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ARTICLE

KANT ON THE INAPPLICABILITY OF THE CATEGORIES TO THINGS IN THEMSELVES[1]

Markus Kohl

This paper addresses the question of what we can legitimately say about things in themselves in Kant's critical doctrine. Many Kant scholars believe that Kant allows that things in themselves can be characterized through the unschematized or 'pure' concepts of our understanding such as 'substance' or 'causality'. However, I show that on Kant's view things in themselves do not conform to the unschematized categories (given their standard discursive meaning): the pure categories, like space and time, are merely subjective forms of finite, discursive cognition. I then examine what this interpretation might entail for central aspects of Kant's system such as his doctrine of noumenal freedom.

KEYWORDS: Kant; things in themselves; categories; discursive cognition; freedom; noumena; *Critique of Pure Reason*; transcendental idealism; noumenal affection; divine intellect

INTRODUCTION

On a metaphysical (as opposed to 'methodological') reading of Kant's transcendental idealism, Kant believes that there is a noumenal world of non-spatiotemporal things in themselves. Many commentators, myself included, are attracted to such a reading.[2] This reading raises the question of what we can legitimately say about the properties of things in themselves. On a

[1]For helpful feedback, I am grateful to Richard Aquila, five anonymous referees of this journal, the editors Michael Beaney and Alix Cohen, and especially Nick Stang (for invaluable comments on multiple drafts). I also thank Stephanie Basakis for her constant support and encouragement.

[2]I cannot discuss the methodological reading (espoused by Allison, *Kant's Transcendental Idealism*) in any detail here. For a good recent critique, see Allais, 'Transcendental Idealism and Metaphysics'. I argue for a metaphysical interpretation of Kant's idealism in Kohl ('Kant on Freedom, Idealism and Standpoints'). One major problem for the anti-metaphysical reading is Kant's insistence that unless space and time ontologically depend upon our mind (cf. A42/B59; B69; A492/B520), synthetic a priori (e.g. geometrical) knowledge is impossible (A47–49/B64–66). The anti-metaphysical reading tries to marginalize this strand of Kant's thought

dominant view, we can characterize noumena by using the unschematized or 'pure' categories, that is, the fundamental concepts of our understanding insofar as they abstract from spatiotemporal criteria of application.[3] This view is based on powerful reasons: it seems that Kant must accept that we can legitimately *think* (if not *cognize*[4]) things in themselves through the pure categories, because (for instance) the pure concept of causality is needed to represent central features of Kant's system such as noumenal affection or noumenal freedom.

However, in this paper I argue that there is a central strand in Kant's critical doctrine which suggests that things in themselves are uncharacterizable by the pure categories: noumena are not substances, do not stand in causal relations, etc. I argue for this view by showing that there is strong textual evidence for attributing to Kant the following two claims: (1) Noumena have categorial properties (i.e. the properties that we represent through the pure categories) only if an intuitive, divine intellect would represent them as having such properties. (2) An intuitive intellect would not represent noumena as having categorial properties. From (1) and (2) it follows that noumena do not have categorial properties.

I examine claims (1) and (2) in the first and second sections, respectively. In the third and fourth sections, I clarify what implications my reading might have for Kant's overall doctrine.

NOUMENA AND DIVINE INTUITION

I attribute (1) to Kant because I believe that Kant accepts a more general principle: how an intuitive intellect would represent things is the one decisive measure for what things are in themselves (and, *a fortiori*, for whether or not things in themselves possess categorial properties). Call this Principle (P). In this section, I argue for (P) by showing that Kant is committed to two further principles. First, only the representations of an intuitive intellect would provide cognizance of things in themselves. Call this Principle (O). Second, an intuitive intellect would have a complete maximum of cognition: it would cognize every property of every thing in itself. Call this Principle (C). (O) and (C) jointly entail (P) and (*a fortiori*) (1).

Principle (P)

Principle (O)

Principle (C)

(cf. Allison, *Kant's Transcendental Idealism*, 117–18), but this seems implausible (cf. Ameriks, *Kant's Theory of Mind*, 260, 271).

[3]This view can be attributed to (among others): Adams, 'Things in Themselves'; Ameriks, *Kant's Theory of Mind*; Ameriks, *Interpreting Kant's Critiques*; Guyer, 'The Deduction of the Categories'; Hogan, 'Noumenal Affection'; Jauernig, 'Kant's Critique of the Leibnizian Philosophy'; Langton, *Kantian Humility*; Pereboom, 'Kant's Amphiboly'; Stang, 'Who is Afraid of Double Affection?'; Watkins, 'Kant's Transcendental Idealism and the Categories'; Watkins, *Kant and the Metaphysics of Causality*.

[4]Most commentators hold that while Kant believes that noumena fall under the pure categories he also thinks that we cannot use the pure categories to cognize noumena. A notable exception is Langton, *Kantian Humility*.

(O) can be attributed to Kant along the following lines. Kant's concept of a thing in itself is the concept of a thing that has a constitution which is independent of sensibility (A26–27/B42–43; A252; B306). The things which appear to us in a certain sensible (namely, spatiotemporal) form also have a non-sensible, 'intelligible' constitution in themselves (' … intelligible entities … correspond to sensible entities … '; B309). Hence, in order to cognize things as they are in themselves, one must cognize things according to their non-sensible, intelligible constitution; and this would require a non-sensible kind of intuition (A256/B311–312; A279–280/B335–336) which Kant calls *intellectual*.[5] To put the point another way, since the 'intellectual world' of things in themselves that correspond to sensible appearances does not – unlike the sensible world of appearances – vary according to the differences in the sensibility of (possible) species of finite cognizers (AA4: 451), it could be cognized only by an understanding whose cognition is not subject to the peculiarities of sensible intuition: namely, by an intuitive understanding capable of non-sensible or intellectual intuition.

Kant thus affirms the following dichotomy: any being whose intuition is dependent on the passive reception of sensible data knows only appearances; only a being whose intuition is non-sensible, non-receptive and (thereby) *self-active* could cognize things in themselves. This dichotomy applies even to self-knowledge:

> Everything that is represented through a sense is so far always appearance, and consequently … the subject which is the object of inner sense could be represented through inner sense only as appearance, not as that subject would judge of itself [as it is in itself: see B153] if its intuition were self-active only, that is, were intellectual.
>
> (B69)

This shows Kant's commitment to (O).

The fact that an intuitive intellect is conceived as self-active also bears upon (C). For Kant, the self-activity of intuition signals the absence of dependency and finitude: an intuitive intellect is a divine intellect whose cognition is without limits (B71–72). This entails that such an intellect would cognize the entire whole of non-sensible reality, that is, the entire 'intellectual world' of things in themselves. If there were intelligible beings or properties that divine intellection fails to grasp, then such intellection would, *per impossible*, incur a limitation. According to the Pölitz lectures, Kant equates an intuitive understanding with 'a maximum of understanding' (AA28: 7) that has to be represented as infinite in the

[5]A non-sensible intuition that cognizes things in themselves is an 'intellectual' intuition 'because, what belongs to cognition and is not sensible can have no other name and significance' (AA8: 216).

sense of 'unlimited' (AA28: 52) and that 'must cognize everything at once' (AA28: 103).

