributes only to Wolff, namely, the view that "even though simples may not be mental, they also cannot be physical *in the same sense* in which bodies are" (288). At least Kant does not consider them to be 'in space' in the same way as material objects are. Watkins also points out that Wolff held that the forces of *bodies* might be derived from the forces constitutive of the *elements* of bodies (281–282), but does not consider the possibility that this might have been Kant's view as well. It is perhaps no coincidence that Kant does not refer to the forces that he attributes to monads as physical forces. In *Substance, Force and the Possibility of Knowledge*, Edwards emphasizes that Kant's early concept of "intrinsic substantial (or monadic) activity" is an *a priori* concept (120) and that his theory of matter in the *Physical Monadology* is not grounded in a concept of material substance or material force (122, cf. 51). Whereas Edwards conceives of the unity constitutive of bodies as something physical, though not material (122), I would suggest that the term 'physical' in the expression 'physical monad' does not have to pertain to the nature of the forces constitutive of material bodies.

capacity of the human mind to intuit, think and act.⁷⁴ Second, only by thus grounding rational psychology and rational physics in the same ontology can these disciplines be regarded as elements of an encompassing metaphysical system.

In sum, Kant seems to introduce the transcendental distinction between phenomena and noumena into metaphysics primarily in order to account for the possibility of human freedom. Whence the references in the *Critique of Pure Reason* to the transcendental object as non-sensible ground or cause of appearances. Since Kant opposes the efforts of former metaphysics to turn this ground into an object of cognition, he might be considered to adhere to an agnostic monadology.⁷⁵ Clearly, the ‘something’ which, according to Kant, both rational physics and rational psychology must consider to ground appearances can be called a noumenon, a transcendental object, a thing in itself or a monad, but in each case it remains “himmelweit unterschieden” (A 44/B 61) from the objects that can be said to affect our sensibility.

8 Allison and Langton

I hope to have demonstrated that the problems and inconsistencies often attributed to Kant’s conception of the thing in itself arise on the assumption that everything the *Critique of Pure Reason* has to say about objects, things in themselves and transcendental objects belongs to a single system. If one assumes, moreover, that this system ought to be able to deal with the issue of affection, it becomes extremely difficult to resolve the alleged contradictions in the *Critique of Pure Reason*. While Allison and Langton focus on two apparently opposed elements of the *Critique of Pure Reason*, they share these two assumptions. Yet their interpretations also contain valuable elements, not least insofar as they point out the defects or limits of the position they oppose.

⁷⁴ Blackwell describes Wolff’s view on forces in similar terms: “On the one hand, material bodies possess a motive force which accounts for their physical actions. On the other hand, souls possess a representative force which explains their cognitive actions. In both cases the function of the force is to transform the possibility of doing to actual doing.” Blackwell: “Christian Wolff’s Doctrine of the Soul”, 347.

⁷⁵ Watkins attributes this agnosticism already to Wolff’s account of monads (NNS 281–282, 288). It might be argued that the critical Kant radicalizes Wolffian agnosticism concerning the ground of matter by arguing that even monads such as the soul and God cannot be known. Unlike Wolff’s work, moreover, the *Critique of Pure Reason* offers an elaborate argument – or ‘proof’ – for the impossibility of cognizing such noumena, namely, by arguing that valid synthetic a priori judgments depend on schematized pure concepts.

Thus, Allison rightly maintains that terms such as ‘thing in itself’ and ‘transcendental object’ are “technical terms within a metalanguage” and do not refer to metaphysical entities endowed with certain powers.⁷⁶ Yet his own interpretation of these terms does not solve the problems he attributes to metaphysical readings, I hold, because he no less than Langton and most other commentators assumes that either appearances or things in themselves – however understood – must play the part of affecting objects. Focusing on empirical cognition, Allison hardly discusses Kant’s references to God and the soul as things in themselves, noumena or transcendental objects.⁷⁷ Accordingly, he takes Kant’s ‘metalanguage’ to serve the purpose of clarifying the role of non-empirical affection. As said, Allison opposes the view – which he also attributes to Langton – that affection can be understood in causal terms alone (KTI 18, 65). He tries to defend the idea of non-empirical affection without taking on board Adickes’ view that the human mind is affected by two different kind of entities (66, 68). Drawing on Prauss, he argues that the distinction between empirical and non-empirical affection comes down to a distinction between two ways of considering the same empirical object: “Talk about the transcendental object, like talk about things as they are in themselves, is to be construed [...] as talk about empirical objects *considered transcendently*, that is, with respect to the conditions of their cognition.”⁷⁸ Insofar as the affect-

