

Simple renderings:

TI (wrt s&t): We should not think of things in themselves as having spatial and temporal properties

ER: We can know with certainty that objects, as they appear to us, are real in s&t

## Kant's Position

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### Transcendental Idealism:



- **Limitation Thesis:** we humans cannot know things as they are in themselves and their forms
- **Constitution Thesis:** we humans can know the forms of appearances, because our human perspective constitutes these forms, which are in fact the forms of our perspective
- **Compare with Copernicus:** we humans perceive the sun as moving, because our human perspective is moving
- **Contrast with Berkeley:** we humans can perceive only ideas in the mind, and cannot in any sense perceive things outside the mind

### Empirical Realism:



- Space, time, and appearances are **empirically real**: they are fundamental within the project of ordinary and scientific cognition of the sensible world
- They are not **transcendentally real**: they are not fundamental within the project of reflection on the most basic conditions that enable but go without saying within ordinary and scientific cognition, within the enterprise of reflection on things in themselves and their forms

**Transcendental Idealism (TI), Transcendental Realism (TR), Empirical Idealism (EI), Empirical Realism (ER) in the 4<sup>th</sup> Paralogism** (note: in A only; not assigned readings): passages from Kant, with my glosses in this font

First, two preliminary matters:

1. distinction between two senses of “external” and “outside us” (first full paragraph of p. 428): (a) “empirically external” objects are things “that are to be encountered in space”; (b) “external in the transcendental sense” refers to “something that, as a thing in itself, exists distinct from us”: the thing as it really is, independent from us.

-if “space and time are both to be encountered only in us” (p. 428.2), these two senses turn out to be *very* different

2. Perception, inference, and certainty: (a) Perception for Kant is immediate/non-inferential & (b) knowledge of physical things that could be had by means of an effect-to-cause inference “is always uncertain” (p. 425.9)

“By *transcendental idealism* I mean the doctrine that appearances are to be regarded as being, one and all, representations only, not things in themselves, and that time and space are therefore only sensible forms of our intuition, not determinations given as existing by themselves, nor conditions of objects viewed as things in themselves” (A369=GW426, but using NKS)

TI takes spatial & temporal properties to be only properties of the objects as they appear to us, not as properties of the objects as they are in themselves

“*Transcendental realism*...regards time and space as something given in themselves, independently of our sensibility. The transcendental realist thus interprets outer appearances (their reality being taken as granted) as things-in-themselves, which exist independently of us and of our sensibility, and which are therefore outside us--the phrase ‘outside us’ being interpreted in conformity with the pure concepts of the understanding” (A369=GW436, but using NKS).

TR takes spatial and temporal properties to be had by the objects as they are in themselves (by the transcendently external objects)

“It is, in fact, this transcendental realist who afterward plays the part of *empirical idealist*. After wrongly supposing that objects of the senses, if they are to be external, must have an existence by themselves, and independently of the senses, he finds that, judged from this point of view, all our sensuous representations...are inadequate to establish their reality” (A369=GW426.7, using NKS)

TR → EI

“The term ‘*idealist*’ is not, therefore, to be understood as applying to those who deny the existence of external objects of the senses, but only to those who do not admit that their existence is known through immediate perception, and who therefore conclude that we can never, by way of any possible experience, be completely certain as to their reality” (A368-9=GW426, using NKS; GW instead has “we can never be fully certain”)

EI: objects in space and time have only at most an uncertain / inferred existence, because they are not immediately perceived

“The transcendental idealist is, therefore, an *empirical realist*, and allows matter, as appearance, a reality which does not permit of being inferred, but is immediately perceived” (A371; G&W, p. 427).

ER: We can know / be certain of objects as being in space & time, and we can immediately (w/o inference) perceive them as being so (but only as appearances)

### First and Third Antinomies

Kant’s skepticism (as I would call it: skepticism regarding what things are like in themselves), his transcendental idealism, is largely driven by the apriority of some of our key (synthetic) judgments regarding space, time, and causality (via the thought that (to now use our G&W translation) “We can cognize of things *a priori* only what we ourselves have put into them” (p. 111.5)). But this skepticism isn’t limited to *a priori* judgments: When I make a simple perceptual judgment about an object’s spatial properties (say, I judge that it has a certain shape), or if I judge that one event that I observe causes another, these judgments, too, I take it, though they are *a posteriori*, are for Kant only correct if taken to be only about things as they are experienced by us, and not how they are in themselves.

