

## Systematic perspectives on the distinction between appearances and things in themselves in the *Critique of Pure Reason*<sup>1</sup>

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The debate about the meaning and role of the concept of noumena and things in themselves in the *Critique of pure reason* is complex and has a history too long to deal with in a single paper. Instead, I want to continue on from a position defended in two recent papers. Firstly, I agree with Oberst's conclusion (2015) that there is no necessary contradiction between the "two-aspect" and the "two-world" interpretations, and, therefore, that they may be reconciled. Secondly, I also agree with De Boer's contention that the concepts of noumena and things in themselves do not belong "to a single, one-dimensional system" (De Boer, 2014, 256; 2020, 144). So, different analytical layers exist that are intrinsically related to the second order discourse of transcendental reflection. Each layer has its own context and deals with specific philosophical problems. What both Oberst (2015) and De Boer (2014; 2020) fail to offer is a systematic explanation of the various meanings of things in themselves throughout the *Critique of pure*

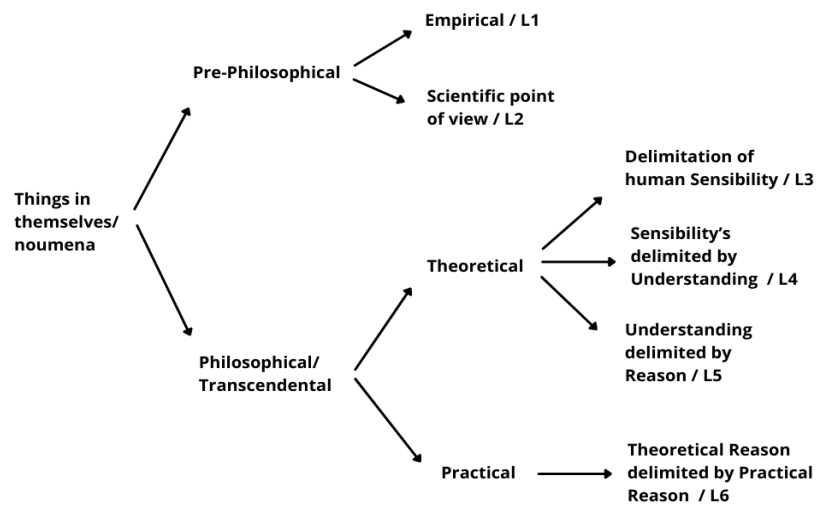
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*reason*. De Boer bases her interpretation on Kant's debate with Locke, but most with Leibniz. I do not disagree with her main points, but I think that her analysis lacks a systemic guiding thread throughout the different layers while treating reason as a system. Without such reconstruction, some important meanings and even layers of analysis remain hidden and without connection.

The *Critique of Pure Reason* is divided and structured according to the analysis of differing representations and their respective higher faculties of knowledge. I will argue in this paper that each level of transcendental reflection entails a specific meaning of the distinction between appearances and things in themselves, which is related with a particular faculty of knowledge or with a particular relation between them. So, the concept of things in themselves is responsible for circumscribing the adequate use of some representations and is related to a particular kind of illusion. I will show that there are six different layers and meanings of things in themselves in the first *Critique* and in the *Prolegomena*. Each constitutes a specific context of analysis and can be presented as follows:



This figure is enriched in the chart below, which indicates the limitative function, a specific meaning, and the particular illusion related to each layer:

Layer	Kind of limitation	Kind of interpretation	Kind of Illusion	Modus of determination	Most common terminology
L1	Limitations of subjective and collective judgments	x	Subjective illusion and empirical illusion	Theoretical determination	Thing in itself
L2	Limitation of collective judgment by scientific judgment	x	Scientific ignorance	Theoretical determination	Thing in itself
L3	Limitation of possible perception	Two worlds and two aspects	Aesthetic illusion	Lack of theoretical determination	Thing in itself
L4	Limitation of possible knowledge	Two aspects	Intellectual illusion	Lack of theoretical determination	Transcendental object / Object in itself
L5	Limitation of possible experience	Two worlds	Rational illusion/ Transcendental illusion	Theoretical- <i>analogical</i> determination	Noumena / Intelligible world
L6	Practical limitation of theoretical philosophy	Two worlds and two aspects	Theoretical and skeptical illusion	Practical - <i>analogical</i> determination	Intelligible world / Moral world

Before going on into the six layers and their textual support, I want to comment on the distinction between the pre-philosophical and the philosophical contexts. The first *Critique* deals almost exclusively with the philosophical meaning of things in themselves. However, along his work, Kant also mentions something about what should be excluded at the philosophical layers, and also how they are related with

distinctions made in the common sense and in the sciences. So, in order to avoid confusions, which are not uncommon between interpreters and critics, it is important to mapping all the perspectives that Kant has drawn in the first *Critique*.

### First Layer (L1) – Empirical

At this level, we need to add a further division, the first indicates defects or variations in a single individual's sensory apparatus or mental state, e.g. colour blindness or schizophrenia, which leads to “subjective illusions” (L1.1); secondly, a distinction that reflects tendencies of all humans, which leads to “empirical illusion” (L1.2).<sup>2</sup>

#### (L1.1) – Subjective

The empirical concept of appearances indicates here a subjective and individual form by which particular individuals perceive things, while things in themselves indicate the empirical real objects, which means things as they are normally perceived by most human beings. This distinction helps us to set up a criterion for distinguishing merely subjective judgments of perception, which might be considered as “subreptions of sensation”, from collective judgments of perceptions, that might also be potentially affected by culture, climate, and peoples’ habits. In this case, appearances indicate singular deviations, such as myopia, colour blindness, effect of narcotics, etc. The concept of things in themselves allows judgments that something is hot, sweet, bitter, green, or red, i.e., indicates something related to the subject but also assumes a general, shared viewpoint. This layer of distinction is mentioned by Kant incidentally in brief passages such as:

The aim of this remark is only to prevent one from of illustrating the asserted ideality of space with completely inadequate examples, since things like colors, taste, etc., are correctly considered not as qualities of things but as mere alterations of our subject, **which can even be**

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<sup>2</sup> I am grateful to Leslie Stevenson for calling my attention to this further division. There are some similarities between Stevenson’s distinctions on Kant’s concepts of appearances and my approach to different concepts of things in themselves. See: Stevenson (1998).

**different in different people.** For in this case that which is originally itself only appearance, e.g., a rose, counts in an empirical sense **as a thing in itself, which yet can appear different to every eye in regard to color.** (KrV, B 45, emphasis added)

Yet this ideality is to be compared with the **subreptions of sensation** just as little as that of space is, because in that case one presupposes that the appearance itself, in which these predicates inhere, has objective reality, which is here entirely absent except insofar as it is merely empirical, i.e., object itself is regarded merely as appearance (...). (KrV, B 53, emphasis added)<sup>3</sup>

In this context, the concept of things in themselves allows the distinction between singular and general judgments of perception. In other words, a merely subjective and private perception cannot be distinguished from an inter-subjective and general human one without the concept of real thing. Without it those cases of mental and physical disorders or variations could not be addressed. The concept of a thing in itself enables us here to identify subjective illusions produced by the particular organization of someone individual's senses or psychological disturbances.

### **(L1.2) – Common physiological and psychological organization of human mind**

In some cases, the concept of things in themselves at L1.1 assumes the position of appearance at L1.2. We are dealing here with two kinds of illusion, the empirical and the logical one. Both are depended of our way of mental and physiological organization that are common for all human beings. The empirical illusion, which the optical kind is an example, “occurs in the empirical use of otherwise correct rules of the understanding, and through which the faculty of judgment is misled through the influence of the imagination” (KrV, B 352) This illusion cannot be avoided at all, so we cannot avoid “that the sea

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<sup>3</sup> See also: “We ordinarily distinguish quite well between that which is essentially attached to the intuition of appearances, and is valid for every human sense in general, and that **which pertains to them only contingently because it is not valid for the relation to sensibility in general but for a particular situation or organization of this or that sense.** And thus one calls the first cognition one that represents the object in itself, but the second one only its appearance. **This distinction, however, is empirical.**” (KrV, B 62, emphasis added; see also Prol. AA 04: 299n.)

appears higher in the middle than at the shores, since we see the former through higher rays of light than the latter, or even better, just as little as the astronomer can prevent the rising moon from appearing larger to him, even when he is not deceived by this illusion.” (KrV, B 354) The logical illusion, by its turn, “consists in the mere imitation of the form of reason (the illusion of fallacious inferences) arises solely from a failure of attentiveness to the logical rule. Hence as soon as this attentiveness is focused on the case before us, logical illusion entirely disappears” (KrV, B 353).

