**Intentionality and Sensory Consciousness in Kant**

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Abstract: According to “intentionalist” interpretations of Kant’s transcendental idealism, Kant’s empirical objects are to be understood as *mere intentional objects*. This interpretation requires a corresponding account of intentionality and intentional objects. This paper defends an account of how the intentionalist should understand the intentional structures at work in the sensory consciousness of physical bodies. First a relational conception of intentionality (articulated in terms of an object’s presence to consciousness) is distinguished from a non-relational conception (articulated in terms of representational content). I argue that the intentionalist’s claim that Kant’s empirical objects are mere intentional objects is primarily a claim about non-relational intentionality. I then ask whether the intentionalist should also recognize a role for relational intentionality as well. After rejecting two possible answers (that there is no relational intentionality, or that there are intentional relations to things in themselves), I argue that sensory consciousness involves having spatially arrayed collections of sensations presented to consciousness in intuition, and then conceptualizing these sensation-arrays as physical objects. The obvious worry about such a phenomenalist interpretation has to do with the consistency of this interpretation with Kant’s empirical realism; these concerns are addressed in detail in the final section.

**I. INTRODUCTION**

According to “intentionalist” or “intentional object” interpretations of Kant’s[[1]](#endnote-1) transcendental idealism, the ordinary objects of experience – what Kant calls “appearances” (*Erscheinungen*) and identifies with physical bodies in space and time[[2]](#endnote-2) – are mere intentional objects and they have no positive ontological status aside from this.[[3]](#endnote-3) According to such readings, although the content of cognition presents empirical objects as the sort of things that exist in space and time independently of me and my representations, *really*, considered from Kant’s full transcendental account of the mind and the world, there are no such things; *really*, there are only representations which purport to describe such objects.[[4]](#endnote-4) The “mere” in “mere intentional objects” is taken seriously.[[5]](#endnote-5) This, in a very small nutshell, is how such interpretations understand Kant’s claims that appearances are “mere representations” (e.g., A107-9, A191/B236), are “in us” (e.g., A371-3), and hence are transcendentally ideal.[[6]](#endnote-6) Van Cleve gives a characterization of such an interpretation in terms of “virtual objects”:

A virtual object is […] not to be conceived as having its own kind of being. Instead, to say that a virtual object of a certain sort (e.g., a patch of red) exists is shorthand for saying that a certain kind of representation occurs. In the case of a more complex or multifaceted virtual object (e.g., a house or a ship), to say that it exists is to say that an entire rule-governed sequence of representations occurs or is in the offering. (Van Cleve 1999: 8-9)

Similarly, Aquila argues that appearances can be understood “as ordinary objects of experience themselves – houses, mountains, rivers, trees, etc. – as they happen to ‘inexist’ in instances of perception” (2003: 232).

The primary motivation for adopting an intentionalist reading of Kant is that it can make the most sense of Kant’s claims about the status of empirical objects and of the tricky relationship between transcendental idealism and his empirical realism. For while he claims that these objects are mind-dependent representations distinct from things in themselves (this is his transcendental idealism), he also characterizes them as non-mental, material substances existing in space and time independently of us (this is his empirical realism). The intentionalist’s reduction of empirical objects to the intentional referents of representational contents respects Kant’s idealism. Yet insofar as it leaves room for claiming that we are capable of forming objectively valid judgments about physical objects in space, it also respects Kant’s realism.[[7]](#endnote-7) The view can fairly be characterized as a form of phenomenalism,[[8]](#endnote-8) but not one of a pernicious (unkantian) variety because, as we’ll see below, it doesn’t entail an ontological identification of empirical objects with mental states (since the intentional object of a mental state should not be identified with the mental state itself), and it doesn’t require that the only immediate objects of reference or knowledge be mental states (more on this point later).

My own sympathies do lie with intentionalist readings of Kant, but my goal here is not to give a definitive argument that such an interpretation must be correct (that would be a much larger project). Rather, my goal is to get clear on the notion (or as we’ll soon see, notion*s*) of intentionality so essential to these interpretations. Claims about intentional objects (“mere” or otherwise) won’t be very illuminating unless we are clear on how intentionality should be understood. My discussion focuses on the intentional structures that obtain in sensory consciousness, i.e., in representational episodes in which I am directly and immediately perceptually aware of an object by virtue of seeing, hearing, or touching it and consequently representing it as an object in space and time.[[9]](#endnote-9) After distinguishing a relational conception of intentionality from a non-relational one (section II), I’ll show that the basic intentionalist thesis (that Kant’s appearances are mere intentional objects) is primarily a claim about non-relational intentionality specifically. This will raise the question whether the intentionalist reading requires that sensory consciousness involve a form of relational intentionality as well (which I’ll unpack in terms of an entity’s “presence to consciousness”). After outlining three different answers one could give to this question (section III) and rejecting two of them (sections IV-V), I will argue that Kant is committed to a model of perception according to which (non-relational) intentional *contents* purporting mind-independent physical objects are dependent on intentional *relations* to the subject’s own sensory states (section VI). I’ll argue that on the most exegetically and philosophically defensible intentionalist reading, to be sensorily conscious of an empirical object is to conceptualize organized sensory states in terms of physical object concepts (e.g., concepts of ‘materiality,’ ‘spatiality,’ ‘substantiality,’ etc.), thereby representing these sensory states not *as* mental states at all, but rather as physical objects in space. Although the only objects directly present to the mind in perception are its own sensations, the conceptualizing understanding typically ignores this fact and instead represents organized collections of sensations as external, physical entities. Many will presume that this sort of interpretation is incompatible with core elements of Kant’s empirical realism, and these concerns are addressed in VII.

The payoff of the whole discussion will be a greater understanding of the philosophical commitments entailed by intentionalist interpretations of Kant. Although I will not be able to give a full defense of the basic intentionalist thesis, nor will I be able to address every relevant complication, my hope is that an attractive picture will emerge of one direction one could take in understanding Kant’s transcendental idealism generally as well as his theory of mental reference in perceptual cognition specifically.

**II. TWO FORMS OF INTENTIONALITY**

Intentionality is that feature of our representations by virtue of which they are *about* something, or in virtue of which they make the subject aware *of* something. While Kant himself never explicitly thematizes the notion of *Intentionalität* per se, (we had to wait until the late 19th c. for Brentano to revive this scholastic term), it is clear that he was very much aware of the notion and that it plays a central role in his conception of what makes a representation representational. This is evidenced by his frequent characterizations of representations in terms of what they “relate to” (*auf… bezieht*),[[10]](#endnote-10) “designate” (*bezeichnen*),[[11]](#endnote-11) or simply have as their “objects.”[[12]](#endnote-12) Kant asserts that “all representations, as representations, have their objects” (A108) indicating that object-directedness is essential to his account of mental activity.

Given that the intentional relation between representation and object is so essential to his account of mental activity, we’ll want to determine what exactly this relation amounts to for him. What structures of intentionality is he presupposing when he says, for instance, that appearances are the “undetermined objects” of intuitions (A20/B34), or that sensations “designate” realities in space (A374)? And assuming the intentionalist line correct, what does it mean to call appearances “mere intentional objects”? These questions are complicated by the fact that the concept of intentionality has always carried with it a certain ambiguity. On the one hand, intentionality could be construed as a *relational* property of a representation, such that a representation intends an existing object (separate from the representation itself) by putting the subject in an awareness relation to it. A representation is intentional in this sense when an object is *present to consciousness* and the representation enables the subject to (speaking loosely) “see” this object. Intentionality in this sense obtains (or not) as a function of whether there really is an entity distinct from the representation and towards which the representation is directed. I cannot intend (in this sense) non-existent objects because it is impossible for a relation to obtain if one of the requisite relata is missing.[[13]](#endnote-13)

On the other hand, intentionality could be construed as a *monadic* property of a representation in virtue of which the representation purports to be about something. Considered in this way, the intentionality of a representation is simply its *content* and it does not depend on a relation to an intentional object distinct from the representation.[[14]](#endnote-14) To use an admittedly inelegant term that has, for better or worse, been in circulation since Brentano, the intentional object “inexists” within the content of the representation (see Brentano 1973: 88ff.). In contrast to the relational conception, a representation can intend (in the non-relational sense) its object irrespective of the actuality of the thing. Representations can be about what they purport to represent even if their objects do not exist.

We thus have two very different conceptions of intentionality on the table. It would be misguided to ask which is the “correct” conception, for both are perfectly coherent notions. Yet since the two really are distinct, we must be careful to keep them distinct in any discussion of intentional structures and relations. Accordingly, I’ll call the relational conception of intentionality *P-intentionality* (since it has to do with what is *present* to consciousness) and the non-relational conception *C-intentionality* (since it has to do with representational *content*), and I’ll use these terms in accordance with the following definitions:

* **P-intentionality** is the relational property of a representation by virtue of which an (existing) entity is present to consciousness.
* **C-intentionality** is the monadic property of a representation by virtue of which the representation’s content purports to be about some object.

