

THE MOORE-WALKER DILEMMA: A CRITIQUE OF TRANSCENDENTAL IDEALISM

DUSTIN MCWHERTER

I. INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this article is to criticize one of the main ways in which Kant argues for transcendental idealism, and to do so by combining two previous objections to Kant's argument into a unified critique. As is well known, one of the main questions that motivates Kant's Critical project is that concerning how synthetic *a priori* propositions are possible. One of the ways in which he justifies his idealism is by arguing that the alternative position—often referred to as “transcendental realism”—could never explain how synthetic *a priori* cognition is possible for us while transcendental idealism can. Consequently, there is an argument by elimination at work in this kind of rationale for Kant's idealism, and it is deployed in contexts concerning space and time as well as the categories and the principles of the understanding in both the first *Critique* and the *Prolegomena*.¹ The problem with this argument by elimination, in my view, is not that there is some “neglected alternative” position that Kant fails to eliminate (which is a longstanding objection), but rather that there is a *problematic asymmetry* in Kant's argument that hinges on the status of transcendental arguments as a possible source of *a priori* cognition.

The critical part of this article (section IV) will present the dialectic that is required to tease out this problem—a dialectic which involves two different

¹ This kind of argument exemplifies the “analytic method,” which is associated more with the *Prolegomena*, although it does occur in the first *Critique* as well. Cf. Immanuel Kant, *Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics: With Selections from the Critique of Pure Reason*, Revised ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 25–6, 28n, and 30–1.

objections to Kant's argument made by G. E. Moore and Ralph Walker, respectively. The ultimate conclusion of this article is that, if transcendental arguments are not a genuine source of *a priori* cognition, then Kant's argument is vulnerable to Moore's objection, and if transcendental arguments are a genuine source of *a priori* cognition, then Kant's argument is vulnerable to Walker's objection. So there is a dilemma, which I call "the Moore-Walker dilemma," in which Kant's argument seems to be stuck. With that said, there is an alternative interpretation of Kant's argument recently proposed by Lucy Allais, which appears to avoid these kinds of problems. However, I think there is a problem with Allais's interpretation, which I will mention in section V. Prior to that, I will begin by clarifying some basic terminology, present Kant's argument and its textual sources, and then elaborate the critique that Moore's and Walker's objections conjointly make possible.

II. PRELIMINARY CLARIFICATIONS

Let me begin by briefly defining the two positions at issue here: transcendental idealism and transcendental realism. There are many debates in Kant scholarship over what transcendental idealism exactly is, but for the purposes of this article it is sufficient to characterize it as the view that the spatiotemporal and other formal characteristics exhibited by objects of cognition are constituted by the forms of intuition and categories of transcendental subjectivity, so that such objects are appearances rather than things in themselves. Transcendental realism, on the other hand, can be roughly defined as the view that objects of cognition are constituted independently of us, in which case they are things in themselves rather than appearances. Although Kant never really gives an extensive definition of transcendental realism, it is generally taken to be exemplified by pre-Kantian metaphysics or to simply be a foil for transcendental idealism.²

Furthermore, by the "formal characteristics" of objects I mean objects' general spatiotemporal characteristics as well as the kind of structural and relational characteristics at issue in Kant's table of categories and the categories of traditional ontology.³ These formal characteristics of objects are essential to the problem of the synthetic *a priori*, for Kant, because he thinks there are true synthetic *a priori* propositions about them in sciences like mathematics, geometry, and physics, whose possibility he wants to elucidate. So, the question here is not just

² Cf. A369 and A490-1/B519. References to Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998) will be in the standard A/B format.

