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Corijn van Mazijk

# Kant and Husserl on Overcoming Skeptical Idealism through Transcendental Idealism

**Abstract:** Both Kant and Husserl claim to endorse a form of transcendental idealism which includes some sufficient form of realism in itself. This chapter offers a systematic comparison of this claim for both authors. The first half of this chapter discusses (i) Kant's criticism of Cartesian skepticism, (ii) his identification of transcendental realism as a fallacious source of that position, and (iii) his own solution based on the fusion of empirical realism with transcendental idealism. I subsequently discuss (iv) whether the negative concept of noumenon Kant accepts obscures this position, and I argue that it need not. Turning to Husserl, the second part discusses his criticism of Cartesian skepticism and the problem of the relation between the intentional and the real object. I argue that Husserl's position resembles Kant's on important points. I then turn to Husserl's concept of a "world beyond ours" in *Ideas I* and argue that Husserl's account of the material counter-sense, but also logical possibility of a world beyond consciousness, mirrors Kant's negative noumenon. I conclude that, disregarding details of their respective proof structures, both views on transcendental idealism are similar in important respects, also regarding the possibility of a noumenal world.

## 1 Overview

Difficulties interpreting Kant's position on the realism-idealism debate have recently steered new discussions which, as Allais puts it, show not "even a tendency toward convergence" (Allais 2015, p. 3). Allais herself takes an anti-realist stance at least insofar as Kant, on her view, bars us from access to aspects of reality: "things (objects) of which we have empirical cognition [...] have natures or aspects that are entirely independent of us, which ground appearances" (Allais 2015, p. 59). In a similar vein, Guyer and Horstmann (2015) recently argued for Kant's "indeterminate ontological realism," with Guyer noting earlier that this indeterminate world is the one to which "we ultimately intend to refer" (Guyer 1987, p. 335). Other recent contributions within this camp include those of Westphal (2004) and Rockmore (2007), who both read Kant as being committed to a world beyond human cognition (Westphal 2004, p. 67; Rockmore 2007, p. 9), and Braver (2007), who holds Kant responsible for a whole new wave of anti-realism in continental philosophy.

But numerous scholars have also expressed disagreement with such readings. An early example of this is Bird (1962), who suggests that phenomenon and noumenon are two ways of looking at the same thing “because, on Kant’s view, there is only one thing at which to look, namely appearances” (Bird 1962, p. 29). Prauss’s (1974) early discussion on the concept of the thing in itself points in the same direction, arguing that Kant’s preferred locution is not “thing in itself” (which suggests its actual existence) but “thing considered as it is in itself” (Prauss 1974). In more recent days, Allison (2004, pp. 50–57) and Luft (2007, p. 371) have provided like-minded readings, with Jansen (2014) boldly suggesting that anti-realist readings of Kant are plainly “symptomatic of a persisting confusion” (Jansen 2014, p. 83).

Is it a coincidence that things stand no differently with regard to Husserl, the other great self-proclaimed transcendental idealist? In recent years, scholars have ascribed virtually all possible positions to Husserl, including realism (Ameriks 1977), mentalism (Carman 2003, p. 62), internalism (Rowlands 2003), anti-realism (Wiltsche 2012), and solipsism (Blackburn 2016, pp. 229–230). Some have argued that the noema (the object as intended by consciousness) and the real object must be “completely distinct entities” (Smith and McIntyre 1989, p. 162), where the first “mediates” between act and object (Smith and McIntyre 1975, p. 115). Yet others claim that the noema does not “intervene between us and ordinary things” (Rouse 1987, p. 231), that the view of Smith and McIntyre is “mistaken” (Banchetti 1993, p. 81), and that it “distorts Husserl’s theory of intentionality” (Drummond 2009, pp. 593–594).

However, recent studies of both Kant and Husserl also include attempts to demonstrate the compatibility of idealism and realism. H. Allison, for instance, claims that Kant employs a “metalanguage” (Allison 2004, p. 73) of things in themselves, the heuristic value of which derives from the paradigm of transcendental realism before him. Rightly understood, Kant’s transcendental idealism is a realist position, his anti-realist tendencies stemming from a metalanguage employed to situate his view in a different philosophical landscape. Likewise, Zahavi (2017) and others interpret Husserl’s transcendental idealism in a way that is not necessarily hostile to realism. Zahavi, for instance, remarks that for Husserl “the world of experience can have all the required reality and objectivity” (Zahavi 2017, p. 69).

This chapter interprets Kant’s and Husserl’s claims to transcendental idealism in a way sympathetic to such recent attempts. I argue that, for both, transcendental idealism is a form of non-problematic idealism which should include all the realism we need. This means, on the one hand, that both are realists: for Kant, physical objects are genuinely “outside us” (Kant 1781, A 376), and for Husserl, “a ‘physical thing’ as correlate [of consciousness] is not a physical thing”

(Husserl 1971, Hua V, p. 85; Husserl 1980, p. 72), because the latter alone exists independently of immediate intentional awareness. On the other hand, for both, this realism still derives from consciousness: for Kant, “external things [...] are [...] nothing but mere appearances” (Kant 1781, A 371–372), and for Husserl, no object signifies a “reaching out beyond the world which is for consciousness” (Husserl 1976, Hua III/1, p. 100; Husserl 1983, p. 121).

I further argue that the apparent incompatibility of these suggestions is overcome by both authors by challenging the tacit presupposition of transcendental or metaphysical realism: the implicit standard specifying that the real must be measured by the ideal of absolute mind-independence. Transcendental idealism then resets the norm for the real within the scope of possible experience; in other words: it is, for Kant as well as for Husserl, essentially a rejection of transcendental realism. While the concept of noumenon could be taken to problematize this position regarding Kant, I argue that Kant can plausibly be read as rendering the thing in itself a mere logical possibility without concrete sense or meaning. As I show, this matches to some extent Husserl’s position on the logical possibility, but material counter-sense, of a world beyond consciousness in *Ideas I* – which should not be understood as compromising transcendental idealism either.

All of this warrants, I think, the claim that there is substantial overlap between Kant and Husserl on the point of transcendental idealism and its compatibility with some form of common sense or empirical realism. Moreover, it reveals that contemporary misunderstandings of Kant and Husserl on this point are largely symmetric. At the same time, it should be noted that manuscripts indicate Husserl’s dissatisfaction with Kantian transcendental idealism, which Husserl believed to be anthropocentric, and which he actively sought to improve upon by insisting on the universal *a priori* correlation. This expands transcendental idealism beyond the human mind to the pure possibility of an object. Moreover, it should be noted that the core transcendental idealist commitment they share does not affect the fundamental differences between them regarding the method, scope, and nature of evidence of transcendental inquiry – points on which Husserl repeatedly sought to differentiate himself from Kant.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> See van Mazijk 2016, 2019 and 2020, where I discuss aspects of Husserl’s criticism of Kant in more detail.

