

# ESTABLISHING THE EXISTENCE OF THINGS IN THEMSELVES

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## Abstract

In the *Critique of Pure Reason*, Kant draws a distinction between appearances and things in themselves, characterizing the latter as uncognizable. While arguing that all we can cognize are appearances, Kant nevertheless maintains that there are things in themselves. This has struck many as questionable: how can we be in a position to affirm, of things stipulated to be uncognizable, that they exist? In this paper, I take up the challenge of establishing the existence of things in themselves. I begin by making the case that, given Kant's epistemological strictures, the existence of things in themselves must follow analytically from the existence of appearances. After examining the pitfalls of a recent attempt at establishing the existence of things in themselves, I go on to argue that the feature of appearances in virtue of which their existence analytically entails the existence of themselves is the subjectivity of their form. It is implicit in the notion of something with a subjective form that its matter is provided via affection from without. Moreover, the things providing the matter of appearances can't be located in space and time, because appearances themselves depend on our sensibility for their formal features.

Keywords: Kant, transcendental idealism, things in themselves, appearances

## 1. INTRODUCTION

In the *Critique of Pure Reason*, Kant draws a distinction between appearances and things in themselves, characterizing the latter as uncognizable (A42/B60).<sup>1</sup> While arguing that all we cognize are appearances, Kant

nevertheless maintains that there are things in themselves. This has struck many as questionable: how can we be in a position to affirm, of things stipulated to be uncognizable, that they exist? Kant's other pronouncements regarding things in themselves, for example that they are not located in space and time, and that they "affect" perceivers to produce appearances, have likewise been deemed problematic. Some early readers, like Jacobi and Schulze, charge Kant with incoherence on these grounds.<sup>2</sup> More recently, commentators like Bird and Van Cleve have tried to lessen the charge by maintaining that Kant's pronouncements regarding things in themselves, taken against the backdrop of the latter's uncognizability, amount to a pragmatic paradox: Kant is affirming *p* while at the same time denying that he knows that *p*.<sup>3</sup>

The complications surrounding the notion of things in themselves have led some commentators to argue that Kant was not, in fact, committed to their existence. According to this line of interpretation, the thing in itself is merely a limiting concept demarcating the boundaries of legitimate theoretical inquiry, or, as Cohen would have it, an ideal for philosophy and science to aim at.<sup>4</sup> However, while in his discussion of the distinction between phenomena and noumena Kant characterizes the notion of noumenon in the positive sense as a "boundary concept" (A255/B311), it is generally agreed that things in themselves are not to be identified with noumena in the positive sense. Moreover, while the objects of the ideas of reason spoken of in the Transcendental Dialectic are not cognizable by us, it's clear that such putative entities, like God and the soul, are not to be conflated with the things in themselves spoken of in the Transcendental Analytic: though adamant in the Dialectic that we can never know whether the objects of these ideas have any reality, Kant seems to have little problem in the Analytic admitting the existence of things in themselves.

In addition to the textual evidence that Kant was committed to the existence of things in themselves, we might think, on independent philosophical grounds, that it would be undesirable to banish these entities from transcendental idealism: such a move runs the risk of turning Kant into an idealist of a Berkeleyan sort who admits nothing but mental entities into his ontology.<sup>5</sup> Of course, it might alternatively be thought that things in themselves are mysterious supersensible entities whose admission into transcendental idealism can only serve to make that doctrine less compelling.<sup>6</sup> But such a reading is able to avoid the Berkeleyan route only at the cost of underplaying the mind-dependence of appearances—something that strikes many of us as too much of a departure from the letter and spirit of transcendental idealism to be a real interpretive option.

We thus face the challenge of showing that transcendental idealism has the resources to establish the existence of things in themselves. This involves, in part, showing that things in themselves play an important theoretical role in transcendental idealism: that accepting the transcendental idealist account of experience involves a commitment to the existence of things in themselves. This is the task I take up in this paper.

I begin by introducing the notions of appearance and thing in itself. Drawing on the text and with an eye to systematic considerations, I make the case that the existence of things in themselves must follow analytically from the existence of appearances. I name this requirement the *Analyticity Constraint* (section 2). I go on to focus my attention on the recent attempt by Lucy Allais to establish the existence of things in themselves by taking them to be the ‘categorical grounds’ of appearances. I argue that the inference Allais draws from the existence of relations to that of categorical grounds is not analytic (section 3). Having examined the pitfalls Allais’s approach, I go on to offer my own solution to the problem of establishing the existence of things in themselves (section 4). I argue that the feature of appearances in virtue of which their existence analytically entails the existence of themselves is the subjectivity of their form. It is implicit in the notion of something with a subjective form that its matter is provided via affection from without. Moreover, the things providing the matter of appearances can’t be located in space and time, because appearances themselves depend on our sensibility for their formal features. Thus, it is analytic that if there are appearances, there are things (1) other than our minds, and (2) in principle uncognizable by us, that (3) provide the matter of appearances. These things are things in themselves.