Corresponding to these two kinds of intentionality, we can define two different conceptions of intentional objects:

* A **P-intentional object** is the (existing) entity which a representation’s P-intentionality makes present to consciousness.
* A **C-intentional object** is whatever a representation’s content purports to be about (irrespective of the actual existence of such an object).

P-intentionality describes what is *in fact* present to consciousness, while C-intentionality describes what we *take ourselves* to be representing in consciousness. P-intentionality is a relation between ontologically similar objects (existing representations and existing objects), while C-intentionality is at best a quasi-relation between existing representations and “inexisting” representational contents.[[15]](#endnote-15) And co-referring terms can be substituted *salva veritate* with P-intentional objects but not with C-intentional objects.[[16]](#endnote-16)

Kantian considerations aside, we typically assume that in healthy, normal, everyday modes of perception, the P-intentional object and C-intentional object of a perceptual representation coincide. We are generally inclined to say that when I perceive a chair, there really is an existing chair present in my perceptual purview (P-intentionality) and that my representation purports to be about that very chair (C-intentionality). Yet we also recognize that the two can come apart. If I mistake the stranger across the courtyard for my colleague, the P-intentional object of my representation is the stranger while the C-intentional object is my colleague.

Further, since C-intentionality does not require the existence of an object, it follows that there can be C-intentionality without P-intentionality (when I imagine fictional characters, for instance). The reverse is not true, at least not for any kind of mental activity interesting enough for us to consider here.[[17]](#endnote-17) If a representation has a P-intentional object – an existing thing that the representation presents to consciousness – then the representation must have C-intentionality too, i.e., there must be some content through which the object is characterized.[[18]](#endnote-18) Furthermore, when a representation has both P-intentionality and C-intentionality, the C-intentionality will be (or at least involve) a conceptualization of the P-intentional object: the thing referred to P-intentionally is C-intentionally conceptualized in a certain way. This is true even if the conceptualization is not veridical (e.g., when I mistake the stranger for my friend). This last point is important for the discussion to follow because it highlights the possibility of representing something as other than it in fact is. That is, a P-intentional object which is in fact φ might be represented with the C-intentional content ‘not-φ’ (or with the content ‘ψ’ where φ and ψ are incompatible). Two of the interpretive options discussed below involve intentional structures of just this sort.[[19]](#endnote-19)

**III. THREE VARIATIONS ON THE INTENTIONALIST THEME**

With the above distinction in place, we can now state more precisely what intentionalist readings of Kant’s transcendental idealism are getting at. In stating that Kant’s appearances are mere intentional objects that have no existence apart from their being the contents of certain complex representational states, these interpretations are defending the claim that physical bodies are the C-intentional objects of experience, but not the P-intentional objects of experience. In order for spatiotemporal appearances to be P-intentional objects, they would have to exist (not merely inexist), distinct from the perceiver, as transcendentally real objects in a transcendentally real space and time. According to the intentionalist reading, since Kant unequivocally rules out the possibility of transcendentally real spatiotemporal entities, there cannot be such things in real relations to our representations.[[20]](#endnote-20) Yet despite the impossibility of the perceiving mind being (P-intentionally) presented with transcendentally real spatiotemporal bodies, such things can still be the C-intentional objects of empirical cognition insofar as our representations can purport to be about such entities.[[21]](#endnote-21)

This characterization of the central intentionalist claim brings us to the question with which I’ll be occupied for the rest of the paper. It is this: If our C-intending of empirical, spatiotemporal objects involves no P-intentional relation to such objects, then is there any P-intentionality in Kant’s account of empirical cognition at all? That is, can we account for the nature of our sensory experience of the external world without appeal to anything that is directly present to consciousness? Or is it instead the case that the only way we can explain the perceptual contents we find ourselves with is by appeal to relations to P-intentional objects which those contents purport to describe?

An analogy can help clarify the motivation behind this line of inquiry (once again abstracting from Kantian considerations). When I look at an image of a friend on the computer screen via live video feed, there is a sense in which the “literal” object of my perception is just a collection of illuminated pixels, and we will all admit that there is some sense in which it is them, strictly speaking, that I see, not my friend. Yet I don’t in general pay attention to this fact and instead take myself to be looking at my friend. I could be said to be in a P-intentional relation to luminescent pixels, which results in a C-intentional representation of my friend. Furthermore, the P-intentional relation to the pixels (or at least some other relevantly similar arrangement of colored material) could be said to be necessary for the particular C-intentional content that arises. After all, I wouldn’t be having this specific perceptual representational content were I not consciously directed towards the screen’s image and conceptualizing *it* as my friend. What happens in this sort of situation is that I (implicitly) say *of a set of luminescent pixels* things like, “There is my friend and there next to her is her cat,” not “there are some pixels and there next to them are some other pixels.” I ignore the fact that I am looking at luminescent pixels and instead take myself simply to be observing my friend. In other words, I project[[22]](#endnote-22) concepts describing my friend onto something that is not my friend.[[23]](#endnote-23)

Similarly, the question about whether there is a place in Kant’s theory for P-intentional relations is asking whether our C-intentional representations of spatiotemporal objects depend on P-intentional relations to entities which are not themselves spatiotemporal objects, but which we nevertheless represent *as* spatiotemporal objects. Before I can represent something in sensory consciousness as being a spatiotemporal object, must my mind first be (P-intentionally) presented with something on to which I can project the relevant concepts (of spatiality, substantiality, etc.) and say of *it* (the P-intentional object) that it’s spatial, substantial, etc.?

There are three plausible answers to this question. One is that there are no such P-intentional objects and that the perceptual content of empirical cognition can be explained by appeal to non-relational representational contents exclusively. However, if that answer turns out to be unworkable and P-intentional objects are necessary for some of our C-intentional contents, it would require things that exist (do not merely “inexist”) distinct from the representation, but which are present to consciousness through the representation. Two very different sorts of entity might fill this role. First off, there are Kant’s things in themselves, which, while not themselves spatiotemporal physical objects, are nevertheless responsible for our representations of such objects (via their “transcendental affection” on the subject). Kant claims that all appearances require some thing in itself that appears (e.g., at 4:314), and this could be taken to indicate that things in themselves are the ultimate objects at which empirical cognition is directed. If Kant understood things in themselves as the P-intentional objects of sensory consciousness, then empirical cognition would involve applying concepts describing spatiotemporal objects to non-spatiotemporal things in themselves. Secondly, there are the subject’s own sensations, which Kant describes as the “matter” of all experience (B207, A166/B208, A223/B270) and sometimes even as the matter of appearances themselves (A42/B59-60, B208, A374). They exist (do not merely inexist[[24]](#endnote-24)) in the mind and without them there could be no determinate reference to particular, actual objects. If Kant understood sensations to be the P-intentional objects of sensory consciousness, then empirical cognition would involve applying concepts describing extra-mental physical substances to non-physical mental states.

Taken together, we have three possible answers to our central question:

1. No P-intentional objects are required to enable the content of sensory consciousness in empirical cognition.
2. Things in themselves are the P-intentional objects of sensory consciousness (but they are represented as spatiotemporal physical bodies).
3. Sensations are the P-intentional objects of sensory consciousness (but they are represented as spatiotemporal physical bodies).

All three of these positions find defenders in the literature, in one form or another. The last of these options will strike some readers as the most “unkantian,” as it might seem to carry with it the specter of Berkeleyan idealism or Humean phenomenalism. Yet this third option, I will argue, is in fact the most plausible intentionalist option, and I will show that we can accommodate this reading of Kant’s theory in a way that leaves in place his empirical realism and his thesis that the immediate objects of experience are physical objects external to the mind. Before turning to it, however, I discuss and criticize the first two options in the next two sections.

**IV. THE CONTENT-ONLY MODEL**

Let’s call the view that our perceptual representations of empirical objects arise simply in the content of our representations (without involving anything present to consciousness) the “content-only model.” The primary motivation for taking such an interpretive stance is that it offers a plausible reading of Kant’s reduction of empirical objects to *mere representations* without requiring that physical objects be ontologically reduced to *mere mental states* (a worry often associated with phenomenalist interpretations of transcendental idealism, and one that we’ll address when we get to the third interpretive option). The objects of experience are made out of physical stuff, not mental stuff; they are “mere representations” not because they are identified with mental states themselves, but rather with what is intended by the *contents* of mental states (they are represent*eds*, not represent*ings*). Proponents of this model will emphasize familiar passages in which Kant articulates his “Copernican” reconceptualization of what it is to be an *object* in terms of what it is to be an *object of representation*. For instance, in the B-Deduction, Kant defines an object as “that in the concept of which the manifold of a given intuition is *united*” (B137, see also B138 and A104-5). And in the Second Analogy, he remarks that a representation’s “relation to an object” requires “nothing beyond making the combination of representations necessary in a certain way, and subjecting them to a rule” (A197/B242). One could take passages like this to indicate that determinate reference to an object requires only a certain type of content-generating cognitive activity, and that no additional intentional relations are required for this content-generation.

