

The Possibility of Kantian Armchair Knowledge¹

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Abstract. In his masterful essay, “Armchair Knowledge: Some Kantian Reflections”, A.W. Moore claims that Kant lapses into contradiction as a result of invoking transcendental idealism as a solution to the puzzle of what Moore calls “armchair knowledge”. Moore talks about “the incoherence of transcendental idealism” and, through a discussion which includes the question of whether different subjects possess different categories, offers an account of armchair knowledge without transcendental idealism. He suggests we should abandon the Kantian a priori intuitions and, with them, also Kant’s synthetic a priori judgements. In this paper, I examine some of the problems identified by Moore in Kant’s account. I do not aim to show that there is no internal inconsistency in Kant’s thought or that Moore (perhaps continuing in this way Kant’s project of uncovering the deceptions of transcendental judgements) might not be right to point to potential problems in Kant’s texts; my claim is rather that there are resources in the Kantian corpus to explain away the main contradictions and conflicts Moore identifies in Kant.

Key words: Kant, Adrian W. Moore, transcendental idealism, knowledge vs. cognition, armchair knowledge, things in themselves.

1. INTRODUCTION

In the *Critique of Pure Reason*, in the second division of Transcendental Logic (namely, Transcendental Dialectic), Kant aims to uncover the illusion of transcendental judgements and to keep it from deceiving us; he notes, however, that Transcendental Dialectic cannot make that illusion disappear and warns us that it will hoodwink and thrust reason incessantly into momentary aberrations, which we will then need to remove. (A297-8/B354-5)²

In his masterful essay, “Armchair Knowledge: Some Kantian Reflections”, A.W. Moore claims that Kant lapses into contradiction as a result of invoking transcendental idealism as a solution to the puzzle of what Moore calls “armchair knowledge”.³ Moore

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2] I am mainly relying on Werner S. Pluhar’s translation, in the 1996 unified edition of KrV, and on the translation by Paul Guyer and Allen W. Wood, in the 1998 CUP edition. Pagination references in the text and footnotes are to the volume and page number in the German edition of Kant’s works, *Kants gesammelte Schriften* (1900-). References to the KrV follow the A (first edition), B (second edition) convention. The translations I use are listed in the bibliography with any abbreviations mentioned after the publication year. Changes to the translation are indicated by “translation (slightly) modified”. The abbreviations “e.o.” and “m.e.” represent, respectively, “emphasis in the original” and “my emphasis, S.B.”

3] Moore’s paper is the text of his 2019 ‘Jean-Jacques Rousseau’ Annual Lecture, published in Moore (2023).

talks about “the incoherence of transcendental idealism” (33)⁴ and, through a discussion which includes the question of whether different subjects possess different categories, offers an account of armchair knowledge without transcendental idealism. He suggests we should abandon the Kantian a priori intuitions and, with them, also Kant’s synthetic a priori judgements.

In what follows, I will examine some of the problems identified by Moore in Kant’s account, with particular focus on the contradiction he thinks Kant commits as a result of being forced to accede to synthetic armchair knowledge of how things are in themselves.⁵ I discuss Moore’s notion of armchair knowledge, Kant’s distinction between cognition [*Erkenntnis*] and knowledge [*Wissen*], the conflict Moore identifies between the necessity and contingency of synthetic armchair knowledge, and the claim that Kant has to be incoherently committed to synthetic armchair knowledge of things in themselves. I will also make a brief note on Moore’s discussion of whether different subjects can have different pure concepts.

I do not aim to show that there is no internal inconsistency in Kant’s thought or that Moore (perhaps continuing in this way Kant’s project of uncovering the deceptions of transcendental judgements – hence the subtitle of his talk, “Kantian Reflections”) might not be right to point to potential problems in Kant’s texts; my claim is rather that there are resources in the Kantian corpus to clarify the significant conflicts Moore thinks Kant ends up with.⁶

2. PUZZLES: ARMCHAIR KNOWLEDGE AND KNOWLEDGE OF WHAT IS NECESSARY AS NECESSARY

Moore defines armchair knowledge as “knowledge that is independent of experience, in the sense that it is not warranted by experience”. (23) This is not armchair-related knowledge (say, of how comfortable the armchair is), but knowledge acquired by the subject⁷ while seated in the armchair. The term “armchair knowledge” is used by Moore to refer to a particular type of a priori knowledge,

4] In what follows, unattributed page references are to Moore’s ‘Rousseau’ Annual Lecture in Moore (2023).

5] Below (see n40), this is called the Metaphysical Contradiction. I also discuss here two other contradictions: the Thinking Contradiction and the Modal Contradiction (see ns27 and 36).

6] In his paper, Moore refers to our previous exchange (2016) as a stimulus for part of the discussion in his ‘Rousseau’ Lecture. My aim in the contribution to the 2016 exchange was also to clarify away the significant contradictions he identified in Kant in his Kant chapter of *The Evolution of Modern Metaphysics* (2012).

7] “Subject” is Moore’s term and he refers to Kant for remarks pertinent to his (Moore’s) use of the term (23 n1).

namely, a priori knowledge that *is* independent of experience.^{8,9} One feature Moore takes to be crucial for armchair knowledge is that it does not involve any appeal to any particular encounter with anything beyond the subject.¹⁰

Moore thinks that accounting for armchair knowledge is one of the oldest philosophical puzzles. It is generated by the fact that there seems to be such knowledge (and, hence, it is acquired without any use of any particular encounter with anything beyond the subject) and, yet, some of it appears to concern what is beyond the subject. Moreover, some such knowledge concerns not only just *some* of what is beyond the subject, but all of what could possibly be beyond the subject.¹¹ The puzzle is summarised by Moore as follows:

- (i) there is armchair knowledge;
- (ii) some armchair knowledge (if such there be) concerns what is beyond the subject;
- and
- (iii) armchair knowledge does not involve any appeal to any particular encounter with anything beyond the subject. (24)¹²

There are philosophers who think the puzzle can be solved, and adopt a form of idealism: they claim that some of what is beyond the subject has a form – a range of essential features – that depends on the subject. (25)¹³ Hence, no use needs to be

8] There is also a priori knowledge that could have been independent of experience. For instance, knowledge of a mathematical truth based on an appeal to authority does not qualify as armchair knowledge, but does qualify as a priori in this sense. This is Moore's example: "my own knowledge that every natural number is the sum of four squares is based on an appeal to authority. So it is not included in what I am calling 'armchair knowledge'. But it is included in what, on this broad usage, would be called 'a priori knowledge', since it is knowledge of a mathematical truth that could in principle have been independent of experience". (24 n3)

9] Moore also notes the use of 'a priori' to refer to truths (Moore gives the example of potential items of armchair knowledge), rather than knowledge, and also to non-propositional entities, such as concepts (Kant's categories, for instance). (1 n3) Finally, another reason for talking about 'armchair', rather than 'a priori knowledge' is offered by Moore later in his paper: he thinks it would be regarded as more acceptable to claim that I have armchair knowledge of my own existence than to classify such knowledge as a priori. (41 n57)

10] In the KrV, Kant claims that "even though all our cognition [*Erkenntnis*] starts with experience, that does not mean that all of it arises from experience". (B1) If all our cognition, including that which does not arise from experience (and is, hence, a priori), starts with experience, then there is some 'use' of some particular encounter with something beyond the subject in the case of Kant's a priori cognition. Moore does not discuss this distinguishing aspect of Kant's account.

11] Moore's reference to Kant (B3-4) here suggests he has in mind knowledge of the conditions which make experience and cognition in general possible.