Despite the differences between empirical and logical illusion, both are related to a subjective way as our faculties work. They are also related with each other (from an anthropological point of view) and the influence of both can be restrained, so they do not lead us to error<sup>4</sup>. The method to avoiding error is depended on what Kant calls *applied general logic*. Differently from the pure general logic, the applied general logic do not “abstract from all empirical conditions under which our understanding is exercised, e.g., from the influence of the senses, from the play of imagination, a the laws of memory, the power of habit, inclination, etc., hence also from the sources of prejudice” (KrV, B 77). It is called applied because “it is directed to the rules of the use of the understanding under the subjective empirical conditions that psychology teaches us.” (KrV, B 77) So, it deals with rules “of its necessary use *in concreto*, namely the contingent conditions of the subject, which can hinder or promote this use, and which can all be given only empirically. It deals with attention, its hindrance and consequences, the cause of error, the condition of doubt, of reservation, of conviction, etc.,” (KrV, B 78f.) Kant suggest that these rules of avoiding error are a kind of “Cathartic of the common understanding” (KrV, B 78).

So, what we judge as only appearances is what does not respect the rules of the cathartic of common understanding, and what we call things in themselves or judgment of reality is what respect those rules. Comparing whit L1.1, we could say that a color blindness makes someone judges different colors (red and green), which are the reality,

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<sup>4</sup> Logical and empirical illusions are different, because they result from different relations of our sensible and intellectual faculties. However, the error is an attribute of our judgment, so in order to avoid it, the rules of applied general logic must be followed as an antidote in both cases of illusion.

as being the same color, which is only the appearance. Now, all humans see a partially immersed pencil into a transparent glass of water as being broken. So, at L1.2, we might say that the broken pencil is only an appearance, but in reality, as a thing is itself, the pencil is not broken. In order to avoid the error, we must know how our faculties and organs work. This must be also the case when we do generalizations or when we make causal relations. The difference between appearances and things in themselves in L1.2 allow us to explain the transition from subjective judgments of association to those of *common experience*, so the concept of things in themselves is related to the *common of empirical consciousness*.

## Second Layer (L2) – Scientific point of view

In L2, the distinction between appearances and things in themselves assumes the objective point of view of science. So, appearances indicate now what is habitually understood according to the laws of association of a common experience, while things in themselves indicate the real object as seen from the point of view of science, in other words, according to the principles regulated by experiments or procedures designed to avoid not only the undue influence of human tendencies, but considers the features of the object. With this distinction, we move from the common empirical consciousness to the general consciousness, which underpins all empirical knowledge of nature. It seems to me, that Kant has such distinction in mind in the following passages:

**Thus, we would certainly call a rainbow a mere appearance in a sun-shower, but would call this rain the thing in itself, and this is correct, as long as we understand the latter concept in a merely physical sense, as that which in universal experience and all different positions relative to the senses is always determined thus and not otherwise in intuition. (KrV, B 63, emphasis added)**

Only in this way does there arise from this relation a *judgment*, i.e., a relation that is *objectively valid*, and that is sufficiently distinguished from the relation of these same representations in which there be **subjective validity, e.g., in accordance with laws of association**. In accordance with the latter I could only say “If I carry a body, I feel a pressure of weight,” but not “It, the body, is heavy,” which would be to say that these two representations are combined in the object, i.e.,

regardless of any difference in the condition of the subject, and are not merely found together in perception (however often as that might be repeated). (KrV, B 142)

The rainbow, as an appearance, is seen as a sun shower, while, as a thing in itself, it is water drops working as a prism separating the yellow sunlight in lights with different wavelengths. So, what was in L1.2 a thing in itself for common human experience, now, at L2, is only appearance.

To have a more easily understood example, consider the following: If the sun shines on the stone, it becomes warm. This judgment is a mere judgment of perception and contains no necessity, however often I and others also have perceived this; the perceptions are only usually found so conjoined. But if I say: the sun *warms* the stone, then beyond the perception is added the understanding's concept of cause, which connects *necessarily* the concept of sunshine with that of heat, and the synthetic judgment becomes necessarily universally valid, hence objective, and changes from a perception into experience. (Prol, AA 04: 301)

This move represents the distinction from the concept of causality as a human habit (Hume) to the causality as a necessary objective rule of experience (cf. KrV, B 240f.). In the same vein, it is possible to distinguish association judgments like “the stone feels heavy” and “the sun spins around the earth” from judgments of experience or even distinguish subjective sequences from objective sequences. Sometimes judgments of experience confirm those of association, but this is not the case in a considerable number of instances. The transition from L1.2 to L2 represents the move from *common empirical consciousness* to *general consciousness* (cf. Prol. AA 04: 300; KrV, B 195s), which is objective and necessary.

Things in itself indicates the field of real experience as distinguishable from appearances understood as immediately perceived objects. It is at work here the distinction between secondary and primary qualities, the former being those recognizable by one of our human senses, e.g., the colours of the rainbow, while the latter being the mathematizable properties that play an explanatory role in scientific theories, even if not directly perceptible, e.g. the “magnetic matter” that



Kant talks of at A226/B273<sup>5</sup>. So, the concept of the thing in itself represents what is scientific real, in the sense of the object of science.

This distinction is pre-philosophical, but not merely contingent, because it is grounded on the scientific method and on the objective use of the categories of understanding. However, the thing in itself in science is still contingent *in a certain way*, because what makes something an object of a judgment of experience is still determined by empirical issues like, for example, the fact that a scientist has decided to study one geographical region and not another or the still inexistence of some devices to test hypothesis. This might lead to the discovery/determination of some species or structures rather than others. Therefore, it cannot be determined what the future objects of science will be. For this reason, sciences cannot establish for themselves their *a priori* boundaries, but only their current and temporary limits. They know only temporary limits in the sense that it is still not possible to know anything beyond them, at least until the old limits are demolished and new ones are built (see Prol. AA 04: 352). In other words, the concept of things in themselves allow us to differentiate between apparent and real experiences, but the necessary boundaries of possible experience cannot be justified, at least not in the positive sense. So, we may predict that future scientific discoveries will take place, but we cannot say anything positive about them yet. As Kant writes:

That the understanding occupied merely with its empirical use, which does not reflect on the sources of its own cognition, may get along very well, **but cannot accomplish one thing namely, determining for itself the boundaries of its use and knowing what may lie within and what without its whole sphere**; for to this end the deep inquiries that we have undertaken are requisite. (KrV, B 297, emphasis added)

Now, in order to say something positive about *future experience and draw the line of the field of possible experiences*, then a deeper layer of the distinction between appearances and things in themselves must be established. The next layer draws, however, a philosophical distinction based on the transcendental reflection.

At L2 we do not deal exactly with any particular kind of illusion. The confusion of appearances with things in themselves is caused by

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<sup>5</sup> I am grateful to Leslie Stevenson for helping me to frame this point.

our *scientific ignorance*. To deal with it we need to develop a particular method, which, by its turn, needs already a great deal of knowledge of the object. Kant call this method a “logic of the particular use of the understanding”, which “contains the rules for correctly thinking about a certain kind of objects”. It can be called “the organon of this or that science” (KrV, B 76).

### **Some remarks on the transition from the pre-philosophical to the transcendental layers**

In earlier layers, the distinction between appearances and things in themselves was based on the criteria of generality (L1) and empirical objectivity (L2). In the philosophical levels, the analysis will rely on a transcendental reflection about the nature of our representations and the respective faculties of knowledge<sup>6</sup>. It is only then that the distinction is developed in a strictly philosophical context.