The claim (C) that an intuitive intellect would have an unlimited grasp of reality is a considered part of Kant's doctrine. In the Pölitz lectures, Kant traces the cognitive limitations of our own intellect, as well as the unlimited completeness of divine cognition, to the fact that our intellect does whereas an intuitive intellect does not depend for cognition on the application of universal concepts to particular instances (AA28: 42; 103). This point plays a prominent role in the third *Critique* (AA5: 402–409): here Kant explains that what accounts for our cognitive finitude is the need to move from the universal to the particular, or (what amounts to the same) the need to cognize things through the interplay of two distinct sources of cognition: understanding and sensibility. This is the mark of cognitive limitation because our concepts do not by themselves determine the reality of objects: we must await the deliverances of sensibility to discern whether, and to what extent, sensibly given particulars can be connected into a unified system of concepts and laws. By contrast, an intuitive intellect would be freed from this limitation: it would possess 'an intuition of a whole as such' (AA5: 407) in which *all* existent parts of non-sensible reality (as well as their relations) are grasped immediately. 'The possibility of some things that do not exist … would not come into the representation of such a being' (AA5: 403). This shows Kant's commitment to (C).

The notion of an intuitive intellect is also crucial to Kant's distinction between the negative and the positive concept of a noumenon. The former concept represents a thing 'so far as it is not an object of our sensible intuition'. The latter, positive conception 'presuppose[s] a special mode of intuition, namely, the intellectual (…)' (B306–307). One might suggest that positive noumena, qua objects of a 'special mode of' intuition, constitute a special class of things in themselves.[6] However, in view of (C) this cannot be right: the infinite intellectual mode of intuition comprises not just a special subset of things in themselves but 'immediately intuits all objects as they are in themselves' (AA28: 105). Kant does posit two types of intelligible entities at B308–309: those that appear and those that may not appear to our senses. But an intuitive intellect would cognize both: for instance, it would intuit both the complete intelligible character of all those noumena that appear to finite cognizers as their phenomenal selves (AA5: 123) and its own noumenal self which does not appear to finite cognizers. The positive concept of noumena is a *special concept* of things that also fall under the negative concept: it is 'the determinate concept of an [intelligible] entity', whereas the negative concept is 'the wholly indeterminate concept of an intelligible entity' (B307) that 'is not … in any way positive, and does not signify a determinate knowledge of anything' (A252). A positive concept

[6]This seems suggested by Allais, 'Transcendental Idealism and Metaphysics', 10 and Willaschek, 'Phaenomena/Noumena und die Amphibolie der Reflexionsbegriffe', 350.

of noumena 'presupposes' a non-sensible intuition because (via (O)) only an intuitive intellect could have determinate knowledge of noumena.

While Kant rules out that only *some* things in themselves are objects of a non-sensible intuition, he admits that for all we can know *no* things in themselves might be objects of a non-sensible intuition, because 'we have [not] been able to prove that [a non-sensible] intuition is possible' (A252). Here one may wonder: if we do not even know whether an intuitive intellect is possible, why should we think that how such an intellect *would* cognize noumena as being is the decisive measure for what noumena *are* (P)?

Even if agnosticism about the possibility of a divine intellect were Kant's last word,[7] this would not detract from the legitimacy of (P). To illustrate why, consider the following scenario. Suppose a scientist believes: (I) Visible objects are constituted by certain fundamental particles. (II) Due to the limits of our sense organs, we cannot know what these particles are like. (III) We have an abstract idea of the technical machinery (sensors etc.) that would be required for complete cognition of these particles. (IV) For all we know, the production of that machinery might be impossible. Here the scientist can legitimately (albeit not very informatively) say that how we would sense objects with the help of the requisite, potentially impossible machinery is the decisive cognitive measure for what the particles are like.

Kant affirms a (distant) analogue of (I)–(IV): (I*) Objects we know as spatiotemporal appearances have some non-spatiotemporal constitution. (II*) We cannot cognize this constitution. (III*) We have an abstract concept of what kind of cognitive faculty would be required for cognizing this constitution – namely (via (O)), an intellect capable of non-sensible intuition which, as such (via (C)), would cognize the entire intelligible constitution of all existent things. (IV*) For all we can theoretically prove, such an intuition might not exist. If (I*)–(IV*) are correct, so is (P).

(II*) and (IV*) seem beyond dispute. I have argued for (III*) above. (I*) must be accepted on any metaphysical reading of Kant's idealism. Consequently, any such reading must accept (P) and (*a fortiori*) (1): noumena have categorial properties only if an intuitive intellect would represent them as having such properties.

PURE CATEGORIES AND DIVINE UNDERSTANDING

Proponents of the dominant view need not deny (P) or (1).[8] On this view, it is precisely because the pure concepts of our understanding abstract from all

[7]It is not: we have practical and theoretical grounds (A829/B857; A697–698/B725–726), albeit not proofs, for positing a divine being.

[8](P) (and thereby (1)) seems accepted by Adams, 'Things in Themselves', 806; Ameriks, *Kant's Theory of Mind*, 265–6, 271; Langton, *Kantian Humility*, 45.

conditions of our sensibility that they allow us to represent (however abstractly) the general intelligible constitution of things in themselves.[9]

Now, Kant emphasizes that 'at least our human' understanding is a faculty for *discursive* cognition whose concepts rest on functions for unifying various given representations under one common representation (A68/B92–93). Likewise, Kant's definitions of *judgement* always refer to the idea that a judgement brings different representations to the unity of consciousness (B141; AA4: 305; AA9: 101).[10] Since judgement is an act of unifying representations in one consciousness, the various different *forms of judgement* correspond to different types of acts of unifying representations (A69/B93–94). Hence, the various logical forms of judgements are identified as discursive conditions for combining representations in one complex thought: for instance, under the categorical form of judgement a subject concept (e.g. body) yields the condition for asserting a predicate (e.g. divisibility).

It is precisely these logical forms of judgement that remain after all conditions of sensibility have been removed from the categories (A241–242/B300–301; A349). For instance, after the temporal schema of permanence has been removed from the concept of substance, what remains is the categorical form of judgement that represents the logical contrast between subject and predicate (A242/B301). Hence, the unschematized concept of substance is 'a condition under which one cognition belongs with one another in one consciousness […] namely: as subject of the inherence of marks' (AA9: 121–122). Now, since the unschematized categories are conditions for bringing representations to the unity of consciousness, it seems that they cannot play a role in the kind of cognition that would be achieved by a divine intellect: for such an intellect would not bring a manifold of representations to unity (B145; AA5: 406).

Accordingly, Kant stresses that while the unschematized categories are independent of *human* sensibility they do not reach beyond sensible intuition in general:

> Space and time […] are valid no further than for objects of the senses […]. The pure concepts of the understanding are free from this limitation, and extend to [erstrecken sich auf] objects of intuition in general, be the intuition like or unlike ours, if only it be sensible and not intellectual.
>
> (B148; cf. B150)

When Kant says that the pure categories enable the 'thinking of an object in general' (A248/B305), he means that they give us the concept of an 'object of a sensible intuition in general' (A253; cf. A245). But he denies that they

[9]See Adams, 'Things in Themselves', 806–9; Langton, *Kantian Humility*, 18; Watkins, 'Kant's Transcendental Idealism and the Categories', 199.