³ Cf. A80/B106. Alongside other differences, traditional ontology usually construes spatiotemporal properties as categories while Kant separates them since he associates them with distinct subjective elements of cognition (sensibility and understanding, respectively).

how it is possible for objects we experience to have these formal characteristics but also how it is possible for us to *know a priori* that they have them—that is, universally, necessarily, and in advance of any particular experience of them.⁴

III. TRANSCENDENTAL IDEALISM AND THE SYNTHETIC *A PRIORI*

To proceed to the relevant rationale for transcendental idealism, Kant basically contends that the formal characteristics of objects can be cognized *a priori* only if transcendental idealism is true and transcendental realism is false. The reason transcendental realism must be false is that if we were dealing with things in themselves, which are constituted independently of us, we would have no way of knowing what their characteristics are without experiencing them first. Consequently, our cognition of them would be *a posteriori*, if we could cognize them at all.⁵ According to Kant, this leaves transcendental idealism as the only remaining option, and he argues that it can account for *a priori* cognition of the formal characteristics of objects. For if these characteristics are contributed by transcendental subjectivity in its constitution of objects of experience, we can know *a priori* that objects of experience will always have them. That is because, for transcendental idealism, all objects must exhibit those characteristics in order to *be* objects of experience in the first place, and it is *we* who contribute those characteristics rather than something independent of us.⁶ Hence, transcendental idealism's supposed advantage over transcendental realism, here, is that transcendental idealism avoids the problem of having to explain how we can have *a priori* cognition of things that do not depend on us.

The opening sections of the *Prolegomena*'s chapter on the possibility of pure natural science exemplifies this rationale for transcendental idealism well. There, Kant argues that our cognition could not rise to the level of necessity and universality embodied in laws of nature if nature consisted of things in themselves. For things in themselves “do not conform to my understanding, but my understanding would have to conform to them; they would therefore have to be given to me in advance so that these determinations could be drawn from them, but then they

⁴ See B3-4 and A9/B13 for Kant's claim that necessity and universality are essential features of *a priori* cognition.

⁵ As Henry Allison explains this point: “On this [transcendental realist] model, Kant tells us, we cannot account for the possibility of [synthetic] *a priori* knowledge, because we cannot explain how the mind could ‘anticipate’ any of the properties of objects so defined, which is required for *a priori* knowledge.” (Henry Allison, *Kant's Transcendental Idealism: An Interpretation and Defense*, Revised and Enlarged ed. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004), 37, second brackets in original). Also cf. A246/B303 and Lorne Falkenstein, *Kant's Intuitionism: A Commentary on the Transcendental Aesthetic* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1995), 322 for similar points about “anticipation” in *a priori* cognition.

⁶ Cf. A92-3/B124-6 and A158/B197.

would not be cognized *a priori*.”⁷ In the ensuing pages Kant goes on to conclude that we can only have *a priori* cognition of nature if the latter is instead construed as the sum of appearances, whose lawfulness is to be found in the universal subjective conditions that make the form of experience possible.⁸

The same rationale for transcendental idealism occurs in the case of the categories, when Kant argues at the end of the A-edition Transcendental Deduction that the objective validity of the categories could not be *a priori* if the categories pertained to things in themselves:

If the objects with which our cognition has to do were things in themselves, then we would not be able to have any *a priori* concepts of them at all. For whence should we obtain them? If we take them from the object [. . .], then our concepts would be merely empirical and not *a priori* concepts. If we take them from ourselves, then that which is merely in us cannot determine the constitution of an object distinct from our representations, i.e., be a ground why there should be a thing that corresponds to something we have in our thoughts, and why all this representation should not instead be empty. But if, on the contrary, we have to do everywhere only with appearances, then it is not only possible but also necessary that certain *a priori* concepts precede the empirical cognition of objects. For as appearances they constitute an object that is merely in us, since a mere modification of our sensibility is not to be encountered outside us at all.⁹

If we took the categories to pertain to things in themselves, as transcendental realism would, we would be faced with the challenge of explaining how we could ever be sure that these concepts within us correspond to the characteristics of things that do not depend on us, prior to any particular experience of those things. Moreover, even if we could get such concepts from the object, they could only be *a posteriori* concepts. Transcendental idealism, on the other hand, has no such difficulty. If the categories pertain to appearances, they do not convey the formal characteristics of things in themselves but instead constitute objects that depend on our cognitive capacities. In that case, it is necessary that they pertain to all objects we could ever experience, because neither the objects nor our experience of them would be possible without them. The same kind of argument is implied in the case of the principles of the understanding at points in the *Analytic of Principles*.¹⁰

⁷ Immanuel Kant, *Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics: With Selections from the Critique of Pure Reason*, Revised ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 46.