## 2. THE ANALYTICITY CONSTRAINT

In the B preface to the *Critique of Pure Reason*, Kant characterizes the revolutionary transformation in theoretical orientation that set mathematics, natural science, and now, with the advent of critique, metaphysics, on the secure path of science [*Wissenschaft*] as rooted in the insight that “we can cognize of things *a priori* only what we ourselves have put into them” (Bxviii). In the case of metaphysics, this reorientation amounts to the realization that for *a priori* theoretical cognition—the kind of cognition metaphysics strives for (B18)—to be possible, objects must conform to the constitution of our cognitive faculties. This means that objects must conform to (1) the forms of our intuition—that is, space and time—and (2) the pure concepts of the understanding—that is, the categories.

Kant takes it for granted that we do have *a priori* theoretical cognition of objects: our grasp of necessary mathematical truths (for example, Euclid's axioms) and universal laws of nature (for example, Newton's laws of motion) is a testament to that (see B14-B18, B20–21).<sup>7</sup> Indeed, Kant thinks the nature of ordinary experience itself confirms that we have *a priori* insight into the makeup of objects (Bxiv, B4-B5, A66/B91). Such cognition is *synthetic* in that it does not consist in mere conceptual analysis, but “amplifies” or “extends” our knowledge of the object. *Analytic* cognition, by contrast, involves judgments where the predicate concept is “contained” [*enhalten*] in the subject concept (A6–7/B10–11).<sup>8</sup> Kant contends that the possibility of synthetic *a priori* cognition could never be explained if we proceed on the assumption that our cognitive constitution makes no contribution to the determination of objects. This is because such an assumption renders all our synthetic cognition empirical in origin, and “[e]xperience never gives its judgments true or strict but only assumed and comparative universality (through induction)” (B3). If there is any necessity or strict universality in our synthetic cognitions, it must have an *a priori* origin.

It follows that there can be no synthetic *a priori* cognition of objects that are not determined by our cognitive faculties. Nor can there be any synthetic *a posteriori* cognition of such objects: it is only through intuition that objects can be given to us, and intuition imposes its *a priori* forms on objects. If we don't have synthetic *a priori* cognition of a thing, then we don't have synthetic *a posteriori* cognition of that thing either (cf. *Prolegomena* §14). We thus get a distinction between objects that we can in principle (that is, contingent cognitive limitations notwithstanding) have synthetic cognition of—‘appearances’—and those that we can't—‘things in themselves.’ This, of course, leaves it open that we can have *analytic* cognition of things in themselves. But I will for simplicity characterize things in themselves as uncognizable *simpliciter*.

Such a distinction does not yet show that there *are* any things in themselves. But Kant is clearly committed to the existence of things in themselves: after discussing the necessary conditions of *a priori* theoretical cognition in the B preface, he observes that such cognition “reaches appearances only, leaving the thing in itself as something actual for itself but uncognized by us” (Bxx). Indeed, Kant seems to think that the notion of a thing in itself is *contained* in the notion of appearance, and that it is “absurd” [*ungereimt*] to think that “there [could be] an appearance without anything that appears” (Bxxvi-xxvii; see also A251–2, B306, and *Prolegomena* §57, §59). These passages suggest that there is an *analytic* relation between the existence of appearances and the existence of things in themselves: Kant is appealing to the content of the concept of appearance [*Erscheinung*] and observing that it involves

reference to something that appears [*erscheint*]. I take this to mean that the existence of things in themselves *follows analytically* from that of appearances—that is to say, on the basis of conceptual content alone. If P follows analytically from Q, then no additional premise is needed to derive P from Q—for instance, no additional premise is needed to derive “Bob is an unmarried man” from “Bob is a bachelor.” Nonetheless, the pattern of analysis in such arguments can be made more explicit if we state the analytic truth mediating between the premise and the conclusion (“bachelors are unmarried men” in the above example) as an additional premise. Adopting this model, Kant’s preliminarily argument for the existence of things in themselves can be formulated as follows:

- (1) (a) There are appearances.
- (1) (b) If there are appearances, then there are things that appear.
- (1) (c) So, there are things that appear.