Several recent commentators have defended interpretations along these lines. According to Pereboom (1988), one of Kant’s most fundamental advances over his early modern predecessors was his reconceptualization of what it means for a mental state to possess intentionality. Where previously most philosophers had characterized intentionality *extensionally* as a relation between the representation and a distinct entity (whether an Aristotelian form, a Lockean idea, or the direct realist’s physical object), Kant recasts intentionality entirely *intensionally* (note the ‘s’) in non-relational terms. In a different vein, Aquila argues that we come to have representational contents referring to ordinary empirical objects when we apply categorial form to given “perceptual fields,” which result from a synthesis occasioned by the presence of sensations in the subject. However, these perceptual fields are not to be identified with the sensations themselves and they are not granted “any being of [their] own” (Aquila 2003: 247). Thus on his reading, we have the “pure ‘form’ of intentional directedness” (ibid.: 247), but without anything outside the representation for this directedness to latch on to. And lastly, Van Cleve argues that Kant’s appearances are to be understood as “virtual objects” and that the supposed “relation” between a perception and its object is “not a relation at all” (Van Cleve 1999: 9). Despite other important differences between them, these three commentators agree that we do not need to appeal to any sort of P-intentional relations in order to explain the C-intentionality of our sensory representations of empirical objects.

The content-only model is correct to emphasize understanding’s rule-following, content-generating role in establishing determinate reference to empirical objects. However, I argue that it mistakes this necessary condition for a sufficient condition for such reference and gives short shrift to sensibility’s contribution to empirical cognition. The basic problem with the model, as I see it, is that it does not leave room for sensibility to carry out its function of “giving” objects to understanding. The only function sensibility could perform, on this model, would be to “inform” or “cause” or “guide” the content of empirical cognition. Sellars sometimes seems to take this line, arguing that sensibility (by way of sense impressions) “can only guide ‘from without’ the unique conceptual activity which is representing of *this-suches* as subjects of perceptual judgment” (Sellars 1967: 16).[[25]](#endnote-25) The idea is that sensibility receives sensory data, and through some sort of response to or interpretation of this data,[[26]](#endnote-26) conceptual reference to empirical objects results. It is possible to represent a “this-such” (i.e., make demonstrative, singular reference to an object) with only conceptual content, and without any appeal to something being present to consciousness.

Describing sensibility’s function in this way does not seem reconcilable with the function Kant himself assigns to sensibility. Intuitions are supposed to represent their objects immediately and singularly (A320/B377). The content-only model can surely capture the singularity requirement, for conceptual content on its own can pick out unique objects by way of definite descriptions (or the “mentalese” equivalent). The problem is with the immediacy requirement. As several commentators have correctly pointed out, the immediacy requirement can only be captured by appeal to the direct presence to consciousness of an object. For instance, Allais argues that,

the most straightforward reading of immediacy and singularity is that intuitions are representations that involve the presence to consciousness of the particular they represent. In other words, intuitions represent objects *immediately* because they *present* the particular object itself, as opposed to being representations that enable us to think about it whether it is present or not. […] they are representations that essentially involve the presence to consciousness of the things they represent.[[27]](#endnote-27)

I take it that Allais’s point, and Kant’s as well, is that it would be impossible to make demonstrative reference to an object – successfully make use of a mental “this” – without there being something “here,” present to the mind, for the “this” to latch directly on to. When an object is given to me in sensory consciousness, I am seeing *it*, referring directly to *it*, and this immediate reference depends on more than being simply “informed” or “guided from without” by sensory data. The content-only model does not have the resources to make sense of this essential function of sensibility.

If these considerations are on the mark, then the take-away is that, whatever else we might say about Kant’s account of the relation between representation and object, perceptual consciousness must involve the direct presence to consciousness of *something* in order for there to be direct, demonstrative reference to objects in cognition. The remaining two interpretive options both take this into account.

**V. THE EXTERNAL PROJECTION MODEL**

Let’s call the view that sensory consciousness requires a P-intentional directedness towards non-spatiotemporal things in themselves the “external projection model.” According to this reading, we “project” concepts describing physical, spatiotemporal determinations onto non-spatiotemporal things in themselves, and hence it is to these things in themselves that we ultimately refer (in the P-intentional sense) in empirical cognition. That is, to have cognition of a perceived object is to be aware (in the P-intentional sense) of a thing in itself, but to represent this thing in itself as something very different from what it is in metaphysical fact. Defenders of this position can appeal to Kant’s frequent suggestions that appearances are appearances of things in themselves, and that the latter are what cognition is ultimately directed at. For instance, “the things that we intuit are not in themselves what we intuit them to be, nor are their relations so constituted in themselves as they appear to us” (A42/B59, cf. A39/B56, 4:314-5). As the external projection model reads passages like this, the claim is that the way we intuit things in themselves (i.e., the content through which we intuit them) does not represent these things as they are in themselves, but that it is nevertheless *them* that we are intuiting and subsequently cognizing.

Although it’s certainly not typically discussed in the way I have described it, the external projection model ends up looking a lot like certain “one-world” interpretations of transcendental idealism. According to some commentators, appearances are not ontologically distinct from things in themselves, but are rather the way we represent these things. Even though things in themselves are not in space and time, we represent them as though they are because that’s how they appear to us. Something like this would seem to be Allais’s position. She argues that Kant’s transcendental idealism can be understood as a form of direct realism in which we are in immediate perceptual relations to things in themselves, even though the contents through which we represent these things present properties that could not possibly be properties of things in themselves. As she puts it, “we (directly) perceive things as being different from the way they are” (Allais 2004: 673).[[28]](#endnote-28) Similarly, Baldner argues for an “adverbialist” reading of transcendental idealism that is easily translated into the intentionalist terms I’ve been using. According to his view,

things in themselves are typically the immediate – and only – objects of experience. (Baldner 1988: 7)

[T]alk about the content of an experience – i.e., that which is ‘in mind’ during experience – is to be understood as talk about how one is experiencing or what kind of experience one is having, and not in terms of what object one is ‘immediately’ related to. (ibid.: 9)

The claim, in my terms, is that sensory consciousness involves a P-intentional relation to things in themselves and a C-intentional conceptualization of these things in themselves as spatiotemporal objects.

I do not think that the external projection model is workable because I do not think it is possible for things in themselves (as Kant describes them) to be the P-intentional objects of our C-intentional representations. To explain why I think this, I’ll appeal to an analogy Allais herself uses to make her case.[[29]](#endnote-29) If we look at an object through a window, we would not say that we were seeing a mere image of the object on the window instead of the object itself. Rather, we see the object through the window. Further, we’d say the same thing even if the window were tinted or warped such that the color or shape were distorted. That is, we’d say we see *the object* as distorted and not that we see a distorted *image* of the object. This all seems right so far. Allais’s point is that it opens the door for a divergence between the direct object of perception and the representational content through which it’s represented. She calls the distorted appearance of the object a “manifest property” and then goes on to define an “essentially manifest property” as one “which objects have only in their perceptually appearing to subjects” (Allais 2011, 387). She then uses the notion of essentially manifest properties to characterize the relation between appearances and things in themselves: “we should understand Kant’s idealism about things as they appear to us as saying that what appears to us (what we experience) are essentially manifest features of reality, and that we have knowledge *only* of essentially manifest features of reality” (ibid., 388).

Here is where I think the metaphor with the windowpane breaks down. When I perceive, say, a rock through the window, even if the color and shape are distorted, what I see still bears *some* resemblance to the actual rock (jagged part in the top left, darker area towards the bottom, whatever). Even though my perception is inaccurate or distorted in certain respects, it is accurate in others. I would claim that it is because of the accurate correspondence of *some* of the perceptual content with the rock that the perception as a whole can be directed at the original rock, and not just at some image caused by the rock. In the case of things in themselves and appearances however, there is nothing in the representational content of the perception that accurately represents the corresponding thing in itself. All of the non-trivial determinations[[30]](#endnote-30) that I represent in the object are either spatiotemporal properties (e.g., shape and size) or depend on spatiotemporal properties (e.g., color and texture). Hence there is no real sense left in which I “see” the non-spatiotemporal thing in itself when I take myself to see a spatiotemporal physical object, because my representational content does not in any way “fit” the thing in itself that occasioned the representation. Hence it cannot be said that the thing in itself is present to consciousness as P-intentional object.