## 2 Kant: The Cartesian Endeavor

Kant's most interesting discussions of the problem of idealism in the first *Critique* appear in the Refutation of Idealism (added in the B-edition), in Phenomena and Noumena, in crucial sections on the Paralogisms (in the A-edition), and in the Antinomies of pure reason.<sup>2</sup> In the Refutation of Idealism, among other places, Kant distinguishes between two sorts of idealism: skeptical and dogmatic (Kant 1787, B 274–275). A skeptical idealist – Descartes is Kant's favorite example – is defined as someone who denies that the existence of objects “is known through immediate perception” and who consequently holds that we “can never [...] be completely certain as to their reality” (Kant 1781, A 368–369). Skeptical idealism is thus defined specifically by an epistemic restriction. It specifies that although we may have experiences and knowledge of real objects, we can never be totally sure about this.

This contrasts with dogmatic idealism, which Kant ascribes to Berkeley. A dogmatic idealist is one who “regards the things in space as merely imaginary entities” (Kant 1787, B 274). Later on in the Paralogisms, Kant characterizes the dogmatic idealist as denying “the existence of external objects of the senses” (Kant 1781, A 368). Unlike the skeptical idealist, then, the dogmatic idealist makes an ontological claim. While the skeptical idealist puts a restriction on our claims to knowledge about the real world, the dogmatic idealist goes further in denying altogether the existence of external objects, claiming instead that they are nothing but imaginary entities. This dogmatic view thus naturally includes the weaker epistemic restriction of skeptical idealism in itself.

It does not matter for our purposes whether Kant is right in ascribing these positions to Descartes and Berkeley respectively, so I will not go into this. In fact, the distinction between both forms of idealism is not crucial to understanding Kant's position regarding them. For Kant, both positions are alike in that they share a certain hostility to realism. More importantly still, Kant believes that they both result from the same, single error of thought. If we can get rid of this error, the appeal of both views should vanish. As Kant puts it at one point, eliminating

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<sup>2</sup> My discussion in what follows strongly focuses on the fourth Paralogism and less on the Refutation of Idealism, which according to some scholars contradicts the fourth Paralogism (for instance Vaihinger 1988, Kemp Smith 1918, and Bader 2012). Guyer believes that “exactly *what* the refutation is supposed to prove is unclear” (Guyer 1987, p. 280). I tend to think there is no contradiction between the refutation and the fourth Paralogism, and that the refutation does not bear directly on the thing in itself as some of these authors have assumed. I will here leave this issue aside, however. For recent discussions on the place of the Refutation of Idealism in Kant's second edition of the first *Critique*, see also Dicker 2008 and Bader 2012.

the error removes “*all controversy* in regard to the nature of the thinking being and its connection with the corporeal world” (Kant 1781, A 395, my italics).

Kant thus opposes idealism because it cannot accommodate realism. This indicates that the preferred transcendental idealism is not just any familiar form of idealism; it isn't one that can be framed in terms of the opposition between realism and idealism within early modern philosophy. Likewise, the realism Kant defends cannot be the “usual” realism – the one which conceptually opposes both Berkeley's ontological, and Descartes's epistemic, idealism. After all, the whole controversy of realism *and* idealism is claimed to be ill-founded. For that reason, Kant subsequently attempts to expose a tacit presupposition onto which the early modern debate is allegedly founded, in order to then draw out the right form of transcendental idealism.

Kant's discussion of this tacit presupposition appears most clearly in the fourth Paralogism section, which focuses on Descartes. Kant starts out by stating his sympathy for the Cartesian starting point, which seeks certainty in immanent consciousness. He agrees with Descartes that there “can be no question that I am conscious of my representations; these representations and I myself, who has the representations, therefore exist” (Kant 1781, A 370). Kant appears to favor less Descartes's subsequent procedure, however. He continues to criticize him specifically for the strategy of inference he then employs: “[For Descartes] I am not [...] in a position to *perceive* external things, but can only infer their existence from my inner perception, taking the inner perception as the effect of which something external is the proximate cause” (Kant 1781, A 368). In this way, Kant thinks, Cartesian representationalism is born, and with it the problem of consciousness's relation to the world.

Kant believes this Cartesian fate can be avoided by reconceptualizing the relation between object and appearance in the original Cartesian model. Thus he presents his solution to the Cartesian inferentialist problem: “external objects [...] are mere appearances, and are therefore nothing but a species of my representations [...]. Thus external things exist as well as I myself, and both, indeed, upon the immediate witness of my self-consciousness” (Kant 1781, A 371). The solution, plainly put, consists of eliminating the idea that perceptions *indicate* the real world, as that strategy invokes the problem of our (inferential) access to the real based on appearance. Instead, we have to conceive of external objects as themselves species of representations. Real objects, Kant repeatedly notes, “are mere appearances;” “external things, namely matter, are in all their configurations and alterations nothing but mere appearances” (Kant 1781, A 371–372). Therefore, Kant concludes, the existence of external things is “immediately perceived,” and the “need to resort to inference” has been dispensed (Kant 1781, A 371).

A superficial reading of Kant's suggestion may tempt one to conclude that the proposed solution simply downgrades the real object to mere appearance, hence falling prey to dogmatic idealism. Kant, however, aware of this threat, introduces a crucial distinction between empirical and transcendental idealism – a distinction which crosses with another one between empirical and transcendental realism.<sup>3</sup>

According to Kant, an empirical idealist is someone who considers objects to be mere empirically-produced ideas in the mind or brain, from which point the best one can do is infer the existence of external objects. Both Descartes and Berkeley, then, on Kant's reading of them, can be considered empirical idealists. Importantly, Kant now maintains that these forms of empirical idealism results from transcendental realism (Kant 1781, A 369); all empirical idealists that Kant claims to know are transcendental realists (Kant 1781, A 372). To identify the problems of skeptical and empirical idealism, then, we must turn to transcendental realism.

On Kant's view, a transcendental realist does not necessarily have to uphold transcendental realism as a theory. Instead, we can follow Allison in positing that transcendental realism is an "implicit norm in the light of which human cognition is analyzed" (Allison 2004, p. 28). The norm at stake is one which specifies the real by the ideal of radical mind-independence. As Stang puts it, transcendental realism concerns the (tacit) assumption that "reality 'is in itself' independently of how we cognize it" (Stang 2016).<sup>4</sup> Put differently, Kant believes that if one is prone to think of the world as a place out there beyond what can be given in appearance, and one subsequently reflects on one's sensibility to find only appearances, then the problem of the real world's immediate manifestation is unavoidable. Indeed, the threat of empirical idealism can always re-emerge – and indeed the entire problematic of our access to the real world with it – as long as transcendental realism sets the norm.