But before going into the philosophical levels of the distinction between appearances and things in themselves, it is very important to call attention to the connection between the pre-philosophical and the philosophical level. The philosophical reflection assumes as its tasks to explain in a transcendental frame what happens at L2. So, since the passage from judgments of association to those of experience requires the transcendental unity of apperception, it may be suggested that this distinction is already dependent from transcendental philosophy. This challenge might be answered by pointing out the difference between two issues regarding the same topic: the first is to answer the question “How do we make synthetic *a priori* judgments?”, which does not require the point of view of transcendental philosophy. For this reason, mathematics and the natural sciences have already found the “highway of science” (KrV, B XII) without the help of metaphysics. The second is framed by the question “How are synthetic *a priori* judgments

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<sup>6</sup> See: “The action through which I make the comparison of representations in general with the cognitive power in which they are situated, and through which I distinguish whether they are to be compared to one another as belonging to the pure understanding or to pure intuition, I call transcendental reflection.” (KrV, B 317). The distinction made by De Boer between physical and metaphysical concepts of things in themselves is equivalent to what I am calling pre-philosophical and transcendental. My approach goes deeper, however, in the sense that I divide the physical into two levels and the metaphysical in further four levels.

possible?” (KrV, B 19), which demands exactly the second order reflection of transcendental philosophy. So, the notion of the transcendental unity of apperception is only needed when we try to explain how is possible that association judgments turn into judgments of experience, but the transcendental theory is not needed when we actually make this move, at least not in the case of mathematics and natural sciences.

Another important point is that the real object, the thing in itself at L2, becomes only appearance *from the point of view of transcendental philosophy*. However, since we cannot continuously make a positive use of the concept of things in themselves at further levels, Kant has to introduce a distinction inside the concept of appearances. So, what was appearances at L2 turns into *mere representations* at the philosophical levels, while what as a thing in itself in L2, became in L3 the *real object of experience*<sup>7</sup>. Both, however, constitutes the two aspects of what in L3 is appearances.

Transcendental philosophy works with the unproved *assumption* that objects [*Gegenstände*, or the sensible manifolds] are given to us, thus, that something affects our sensibility. It is a fundamental assumption which has triggered intense debate and criticism, and, from my point of view, tremendous confusion. Kant's transcendental reflection takes a contextual perspective in which each context deals with a particular faculty of knowledge or some specific relation. To a certain extent this is obvious, yet, some consequences are not. Therefore, transcendental reflection must use a second order language,

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<sup>7</sup> See: “Thus, e.g., the apprehension of the manifold in the appearance of a house that stands before me is successive. Now the question is whether the manifold of this house itself is also successive, which certainly no one will concede. Now, however, as soon as I raise my concept of an object to transcendental significance, the house is not a thing in itself at all but only an appearance, i.e., a representation, the transcendental object of which is unknown; therefore what do I understand by the question, how the manifold may be combined in the appearance itself (which is yet nothing in itself)? Here that which lies in the successive apprehension is considered as representation, but the appearance that is given to me, in spite of the fact that it is nothing more than a sum of these representations, is considered as their object, with which my concept, which I draw from the representations of apprehension, is to agree. One quickly sees that, since the agreement of cognition with the object is truth, only the formal conditions of empirical truth can be inquired after here, and appearance, in contradistinction to the representations of apprehension, can thereby only be represented as the object that is distinct from them if it stands under a rule that distinguishes it from every other apprehension, and makes one way of combining the manifold necessary. That in the appearance which contains the condition of this necessary rule of apprehension is the object.” (KrV, B 325f.)

which requires to use the categories of understanding in a way which is somehow out of place and this creates a particular kind of illusion. The category of causality can only be appropriately used when it determines sensible representations (categories have their proper use when they determine the sensible given manifold). According to the internal analysis of sensibility, we can only know that something affects us<sup>8</sup>. However, by recognizing that something is affecting us, we can only deal with it in the representational context. So, *from a transcendental point of view*, it is absolutely alien to us *how* affection takes place or even what are other determinations of the object outside our representational faculties. We can *think* about the thing in itself, e.g. the thing as transcendental independent to our faculties, only by using the categories in an *improper* way, but we cannot *know* about this determination.<sup>9</sup> For this reason, Kant does not develop a *transcendental* theory of affection, but he is not against an empirical theory of affection, more precisely, a pre-philosophical theory in the level of empirical sciences. By a *transcendental* theory of affection, I understand a theory that explains *how* things (in itself) cause sensible representation in us outside our representational framework. This kind of investigation is alien to critical philosophy.

The assumption that we are affected by something is not random, however. This is so because, even a skeptic, it can be argued, has to agree that objects of representations are given to us. Moreover, we have no awareness that our mind has any active capacity to create objects that we perceive to be affecting us. Finally, assuming that things in themselves must be in some manner given to us is compatible with a posture of a “theoretical humility”. Otherwise we would be stating that

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<sup>8</sup> In this sense, I interpret Zöllner's position: “Die ‘Sache an sich’ (B 45/A 30) kommt allerdings nicht vor wie eine ‘Erscheinung’, ist insofern (vom Philosophen) *hinzugedacht*, aber deshalb nicht *ausgedacht* und imaginär. Die Grundunterscheidung von Ding an sich und Erscheinung als zweier Aspekte an den Gegenständen liegt der *Kritik* aber auch nicht in Gestalt einer gleichsam externen ‘transzendentalen Hypothese zugrunde’ (Zöllner, 1984, p.58).

<sup>9</sup> So, as I see it, the discussion of an alleged noumenal causality working in Kant's transcendental philosophy is completely misplaced. An improper use of the category of causality is found in the following passage: “The understanding accordingly bounds sensibility without thereby expanding its own field, and in warning sensibility not to presume to reach for things in themselves but solely for appearances **it thinks of an object in itself, but only as a transcendental object, which is the cause of appearance (thus not itself appearance), and that cannot be thought of either as magnitude or as reality or as substance, etc.**” (KrV, B 344f., emphasis added)

our sensibility is original, “one through which the existence of the object” (KrV, B 72) is created. The latter “can only pertain to the original being”, while ours “is dependent on the existence of the object, thus it is possible only insofar as the representational capacity of the subject is affected through that” (KrV, B 72). Therefore, the issue under debate here is the following: once objects [*Gegenstände*] are given to our perception, which is not a burdensome theoretical assumption, then they are immediately determined by the transcendental conditions of our representational framework. We can deal with them only as appearances.

In some sense, those remarks already advance some arguments and thesis that will be developed below, but it was important to present them at this point in order to draw the limit between the pre-philosophical and the philosophical levels of distinction, and indicate how distinctions from former levels became an object for transcendental reflection, without contradiction and without mixing them up.

One more remark is important at this point. The issue regarding the proper way to understand things in themselves in transcendental philosophy has been subject to a long debate. Some scholars defended that Kant assumes two different ways of considering the same object, which is labelled as the “two aspect” view (so, for example, Prauss, 1974; Robinson, 1994; Allison, 2004), while others had argued that Kant holds a metaphysical “two world” view (for example, Aquila, 1983; Guyer, 1987; Van Cleve, 1999). I assume that the difference between the two lines of interpretation regarding the distinction between things in themselves and appearances is that in the “two world” view, we are dealing with two different kind of entities, while in the “two aspect” view, we are dealing with the *same* entities considered from two different perspectives. So, the central issue is the *numerical identity between appearances and things in themselves*. Having this in mind, I will argue that Kant sustains both positions depending on the context.

### Third Layer (L3) – Limitation of human sensibility – Transcendental Aesthetics

Something that was a thing in itself in the second level, becomes here only appearance. So, “water drops working like a prism” are in this context only appearances:

But if we consider this empirical object in general and, without turning to its agreement with every human sense, ask whether it (not the raindrops, since these, as appearances, are already empirical objects) represents an object in itself, then the question of the relation of the representation to the object is transcendental, and not only these drops are mere appearances, but even their round form, indeed even the space through which they fall are nothing in themselves, but only mere modifications or foundations of our sensible intuition; **the transcendental object, however, remains unknown to us.** (KrV, B 63, emphasis added)

The third layer of the distinction emerges from the methodological and philosophical reflection on sensibility and finds its context in *Transcendental Aesthetics*<sup>10</sup>. Moreover, the concept of things in themselves has an exclusively *negative* and *limitative* function. Kant argues that space and time are not concepts and are not abstracted from