⁸ For example, “we will therefore be able to study *a priori* the nature of things in no other way than by investigating the conditions, and the universal (though subjective) laws, under which alone such a cognition is possible as experience (as regards mere form), and determining the possibility of things as objects of experience accordingly” (Immanuel Kant, *Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics: With Selections from the Critique of Pure Reason*, Revised ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 49).

⁹ A128-9. Similar points are made at A130, B164, B166-7, and A190/B235.

¹⁰ For example, A181/B223 and A210/B256. Cf. Frederick C. Beiser, *German Idealism: The Struggle Against Subjectivism, 1781-1801* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002), 176-7 and Lorne Falkenstein, “Critique of Kantian Humility,” *Kantian Review* 5, No. 1 (2001): 49-64, 51.

THE MOORE-WALKER DILEMMA

In the case of space and time, Kant focuses mainly on the possibility of synthetic *a priori* propositions about space in geometry. In the Conclusions from the Above Concepts following the Transcendental Exposition of the Concept of Space in the Transcendental Aesthetic, Kant writes:

Space represents no property at all of any things in themselves nor any relation of them to each other [...]. For neither absolute nor relative determinations can be intuited prior to the existence of the things to which they pertain, thus be intuited *a priori*. [...] Space is nothing other than merely the form of all appearances of outer sense [...]. Now since the receptivity of the subject to be affected by objects necessarily precedes all intuitions of these objects, it can be understood how the form of all appearances can be given in the mind prior to all actual perceptions, thus *a priori*, and how as a pure intuition, in which all objects must be determined, it can contain principles of their relations prior to all experience.¹¹

Later, in the General Remarks on the Transcendental Aesthetic, Kant uses the example of a triangle to develop this argument further:

[I]f the object (the triangle) were something in itself without relation to your subject: then how could you say that what necessarily lies in your subjective conditions for constructing a triangle must also necessarily pertain to the triangle in itself? For you could not add to your concept (of three lines) something new (the figure) that must thereby necessarily be encountered in the object, since this is given prior to your cognition and not through it. If, therefore, space (and time as well) were not a mere form of your intuition that contains *a priori* conditions under which alone things could be outer objects for you, which are nothing in themselves without these subjective conditions, then you could make out absolutely nothing synthetic and *a priori* about outer objects.¹²

In other words, geometry could not provide *a priori* cognition of spatial forms if space pertained to things in themselves, as the Newtonian and Leibnizian versions of transcendental realism would have it. If we assume that a triangle we construct in pure intuition also exists in itself, we could never explain why the “triangle in itself” necessarily (and thus always) conforms to the geometrical principles that apply to the constructed triangle.¹³ On the other hand, if space is merely a subjective form of our intuition, as transcendental idealism maintains, then it precedes all experience of objects as “the receptivity of the subject to be

¹¹ A26/B42. Similar points are made at A166/B207 and Immanuel Kant, *Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics: With Selections from the Critique of Pure Reason*, Revised ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 34 and 35–6. A similar argument to the one above is given just before, in the Transcendental Exposition of the Concept of Space, at B41, but there Kant elaborates his transcendental idealist theory of space without explicitly considering the transcendental realist alternative.

¹² A48/B65–6.