Now we can see how Kant believes erroneous forms of idealism follow from an implicit transcendental realism, the latter doctrine being the "common prejudice" (Kant 1781/1787, A 740/B 768) accepted by all philosophers before Kant. Interestingly, Kant offers something of an explanation as to why transcendental realism is so attractive, one which is somewhat akin to Husserl's descriptions of the so-called natural attitude. According to Kant, objects of experience have this "deceptive property that [...] they detach themselves as it were from the soul and

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<sup>3</sup> The distinction between empirical and transcendental investigation is made earlier on already (Kant 1781/1787, A 97/B 118–120). The relevant distinction, however, occurs in Kant 1781, A 371–373.

<sup>4</sup> Note that Stang's definition pertains to Allison's account.

appear to hover outside it” (Kant 1781, A 385). It belongs, he notes, to ordinary experience to posit objects “as objects outside us, [thereby] completely separating them from the thinking subject” (Kant 1781, A 389). This results in “the ordinary concepts of our reason with regard to the communion in which our thinking subject stands with the things outside us” (Kant 1781, A 389); in other words: it leads to the ordinary (transcendental realist) conception of objects as enjoying radical independence from experience. However, as long as we do this, “we are dogmatic, looking upon them as real objects existing [radically] independently of us” (Kant 1781, A 389).

### 3 Kant: The Solution

The problems caused by transcendental realism bring us to the other combination of views: empirical realism with transcendental idealism. This new combination should provide the solution to all the skeptical problems that stem from transcendental realism. From the new viewpoint, Kant notes, objects are genuinely “outside us” (Kant 1781, A 376). This is Kant’s empirical realism. At least in the usual (veridical) case, “outer perception [...] yields immediate proof of something real in space [...]. In this sense empirical realism is beyond question” (Kant 1781, A 375). On Kant’s view, then, we have immediate, non-inferential access to real objects. But what does it mean for an object to be real here?

Clearly, for an object to be real does not mean, as with transcendental realism, that it exists *radically* independently from us. Instead, Kant’s transcendental idealism specifies that they are to be considered *transcendentally* inseparable from us. That is to say, objects “need” us – as a transcendental condition of possibility – in order to be objects at all. Certainly, however, this does not mean that things not currently perceived by anyone do not exist. As Kant notes, “that there may be inhabitants in the moon, although no one has ever perceived them, must certainly be admitted” (Kant 1781/1787, A 493/B 251). In other words, we can legitimately treat the world as a place filled with real objects, as empirical realism specifies. Yet this thesis can be properly maintained only within the confines of transcendental idealism. The reality of objects can be granted exclusively from within the scope of possible experience, not outside of it, as transcendental realism has it.

This should help address Kant’s otherwise confusing remarks that external objects are “mere appearances” (Kant 1781, A 371–372), and that transcendental idealism sees objects as “representations only” (Kant 1781, A 369). In saying so, Kant does not intend to contradict his commitment to empirical realism, which



postulates that objects are truly “outside us,” only to relapse into empirical idealism. Interpreting Kant this way “would be unjust” (Kant 1781/1787, A 491/B 519). That objects are mere appearances in us states that they are transcendently “in” us, that is, transcendently dependent on us. Yet they *appear as* being outside of us, and it is on that peculiar appearance structure that the natural sciences are legitimately erected. Transcendental idealism is thus merely the explication of the thesis that nothing more than this type of empirical realism is demanded, while transcendental realism, by contrast, is the tacit conviction that we need more.

Kant thus effectively seeks to deny that appearances are empirical ideas. They do not have a status akin to that of illusions, hallucinations, or dreams, and hence they are legitimately considered real (provided they accord with the categories). This point is also emphasized in the *Prolegomena*. Here, Kant writes that “the difference between truth and dream, however, is not decided through the quality of the representations that referred to objects, for they are the same in both, but through their connection according to the rules” (Kant 2004, AK. IV, p. 290). In other words, a non-veridical perception is not distinguished from a veridical one for failing to establish a causal connection to mind-independent external objects. Rather, what defines veridical perception is the way in which representations are connected by rules of understanding. Kant, then, is a conjunctivist regarding perception insofar as the external object is not regarded as a necessary constituent of veridical perception. In true perception there “is contained not the least illusion or temptation toward error,” because here representations “can be connected together correctly in experience according to rules of truth” (Kant 2004, AK. IV, p. 291), and that settles the matter of reality to which perception makes claim.

This position in *Prolegomena* is perfectly in line with what Kant defends in the fourth Paralogism. Both texts support the idea that we should not measure the capacity of perception to give us real things by some norm conceptualizing the real as being outside of the scope of possible experience. The right mark of reality is a correct synthetic arrangement of representations through functions of understanding – not a (causal) relation to a radically mind-independent object.

And thus, Kant thinks, is the century-old problem of empirical idealism transcended. Proof of anything more than empirical realism of the sort Kant has argued for simply is not needed (Kant 1781, A 375–376). To the contrary, the only reasons for seeking for more stem from the false prejudice of transcendental realism. From now on, “the question is no longer of the communion of the soul with other known substances of a different kind outside us [transcendentally speaking], but only of the connection of the representations of inner sense with the modifications of our outer sensibility” (Kant 1781, A 386).

## 4 Kant: Phenomena *and* Noumena?

Ever since its first edition, Kant's first *Critique* has seen a steady branch of anti-realist or representationalist interpretation.<sup>5</sup> In Kant's own time this included Eberhard, Jacobi, Maimon, and Garve and Feder (to whom Kant responded in the *Prolegomena*). In twentieth-century philosophy, this tradition was furthered by Strawson (1966), who claimed that for Kant "reality is supersensible and [...] we can have no knowledge of it" (Strawson 1966, p. 16). More recent representationalist interpretations include Guyer (1987, p. 335), Westphal (2004, p. 67), Braver (2007), Rockmore (2007, p. 9), Allais (2015, p. 59), and Guyer and Horstmann (2015), among numerous others.

If these authors are right that Kant is ontologically committed to a reality beyond the one we can experience, then this obviously threatens Kant's empirical realism as I have just outlined it. This is because empirical realism depends on transcendental idealism, whereas these authors see Kant (in some important sense at least) as being committed to transcendental realism. Without discussing the detailed arguments of all these scholars, this section argues that Kant is not committed to a supersensible reality in a way that would threaten the proposed conjunction of empirical realism and transcendental idealism.