12] Moore notes that some philosophers try to solve the puzzle by denying (i), (ii) or (iii): some empiricists deny (i); other empiricists accept (i), but deny (ii); for them, all armchair knowledge concerns the subject's command of language or the subject's conceptual repertoire or something of this kind; some Platonists accept (i) and (ii), but deny (iii); they claim that armchair knowledge is acquired through acquaintance with one or more Platonic Ideas. (24-5)

13] I think there will be a difference here between the position of those who think that some of

made, in acquisition of this knowledge, of any particular encounter with anything beyond the subject. (25)¹⁴

Moore attributes this view to Kant. He thinks the attraction of this view is not limited to the puzzle of armchair knowledge, but goes beyond to account for some knowledge of what is necessary. Moreover, "it can be used to account for (some) knowledge of what is necessary, *as necessary*." (25 - e.o.) After all, according to Moore, Kant takes it that all armchair knowledge, simply qua armchair knowledge, is knowledge of what is necessary. For example, some armchair knowledge might be knowledge to the effect that whatever has the given form is of such and such a kind; then, for Moore, Kant's view is that some of this knowledge is also knowledge to the effect that whatever has the given form *must be* of such and such a kind.

This, however, (namely, how to account for knowledge of what is necessary *as necessary*) is, according to Moore, another old philosophical puzzle. The puzzle is given by the implication that, finite and contingent beings like us, who have knowledge of what is necessary, must have "epistemic access to all the ways things might have been". (25)¹⁵ A solution to this puzzle, Moore claims, is to find a grounding for necessity in contingency. On his view, Kant attempts to offer a successful account of this kind.

This is how Moore interprets Kant: Kant's idealism maintains that the part of the subject's armchair knowledge, which pertains to the given form, is knowledge from a particular point of view; a point of view admits of alternatives; hence, the subject's having this point of view is the contingency in which necessity is grounded; this does not compromise necessity, since there is not "anything in his idealism to preclude the subject's continuing to have, and continuing to exercise, knowledge from the given point of view"; (26) such knowledge, however, cannot itself include acknowledgement of the idealism.

At this point, Moore introduces the notion of *i-dependence*, the dependence posited by the idealist (of the form of what is beyond the subject on the subject). With this notion, he claims, transcendental idealism can be read as a version of idealism

what is beyond the subject has a form that depends on the subject, on the one hand, and, on the other, the positions of those for whom some of what is beyond the subject has a form, which does not depend on the subject, but nevertheless is a form which corresponds to the form that the subject also has and that the subject needs in order to make sense of what is beyond her.

14] Again, it depends depends on what "use" means means, but we can also say that the subject is an epistemic agent with the mind structured by the form.

15] It seems that the idea here is that, to have knowledge of what is necessary is to have knowledge that that which is necessary could not have been otherwise; and, to know that things could not have been otherwise (than how they necessarily are) implies that we, finite and contingent beings, have epistemic access to all the ways things might have been. This, however, must be an accurate presentation of a situation in which a finite and contingent being tries to show that knowledge of X is knowledge of what is necessary; if we start with the assumption that knowledge of X is knowledge of what is necessary and try to understand how this might be possible, this puzzle does not seem to emerge.

in which i-dependence is not itself included in whatever has this form. By contrast, empirical idealism is idealism in which i-dependence is included. Kant's idealism is transcendental, since it assigns contingency to the i-dependence:

(for it allows that there might not have been any such subject, nor therefore any such form depending on any such subject), and this contingency, simply *qua* contingency, must transcend the necessity attendant on whatever has the form in question. (26)

Next, Moore focuses on the distinction between analytic and synthetic armchair knowledge. He notes that, for Kant, we can distinguish between these two kinds of armchair knowledge, a distinction related to Kant's distinction between intuitions and concepts. The subject is given various objects of knowledge by means of intuitions and she thinks about these objects by means of concepts. Moreover, Moore observes that any knowledge, "at least if it has what Kant calls 'content'", must make use of both intuitions and concepts. (27)

Distinctive about analytic knowledge, Moore remarks, is that the exercise of concepts does all the relevant work: the subject can know that what is being thought is true by appeal to the concepts involved and by analysis of them. By contrast, in the case of synthetic armchair knowledge, the subject must also appeal to the intuitions involved. This would seem to suggest that no analytic armchair knowledge concerns what is beyond the subject.¹⁶ Yet, Moore maintains that we are not forced to conclude this:

There is a perfectly good sense of 'concern' in which the subject's analytic armchair knowledge that all vixens are female, say, concerns vixens, not the subject's concept of a vixen, nor any part of the subject's conceptual repertoire. [...] Indeed my own view is that Kant allows for analytic armchair knowledge that lacks content, that is to say analytic armchair knowledge in which the concepts involved do not relate to intuitions, and that even knowledge of *this* kind can, in the relevant sense of 'concern', concern what is beyond the subject. An example might be the subject's knowledge that things in themselves are things irrespective of how they are given to us, knowledge which concerns things in themselves. (27-8 - e.o.)

The first point noted by Moore in this quotation is that analytic armchair knowledge, although true only by appeal to the concepts involved and by analysis of them, nevertheless also concerns what is beyond the subject. This is significant, since it suggests there is analytic armchair knowledge. The second point noted by Moore here is that this analytic armchair knowledge can concern things in themselves. I discuss these claims in more detail, in the next two sections, and I start with Moore's notion of armchair knowledge and its relation to Kant's distinction between cognition [*Erkenntnis*] and [*Wissen*].

[16] Hence, given the way the puzzle of armchair knowledge was formulated by Moore above, it seems that ii) only applies to synthetic armchair knowledge.

3. ARMCHAIR KNOWLEDGE, KNOWLEDGE [*WISSEN*] AND COGNITION [*ERKENNTNIS*]

Immediately following the previous quotation, Moore inserts the following footnote:

Note that the distinction between knowledge and cognition that many Kant exegetes draw is very pertinent to what I am suggesting here and may help to make what I am suggesting appear less exegetically contentious. (28 n19)

In order to try to mitigate unnecessary exegetical contention, in this section, I will focus on Kant's distinction between knowledge and cognition, and their relation to Moore's armchair knowledge. In this footnote, Moore makes reference to another footnote, from his chapter on Kant (2012: Ch. 5) in *The Evolution of Modern Metaphysics*. (2012: 112-3 n13) My starting point will be this second footnote, which is quite substantial and exegetical.

First, the context in which, in *The Evolution*, Moore discusses Kant's distinction between knowledge and cognition is given by a discussion of Kant's distinction between "truths that can be known *a priori* and truths that cannot". (2012: 112) The respective footnote then follows. In this footnote, Moore notes that he uses 'knowledge' for Kant's 'cognition'. He says he agrees with the translation of Kant's '*Erkenntnis*' by 'cognition', as he thinks that whatever Kant means by '*Erkenntnis*', it is not 'knowledge'. This raises the following question: if *Erkenntnis*, the term in Kant usually translated by cognition, is not knowledge, then why does Moore use 'knowledge' for Kant's 'cognition'? We will examine his justification for this, but for the moment, let us follow Moore's discussion in this footnote further.

He notes that Kant takes "*Erkenntnis*" to be "the conscious representation [*Vorstellung*] of an object"¹⁷, and notes that this excludes some knowledge [*Wissen*] and includes some non-knowledge. The *Wissen* that *Erkenntnis* excludes, Moore continues, is "knowledge that is purely conceptual and makes no reference to any object", but, Moore notes, this is not the same as *analytic Wissen* (which is purely conceptual and need not make reference to any particular object either, although (as we have seen at the end of the previous section) Moore introduces a sense in which it "concerns" objects or what is beyond the subject).¹⁸ By contrast, the purely conceptual *Wissen* without reference

[17] He refers here to A320/B376-7 and the "Dohna-Wundlacken Logic" (24: 702).