(An aside: it may be thought that the containment criterion of analyticity appealed to earlier only applies to judgments of subject-predicate form, and is, thus, not able to allow for analytic judgments of other syntactic forms, like (1b). But I take (1b) to be just another statement of the fact that the notion of something that appears is contained in the notion of appearance.)

The existence of things in themselves follows from the existence of appearances in the same sense in which Bob’s being unmarried follows from Bob’s being a bachelor: analytically or by conceptual necessity. This is exactly what we should expect: as is well-known, Kant thinks all existential judgments are synthetic—existence can never be contained in the concept of something (A597–8/B625–6).<sup>9</sup> Moreover, as we saw, things in themselves are stipulated to be in principle uncognizable by us, which means we aren’t in a position to make any synthetic judgments about them (cf. B332/A276, where Kant observes that it is “impossible” for us to say anything synthetic about things in themselves). If the existence of things in themselves is nevertheless something we are in a position to affirm, this can only be because it follows analytically from another existential judgment that we are in a position to affirm. The most obvious candidate for such an existential judgment is the judgment “there are appearances.”

While it is reassuring to see that Kant took the existence of things in themselves to follow analytically from that of appearances, the above premise-conclusion argument is bound to strike many as unsatisfactory: it does not establish that the things that appear are *things in themselves*—that is, things that we in principle cannot cognize. The challenge of establishing the existence of things in themselves is, thus,

not so easily met. In continuing to look for a more satisfactory argument, though, we ought to keep in mind that the existence of things in themselves must follow analytically from that of appearances. Let us call this requirement the *Analyticity Constraint*:

Analyticity Constraint: The existence of things in themselves follows analytically from that of appearances

As we have seen, the Analyticity Constraint is both (i) suggested by Kant's own remarks on the matter, and (ii) required by the fact that things in themselves are in principle uncognizable and existential judgments are synthetic.

### 3. HOW (NOT) TO ESTABLISH THE EXISTENCE OF THINGS IN THEMSELVES

In the B preface, Kant speaks as though things in themselves and appearances are one and the same thing: he observes that while we can cognize objects as they appear, we cannot cognize "these same things" as things in themselves, and characterizes the distinction made necessary by critique as that "between things as objects of experience and the very same things as things in themselves" (Bxxvi-Bxxvii). There are other passages in which Kant likewise implies that the same objects can be "considered" either as appearances or as things in themselves (A39/B56, B308, B312). If things in themselves and appearances are the same things, considered in different ways, then we have an account of how the existence of the former follows analytically from the existence of the latter: if there are appearances, and things in themselves are, by definition, appearances considered in a different way, then there are things in themselves.

While taking things in themselves to be the same things as appearances may seem like the most natural way of establishing their existence, Kant does not always identify appearances and things in themselves. In the *Prolegomena*, for instance, he observes, "if we view the objects of the senses as mere appearances, as is fitting, then we thereby admit at the very same time that a thing in itself underlies them [*daß ihnen ein Ding an sich selbst zum Grunde liege*]" (§32). Here, the conceptual connection between the notions of appearance and thing in itself seems to be preserved, but the relation between the two is said to be one of grounding, not identity. Elsewhere Kant speaks of the non-sensible and, thus, uncognizable "cause" of appearances, which he typically calls the "transcendental object" (A288/B344, A494/B522). Many commentators take 'transcendental object' to be another name for things in themselves.<sup>10</sup> As a result, such passages may seem to provide us with an alternative way of establishing the existence of things in themselves. Since grounding and causation are generally taken to be irreflexive rela-



tions, it would seem that those opting for this route would have to take things in themselves and appearances to be metaphysically distinct.

In fact, however, we need not take a position on the metaphysical relationship between appearances and things in themselves in order to establish the existence of the latter. After all, the Analyticity Constraint is a conceptual constraint, and conceptual truths obtain regardless of the metaphysical makeup of the entities falling under the notions they relate: bachelors are unmarried men, regardless of our metaphysics of gender, and water is water, regardless of our metaphysics of natural kinds. While the argument for the existence of things in themselves I will be proposing does draw on a non-trivial feature of appearances, it does not, as we will see, presuppose a particular view of the metaphysical relationship between appearances and things in themselves. Accordingly, it has the benefit of being adoptable by readers of Kant across the ideological spectrum.