In a section in the chapter on Phenomena and Noumena (deleted in the B-edition), Kant first defines "*phaenomena*" as "objects according to the unity of the categories" (Kant 1781, A 248–249). Phenomena, in other words, are appearances; they are representations of which we can acquire knowledge. Second, Kant offers a (more striking) definition of *noumena*. There are, Kant contends, "things which are mere objects of understanding, and which, nevertheless, can be given as such to an intuition, although not to one that is sensible – [...] such things would be entitled *noumena*" (Kant 1781, A 249). A bit further on, Kant aligns this concept of noumenon with that of the thing in itself: "apart from the constitution of our sensibility (upon which the form of our intuition is grounded), [there] must be something in itself, that is, an object independent of sensibility. There thus results the concept of a *noumenon*" (Kant 1781, A 252).

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<sup>5</sup> Note that I will not deal with Kant's practical philosophy in this section, which some scholars believe involves a stronger ontological commitment to the noumenon than is to be found in his theoretical work. At the moment I am most sympathetic to Adams (1997) on this point, who concludes, after discussing the import of Kant's practical philosophy, that "uncertain as it may be of the real possibility of noumenal causality, theoretical reason seems justified in affirming [only] the logical possibility of the concept" (Adams 1997, p. 821).

Not unimportantly, Kant also invokes a challenging distinction between *our* form of intuition – which, Kant maintains, is necessarily sensible – and intuition *as such*. Apparently, then, another kind of intuition is conceivable which is not sensible, as it is with us. There might be, although this is not necessarily so, “intelligible entities to which our sensible faculty of intuition has no relation whatsoever” (Kant 1787, B 309). Elsewhere, he writes that he has *not* proven “that another kind of intuition is possible,” although neither has he proven “that sensible intuition is the only possible intuition” (Kant 1781, A 252).

Things are further complicated by a distinction between a positive and a negative noumenon (in the second edition, but the first edition discussion is, I think, not essentially different). Subscribing to a positive noumenon would amount roughly to acknowledging that we can comprehend the possibility (Kant 1787, B 307) or that we have the ability to comprehend (Kant 1781/1787, A 255/B 310) “an *object* of a *non-sensible intuition*” (Kant 1787, B 307). Crucially, this capacity for comprehension Kant *denies*. For Kant, the very “thing” the concept of a thing in itself denotes is not something we could possibly comprehend. This is why Kant repeatedly emphasizes that the concept is without “sense” (Kant 1781/1787, A 240/B 299), without “meaning” (Kant 1781/1787, A 241/B 300), and that it “signifies nothing at all” (Kant 1787, B 306).

The positive concept of a thing in itself, then, which is the cornerstone of noumenalist readings such as Strawson’s (1966), is refuted by Kant.<sup>6</sup> Yet, while the concept is thus without “sense,” it is not, Kant maintains, “in any way contradictory.” This, he argues, is because “we cannot assert of sensibility that it is the sole possible kind of intuition” (Kant 1781/1787, A 254/B 310). Therefore, as he puts it later on in the *Critique*, “a place remains open for other and different objects; and consequently that these latter must not be absolutely denied, though [...] neither can they be asserted as objects for our understanding” (Kant 1781/1787, A 287–288/B 344). Kant, then, makes a distinction between the concept of noumenon as denoting a real intuitive possibility and as a merely

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<sup>6</sup> There is also some debate about whether several of Kant’s remarks stress that things in themselves are explicitly *not* spatiotemporal (Kant 1781/1787, A 26/B 42; A 32/B 49; A 492/B 520), which would of course contradict his other remarks that the thing in itself is merely a transcendental concept, and not a “thing” we can know determinatively. If things in themselves are explicitly non-spatiotemporal, this could lead to a position we may call dogmatic transcendental idealism (Guyer 1987, p. 335). I am sidestepping this issue here, but see particularly Allison 1976 – whose position on the issue I am most sympathetic to – and Guyer (1987, pp. 333–344) for more discussion.

formally-coherent concept<sup>7</sup> and makes it clear that he believes the concept is without sense or meaning but formally non-contradictory (thus he accepts the latter but not the former).<sup>8</sup>

Kant subsequently moves from the mere formal possibility of things in themselves to arguing for their *necessity* (Kant 1781/1787, A 254/B 310). It is crucial, however, to understand this necessity as the necessity *of* the concept of the mere logical possibility. This necessity is further qualified by Kant as being of a transcendental kind. That is to say, the negative concept of noumenon is a necessary *a priori* product of the transcendental structure of our experience. It is produced “to prevent sensible intuition from being extended to things in themselves” (Kant 1781/1787, A 254/B 310). It is “not only admissible, but as setting limits to sensibility [...] likewise indispensable” (Kant 1781/1787, A 256/B 311).

This yields the question of how human experience transcendently generates the negative concept of noumenon. While the workings of sensible intuition may seem a plausible candidate here, this is not Kant’s view. As Kant notes, “the understanding is not limited *through* sensibility; on the contrary, it itself limits sensibility by applying the term noumena to things in themselves [through which it at the same time] sets limits to itself” (Kant 1781/1787, A 256/B 312). In other words, it is the understanding which is “not satisfied with the substrate of sensibility, and [...] therefore add[s] to the phenomena noumena which only the pure understanding can think” (Kant 1781, A 251). Likewise, in the *Prolegomena*, Kant says that “the understanding, just by the fact that it accepts appearances, also admits of the existence of things in themselves, [this] is not merely permitted but also inevitable” (Kant 2004, AK. IV, p. 315).

Kant, then, by accepting the negative concept of noumenon, does not commit ontologically to things in themselves – the positive concept of noumenon he rejects. Instead, Kant deems things in themselves as (i) only logically possible – a possibility rooted in the fact that a non-sensible intuition of noumenal reality cannot be logically excluded, even though it isn’t a real possibility – and (ii) transcendently necessary, since it is transcendently engrained in our understand-

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<sup>7</sup> This reading of Kant as committed solely to the formal or logical possibility of the noumenal world but not to its real possibility is in broad agreement with the reading provided by Adams (1997).

<sup>8</sup> Note that the logical space of the thing in itself as here illustrated is not confined exclusively to an unknowable shadow side of appearances to which we have access, as some versions of the double aspect view have it. See also Ameriks 2003, who develops the point that “some things in themselves could lack appearances” – at least such a thing cannot be *logically* excluded either – which means a “one-on-one-mapping” of things in themselves (as thought entities) onto real things is impossible (Ameriks 2003, pp. 34–35).

ing's response to operations of sensibility. The necessity pertains, however, only to the negative concept of noumenon; in other words: we are of necessity capable of conceiving of the logical possibility of a reality beyond ours, and this, likewise with necessity, accrues our cognition with a sense of limitation. Nothing more is at stake in these discussions than this transcendental necessity of the negative concept of the noumenon. It is "a merely *limiting concept*" and "therefore only of negative employment" (Kant 1781/1787, A 255/B 310–311).