[18] It should be noted, however, that Kant does not talk about analytic *Wissen* in his work. (Willaschek and Watkins 2020: 3211 n45) For the discussion of Kant's distinction between *Erkenntnis* and *Wissen*, I am relying on my "Kant's Rechtfertigung and the Epistemic Character of Practical Justification". (2013) I have also found very useful Willaschek and Watkins (2020), although there are a few important aspects (some mentioned in this paper), where my reading of Kant is slightly different from theirs.

to any object that Moore has in mind seems to be *Wissen* of things in themselves, for instance, “knowledge that there *are* things in themselves” (2012: 133 - e.o.), which he also offers as an example in the paper I am currently discussing.¹⁹

This suggests that Moore *may* accept *analytic Wissen* (perhaps even analytic knowledge of things in themselves) as the kind of knowledge included by *Erkenntnis*. The kind of knowledge that is excluded is, therefore, (perhaps merely) synthetic knowledge of things in themselves. As suggested just above and as we will see further on in this paper, Moore thinks that Kant incoherently must nevertheless make room for this kind of knowledge as part of cognition.

The non-*Wissen* that *Erkenntnis* includes is “the conscious representation of an object that contains some error”.²⁰ If *Erkenntnis* excludes *some Wissen* and includes some non-*Wissen*, then, at best, ‘*Erkenntnis*’ and ‘*Wissen*’ can overlap. Now, one reason why Moore wants to talk in terms of ‘knowledge’, when Kant uses ‘cognition [*Erkenntnis*]’, is that (he says) it “connects better with my broader concerns”; his justification for using ‘knowledge’, however, is that:

in all the relevant contexts, the questions that Kant raises about cognition, and the answers that he gives are equally questions and answers about knowledge. When he asks, for example, how cognition of a certain kind is possible [...],²¹ *the kind of cognition in question is likewise a kind of knowledge* (m.e.).²²

Hence, Moore relies on the fact that the notions overlap in all the relevant contexts; in the relevant contexts, the kind of cognition Kant discusses is also a kind of knowledge. This is how footnote 13 in *The Evolution of Modern Metaphysics*, Ch. 5, ends. In the next section, I focus on the relation between Moore’s armchair knowledge and Kant’s distinction between *Erkenntnis* and *Wissen*.

19] Moore makes reference to a section of his chapter, where he talks about knowledge of things in themselves. There are other examples he gives there: “space represents no property at all of any things in themselves nor any relation of them to each other (A26/B42)” or “[time] cannot be counted either as subsisting or inhering in the objects in themselves (A36/B52)” or “objects in themselves are not known to us at all (A30/B45)”. The assumption here seems to be that there is a distinction between objects and things in themselves (and perhaps between objects and objects in themselves, to include the expression at A30/B45), and the knowledge excluded by cognition is of things in themselves. To be sure, there is practical cognition of specific things in themselves (such as God or freedom), but no knowledge of specific things in themselves (at least, if Kant were to be consistent). My focus in what follows is on knowledge claims concerning things in themselves, which are formulated in positive terms. Those formulated in negative terms (as are the examples given above in this footnote) can easily be accounted for; for instance, they can be presented “through all the predicates that are already contained in the presupposition that the object has as a property nothing belonging to sensible intuition”. (B149)

20] Moore refers here to the “Blomberg Logic” (24:93-4 and 105) and the “Jäsche Logic” (9:53-4).

21] He refers here to B19ff. and Prolegomena (§5).

22] He makes further reference here to Bvii-x and Prolegomena (4:371).

4. KNOWLEDGE [*WISSEN*] AND COGNITION [*ERKENNTNIS*]

When Moore talks about Kant’s *Erkenntnis*, one passage to which he refers from Kant is the famous *Stufenleiter* passage at A320/B376-7 (e.o.), where Kant refers to a chart of kinds of presentations:

The genus is presentation [*Vorstellung*] as such (*repraesentatio*). Under it falls presentation with consciousness (*perceptio*). A *perception* that refers solely to the subject, viz., as the modification of the subject’s state, is *sensation* (*sensatio*); an objective perception is cognition (*cognitio*). Cognition is either *intuition* or *concept* (*intuitus vel conceptus*). An intuition refers directly to the object and is singular; a concept refers to the object indirectly, by means of a characteristic that may be common to several things.

”Cognition” is defined here as objective presentation with consciousness. ‘Objective’ seems to mean reference (whether direct or indirect) to an object, distinct from the subject. In the “Dohna-Wundlacken Logic”, the passage to which Moore refers clarifies these notions further: the consciousness which accompanies the objective presentation is described as “an *action* in the mind [...a] (presentation of our presentation), which is lacking in obscure presentations.” (24:701 - e.o.)²³ In the ‘Jäsche Logic’, Kant offers also an example; he explains that to cognise is “to be acquainted with something with consciousness” and adds that “[a]nimals are *acquainted* with objects too, but they do not *cognise* them”. (9:65 - e.o.) This suggests that, on Kant’s account, (some) animals have “obscure” presentations of objects, are acquainted with them, but without having also presentations of the respective presentations of the objects (that is, consciousness). Hence, they lack cognition of objects, although they have presentations.

One thing to note is that there are variations in the ways Kant defines *Erkenntnis*. For instance, in the *KrV*, he talks about the presentation of an object with consciousness, whereas in the ‘Jäsche Logic’ he talks about being acquainted with an object with consciousness. A second thing to remark is that, in some places at least, for Kant, both intuitions and concepts *on their own* count are cognitions. They refer (directly or, respectively, indirectly) to an object, and are conscious. The third interesting point is the distinction between the ways in which intuitions and concepts refer to objects – they, to use Moore’s terminology, “concern” objects in different ways.

The second aspect just mentioned (that intuition and concepts are on their own cognitions) offers an opportunity for a clarification. As suggested above, the Kantian notion of cognition, *Erkenntnis*, which Moore seems to have in mind in his discussion (let us call it E_M), is broader than the notion of cognition requiring both intuitions and concepts, a notion that Kant also formulates explicitly (call this, E_K). Thus, Kant says:

23] Translation slightly amended.

[S]ynthesis of a manifold (whether this manifold is given empirically or a priori) is what first gives rise to a cognition. [...] Bringing this synthesis to concepts, on the other hand, is a function belonging to the understanding; and it is through this function that the understanding first provides us with cognition in the proper meaning of the term. (A77-8/B103 - e.o.)²⁴

Here Kant talks about E_K . The different ways in which intuitions and concepts concern objects are thereby a bit further clarified by Kant: objects are given through intuitions and they are thought through concepts. This is a sense specified also by Moore. Hence, as mentioned above, the kinds of cognitions Moore seems to have in mind (E_M) correspond in Kant to cognitions which require intuitions and concepts (E_K), but also cognitions, where the presentation of objects with consciousness is given only by concepts or only by intuitions.

Now, as Moore notes, one way in which *Erkenntnis* is different from *Wissen* in Kant is that *Erkenntnis* need not refer to true presentations and, hence, includes what Moore calls “non-knowledge”. Thus, Kant notes that “if a cognition does not agree with the object to which it is referred then it is false, even if it contains something that might well hold for other objects”. (AA58/B83) But, if we focus on E_M (which includes cognitions requiring both concepts and intuitions, but also cognitions involving only concepts or only intuitions) and set as condition that we refer only to true cognitions of the type E_M (call this class of cognitions E_T), are all cognitions in this special class cases of knowledge [*Wissen*], as Moore suggests? In other words, is knowledge in Kant a true presentation, accompanied by consciousness, which refers to an object either thought through concepts or given through intuitions or both given through intuitions and thought through concepts?