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<sup>10</sup> In this sense also Zöller: “Die theoretische Unerkennbarkeit der “Dinge an sich” widerspricht auch nicht der in ihrem Begriff angezeigten Betrachtung der Gegenstände unabhängig von sinnlicher Anschauung. Meint doch letzteres nicht die positive intellektuelle Betrachtung der Sachen selbst, sondern die philosophisch-methodische Reflexion auf den *Unterschied* der beiden Betrachtungsweisen der Gegenstände. Ebendiese “kritische Unterscheidung” (B XXVIII) gehört – noch unabhängig von der Restriktion auch der Verstandesfunktion auf den Bereich der sinnlichen Anschauung – zum Themenbereich der Transzendentalen Ästhetik. Der Unterscheidung von Ding an sich und Erscheinung als zweier Betrachtungsweisen derselben Gegenstände entspricht die Abgrenzung der unerfahrbaren Bestimmtheit der Gegenstände in ihrer Eigenexistenz von deren “Wirklichkeit” (B 55/A 38) für das affizierte, empfindende, anschauende Subjekt. Die Zugehörigkeit der Erscheinungen zur Sinnlichkeit faßt Kant mit dem Terminus “Vorstellung” (B 45/A 30; auch “Vorstellungsart”; B 51/A 35). Der ursprüngliche Gegensatz zu “Vorstellung” ist demnach nicht der Gegenstand, das Objekt im Sinn von “Gegenstand der Vorstellung”, sondern es ist das Ding, die Sache “an sich”, nämlich unabhängig von “unserer” sinnlichen Vorstellung der Dinge. (A 369) “Ding an sich” heißt soviel wie das Nicht-Vorgestellte, das Nicht-Vorzustellende. Bezogen auf den grundlegenden Unterschied von Vorstellung des Gegenstandes und dessen absoluter, unvorgestellter Existenz fallen nun auch die *Gegenstände* der Vorstellung auf die Seite der *Vorstellung*. Erscheinungen, so kann es jetzt heißen, sind “bloße” Vorstellungen – und nicht etwa Dinge an sich. Der Satz, daß auch Gegenstände der Vorstellung nur und niemals mehr als Vorstellungen sind oder doch sein könnten, bildet die Grundthese des *Idealismus*.” (Zöller, 1984, p.58s)

experience. They are sensible representations that work as *a priori* forms of our intuition.

Regarding space Kant states that

we can accordingly speak of space, extended beings, and so on, only **from the human standpoint**. If we depart from the subjective condition under which alone we can acquire outer intuition, namely that through which we may be affected by objects, then the representation of space signifies nothing at all. (KrV, B 42f. emphasis added)

Stating that space is a form of our outer intuition of appearances and denying that it is something to things in themselves means accepting the possibility that other kinds of intuitions or even other kinds of external sensible intuitions might exist. It cannot be said what those other forms of intuition and their objects might be, but the concept of things in themselves allows us to accept the possibility that our way of perceiving appearances must not be the only one. Therefore, in the first and the second layer, the concept of thing in itself was determined, while now, at the third layer, it is only a limiting concept. The same stands for time (see KrV, B 51).

Outside appearances, space and time are devoid of meaning. Kant is not saying that space and time might not be determinations of things in themselves, because this position would transcend the limits of transcendental reflection. The point is, then, that even in the event that space and time were determinations of things in themselves, for us, such an assumption means nothing, since this could never be proved. This logical possibility is presented here:

Those alone [space and time] are the field of their validity beyond which no further objective use of them takes place. This reality of space and time, further, leaves the certainty of experiential cognition untouched: for we are just as certain of that **whether these forms necessarily adhere to the things in themselves or only to our intuition of these things**. (KrV, B 56, emphasis added)

In other passages Kant even seems to acknowledge the possibility that our spacial-temporal forms of intuition might be shared with other sensible beings, but immediately calls the attention that this is only a speculation: “It is also not necessary for us to limit the kind of intuition in space and time to the sensibility **of human beings**; it may well be that all finite thinking beings must necessarily agree with human beings in this regard (**though we cannot decide this**)” (KrV, B 72,

emphasis added) So, even *if* space and time are not merely human forms of intuition but also properties of the things in themselves, or a shared form of intuition with other finite thinking beings, we cannot decide about this and therefore this hypothesis has no meaning<sup>11</sup>. Such issues cannot be answered, and they are, therefore, of no import, since knowing objects as they appear to us is all we can do:

What may be the case with objects in themselves and abstracted from all this receptivity of our sensibility remains entirely unknown to us. We are acquainted with nothing except our way of perceiving peculiar to us, and which therefore **does not necessarily pertain to every being, though to be sure it pertains to every human being.** (KrV, B 59, emphasis added)

It seems to me that in *Transcendental Aesthetics* Kant considers both alternatives, the “two aspect” and the “two world” interpretation. Actually, accepting both positions is a logical consequence of the transcendental reflection within the context of sensibility. If appearances are always subjected to human sensibility, then, by accepting the logic-philosophical possibility of things in themselves, we have to acknowledge not only different kinds of passive sensibilities with other forms of intuition but also an active or original type of sensibility. Exactly because Kant considers both alternatives, he acknowledges that the same objects might be considered from other perspectives *and* that other kinds of objects which are completely alien

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<sup>11</sup> See: “Die Rede von der transzendentalen Idealität des Raumes und der Zeit läßt sich so als Aussage darüber verstehen, daß beide sinnliche Vorstellungen sind. Im Hinblick auf die Existenz “an sich” der Gegenstände ist die transzendente Idealität der Vorstellungen Raum und Zeit gleichbedeutend mit ihrer Nichtigkeit. Doch handelt es sich hier um eine den sinnlichen Vorstellungen in genere zukommende Nichtigkeit. Alle sinnlichen Vorstellungen stimmen darin überein, daß sie aufgrund ihres Formursprungs im Subjektsvermögen Sinnlichkeit nicht auf die von Sinnlichkeit und Subjektivität unabhängige Eigenexistenz der Gegenstände (“Dinge an sich”) zu beziehen sind. Doch läßt dies den sinnlichkeitsbedingten Bezug der Vorstellungen auf “ihre” Gegenstände (Erscheinungen) unberührt. Die für Raum und Zeit vorgenommene Gleichsetzung von Idealität mit Nichtigkeit oder Bedeutungslosigkeit betrifft also nur die transzendental-ontologische Erwägung der sinnlichen Vorstellungen in ihrer Unbezüglichkeit auf das Absolut-Reale; sie ist durchaus mit der für die gleichen Vorstellungen geltend gemachten empirischen Realität verträglich.” (Zöller, 1984, p.62s) In this sense, I think that the mere hypothesis that space and time could also be features of “things in themselves” is only logical non- impossibility, but as an hypothesis it is meaningless for us. The concept of thing in itself that emerge in the Transcendental Aesthetics is one that indicate *an absolute limit*. I thank here Luis Felipe Garcia and Farhad Alavi for raising questions that called my attention to develop this point further.



to our spatial-temporal structure might exist. The following passages clearly state both options. The first presents the “two world” and the second the “two aspect” reading:

Since we cannot make the special conditions of sensibility into conditions of the possibility of things, but only of their appearances, we can well say that space comprehends all things that may appear to us externally, **but not all things in themselves, whether they be intuited or not, or by whatever subject they may be intuited.** For we cannot judge at all whether the intuitions of other thinking beings are bound to the same conditions that limit our intuition and that are universally valid for us. (KrV, B 43, emphasis added)

[...] appearance, which always **has two sides, one where the object is considered in itself** (without regard to way in which it is to be intuited, the constitution of which however must for that very reason always remain problematic), **the other where the form of the intuition of this object is considered,** which must not be sought in the object in itself but in the subject to which it appears, but which nevertheless really and necessarily pertains to the representation of this object. (KrV, B 55, emphasis added)

Even considering these two possibilities, what is unequivocal is that space-temporal objects are the only ones that our human sensibility has access to. So, we will still be dealing with appearances no matter how deeply our investigation penetrates.

Even if we could bring this intuition of ours to the **highest degree of distinctness** we would not thereby come any closer to the constitution of objects in themselves. For in any case we would still completely cognize only our own way of intuiting, i.e., our sensibility, and this always only under the conditions originally depending on the subject, space and time; what the objects might be in themselves would **still never be known through the most enlightened cognition of their appearance, which alone is given to us.** (KrV, B 60, emphasis added)

Accepting this limitation implies that all human knowledge about appearances will always be that of mere representations of relations (see KrV, B 67). From the point of view of the sciences, the distinction drawn in this third layer is equivalent to a barrier that can never be pushed further: human perception will always be that of appearances and relational. Here, the concept of things in themselves allows us to identify the limits of our sensible perception and then to avoid the illusion of absolute scientism or materialism.

From a philosophical point of view, this third layer has profound metaphysical implications. It allows us to avoid the illusion of absolute realism, which considers space-temporal properties of appearances to be those of entire reality or even reality in itself. This was the case for Newton, who considers space and time as two absolute entities that would exist even without any appearances, and for Leibniz, who considers time and space properties of things in themselves.