One of Kant’s main examples of a synthetic *a priori* judgment is his “Everything that happens has its cause.” As I noted on the 4/17 handout, Kant finds this one dangerous to our freedom,

and his transcendental idealism is supposed to safeguard our freedom from this threat (in the way explained at B27, pp. 115-116), at least as something we can coherently think, even if we cannot know, at least about ourselves as we are in ourselves.

We see the destructive power of this supposed *a priori* judgment unleashed in Kant's Third Antinomy (pp. 484-489), which was not in our assigned reading, but that we will consider in outline form. Let's warm up for a discussion of that by first taking a brief look in section at Kant's First Antinomy (which is in our assigned reading, at pp. 467-475),\* just to discuss what these antinomies are supposed to accomplish, before turning to the Third Antinomy.

On pp. 3-4 below, we have Kant's arguments from his Third Antinomy, as outlined by Eric Watkins [ <http://philosophyfaculty.ucsd.edu/faculty/ewatkins/Phil106S07/ThirdAntinomy.html> ]. These are not the easiest arguments to follow, even as clarified by Watkins, and where the problems in these arguments might be depends on how one understands the terminology, and we can get into that, and with the help of Watkins's outlines, if you want, but I'm presenting the outlines mainly as support for the thought that something like P6 of the thesis argument / P3 of the antithesis argument really do occur as premises of the arguments.

I don't think we need to appeal how things seem to us when we attend to our making of an intentional free action in order to question whether Kant's principle of causality is really so ironclad *a priori*—I myself am not inclined (a priori or otherwise) to endorse it even as it applies to completely unthinking little physical events. But in case it helps to consider how things seem—or can seem—to us as we perform such actions, we can consider again that passage from the current libertarian, Timothy O'Connor, that we already looked at at the end of our Reid unit. O'Connor is here at the point of questioning at which his reasons are being fingered as the potential causes of his decision to act and then of his action: "Well, why did you do it, then?"; "Well, I acted for these reasons...."; "Ah, so they are the cause of your action?" O'Connor's answer is that that at least is not how things seem to go:

It does not seem to me (at least ordinarily) that I am caused to act by the reasons which favor doing so; it seems to be the case, rather, that I produce my decision in view of those reasons, and could have, in an unconditional sense, decided differently. (Timothy O'Connor, "Agent causation," in T. O'Connor, ed., *Agents, Causes, and Events* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995): 173-200, pp. 196.)

It seems that we can experience ourselves as acting in ways that we are not caused to act. We, thought of as objects of our own experience, need not obey the principle of causality. And so far as I can see, we can very well "cognize" others as similarly acting.

## **The First Antinomy — focusing on Time (B454-B461, G&W, pp. 470-475)**

*Thesis:* The world has a beginning in time

*Antithesis:* The world has no beginning in time

### ARGUMENT FOR THE THESIS (HIGHLIGHTS):

1. Assume the opposite: the world has no beginning in time
2. It follows that up to any given moment, including up to the present, an eternity has elapsed.
3. This means that an infinite number of successive changes in states of things (an infinite number of successive events) has actually occurred; that is, an infinite series has been completed.
4. But, according to the “true (transcendental) concept of infinity” (p. 472.9), the infinity of a series “consists precisely in the fact that it can never be completed through a successive synthesis” (p.470.5) [NKS: “through a series of successive changes”]
5. Therefore, (3) is impossible.
6. So, there **must** be a beginning of the world in time.