Recent attempts at establishing the existence of things in themselves have, by contrast, tended to take place against the backdrop of a substantive picture of the metaphysical relationship between appearances and things in themselves. James Van Cleve, for instance, characterizes appearances as virtual objects constructed out of perceptual states, and maintains, on this basis, that the only things in themselves whose existence can be established are noumenal subjects—the perceivers out of whose modifications appearances are constructed.<sup>11</sup> Rae Langton, likewise, identifies things in themselves with the intrinsic properties of things, and her argument for the existence of things in themselves—to the extent that she offers one—rests on the claim that Kant thought things must have some intrinsic nature.<sup>12</sup>

Lucy Allais's recent attempt at establishing the existence of things in themselves likewise draws on her account of the metaphysical relationship between appearances and things in themselves. However, unlike Van Cleve or Langton, she acknowledges something like the Analyticity Constraint, and maintains that her account is able to meet it. According to Allais, things in themselves are the “categorical grounds” of appearances, which are essentially relational, and Kant took it to be an analytic truth that relations require categorical grounds.<sup>13</sup> In what follows, I will critically examine Allais's argument, making the case that, despite her contentions, it does not meet the Analyticity Constraint.

### 3.1 Allais's Argument

Allais's discussion of the relationality of appearances draws on Kant's discussion of inner and outer determinations in the Amphiboly section of the *Critique*, where he suggests that there is nothing absolutely “internal” [*innere*] in matter (A277/B333), and that appearances in space “contain mere relations” or outer determinations (A284/B340). Allais

traces the relationality of Kantian appearances to two distinct sources: first, their spatiality, and second, their mind-dependence. Appearances are relational because they are spatial and spatial properties are relational, and appearances are relational because they consist of “essentially manifest qualities” that “exist in relation to possible perceivers.”<sup>14</sup>

Allais takes this to mean that, on Kant’s view, “categorical non-relational features of reality” are not needed for theoretical knowledge of the empirical world, and science “never reaches anything absolutely intrinsic or non-relational.”<sup>15</sup> Nonetheless, she claim that Kant thinks “we cannot have a complete ontology with relations only.”<sup>16</sup> Allais bases this claim on several passages in the *Amphiboly*, where Kant seems to suggest that substances must have inner determinations (A265/B321, A274/B330) and that relations or outer determinations require an “inner” for their substratum (A282/B338). This, according to Allais, is what justifies our commitment to the existence of things in themselves, construed as the “categorical grounds” or “intrinsic natures” of relational appearances: “we cannot make sense of the idea that something could exist and have only relational qualities.”<sup>17</sup> Allais’s argument for the existence of things in themselves is thus as follows:

- (2) (a) There are appearances—that is, relations.
- (2) (b) Relations require categorical grounds.
- (2) (c) So, there are categorical grounds.

Allais is careful to say that categorical grounds “play no explanatory role. . . at the level of experience”—for if they did, then the Kantian picture would collapse into a Lockean one, according to which intrinsic primary qualities ground *and* explain the relational properties of objects.<sup>18</sup> Nonetheless, Allais maintains that the intrinsic natures of things are somehow “responsible” for their relational qualities—it is “in virtue of” their intrinsic natures that things have the relational qualities they do.<sup>19</sup>

### 3.2 The Problem with Allais’s Argument

Allais has been criticized, like Langton, for treating Kant’s remarks in the *Amphiboly* as expressions of his own views rather than views he takes Leibniz to have held.<sup>20</sup> According to this line of criticism, Kant’s characterization of “objects of the pure understanding” as having “inner determinations” in the *Amphiboly* (A265/B321) is not to be taken as a characterization of things in themselves, but only of noumena in the positive sense—putative objects of an intuitive intellect into whose possible existence we have no insight, and which, according to Kant, Leibnizian monads amount to.<sup>21</sup> Allais is aware of this potential objection, and presents some textual considerations for thinking that Kant shares the



premises he attributes to Leibniz and only takes issue with the *conclusions* he takes Leibniz to have invalidly drawn from these premises.<sup>22</sup>

I do not intend to get involved in the interpretive questions related to the Amphiboly, which is a notoriously difficult section of the *Critique*. What I am concerned with is whether Allais's reading succeeds in establishing the existence of things in themselves. We have seen that the existence of things in themselves has to follow analytically from that of appearances. Does the existence of categorical grounds follow analytically from that of relations?

In the Amphiboly, Kant seems to suggest that it is an analytic or conceptual truth that every relation has a ground. He says, “[a]ccording to mere concepts the inner is the substratum of all relations or outer determinations,” adding that “[t]hrough mere concepts” we can’t “think something external without something inner” because “relational concepts absolutely presuppose given things and are not possible without these” (A283–4/B339/40). These passages might be thought to show that the existence of things in themselves follows analytically from that of appearances on Allais's account. This seems to be what Allais herself thinks: she writes, drawing on the passages quoted above, “Kant thinks something absolutely inner, or something non-relational, is required as a matter of a conceptual truth.”<sup>23</sup> Thus, in keeping with the Analyticity Constraint, Allais takes (2b) in her argument to be analytic.