¹³ Cf. Lorne Falkenstein, *Kant's Intuitionism: A Commentary on the Transcendental Aesthetic* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1995), 290–1, Paul Guyer, *Kant*, 2nd ed. (Abingdon: Routledge, 2014), 72–4, Moore, *Some Main Problems of Philosophy* (New York: Macmillan, 1953), 152–3, Lisa Shabel, “Kant's Philosophy of Mathematics,” *The Cambridge Companion to Kant and Modern Philosophy*, ed. Paul Guyer (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 94–128, 115–16, and James Van Cleve, *Problems from Kant* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 36.

affected by objects” and thereby determines (or, constrains¹⁴) the spatial forms that any object we experience could ever take. Given this, it is necessary that the geometrical principles which apply to figures constructed in pure (*a priori*) intuition also apply to figures encountered in empirical (*a posteriori*) intuition, because the same form of intuition determines the spatial characteristics of both.¹⁵ Similar considerations apply in the case of time.¹⁶ So, whether we are dealing with natural laws, the categories, or space and time—all of which involve synthetic propositions—Kant maintains that only transcendental idealism can explain how we could cognize these things *a priori*, while transcendental realism can at best never get past a *a posteriori* cognition.

IV. THE MOORE-WALKER DILEMMA

As sophisticated as this rationale for transcendental idealism is, I think it suffers from a fairly simple though not immediately obvious problem: *it implicitly assumes that the characteristics of transcendental subjectivity can be cognized with a kind of apriority that is unavailable in the case of things in themselves, and this assumption is illegitimate insofar as Kant's method of establishing the characteristics of transcendental subjectivity does not in principle exclude things in themselves.* To elaborate, Kant argues that the formal characteristics of objects cannot pertain to things in themselves since cognition of things in themselves cannot be *a priori*, and so his idealism must meet this standard that he thinks transcendental realism fails to meet. That is to say, if transcendental subjectivity is to be the sole basis of the formal characteristics of objects, then *it* must be cognized *a priori*, and in a way that things in themselves cannot be. For if we cannot know *a priori* that transcendental subjectivity consists of forms of intuition and categories, we cannot know *a priori* that objects of experience will always exhibit the same formal characteristics, since those characteristics are supposed to result from the transcendental subject.

¹⁴ Cf. Lorne Falkenstein, *Kant's Intuitionism: A Commentary on the Transcendental Aesthetic* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1995), 267 and 272.

¹⁵ Cf. Gary Hatfield, “Kant on the Perception of Space (and Time),” *The Cambridge Companion to Kant and Modern Philosophy*, ed. Paul Guyer (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 61–93, 75–6 and Thomas C. Vinci, *Space, Geometry, and Kant's Transcendental Deduction of the Categories* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), 92–3.

¹⁶ Corresponding arguments for temporal form are given at A31/B47 and B48-9, although they do not explicitly affirm the transcendental ideality of time. Cf. Lorne Falkenstein, *Kant's Intuitionism: A Commentary on the Transcendental Aesthetic* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1995), 263. However, we can see from passages like that from A48/B65-6 quoted above that Kant takes his claims about the transcendental ideality of space to apply to time as well.

In my view, it is basically this problem that G. E. Moore pinpoints in the following passages:

It does, of course, follow, that *if*, as Kant says, Space is merely a form of our Sensitive Faculty—if, that is to say, our minds are so constituted that every triangle, which appears to us, must have its angles equal to two right angles, then, every triangle which appears to us always has had and always will have its angles equal to two right angles. This is, of course, true. But does this, in fact, explain at all, how we can *know* that this always has been and always will be the case? Obviously, it does not, unless it be first explained or be self-evident, how we can know that our minds *are* so constituted as always to give this result.¹⁷

Is it really more easy to see how you can know such a proposition as this,¹⁸ than how you could know such a proposition as that *all* triangles, whether directly apprehended or not, must have their angles equal to two right angles? [...] And if [...] you are nevertheless able to know that all men's minds always have and always will act in this way; why should you not be able to know that *all* triangles, even if triangles are not merely appearances produced by the action of your mind, must always have their angles equal to two right angles? It is not, in fact, a bit plainer how you can know universal synthetic propositions about the action of the human mind, than how you could know them about other things; and hence the argument that anything about which you can know universal synthetic propositions must be due to the action of the human mind, entirely loses all plausibility.¹⁹

So Moore's point is that Kant's argument assumes that the characteristics of transcendental subjectivity are already cognized, or are at least more cognizable than the characteristics of things in themselves would be. Moore disputes this assumption, because he does not think Kant has justified it.