This should make it clear that the concept of noumenon which Kant defends in fact can have no ontological import. On Kant's terms, there is nothing "real" about the noumenon, as "reality" does not derive its sense from the parameters of transcendental realism but from qualifications concerning the synthetic orderings of representations instead. While an object beyond possible experience may *always* be logically conceived, it *cannot possibly* have "sense" (Kant 1781/1787, A 240/B 299) or "meaning" (Kant 1781/1787, A 241/B 300). The noumenon is not, then, that to which "we ultimately intend to refer" (Guyer 1987, p. 335). It is, to the contrary, better understood as having no significance when it comes to determining the conditions that must be satisfied for the ascription of a sense of reality to something.

## 5 Husserl: The Cartesian Endeavor

Like Kant, Husserl claims to endorse a form of transcendental idealism. At the same time, he suggests that there can be no stronger realism<sup>9</sup> and that no ordinary realist has ever been so realistic and concrete as he has been (Husserl 1994, p. 16).<sup>10</sup> In what follows, I first focus on Husserl's famous reading of Descartes in the first *Cartesian Meditations*, which should compare nicely to Kant's discussion of Descartes dealt with earlier. I then reconstruct Husserl's complicated views on the relation between the intentional object and the real object, for which I draw on a variety of later works and manuscripts.<sup>11</sup> Lastly, I discuss a section from

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<sup>9</sup> "A stronger realism therefore cannot be given, when this word says nothing more than: 'I am conscious of being a human being living in this world etc., and this I doubt not the slightest bit'" (Husserl 1976, p. 191, my translation).

<sup>10</sup> "No ordinary 'realist' has been so realistic and concrete as I, the phenomenological 'idealist'" (Husserl 1994, p. 16, my translation).

<sup>11</sup> I leave out *Logical Investigations* here, which was written prior to Husserl's transcendental turn, although I do not think Husserl's position there yields a very different picture of the relation between intentional and real object. See also Zahavi 2017, who offers a more elaborate case against representationalist readings of *Logical Investigations* in his recent book on Husserl.

*Ideas I* where Husserl discusses the logical possibility of a noumenal world. These discussions all illustrate that Husserl's thinking about the pitfalls of transcendental realism as well as the proposed solution of transcendental idealism are fundamentally akin to Kant's.

As is well-known, Husserl offered an(other) introduction to his philosophy for a French audience in 1929, in which he departs from Descartes's attempt to reform "philosophy into a science grounded on an absolute foundation" (Husserl 1950, Hua I, p. 43; Husserl 1960, p. 1). There has been an unfortunate tradition of scholarship which appears to have taken the fact of this starting point to indicate the neo-Cartesian nature of Husserl's own position,<sup>12</sup> suggesting that he upholds an inherently internalist, solipsist, and/or representationalist philosophy. A close reading of the first Meditation, however, should suffice to rebuff such a view.

Above all, the first Meditation reveals Husserl's deep admiration for the radicalism of Descartes's philosophical endeavor. Descartes is worthy of Husserl's appraisal as being one who "seriously intends to become a philosopher," an attempt which required Descartes to "withdraw into himself and attempt, within himself, to overthrow and build anew all the sciences that, up to then, he has been accepting:" Descartes, Husserl thinks, saw that philosophy is of its essence a "personal affair" (Husserl 1950, Hua I, p. 44; Husserl 1960, p. 2). He understood that radical philosophy demands beginning anew within oneself because of the recognition that absolute evidence can never take its departure from the naively accepted existing world or the opinions of others. It must, at least at first, withdraw from that world into the immediacy of immanent consciousness.

Husserl continues to grant Descartes's initial success in finding a correct starting point for philosophy – just as Kant did before him. Descartes's "famous and very remarkable method of doubt" successfully reveals that the world's existence is not given absolutely, and Descartes correctly follows up on that intuition by claiming that "the being of the world must remain unaccepted at this initial stage" (Husserl 1950, Hua I, p. 45; Husserl 1960, p. 3). Descartes thus "keeps only himself, qua pure ego of his *cogitationes*, as having an absolutely indubitable existence, as something that cannot be done away with" (Husserl 1950, Hua I, p. 45; Husserl 1960, p. 3).<sup>13</sup> This way, the Cartesian path of philoso-

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<sup>12</sup> Husserl himself suggests that "one might almost call transcendental phenomenology a neo-Cartesianism, even though it is obliged – and precisely by its radical development of Cartesian motifs – to reject nearly all the well-known doctrinal content of the Cartesian philosophy" (Husserl 1950, Hua I, p. 43; Husserl 1960, p. 1).

<sup>13</sup> Already in his much earlier reading of Descartes in lectures from 1907, Husserl notes that he "can latch onto this point" (Husserl 1950, Hua II, p. 49; Husserl 1999, p. 38).

phy leads, correctly according to Husserl, “from naïve Objectivism to transcendental subjectivism” (Husserl 1950, Hua I, p. 46; Husserl 1960, p. 4).

It is only in appropriating the significance of this discovery of certainty that Descartes goes amiss. Descartes “stands on the threshold of the greatest of all discoveries [but] he does not grasp its proper sense” (Husserl 1950, Hua I, p. 64; Husserl 1960, pp. 24–25). In spite of the attempted radicalism, Husserl maintains that certain “prejudices were at work” (Husserl 1950, Hua I, p. 63; Husserl 1960, p. 24), by which he refers specifically to the “ideal of science” (Husserl 1950, Hua I, p. 48; Husserl 1960, p. 7) of the modern period, namely geometrical-axiomatic deduction. This assumed ideal led Descartes to conceive of the *ego cogito* as “the axiom of the ego’s absolute certainty of himself” (Husserl 1950, Hua I, p. 49; Husserl 1960, p. 8), thus transforming the ego into “a little *tag-end of the world*,” after which “the problem is to infer the rest of the world by rightly conducted arguments” (Husserl 1950, Hua I, p. 63; Husserl 1960, p. 24).