[10]For helpful discussion, see Longuenesse, *Kant and the Capacity to Judge* (chap. 4).

also give us the concept of an object of a non-sensible intuition.[11] This is just what one should expect given Kant's identification of the unschematized categories with logical functions of unity. The class of cognizers that stand in need of such functions – the range of discursive cognizers – is potentially broader than the class of human cognizers that intuit things in space and time (A27/B43; B72), but it is more narrow than the class of cognizers as such (AA5: 402–403). In particular, the need to unify given data in one consciousness would arise for any discursive understanding, but it would not arise for 'an understanding which should know its object, not discursively through categories, but intuitively in a non-sensible intuition' (A256/B312). A non-sensible intuition would not operate with 'given' data because only sensible intuitions are received passively (by a finite mind) from existent objects (B129), that is, are derivative rather than original or self-produced (B72). An understanding capable of non-sensible intuition would be non-discursive because only sensible intuitions exhibit a lack of unity or interconnectedness that calls for discursive syntheses (B129–130; B145).

The latter point crucially informs Kant's argument in the first part of the B-version of the transcendental deduction. There Kant argues that 'the principle of the original synthetic unity of apperception', according to which given representations must be brought to a unity of consciousness that enables their relation to an object (B137), applies to all finite cognizers (B138): all such cognizers require an act of synthesis for the unity of consciousness. Kant then argues that synthesis of intuitions must be subject to the categories (B143) because these are the only concepts that allow for an objective combination of given representations which enables a thinker to judge what is the case in a public, intersubjective world (B139–142). He explains that this proof for the validity of the categories 'abstracts from the specific [e.g. spatiotemporal] mode in which the manifold for an empirical intuition is given' (B144), but not from the condition that the manifold of intuitions be *given*; hence the proof has no validity with regard to 'an understanding which is itself intuitive' (B145).

The claim that the unschematized categories 'extend to' all objects of sensible intuition does not entail that these concepts allow us to cognize objects of a (logically possible) sensible, non-spatiotemporal intuition. To acquire cognitive significance, the categories need a criterion of application that derives from the specific character of (forms of) sensible intuition (B150). Unless they can be applied to some actual (for us: spatiotemporal) manifold, they cannot fulfil their conceptual *telos*, that is, bring a given sensible

[11]Baum (*Deduktion und Beweis in Kants Transzendentalphilosophie*, 83f.) invokes AA20: 272 to show that pure categories represent objects of a non-sensible intuition. But Kant ends this passage by stressing that the independence of the categories from space and time means that the categories may also have other forms as substrata, 'if only these forms concern the subjective which a priori precedes all cognition' – thus limiting the pure categories to sensible intuition.

manifold to the unity of consciousness by combining it into the concept of an object (A239/B298; A253; AA4: 452). The pure categories 'extend' further than space and time in the sense that we can think of objects of a (logically possible) non-spatiotemporal, sensible intuition as substances etc. This is an 'empty' thought which is 'of no [cognitive] advantage to us' (B148; cf. A241/B300). But the pure categories do not 'extend' in even this weak sense to objects of non-sensible intuition: objects of an intuitive intellect cannot even be thought as substances etc., because an intuitive intellect would not cognize its objects via discursive functions of unity (AA8: 216; B145; B309).

Here proponents of the dominant view might respond that there is an ambiguity in the notion of a pure category: this notion might refer either to a conceptual function of combination (a ^category^) or to a real way of being (a CATEGORY). While a non-discursive intellect would not employ our (or, indeed, any) concepts (^categories^), it would know that noumena exhibit those features (SUBSTANTIALITY etc.) that we also think through these concepts.[12] Call this the ambiguity-hypothesis.

the ambiguity-hypothesis

This hypothesis raises the question of why Kant never once disambiguates between ^categories^ and CATEGORIES. He does, after all, recognize the need to disambiguate between various senses of 'noumena' because the 'ambiguity [between negative and positive noumena] may occasion serious misapprehension' (B306). If the ambiguity-hypothesis is correct, the confusing notion that pure categories qua CATEGORIES but not qua ^categories^ extend to noumena may occasion similar misapprehension, and this should spur Kant to the corresponding disambiguation. That such disambiguation never occurs in the first *Critique* (or elsewhere) provides *prima facie* evidence against the ambiguity-hypothesis.

But this hypothesis faces deeper problems. Qua defence of the dominant view, the ambiguity-hypothesis must hold that on Kant's view, what we think through ^categories^ accurately represents CATEGORIES. Now if we can accurately represent the (general, abstract) features of things through our pure concepts, this surely implies: (I) our concepts *apply to* those things and (II) our concepts are *valid of* those things. However, Kant explicitly denies (I) and (II) with regard to the relation between our pure concepts and noumena qua objects of intuitive intellection.

Concerning (I), Kant says:

> […] suppose an object of a non-sensible intuition to be given […]. […] what has chiefly to be noted is […] that to such a something not a single one of all the categories could be applied. We could not, for instance, apply to it the concept of substance, meaning something that can exist as subject and never as mere predicate.
>
> (B149; cf. B309; A286/B242–243; AA4: 312)

[12]For a suggestion along those lines, see Adickes, *Kant und das Ding an sich*, 72–4.

Kant here does not make the trivial point that an intuitive intellect, whose cognition would not employ any concepts, would not employ the unschematized concept of substance. Nor does he say, in an agnostic vein, that we cannot know whether we could apply this concept to objects of a non-sensible intuition.[13] Rather, Kant affirms, without any hint of epistemic uncertainty, the non-trivial ('what has to be chiefly noted') point that we could not apply our pure concept of substance to an object of a non-sensible intuition.[14]

Concerning (II), Kant argues (A146–147/B186–187) that it only seems that by removing the schemata from the categories we thereby 'amplify' the categories so that they 'should be valid' of things as they are in themselves as opposed to how they appear. Again, Kant does not merely say that we cannot know whether removing the schemata from the categories would amplify the categories: rather, he denies the amplification hypothesis by emphasizing that the pure categories represent no objects at all (whereas the schematized categories at least represent appearances). Hence, 'our [pure] categories are admittedly not valid' (A286/B342) with regard to objects of a non-sensible intuition.

This raises the question: why does Kant so confidently rule out the applicability of our pure concepts to objects of a non-sensible intuition? One might suggest the following answer: a non-discursive intellect could not intuitively represent a property that we can only represent discursively through ^categories^ because a non-conceptual intellection could not represent a property that is shared among different things. However, for Kant *general* representations need not be *conceptual*: an intuitive intellect might represent things as having features in common through what Kant calls a 'synthetic universal', namely, through an intuition that immediately apprehends the common structure of the various parts that make up the whole of reality (AA5: 407).[15]

I suggest that Kant denies that our pure concepts are valid of, or applicable to, objects of an intuitive intellect because he endorses the following claims: (i) A non-discursive intellect would not represent purely discursive features. (By 'purely discursive features', I mean: properties that wholly depend on a

purely discursive features

[13]Paton (*Kant's Metaphysics of Experience*) endorses this agnostic reading (447–8).