James Van Cleve deserves credit for bringing Moore's objection to the attention of Kant scholars,²⁰ but in my estimation it remains underappreciated. Graham Bird is the only author of whom I am aware that defends Kant against Moore's objection,²¹ and I will address his response below. Lucy Allais mentions

¹⁷ G. E. Moore, *Some Main Problems of Philosophy* (New York: Macmillan, 1953), 153. The same basic objection is given at Moore, "Kant's Idealism," *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 4 (1903–4): 127–140, 133. The remainder of Moore, "Kant's Idealism," *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 4 (1903–4): 127–140 advances objections to transcendental idealism against which Kant can be easily defended.

¹⁸ That is, "that *all* men's minds are so constituted as *always* to act in a certain way" (Moore, *Some Main Problems of Philosophy* (New York: Macmillan, 1953), 154).

¹⁹ Moore, *Some Main Problems of Philosophy* (New York: Macmillan, 1953), 154.

²⁰ James Van Cleve, *Problems from Kant* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 37, 41–3, and 269n22. Van Cleve interprets Moore's objection to be questioning the necessity of transcendental subjectivity, and he joins it with an objection made by Bertrand Russell concerning the contingency of transcendental subjectivity to create a dilemma for Kant.

²¹ Graham Bird, *The Revolutionary Kant: A Commentary on the Critique of Pure Reason* (Peru: Open Court, 2006), 852n8.

the objection, implying that it would be valid if the interpretation of Kant's argument upon which it is based were correct,²² and offers a different interpretation of her own, which I will address in section V. Aside from this, Moore's objection is mentioned at Stern 2009: 23n55, and Van Cleve's discussion of it is mentioned at Sebald 2014: 57–8,²³ Taliaferro 2005: 226,²⁴ and Vinci 2015: 76n14. I am unaware of any other instances the objection is considered in the secondary literature on Kant.²⁵

At any rate, Moore's objection might appear easy to answer at first glance, especially if it is isolated from Kant's argument by elimination strategy (as it usually is). This is because it seems clear enough that transcendental subjectivity is "cognized," and "cognized a priori," as a result of Kant's transcendental arguments, which reflect upon cognitive experience and infer the subjective conditions that are necessary for it to be possible. So, for example, it might be tempting to say that transcendental subjectivity is cognized through arguments to the effect that the intuitional and *a priori* character of our representations of space and time require us to have forms of intuition, or that the structure and relations exhibited by objects of experience require us to have *a priori* concepts of the understanding. That is basically how Bird responds to Moore's objection. According to Bird, Moore's objection is that "Kant never asked how we *know* about our mental contribution to experience, but that is

²² Lucy Allais, "Kant's Argument for Transcendental Idealism in the Transcendental Aesthetic," *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 110, Part 1 (2010): 47–75, 52, 55, and 69. Allais references Van Cleve's discussion rather than Moore directly, but the latter is implied. She also mentions a similar but distinct objection advanced by Laurence Bonjour at Bonjour, *In Defense of Pure Reason* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 24–5. Like Moore, Bonjour points out that Kant's own transcendental claims are as synthetic *a priori* as the propositions they are supposed to explain. However, Bonjour goes on to argue that this creates the dilemma of Kant having to choose between a vicious regress, wherein "the mind so operates to make it true that: the mind so operates to make it true that [...] and so on *ad infinitum*" (Laurence Bonjour, *In Defense of Pure Reason* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 24), or an implausible analytic justification of his transcendental claims, which would also make the propositions they explain analytic rather than synthetic.