According to Husserl, then, Descartes erred in assuming that philosophy should be modeled on mathematics, an assumption which subsequently perverts the problem of the mind’s relation to the world as one of inference. Descartes falls short of his own pursued radicalism by failing to see that, properly undertaken, even “logic is deprived of acceptance by the universal overthrow” (Husserl 1950, Hua I, p. 53; Husserl 1960, p. 13) of the world’s certainty through methodical doubt. The *ego cogito*, in other words, simply isn’t the inferential base Descartes thought it was, and he could – at least in principle – have seen this, had he freed himself more fully from bias.

It is worth mentioning that, from Husserl’s viewpoint – although it is not elaborated in *Cartesian Meditations* –, Kant’s transcendental philosophy is similarly unsuccessful in eliminating biases stemming from the Galilean paradigm.<sup>14</sup> In the end, both Descartes and Kant fail (i) to uncover transcendental subjectivity as one’s “own pure conscious life, in and by which the entire objective world exists for me and is precisely as it is for me” (Husserl 1950, Hua I, p. 60; Husserl 1960, p. 21), and (ii) to erect subsequently an eidetic science on this which operates exclusively within the confines of pure subjectivity, and which accepts nothing but what can be gained on the basis of the immediate epistemic access which essentially characterizes it.

However, Husserl’s deeper allegations regarding the supposed mythical and ungraspable nature of Kant’s allegedly groundless metaphysics need not concern

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<sup>14</sup> Kant’s failures are not, however, exactly the same as Descartes’s, but time does not permit me to discuss this here.

us here.<sup>15</sup> What matters for our purposes is the similar extent of their respective appraisals of Descartes. As I discussed earlier, Kant, too, applauded Descartes's proof of the fact that "these representations and I myself [...] exist" (Kant 1781, A 370). Moreover, Kant's appraisal likewise terminated with Descartes questioning our "position to *perceive* external things" (Kant 1781, A 368) and the resort to inference that follows from it. What remains to be seen now is whether, abstracting from minute details, their solutions are also similar.

## 6 Husserl: The Solution

What has been said so far concerning Husserl's criticism of Cartesian representationalism leaves open how Husserl seeks to (dis)solve the problem to which Descartes reacted. In other words, we need a positive account of Husserl's construal of the relation between the world *as* experienced and the empirically real world outside of consciousness.

There is a long-standing debate (the so-called "noema-debate") between East Coast and West Coast interpreters of Husserl which deals with just this problem. On the one hand, there are those who, eager to avoid subscribing dogmatic idealism to Husserl, maintain a rigid distinction between the *experience* of an object and the *being* of an object. Here I gather West Coast readers Føllesdal (1969), Dreyfus and Hall (1982), Smith and McIntyre (1982, 1989), McIntyre (1986), Smith (2007, 2013), among others. These authors emphasize that the noema or the object *as* experienced is categorically distinct from the object *as* real. The aim of this conceptual distinction is to ensure that while Husserl's language of phenomenological constitution may apply to appearances of objects and our intentional directedness to them, it does not apply to their actual existence. Put differently, intentional consciousness can let a physical world appear to a subject, but it cannot for all that *create* the world.

While this strategy successfully eliminates the threat of dogmatic idealism, it risks doubling the intentional object, as others have keenly pointed out.<sup>16</sup> In doing so, the West Coast interpreters could undesirably make Husserl susceptible to the kind of representationalism he consistently argued against. Moreover, interpreting the intentional and real object as "distinct entities" (Smith and McIntyre 1989, p. 162) fits uncomfortably with Husserl's frequent denial that the two senses of object can be held apart. For instance, Husserl argues that re-

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<sup>15</sup> See: Husserl 1976, Hua VI, pp. 116–118; Husserl 1956, Hua VII, p. 362.

<sup>16</sup> This includes Drummond (1990, 2009) and Zahavi (2004, 2008, 2010), among many others.



ality does not somehow contain two types of being which “dwell peaceably side by side” (Husserl 1976, Hua III/1, p. 93; Husserl 1983, p. 111). Elsewhere, he notes that the “true being of nature is not a second one next to mere intentional being” (Husserl 2002a, Hua XXXV, p. 276, my translation). Also, the *Cartesian Meditations* stress that the real object isn’t radically beyond consciousness: it “necessarily acquires all the sense determining it, *along with its existential status*, exclusively from my experiencing” (Husserl 1950, Hua I, p. 65; Husserl 1960, p. 26, my italics).

In spite of the noema-debate’s central status in Husserl scholarship, I think it can be solved relatively easily. On the one hand, West Coast readers are right that (i) Husserl maintains that talk of real objects must be kept separate from talk of objects’ appearances. Both *Logical Investigations* and *Ideas I* emphasize that whereas we can say about a real tree that it can burn down, we cannot do so about the tree’s appearance (Husserl 1976, Hua III/1, pp. 182–184; Husserl 1983, pp. 214–216; Husserl 1984, XIX/1, pp. 359–390). Likewise, *Ideas III* stresses that “a ‘physical thing’ as correlate [of consciousness] is not a physical thing [...]. The theme is therefore a totally different one” (Husserl 1971, Hua V, p. 85; Husserl 1980, p. 72). In some sense, then, real objects are not mere appearances for Husserl.

Yet West coast readers tend to either downplay or overlook the fact that Husserl repeatedly states that (ii) the real, burnable tree also ultimately derives from consciousness. As Husserl puts it in his *Cartesian Meditations*, “that every sense that any existent whatever has or can have for me – in respect of its ‘what’ and its ‘it exists and actually is’ – is a sense in and *arising from* my intentional life” (Husserl 1950, Hua I, p. 123; Husserl 1960, p. 91). In his *Natur und Geist* lectures (1927), Husserl notes that every thinkable world in general is only thinkable as relative to the reality of consciousness (Husserl 2001, Hua XXXI/1, p. 78). Likewise, manuscripts on the phenomenological reduction emphasize that the world is only thinkable as idea from within the coherence of transcendental subjectivity (Husserl 2002b, Hua XXXVI, p. 26). In short, while a real object is certainly given *as* independent of consciousness and in that sense also distinct from a mere appearance, Husserl also seems to believe that the object ultimately derives its reality-sense from consciousness.

The solution to this ambiguity lies in the fact that Husserl, like Kant, seeks to blend realism within idealism. Simply put, (i) real objects and appearing objects are categorically distinct, yet (ii) both are also in a deeper sense rooted in consciousness. As with Kant, a superficial reading could lead one to conclude that point (ii) must contradict point (i) – yet Husserl, like Kant, denies this. On Husserl’s view, it is consistent to say, for instance, that one believes that the physical world truly exists independently of one’s personal experiences,

while at the same time believing that that conviction ultimately derives all its sense (including that which the conviction is about) in some way from one's experiences. To make this more concrete: one can believe that the Big Bang created our universe 13.8 billion years ago (*a posteriori*, since it pertains to natural facts), while also believing that even the Big Bang and "all the sense determining it" comes, in the end, "from my experiencing" (*a priori*, since all sense-determination comes from experiencing consciousness) (Husserl 1950, Hua I, p. 65; Husserl 1960, p. 24).