⁷⁶ Allison, KTI 73. On some occasions Allison seems to identify the thing in itself and the transcendental object (cf. 50, 53 and the passages at 64, 65 quoted above). Elsewhere he maintains that the thing in itself, the noumenon and the transcendental object are “related, though distinct conceptions” (50, cf. 57). In his view, Kant himself advances both views (60). Allison’s own effort to solve this problem is rather elusive. In an earlier article, he likewise attributes to Kant an ambiguous treatment of the transcendental object. This ambiguity, he notes, “is quite obviously grounded in the fact that Kant moves without warning from a vague conception of a transcendental object as an unknown, transcendent entity in general to the object [...] to which we refer appearances” (182). Allison refers to the latter as a “transcendentally real” entity and identifies it with what he takes to be Kant’s concept of things in themselves, the existence of which must allegedly be “inferred from an analysis of sensibility” (182–183). For Allison, both the thing in itself and the transcendental object in the latter sense must refer to the “non-empirical cause of our representations” (170), which he implicitly identifies with the affecting object. If one assumes, by contrast, that Kant’s discussion of the transcendental object has nothing to do with his references to the thing in itself in the physical sense of the term, then very little remains of the ambiguity Allison attributes to Kant. See Allison, Henry: “Kant’s Concept of the Transcendental Object”. In: *Kant-Studien* 59/2, 1968, 165–186.

⁷⁷ Allison refers to the soul and God as non-sensible beings (KTI 51), as noumena (57), as transcendental objects (120) and as the putative objects of special metaphysics (327). To my knowledge he does not use the terms ‘thing in itself’ and ‘transcendental object’ in the context of his discussion of the Transcendental Dialectic.

⁷⁸ Allison, KTI 62, cf. 67.

ing object is “to function in a transcendental account”, he continues, philosophy must abstract from the fact that it is spatio-temporal so as to treat it as a “merely intelligible cause of appearances”.⁷⁹

Apart from the textual problems discussed above, I find it very hard to make sense of Allison’s position, because I do not see how we could treat something at once as affecting the mind and as noumenon. Whereas these two perspectives can intend the same referent, they are mutually exclusive: if I consider a rose as a noumenon, I precisely consider it no longer as the efficient cause of my representations, but as something of which the inner characteristics are knowable (the Wolffians) or unknowable (Kant). I have argued that this latter perspective is primarily relevant to Kant’s critical reflection on the alleged capacity of reason to achieve knowledge of the soul, the world as such and God. I do not see, in other words, how framing Jacobi’s problem in terms of epistemic conditions yields a convincing solution to the problem that Allison identifies. If, by contrast, considering representations from a transcendental perspective means that we are no longer dealing with the issue of affection at all – as I have proposed to do – then there is no need to preserve any notion of transcendental affection by things in themselves.

Given his focus on what he considers to be Kant’s epistemology, it is no surprise that Allison in the second edition of *Kant’s Transcendental Idealism* is skeptical of Langton’s “virtual identification of Kant’s things in themselves with Leibnizian monads”.⁸⁰ Unlike Allison, however, I hold that Langton’s account is

79 Ibid., 68f., cf. 72. Compare Prauss, who writes that “[m]it der ‘Affektion durch Dinge an sich’ [...] ist nichts anderes als eine Affektion durch eben diese empirischen Dinge gemeint, die die transzendental-philosophische Reflexion auch ‘an sich selbst’ betrachten muss.” (PDS 197, cf. 200). In order to account for those of Kant’s references to the thing in itself that do not fit this reading well, Prauss distinguishes between two stages of Kant’s reflection on the thing in itself, stages that he takes Kant himself to have confused (98, 203). Whereas he, simply put, considers the first stage to consist in realizing that objects are constituted by the subject, the second stage is said to consist in realizing that this constitution does not come about through the subject alone, but also requires things that affect the mind (134, cf. 197). Prauss takes Kant’s reflections on the possibility of considering things as they are in themselves to pertain exclusively to this second stage. Allison only seems to depart from Prauss, first, by not conceiving of the two perspectives that the latter distinguishes as two different stages in a process of reflection and, second, by allowing that which affects the mind to be conceived as the result of affection “in a transcendental sense”, that is, by things in themselves (KTI 66). For Prauss, by contrast, the thing in itself can only refer to mind-independent material objects that affect the senses (PDS 134). Accordingly, he in my view rightly dismisses the very idea of non-sensible affection. Allison criticizes Prauss exactly at this point (KTI 66).