It might be thought that Allais's claim here can be countered using the same general strategy mentioned above—by maintaining that what Kant says regarding the conceptual relation between inner and outer determinations concerns the objects of an intuitive intellect, or noumena in the positive sense. But I'm not sure that Kant is speaking about noumena in the positive sense in the above passages—he does not explicitly say so. Moreover, I'm not sure that if this were the case, that would settle the matter against Allais—there is reason to think that while things in themselves can't be taken to *just be* noumena in the positive sense, the latter, if they exist, are things in themselves.<sup>24</sup> Thus, there is reason to think that even if Kant is talking about noumena in the positive sense, what he says applies to things in themselves too.

In my view, even if we allow that Kant takes it to be an analytic truth that relations require grounds, this does not show, as Allais claims, that the existence of things in themselves follows analytically from the existence of appearances. This is because Kant is explicit that a relation can act as the ground for another relation: concerning matter he observes, “a persistent appearance in space (impenetrable extension) contains mere relations and nothing absolutely internal, and nevertheless can be the primary substratum of all outer perception” (A284/B340). Mat-

ter is comprised of relations alone, and yet it serves as the substratum or 'ground' of all outer appearances. The existence of a relation does, indeed, analytically entail the existence of its ground, but this does not tell us that the ground in question is not itself a relation, grounded by something else (which may, in turn, also be a relation, and so on). While Kant says it's a matter of conceptual necessity that relations have a ground, Allais reads him as saying it's a matter of conceptual necessity that relations have a *categorical* ground. This is a distortion: the inference from "*x* is a relation" to "*x* has a categorical ground" is not analytic.

There is one passage in the *Amphiboly* where Kant seems to make the stronger claim that categorical grounds are conceptually necessary, but it is in the context of warning against any inferential leaps from the realm of concepts to the realm of objects: "I cannot say that since without something absolutely inner no thing can be represented through mere concepts, there is also nothing outer that does not have something absolutely internal as its ground in the things themselves that are contained under these concepts and in their intuition" (A284/B340). Allais quotes this passage, but fails to address Kant's remarks about the invalidity of an inference from the existence of something "outer" to the existence of something "absolutely internal" in the realm of appearances. Her comments on the passage focus on making the case that relations between concepts also apply to relations between objects, because what is conceptually (or, in Kantian parlance, *logically*) necessary is also metaphysically (or, in Kantian parlance, *really*) necessary.<sup>25</sup> I do not disagree with Allais in this regard. But if Kant was indeed arguing that conceptual considerations regarding relations apply to appearances as well, he chose a strange and counter-intuitive way of expressing his point. A more natural reading of the passage in question is that Kant was drawing a contrast between what is conceptually non-relational and what is metaphysically so. Something that, considered conceptually, is non-relational, might, when considered under the conditions of our sensibility, be relational, just like, as Kant observes earlier in the *Amphiboly*, two things that, considered conceptually, are identical, might, when considered under the conditions of our sensibility, be distinct. The example Kant gives for the latter case is a cubic foot of space:

The concept of a cubic foot of space, wherever and however often I think it, is in itself always completely the same. Yet two cubic feet are nevertheless distinguished in space merely through their locations (*numero diversa*); these are conditions of the intuition in which the object of this concept is given, which do not belong to the concept but to the entire sensibility. (A282/B339)

Kant makes a similar point regarding Leibniz's well-known example involving two qualitatively identical drops of water (A264/B320). What is

conceptually non-relational may not be metaphysically so—the inference from the conceptual non-relationality of something to its metaphysical non-relationality is invalid.

It might be objected that Kant himself sometimes uses the language of grounds to characterize the relation between things in themselves and appearances: in the A Paralogism, for instance, he says the transcendental object “grounds both outer appearances and inner intuitions” (A379/80), and in his response to Eberhard, he talks of “ultimate grounds which are not appearances” (8:208; see also 8:215). However, while Kant allows that, in the absence of intuition, we can use the pure concepts of the understanding to *think* about logically possible entities, he is clear that such thinking does not suffice to determine the concepts of such entities or to establish their existence (A248/B305). Likewise, it is one thing to *think* of things in themselves as the grounds of appearances, and another to claim their existence follows from the existence of appearances in the same way the existence of a ground follows from the existence of a relation. The same can be said about Kant’s occasional characterization of things in themselves as “causes” of appearances (A288/B344), which might also seem to involve a transcendental misuse of the categories.