What is not to be encountered in the object in itself at all, but is always to be encountered in its relation to the subject and is inseparable from the representation of the object, is appearance, and thus the predicates of space and of time are rightly attributed to the objects of the senses as such, and there is no illusion in this. On the contrary, if I attribute the redness to the rose in itself, the handles to Saturn or extension to all outer objects in themselves, without looking to a determinate relation of these objects to the subject and limiting my judgment to this, **then illusion first arises**. (KrV, B 70n., emphasis added)

Thus, the distinction between appearances and things in themselves at L3 is strictly negative and only serves to restrict our sensibility so that it cannot be regarded as the only one possible. Because other types of sensibility are conceivable, whether passive or active, then it is conceivable that *the same objects* might be perceived from another perspective, while there *might exist other kinds of objects*, which fail even to appear to us. Nevertheless, the thing in itself is still only *a negative one*, since we are not even stating its existence. For the sciences, this concept prevents an illegitimate entry of pseudo-objects, which might lead to metaphysical phantasies. For philosophy it helps to detect the illusion that extends our perception to things in themselves. In other words, the transcendental reflection regarding our sensibility allows us to establish the *limits of our possible perception*.

#### **Fourth Layer (L4) – Sensibility’s limitation by Understanding – Transcendental Analytics**

In L3, the transcendental distinction between appearances and things in themselves is based on the limitations on our sensibility arising from the consideration of other potential ones. In L4, that distinction receives another meaning, which results from the **limitation of our sensibility by our understanding**. In L3, things in themselves are a

mere possibility and carry *no positive meaning*. Now, things in themselves are something that we can at least *think* about, even though only in a problematic way.

Things in themselves are understood on the basis of the distinction between *thinking* and *knowing* and herein lies the “two aspects” of the same object, as proposed by Allison and Prauss. One of the central aims of transcendental idealism is to ensure that the *same thing* might be considered from two distinct perspectives, from the point of view of appearances and from that of the things in themselves. It is only this meaning of things in themselves that makes it possible to consider human beings as being subject to two simultaneous kinds of legislation. On the one hand, the laws of nature for human beings considered as appearances and, on the other, the laws of freedom for human beings considered as noumena. In other words, if we cannot give a positive argument for the legitimacy of considering the *same* object under two different perspectives, then we cannot speak of morality *in this world*. It is important to stress that, in L3, the “two aspect” interpretation was only a possibility, but in L4 we have a positive argument to sustain the transcendental validity of this reading.

In *Transcendental Aesthetics*, Kant argues “that all the manifold of sensibility stand under the formal condition of space and time” (KrV, B 136), while in *Transcendental Analytics* his aim is to establish “that all the manifold of intuition stand under conditions of the original synthetic unity of apperception” (KrV, B 136). As *a priori* representations of understanding, categories function as rules of synthesis through which the given manifold of sensibility is combined and ordered under the unity of apperception (see KrV, B 145). Beyond this synthetic function, categories have no significance or proper use, nor are they absolutely limited to appearances:

Space and time are valid, as conditions of the possibility objects can be given to us, no further than for objects of the senses, hence only for experience. Beyond these boundaries they do not represent anything at all, for they are only in the senses and outside of them have no reality. **The pure concepts of the understanding are free from this limitation and extend to objects of intuition in general, whether the latter be similar to our own or not, as long as it is sensible and not intellectual.** But this further extension of concepts beyond our sensible intuition does not get us anywhere. For they are then merely empty concepts of objects, through which we cannot even judge whether the latter are possible or not – mere forms of thought without objective

reality—since we have available no intuition to which the synthetic unity of apperception, which they alone contain, could be applied, and that could thus determine an object. Our sensible and empirical intuition alone can provide them with sense and significance. (KrV, B 48, emphasis added)

This broadening of categories to objects in general is only logical and does not allow any real meaning or use of them. However, it is exactly this wider breadth that allows the transcendental distinction between *thinking* and *knowing* and also between appearances and things in themselves:

**To think an object and to cognize an object are thus not the same.** For two components belong to cognition: first, the concept, through which an object is thought at all (the category), and second, the intuition, through which it is given; for if an intuition corresponding to the concept could not be given at all, then **it would be a thought as far as its form is concerned, but without any object**, and by its means no cognition of anything at all would be possible, since, as far as I would know, nothing would be given nor could be given to which my thought could be applied. Now all intuition that is possible for us is sensible (Aesthetic), thus for us **thinking of an object in general through a pure concept of the understanding** can become cognition only insofar as this concept is related to objects of the senses. (KrV, B 146, emphasis added)

This extension is grounded in a second order discourse of transcendental reflection, which deals in L4 with the faculty of understanding. So, by the concept of transcendental object or objects in general, Kant is thinking from a point of view that considers objects void of any aspect of our intuition, and, therefore, we are not actually making a proper use of the categories. They are not being used to determine the object, since “it is not yet a genuine cognition if I indicate what the intuition of the *object* is not, without being to say what is then contained in it” (KrV, B 149). At the level of transcendental reflection, it is valid to *think* that the “object in general”, or the “transcendental object”, provides the grounds for appearances. In a sense, we assume the output of L3, but linked now with the complexity of the perspective of discursive understanding, which is to a certain extent independent of any particular sensibility. So,

**categories are not restricted in thinking by the conditions of our sensible intuition, but have an unbounded field**, and only the cognition of objects that we think, the determination of the object,

requires intuition; **in the absence of the latter, the thought of the object can still have its true and useful consequences for the use of the subject's reason, which, however, cannot be expounded here**, for it is not always directed to the determination of the object, thus to cognition, but rather also to that of the subject and its willing. (KrV, B 166n. emphasis added)<sup>12</sup>

The concept of things in themselves that emerges allows us to determine *the boundaries of our sensible cognition*:

The understanding accordingly bounds sensibility without thereby expanding its own field, and in warning sensibility not to presume to reach for things in themselves but solely for appearances **it thinks of an object in itself, but only as a transcendental object, which is the cause of appearance (thus not itself appearance), and that cannot be thought of either as magnitude or as reality or as substance, etc.** (since these concepts always require sensible forms in which they determine an object); it therefore remains completely unknown whether such an object is to be encountered within or without us, whether it be out along with sensibility or whether it would remain even if we took sensibility away. If we want to call this object a noumenon because the representation of it is nothing sensible, we are free to do so. But since we cannot apply any of our concepts of the understanding to it this representation still remains empty for us, and **serves for nothing but to designate the boundaries of our sensible cognition** and leaves open a space that we can fill up neither through possible experience nor through the pure understanding. (KrV, B 344f., emphasis added)

When Kant writes about the object in itself as the “cause of appearance”, he is not thinking of any noumenal causality. This is only an improper use of the concept of causality, which is inevitable in the second order discourse of transcendental reflection (a similar point to the case where Kant writes that the transcendental apperception exists, see KrV, B 159). In L3 Kant fix the boundaries of our perception, while in the fourth level he draws the *boundaries of our sensible cognition*. In some manner, both have the same objective extension, but they involve

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<sup>12</sup> “But if (...) I leave out intuition, then there still remains the **form of thinking, i.e., the way of determining an object for the manifold of a possible intuition. Hence to this extent the categories extend further than sensible intuition, since they think objects in general seeing to the particular manner (of sensibility) in which they might be given.** But they do not thereby determine a greater sphere of objects, **since one cannot assume that such objects can be given without presupposing that another kind of intuition than the sensible kind is possible**, which, however, we are by no means justified in doing.” (KrV, B 309, emphasis added)

different meanings, since the context of L4 allows us *to think of a problematic extension*. In other words,

the concept of a noumenon is therefore merely a *boundary concept*, in order to limit the pretension of sensibility, and therefore only of negative use. But it is nevertheless **not invented arbitrarily, but is rather connected with the limitation of sensibility**, yet without being able to posit anything positive outside of the domain of the latter. (KrV, B 310, emphasis added)

So, although the extension has only a problematic meaning, it is not arbitrary but necessary. In L3 we only assume the potential existence of other kinds of sensibility, while in L4 we are dealing not only with the nature of the relationship of our understanding to our sensibility.

In L4 the particular feature of illusion is to assume that mere logical forms can determine real objects.

We therefore think something in general, and on the one side determine it sensibly, only we also distinguish the object represented in general and *in abstracto* from this way of intuiting it; thus there remains to us a **way of determining it merely through thinking** that is, to be sure, **a merely logical form without content**, but that **nevertheless seems to us** to be a way in the **object exists in itself** (*noumenon*), without regard to the intuition to which our sensibility is limited. (KrV, B 345f., emphasis added)

The illusion that the object in general exists in itself or that we might do *a priori* judgments about it will never disappear, yet through transcendental reflection its problematic reality can be asserted and thus the error avoided.