[14]If our pure concept of substance could be applied to the noumenal soul, Kant's criticisms of rationalist psychology at A349–350, A354–356 would be spurious, as they indeed are according to some proponents of the dominant view (cf. Ameriks, *Kant's Theory of Mind*, 66–7).

[15]A universal representation is 'synthetic' if it grasps the connections among all individual parts that constitute a whole through its grasp of the totality of the whole itself. By contrast, a universal representation is *analytic* (conceptual) if it merely represents certain given parts of a whole through universal marks, without determining whether (and how many) further (not yet given) parts of the whole can be subsumed under these marks. See: AA5: 405–410 and Smit, 'Kant on Marks and the Immediacy of Intuition' for helpful discussion. Kant calls the conceptual representation of universality 'analytic' because 'analytic unity of consciousness' – that is, the unity that a number of representations have with respect to some common representation – attaches to any 'conceptus communis': cf. B133–134.

the synthetic universal

discursive manner of representation.) (ii) Our pure concepts signify purely discursive features. (i) is trivially true. I now show that Kant affirms (ii) in three (related) ways.

First, Kant states that the pure categories 'contain exclusively [allein] the synthetic unity of apperception' (B148; cf. A119; A138/B177). Such a unity arises when a manifold of intuitive representations, 'given [to us] from elsewhere' (B145), is combined in the concept of an object (B139). An intuitive intellect would not represent this synthetic unity because it would not synthesize given representations (B138–139; B145; AA5: 406). A synthetic unity of apperception is exhibited only by sensible appearances (B164): the concept of an object as appearance *is* the concept of a unity of given representations (A104–105). This is because appearances are constituted as objects through a synthesis of sensible data that is governed by the categories. Since the pure categories contain exclusively the abstract form of the synthesis that constitutes appearances, they 'serve only to spell [buchstabieren] appearances' (AA4: 312).

Second, Kant states that in the unschematized categories 'nothing can be found other than the mere form of thought' (A567/B595; cf. A50–51/B75; B288). For Kant, thought as such is discursive (AA9: 58; 91), finite, and restricted (by its cognitive dependency on sensible data) to appearances (B71–72). Thus only a discursive understanding qua capacity for thought (A51/B75; B139) represents the form of thought. This form could not enter into the representation of an intuiting understanding that does not think (B71–72; AA8: 399; AA28: 42).

Finally, Kant states that the pure category 'can contain nothing but the logical function to bring the manifold under a concept' (A245). Since this is the *entire possible* content of the pure categories, it follows that an intuitive intellect, which would not bring manifolds under concepts, would not represent what we think in the pure categories.

Kant's emphasis on the purely discursive content of the unschematized categories raises a further problem for the ambiguity-hypothesis. Kant insists that the pure categories are 'merely subjective forms of the unity of understanding' (A287/B344; cf. A567/B595), 'nothing but' logical functions for combining given manifolds (A245; AA4: 324). These characterizations echo Kant's claims about space and time: these are 'nothing but' (A42/B59; A33/B49; A492/B520), 'merely' (A48/B66) 'subjective condition[s] of sensibility' (A26/B42), 'mere form[s] of … intuition' (A48/B66). It should be uncontroversial that in the case of space and time, the phrase, 'nothing but a subjective form' plays the rhetorical function of *excluding* an ambiguity between subjective forms of intuition (^space and time^) and objective ways of being (SPACE AND TIME). So it seems fair to assume that when Kant applies the exact same phrase to pure categories, he also seeks to exclude the possibility that pure categories are objective ways of noumenal being (CATEGORIES). Here the natural response on behalf of the ambiguity-hypothesis would be to stress an obvious

disanalogy: pure categories, unlike space/time, are independent of sensibility; hence, it might be argued, pure categories but not space/time extend (as CATEGORIES) to objects of a non-sensible intuition. But Kant himself rules out this response when he warns us of an 'illusion' that arises from the fact that the categories do not have their origin in sensibility: while they 'seem … to allow of an application extending beyond all objects of the senses', 'as a matter of fact they are nothing but forms of thought' (B305–306). Thus, both space/time and the pure categories are 'mere subjective forms' of finite cognition, namely (respectively) of human sensibility and of thought in general. Therefore, 'neither' of them 'is appropriate to a non-sensible object' (A287/B343): that is, neither of them is appropriate to an object of an understanding that neither sensibly intuits nor thinks. The nature of things in themselves is independent 'of the conditions both of our senses and understanding' (AA4: 322).

the subjectivity of the modal concepts

For a final illustration of this point, consider Kant's remarks about our pure modal concepts in the third *Critique* (AA5: 401–403). He states that the need to distinguish between possibility and actuality lies exclusively in our cognitive need to combine 'two … heterogeneous pieces, understanding for concepts and sensible intuition for objects that correspond to concepts'. If cognition did not depend on those two pieces, then the 'distinction [between the possible and the actual] would not exist'. Hence, possibility, contingency and necessity 'would be unable to come in the representation of [an intuitive understanding]' (AA5: 403).

This illustrates my main point in this section: since the pure categories signify a purely discursive content, an intuitive intellect would not represent noumena as having the categorial features that correspond to this content (2). Assuming that noumena have categorial properties only if an intuitive intellect would represent them as having categorial properties (1), it follows that noumena lack categorial properties.[16]

the need for an intuitive intellect

Since my argument for this conclusion has relied on the notion of an intuitive intellect, I want to clarify some central issues pertaining to this notion. First of all, my justification for placing central interpretive weight on this notion is that Kant explicitly states that his theoretical philosophy requires this notion in two different ways (AA5: 405). The project of the third *Critique* requires the notion of an intuitive intellect as a necessary component of the idea of the purposiveness of nature (an idea which, in turn, is presupposed by our cognitively indispensable faculty of reflective judgement); and the project of the first *Critique* requires the notion of a non-sensible intuition

[16]Notice that my argument for this claim has been mostly based on writings from Kant's critical period. Proponents of the dominant view often appeal to Kant's pre-critical works (Langton, *Kantian Humility*; Watkins, 'Kant's Transcendental Idealism and the Categories'). This raises important issues that I cannot consider here. I only want to note that it is highly controversial whether 'Kant [in his critical doctrine] would retain as much as possible of his pre-Critical view' (Watkins, 'Kant's Transcendental Idealism and the Categories', 293); this is denied, for instance, by Friedman, *Kant and the Exact Sciences*, 36–8.

as the necessary counterpart for our sensible mode of intuition that represents objects only as appearances (B71–72; B145–150; B306–310).