### ARGUMENT FOR THE ANTITHESIS (HIGHLIGHTS):

1. Assume the opposite: the world has a beginning in time
2. But a beginning is “an existence which is preceded by a time in which the thing is not.”
3. So, if one is to speak of the whole world as beginning, it is necessary to assume this is preceded by an empty time.
4. But, it is impossible for anything to come into being in empty time, because “no part of such a time has, in itself, prior to another part, any distinguishing condition of its existence rather than its non-existence” (p. 471.4)
5. So, the world itself **cannot** have a beginning in time.

I may be keeping our discussion of the First Antinomy brief, and if I do that, but you get interested in that antinomy itself (and not just as something to help us discuss what the antinomies need to accomplish), a very crisp and reader-friendly – and classic!, esp. now that it’s over 50 years old – discussion of a key move of the thesis argument is at the first 1-and-2/3 pages of Jonathan Bennett’s “The Age and Size of the World”: <https://link.springer.com/content/pdf/10.1007%2FBFB00414149.pdf>

I think the problem is with the analysis of infinity. What is true, I suppose, is that time cannot be an infinitely long doubly-closed series. That doesn’t mean there can’t be an infinitely long series that is open-ended on either one of its ends (here, going back in time from the present). It may be in a way mind-blowing to suppose that the world not having a beginning in time in that way. But the other options are similarly mind-blowing, and these all seem to me to be the “Wow, I can’t see how things can be that way” type of mind-blowing, not (what Kant is urging, and needs for his purposes) the “Wow, I can see that things cannot be that way” type.

## **Third Antinomy (B472-B479, G&W 484-489)—Thesis Argument**

- P1. Suppose there were no freedom and that all causality occurs in accordance with the laws of nature.
- P2. If all causality occurs in accordance with the laws of nature, then, for every event that happens, there must be a previous state from which it follows in accordance with the laws of nature.

- C1. For every event that happens, there must be a previous state from which it follows in accordance with the laws of nature. (from P1 and P2)
- P3. If the state from which an event follows in accordance with the laws of nature had existed forever (i.e., were not an event, and thus did not come into existence and require a previous state from which it followed), then it could not have brought forth the event that is supposed to follow from it in accordance with the laws of nature. (Kant remarks: “since if it [the state] had been at every time, then its consequence could not have just arisen, but would always have been” [A444/B472].)
- C2. For any event that happens, the state from which it follows in accordance with the laws of nature is itself an event. (from C1 and P3)
- P4. If every event presupposes a preceding event from which it follows in accordance with the laws of nature, then there is never an absolutely first causal event and thus “no completeness of the series [of events] on the side of the causes descending from one another” (A446/B474).
- C3. There is no completeness of causes for any event. (from C2 and P4)
- P5. If there is no completeness of causes for an event, then that event happens “without a cause sufficiently determined a priori” (A446/B474).
- C4. Every event happens “without a cause sufficiently determined a priori.” (from C3 and P5)
- P6. C4 is false; no event happens “without a cause sufficiently determined a priori.”**
- C5. P1 is false; there must be a kind of causality distinct from causality in accordance with the laws of nature, i.e., one that occurs without its cause being determined by another, previous cause—“an absolute causal spontaneity beginning from itself” (A446/B474) called transcendental freedom. (from C4 and P6)

### **Third Antinomy—Antithesis Argument**

- P1. Suppose there were freedom, i.e., a spontaneous (or uncaused) cause of the (absolute) beginning of a series of events.
- P2. If a series of events were caused by a free or spontaneous cause, the spontaneous cause would not be caused by any previous state (or event) to be the cause of that series of events, i.e., “the determination of this spontaneity itself to produce the series ... will begin absolutely” (A445/B473).
- C1. A spontaneous cause is not caused by a previous state to be the cause of the series of events it causes. (from P1 and P2)
- P3. For everything (or for every event) that happens, there must be a previous state from which it follows in accordance with the laws of nature.**
- C2. If a spontaneous cause happens (or begins to act), there must be a previous state from which it follows (causally) in accordance with the laws of nature. (from P3)
- C3. A spontaneous cause is caused by a previous state in accordance with the laws of nature. (from P1 and C2)
- C4. C1 and C3 are contradictory. P1 must be false; there can be no freedom in the world.