To return to the analogy once more, if the windowpane’s distortion were funny enough that, say, a red square appeared as a yellow triangle (or perhaps even as the sound of a bird chirping), then there wouldn’t be any real sense left in which I was still seeing the red square. Now it really is just an image that I’m seeing. By contrast, and returning now to the example of my friend appearing over video feed, even though my friend is different from the image on the screen because she is not made of pixels, there is still some similarity between her and what I see—the colors and contours on the screen correspond to the colors and shape of the actual person—and these similarities explain why the image on the screen can stand in for my friend as object of reference in my perceptual representation. Likewise, returning to an even earlier example, the reason I can mistake the stranger across the courtyard for my colleague is that they bear at least some superficial resemblance. If it weren’t a stranger I was seeing across the courtyard, but, say, a burning bush, a tiny sparrow, or a 30-foot tall flag poll, then (barring any mental illness) I couldn’t conceptualize it as my colleague. The point is that there must be at least *some* homogeneity or “fit” between a P-intentional object and a representational content for it even to be possible for that content to be applied the object.

Relevant here is Kant’s oft-repeated assertion that “we have only to do with our representations; how things in themselves may be (without regard to representations through which they affect us) is entirely beyond our cognitive sphere” (A190/B235; see also A105, A129, A390). All we have is a representational content that was caused by the thing in itself, but there is no direct and immediate awareness of the thing in itself. We can be aware of the effects things in themselves have on us (sensations), but being aware of an effect does not entail awareness of the cause (cf. A368). To insist otherwise would be like saying that in looking at the chip in my windshield I am directly aware of the pebble that caused it. Though the pebble may be the causal basis for my perception of the crack (just as the thing in itself may be the causal basis for my perception of an empirical object) a P-intentional object must be more than a mere cause; it must also be able to stand in for the object we take ourselves to be representing. If things in themselves lead to the generation of empirical representational content only by way of causing this content, then the view has collapsed back into the content-only model (and we’ve already found reason to reject it).

Another way to put the point is to emphasize that P-intentionality is fundamentally a phenomenological notion. For something to be a P-intentional object, it must be phenomenologically present to consciousness, and this requires that there must be some sense in which the object is “seen” (to speak loosely) within conscious experience. But all we “see” in conscious experience are objects with spatial or temporal structure. For my part, I don’t know what it would be like to have a non-spatiotemporal thing phenomenologically present to my consciousness.

Kant seems to have been sensitive to this issue even in some of the passages that one-world interpreters frequently take to support their reading. For instance, in an oft-cited passage from the *Prolegomena*, Kant argues that we can be certain that things in themselves exist because we are certain of the existence of their appearances. But, he insists, “we are not acquainted [*kennen*] with this thing as it may be constituted in itself, but only with its appearance, i.e., with the way in which our senses are affected by this unknown [*unbekannten*] something” (4:314-5). The claim is that we are acquainted with the effects of things in themselves, *not* (as the proponent of the external projection model would have it) that we are acquainted with the thing in itself though the affection.

To summarize, so far we’ve seen that the central problem with the content-only model is that it cannot account for immediate and direct demonstrative reference in perception. And the problem with the external projection model is that the heterogeneity between C-intentional object and thing in itself is too great for the thing in itself to count as the P-intentional object of perceptual cognition. This means that what the intentionalist needs is an account in which there is *something* for perception to P-intentionally latch on to, and that this something must be *at least partially* homogeneous with what we judge as ordinary objects such that it is possible for our C-intentional content to purport to be about them. We’ll see next that the internal projection model fits this bill and additionally that it finds support in the text.

**VI. THE INTERNAL PROJECTION MODEL**

Let’s call the view that sensory consciousness depends on a P-intentional relation to sensations the “internal projection model.” According to this view, when we perceive an object in empirical cognition, we project concepts describing physical objects onto collections of sensations that are present to consciousness. This sort of interpretation is lately out of fashion, primarily because many assume that any appeal to sensory “intermediaries” as immediate objects of perception will mark a lapse into an unacceptable Cartesian epistemology (this worry is addressed below). Nevertheless, one can find voices in the literature arguing for interpretations that go in the direction of the internal projection model. For instance, Sellars argues that, for Kant, “perceptual consciousness involves the *constructing of sense-image models of external objects*” (Sellars 2007: 459).[[31]](#endnote-31) These “image-models are ‘phenomenal objects.’ Their *esse* is to be *representatives* or *proxies*”[[32]](#endnote-32) (ibid.: 460) that function as stand-ins for what we conceptualize as ordinary empirical objects. More recently, Haag has argued for something close to what I’ve described as the internal projection model. He argues that sensations constitute the appearance as object of intuition and that concepts describing physical objects are “projected” onto these sensations: it is “one and the same sensation […] that appears once as matter in the appearance and once more as a property of a represented object” (Haag 2007: 141, my translation). Vaihinger,[[33]](#endnote-33) Prauss,[[34]](#endnote-34) and George[[35]](#endnote-35) occasionally flirt with versions of the internal projection model as well.

The internal projection model is best motivated by an analysis of sensation as the “matter” of empirical cognition and of sensation’s function in intuition.[[36]](#endnote-36) A great deal has been written on sensation as matter, so here I’ll only summarize the sort of interpretation I have in mind.[[37]](#endnote-37) The core idea is that empirical intuitions are made up of collections of sensations organized into three-dimensional arrays within sensibility’s a priori representation of space. This is what Kant means when he says that sensation is the matter of intuition while space is the form (A22/B36, A267/B323, 29:795, 29:800); and this is why he claims that sensations are “ordered and placed” in space (A20/B34) and that they are represented “outside and next to one another” (A23/B38). In perceptual cognition, the mind is directed towards these intuited sensory arrays and they stand in for the empirical object when they are judged to be physical bodies.[[38]](#endnote-38)

A point in favor of this interpretation is that it can make good sense of Kant’s claims about the relation between sensation and appearance, and about the status of appearance as the “undetermined object of empirical intuition” (A20/B34). In addition to calling sensation the matter of cognition, Kant also sometimes calls sensation the matter of appearance itself (see A42/B60, B207, *Metaphysik Mrongovius* 29:829). One naturally wants to know what Kant means by this. The internal projection model would have it that intuited appearances, when considered in abstraction from how they might come to be conceptualized – “determined” – as objects, are to be identified with the spatially organized collections of sensations mentioned in the previous paragraph. When Kant refers to appearances as “undetermined” objects, he is considering them independently of how they will be conceptualized and judged, i.e., what they will be conceptualized *as*, which I’ve been describing in terms of C-intentionality. So a reasonable way to take all this is that in calling appearances (which contain sensation as their matter) “undetermined objects,” he’s saying that they are the P-intentional objects of experience, which can come to be determined (i.e., conceptualized), when C-intentional conceptual content is applied to them.

Along the same lines, this model can make sense of some of Kant’s otherwise troubling remarks about the relation between sensation and the objects of experience. He says that “the objects of perception […] contain […] the real of sensation” (B207) and that “every outer perception […] immediately proves something real in space, *or rather is itself the real*” (A375, italics added). The suggestion that the objects of perception are made up of sensations might suggest an unattractive Berkeleyan idealism. However, if the interpretation on offer here is correct, then these passages can be taken to be claims about P-intentional objects, not C-intentional objects. The things presented to the mind in sensory consciousness are made up of “the real of sensation,” but this does not entail that the objects of cognition that we (C-intentionally) come to represent are themselves made of sensations. In normal cases of perceptual awareness, our representational faculties take collections of sensations not to be sensations at all, but rather physical objects appearing to us. Sensations are the medium out of which our representations of external objects are made, but this does not entail that the represented objects are made of sensations (any more than my friend appearing on the screen is made of pixels or the scene depicted in a painting is made of paint).

The internal projection model has a high degree of phenomenological plausibility. Consider human color vision. It is generally accepted that I represent objects as possessing the particular hues they do because these chromatic properties are presented in sensation, and that if the sensitivities and neural processes of the human visual system were different, we would represent different chromatic properties in the objects. When I see an apple, the neural processing of the stimulation in the retina and visual cortex produces certain red sensations, which are occurrences in the mind. Yet I rarely represent these properties *as* occurrences within my mind. Instead, I represent the red as being “out there” on the surface of the apple, and not “in here” as merely a property of a mental, sensory state. Similarly with audition, even though the auditory sensations in me are the result of neural processing of compression waves in my ear, I represent these sounds as occurring at more or less specific locations in space, and not, in general, in my own mind nor even in my ear (e.g., when I hear footsteps *in the hall*). This basic phenomenological datum can be explained by the internal projection model. We represent chromatic, auditory, and tactile sensory qualities[[39]](#endnote-39) as being outside of our minds and in the world because we project concepts describing physical and worldly properties onto the sensory qualities occurring in the mind when those sensory qualities are combined into outer intuitions.