As mentioned above, the proper interpretation here is the “two aspect” reading. The same object might be considered, on the one hand, as a pure object of thought, and on the other, as an object of possible knowledge when related to our sensible intuition. It is imperative for Kant’s critical project to ensure that the *same objects* might be considered from two different perspectives, because only then can he conclude, in the solution of the *Third antinomy*, that human beings might be considered both under the laws of nature and under that of freedom. Otherwise, we could only consider that human beings are in this life under the laws of nature and in another life (afterlife) under that of freedom. This would not enable us to find a way to think freedom and morality as compatible in *this world*. This outcome is only possible

if in L4 we have *the legitimacy*, which means *a positive argument to think the same object* from two different perspectives. In L3, the “two aspect” interpretation was a mere possibility (or better, it was not an impossibility), but in L4 it is a necessary outcome.

### **Fifth Layer (L5) - Reason’s limitation of understanding – Transcendental Dialectics**

In L5, Kant deals with the limitation of understanding by the faculty of reason (strict sense). In the structure of the first *Critique*, this concept of things in themselves appears at the end of *Transcendental Analytics*, but it is actually used and justified in *Transcendental Dialectics*. Now, the concept of things in themselves is more used as noumena and understood with recourse to the “two world” interpretation. So, we are thinking of objects without any empirical counterpart, such as God.

In L5 we consider the possibility of *a different kind of understanding*, an intuitive one. In this case, categories would not be rules for synthesis, and, therefore intuitive understanding could grasp the object as an analytical whole. Sometimes, Kant names it as an *intellectus archetypus*<sup>13</sup>, which might be a kind of divine understanding that could even create the object simply by thinking of it. Even if we cannot have a clear notion of how it might work, the transcendental reflection has to assume its possibility, otherwise we would be saying that our kind of understanding is the only possible, which would be a dogmatic position<sup>14</sup>. It follows from this assumption that things in themselves or noumena indicate other kinds of objects, distinct from those that appear to us. So, the “two world” interpretation finds here its proper place, since we are not considering a numeric identity between

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<sup>13</sup> Kant mentions this possibility in KrV, B 145 and develops it further in *CJ*, paragraph 77.

<sup>14</sup> See: “the human understanding cannot even form for itself the least concept of another possible understanding, either one that would intuit itself or one that, while possessing a sensible intuition, would possess one of a different kind than one grounded in space and time.” (KrV, B 139) And also: “it would be an even greater absurdity for us not to allow any things in themselves at all, or for us to want to pass off our experience for the only possible mode of cognition of things – hence our intuition in space and time for the only possible intuition and **our discursive understanding for the archetype of every possible understanding** – and so to want to take principles of the possibility of experience for universal conditions on things in themselves.” (Prol, AA 04: 350f.)

appearances and noumena. In other words, the concept of noumena dictates here the possibility of a set of things that have their existence in an intelligible world. We find this position in the following passages:

Nevertheless, if we call certain objects, as appearances, beings of sense because we distinguish the way in which we intuit them from their constitution in itself, then it already follows from our concept that to these we as it were oppose, as objects thought merely through the understanding, **either other objects** conceived in accordance with the latter constitution, even though we do not intuit it in them, **or else other possible things, which are not objects of our senses at all** and call these beings of understanding (*noumena*). (KrV, B 306, emphasis added)

Now since such an intuition, namely intellectual intuition, lies absolutely outside our faculty of cognition, the use of the categories can by no means reach beyond the boundaries of the objects of experience; and although beings of understanding certainly correspond to things of sense, and **there may even be beings of understanding to which our sensible faculty of intuition has no relation at all, our concepts of understanding**, as mere forms of thought for our sensible intuition, **do not reach these in the least**. (KrV, B 308f., emphasis added, see also KrV, B 344.)

If in L4 we had the confirmation of the “two aspect” interpretation, in L5 we have the confirmation of the “two world” reading.

Conditional knowledge is the only one that the sensible world allows, i.e., appearances are known always in relation to our faculty of mind, which works through synthesis. Appearances are always conditioned, which means that they are always dependent on other conditions. In this case, the series of conditions remains always incomplete. Reason *feels a need* to end this incompleteness and therefore it “removes” the categories from the function of synthesizing intuitions and applies them to *thinking* the unconditioned<sup>15</sup>. In other words, we have a “higher need than that of merely spelling out

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<sup>15</sup> See: “Reason demands this in accordance with the principle: *If the conditioned is given, then the whole sum of conditions, and hence the unconditioned, is also given*, through which alone the was possible. Thus *first*, the transcendental ideas will really be nothing except categories extended to the unconditioned, and the former may be brought into a table ordered according to the headings of the latter.” (KrV, B 436)



appearances according to a synthetic unity in order to be able to read them as experience” (KrV, B 370). Therefore, an internal division emerges in our faculty of understanding. On the one hand, Kant starts to call understanding in a strict sense the faculty of categories that determine appearances, while, on the other, he calls reason in a strict sense the faculty of understanding that projects itself outside the conditional use of categories and creates other kinds of conceptual representations called transcendental ideas. While, in L4, understanding had laid the boundaries of sensibility, now, in L5, it is reason that limits our understanding. In this case, the concept of noumena or things in themselves indicates other kinds of entities, which do not appear to us. Those are pure intelligible and unconditional things. Kant is careful enough not to state the existence of said intelligible things, because this would be a dogmatic move. What he does state is the transcendental possibility of those entities as pure intelligible things of our ideas.

In *Prolegomena* we find a detailed characterization of the meaning and utility of the distinction drawn in L5:

**Now reason clearly sees: that the sensible world could not contain this completion, any more than could therefore all of the concepts that serve solely for understanding that world:** space and time, and everything that we have put forward under the name of the pure concepts of the understanding. The sensible world is nothing but a chain of appearances connected in accordance with universal laws, which therefore has no existence for itself; it truly is not the thing in itself, and therefore it necessarily refers to that which contains the ground of those appearances, to beings that can be cognized not merely as appearances, but as things in themselves. **Only in the cognition of the latter can reason hope to see its desire for completeness in the progression from the conditioned to its conditions satisfied for once. (...) We should, then, think for ourselves an immaterial being, an intelligible world, and a highest of all beings (all noumena), because only in these things, as things in themselves, does reason find completion and satisfaction,** which it can never hope to find in the derivation of the appearances from the homogeneous grounds of those appearances; and we should think such things for ourselves because the appearances **actually do relate to something distinct from them** (and so entirely heterogeneous), in that appearances always presuppose a thing in itself, and so provide notice of such a thing, whether or not it can be cognized more closely. (Prol, AA 04: 353ff., emphasis added)

So, it is only with the “two world” perspective that we might think about beings with no empirical counterpart, such as God. It is only

at L5 that Kant is able to ground his theory of the regulative use of ideas. When we think of a wise creator of nature, we do not determine the existence of God, but we *think* of it as a being that “exists” outside the realm of appearances (see KrV, B 589) and from which we might think the articulate whole of possible experience. In *Prolegomena* we find one of the best descriptions of this move:

**Experience, which contains everything that belongs to the sensible world, does not set a boundary for itself: From every conditioned it always arrives merely at another conditioned.** That which is to set its boundary must lie completely outside it, and this is **the field of pure intelligible beings**. For us, however, as far as concerns the *determination* of the nature of these intelligible beings, this is an empty space, and to that extent, if dogmatically determined concepts are intended, we cannot go beyond the field of possible experience. (...) **But setting the boundary to the field of experience through something that is otherwise unknown to it is indeed a cognition that is still left to reason from this standpoint**, whereby reason is neither locked inside the sensible world nor adrift outside it, but, **as befits knowledge of a boundary, restricts itself solely to the relation of what lies outside the boundary to what is contained within.**

Natural theology is a concept of this kind, on the boundary of human reason, since reason finds itself compelled to look out toward the idea of a supreme being (and also, in relation to the practical, to the idea of an intelligible world), **not in order to determine something with respect to this mere intelligible being (and hence outside the sensible world), but only in order to guide its own use within the sensible world in accordance with principles of the greatest possible unity (theoretical as well as practical)**, and to make use (for this purpose) of the relation of that world to a free-standing reason as the cause of all of these connections – **not, however, in order thereby merely to fabricate** a being, but, since beyond the sensible world there must necessarily be found something that is thought only by the pure understanding, in order, in this way, **to determine this being, though of course merely through analogy.** (*Prol.* AA 04: 360f., emphasis added)

*Analogy* is what enables us to insert some content in the concept of God (see also KrV, B 594). This determination is merely regulative, which means that we do not know anything objectively about God as such, not even if it actually exists (in the sense of the proper use of the category of existence). So, this *analogical determination*, which enables us to make a regulative use, is necessary *when* we want to go

beyond every *given* experience and deal with the *field of possible experience*, which is the intention of *scientific theories*.