Husserl's transcendental commitment to (ii), then, which is generally emphasized by East Coast readers, does not change the potency of the distinction defended by West Coast readers made in (i). This is also made pretty clear in lectures on phenomenological psychology, where Husserl notes that a "physical thing [is] *a priori*, like any object at all, referable to a subjectivity, as experienceable and knowable by it; but [...] in its sense as an object, a thing includes nothing of a subjectivity related to it" (Husserl 1962, Hua IX, p. 118; Husserl 1977, p. 89).<sup>17</sup> This illustrates that conceptually differentiating them does not necessitate their ontological differentiation.<sup>18</sup> This is also why Husserl insists that the phenomenologist doesn't study separate mental entities. To the contrary, phenomenology makes "the world *as such* our theme together with every natural consideration of the world" (Husserl 1962, Hua IX, p. 222; Husserl 1977, p. 170, *my italics*); it studies the "always known and knowable world, precisely as it is known and knowable" (Husserl 1956, Hua VII, p. 272; Husserl 1974, p. 43).

For Husserl, then, as for Kant, the Cartesian conviction that an account of the communion of consciousness with radically mind-independent entities must be given has to be rejected. Reality does not derive its sense from a relation to mind-independent objects. To the contrary, transcendental idealism relocates the norm for reality ascription to within the scope of possible experience: the "space of possible absolute consciousness encompasses *all meaningful questions and answers, all meaningful truth and existence*" (Husserl 2002a, Hua XXXV, pp. 270 –

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17 The same point is emphasized in *Ideas III*: The issue we need to understand is "how 'the same thing' functions as to concepts and propositions in ontological [scientific] and phenomenological [transcendental] research [respectively]" (Husserl 1971, Hua V, p. 80; Husserl 1980, p. 68, *my italics*).

18 This reading brings not only the noema-debate to its only viable solution, but also, I think, Ameriks's (1977) early dispute with Solomon (1972), Ingarden (1973), and others about the term 'constitution' in Husserl's work and about the meaning of consciousness as productive source of the world. One can agree with Ameriks's realist reading that the world for Husserl is not "a part of consciousness" and that constitution does not signify "creation" or "invention." One can accept all that while still agreeing with Ingarden (1973) that Husserl regarded external objects rooted in the productivity of transcendental consciousness.

271, my translation). This means that, again in line with Kant, the mark of veridical perception cannot be the presence of a relation to radically mind-independent objects. As Husserl puts it: “everything depends upon the interconnections [in consciousness] that present intelligible unity. They themselves constitute objectivity [...] It is only in these connections that the objectivity of the objective sciences [...] constitutes itself” (Husserl 1950, Hua II, p. 75; Husserl 1999, p. 55).

## 7 Husserl: Phenomena *and* Noumena?

Husserl scholars may have this advantage over Kant scholars: that the former’s work is not pervaded with puzzling remarks on the existence of noumena. Yet Husserl does, precisely in what is arguably the most idealist section in *Ideas I*, address the issue of the noumenon in a paragraph entitled “The Logical Possibility and the Material Countersense of a World Outside Ours” (Husserl 1976, Hua III/1, pp. 90–91; Husserl 1983, pp. 108–109). Focusing on this paragraph should help draw out more clearly that, in spite of the widespread acceptance of the contrary view, Husserl’s position on the noumenon and on the faults of transcendental realism are, in its broad outlines, very similar to Kant’s.

Starting from the paragraph’s title, the first question that arises is what Husserl means by *logical* possibility/countersense and *material* possibility/countersense.<sup>19</sup> This demands a clarification of the concepts of material and formal in Husserl’s work. In brief, for Husserl, so-called formal ontology includes only formal entities (or concepts), which constitute the study province of formal logic. The formal character of such entities at the same time suggests that they do not belong to any particular material-ontological region. Instead, material regions all abide by and in some sense at least make use of formal principles. Material ontology can in turn be divided into different regions to which various sciences correspond, such as biology, geometry, or phenomenology (“organism,” “space,” and “consciousness” would be their respective material-ontological regions). Any region of inquiry which is not strictly formal is thus to be considered material (so the term has nothing to do with “physical matter”).

The second question which now rises is what constitutes a countersense on both levels. First, a material countersense is, for Husserl, any expression whose concrete content matter is inherently contradictory. For instance, the proposition

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<sup>19</sup> Unimportant in the present context, Husserl also differentiates the countersense from the nonsense, which “results when the formation-rules for complex terms and sentences are violated” (Centrone 2010, p. 117). One example of this would be meaningless gibberish (a sentence without meaning whatsoever).

that “if something is clearly red all over then it is clearly green all over” is a material countersense.<sup>20</sup> Also, “a round square” – often used by Husserl – is a material countersense.

Second, a formal countersense is an expression whose content involves an inherent formal contradiction, as for instance in the proposition that “for any properties  $x$  and  $y$ , if something has both  $x$  and  $y$  then it does not have  $x$  and  $y$ .”

From here a third and more urgent question can finally be raised, namely why the existence of a world beyond possible experience is in fact a material countersense. That this idea is not logically contradictory is deemed evident by Husserl: “something real outside this world is, of course, ‘logically’ possible; obviously it involves no formal contradiction” (Husserl 1976, Hua III/1, p. 90; Husserl 1983, p. 108). Husserl, then, like Kant, accepts at least the formal coherence of this idea. So where, according to Husserl, does its material contradiction lie?

The answer is: in the material region of transcendental consciousness. What does that mean? Husserl believes that while we may be capable of conceiving the merely empty possibility (its formal coherence) of a world beyond ours, as soon as “we ask about the essential conditions on which its validity would depend,” we “recognize that something transcendent *necessarily must be experienceable* not merely by an ego conceived as an empty logical possibility but by *any actual ego*” (Husserl 1976, Hua III/1, p. 90; Husserl 1983, p. 108, my italics).<sup>21</sup> In other words, any object whatsoever presupposes the possibility of being intended by a consciousness. This universal *a priori* correlation between object and consciousness, insofar as it states a universal law for the being of any object, is a material – not a formal – law. Obviously, this correlation claim does not pertain to any physical law governing things; but that is not required to make it a material law. For Husserl, it is material in the sense of being a “philosophical” or “transcendental” law at the fundamental level of transcendently constituting consciousness.<sup>22</sup>

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**20** Example taken from Centrone 2010, p. 118. See also Leichtle 2002 for a more elaborate discussion of this.