²³ Richard Sebald, *Continental Anti-Realism: A Critique* (London: Rowman & Littlefield International, Ltd, 2014).

²⁴ Charles Taliaferro, *Evidence and Faith: Philosophy and Religion since the Seventeenth Century* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

²⁵ It is possible to interpret parts of Hegel's critique of Kant as a precursor to Moore's objection. For example, the critique of the instrument/medium model of cognition at G. W. F. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977), 46–8 can be taken to question the assumption that the subjective "instrument" or "medium" through which we cognize the absolute is more epistemically secure than the absolute itself. I am grateful to Robert Stern for bringing this connection between Hegel and Moore to my attention. Cf. Robert Stern, *Hegelian Metaphysics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 23–4 for a related discussion.

THE MOORE-WALKER DILEMMA

answered by Kant's proofs of a priority for space, time, and categories, and the connection he then makes between that a priority and our cognitive powers."²⁶

However, as both Kant's argument by elimination strategy and the second passage from Moore above imply, the problem is not that simple, and thus an adequate response to it cannot be either. In other words, it is not enough to simply appeal to Kant's transcendental arguments as the means by which transcendental subjectivity is cognized *a priori*. Instead, you also have to show that things in themselves cannot likewise be cognized *a priori* as a result of transcendental arguments. For if they can, Kant loses his reason for rejecting transcendental realism, since things in themselves would be cognizable *a priori* after all.²⁷ The notion that things in themselves cannot in principle be cognized through transcendental arguments is, I think, much more difficult to show. This is where an objection made by Ralph Walker can be used to supplement Moore's.

Walker argues that there is no reason why transcendental arguments cannot establish conclusions about things in themselves. He thinks that their potential to do this is obscured by Kant's conflation of a *posteriori* cognition with cognition made possible by objects:

[Kant] took himself to have established already that synthetic *a priori* judgements are confined to the world of experience, by means of his thesis that either 'the object alone makes the representation possible' (as in the case of *a posteriori* knowledge) or else 'the representation alone makes the object possible' (A92/B124-5). He failed to see that transcendental arguments provide a way of establishing synthetic *a priori* truths that belong to neither category: they can be known to be true because without them experience would not be possible at all. There is no reason why these truths should not concern things as they are in themselves. [...] This puts in question the whole basis for transcendental idealism. Kant's case for it was that knowledge must either be read off from the world empirically, or read into it by us. If transcendental arguments provide a way of justifying synthetic *a priori* knowledge, independently of transcendental idealism, that case has gone.²⁸

²⁶ Graham Bird, *The Revolutionary Kant: A Commentary on the Critique of Pure Reason* (Peru: Open Court, 2006), 852n8. At the same place, Bird also addresses what he takes to be a second component of Moore's objection: that Kant fails to justify the generalization to all human minds and their acts.

²⁷ A further problem for Bird's response to Moore is that the transcendental analyses Bird appeals to—the metaphysical expositions of space and time and the metaphysical deduction of the categories—neither contain nor entail a critique of transcendental realism (and most likely do not intend to). This is because they are concerned with subjective elements of cognition from the start (spatio-temporal representations and *a priori* concepts, respectively) and do not even consider the possibility of non-subjective elements. Consequently, they are of no use in response to Moore's objection, which questions why things in themselves cannot be known by similar means.

²⁸ Ralph Walker, "Kant and Transcendental Arguments," *The Cambridge Companion to Kant and Modern Philosophy*, ed. Paul Guyer (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 238–68, 249. Cf. Walker, "Kant and Transcendental Arguments," *The Cambridge Companion to Kant and Modern Philosophy*, ed. Paul Guyer (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 238–68, 251.