This last point indicates how the internal projection model avoids the difficulty associated with the external projection model. We saw that the reason why (C-intentional) representations of appearances could not also be (P-intentional) representations of things in themselves was that there is nothing in the representational content of a physical object that corresponds in any non-trivial way to the unknowable properties of things in themselves. Things in themselves are completely heterogeneous with the C-intentional content of perceptual cognition, and hence there is no way that the C-intentional content could “fit” the thing in itself as supposed P-intentional object. Things are different with the relation between sensations and the C-intentional content of perceptual cognition because there are two points of homogeneity between them. First, the qualities given in sensation[[40]](#endnote-40) are identical to the qualities presented in outer intuitions and we subsequently judge these sensory qualities to be physical qualities of material bodies.[[41]](#endnote-41) Second, although sensations on their own have no spatiotemporal extension, collections of sensations are given spatiotemporal organization in empirical intuition. Thus the collection of sensations immediately present to consciousness as P-intentional object is homogeneous with the C-intentional object with respect to spatiotemporal form. This partial homogeneity (of sensory quality and spatiotemporal form) between the sensory manifold constituting the intuition and the represented object is what allows that sensory manifold to stand in as (and be judged as) an ordinary, physical object.

**VII. EMPIRICAL REALISM**

I conclude by addressing two of the most likely objections to the internal projection model: first, that the view amounts to a fictionalism or an error theory, and second, that the view lapses into a pre-Kantian, “Cartesian” theory of mind. Both of these objections threaten the consistency of my interpretation with Kant’s empirical realism, hence responding to both is necessary for preserving the viability of the interpretation.

*A. The Fictionalism Objection*

According to the internal projection model, sensory consciousness involves conceptualizing collections of sensations as physical objects. Of course, collections of sensations *aren’t* physical objects. Hence, one might object, in the same way that I err when I mistake the stranger across the courtyard for my colleague, I would also be making a mistake when I conceptualize things that aren’t physical objects as physical objects. Since all attempts to cognize the physical realm would commit the same error, the theory would entail that we are never judging truly in our attempts at cognition. At best, things would merely *seem* to be physical objects, but Kant explicitly rejects such an interpretation of his transcendental idealism and empirical realism (see *Prol.* 4:290-294).

The problem comes down to whether the internal projection model can account for the possibility of making true empirical judgments of physical objects. Fortunately, there is a natural way to understand Kant’s notion of truth in empirical judgments that is consistent with the intentionalist line I’ve been pushing and which avoids the fictionalism objection.[[42]](#endnote-42) Although Kant admits that the “nominal definition of truth… is the agreement of cognition with its object” (A58/B82), he eventually wants to explain truth in empirical judgments in terms of an objectively valid rule-governed synthesis of the manifold. For instance, “we say that we cognize the object if we have effected synthetic unity in the manifold of intuition” (A105; also A191/B236, A197/B242, *Prol.* 4:290). Kant’s account of truth in cognition in terms of successful rule-governed synthesis is a fundamentally *internalist* theory.[[43]](#endnote-43) The rules that govern the synthesis of the empirical manifold are a priori rules based in the categories; they are the mind’s own rules. Accordingly, if, as the internal projection model would have it, empirical cognition involves synthesizing concepts describing physical objects with organized collections of sensations, the judgments about physical objects that result can be true so long as the appropriate rules of synthesis (the pure principles of understanding applied to the sensory data given in experience) have been followed. In short, our judgments about physical objects can be true (not mere illusions or seemings) so long as the mind follows the correct procedure in forming those judgments. And insofar as we are justified in forming judgments that describe objects as physical, spatial entities that exist outside the mind and distinct from my sensations of them, it is true of these objects that they are physical, spatial, etc.

This line of reasoning is further supported by Kant’s account of what it is for an object to be actual. One way to take the fictionalism objection is as the worry that there are no actual physical objects for us to make true judgments about. Kant understands actuality in terms of “that which is connected with the material conditions of experience (of sensation)” (A217/B265). By this Kant means that something is actual when it is sensed, or when it is connected “in accordance with empirical laws” (A226/B273) to what is sensed. Although “cognizing the *actuality* of things requires *perception*,” one need not have “immediate perception of the object” but only “its connection with some actual perception in accordance with the analogies of experience, which exhibit all real connection in an experience in general” (A225/B272; see also *Prol*. 4:290). According to the Analogies, all objects and events together constitute one world because they are all interrelated within a single, all-encompassing causal network (A216/B263). Kant’s claim then is that we are justified in representing an object as actual when the representation of that object coheres with the rest of our representations of nature in accordance with empirical causal laws. Importantly though, Kant isn’t saying simply that this represented coherence is a mere indication of actuality; rather his point is that this is all that the actuality of an object consists in: “Whatever is connected with a perception according to empirical laws, is actual” (A376). Consequently, the proponent of the internal projection model can say that physical objects are perfectly actual insofar as we do succeed in forming objectively valid representations of them in such a way that they together form a coherent system of causally interconnected nature.

The above appeal to Kant’s theory of truth in empirical judgment indicates how *in general* it might be possible for the intentionalist to appeal to Kant’s theory of truth to escape the fictionalism concern. However, one might still have reservations about this and wonder how exactly such (rule-governed, objectively valid) true judgments can arise in the *particular* case of conceptualizing collections of sensations as physical objects.[[44]](#endnote-44) Here I think it would be useful to appeal again to the analogy (discussed above) regarding one’s conceptualization of a friend appearing on a computer screen. Although what I “literally” see is an arrangement of illuminated pixels, I nevertheless conceptualize these pixels as my friend and take myself to see *her*, all the while ignoring the role played by the pixels. I argue that I am justified in representing collections of sensations as physical objects for the same reason that I am justified in taking myself to see my friend; and my judgments about physical objects can be true for the same reason that my claims about my friend can be true (excepting two important disanalogies discussed two paragraphs down). In both cases, the justification for conceptualizing things in the relevant way and the possibility of the resulting judgments being true follow from the existence of certain rules and from the possibility of applying those rules correctly in the appropriate contexts.

When my friend asks “can you see and hear me?” and I say “yes,” I’m not saying anything false. The reason is that the rules that govern how a computer user thinks about and responds to images on computer screens licenses such conceptualizations. The conceptual schemes relevant to thinking and talking about live video feeds warrant the claim, “yes I can see you,” in the context where the colors of the pixels articulate contours that correspond to part of a human figure. (In the different context where the pixels only show a black rectangle or an image of an empty room, such a claim would not be justified.) Likewise, when I conceptualize collections of sensations as physical objects, the consequent judgments can be called true insofar as such conceptual responses follow the rules governing how a human perceiver is supposed to respond conceptually to such sensory episodes. So for instance, a sensory episode in which one (P-intended) collection of sensations is altered after coming into close proximity to another (P-intended) collection of sensations may be a good candidate for the (C-intentional) judgment that a causal interaction took place. Or when a group of (P-intended) color sensations tend to stay together in a cohesive shape while moving relative to a broader (P-intended) sensory context or background, I might be justified in (C-intentionally) representing the object as a cohesive, substantial body. If these sensations are the right color and they form the right shape, I could be justified in conceptualizing this body as a billiard ball. And so on. In general, certain patterns of sensory arrays will justify the application of various a priori and empirical concepts, and insofar as the appropriate rules are followed in this conceptualization, the resulting judgments will be true judgments.[[45]](#endnote-45)

Note however that the analogy with the computer screen is not supposed to be a perfect analogy, and two important differences should be emphasized between that case and sensory consciousness as described by the internal projection model. First, the rules governing my conceptualization of the pixels on the computer screen are *contingent*, based on the particularities of technology and how it happens to be used in our culture. By contrast, many of the rules governing my cognition of physical bodies are *necessary*, since they’re based in the a priori, transcendental laws of the understanding (e.g., the rules dictating that objects be extensive and intensive magnitudes, that they be causally interacting substances, etc.). So while it is not necessary that I conceptualize the array of pixels as my friend, it is necessary that (at least most of the time) I represent collections of sensations as physical bodies (more on this is said shortly in relation to the second objection discussed below). Second, given the contingency of the rules governing my thinking about the computer screen, the “illusion,” as it were, that I am really seeing my friend (directly) will never be complete. There will always be the implicit awareness, at least in the back of my mind, that I am really just seeing an image of my friend (it’s not as though I presume that I could reach out and shake hands). Not so in typical cases of sensory perception. One who hasn’t studied any philosophy may go their entire life never entertaining the possibility that sensory consciousness involves conceptualization of sensations as physical bodies. And even after studying philosophy and perhaps becoming convinced of something like the internal projection model, the vast majority of the time this fact about perception is simply not on the cognitive radar, even implicitly.[[46]](#endnote-46) I take this fact about the phenomenology of perception to be a consequence of the fact that the categories are necessary concepts and so necessitate me in conceptualizing objects as external spatial bodies (as opposed to mere internal sensations), at least most of the time.