Kant concedes that the idea of exclusively intuitive, self-active cognition must remain mysterious to us: our discursive understanding fails to grasp how an intuition free of the 'blindness' inherent in our sensible intuition would secure reference to objects (B307; A256/B311; AA4: 355–356). We can conceive an intuitive intellect only 'negatively, namely, as non-discursive' (AA5: 406). But our inability to positively comprehend a non-discursive model of cognition does not show that a non-discursive, exclusively intuitive kind of cognition is impossible. Note, moreover, that Kant's position (and my interpretation) requires only that an intuitive intellect is *logically* possible, that is, that the notion of such an intellect is free of contradiction (AA5: 408). Two points are relevant here. First, for Kant the discursive notion of thought is not definitive of the notion of an intellect or understanding. His most abstract definition of 'understanding' is: a spontaneous faculty of cognition, distinct from sensibility. An intuitive intellect would satisfy this definition because it would cognize things through a non-sensible, spontaneous intuition (AA5: 406). Second, the discursive notions of thought, judgement or concept are not built into Kant's definition of cognition. He defines cognition as a conscious, objective representation that is either intuition or concept (A320/B377–378; AA9: 91). So there is no reason to deny that the notion of intuitive intellection is minimally coherent. Since Kant does not make the stronger claim that this notion also has objective reality (i.e. that an intuitive intellect is 'really possible'), he does not incur the burden to explain how such an intellect would operate (cf. A220–221/B267–268).

What does my argument entail about the legitimacy of our thoughts about noumenal reality? The claim that the unschematized categories are inapplicable to noumena allows that we can use the pure categories to think things in themselves as non-sensible correlates of sensible appearances; but it stresses that this representation of noumena is wholly negative and indeterminate (B306–307; A286/B343). The pure categories afford us 'the thought of something in general outside our sensibility' (B307), a representation which 'is not indeed in any way positive' (A252). All we think here is an entirely indeterminate 'something' (B149; cf. B312). About this 'something', we can only make negative judgements such as 'Noumena are not extended' that follow trivially from the analysis of the concept of a non-spatiotemporal object (B149).[17]

the 'negative & indeterminate' thought of things in themselves

[17]On my interpretation these negative analytic judgements are about *things* in themselves, not (as on the methodological reading) merely about our *concept* of things in themselves (see Allison, *Kant's Transcendental Idealism*, 10, 56). One might object, in the vein of Jacobi, that we cannot know that unknowable noumena lack certain features. But here Kant's reply is that negative determinations do not yield 'proper knowledge' (B148; A358–359), which is of positive determinations (A291/B347; A574–575/B502–603). Negative marks are insufficient to cognize (kennen lernen) a thing (AA9: 59–60).

However, many would protest here that Kant's doctrine requires that we *can* positively think of noumena under the pure categories. In the following sections, I address central facets of this problem.

NOUMENAL FREEDOM

Clearly, Kant holds that we can use the pure concept of causality to represent our noumenal freedom. In this section I want to sketch how this might be possible on my interpretation. I begin by showing that Kant's discussion of noumenal freedom incorporates several claims that figured centrally in my above argument.

In the second *Critique*, Kant explains that the idealist framework of the first *Critique* was able to 'defend' the thought of free noumenal causality: it did so by showing that we may regard the causality of a being 'as physically unconditioned insofar as the acting being is a [noumenon]'. But Kant emphasizes that this defence left us with 'a merely negatively thought causality whose possibility was incomprehensible' for theoretical reason (AA5: 48; cf. A557–558/B585–586). The claim that the representation of freedom qua sensibly unconditioned causality is 'merely negative' is a cornerstone of Kant's critical doctrine of freedom (AA4: 446, 458; AA5: 33, 42–43; AA6: 213, 221). It follows, as a specific consequence, from the above mentioned principle that pure categories afford us only a negative concept of noumena: if we purge the pure category of causality of all sensible content, such as the predicate 'physically conditioned', we end up with a thought that lacks all positive determinations and hence represents only an 'indeterminate something' (B149).

This may seem puzzling. When we represent our freedom through the pure concept of causality, as a temporally unconditioned ground of a (series of) effect(s), why is this not a 'positive' representation of our freedom? Here we must take seriously Kant's doctrine that the pure categories by themselves are only empty forms of thought which yield a 'mere play of the understanding' (A239/B398). By this Kant means that the pure categories allow for no minimally determinate representation of any object that corresponds to their content: 'through them alone no object can be thought or determined' (B305); 'we cannot through any example make comprehensible to ourselves what sort of thing is to be meant by such a concept' (A241/B300). If one operated with the concept of causality in abstraction from all temporal conditions, 'one could not … distinguish cause and effect from each other' (A243/B301). Hence, the bare thought of a temporally unconditioned causality fails to satisfy a minimal condition for representing a causal relation. Therefore, we cannot 'positively' comprehend what sort of thing this thought refers to, or whether it refers to anything at all.

Now, my above interpretation suggests: first, a positive determination of freedom requires an appeal to how an intuitive intellect would represent

noumenal freedom (cf. AA5: 31); second, the pure categories are unsuitable for such determination. These two points are also echoed in Kant's discussion of freedom in the second *Critique*. Kant says:

> … the concept of causality, whose application and meaning holds properly [eigentlich] only in relation to appearances, in order to connect them to experiences … is not extended by speculative reason in such a way that it [speculative reason] enlarges its [the concept's] use beyond thought limits.
>
> (AA5: 49)

To enlarge the pure concept of causality beyond appearances, that is, to positively determine our noumenal freedom through this concept, speculative reason would have to show, *per impossible*, how this discursive representation as 'the logical relation of ground and consequence could be synthetically used in a form of intuition which differs from the sensible' (AA5: 49), that is, in a non-sensible, non-discursive cognition.

This shows that the principle of the inapplicability of the pure categories to noumena, as expounded in the first and second sections, is well acknowledged in Kant's discussion of noumenal freedom. But this of course raises the question: if the pure discursive representation of causality applies 'properly' only to sensible appearances, how could we legitimately and positively think of our noumenal will as a free cause? Kant's answer is that the pure categories cease to be 'empty forms of thoughts' and succeed in positively signifying a noumenal object once such an object is presented by practical reason (AA5: 136). Specifically, we can form a positive representation of freedom only if we invoke the idea of the moral law (AA4: 446; AA5: 133; 141). Through the moral law, the negative conception of a physically unconditioned causality achieves 'a positive determination' 'for the first time' (AA5: 48). The 'merely negative thought of an intelligible world … is positive only in the single point that freedom as negative determination is … connected with a positive power and even a causality of reason, which we call a will' to act under the moral law (AA4: 458). But this shifts all weight to the further question: how can the moral law ensure that the pure concept of causality is not (as it previously seemed) confined in its 'proper' application to sensible appearances?

One important point here, which Kant never tires of stressing, is that when we consider ourselves as free noumenal agents our employment of the pure concept of causality is only for a practical purpose (AA5: 49), namely, for the purpose of assessing actions through moral predicates ('good', 'evil', 'permitted') and acting in accordance with our conception of the good (AA5: 141). This purpose does 'not demand […] to theoretically know the constitution of a being insofar as it has free will' (AA5: 56); and so practical reason 'can abstract altogether from the application of this concept [of causality] to objects with a view to theoretical knowledge' (AA5: 49). So, part of Kant's solution is that legitimate positive thought about noumenal freedom

is confined to the pursuit of practical questions framed by the moral law, and does not address theoretical questions such as: why does a free agent act in the way she does?