In other words, Kant thinks that the transcendental realist model of cognition, in which cognition is made possible by things in themselves that cognition must conform to, would have to be *a posteriori*. Walker's point, though, is that there could be a transcendental argument which concludes that there is some feature of things in themselves that makes experience or cognition possible. In that case, there would be a conclusion about things in themselves which is not *a posteriori*, and which is just as *a priori* as Kant's conclusions about transcendental subjectivity are.²⁹

Note that Walker is not raising a merely hypothetical counterpoint, because transcendental arguments for realistic conclusions have been advanced in works such as Strawson 1959,³⁰ Bhaskar 1978,³¹ and Westphal 2004,³² among others. Of course, realistic transcendental arguments are not without controversy, but I do not think any of the controversies undermine Walker's objection. That is because those controversies mainly arise in a context where scepticism is the relevant counterposition,³³ and in this case it is not. Indeed, Kant's argument begins with the premise that *we do* have synthetic *a priori* cognition, and it is concerned to refute the transcendental realist, not the sceptic.

At any rate, if Moore's and Walker's objections are legitimate, this is the dilemma for Kant's argument: if you want to respond to Walker's objection by denying that transcendental arguments yield *a priori* cognition (or the relevant

²⁹ Furthermore, it seems to me that, although we must carefully distinguish transcendental subjectivity from empirical and metaphysical subjectivity, transcendental subjectivity seems to be just as epistemically independent of us as things in themselves. That is, the characteristics of transcendental subjectivity are not constituted by our cognitive capacities precisely because *they are* our cognitive capacities. The only way this would not be the case is if transcendental subjectivity was somehow self-constituting, but I cannot imagine what that would be like. Consequently, not only does Kant's method of establishing the characteristics of transcendental subjectivity fail to exclude the possibility of establishing the characteristics of things in themselves, his reason for denying the possibility of cognizing things in themselves *a priori*—that is, their independence from our cognitive capacities—might also apply to transcendental subjectivity. Cf. Edward Jonathan Lowe, *A Survey of Metaphysics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 7–8 for a related critique of Kant. Also notice that in the passage from A128-9 above, Kant questions where our concepts of things in themselves would come from: either from them or from ourselves. But notice that our concepts of the characteristics of transcendental subjectivity come from another source: a transcendental analysis of experience, and there does not seem to be any reason why concepts of things in themselves could not also have this origin.

³⁰ P. F. Strawson, *Individuals: An Essay in Descriptive Metaphysics* (London: Methuen, 1959).

³¹ Roy Bhaskar, *A Realist Theory of Science*, 2nd ed. (Verso: London, 1978).

³² Kenneth R. Westphal, *Kant's Transcendental Proof of Realism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

³³ See Robert Stern, "Transcendental Arguments," *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Summer 2015 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL = <<http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2015/entries/transcendental-arguments>> for a useful summary.

THE MOORE-WALKER DILEMMA

sort of *a priori* cognition), or if you want to contend that the transcendental subject is a non-metaphysical epistemic structure that as such is never properly cognized, then you have no response to Moore's objection that transcendental subjectivity is not cognized *a priori*. And if you cannot show that transcendental subjectivity is cognized *a priori*, then you have no reason to prefer transcendental idealism over transcendental realism as an explanation for the possibility of synthetic *a priori* propositions. Consequently, it seems as though you have to admit that transcendental subjectivity is cognized *a priori* via transcendental arguments, because there do not appear to be any other means: we cannot possibly have empirical knowledge of the transcendental subject, and even if we could that would be *a posteriori*, and we do not have any kind of intellectual intuition of transcendental subjectivity. However, once you admit that transcendental subjectivity is cognized *a priori* as a result of transcendental arguments, you have to reject Kant's criticism of transcendental realism—that things in themselves cannot be cognized *a priori*—because the capacity of transcendental arguments seems to imply the contrary.