#### 4. AN ALTERNATIVE ARGUMENT FOR THE EXISTENCE OF THINGS IN THEMSELVES

As we saw in section 2, for the existence of things in themselves to follow analytically from that of appearances, the premise relating the existence of the former to that of the latter must be analytic. We are thus looking for an analytic judgment to insert in the place of (3b) to make the following argument valid:

- (3) (a) There are appearances.
- (3) (b)
- (3) (c) So, there are things in themselves.

We have seen that the premise that Allais uses to mediate between the existence of appearances and things in themselves (“relations require categorical grounds”) is not, despite what she claims, analytic, and the nearby premise that *is* analytic (“relations require grounds”) does not prevent there being an overlap between the two sets of existents in question: grounds can in turn be relations. As such, it leaves open the possibility that the things grounding appearances are other appearances. An additional constraint on the mediating premise, then, would seem to be that the qualities standing for appearances and things in themselves be mutually exclusive.

In looking for such a premise, we are looking for that feature of appearances in virtue of which the existence of things in themselves follows analytically from their existence. Allais took this feature to be relationality, and while it may be true that appearances are relational, we have seen that it cannot be *in virtue of* their relationality that positing their existence amounts to positing the existence of things in themselves. In my view, the feature of appearances in virtue of which the existence of things in themselves follows analytically from their existence is *having a subjective form*, by which I mean having a form that essentially depends on our sensibility. The forms in question are space and time: in the Transcendental Aesthetic, Kant argues that space and time are nothing but the forms of our sensibility (B73). Insofar as the notion of *form* finds a correlate in that of *matter*, this already gestures toward a way the existence of appearances may imply the existence of things in themselves. Kant discusses the distinction between the form and matter of appearances early on in the Transcendental Aesthetic:

I call that in the appearance which corresponds to sensation [*der Empfindung korrespondiert*] its matter, but that which allows the manifold of appearance to be intuited as ordered in certain relations, I call the form of appearance. Since that within which the sensations can alone be ordered and placed in a certain form cannot itself be in turn sensation, the matter of all appearance is only given to us *a posteriori*, but its form must all lie ready for it in the mind *a priori* (B34/A20).

Kant tells us that while the form of appearance is supplied by the mind, its matter, which “corresponds to sensation,” is not (cf. A581/B609). Later on, he makes it clear that this is because our intuition is sensible:

[Our intuition] is called sensible because it is not original, i.e., one through which the existence of the object of intuition is itself given (and that, so far as we can have insight, can only pertain to the original being); rather it is *dependent [abhängig] on the existence of the object*, thus it is possible only insofar as the representational capacity of the subject is affected through that (B72; emphasis added).

Human intuition is sensible, and sensibility is a receptive faculty. This means that empirical intuitions are possible only if the representational capacity of the subject is “affected” by independently existing objects (A19/B33). The result of this affection is sensation. By contrast, “original” or intellectual intuition (which can only belong to God) produces its objects *a priori*. While Kant does not mention the form-matter distinction in the above passage, his earlier remarks on the distinction indicate that our intuition “depends” on the “existence of the object” only insofar as the *matter* (and not form) of appearances is concerned, since it is the *matter* (and not form) of appearances that corresponds

to sensation. The form of appearances is, as we have seen, provided by our cognitive constitution.

The above considerations suggest that, if there is an original intuition, its objects do not, by definition, have a subjective form. For suppose they did. Then they would have a form that essentially depends on our sensibility. But sensibility is a receptive faculty, and an original intuition is, by definition, not receptive. Accordingly, something with a subjective form is, by definition, not the object of an original intuition. Since what it means for an intuition to be receptive is that the matter of its objects is provided via affection from without, there is an analytic connection between something's having a subjective form and its matter being provided via affection from without: if something has a subjective form, then, by definition, its matter is provided via affection from without.<sup>26</sup> The reverse does not hold, however: we can allow that human intuition is receptive while maintaining that space and time are more than just the forms of our sensibility. In other words, an intuition's being receptive is a necessary but not sufficient condition for its objects having a subjective form. If that is right, then we can complete argument 3 (with 3c) slightly modified) in the following way:

- (3) (a) There are appearances—that is, things with a subjective form.
- (3) (b) If something has a subjective form, then its matter is provided via affection from without.
- (3) (c\*) So, there are things other than our minds providing the matter of appearances.

What are the objects on whose existence our intuition is said to depend on account of its receptivity? In other words, what are the objects providing the matter of appearances? Even if the analyticity of 3(b) is granted, it might be thought that establishing 3(c\*) does not quite amount to establishing the existence of things in themselves. After all, 3(c\*) only states that there are things other than our minds providing the matter of appearances; it does not state that there are things in themselves. Why should we think that the things providing the matter of appearances fit are things in themselves? That is to say, why should we think that they are in principle uncognizable by us?