80 Allison, KTI 10, cf. Langton, KH 68–72, 202. Allison reproaches Langton with considering “the thought of things as they are in themselves [...] to be at least minimally informative about the nature of such things” (KTI 18). Yet Langton’s view makes perfectly sense, it seems to me, if it is

problematic not so much because it is 'metaphysical' but because her conception of metaphysics deviates from Kant's own. Langton starts from the view that Kant considers things in themselves to exist as well as to be unknowable.⁸¹ Her reconstruction of what she takes to be Kant's argument for this position falls into two parts. On the one hand, she follows most commentators by taking this argument to be related to the issue of affection and, more generally, to the conditions of empirical knowledge. That is why she pays considerable attention to Locke's distinction between primary and secondary qualities, which she aligns with the distinction between intrinsic properties and relational properties or powers (KH 151, 155).

Unlike Allison and most commentators, however, Langton thinks that we can only understand Kant's argument for the claim that things in themselves cannot be known by taking into account his implicit and explicit discussion with Leibniz. On her reading, what Kant calls a thing in itself is a substance that possesses intrinsic properties, which is exactly what Leibniz calls a monad. The *Critique of Pure Reason* only departs from Leibniz, she rightly maintains, by claiming that the relational properties of substances, that is, phenomena, cannot be *reduced* to these intrinsic properties (5, 109). Accordingly, we cannot get access to things in themselves by starting out from the way in which they appear to us in space and time (154–155, 161). Yet whereas the very things that affect us cannot be known with regard to their intrinsic properties, they can, on Langton's account, nevertheless be regarded as the cause of our representations. Following Locke, she argues that the power to affect the human mind must be attributed to external rather than to intrinsic properties of things and that nothing prevents us from acquiring knowledge of the former (139, 205).

To the extent that Langton draws attention to Kant's life-long engagement with the Leibnizian tradition, she rightly highlights a dimension that Allison and many others all but ignore. Yet her reading is constrained by the fact that she takes her bearings from Locke's account of empirical cognition as well as from pre-critical texts such as *Thoughts on the True Estimation of Living Forces* and the *Physical Monadology*.⁸² Accordingly, she reduces the discussions of the thing in itself in the *Critique of Pure Reason* to the view that matter is grounded in physical

understood as a position that Kant attributes to the Wolffians, a possibility that Allison does not consider. I agree with Allison, however, that Langton misses the point by assuming that Kant straightforwardly attributes both existence and causality to things in themselves considered as metaphysical entities. Langton, for her part, challenges Allison's view that "Kant is not interested in making existence claims" (KH 8) and "that there are no unknowable entities in the picture" (9).
⁸¹ Langton, KH 7–14, 41.

⁸² This is also one of Ameriks points in his detailed discussion of Langton's book. See Ameriks, Karl: "Kant and Short Arguments to Humility". In: *Interpreting Kant's Critiques*, 146–147.

monads – or “unextended centres of fields of forces” – that affect us by means of their extrinsic properties but themselves cannot be known (99, cf. 77). Without putting it that way, she therefore deals only with Kant’s first-order contribution to what he calls rational physics, ignoring, most importantly, the role of the thing in itself in Kant’s reflection on the conditions that metaphysics as such has to meet in order to become a science.

9 Conclusion

I have argued that Allison’s and Langton’s complementary ways of tackling the problem of the thing in itself are flawed because they rest on assumptions that go back to either Jacobi’s criticism of Kant or subsequent interpretations of this criticism. I have challenged these assumptions by differentiating between the various contexts within which Kant treats of the thing in itself. On this account, first, the context within which Kant discusses affection belongs to the domain of the sciences and a Lockean investigation into empirical cognition. Reflecting on the discipline that used to be called ontology or general metaphysics, second, Kant often uses the term ‘thing in itself’ to criticize the Wolffians, who assumed that it was possible – at least in principle – to achieve purely rational knowledge not only of material things such as roses, but also of immaterial things such as the soul and God. Third, when Kant discusses the ‘something’ that must be considered to ground appearances in a positive way, he tends to use the term ‘transcendental object’ instead of the term ‘thing in itself’. Contrary to the way in which former ontology conceived of a thing, Kant here defines the transcendental object – or that which is presupposed in all knowledge – as something that must be sensibly intuitable. Insofar as the realm of former special metaphysics is concerned, finally, Kant maintains that its various branches must assume a transcendental object that, while thinkable, cannot be sensibly intuited and hence cannot be turned into an object of knowledge. He sometimes uses the term ‘noumenon’ to refer to the transcendental object in this latter sense. I have wished to show that Kant’s account of these terms becomes perfectly consistent if the *Critique of Pure Reason* is read in view of his second-order reflection on the possibility and limits of the metaphysical tradition such as it was known to him. Without taking into account Kant’s lasting engagement with this tradition it is surely impossible to find one’s way into the Kantian system.⁸³

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