One final remark on this issue before turning to the second objection. One might wonder whether my appeal to Kant’s theory of truth as a theory of rule-governed, objectively valid synthesis might not give a second chance to the external projection model (according to which the P-intentional objects of empirical cognition are non-spatiotemporal things in themselves). Why, it could be asked, is it possible to generate true judgments by following the appropriate rules when conceptualizing collections of sensations as physical objects, but not possible to do the same with things in themselves? The answer goes back to my earlier point about the need for at least some homogeneity between P-intentional object and C-intentional object. For it is only possible to apply a rule in a context in which the rule is applicable in the first place. The rules embodied by the categories and their corresponding principles are only applicable to objects with spatiotemporal structure. (This is one of the central points of the Schematism (A137/B176ff.), which Kant also articulates in terms of homogeneity (*Gleichartigkeit*).) It is possible to apply these rules to organized collections of sensations because, according to my interpretation, their organization is a spatial one (intuitions involve the arraying of sensory qualities within the a priori representation of space). By contrast, even if things in themselves could be phenomenologically present to consciousness as P-intentional objects (and I don’t think they can be), since they’re not spatiotemporal, they wouldn’t be the sort of things to which categorial rules could apply.

*B. The Cartesianism Objection*

The second objection I want to consider is that the internal projection model would mark a collapse back into the pre-Kantian theory, whether espoused by Descartes, Locke, Berkeley, or Hume (I’ll just use “Cartesianism” as a blanket term), that we only come to represent objects external to us by way of a tacit or subconscious inference from the data given in immediately accessible sensory states. According to these early modern thinkers, knowledge of the external world can never attain full certainty because the inference from perceived effect (sensations) to inferred cause (an external body) can never be fully justified (since for any given effect there are always many possible causes). The Kantian mind, by contrast, is said to be in direct and immediate conscious relation to ordinary objects in the spatiotemporal world such that no inference from internal states is necessary. This immediacy is implicit already in Kant’s definition of empirical intuitions, which are said to “relate immediately” to their objects (A19/B33),[[47]](#endnote-47) and it is made explicit in the A-edition’s Fourth Paralogism (A366ff.) and the B-edition’s Refutation of Idealism (B275ff.). In these passages, Kant claims that our consciousness of external objects is immediate and does not depend on any consciousness of internal mental states. In the Refutation, he will even go so far as to make the stronger claim that our consciousness of internal mental states depends on our consciousness of external objects.[[48]](#endnote-48) It could be objected that the internal projection model is inconsistent with these claims because it holds that sensory consciousness of external objects depends on P-intentional relations to internal sensory states.

To see the way around this objection, we must consider what sort of “consciousness” (*Bewußtsein*) Kant has in mind in the Refutation.[[49]](#endnote-49) Kant says there that consciousness of internal mental states depends on consciousness of external physical objects (and not the other way around). But we have two different conceptions of intentionality on the table and thus two different ways in which “consciousness” could be understood: Is this P-intentional consciousness or C-intentional consciousness?

It cannot be P-intentional consciousness, at least not according to the intentionalist interpretation under consideration in this paper. Reading the consciousness described in the Refutation in terms of P-intentionality is not available to the intentionalist because P-intentional relations to objects in space simply are not possible according to such an interpretation. A P-intentional relation to an object in space would require that such objects exist (do not merely inexist) separate from the subject in a transcendentally real space and time. But Kant unequivocally rules this out (so the intentionalist would have it, at least).

Thus Kant must have what I’ve been calling C-intentionality in mind here. Accordingly, we can read the central thesis of the Refutation as entailing:

The C-intending of internal mental states depends on the C-intending of external physical objects.

That is, I can only have representations whose contents purport to be about the current states of my own mind if I also (previously or concurrently) have representations whose contents purport to be about external states of the physical world.[[50]](#endnote-50) This claim is perfectly consistent with the internal projection model’s claim that:

The C-intending of external physical objects depends on the P-intending of internal mental states.

Accordingly, the intentionalist line under consideration can say the following about the Refutation: even though I cannot have cognitions about my sensations (which requires C-intending sensations *as sensations* and discerning their temporal order) independently of a cognition of physical bodies in space, the cognition of physical bodies in space nevertheless depends on the (pre-cognitive, pre-discursive) presence to consciousness of those sensations.

**VIII. CONCLUDING REMARKS**

The reading of the Refutation in the previous section puts front and center one of the important consequences of the Internal Projection version of the intentionalist line. The interpretation implies a theory of mental reference that wants to maintain a sharp distinction between making meaningful, content-laden reference to objects on the one hand, and having something present to consciousness on the other. Immediate reference to an object in sensory consciousness is neither synonymous nor coextensive with the literal presence to consciousness of that same object. Our cognitions can refer immediately and directly to physical objects even though it is only our sensations (not the objects themselves) that are literally present to consciousness. The former is a cognitive achievement and involves the activities of understanding and sensibility together; the latter is an achievement of mere sensibility. To be sure, both activities involve a sort of “immediacy,” but they are different kinds of immediacy. The immediacy of presence to consciousness is just what the phrase indicates: the thing is right there, “before the mind’s eye.” The immediacy of cognitive reference in sensory consciousness, by contrast, has to do with the lack of any semantic or epistemic intermediary. When I perceive my cat, my reference to it makes use of demonstratives, not indirect definite descriptions that depend on demonstrative reference to sensations: “*that* cat,” not “*the* cat which I take to be the cause of *these* sensations.” Correspondingly, my knowledge of the cat’s existence is not inferential knowledge derived from an epistemically more basic knowledge of my sensations. Since I can refer directly to external objects, I can have immediate knowledge of them as well.

The internal projection version of the intentionalist reading can be characterized as a form of phenomenalism and as a sense-data theory. Many take both phenomenalism and sense-data theories to be incompatible with empirical realism. However, when we are careful about the precise sense in which this interpretation is a phenomenalism and a sense-data theory, these worries evaporate. The usual worry about phenomenalism as an interpretation of Kant is that it would entail an ontological reduction of physical objects to collections of sensations or other mental states (as we find in Berkeley or Hume). But as we’ve seen, the intentionalist’s reduction of empirical objects to mere intentional objects respects the metaphysical claim that our judgments of appearances as physical, material substances are objectively valid. The objects represented in empirical cognition are no more made up of sensations than the scene depicted in a painting is made of paint. And the usual worry with sense-data theories as interpretations of Kant is that they entail the semantic or epistemic intermediaries described in the previous paragraph, but we’ve seen that the internal projection model escapes this worry as well.

Although I don’t claim to have given a defense of the basic intentionalist thesis (that Kant’s empirical objects are mere intentional objects), I hope that I have accomplished at least two things. First, I hope to have shown that the most philosophically and exegetically defensible version of an intentionalist interpretation should be cashed out in terms of the internal projection model (together with the model of empirical intuition outlined in section 6). Second, by showing how this intentionalist reading is consistent with core elements of Kant’s empirical realism, I hope to have shown one way in which the interpretation on offer should be taken seriously as an attractive option.[[51]](#endnote-51)