Therefore, if transcendental arguments are *not* a genuine source of *a priori* cognition, then Moore's objection is sound, and transcendental subjectivity is no more cognizable than things in themselves; and if transcendental arguments *are* a genuine source of *a priori* cognition, then Walker's objection is sound, and Kant is wrong to suppose that things in themselves could never be cognized *a priori*. Likewise, this is the problematic asymmetry in Kant's argument by elimination: when he rejects transcendental realism on the grounds that things in themselves cannot be cognized *a priori*, it is as though transcendental arguments do *not* count as a source of *a priori* cognition, but when he accepts transcendental idealism on the grounds that transcendental subjectivity formally constitutes all possible objects of experience, it is as though transcendental arguments *do* count as a source of *a priori* cognition. Obviously, he cannot have it both ways.

V. ALLAIS'S INTERPRETATION OF KANT'S ARGUMENT

The traditional interpretation of Kant's argument for transcendental idealism has recently been challenged by Allais, particularly in the case of space. On Allais's reading, the question of synthetic *a priori* propositions' possibility is not one of how such propositions could be justified but rather one of how they could *have objects*.³⁴ For her, *a priori* intuition by itself explains the possibility of synthetic *a priori* propositions in geometry rather than transcendental idealism, while transcendental idealism simply follows from the nature of *a priori* intuition. So, instead of transcendental idealism explaining *a priori* intuition, *a priori*

³⁴ Lucy Allais, "Kant's Argument for Transcendental Idealism in the Transcendental Aesthetic," *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 110, Part 1 (2010): 47–75, 66–7.

intuition entails transcendental idealism. The reason *a priori* intuition entails transcendental idealism, according to Allais, is as follows. A mind-independent object (i.e., a thing in itself) can only be intuited if it affects us.³⁵ This cannot be a case of *a priori* intuition since affection cannot occur prior to experience of the object. Consequently, anything which is intuited *a priori* would have to be mind-dependent (i.e., transcendently ideal) and intuited without affection.³⁶

One reservation I have about this interpretation is that it seems to make Kant's argument suffer from a problem that is structurally similar to the one that is the topic of this article: it eliminates the transcendental realist (and, in this particular case, rationalist) option from consideration without holding the transcendental idealist option to the same standard. More specifically, Allais claims "Kant thinks that we simply cannot see how something [mind-]independent could be present to us without affecting us,"³⁷ but she does not explain how the transcendental idealist alternative, wherein mind-dependent spatiotemporal forms are somehow present to us without anything affecting us, is possible or less obscure. So, we must ask: how exactly are these forms made present to the transcendental subject so that they can be intuited *a priori*, distinct from the way the *a posteriori* elements of intuition are made present? If the transcendental subject is constituted in such a way as to allow it to intuit the very spatiotemporal forms it contributes to experience, what exactly is that constitution?³⁸ As long as we do not have answers to questions like this, how is *a priori* intuition of mind-dependent objects less "mysterious" than "rational intuition" of mind-independent objects?³⁹ To be fair, Allais is explicit that her aim is not to defend Kant's argument but to understand its strategy,⁴⁰ and her interpretation has merits in that regard. However, I am interested in the defensibility of Kant's arguments, and Allais takes her interpretation to avoid the kinds of problems I have discussed here. If my reservation is justified, then Kant's argument so interpreted is at best incomplete.

American University of Beirut

³⁵ Allais, "Kant's Argument for Transcendental Idealism in the Transcendental Aesthetic," *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 110, Part 1, 2010: 47–75, 63 and 72.

³⁶ Allais, "Kant's Argument for Transcendental Idealism in the Transcendental Aesthetic," *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 110, Part 1, 2010: 47–75, 62–3.

³⁷ Allais, "Kant's Argument for Transcendental Idealism in the Transcendental Aesthetic," *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 110, Part 1, 2010: 47–75, 64.

³⁸ Cf. A42/B59, where Kant speaks of "the subjective constitution of the senses."

³⁹ Cf. Allais, "Kant's Argument for Transcendental Idealism in the Transcendental Aesthetic," *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 110, Part 1, 2010: 47–75, 63.

⁴⁰ Allais, "Kant's Argument for Transcendental Idealism in the Transcendental Aesthetic," *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 110, Part 1, 2010: 47–75, 49 and 72.