Kant’s discussion of knowledge [*Wissen*] in the ‘Canon of Pure Reason’ suggests the answer is negative: even the more restricted kind of *Erkenntnis* (E_T) does not correspond to an appropriately restricted *Wissen*. Thus, in the Canon, *Wissen* is briefly introduced as a special case of assent or holding-to-be-true or considering-true [*Fürwahrhalten*]. ‘Assent’ is defined as “an event in our understanding that may rest on objective bases but that also requires subjective causes in the mind of the person who is judging”. (A820/B848) Hence, to know something is to assent to it in a particular way, as a result of judging it. This requires some subjective “causes” and may also require objective bases or grounds. In particular, Kant specifies that “assent that is sufficient both subjectively

24] Willaschek and Watkins (2020: 3199-200) identify a passage at A92-3/B125, as the place where Kant would introduce E_K . There, according to them, Kant seems to suggest that “cognition of an object requires both an intuition and a corresponding concept”. (2020: 3200 – e.o.) Yet, Kant talks about “two conditions under which alone the cognition of an object is possible [zwei Bedingungen, unter denen allein die Erkenntnis eines Gegenstandes möglich ist]”. (A92/B125) But this can be interpreted also as stating two separate conditions which can individually make possible the cognition of an object. The quotation I provide in the text is much clearer about the need for both conditions (and I make haste to add that it is also referred to by Willaschek and Watkins). On page 27 of his text, as we have seen, Moore talks about E_K , as knowledge with content.

and objectively is called *knowledge* [*Wissen*].” (A822/B850 - e.o.) Knowledge is the result of subjective causes, which convince me of the object of my assent, and of objective grounds, which give certainty about it. (A822/B851)

As a form of assent, however, *Wissen* is distinct from *Erkenntnis*, which is a type of presentation – objective presentation accompanied by consciousness. What I assent to is a presentation, but, in addition to this presentation (which may be the object of a cognition of type E_M), Kant specifies the need for some subjective and objective support, which, respectively, are sufficient to convince me of the truth of the presentation and to provide certainty for everybody.

How does this bear on Moore’s discussion so far? First, Moore’s justification for the use of ‘knowledge’, where Kant uses ‘cognition’, does not seem to hold, given that the notions are not the same even when the focus is on a narrower range of cases. An instance of *Erkenntnis* might be part of an instance of *Wissen*. For instance, an objective presentation might be the object of assent supported by sufficient subjective and objective grounds. Moreover, such an objective presentation may function as (or as part of a) sufficient objective ground for the object of a propositional attitude (in this case, assent). (Willaschek and Watkins 2020: 3210) Yet, contrary to Moore’s comments, *Erkenntnis* and *Wissen* are not overlapping concepts, in the way in which, say, the groups of possessors of mobile phones and of TV sets are; rather they are more similar to the concepts of triangles and quadrilaterals.

Moore says that *Erkenntnis* excludes *Wissen* that makes no reference to any object; however, *Wissen* that makes reference to an object is still distinct from *Erkenntnis*, although they both share the objective character (the reference to the object). By analogy, for instance, we can say that the class of triangles excludes concave quadrilaterals, since no triangle has angles over 180 degrees, although convex quadrilaterals and triangles are still distinct concepts, despite the fact that they share the property that their angles are not over 180 degrees. Moore also claims, as we have seen, that *Erkenntnis* includes non-*Wissen*, namely, the conscious representation of an object that contains some error. Yet, the conscious representation of an object that is true is not automatically *Wissen*. Similarly, we can say that the class of quadrilaterals includes some non-quadrilaterals, namely, those geometrical figures, which do not have only three sides. Nevertheless, these geometrical figures do not immediately count as quadrilaterals. This suggests that a reconsideration of the notion of armchair knowledge might be in order for Moore.

Secondly, consider Moore’s view that:

There is a perfectly good sense of ‘concern’ in which the subject’s analytic armchair knowledge that all vixens are female, say, concerns vixens, not the subject’s concept of a vixen, nor any part of the subject’s conceptual repertoire. (27-8)

The discussion of *Erkenntnis* in Kant shows that, as such, this suggestion by Moore about analytic armchair knowledge is quite unproblematic for the framework of Kant’s terminology. As we have seen (the third aspect I mentioned above, namely,

the different ways in which intuition and concept refer to objects), Kant says that intuitions are singular and refer to objects directly, whereas concepts are general and refer to objects indirectly. Concepts refer to objects indirectly, since concepts include 'marks' or features, which are common to several objects, so they refer to a particular object through a particular feature, a feature which may be shared by other objects too. This also explains why concepts are general. Hence, we can see that analytic armchair knowledge can concern objects and indeed it concerns them in a different way than the type of cognition or *Erkenntnis* requiring both concepts and intuitions (E_K) or the *Erkenntnis*, which consists of an intuition (as part of E_M).

What may seem puzzling in Moore's idea of analytic armchair knowledge, which concerns things in themselves, becomes clear when we consider E_K , the restricted notion of cognition. If Moore uses "knowledge" when Kant uses "cognition", and if we take "cognition" to refer to the notion that Kant regards as "cognition in the proper meaning of this term" (A78/B103)²⁵ – what I have labelled E_K –, then we end up with a contradiction. Thus, E_K requires both concepts and intuitions; at the same time, however, analytic cognition does *not* require intuition. Hence, Moore's 'analytic armchair knowledge' becomes contradictory, since analytic Kantian cognition (analytic E_K) would at the same time require and not require intuition.

Still, we have seen that the best way to interpret Moore's understanding of 'cognition' is as a less restricted notion of cognition (E_M , not E_K), one which may include concepts and intuitions, but may also just consist of concepts or just of intuitions. On this broader notion of cognition, we can talk unproblematically about analytic cognition.

5. THE INCOHERENCE OF TRANSCENDENTAL IDEALISM AND OTHER CONTRADICTIONS

With these terminological clarifications in place, let us look further at Moore's argument. He raises two associated questions, whose force can be appreciated if we note that analytic armchair knowledge can be regarded as part of the original puzzle of armchair knowledge, since, as we have seen, for Moore, this type of knowledge, too, concerns what is beyond the subject.

Now, Moore thinks that Kant holds that transcendental idealism is needed to solve the puzzle with regard to synthetic armchair knowledge, but *only* with respect to synthetic armchair knowledge. (28) He thinks Kant's reasons for holding this are not apparent yet. The two questions which arise are the following: (Q1) whether Kant would allow that transcendental idealism be invoked to solve the puzzle with regard to analytic armchair knowledge, even if it does not have to be invoked; (Q2) what it is

25] As mentioned above, when Moore justifies his use of 'knowledge' for Kant's 'cognition', he refers to B19ff., where Kant talks about the possibility of synthetic a priori judgements, which require both concepts and intuitions.

about synthetic armchair knowledge that would make Kant think that transcendental idealism *must* be invoked to solve the puzzle with respect to synthetic armchair knowledge. (28)

Moore thinks that, for Kant, the puzzle of armchair knowledge can be solved for analytic armchair knowledge by noting that the subject can acquire such knowledge just by analysing the concepts involved, even if we were to acknowledge that analytic armchair knowledge concerned what is beyond the subject.²⁶ There is no need to invoke i-dependence and transcendental idealism. Yet, Moore wonders whether, despite the fact that there is no *need* to do this, Kant would have anything against doing this.