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1. All quotations of Kant are from the Cambridge Editions of the Works of Immanuel Kant. Citations of *Critique of Pure Reason* use the standard A/B pagination; citations from other works refer to the *Akademie Ausgabe* volume number and page number. [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. There is not complete agreement in the literature regarding whether Kant meant to identify appearances with empirical objects. However, since nothing in my argument in this paper turns on the issue, I will for the most part be using the terms “appearance,” “empirical object,” “physical object,” and “spatiotemporal object” interchangeably. [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. Aquila 1982 and 2003, Van Cleve 1999, Pereboom 1988, Haag 2007, Sellars 1967 and 2007, and Vaihinger 1892 offer interpretations along these lines, all of which are discussed below. I borrow the label “intentionalist” from Aquila’s 2003 article. [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
4. Kant famously distinguishes between empirical and transcendental senses of existence (e.g., at A28/B44 and A373). It’s in the transcendental sense that intentionalist readers claim that spatiotemporal objects don’t “really” exist. This is meant to be consistent with the empirical reality of such objects. Such readers are trying to explain both the transcendental ideality and empirical reality of spatiotemporal objects in terms of their status as mere intentional objects. How exactly this works will be elaborated throughout the paper. [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
5. Historically, many have understood intentional objects (especially *mere* intentional objects) to possess their own special kind of being (along Meinongian lines, for instance). This is not how I will be treating them however. To say of something that it is a *mere* intentional object is to deny it any positive ontological status whatsoever. At most, they can be represented *as* existing, but obviously *representing* that something is the case by no means entails that it *is* the case. [↑](#endnote-ref-5)
6. Intentionalist interpretations are difficult to situate in the traditional one-world/two-world interpretive divide, and hence they offer an interesting alternative to this stalemate. Since such interpretations do not identify appearances with things in themselves (since it is impossible to identify something that does not exist with something that does), such interpretations are not naturally amenable to traditional one-world readings. Yet for the same reason, intentionalist interpretations do not quite fit with two-world interpretations either because, since they don’t exist, appearances cannot be said to constitute a “second” ontological realm. Aquila takes these considerations to speak in favor of treating the intentionalist line as an attractive alternative to the usual options: “One advantage of an intentionalist approach would be that, while remaining altogether neutral on the question of (transcendent) ‘things in themselves,’ it at least undercuts any presumption that what must be in question is some sort of ontological distinction between distinct sets of items, members of one of which would be the appearances of those of another” (Aquila 2003: 233). [↑](#endnote-ref-6)
7. This is elaborated in detail below (sections 6 and 7). The basic idea is that although transcendental philosophy reveals empirical objects as mere intentional objects, in normal, everyday cognition we necessarily represent these objects not as mere (mind-dependent) intentional objects, but rather as material bodies that exist and do their thing independently of us and our representational activity. [↑](#endnote-ref-7)
8. Sellars 1967: 48-9 and Van Cleve 1999: 11 are happy to use the “phenomenalist” label for the view. Allais 2004: 657 and Hall 2010: 49 use the label as well, albeit in a pejorative sense. [↑](#endnote-ref-8)
9. Thus in my discussion I will for the most part not be concerned with cases of empirical cognition in which we represent objects not presently within our perceptual purview (for instance when I make a judgment about an unseen object in the next room). Some of what I say will however have implications for such representations. [↑](#endnote-ref-9)
10. See A19/B34, A28/B44, A56/B81ff., B146, A156/B1194ff., A320/B376. [↑](#endnote-ref-10)
11. See A190/B235, A374. [↑](#endnote-ref-11)
12. See A104, B137f., A182/B225, A197/B242. [↑](#endnote-ref-12)
13. Again, I am discounting any extravagant Meinongian ontology that would allow for the possibility of a real relation to something that does not exist. [↑](#endnote-ref-13)
14. By “content” I mean the property of a representation in virtue of which that representation purports to be about something and presents that thing to the subject in some determinate way. The content of a representation is how the subject “takes” the object to be. If I represent an animal first as frightful and then as friendly, the thing I refer to remains the same, but the content through which I refer to it changes. In this respect, “content,” as I will be using the term, is roughly analogous to Fregean *Sinn*. See Tolley 2011 for a detailed description of Kant’s theory of representational content. Tolley agrees that Kant understood content along “Fregean” lines. [↑](#endnote-ref-14)
15. To be sure, we can make a conceptual distinction between a representation and its content in the same way that we can distinguish a painting from its depicting of its subject matter. But it would not be a distinction between separate things, but rather a distinction between a thing and its function. [↑](#endnote-ref-15)
16. For instance, if the fluffy cat is also a hungry cat then P-intending the fluffy cat entails P-intending the hungry cat, but C-intending the fluffy cat does not entail C-intending the hungry cat because I may not know that the fluffy cat is hungry. [↑](#endnote-ref-16)
17. I suppose it is conceptually possible for there to be P-intentionality without C-intentionality. Perhaps this is what creatures with the lowest level of consciousness experience (if that can be called experience), but this sort of awareness would be unthinking and nearly vegetative, and so not the sort of thing we’re concerned with when investigating normal human cognition. [↑](#endnote-ref-17)
18. In Kant’s familiar words, “intuitions without concepts are blind” (A51/B75). [↑](#endnote-ref-18)
19. One might worry that these two conceptions of intentionality don’t capture all modes of intentionality, and hence that something important has been left out. Specifically, it might be asked how we can account for intentional relations to objects that are not currently perceived, e.g., when I think of an object in the next room. Clearly I’m thinking about *it*, and hence am in a relation to it. Hence it’s more than just (monadic) C-intentionality. But since the object isn’t present to consciousness, it doesn’t fit my characterization of P-intentionality.