The things providing the matter of appearances can't be appearances because, as we have seen, appearances themselves depend on our sensibility for their formal features: there would be no appearances in the absence of subjects with our sensibility, which means that appearances exist partly in virtue of our having (or being predisposed to have) the appropriate outer intuitions. If that's the case, then our *having* outer intuitions cannot in

turn depend on the existence of appearances; the things providing the matter of appearances cannot be appearances. Now, insofar as appearances are things that we can, in principle, cognize, something that is not an appearance is something that we in principle cannot cognize—in other words, a thing in itself. Accordingly, if the things providing the matter of appearances can't be appearances, they must be things in themselves. Kant confirms this in his reply to Eberhard, where he observes that “objects as things in themselves give the matter to empirical intuitions” (8:215). Things in themselves provide the matter of appearances.

To recap, I have argued that it is implicit in the notion of something with a subjective form that its matter is provided via affection from without—that, in other words, it is the object of a receptive intuition such as ours. The objects “affecting” our representative capacity, thus providing the matter of appearances, can't themselves be appearances: appearances depend on our intuition for their formal features, so our intuition can't in turn depend on appearances for its matter. Insofar as it is centered on a basic and incontestable feature of appearances—namely, the subjectivity of their form—the argument I offer for the existence of things in themselves is not one that presupposes a particular view of the metaphysical relationship between appearances and things in themselves. It can be adopted by most readers of Kant across the ideological spectrum, so long as they are realists about things in themselves.

It might be wondered whether the strategy I employed against Al-lais's argument for the existence of things in themselves can't be turned against the account I'm offering: if a relation can be the ground of another relation, why can't an appearance provide the matter of another appearance? In other words, what prevents us from thinking that, for each appearance, the matter of that appearance is provided by some other appearance, just as, for each relation, the ground of that relation can be some other relation? We have seen that while the existence of a relation entails the existence of its ground, it does not entail the existence of something absolutely non-relational; likewise, it might be thought, while the existence of an appearance entails the existence of something providing its matter, it does not entail the existence of something absolutely non-phenomenal.

Before I respond to this objection, it helps to bring into relief the way it can accommodate the case made for thinking that the things spoken of in 3(c\*) are things in themselves: I had argued that the objects on whose existence our outer intuitions are said to depend couldn't be appearances, since appearances themselves exist in part in virtue of our having (or being predisposed to have) the appropriate outer intuitions. The objection can accommodate an individualized version of this point by allowing that, for each object *x*, the object on whose existence our



intuition of  $x$  depends can't be  $x$  itself, since  $x$  itself exists in part in virtue of our having (or being predisposed to have) the appropriate outer intuition of  $x$ . The objection then goes on: this doesn't show that the object on whose existence our intuition of  $x$  depends can't be *some  $y$  different from  $x$* , whose existence, in turn, consists in part in our having (or being predisposed to have) the appropriate outer intuitions of *it*—and so on.

As the above comparison shows, such a strategy takes remarks about appearances *as a whole* (that their matter can't be provided by our minds, that they can't be the entities on which our having outer intuitions depends) and applies them to individual appearances, thereby showing (at least ostensibly) that such remarks do not suffice to establish the existence of things in themselves. But this is exactly where the objection goes wrong. Such remarks are not about the relation between individual appearances, but about the notion of appearance *as such*. In Kantian terminology, the objection rests on conflating logical relations (holding between concepts) with real relations (holding between objects of possible experience). It's not that the matter of this or that appearance can't be provided by our cognitive capacities; rather, the matter of appearance as such can't be provided by our cognitive capacities. Likewise, it's not that the empirical intuition of some appearance  $x$  can't depend on  $x$ ; rather, empirical intuitions as such can't depend on appearances. We are, thus, dealing with logical relations, not real ones—and, as has already been observed, it is not “logically” or conceptually possible for the object on which our intuition depends for its matter to in turn depend on our intuition for its form: the qualities of having a subjective form and providing the matter of things that have a subjective form are mutually exclusive. Such a line of response is not available to Allais: the qualities of being a relation and being a ground are not mutually exclusive (and while the qualities of being a relation and being a categorical ground are mutually exclusive, it is not a conceptual truth that relations require categorical grounds).<sup>27</sup>

## 5. CONCLUSION

In this paper, I have argued that arguments purporting to establish the existence of things in themselves are subject to the Analyticity Constraint, and have offered an argument for the existence of things in themselves that meets this constraint. I have made the case that Allais's attempt at establishing the existence of things in themselves, understood as the categorical grounds of relational appearances, does not meet the Analyticity Constraint, and, thus, is unsuccessful: if the existence of things in themselves is to follow analytically from the existence of appearances, the notion of a thing in itself must be contained in the notion of appearance; however, the notion of a categorical ground is not contained in the notion of a relation.