The way Moore presents the situation is as follows. He asks us to imagine a philosopher who thinks that the form of what is beyond the subject (which, Moore adds, "depends on the subject and to which the subject's armchair knowledge pertains") is not confined to the features Kant asserts (spatio-temporal conditions, causality, etc.), but extends to "all those of its essential features that are in any way conceptual, such as the feature of being, if a vixen, female"; moreover, this philosopher thinks that the contingency of the i-dependence belongs equally to "the subject's general conceptualisation of things" and to "the subject's spatio-temporal intuition of them". (29)

Moore's answer is that Kant would have something against this. This is because, on Moore's account, Kant thinks a subject can have thoughts concerning things in themselves, for instance, as suggested above by Moore, some analytic armchair knowledge or, in its absence, the thought that we are free. If we think that the subject's conceptualisation contributes as much to the contingency of the i-dependence as the subject's spatio-temporal intuitions do, then the subject's thinking, just like the subject's intuiting, is always of appearances.²⁷

But would this really be Kant's concern? Let us stick for a moment to Kant's model of the mind, which includes among its a priori structures pure intuitions, categories and ideas, but not other concepts. On this model, Kant claims we can think of things

26] Moore notes in a footnote (29 n23) that the concepts involved in analytic armchair knowledge refer to what is beyond the subject, when the concepts involved do apply to what is beyond the subject. He gives the example of knowledge that mermaids have fishes' tails as another example of analytic armchair knowledge, which can ("arguably") be said ("in the same attenuated sense of 'concern'") to concern mermaids. This raises, of course, a question about the difference between what Moore means by applying to, or concerning, what is beyond the subject and what Kant does; for Kant, the important distinction is between a concept's logical possibility and its real possibility, a distinction which Moore's example suggests Moore is not considering. Moore says (see below in this paper) that analytic armchair knowledge is provided by linguistic rules in force and their necessity is not affected by the contingency of their being in force.

27] Let us call this the 'Thinking Contradiction'; this would be committed by Kant (as read by Moore), since, on the one hand, Kant thinks we can have thoughts concerning things in themselves; on the other hand, however, Kant does not seem to allow room for such thinking. This is because a priori concepts contribute to the "contingency of the i-dependence", that is, contingency of the form of what is beyond the epistemic agent. Hence, the subject's thinking through these a priori concepts is of appearances. But if the subject cannot think about things in themselves with the help of a priori concepts, it seems even less likely that she will be able to think about things in themselves with the help of empirical concepts.

in themselves. But Kant does not believe that we can think of things in themselves specifically with the help of empirical concepts, which are not part of the a priori structure of the mind. He thinks we can think of things in themselves whatever we want as long as we are not contradicting ourselves and as long as we are aware that what we are thinking about through a concept might have no object corresponding to it (both in the sense that some concepts might not have real possibility, and in the sense that we might never cognise the object of some really possible concept, when we consider it as it is in itself). (Bxxvi n)²⁸ Hence, extending the a priori structure of the mind to include essential features that are conceptual is not going to make a difference to our capacity to have thoughts concerning things in themselves (at least as this capacity is understood by Kant).

So Moore here does not quite capture Kant's reservation for the extended model of the mind and the extended solution to the puzzle of (analytic and synthetic) armchair knowledge. But even if he did, the question would still be whether Kant would be justified in rejecting this extended model and the associated solution. Moore thinks an answer to this question depends on an answer to the following question:

[W]hen Kant argues from the existence of armchair knowledge concerning what is beyond the subject to the truth of transcendental idealism, at what point in his argument does he make crucial appeal to the fact that the armchair knowledge is synthetic, and, relatedly, what, in his own terms, would preclude someone's extending the argument to armchair knowledge that is analytic? (30)

Moore imagines two replies Kant might give to this question (which is a version of Q2). First, Kant might say that his argument for transcendental idealism is an inference to the best (and only) possible explanation. Extended to analytic armchair knowledge, the argument for transcendental idealism would no longer be the best possible explanation: the simpler explanation involving only the subject's analysis of the concepts involved would be available. Secondly, on Moore's account, Kant might say that the extended version of the argument rules out thoughts about things in themselves, which he is obliged to allow for "otherwise there would follow the absurd proposition that there is an appearance without anything that appears". (30)²⁹

28] This would then solve the Thinking Contradiction by dissolving the problem. The assumption that we can only think about things in themselves with the help of some specific concepts, in particular, concepts which are not part of the a priori structure of the mind, is an unusual presupposition. There is in particular the puzzle of the a priori ideas of God, freedom and world as a whole, which makes the problem acute, since these ideas are the conceptual means by which we can uniquely refer to some specific things in themselves, rather than generically to the class of things in themselves.

29] This seems to refer to the previous argument which I questioned, namely, that including essential features of a conceptual nature among the a priori elements of the mind makes it impossible for us to think about things in themselves. I have called this alleged problem in Kant the Thinking Contradiction (see n27 above) and argued that it has a solution (n28 above).

Moore thinks that these responses are not "entirely satisfactory". (30) With regard to the first, he thinks there would be a presupposition Kant would make, according to which the unity and power of an explanation that applies to all armchair knowledge is more significant than the simplicity of an explanation that applies only to analytic armchair knowledge. Yet, "there would be an obvious answer to this question if the first response were buttressed by the second". (30) More exactly, if the second answer showed why the unity of the explanation was needed, the first answer's presupposition would be justified. Still, Moore thinks that the second response also begs some questions about the coherence of Kant's transcendental idealism.

As we have seen, however, on its own, the extended version of the argument does not challenge Kant's requirement that we be able to think about things in themselves. Moreover, concerning the first reply, it is still unclear transcendental idealism would be an appropriate account of analytic armchair knowledge (even with the extended model of the mind stipulated by the imaginary philosopher mentioned above).

To answer Q2³⁰, Moore begins with a presentation of other positions, distinct from transcendental idealism and which are not even versions of idealism, which can claim to account for knowledge of what is necessary, as necessary. He gives the example of the view according to which the subject's knowledge that vixens are female consists in command of a particular rule that prohibits counting a creature as vixen without also counting that creature as female.

Moore acknowledges that this is knowledge of a contingency (for there might never have been any such rule), but he thinks the necessity concerned is not compromised:

If there had never been any such rule, vixens would not have failed to be female. Rather, what sex vixens are would not have been an issue for anyone: no-one would have thought in those terms. Vixens would not have failed to be female, because vixens *must* be female. And this 'must' is as hard as it either can or need be. (31 - e.o.)³¹

Moore calls this a Wittgensteinian view and regards it as "a variant of Kant's view of analytic armchair knowledge". (31)³² He thinks that, by exploring how this Wittgensteinian view would not be similar to Kant's view of synthetic armchair knowledge, we will be helped with addressing Q2. Moore begins with the observation

30] Recall Q2: What is it about synthetic armchair knowledge that makes Kant think that transcendental idealism must be invoked to solve the puzzle with respect to it? (28)

31] Here we end up with a tension between the claim that knowledge that vixens are female is knowledge of a contingency, on the one hand, and, on the other, the claim that vixens must be female, with a strong sense of 'must'. Given this 'must', it seems that knowledge that vixens are female is knowledge of a necessity. What is contingent is the having of this knowledge, not the content known; this is because, for Moore, without the particular rule connecting vixens and female, "no-one would have thought in those terms", so no-one would have had the knowledge that vixens are female, although vixens would still have been, since they must be female. (31)

32] He also notes, however, referring to Moore (2019: §1), that differences are important, indeed crucial, insofar as, due to these differences, the Wittgensteinian view might count as a rival to Kant's view.

that, on a Wittgensteinian view, given any relevant item of knowledge (e.g., the knowledge that vixens are female) sheer familiarity with the concepts involved ensures that one can see the truth of what is known.³³ By contrast, Kant insists that one cannot see the truth of what is known in the case of synthetic armchair knowledge without appeal to the intuitions involved. (31-2)

Moore thinks that even in this case, Kant would accept that sheer familiarity with the concepts involved ensures that “one can see how things must be for what is known to be true [or...] that one can see, not the truth of what is known, but the truth *conditions* of what is known”. (32 - e.o.)³⁴ The example Moore gives is of the claim that the sum of the angles in a triangle is equal to two right angles. To show that this is not an analytic truth, we would need alternatives in which the sum of the angles is something other than two right angles (and these alternatives need not be realised; they only need to exist). Without such alternatives, there would be a sense in which sheer familiarity with the concepts involved would ensure that one could see the truth of what is known. (32) This, Moore thinks, leads us to an answer to Q2: synthetic armchair knowledge admits of alternatives qua synthetic; yet, qua armchair knowledge, admits of no alternatives. It is knowledge of both a contingency and of a necessity.