    In response, I argue that we can capture this sort of relation with the resources already articulated. The intentional relation to an unseen object consists in, *first*, the fact that there is a sufficient degree of correspondence between the representation’s content (C-intentionality) and the object itself, and *second*, the fact that there is some causal history between the object and the representation such the object (directly or indirectly) caused the representation. In other words, my thought puts me in a relation to the unseen object because the content of the representation is a sufficiently accurate description of the object, and because the object is somehow responsible for the occurrence of that content. I take both of these criteria to be necessary conditions. If only the first condition is met then the representer simply got lucky and happened to imagine something that is similar to an existing object. If only the second condition is met, then even though the representation was caused by the object, it lacks the content necessary to purport to be about that object. [↑](#endnote-ref-19)
20. When I introduced the P-intentionality/C-intentionality distinction in the previous section, I was for the most part leaving Kantian considerations to the side. There the distinction between the “real relation” of P-intentionality and the mere quasi-relation of C-intentional representational purport did present too much of a problem. Now that Kantian considerations are front and center, things are more complicated. For whether something can or cannot exist in a “real relation” to the mind depends on whether we are describing something in the context of Kant’s empirical realism or his transcendental idealism. Thus, when I say here (and in similar remarks to follow) that there cannot be real relations to physical objects (because they are mere C-intentional objects), this should be understood as a claim uttered from the transcendental perspective, not the empirical one. [↑](#endnote-ref-20)
21. Note a peculiar fact about (mere) C-intentional objects. Since the features of a C-intentional object are determined only by the content of the representation, it follows that this content determines what is true of the object. Thus if it’s *necessary* (as Kant thinks it is) that I represent an object as a causally efficacious substance, as possessing extensive and intensive magnitudes, etc. (as described in the Analytic of Principles), then it’s true of the object that it is a causally efficacious substance, etc. This is how the intentionalist interpretation can respect Kant’s empirical realism with its insistence that the objects of experience are physical substances: it’s true that they are such insofar as it’s necessary that we represent them as such. I return to this point in the final section below. [↑](#endnote-ref-21)
22. I borrow this terminology of concept “projection” from Prauss 1971 and Haag 2007 who use the terms “*Entwurf*” and “*projezierte*” (respectively) to describe the relation between representational content and represented object. [↑](#endnote-ref-22)
23. This example is of course imperfect because it is not as though the illusion is ever so complete as to convince me that I could, say, reach out and shake hands with the other person. We could, if we cared to, imagine examples of illusions that would be more complete. [↑](#endnote-ref-23)
24. The claim that sensations exist in the mind (instead of merely inexisting) brings a host of complications that I will not be able to address in any detail here. Some might object that sensations are empirical, hence they are appearances, hence they’d need to have the same ontological status as other appearances. My reason for claiming that sensations must exist in the mind (instead of inexisting as mere appearance) is that they are the effects of the transcendental affection of things in themselves on the mind. Since things in themselves exist, the effects of their affection must also exist. Further, Kant sometimes claims to be an idealist only with respect to the *form* of cognition, not the *matter* (4:337), which would indicate that sensations (the matter of experience) as such are not ideal in the same respect in which empirical objects are. [↑](#endnote-ref-24)
25. Pippin 1982: 51takes a similar line. However, whether Sellars himself stayed committed to this purely “causal” interpretation of sensation’s function is not clear. Below I discuss a later paper of his in which he seems to change his mind. [↑](#endnote-ref-25)
26. Of course for Sellars, the story we would tell about how this “interpretation” of the sensory input proceeds would have to be one that doesn’t fall sway to the “myth of the given.” [↑](#endnote-ref-26)
27. Allais 2009: 389. Cf. Allais 2011: 383, and Parsons 1992. As we’ll see in the next two sections, where Allais wants to claim that the immediately present-to-consciousness objects of intuitions must be things in themselves, I’ll argue that they are instead organized collections of sensations. [↑](#endnote-ref-27)
28. To be sure, Allais and others like her would not be favorably disposed to my characterization of such a view as “intentionalist,” especially when this thesis is taken to entail the claim that the objects of empirical cognition merely inexist within representational contents. However, if we drop the divisive language about “mere intentional inexistence” and instead describe the view in terms of three claims – 1. things in themselves are directly present to consciousness, 2. things in themselves are not spatiotemporal, 3. things in themselves are represented as spatiotemporal – then we see that the external projection model is close enough in spirit to her reading. [↑](#endnote-ref-28)
29. The example is from Allais 2011: 386ff. She borrows it from John Campbell. [↑](#endnote-ref-29)
30. A trivial determination would be something like ‘exists’ or ‘is self-identical’. [↑](#endnote-ref-30)
31. Sellars’s position here (from 1978) seems to make a divergence from his earlier (1967) position, which seemed to more closely align with the “content-only” model. [↑](#endnote-ref-31)
32. Importantly, for Sellars, “although the objects of which we are directly aware in perceptual consciousness are image-models, we are not aware of them *as* image-models” (1978: 459-460). Sellars distinction between *what* we are aware of and what we are aware of it *as* maps onto my distinction between P-intentional objects and C-intentional objects (respectively). [↑](#endnote-ref-32)
33. Vaihinger 1892: 32 argued that we come to represent ordinary objects (C-intend them, in my terminology) when we apply categorial determinations to “*Empfindungsmaterial*,” which constitutes the appearance as its matter and towards which we are intentionally directed when we apply concepts in cognition. See Aquila 2003 for a detailed discussion of Vaihinger’s views on “sensation-material” as intentional object. [↑](#endnote-ref-33)
34. Prauss 1971 argues that we come to represent external objects by way of an “interpretation” (“*Deuten*”) of an internal “subjective appearance,” which Prauss understands as a collection of sensations (see ch. 1). [↑](#endnote-ref-34)
35. George argues for a “sensationist” model to explain the origin of intentionality in cognition. On his reading, the imagination imposes interpretive forms on non-representational, brute sensory data, yielding representations of objects: “It is evident that Kant took the spatial and extended nature of objects to be the result of an interpretation placed upon certain sequences of sensations, which are themselves without extension” (1981: 240). [↑](#endnote-ref-35)
36. See A22/B36, A42/B59-60, A267/B323, *Fortschritte* 20:266, *Metaphysik Mrongovius* 29:795 and 29:800. [↑](#endnote-ref-36)
37. I defend the following interpretation at length in Jankowiak 2014: 505-509. For other discussions of sensation as matter, see Vaihinger 1892, Aquila 1983, and Pippin 1982. [↑](#endnote-ref-37)
38. This interpretation of Kant’s theory of empirical intuition bears some affinity to contemporary “projectionist” theories of perception (as defended by, for instance, Baldwin 1992 and Boghossian and Velleman 1989). As Baldwin describes his view, “sensory qualities lead a double life – both as intrinsic qualities of experience and as apparent qualities of the objects of experience. So the idea is that the intrinsic spatial reference of sense experience converts the subjective sensory quality of sense experience into the apparently objective quality of a physical object located before the subject. Thus by projecting the sensory qualities of sensation out into physical space, sense experience attains that phenomenological primitive intentionality, whereby a blue sensation becomes a sensation of blue” (Baldwin 1992: 185). The primary difference between this contemporary theory and (my reading of) Kant’s has to do simply with the status of the space into which these sensory qualities are projected: Kant thought that space was transcendentally ideal. (It should be noted that the “projection” of these “projectionist” theories is a different projection than the one that gives the internal projection model its name. Where Baldwin et al. are referring to the projection of sensory qualities into space, I’ve focusing on the projection of concepts onto P-intentional objects.) [↑](#endnote-ref-38)
39. I mention these three sensory modalities specifically because Kant picks them out as the three “objective” senses in the *Anthropology*. In contrast with the “subjective senses” (taste and smell), the objective senses “contribute more to the *cognition* of the external object than they stir up the consciousness of the affected organ” (7:154). [↑](#endnote-ref-39)
40. I put it this way for simplicity, but one shouldn’t be misled by the phrase “qualities given in sensation” as though there were two things: the sensation and the quality it happens to possess. Rather, as I understand Kant, the sensation just *is* the occurrence of some sensory quality (to some particular degree (see B207-8)). This claim might lead some to wonder what else we can or should say about the metaphysical status of these sensory qualities as existing entities or occurrences. Unfortunately though, I don’t think it is possible to give a further analysis of the metaphysical status of these sensory qualities, at least not in terms of what they are made up of. As the fundamental matter of empirical cognition, we can analyze other representations (especially intuitions) in terms of sensations as their constituents, but sensation is where such analysis comes to an end. I’m not sure whether they should be considered metaphysical primitives, but they are explanatory primitives. (This is analogous to Kant’s theory of physical matter: bodies are made up of interacting attractive and repulsive forces, but there is no answer available to the question, “what are these forces made up of?”.) [↑](#endnote-ref-40)
41. Cf. *Critique of Judgment*, 5:206: “The green color of the meadow belongs to *objective* sensation, as perception of an object of sense.” In saying that the “green color” is both “of the meadow” and yet “belongs to sensation,” Kant is implicitly indicating a homogeneity between the sensation and the object of perception itself. Of course, one must be precise about the sense in which the sensory qualities of sensations are identical to the sensible qualities represented in physical objects. For if I conceptualize an apple as red I certainly mean something different than if I conceptualize a sensation as red. In the one case I am describing a property that I take to apply only to the surfaces of objects in space (and sensations are not surfaces in space); in the other, I am describing a property that I take to apply only to mental states (and surfaces in space are not mental states). Hence, the homogeneity between the quality of the sensation and the quality of the sensed object cannot be one of conceptual content. Instead, the homogeneity must reside at the level of (pre-conceptual) intuitive content. The property *intuited* in the object is identical to the property possessed by the sensation (the “real of sensation,” as Kant puts it sometimes (B207)), but this intuited property will typically be *conceptualized* as a property of a physical object. Haag makes a similar point about one and the same sensation-property being conceptualized in different ways: “Properties of sensations are not represented by us in sensible perception *as properties of sensation*, (i.e., as mere subjective modification of subjects), but rather *as properties of the represented objects*” (2007: 135, my translation; cf. ibid.: 141). This issue is also addressed in my Jankowiak 2014: 510. [↑](#endnote-ref-41)
42. There is certainly more to say about Kant’s theory of truth than what I sketch in this paragraph, and this is not meant to be a full defense of it. My point is simply that there are viable interpretations of Kant’s theory of empirical truth to which a proponent of my interpretation could appeal to avoid the objection in question. [↑](#endnote-ref-42)
43. One might wonder how Kant’s theory of truth could be both an internalist theory and a correspondence theory. The intentionalist’s answer is simply that that object as well as the representation are both (transcendentally) internal to the mind. Accordingly the correspondence is not between something in the mind and something (transcendentally) outside it. Longuenesse makes this point convincingly when she describes Kant’s revolutionary insight in terms of the “internalization within representation of the relation between representation and object” (1998, 20-26). [↑](#endnote-ref-43)
44. I am indebted to an anonymous referee for pushing me on the importance of clarity on this matter. [↑](#endnote-ref-44)
45. This account raises deeper questions about what leads to these collections of sensations being combined together in such a way as to make the application of concepts through rule-following possible in the first place. How did the collections of sensations end up being such that these conceptual rules were applicable? This is a very important question, but not one that I will be able to address in detail in this paper (a complete answer, I take it, would require a full interpretation of the Transcendental Deduction). For now, I’ll say that I think the story that would need to be told would be the sort of story told by Longuenesse. She places emphasis on the spontaneous activity of the imagination in its formation of intuitions. As she reads the famous “same function” passage from the Metaphysical Deduction (A79/B105), the functions that manifest as the categories and the forms of judgment at the conceptual level also work in the formation of intuitions at a pre-conceptual or proto-conceptual level. Accordingly, the reason why it is possible successfully to apply concepts to intuitions is that the same functions that structure the categories (the most basic concepts of objects) also structure the intuitions that the categories are supposed to conceptualize (see Longuenesse 1998: 201). Longuenesse is not defending an internal projection interpretation, but we can see how her account could be applied to it. The claim would be that the proto-conceptual manifestations of the categorial functions work to organize sensations (i.e., produce the sensory arrays which are the P-intentional objects of sensory consciousness) in such a way that it is possible successfully to apply concepts to them. [↑](#endnote-ref-45)
46. Kant indirectly addresses this issue in the discussion of vision from the *Anthropology* (see 7:156). [↑](#endnote-ref-46)
47. Allais 2009: 390 also emphasizes this point about the immediacy of intuition. [↑](#endnote-ref-47)
48. I leave aside the vexed question of the exact structure of Kant’s argument in the Refutation. What matters is that he held the conclusion to be an indispensible aspect of his empirical realism, and hence any interpretation of his overall theory must be consistent with this aspect. [↑](#endnote-ref-48)
49. I focus my discussion on the Refutation instead of the Fourth Paralogism because the Refutation makes a stronger claim and because it reflects Kant’s considered view from 1787. [↑](#endnote-ref-49)
50. More specifically, this dependence relation would have to be spelled out in terms of the possibility of the time-determination of internal and external events. Time-determination, as a conceptual achievement, would be an instance of C-intentionality. [↑](#endnote-ref-50)
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