But Kant makes a further important suggestion. He indicates that the moral law provides a distinctive *practical meaning* for the concept of causality:

> But [reason] does not need to determine the concept that it makes of its own causality as noumenon theoretically for the purpose of cognizing its supersensible existence, and hence does not need to attach meaning to this concept in that [theoretical] manner. For, the concept does achieve meaning anyway, albeit only for a practical use, namely through the moral law. … the meaning provided [for the concept of causality] by reason through the moral law is merely practical. (AA5: 49–50; cf. AA5: 56)

Once the concept of causality has acquired this practical meaning, it can function as a 'category of freedom' as opposed to a 'category of nature' (AA5: 65).

I suggest that we should understand Kant's view here in the following threefold manner. (I) If we tried to employ the concept of causality for the theoretical purpose of cognizing how the noumenal will is constituted, then we would need to invoke the standard theoretical meaning this concept has qua function for combining sensible manifolds into concepts of objects of discursive cognition. In this case our representation would involve a distortion since a noumenon cannot be positively characterized through a discursive function of unity (AA5: 137). (II) Now suppose the moral law could provide a *non-discursive* meaning for the representation of causality. This practically transfigured idea of causality might allow us to represent our noumenal will in a way that theory could admit to be free of error, although theory itself could not make any positive use of that idea (i.e. it could not use this non-discursive representation to determine an object of our essentially discursive theoretical knowledge) (AA4: 459; AA5: 133). (III) However, this idea could be of positive use in practical reasoning that does not aim at theoretical comprehension (which is free 'from the burden that weighs on theory'; AA4: 448).

This suggestion requires elaboration with regard to (II) and (III). (II) raises two main questions: (IIa) What is the practical meaning of 'causality' supposed to be, and how can this meaning be considered non-discursive? (IIb) How does this meaning enable a positive determination of our noumenal freedom?

I begin by addressing (IIa). For Kant, the meaning that our pure concept of causality acquires in practical contexts derives from the relation that obtains between our consciousness of the moral law and our noumenal will or practical reason: the practical idea of noumenal freedom refers to 'a causality of pure reason … insofar as the determining ground of this causality lies in the rational representation of a law of reason' (AA5: 65; cf. AA4: 458; AA5: 42–43).

That is: we consider ourselves agents that freely cause certain effects *only* insofar as we are conscious of being governed by a moral principle that has the status of a normative law of practical rationality. The moral law is the 'ratio cognoscendi' of freedom of will (AA5: 4; 29–32).

Now, there is a striking sense in which our idea of acting freely under the moral law 'transcends' the discursive content of the unschematized concept of causality. This discursive content signifies 'that there is something from which we can conclude to the existence of something else' (A243/B302), that is, it expresses a relation of strict entailment between ground and consequent: if the ground is given the consequent cannot but follow (AA9: 106). This relation does not obtain between the representation of the moral law and our noumenal will. My consciousness of the moral law can, of itself, move me to will the morally right thing (AA6: 393), but this consciousness does *not* function as a ground from which my conformity to the law cannot but follow: my awareness of the law is equally compatible with both the occurrence and the non-occurrence of lawful volition. What prevents the representation of an inferential relation between 'consciousness of the moral law' as ground and 'lawful volition' as consequence is the rational imperfection of my finite will, which makes me apprehend the moral law as an *imperative* or *ought*, and which makes it contingent whether or not my will conforms to the law (AA4: 412–414; AA5: 403–404; AA6: 222). This indeterminacy of our noumenal will vis-à-vis the moral law profoundly affects the way in which our noumenal will can be considered the cause of our observable ('outer') actions: insofar as these actions result from the free exercise of our will, the fact that it is contingent whether our will conforms to the moral law implies that it is also contingent whether we perform morally good or bad actions. Hence the exercise of our free noumenal will, qua subject to moral oughts, may lead to mutually incompatible observable effects: it can produce either morally good or morally bad behaviour. I want to confirm this claim by considering how Kant understands the idea that our 'intelligible character' is the noumenal cause of our observable behaviour in the first *Critique* and in the *Religion*.

In the first *Critique*, Kant's notion of 'intelligible character' centres upon the idea of an atemporal causality of reason (A551/B579), a causality that Kant takes (anticipating the argument of the second *Critique*) to be uniquely revealed by the representation of practical oughts (A547/B575). When we hold agents responsible for morally bad acts such as telling a lie, we invoke 'reason [as] a cause, which could and ought to have determined the behavior of man differently' (A555/B583). We thus presume that the agent's free intelligible causality of reason does not inevitably determine its particular effects. In the *Religion*, the notion of an intelligible character refers to an agent's disposition ('Gesinnung'), a 'highest' maxim that underlies the agent's particular choices (AA6: 37). Kant argues that we must attribute a (freely adopted) evil highest maxim to human beings, but this does not mean that we are forever doomed to morally bad actions: our

evil intelligible character is not an immutable causal ground whose presence signals that certain effects, that is, evil actions, cannot but follow. There is always the possibility of a free revolution of that character (AA6: 47f.): the moral law implies that moral self-improvement is possible for morally corrupt agents *now* (AA5: 41; 50), and so the performance of no particular evil action (that may occur in the future) is inevitable for us *even given* the state of moral corruption that afflicts our noumenal will. But, on the other hand, neither does a *good* finite will inevitably produce good actions: even assuming that a human being has adopted good maxims, the 'frailty' of the human will, which accounts for our 'consciousness of a continuous propensity to transgress the moral law' (AA5: 128) always leaves open the possibility of weak-willed failure to execute good general maxims on particular occasions (AA6: 29).

The impossibility to infer from some intelligible character to particular observable actions is not merely epistemic.[18] If it were, then our moral awareness that alternative options are (for better or worse) genuinely open to us would be illusory. The veridicality of our moral self-conception as finitely rational agents requires that our noumenal will metaphysically speaking lacks grounds that inevitably determine the occurrence of particular actions.[19]

Thus, the practical idea of a free 'causality of reason' under moral oughts discharges the representation of a ground that strictly entails a certain consequence. Since the latter representation is a formal condition for the unity of consciousness, it follows that the practically reconfigured category of causality no longer represents a formal condition for the unity of consciousness: it abstracts not merely from spatiotemporal schemata but also from purely logical conditions of discursive unity, including those expressed by forms for subordinating judgements (such as the form of hypothetical judgement which yields the discursive content of the pure concept of causality; AA9: 104).[20] This concludes my account of how the discursive concept of causality is transformed into a 'category of freedom' that has practical, non-discursive meaning (IIa).