I have suggested that the feature of appearances in virtue of which their notion contains the notion of things in themselves is the subjectivity of their form. There is an analytic connection between the form of something being subjective and its matter being provided via affection from without—if the objects of our intuition have a subjective form, it is analytic that their matter is provided by something other than our minds. The things providing the matter of appearances can't be appearances, for appearances themselves depend on our sensibility for their formal features. Thus, it is analytic that if there are appearances, there are things (1) other than our minds and (2) in principle uncognizable by us, that (3) provide the matter of appearances. These things are things in themselves.

## NOTES

1. I will follow the practice of citing the first *Critique* by giving the page number for the first edition of 1781 (A) followed by the page number for the second edition of 1787 (B). I will refer to Kant's other works by the volume and page number in the Akademie edition. All translations are from the Cambridge edition of the works of Immanuel Kant. For convenience, I will use in-text citation for Kant's works.

2. Jacobi (1994 [1787]) and Schulze (1997 [1792]). For an overview of the historical controversies surrounding the thing in itself, see Moltke (1980).

3. Bird (2000, 108), Van Cleve (1999, 135).

4. Cohen (1885, 503–5). Schaper (1950) characterizes the thing in itself as a “philosophical fiction,” while Kroon (2001) characterizes talk of things in themselves as an instance of “constitutive pretense.”

5. That transcendental idealism is a kind of Berkeleyan idealism is something that Kant vehemently denies in his responses to the Feder-Garve review (4:374–6).

6. Accordingly, Strawson (1966, 38) thinks that Kant's doctrine of things in themselves renders reality itself supersensible—something he finds (like the transcendental idealist contention that empirical objects are mind-dependent) incoherent.

7. It should be noted that while Kant takes empirical laws of nature to be typically *a posteriori*, he takes certain principles of natural science (such as Newton's laws of motion) to be *a priori* (B17–18, 4:472–3). For a helpful discussion, see Friedman (1992, chapters 3–4).

8. As is widely recognized, Kant employs various notions of analyticity in the *Critique*, not all of which are obviously equivalent. See Proops (2005) for a critical overview of these notions.

9. It should be noted that while Kant thinks all existential judgments are synthetic, he denies that existence is a “real predicate” (A598-B626)—that is, he denies that existence can expand or amplify the concept of something.

10. Allais (2015, chapter 1), for instance, treats Kant’s remarks about the transcendental object as remarks about things in themselves. See Allison (2004, Chapter 3) for an argument to the effect that the B edition distinction between positive and negative noumena is a reformulation of the A edition distinction between noumena and the transcendental object.

11. Van Cleve (1999, 137). I am not sure if Van Cleve takes the existence of perceivers to follow analytically from that of perceptual states. Either way, his proof fails to do justice to Kant’s claim that it is absurd that there could be appearances without things that appear.

12. Langton (1998, 18,19; 49–50). Once again, it’s hard to see how such an argument for the existence of things in themselves meets the Analyticity Constraint.

13. Allais (2015, 231).

14. Allais, 229.

15. Allais, 224.

16. Allais, 246.

17. Allais, 248

18. Allais, 231, 225.

19. Allais, 251. Contrast Langton, who maintains that the relational properties of substances are neither unilaterally nor bilaterally reducible to their intrinsic properties. As such, they must be “superadded by God” (1998, 112, 115).

20. See Bird (2000, 106) for such a criticism of Langton, and Kreines (2016, 260) for such a criticism of Allais.

21. Kreines (2016, 260).

22. Allais (2015, 234–243).

23. Allais (2015, 238).

24. Admittedly, this is something Allais herself denies (2015, 61). See Walker (2010) for an argument as to why it would be strange to think that noumena in the positive sense are a different kind of object from things in themselves.

25. Allais (2015, 240). On the difference between logical and real possibility, see Bxxviii and A244/B302.

26. It might be objected that the objects of our imaginings, hallucinations, and dreams have a subjective form, yet their matter is not provided via affection from without. I follow Jauernig (2021, 312–313) here in maintaining that the matter of such objects must *ultimately* be provided via affection from without. For convenience, I will continue to use the simpler formulation.

27. I am grateful to Anja Jauernig, Beatrice Longuenesse, Caroline Bowman, and members of the NYU Philosophy Work-in-Progress seminar for feedback on earlier drafts of this paper.

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