ON EXTERNAL OBJECTS
By Immanuel Kant
From Critique of Pure Reason (1781)

General Observations on The Transcendental Aesthetic

To avoid all misapprehension, it is necessary to explain, as clearly as possible, what our view is regarding the fundamental constitution of sensible knowledge in general.

What we have meant to say is that all our intuition is nothing but the representation of appearance; that the things which we intuit are not in themselves what we intuit them as being, nor their relations so constituted in themselves as they appear to us, and that if the subject, or even only the subjective constitution of the senses in general, be removed, the whole constitution and all the relations of objects in space and time, nay space and time themselves, would vanish. As appearances, they cannot exist in themselves, but only in us. What objects may be in themselves, and apart from all this receptivity of our sensibility, remains completely unknown to us. We know nothing but our mode of perceiving them – a mode which is peculiar to us, and not necessarily shared in by every being, though, certainly, by every human being. … Even if we could bring our intuition to the highest degree of clearness, we should not thereby come any nearer to the constitution of objects in themselves. We should still know only our mode of intuition, that is, our sensibility. … What the objects may be in themselves would never become known to us even through the most enlightened knowledge of that which is alone given us, namely, their appearance. …

The representation of a body in intuition … contains nothing that can belong to an object in itself, but merely the appearance of something, and the mode in which we are affected by that something; and this receptivity of our faculty of knowledge is termed sensibility. Even if that appearance could become completely transparent to us, such knowledge would remain toto coelo different from knowledge of the object in itself. …

It is not that by our sensibility we cannot know the nature of things in themselves in any save a confused fashion; we do not apprehend them in any fashion whatsoever. If our subjective constitution be removed, the represented object, with the qualities which sensible intuition bestows upon it, is nowhere to be found, and cannot possibly be found. For it is this subjective constitution which determines its form as appearance.
On the Ground of the Distinction of all Objects in General into Phenomena and Noumena

Appearances, so far as they are thought as objects according to the unity of the categories, are called *phenomena*. But if I postulate 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*. ...

If the senses represent to us something merely as it appears, this something must also in itself be a thing, and an object of a non-sensible intuition, that is, of the understanding. In other words, a [kind of] knowledge must be possible, in which there is no sensibility, and which alone has reality that is absolutely objective. Through it objects will be represented as *they are*, whereas in the empirical employment of our understanding things will be known only as they appear. ...

All our representations are, it is true, referred by the understanding to some object; and since appearances are nothing but representations, the understanding refers them to a *something*, as the object of sensible intuition. But this something, thus conceived, is only the transcendental object; and by that is meant a *something* = X, of which we know, and with the present constitution of our understanding can know, nothing whatsoever ... and the same conclusion also, of course, follows from the concept of an appearance in general; namely, that something which is not in itself appearance must correspond to it. For appearance can be nothing by itself, outside our mode of representation. Unless, therefore, we are to move constantly in a circle, the word appearance must be recognized as already indicating a relation to something, the immediate representation of which is, indeed, sensible, but which, even apart from the constitution of our sensibility (upon which the form of our intuition is grounded), must be something in itself, that is, an object independent of sensibility. There thus results the concept of a *noumenon*. It is not of anything, but signifies only the thought of something in general, in which I abstract from everything that belongs to the form of sensible intuition.
**The Fourth Paralogism: Of Ideality (In Regard to Outer Relation)**

Now all outer appearances are of such a nature that their existence is not immediately perceived, and that we can only infer them as the cause of given perceptions:

Therefore the existence of all objects of the outer senses is doubtful. This uncertainty I entitle the ideality of outer appearances, and the doctrine of this ideality is called **idealism**, as distinguished from the counter-assertion of a possible certainty in regard to objects of outer sense, which is called **dualism**.

**Critique of the Fourth Paralogism of Transcendental Psychology**

Let us first examine the premises. We are justified, [it is argued], in maintaining that only what is in ourselves can be perceived immediately, and that my own existence is the sole object of a mere perception. The existence, therefore, of an actual object outside me (if this word 'me' be taken in the intellectual [not in the empirical] sense) is never given directly in perception. Perception is a modification of inner sense, and the existence of the outer object can be added to it only in thought, as being its outer cause, and accordingly as being inferred. For the same reason, Descartes was justified in limiting all perception, in the narrowest sense of that term, to the proposition, 'I, as a thinking being, exist.' Obviously, since what is without is not in me, I cannot encounter it in my apperception, nor therefore in any perception, which, properly regarded, is merely the determination of apperception.

I am not, therefore, 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. Now the inference from a given effect to a determinate cause is always uncertain, since the effect may be due to more than one cause. Accordingly, as regards the relation of the perception to its cause, it always remains doubtful whether the cause be internal or external; whether, that is to say, all the so-called outer perceptions are not a mere play of our inner sense, or whether they stand in relation to actual external objects as their cause. At all events, the existence of the latter is only inferred, and is open to all the dangers of inference, whereas the object of inner sense (I myself with all my representations) is immediately perceived, and its existence does not allow of being doubted.

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.

Before exhibiting our paralogism in all its deceptive illusoriness, I have first to remark that we must necessarily distinguish two types of idealism, the transcendental and the empirical. 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. To this idealism there is opposed a *transcendental realism* which 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 pure concepts of understanding. It is, in fact, this transcendental realist who afterwards 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.