**21** The word “any” [meaning “every”] may surprise here. Husserl elaborates on this further on, noting that “what is cognizable by one ego must, of essential necessity, be cognizable by *any* ego” and that there exist “eidetically regarded, *essential possibilities of effecting a mutual understanding*” such that “worlds of experience separated in fact become joined by concatenations of actual experience to make up the one intersubjective world” (Husserl 1976, Hua III/1, p. 90; Husserl 1983, p. 108). In what follows, I speak simply of a (not just any) ego.

**22** One could ask here why the logical possibility of a radically mind-independent world is not in fact more important than its material countersense. Does formal logic not stand in the highest possible regard, above that of any conceivable material inquiry? But the answer, for Husserl at

And so Husserl concludes, in a manner reminiscent of Kant, that the “formal-logical possibility of realities outside the world [...] materially proves to be a countersense” (Husserl 1976, Hua III/1, p. 91; Husserl 1983, p. 109).<sup>23</sup> It may be worth highlighting an apparent difference though, namely that whereas Husserl here focuses on the formal possibility of a world beyond ours, Kant seemed instead to focus on the limits of intuition. As discussed earlier, Kant emphasized in particular that he had proven neither “that another kind of intuition is possible” nor “that sensible intuition is the only possible intuition” (Kant 1781, A 252).<sup>24</sup> Still, I do not think this makes for a substantial difference between both accounts. Kant’s point was that we have no intuition of a noumenal world and cannot even truly imagine the reality of such an intuition. Since for Kant all justification of propositions with content must come from intuition – since “thoughts without content are empty” (Kant 1781/1787, A 51/B 75) – the concept of such a world as well as of a corresponding non-sensible intuition lacks real justification and becomes a mere formal postulation. Kant explicitly acknowledges this, saying that we “are in no way justified” in positively accepting another kind of intuition that is non-sensible (even though the idea is formally non-contradictory) (Kant 1781/1787, A 259/B 309).

Thus, for Kant, the possibility of a non-sensible intuition of a noumenal world proved to be, in spite of its formal coherence, not a real possibility. So while Kant, indeed, unlike Husserl, focused on intuition to discuss the possibility of a world beyond ours, the conclusion he reaches still turns out pretty much the same – namely that although we cannot imagine what such an intuition would be like (since it has no intuitive or “material,” justificatory ground, in Husserl’s idiom) it is still formally coherent (we have an empty concept for it).

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least, is negative. That the *a priori* correlation is universal means that it holds for all formal expressions as well. Put differently, even logic derives its sense and validity from transcendental consciousness – since *no object* [including ideal ones] signifies a “reaching out beyond the world which is for consciousness” (Husserl 1976, Hua III/1, p. 100; Husserl 1983, p. 121).

<sup>23</sup> Leichtle (2002) comes to a similar conclusion based on Husserl’s much earlier *The Idea of Phenomenology* (from 1907), writing that Husserl “will attempt to demonstrate the countersense of construing the problem of transcendence as that of understanding how ‘real immanence’ correlates with ‘absolute transcendence’” (Leichtle 2002, p. 386).

<sup>24</sup> Thanks in particular to Stefano Vincini for pointing this out to me.

## Conclusion

This chapter has offered a general systematic-historical comparison of Kant and Husserl regarding their defenses of transcendental idealism. I argued that for both, transcendental idealism is genuinely a form of idealism, albeit one which is motivated precisely by the attempt to overcome skeptical idealism by incorporating realism. Both defenses further share a point of departure in Descartes's philosophy, which both Kant and Husserl take to be rooted in a transcendental realism that has to be overcome by relocating the norm for reality ascription within the scope of possible experience. I suggested that Kant is plausibly read as being consistent on this matter, and that the negative concept of noumenon remaining in his philosophy entails nothing but the necessary concept of the empty logical possibility of a world beyond ours – something that can also be found in Husserl.

At the same time, I wish not to downplay the fact that Husserl's exploration of transcendental idealism through the universal *a priori* correlation as a synthetic (material) *a priori* truth is quite different from Kant's. Further differences would, I think, become apparent through a more detailed exposition of Husserl's intricate proof structure, which would involve a discussion of Husserl's concept of *a priori*<sup>25</sup> and of his theory of *a priori* intuition.<sup>26</sup> Most notably, perhaps, this would draw out (i) the different theories of *a priori* evidence that underlie their respective proofs, and how this subsequently (ii) leads Husserl to distance him-

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<sup>25</sup> I cannot dwell on the details of Husserl's concept of *a priori* here, although a further elaboration would be required for a complete exposition of the universal *a priori* correlation. In brief, Husserl maintains that *a priori* refers to pure possibility, i.e. to pure imaginative possibility in detachment from actuality. Any *a priori* proposition is one which holds valid in pure possibility, and therefore "prescribes rules" to the actual (as an instance of the possible). Euclidean geometrical propositions are instances of regionally valid *a priori* propositions (valid within a Euclidean manifold). Husserl, however, maintains that "there is not the slightest reason to consider the methodological structure of *a priori* thinking [...] as an exclusive property of the mathematical sphere" (Husserl 1997, p. 353). This is while the capacity for the free variation of possibilities in pure imagination involved in *a priori* cognition is "everywhere the same" (Husserl 1997, p. 354). As a result, "from every concrete actuality, and every individual trait actually experienced in it or capable of being experienced, a path stands open to the realm of ideal or pure possibility and consequently to that of *a priori* thinking" (Husserl 1997, pp. 353–354). Phenomenology itself is an example of a non-mathematical *a priori* discipline. In the same manner, the necessity of the correlation of object to consciousness can be known to hold *a priori* in pure possibility. See also van Mazijk 2018 where I discuss this extensively.

<sup>26</sup> On Husserl's view, in contradistinction to Kant's, *a priori* truths can be directly intuited by us. See Tieszen 1984 and Uehlein 1992 for discussions on Husserl's concept of *a priori* intuition.

self from Kant's philosophy, which Husserl read as pertaining exclusively to humans, rather than to the pure possibility of an object in general.<sup>27</sup> Lastly, this would also, I think, reveal that Husserl does not just attempt to "save" empirical realism as Kant does (the reality of spatiotemporal things), but the reality of any intended object – reality understood each time within the essential limitations of the respective region. These deeper divergences, however, lie outside the scope of the present chapter, which was concerned with fleshing out more generally the similarities between Kant's and Husserl's attempts to overcome skeptical idealism through transcendental idealism.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> See Husserl 1956, Hua VII, pp. 357–364, 377–381.

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