Although it is **only an idea (*focus imaginarius*)** – i.e., a point from the concepts of the understanding do not really proceed, since it lies entirely outside the bounds of possible experience nonetheless still serves to obtain these concepts the greatest unity alongside the greatest extension. Now of course it is from this that there arises the deception, as if these lines of direction were shot out from an object lying outside the field of possible empirical cognition as object are seen behind the surface of a mirror); yet **this illusion** (which can be prevented from deceiving) **is nevertheless indispensably necessary if besides the objects before our eyes we want to see those that lie far in the background, i.e., when, in our case, the understanding wants to go beyond every given experience** (beyond this part of the whole of possible experience), and hence wants to take the measure of its greatest possible and uttermost extension. (KrV, B 272 f. emphasis added)

The peculiar feature of illusion in L5 is to consider those intellectual entities as actually existing. The illusion in itself is useful and even necessary when we want to make regulative use of ideas. The error happens only when we let the illusion deceive us and actually state the existence of said entities rather than merely acting *as if* they were real. In other words, the “two aspect” interpretation cannot deal properly with the assumptions demanded by the regulative use of ideas, such as the assumption of God. According to the regulative use of ideas, we have to act and think as if God were real, even if we are not determining Its existence in a proper sense. It is only with the distinction between a sensible and an intelligible world, which implies the logical-reflexive assumption of an intelligible world, that we might grasp the full dimension of the regulative use of ideas.

Even if said regulative use of ideas solely implies an “as if”, which does not constitutively determine the noumena, we still have to assume *a kind of noumenal reality*. So, we could talk about a noumenal ontology on the level of mere *thinking*,<sup>16</sup> an ontology of merely

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<sup>16</sup> Someone could argue that the “two perspective” interpretation would deal properly with this kind of assumption, since we are dealing merely with an analogical determination in thinking. However, even then we would be stating more than only a fiction. We are assuming, at the level of thinking, that there is an entity that does not have any empirical counterpart. So, the case of God is different from the transcendental I think, which we could state that has an empirical counterpart. For this reason, I do not think that the “two perspective” interpretation could deal well with what is required by the regulative use of ideas.

intelligible beings, which cannot be reduced to the concept of a mere fiction but is object of a regulative theory. This means that when we think of a systematic and organized nature, which must be thought of as a product of a wise intellect, we must then inevitably *think of the existence* of such an intellectual being, that we normally call God. So, we are inevitably assuming the point of view of “two worlds”, which lacks a numerical identity of entities. In other words, without the “two world” interpretation sustained in L5 we would not be able to understand an important aspect of the transcendental reflection developed in *Transcendental Dialectics*.

If in L3 Kant draws the boundaries of our *possible perception* and in L4 he deals with those of our *possible knowledge*, now, at L5, the concept of noumena allows him to draw the boundaries of *possible experience*, that is intrinsically related to our capacity of build scientific theories. Only with the regulative use of ideas we may surpass the simple “spelling out appearances according to a synthetic unity in order to be able to read them as experience” (KrV, B 370). The difference between real and possible experience is the concept of nature understood as a system of laws, which needs large coordinated spheres of scientific theories. Only with the maxims of reason our understanding can reach systematic unity and then draw the boundaries of possible experience. Therefore,

[t]he understanding constitutes an object for reason, just as sensibility does for the understanding. To make systematic the unity of all possible empirical actions of the understanding is a business of reason, just as the understanding connects the manifold of appearances through concepts and brings it under laws. (KrV, B 292)

In L4 the understanding was limiting our sensibility, while in L5, reason is what limits our understanding.

Now since every principle that establishes for the understanding a thoroughgoing unity of its use *a priori* is also valid, albeit only indirectly, for the object of experience, the principles of pure reason will also have objective reality in regard to this object, yet not so as to *determine* something in it, but only to indicate the procedure in accordance with which the empirical and determinate use of the understanding in experience can be brought into thoroughgoing agreement with itself, by bringing it *as far as possible* into connection with the principle of thoroughgoing unity; from into connection it is derived. (KrV, B 693f)

In the transcendental layers, Kant never theoretical determines the noumena nor is he deceived by transcendental illusion. He manages to find different aspects and uses of the problematic concept of things in themselves to draw different kinds of boundaries, which do not stand in opposition to each other, but are systematically coordinated. In L5, with the regulative use of ideas, he manages to expand our experience as far as possible. So, for example, the regulative principle that nature does not make leaps in its products, helps naturalists to search for a gradual process of evolution, even when they do not have yet any real experience of it. Now, this teleological principle of investigation does not determine any supra sensible being, yet it is not merely a fiction that we might voluntarily create to satisfy whatever needs we have and then put aside as an unnecessary tool. The concept of God is not a mere fiction, but it is also not a real entity that we may know. Similar to the transcendental “I”, “God” functions here as a transcendental assumption in case we want to use the maxims of reason to structure scientific theories. Taking the regulative use of ideas seriously implies attributing to it *by analogy categories such as existence*. We are dealing, then, in the critical boundaries of the transcendental reflection with a kind of *noumenal ontology*, at least as far as *thinking* is concerned. Kant stresses, however, that we can never be careful enough when dealing with the regulative use of reason and the illusion of intelligible beings intrinsic related to it. Without the *CPR* we may fall easily into the common errors of lazy reason (*ignava ratio*) and perverted reason (*perversa ratio*) (see KrV, B 717f.).

#### **Sixth Layer (L6) – Reason’s practical determination of noumena – Doctrine of Method**

The perspective changes completely in L6. Kant no longer deals with reason in its theoretical use, but with the practical use by which reason establishes what has to be done. There is some difficulty with the label “transcendental” here, at least in the strict sense as defined in the beginning of the first *Critique* (see KrV, B 25; 80). Kant himself was sometimes flexible with his terminology. “Transcendental” has also a more generic meaning indicating the philosophical level of

investigation (see KrV, B 844). Therefore, even if L6 concerns the practical use of reason, it is still the object of transcendental reflection.

In L5, the concept of noumenon is determined by analogy and has a solely regulative use. In L6, noumena stands for those unconditioned ideas determined by practical reason. In L5, the intention was drawing the boundaries of the field of possible experience, while in L6 the objective is to legitimize another kind of reality inside the field of possible experience. In L5, God is *thinking* as a higher understanding that creates a systematic nature, from which we are part. In L6, at least in the first *Critique*, God is thought as the *wise moral* author of the world that *motivates* us to act morally. While in L5, the concept of God helps us to know the empirical laws of nature and their particular forms, in L6 God allows us to *believe* in the creation of a moral world.

I call the world as it would be if it were in conformity with all moral laws (as it *can* be in accordance with the *freedom* of rational beings and *should* be in accordance with the necessary laws of *morality*) *a moral world*. **This is conceived thus far merely as an intelligible world**, since abstraction is made therein from all conditions (ends) and even from all hindrances to morality in it (weakness or impurity of human nature). Thus far **it is therefore a mere, yet practical, idea, which really can and should have its influence on the sensible world, in order to make it agree as far as possible with this idea. The idea of a moral world thus has objective reality**, not as if it pertained to an object of an intelligible intuition (for we cannot even think of such a thing), but as pertaining to the sensible world, although as an object of pure reason in its practical use and a *corpus mysticum* of the rational beings in it, insofar as their free choice under moral laws has thoroughgoing systematic unity in itself as well as with the freedom of everyone else. (KrV, B 836, emphasis added)

The concept of a moral world directly says that the intelligible world has objective practical reality. It allows for a kind of theoretical determination but only with practical intentions or for a practical use (see KrV, B 844f).

In L5 we can only make conditional use of the concept of noumenon, namely, we might think of an intelligible world in case we want to have a regulative use of ideas. This conditionality results from our *theoretical interest* in drawing the *boundaries of with our possible experience*. We might decide to decline this regulative use of ideas, at the cost of not having an interconnected system of empirical experience. In L6 there is no such conditionality, so there is no other option. Reason

in its practical use requires us to assume *noumenal reality*. In this sense, practical reason determines the noumena, but only for a practical use and with a practical intent, so we might have proper and interconnected use of practical ideas.