The transcendental idealist, on the other hand, may be an empirical realist or, as he is called, a *dualist*; that is, he may admit the existence of matter without going outside his mere self-consciousness, or assuming anything more than the certainty of his representations, that is, the *cogito, ergo sum*. For he considers this matter and even its inner possibility to be appearance merely; and appearance, if separated from our sensibility, is nothing. Matter is with him, therefore, only a species of representations (intuition), which are called external, not as standing in relation to objects in themselves external, but because they relate perceptions to the space in which all things are external to one another, while yet the space itself is in us.

From the start, we have declared ourselves in favour of this transcendental idealism; and our doctrine thus removes all difficulty in the way of accepting the existence of matter on the unaided testimony of our mere self-consciousness, or of declaring it to be thereby proved in the same manner as the existence of myself as a thinking being is proved. There can be no question that I am conscious of my representations; these representations and I myself, who have the representations, therefore exist. External objects (bodies), however, are mere appearances, and are therefore nothing but a species of my representations, the objects of which are something only through these representations. Apart from them they are nothing. Thus external things exist as well as I myself, and both indeed, upon the immediate witness of my self-consciousness. The only difference is that the
representation of myself, as the thinking subject, belongs to inner sense only, while the representations which mark extended beings belong also to outer sense. In order to arrive at the reality of outer objects I have just as little need to resort to inference as I have in regard to the reality of the object of my inner sense, that is, in regard to the reality of my thoughts. For in both cases alike the objects are nothing but representations, the immediate perception (consciousness) of which is at the same time a sufficient proof of their reality.

The transcendental idealist is, therefore, an empirical realist, and allows to matter, as appearance, a reality which does not permit of being inferred, but is immediately perceived. Transcendental realism, on the other hand, inevitably falls into difficulties, and finds itself obliged to give way to empirical idealism, in that it regards the objects of outer sense as something distinct from the senses themselves, treating mere appearances as self-subsistent beings, existing outside us. On such a view as this, however clearly we may be conscious of our representation of these things, it is still far from certain that, if the representation exists, there exists also the object corresponding to it. In our system, on the other hand, these external things, namely matter, are in all their configurations and alterations nothing but mere appearances, that is, representations in us, of the reality of which we are immediately conscious.

Since, so far as I know, all psychologists who adopt empirical idealism are transcendental realists, they have certainly proceeded quite consistently in ascribing great importance to empirical idealism, as one of the problems in regard to which the human mind is quite at a loss how to proceed. For if we regard outer appearances as representations produced in us by their objects, and if these objects be things existing in themselves outside us, it is indeed impossible to see how we can come to know the existence of the objects otherwise than by inference from the effect to the cause; and this being so, it must always remain doubtful whether the cause in question be in us or outside us. We can indeed admit that something, which may be (in the transcendental sense) outside us, is the cause of our outer intuitions, but this is not the object of which we are thinking in the representations of matter and of corporeal things; for these are merely appearances, that is, mere kinds of representation, which are never to be met with save in us, and the reality of which depends on immediate consciousness, just as does the consciousness of my own thoughts. The transcendental object is equally unknown in respect to inner and to outer intuition. But it is not of this that we are here speaking, but of the empirical object, which is called an external object if it is represented in space, and an inner object if it is represented only in its time-relations. Neither space nor time, however, is to be found save in us.
The expression 'outside us' is thus unavoidably ambiguous in meaning, sometimes signifying what as thing in itself exists apart from us, and sometimes what belongs solely to outer appearance. In order, therefore, to make this concept, in the latter sense – the sense in which the psychological question as to the reality of our outer intuition has to be understood – quite unambiguous, we shall distinguish empirically external objects from those which may be said to be external in the transcendental sense, by explicitly entitling the former 'things which are to be found in space'.

Space and time are indeed a priori representations, which dwell in us as forms of our sensible intuition, before any real object, determining our sense through sensation, has enabled us to represent the object under those sensible relations. … It is sensation, therefore, that indicates a reality in space or in time, according as it is related to the one or to the other mode of sensible intuition. … This admits of no doubt; whether we take pleasure and pain, or the sensations of the outer senses, colours, heat, etc., perception is that whereby the material required to enable us to think objects of sensible intuition must first be given. This perception, therefore (to consider, for the moment, only outer intuitions), represents something real in space. For, in the first place, while space is the representation of a mere possibility of coexistence, perception is the representation of a reality. …

All outer perception, therefore, yields immediate proof of something real in space, or rather is the real itself. In this sense empirical realism is beyond question; that is, there corresponds to our outer intuitions something real in space. Space itself, with all its appearances, as representations, is, indeed, only in me, but nevertheless the real, that is, the material of all objects of outer intuition, is actually given in this space, independently of all imaginative invention. Also, it is impossible that in this space anything outside us (in the transcendental sense) should be given, space itself being nothing outside our sensibility. Even the most rigid idealist cannot, therefore, require a proof that the object outside us (taking 'outside' in the strict [transcendental] sense) corresponds to our perception. For if there be any such object, it could not be represented and intuited as outside us, because such representation and intuition presuppose space, and reality in space, being the reality of a mere representation, is nothing other than perception itself. The real of outer appearances is therefore real in perception only, and can be real in no other way. … If we treat outer objects as things in themselves, it is quite impossible to understand how we could arrive at a knowledge of their reality outside us, since we have to rely merely on the representation which is in us. For we cannot be sentient [of what is] outside ourselves, but only [of what is] in us, and the whole of our self-consciousness therefore yields nothing save merely our own determinations.