This raises the further issue (IIb): how does this category of freedom afford us a positive representation of our noumenal will qua object of intuitive intellection? Here it is crucial to note that the practically reconfigured

[18]This is also emphasized by Hogan ('How to Know Unknowable Things in Themselves').
[19]See Kohl ('Kant on Determinism and the Categorical Imperative') for further discussion of how these points relate to Kant's incompatibilism about free will.
[20]Since the practical idea of a causality of reason does not allow for stringent 'if, then' reasoning, we cannot invoke this idea for explanatory purposes: for instance, we cannot represent the state of an agent's free will as the sufficient explanatory ground of her observable behaviour. Watkins ('Kant's Transcendental Idealism and the Categories', 412f.) argues that the pure categories allow us to construct a metaphysical theory of agent causation that explains why free actions occur at a specific time. But this flies in the face of Kant's frequent verdict that 'we can explain nothing but what we can reduce to [natural] laws' (AA4: 459; cf. AA5: 49–50; 54–55; 98–99; A550/B578; A557/B585).

category of causality falls outside the scope of my above argument for the inapplicability of pure categories to noumena: since this practical category no longer represents a logical function of synthesis, what it represents might also enter into the representation of a non-synthesizing understanding. The practical category signifies the free causality of a finitely rational will under the moral law: a power to be motivated by the consciousness of duty whose exercise is always consistent with mutually incompatible consequences, namely, with lawful or unlawful actions.[21] Now, Kant stresses that a divine intellect would *justly* hold us morally responsible for our actions (AA5: 123; AA6: 48; 73–74). Hence, a divine intellect would represent both our rational power to conform to the moral law and the contingency of actions that result from the exercise of this power: for these actions can fairly and justly be imputed to us only if they are not inevitably necessary (AA6: 21; 32).[22]

Modal worry

Here one might raise a worry. How could a divine intellect represent the contingency of free human action if (as we saw) modal features such as contingency cannot enter into intuitive intellection? I suggest the following response on Kant's behalf. An intuitive intellect discharges any form of modal representation that is essentially tied to the use of concepts: for example, the representation of logical necessity (A76/B101) which concerns the (analytic) 'connection of concepts' (A226/B279), or the discursive consciousness of mere possibility and contingency that attaches to our awareness that what we merely think through concepts may or may not exist (AA5: 403; 405). However, there is also a distinctively practical, non-discursive sense of modality. The moral law contains the idea of synthetic practical necessity: this idea is not peculiar to discursive thought since a divine being would cognize morally right actions 'as objectively necessary … that is, as [unconditionally] good' (AA4: 412) (although it would not apprehend this necessity through an 'ought'; AA5: 403). The representation of the practical contingency of free human action requires two components: the representation of rational necessity contained in the moral law, and the representation of the rational imperfection that afflicts our noumenal will (AA4: 413–414). Since a divine intellect would cognize both the moral law and our rational imperfection, it could intuit the practical contingency of free, law-governed human agency.

To clarify: I am not claiming that our practical representation of our free noumenal causality is wholly non-discursive and (thereby) wholly adequate to how an intuitive intellect would represent our noumenal will. My more

[21]This raises the question: how can we positively think of a *perfect, divine* being's free rational activity? Kant argues that predicates such as causality 'which find their object only in the sensible world' cannot be used to determine the concept of God as a super-sensible being because this concept 'discharges' all those predicates; but for practical purposes we can represent God through an 'analogy' with our concepts and faculties (AA5: 483–485; AA5: 57).

[22]Accordingly, God's foresight of our actions does not determine that these actions must happen (AA28: 109).

modest suggestion is that this representation shares a certain positive core with how an intuitive intellect would represent our will. Since the elements that constitute this core (the moral law etc.) have only practical significance, this common core does not allow us to comprehend how an intuitive intellect would explain and foresee our actions. But from the standpoint of practical reasoning, we bracket such theoretical issues and focus only on those practical elements that would also be represented in a non-sensible intuition of our noumenal character. Hence, in the context of practical reasoning our positive representation of our non-sensible character does not involve a distortion. This concludes my discussion of (II).

I want to briefly address the third aspect of Kant's account (III): what does the legitimate use of our positive idea of free noumenal causality consist in within the context of practical reasoning? Kant states that while the pure concept of causality must remain 'theoretically empty' because it lacks 'any suitable intuition', 'in compensation meaning is given to it in the moral law and … in a practical sense' that justifies its application to noumena. This suggests that the moral law can simulate, within a practical context, the objectifying role that empirical intuitions play in a theoretical context: the moral law enables an 'exhibition' of the practical idea of causality, 'in concreto in maxims or dispositions [Gesinnungen]' (AA5: 56). That is: the moral law allows us to get a determinate handle on the idea of a free causality of reason by 'exhibiting' the effects that derive from this causality. These effects are inner states of character (and corresponding outer actions) that we practically determine by subsuming them under moral predicates such as 'good' or 'merely permissible'. For Kant, this is a *legitimate* positive employment of the idea of free causality because the practical determination of effects of noumenal causality is governed by standards of practical *knowledge* or *cognition* (A823/B851; AA4: 410; AA5: 4; 43). The judgement that a certain maxim is good, evil or permissible rests upon practical principles that have intersubjective validity (AA5: 19). Indeed, the moral law extends the validity of our exhibition of the effects of a free causality altogether beyond the narrow sphere of human thought: it determines these effects through moral standards that apply to all rational beings, including a divine being (AA4: 389; AA5: 32). In this way, the idea of noumenal causality acquires a determinate practical meaning that can be considered truly objective (AA5: 44).[23]

I want to conclude this section by clarifying how the theoretical defence of freedom provided in the first *Critique* relates to the practical conception of

[23]Note here that (*pace* Chignell, 'Real Repugnance and Belief', 197) Kant does not posit a single standard of 'determinacy' or objectivity that is fixed by empirical intuition. For Kant, the representation of effects of noumenal freedom via moral predicates is just as determinate and fruitful for practical cognition as the representation of effects of empirical powers via empirical intuitions is for theoretical cognition. For a pioneering account of Kant's conception of practical knowledge, see Engstrom, *The Form of Practical Knowledge*.

freedom that Kant develops in later works. In the first *Critique*, Kant stresses that his idealism 'leaves open a place for' intelligible objects, but this place 'serves only, like an empty space, for the limitation of empirical principles […]' (A259–260/B315); it is 'a space which we can fill neither through possible experience nor through the pure understanding' (A288–289/B345; cf. AA4: 462). These remarks can be applied to the issue of freedom as follows. If everything were subject to natural causality – if the scope of the empirical principle of causal determination were unlimited – then the human will would always and exclusively be determined by natural states in accordance with necessary laws of nature: this would 'render every action … necessary', and that would 'involve the elimination of all practical freedom' (A534/B562) that is presupposed by morality (BXXIX). But Kant's transcendental idealism limits the scope of deterministic, empirical causality to sensible appearances.[24] Hence, the theoretical principle that deterministic causality reigns universally in the sensible world is compatible with the assumption that there is also a noumenal form of causation that does *not* render its effects necessary (AA5: 42–43). The pure understanding is unable to conceive what sort of thing this noumenal causation might be, just like theoretical reason is unable to establish whether a free causality is so much as possible (A557–558/B585–586): theory here leaves us only with an 'empty space', that is, with the purely negative representation that a free causality would not be determined by the temporal conditions that reign (only) among appearances. But once 'theoretical philosophy … [has] clear[ed] the way for practical philosophy' (AA4: 456), this empty space can be filled through practical reason, which forms a positive idea of a non-deterministic causality that is integral to our moral self-conception as finitely rational beings who have the freedom to go either way with regard to the moral law.