This is not the case for the knowledge that vixens are female, on the Wittgensteinian view. On this view, there seems to be no conflict between contingency and necessity – this is because the necessity attaches to the known truth itself (vixens are female), whereas the contingency is of the second-order truth that there is a rule in force whose statement consists in the enunciation of the first-order truth. The alternative is to that second-order rule’s being in force. By contrast, on Kant’s view, the alternatives “*are* alternatives to the known truth itself: in the example considered above, they are alternatives to triangles’ having angles whose sum is equal to two right angles”. (33 - e.o.)³⁵ Kant and Wittgenstein make “an attempt of sorts to ground necessity in contingency”; yet, whereas Wittgenstein does not need to appeal to transcendental idealism, Kant does,

33] A clarification is introduced by Moore here: the truth of the item of knowledge is not derived from the familiarity with the concepts; rather, one counts as familiar with the concepts when one has command of the relevant rule – presumably one can accurately say whether the item of knowledge is true or not.

34] He contrasts this with the logical form of what is known, “which leaves the truth conditions of what is known undetermined”. (32) A qualification is added here: there is no such a thing as ‘the’ logical form of what is known; to talk about this, Moore suggests, would involve “tendentious” considerations about complete logical analysis. (32 n32) Moore thinks this explains why, if I wanted to show that what is known is not an analytic truth, I could not appeal to a procedure purporting to show that what is known is not a logical truth. More precisely, Moore adds that to show that what is known is not a logical truth, one would specify a false proposition with the same logical form, whereas to show that it is not an analytic truth, one would have to consider alternatives to that very truth. This presupposes the availability of alternatives.

35] This is not quite so: when Kant gives the example of ‘ $7 + 5 = 12$ ’, he does not really consider the possibility that the sum of 7 and 5 is different from 12, but the possibility that the concept of the sum of 7 and 5 may not presuppose as an essential feature number 12.

since Kant needs to “allay what would otherwise be a simple conflict between a claim of necessity and a claim of contingency with respect to one and the same truth”. (33)³⁶

I find the assertion that there is a conflict between a claim of necessity and a claim of contingency in Kant problematic. I agree that Kant takes the truths of disciplines, such as geometry, to be necessary. He is trying indeed to account for this necessity. Pure intuitions (and transcendental idealism) play indeed here a crucial role and, without pure intuitions, he takes the claim that the sum of a triangle’s angles is two right angles to be contingently true. The concept of the sum of a triangle’s angles (call this concept S) does not include as an essential feature the concept of two right angles (call this concept P). Yet, this fact about the relation between S and P, namely, that S does not include P, is not changing when we consider the triangle’s angles and right angles as geometrical objects. The claim about geometrical objects can be necessary, even though the distinct claim about the *concepts* of those geometrical objects is not.³⁷ It is, therefore, unclear that a conflict exists between the necessity and contingency of the same truth.

This, however, is not the most serious objection Moore formulates against Kant. Moore thinks that Kant solves the conflict between contingency and necessity by introducing some appropriate relativisation:

He holds that the truth in question is necessary *from a particular point of view*, the very point of view that the subject’s knowledge is from, constituted, in part, by the intuitions to which the subject appeals in having the knowledge. But when the truth is *not* considered from that point of view – when a step back is taken to reflect on why appeal to these intuitions is necessary to have knowledge of the truth, which is done precisely by *not* appealing to them but rather by duly prescinding from them – then Kant thinks that the truth can be conceived as admitting of alternatives. (33 - e.o.)³⁸

Moore notes that Kant’s transcendental idealism is introduced “to explain how the subject can have armchair knowledge of what admits of such alternatives”. (33) The relation of i-dependence follows from this. This relation, Moore adds, “has to be conceived as transcending the necessity in question. For the i-dependence cannot so much as be entertained until that step back is taken from the original point of view”.

36] Call this Kant’s Modal Contradiction: Kant claims that the same truth is necessary and contingent.

37] What is contingent is the relation between the concepts of a triangle’s angles and of two right angles. What is necessary is the distinct relation between a triangle’s angles and two right angles. This is not much different from the ‘Wittgensteinian’ alternative favoured by Moore, and answers the Modal Contradiction.

38] This can also be read as follows: Kant says that the judgement is synthetic, since the concept of the subject does not presuppose as a part the concept of the predicate. The contingency is the result of this relation between the subject and the predicate, as far as we consider only the concepts of the subject and the predicate. The necessity is given indeed from a particular point of view, namely, that of the spatio-temporal agent and is indeed the result of the constitution of the relation between the subject and the predicate by the a priori intuitions.

(13)³⁹ We get in this way to Moore's discussion of the incoherence of transcendental idealism.⁴⁰ Moore acknowledges that Kant is vindicated in his claim that transcendental idealism is needed to solve Kant's puzzle of synthetic armchair knowledge. Yet, he thinks that Kant's account quickly runs into difficulties. The step back from the original point of view is not to another point of view, but to no point of view at all, it is a step to thinking how things are in themselves. Yet, Moore claims:

This would be all very well if such thinking were only ever mere thinking. Kant is not involved in any internal inconsistency simply in allowing us thoughts about things in themselves. The problem is that, by Kant's own lights, such thinking sometimes amounts to *knowledge*. (34 - e.o.)

The example given by Moore is the thought that there is synthetic armchair knowledge. This, Moore claims, is a piece of knowledge and, moreover, a piece of synthetic armchair knowledge. It is not analytic and it is not based on experience. Hence, Kant "is, by his own lights, forced to accede to the very thing that it is his business to deny, synthetic armchair knowledge of how things are in themselves". (34) This, Moore thinks, shows that Kant ends up with a contradiction; it does not invalidate the argument for transcendental idealism, but, in order to avoid the contradictions to which transcendental idealism leads, we can reject synthetic armchair knowledge. We might reject it because there is no armchair knowledge or there is only analytic armchair knowledge or there is something wrong with the distinction between analytic and synthetic armchair knowledge or for some other reason.

6. A KANTIAN SOLUTION TO THE METAPHYSICAL CONTRADICTION

I think Moore's argument is the following: Kant wants to account for (what he takes to be) the necessity of certain claims in disciplines, like geometry. A claim like the one we discussed above, concerning the angles of a triangle, will appear as necessary when the pure intuitions of space and time are regarded as constitutive of experience. Pure intuitions can be regarded as constitutive of experience, when they are acknowledged as a priori structures of the subject (hence, when i-dependence is acknowledged), that is, when they are regarded from a different point of view than that of the subject. This

39] Say that no step back is taken from the original point of view; say I have two claims: 'A triangle has three sides' and 'A triangle has angles whose sum is equal to two right angles'. Without any stepping back, I can see, through familiarity with the terms of the first claim, that it has to be true; at the same time, I can see that, despite my familiarity with the terms of the second claim, the notion of the sum of the angles of a triangle does not presuppose that of two right angles and, from that perspective, alternatives are open for consideration.