Now since we must necessarily represent ourselves through reason as belonging to such a [intelligible] world, although senses do not present us with anything except a world of appearances, **we must assume** the moral world to be a consequence of our conduct in the sensible world; and since the latter does not offer such a connection to us, we must assume the former to be a world that is future for us. Thus God and a future life are two presuppositions that are not to be separated from the **obligation that pure reason imposes on us** in accordance with principles of that very same reason. (KrV, B 839, emphasis added)

This practical determination of noumena is not intended to overthrow the previous boundaries built up from L3 to L5. This determination involves, instead, theoretical assumptions only *with a strictly practical aim*.

And thus, in the end, pure reason, although only in its practical use, always has the merit of connecting with our highest interest a cognition that mere speculation can only imagine but never make valid, and of thereby making it into not a demonstrated dogma but yet an absolutely necessary presupposition for reason's most essential ends. (KrV, B 846)

The boundaries from L3 to L5 are respected because the ideas of God, practical freedom, and future life are not used to derive any theoretical statement for nature and knowledge (as happens in the mistake of perverted reason). Actually, a theoretical determination (as the use of the category of existence to think about God) is carried out only *for the benefit* of moral laws and freedom. In *Critique of practical reason* Kant expresses this point more clearly and states that theoretical reason agrees to *grant* its categories, such as existence, so practical reason might represent the possibility of its entire object, the highest good (see KpV, AA 05: 135). So, the doctrine of postulates of practical reason, that states the existence of freedom, the immorality of the soul and God is a *theoretical concession of categories for practical purposes*.

Both in L5 and L6, reason must use analogical procedures in order to think the content of ideas, but in L5 a conditional need had driven us to talk about our possible experience, while in L6 an *unconditional need drives us for the benefit our practical experience*.

This unconditional need is not limited to the sphere of the question “What should I do?”, but also includes the sphere of “What may I hope?”. The obligatory nature of moral law requires us to have a practical use of ideas.

Two kinds of illusion arise in L6 and work in different directions. The first follows the direction from L5 to L6, while the second follows the direction from L6 to L5. So, on the one hand (from L5 to L6), there is the illusion that deceives practical empiricists or sceptics who restrict practical knowledge on the basis of what is normally done. In this regards Kant states:

For when we consider nature, experience provides us with the rule and is the source of truth; but with respect to moral laws, experience is (alas!) the **mother of illusion**, and it is most reprehensible to derive the laws concerning what *I ought to do* from what *is done*, or to want to limit it to that. (KrV, B 373, emphasis added)

On the other hand (from L6 to L5), there is the illusion of pushing practical assumptions into the theoretical domain. Thus, this illusion regards moral theology as a transcendental one, namely, the practical determination of noumena is used to derive a set of theoretical propositions for theoretical reason, which ends by destroying the morally legislative reason itself and also sciences. This point is stressed in the following passage:

Moral theology is therefore only of immanent use, namely for fulfilling our vocation here in the world by fitting into the system of all ends, not for fanatically or even impiously abandoning the guidance of a morally legislative reason in the good course of life in order to connect it immediately to the idea of the highest being, which would provide a transcendental use but which even so, like the use of mere speculation, must pervert and frustrate the ultimate ends of reason. (KrV, B 847)

In L5, the noumena are determined through analogy, resulting in *regulative knowledge*, while in L6 the analogical determination of noumena yields *a belief or faith*. In this sense we should read the famous passage from the Preface B:

I cannot even *assume God, freedom and immortality* for the sake of the necessary practical use of my reason **unless I simultaneously deprive speculative reason of its pretension to extravagant insights**; because in order to attain to such insights, speculative reason would have to help itself to principles that in fact reach only to objects of possible experience, which, if they were to be applied to what cannot be an



object of experience, then they would always actually transform it into an appearance, and thus declare all *practical extension* of pure reason to be impossible. Thus **I had to deny knowledge in order to make room for faith.** (KrV, B XXX, emphasis added)

Characterizing this practical determination of noumena as subject to faith is first proposed in the first *Critique*. In the second *Critique*, some aspects of this faith become practical knowledge. In the latter work, is possible to argue that L6 is divided into two additional categories. The first, let us call it L6a, would be the practical knowledge grounded directly on moral law (the knowledge of freedom as the *ratio essendi* of morality), while the second, which we may call L6b, would become the strict field of practical belief (the belief in God and in a future life or even the believe in the moral progress in history). The former requires a practical constitutive use of reason, while the latter only needs its practical regulative use. This latest distinction, however, is beyond the scope of this work and I have developed it elsewhere<sup>17</sup>.

## Final Remarks

This paper proposes a roadmap to the *Critique of pure reason*, using the concept of things in themselves as its reference point. The topography of the first *Critique* is not simple. We are not dealing with a single plain, but rather with complex contexts and meanings, that are systematically interconnected. In a geological framework, we could say that there are different layers of things in themselves, and each one has a peculiar meaning and occupies a specific argumentative context. Each layer deals also with a peculiar kind of illusion and is subject to a particular type of deception. Even if Kant is not always rigorous in the use of words, I think that we might find in each layer *some terminological prevalence*. So, in the first three layers Kant *usually* uses the expression “thing in itself”. In the fourth layer he tends to use the concept of “transcendental object” or object in itself. In the fifth layer we find more often “noumena” and “intelligible world” or “intelligible

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<sup>17</sup> I have dealt with some aspects of this distinction in Klein (2013, 2014, 2017, and 2019).

being”, while in the sixth layer we see both “intelligible world” and “moral world”<sup>18</sup>.

I believe that this interpretation enables us to reconcile longstanding disagreements in the secondary literature about how to interpret the diverse and apparently contradictory passages of the first *Critique*. Some scholars have gone so far as to declare the impossibility to decide between the “two world” and the “two aspect” interpretations as the textual evidence appears in roughly equal amounts (see Wood, 2005, 63f). I followed the hermeneutical principle constitutive of Kant’s transcendental philosophy, namely, the contextual analysis of faculties and their respective representations and proper use. The unifying ground of all the different meanings of things in themselves is the following: firstly, all meanings are interconnected in a single framework in the sense that each level is reframed by the next; secondly, at least at philosophical level, all meanings are grounded on the transcendental reflection and there has not been any theoretical *constitutive* determination of them; third, each concept is used in order to identify the adequate use of a faculty and a specific kind of illusion; fourth, in addition to the lack of contradiction, all meanings actually allow and even require the former levels, so they work as a teleological whole that gives our reason the broader possible scope. In other words, each level has its meaning articulated with the antecedent and subsequent levels, so reason could reach the broader theoretical and practical use as an articulated whole.

Even if we are unable to theoretically know things in themselves in a transcendental sense, we can justify different concepts and we can make different *positive uses of them*, both to benefit of our knowledge and in order to framing our agency. Using a building metaphor (which Kant also frequently uses), we could say that each layer constitutes a new floor in the first *Critique* building. In a sense, each floor has the same area and uses the material available in the “land of truth”. As we build up and get a higher perspective, we do not leave the island, but we get a better view of its boundaries and its inner relations.

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<sup>18</sup> I tend also to agree that the variations of terminology can also be related with Kant’s intention to discuss some specific issue of the history or philosophy (see De Boer 2014), but again I do not think that he is always very strict in his use of terminology.

This land, however, is an island, and enclosed in unalterable boundaries by nature itself. It is the land of truth (a charming name), surrounded by a broad and stormy ocean, the true seat of illusion, where many a fog bank and rapidly melting iceberg pretend to be new lands and, ceaselessly deceiving with empty hopes the voyager looking around for new discoveries, entwine him in adventures from which he can never escape and yet also never bring to an end. (KrV, B 294f.)

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**Abstract:** In this paper I argue that in the first *Critique* and in the *Prolegomena* Kant's distinction between Appearances and Things in themselves do not belong to a single, one-dimensional system, but actually entails six different layers. Each layer has a particular perspective on the concept of things in themselves, which is used for drawing specific boundaries regarding appearances and is related to a particular kind of illusion. I also argue that these six different meanings of things in themselves are systematically articulated according the broader use of reason in its theoretical and practical field.

**Keywords:** Things in themselves, appearances, illusion, theoretical and practical interests.

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