NON-PRACTICAL CATEGORIAL THOUGHT ABOUT NOUMENA

The argument of the preceding section sketches how the categories, suitably transformed, might serve for legitimate positive thought about noumena in a practical context. But what about cases in which Kant seems to apply the categories to things in themselves in his *theoretical* philosophy? How, for instance, is the claim that sensible data arise when our mind is affected by things consistent with the idea that pure categories such as causality are inapplicable to noumena?

It should be noted that there is an exegetical problem here quite independently of my interpretation. As we saw, Kant insists that the unschematized theoretical concept of causality is incapable of positively representing a

[24]For a detailed account of how this works, see Kohl, 'Kant on Freedom, Idealism and Standpoints'.

causal relation (AA4: 458; AA5: 48–49). Moreover, he claims that 'it is not a theoretical but a practical purpose which makes it necessary for us' to apply the concept of causality to things in themselves (AA5: 54). This is inconsistent with the idea that the theoretical assumption that things affect our minds requires the thought of a causal relation between noumena. Now, there are two views in the literature on noumenal affection that would solve this exegetical problem, and that might also reconcile my interpretation that noumena lack the features represented by our pure theoretical concepts with Kant's insistence that our mind is affected with sensible data.

One type of interpretation denies that Kant posits a causal relation between noumena. Two different species of this view can be distinguished by how they handle passages in which Kant seems to suggest that sensible data arise in our noumenal mind as the effect of some noumenal action. Some argue that these passages do not implicate a relation of noumenal affection at all: Kant only claims that sensible data arise in the *phenomenal* mind as a result of causal action by a *sensible* object, and when Kant refers to a non-sensible cause of appearances he means the 'transcendental object', a term which does not refer to noumena but serves as an abstract description of sensible objects in general (see Kitcher, *Kant's Thinker*, chap. 12). A different proposal concedes that Kant posits a relation of noumenal affection but contends that this relation is not causal: roughly, when an object noumenally affects our mind, it relates to us epistemically or phenomenologically by *presenting itself* to our consciousness. This phenomenological relation enables the causal relation that obtains between the object as it appears and the phenomenal mind (see Gram, *The Transcendental Turn*, 108). Here it is noteworthy that Kant at least sometimes uses the term 'affection' in a patently non-causal sense (e.g. when he says that the negation affects the copula; cf. AA9: 104). The main question concerning these proposals is whether stressing the fact that Kant posits a causal relation between sensible object and phenomenal mind can replace the need for an *additional* causal relation between noumenal object and noumenal mind.[25]

On a second interpretation, Kant does posit a relation of causal affection between noumena but does not conceive this relation independently of his practical philosophy: his appeal to noumenal affection is intended to capture a causal relation between free agents (see Hogan, 'Noumenal Affection'). If this were right, then my account in the preceding section (concerning the practical conception of free noumenal causality) might be extended to the issue of noumenal affection. However, the class of things that are related via affection seems larger than the class of things that exhibit the causality of freedom. Kant's affection talk typically generalizes to all things in themselves which appear to us, including things that Kant does not want to

[25]The idea that Kant here posits *two* causal affection relations yields the infamous 'double affection' interpretation. See Stang ('Who is Afraid of Double Affection?') for a new defence of that view.

treat as noumenally free agents, such as the things in themselves underlying the appearances of stones or donkeys.[26]

There is a further possibility. Suppose there is no way around (I) the argument of the first and second sections, regarding the inapplicability of the pure categories to noumena, and (II) the claim that Kant's theoretical philosophy positively characterizes noumena in causal terms. (I) and (II) could be reconciled by suggesting that our epistemic attitude towards the theoretical assumption that noumena fall under the categories should be the belief that this assumption involves a subjectively necessary fiction. It is subjectively necessary because we must assume that our finite minds stand 'in contact with' (Ameriks, *Interpreting Kant's Critiques*, 29) existent things, and the nature of our understanding constrains us to represent this contact as a causal relation. It is a fiction because (we know that) the discursive representation of causality does not adequately reflect the objective nature of the non-sensible things represented in the thought of noumenal affection. Kant has a systematic place for judgements that are objectively inadequate but subjectively necessary, and whose inevitability and inadequacy both derive from the limits of finite cognition. For instance, we are subjectively constrained to assume that natural organisms are governed by a form of causality according to purposes that we represent as being irreducibly distinct from mechanistic causality (AA5: 411–413), but we can also know that we would find no difference between mechanistic and teleological causality if it were not for the peculiarities of our discursive understanding (AA5: 404).[27] Admittedly, one problem with extending this model to noumenal affection is that Kant does not use 'as if' language with regard to noumenal affection.

I have sketched some ideas about how Kant's seeming appeal to noumenal affection might cohere with his denial that the categories in their theoretical meaning are applicable to noumena. It is possible that all these suggestions fail and that Kant has no coherent view here, as was suspected by his earliest critics. While this verdict should only be a last interpretive resort, I cannot conclusively rule it out here.

Causality is not the only category that raises potentially problematic issues: we must also represent the *existence* of things in themselves in theoretical contexts (AA4: 315). Since Kant states that existence – unlike possibility and necessity – would be represented by a non-discursive intellect (AA5: 403), we might suppose that the representation of existence is unique among our pure categories insofar as it does not solely reflect

[26] *Pace* Beck (*A Commentary on Kant's 'Critique of Practical Reason'*, 190), Kant is not a 'panlibertarian'. We have no reason for attributing non-sensible, spontaneous causal powers to the noumena that underlie appearances of inanimate matter or animals (A546/B574). This raises a further problem for any reading on which things in themselves that appear to us, considered simply as such, have a causal power of affection.

[27] Or, consider our subjective need to conceive of God's eternity as 'existence at all time' even though we know that God would exist outside of time (AA5: 484).

peculiarities of discursive cognition. This supposition is not merely ad hoc. The pure modal categories are not predicates that represent properties of things; rather, they designate the relation of a representation to a faculty of cognition (A74–75/B99–100; AA9: 108–109). For an understanding that cognizes without concepts, the only representations are intuitions that relate immediately to existent objects; hence such an understanding does represent existence whereas it has no use for the representation of possibility (AA5: 401–403). Conversely, for an understanding like ours the pure conceptual representation of existence, divorced from any sensible intuition, collapses into the representation of mere possibility (A601/B629). When we represent the existence of things in themselves we go beyond mere possibility because we posit a non-spatiotemporal constitution of objects whose existence we already know (synthetically) through sensible intuitions, and because we know (analytically) that what appears in spatiotemporal form must have some constitution that is not appearance (A251–252) (see also Allais, 'Transcendental Idealism and Metaphysics', 15).

CONCLUSION

I have expounded a central strand in Kant's philosophy that entails that the proud concepts of rationalist ontology cannot be applied to things in themselves. A final verdict on whether this conclusion coheres with all of Kant's multifaceted commitments requires further discussion. But I hope to have shown that the idea that through the pure, unschematized categories we not only fail to cognize but even to (positively) think noumena raises central issues for Kant scholarship.

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Quotations from Kant's works, apart from the Critique of Pure Reason which is cited according to the standard A/B pagination, cite the page number of the Academy edition, Kants Gesammelte Schriften, ed. Königlich Preussische Akademie der Wissenschaften, vols. 1–29. Berlin: de Gruyter, 1902–.. Translations are my own.

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