40] Call this Kant's Metaphysical Contradiction: according to Moore, Kant's thinking of how things are in themselves sometimes amounts to knowledge; for instance, the thought that there is synthetic armchair knowledge is of things in themselves, is not analytic and is not based on experience, so it can only be synthetic armchair knowledge of how things are in themselves. Yet, on Moore's account, Kant also rejects the possibility of synthetic armchair knowledge of how things are in themselves.

different point of view, however, is not that of another subject, but is supposed to be no point of view at all, the perspective independent from that of the subject and, hence, the perspective of things in themselves. In general, to account for synthetic armchair knowledge, we need to acknowledge i-dependence, which Moore thinks moves us into the no-perspective position of things in themselves. Hence, knowledge⁴¹ that there is synthetic armchair knowledge is synthetic⁴², is not empirical⁴³ and is about things in themselves.⁴⁴

Now the claim that there is synthetic armchair knowledge is indeed a synthetic claim, as any existential claims are. Moreover, I agree that it is not an empirical claim. As Moore notes, Kant provides an argument in support of the claim that a particular claim or other is synthetic a priori. The a priori character of a claim cannot be justified by appeal to experience. The claim that there is synthetic a priori knowledge seems therefore also to be a piece of knowledge (perhaps even in accordance with Kant's notion of knowledge [*Wissen*]) and, more precisely, a piece of synthetic knowledge, which is not based on experience. This is why Moore regards it as a piece of synthetic armchair knowledge. Moreover, since to show that a particular claim is synthetic a priori knowledge we need to invoke an argument about i-dependence and the status of pure intuitions, Moore thinks that Kant puts here forward a piece of synthetic armchair knowledge about things in themselves. Yet, he takes this to be incoherent, since he takes Kant to deny synthetic armchair knowledge of how things are in themselves.

There are two issues here. First, the claim that there is synthetic a priori knowledge is not a claim about how things are in themselves. It is a claim about the existence of a particular type of knowledge, namely, the synthetic a priori type. The concept of synthetic a priori knowledge refers to knowledge about phenomenal entities, such as triangles. So the claim is that there is knowledge about phenomenal entities, not things in themselves. I will return to this, but consider first a possible reply from Moore: what is the status of a claim that *there are things in themselves*, a claim to which some commentators say Kant is committed (for instance, see n49 below)? Is this not synthetic a priori knowledge of *things in themselves* – is this not synthetic armchair knowledge of things in themselves?

First, a clarification: at Bxxvii, Kant makes the claim Moore quotes repeatedly in his paper, namely, that, without things in themselves, "an absurd proposition would follow, viz., that there is appearance without anything that appears". Yet, Kant takes this absurd proposition to be the conclusion of a *reductio* whose starting point is not that

41] "This, by his own lights, is a piece of knowledge – if only because he has arrived at it as a result of what he takes to be a decisive argument". (34)

42] "For Kant would surely deny that it depends on sheer analysis of the concepts involved". (34)

43] "[H]e would also surely deny that it depends on experience". (34)

44] The change of perspective introduced by i-dependence "is a shift from considering things from one point of view to considering them from no point of view at all, from thinking about how things appear to thinking about how they are in themselves". (34)

things in themselves exist, but that we must be able to *think* of things in themselves.⁴⁵ Kant also explicitly acknowledges that we might not be able to cognise things in themselves.⁴⁶ He explains, in a footnote (Bxxvii n), that to cognise an object I must be able to “prove [*beweisen*] its [real] possibility”, and he contrasts merely logical possibility (which is a condition for an object to be thought) and real possibility, which shows the “objective reality” of a concept. (Bxxvi n) He specifies that, to show the real possibility of an object and, hence, to cognise it, I can proceed from “its actuality as attested by experience, or a priori by means of reason”. (Bxxvi n) At the end of the footnote, Kant seems to specify that showing the real possibility of the concept of a thing in itself by means of reason is possible with “practical” sources of cognition.⁴⁷ Here, Kant talks about theoretical cognition in the restricted, “proper” meaning of the term (E_K). As we have seen above, this requires both intuitions and concepts. Moreover, it also becomes clear that, insofar as cognition requires the real possibility of the object to be cognised, a cognition in the extended sense (including those presentations given by concepts only) does not qualify as such, since, as we have seen, concepts refer to objects only indirectly, through a characteristic mark, which can belong to several objects. Similarly, while intuitions are cognitions which can show the actuality of their respective objects, on their own, without the understanding, the cognitions they would provide would be limited to this actuality.

So, on the basis of theoretical sources of cognition, with regard to things in themselves, we cannot show that they exist (that they are really possible), although Kant seems to suggest that we can show that they exist as objects of our thought (that they are logically possible). Hence, Kant’s claim concerning the existence of things in themselves refers to their possibility. The epistemic claim concerning things in themselves, more exactly the fact that we do not have epistemic access to them, is about cognition [*Erkenntnis*]. Given that Moore uses ‘knowledge’ for Kant’s ‘cognition’, he is right to interpret Kant as claiming that we cannot have knowledge (cognition, in the restricted, “proper” meaning of the term) of things in themselves. This is because, by definition, we cannot have intuitions of things in themselves. It becomes also clearer that Kant’s focus is on the restricted notion of cognition.

Now, consider the case where the claim ‘there are things in themselves’ is a knowledge claim in the Kantian sense of ‘knowledge’. It is a synthetic claim, since it is an existential claim. It is not derived empirically, since we cannot have intuitions of

45] “[W]e must be able at least to think [...] the same objects also as things in themselves. For otherwise an absurd proposition will follow, viz., that there is appearance without anything that appears”. (Bxxvi-xxvii)

46] “[W]e must be able at least to think [*denken*], even if not cognise [*erkennen*], the same objects...” (BBxxvi – e.o.)

47] As a result, in Kant, we can have practical cognition [*Erkenntnis*] of specific things in themselves, such as God, but not theoretical cognition. Moreover, assent to this practical cognition can be justified as an instance of belief or faith [*Glauben*], but not of knowledge [*Wissen*].

things in themselves. The synthetic link between the concept of a thing in itself and the concept of existence is not grounded in an a priori intuition. Here the *reductio* might work as a justification of our assent to the synthetic claim that things in themselves exist. If we assume appearances exist and are not mere illusion, then things in themselves exist too, since without them we would have the absurd claim that appearances exist and are illusions at the same time.⁴⁸

The difference between a cognition of things in themselves and knowledge of things in themselves is that a cognition (E_K) offers a presentation of the object (by appeal to both intuition and concept), whereas knowledge is justified assent to a presentation. This justification, however, need not make reference to intuition, but can be any objective support for the given presentation. As a result, Kant has sometimes been interpreted as being committed to the existence of things in themselves, in virtue of the sufficient objective and subjective justification of assent to this existence: the synthetic presentation of things in themselves as existing has been regarded as objectively justified by arguments independent from a cognition of things in themselves, which would imply intuition.⁴⁹

This would seem to suggest that Moore is right – Kant asserts that we have knowledge of a synthetic a priori cognition concerning things in themselves, knowledge which he, at the same time, denies. Yet, and this is the second issue I wanted to mention, it is unclear what we have here is a genuine contradiction. The claim that things in themselves exist is indeed a synthetic claim. What this claim implies is that things in themselves are not only logically possible, but also really possible. Kant suggests, however, that the first *reductio* mentioned above does not yet prove the real possibility of things in themselves. Things in themselves are regarded as necessary presuppositions of the appearances that we encounter in experience; yet, the *reductio* only works if we attribute certain other features to these appearances, such as empirical reality.

The empirical reality of the objects we encounter in experience might be the best possible explanation we can have given our experience. The same goes for the reality of our freedom – it seems to us we are both free and subject to laws of nature, and the question is how to reconcile these claims. Hence, at most, such arguments show the necessity of assuming things in themselves exist as (possible) objects of thinking. This is not surprising, because we do not have intuitions of things in themselves, so the only cognition we can have is indirect, through the concept of a thing in itself and without direct reference to a specific thing in itself or other. But the truth of such a presentation only shows something about all the other things which stand under the concept. The experience of a specific object will give me that object and, hence, will show that the

48] There is, in addition, by the way, another *reductio* formulated by Kant in the same context; this is an argument concluding that the distinction between objects of experience and the same objects as things in themselves is needed to make sense of the fact that we are free and subject to natural laws. (Bxxvii)

49] See for instance Willaschek and Watkins (2020: 3211-2).

concept of that object has at least one instantiation. The concept of a specific object will only refer to the group of the objects falling under the concept, but, if it is not possible to have intuitions of specific objects of that type, then all an argument can show is that it is possible to draw a distinction and think in terms of that concept.

Before moving on to some concluding remarks, I would like to return to the question of the status of the claim that there is synthetic a priori knowledge. Consider the following reply: since this is a claim of existence, it is a synthetic claim; moreover, its truth does not rely on an empirical encounter of such knowledge, but on the argument in support of the particular synthetic a priori knowledge item under discussion (say, that about the sum of the triangle's angles). Defenders of Kant might want to say that this is not a claim about things in themselves, as I have also argued above; yet, as we have seen, the claim relies on the assumption of i-dependence (the dependence of the form of what is beyond the subject on the subject), which is formulated from the perspective of things in themselves. When I step back from my limited perspective into the absolute world of things in themselves and I make a claim, is this not a claim about things in themselves or, rather, a claim about its object considered as a thing in itself?

My response, for the particular case considered by Moore, is negative. To see this, consider an analogy with a picture, which seems to me to have been taken with a camera, which had an orange-tinted lens. The assumption of the constitutive chromatic filter, which contributes to the picture, is analogous to the assumption of the a priori intuitions of space and time, which are constitutive of experience. These assumptions introduce a distinction between the appearance given by experience and the way things would be independently from the elements which constitute the experience. Now, my claims that the picture is necessarily orange, when taken with that camera, and that the sum of a triangle's angles necessarily equals two right angles have an apodictic character, but they are claims about how we experience the objects, rather than about how objects would be in themselves. If a priori intuitions are contingent on the epistemic agent, then the claim about the triangle's angles considered in itself would be assertoric, rather than apodictic. Similarly, the claim about the chromatic properties of the photographed landscape would be assertoric, if I were to regard the photographed landscape independently from the orange-tinted lens.

In addition and importantly, the claims which rely on the assumption of some constitutive elements, and, hence, which introduce the distinction between appearances and things as they are in themselves (and, hence, between the limited perspective of the epistemic agent and the absolute world of things in themselves) do not rely on any implicit appeal to intuitions of things in themselves. The assumption of the constitutive elements is one way of accounting for what is experienced, and the apodictic character of these claims or of the claims that things as they are in themselves are different from the way they appear to be are simply logical inferences from that assumption.

5. CONCLUDING REMARKS

Moore's text continues with an advice that we should abandon the view that there are a priori intuitions (a view Moore calls the Intuition Thesis). These, he says, are necessary in order for there to be synthetic armchair knowledge.⁵⁰ Without the Intuition Thesis, however, there is still the Concept Thesis – the thesis that there are pure concepts. If we accept the Concept Thesis, but abandon the Intuition Thesis, then we do not need to accept transcendental idealism. This holds even if we accept what Moore calls the "Relativised Concept Thesis". (35) The latter allows for the possibility that different subjects (humans and extraterrestrials, for instance) possess different pure concepts. It is a thesis similar to the Relativised Intuition Thesis (which claims that different subjects possess different pure intuitions), which Kant explicitly endorses.

Moore notes two aspects of the relativised theses. First, concerning the Relativised Intuition Thesis, he observes that it is this thesis which may *seem* to make Kant's commitment to transcendental idealism mandatory. Yet, Moore claims, what makes a commitment to transcendental idealism mandatory for Kant is the contingency Kant endorses in those intuitions' being the way they are. Secondly, the contingency in the subject's possessing such and such pure concepts is similar to the contingency in the subject's abiding by such and such a rule on the Wittgensteinian view.

We are not forced to a relativisation of the necessities the subject acknowledges: if the subject's possessing such and such pure concepts involves and is involved in the subject's acknowledging that things must be thus and so, it does not follow that things might not be thus and so for subjects not possessing those concepts. Subjects not possessing those concepts will not have an issue with whether things are thus and so – they do not think in those terms. In the final section of his paper, a notion of armchair knowledge which is not of what is necessary (but admits of alternatives) is presented. (40) On the basis of this notion of armchair knowledge, the argument for transcendental idealism, Moore claims, fails. He constructs two possible accounts of armchair knowledge, one inspired by Spinoza and one, by Aristotle. These are all

⁵⁰ In n49, Moore explicitly states his interpretative assumption that "only by appeal to a priori intuitions can the subject have synthetic armchair knowledge". Here Moore mentions a set of references from KrV, where Kant explains how a priori intuitions are necessary for synthetic a priori cognitions (in the narrow sense E_K). He also acknowledges that there may be instances where Kant seems to contradict himself in this respect (the example given is from the KU, although I think it refers to something slightly different). Additionally, Moore mentions that his talk of synthetic a priori knowledge "already involves departure from Kant's own way of framing these ideas". (39 n49) In this paper, I have accepted Moore's assumption that a priori intuitions are necessary for synthetic a priori cognitions (although only theoretical cognitions). I have argued that the contradiction Moore mentions in this footnote (which is one of the three contradictions I consider in this paper – the Metaphysical Contradiction) can be briefly answered as follows: if theoretical synthetic a priori cognitions require a priori intuitions, then a theoretical synthetic a priori knowledge claim about things in themselves (such as, the claim that there are things in themselves) cannot be a piece of theoretical cognition, but can be a piece of knowledge (in the Kantian sense of *Wissen*), for which a priori intuitions are not necessary.

fascinating topics on their own, but within the confines of this paper, I cannot investigate and evaluate them further.

Before, I conclude, I want to make a brief comment on Moore's discussion of the Relativised Concept Thesis. Moore thinks this is of philosophical interest, since it may lead to the same problem he formulated against Kant before (the Modal Contradiction): the contingency of the subject's pure concepts is the ground for the necessities the subject has armchair knowledge of; to acknowledge this contingency, the subject must take a step back from her point of view, and this, Moore claims, "is to credit her with the capacity to gain insight into how things are in themselves of just the sort Kant insists is impossible" (40) (leading to the Metaphysical Contradiction). However, if I am right and the various conflicts Moore points to do not in fact obtain, then this would not only relieve the transcendental idealist of some of the worries expressed by Moore, but may also explain why Kant does not discuss the Relativised Concept Thesis in his work.

As Moore notes, "it would be setting the bar too high to insist that one cannot make best sense of what Kant says unless one absolves him of all internal inconsistency". (40) Absolving Kant of all internal inconsistency was certainly not my aim in this paper – my aim has been to address the important internal inconsistencies presented by Moore and to argue that they are less problematic than he suggests.

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