

**The World as it is.**  
**Kantian realism past and present**

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**Introduction**

Although realism takes many forms, the ongoing contemporary controversy over realism can be roughly portrayed along the following lines: (metaphysical or scientific) realists hold a correspondence theory of truth, take the world to exist independently of cognizers or language users, respectively, and endorse the bivalence principle, i.e., the principle that every proposition is either true or false whether we know it or not. Anti-realists, by contrast, hold a coherence theory of truth, take the world to not exist independently of cognizers or language users, and dismiss the bivalence principle. For Dummett, the bivalence principle makes all the difference: Anti-realism ‘can assume a wide variety of forms’ but ‘the great majority of anti-realistic views are ones whose most characteristic expression consists in a rejection of the principle of bivalence.’<sup>1</sup> The divide of the realism-debate in two major camps, realists and anti-realists, might appear as oversimplistic since some (metaphysical or scientific) realists tend to reject correspondence in favor of coherence. By contrast, some anti-realists accept independence and reject the view that beliefs about the world depend on the kind of conceptual scheme one accepts. On the other hand, however, for the most part, the acceptance or dismissal of correspondence and coherence, independence and bivalence broadly defines what realists and anti-realists alike believe.

On the face of it, the divide between realism and anti-realism looks like a disjunction that makes things easy. Those who have views about what there really is, necessarily find themselves either in the realists’ or the anti-realists’ camp for apparently there is no viable third way available. The aim of this paper is to show that Kant makes a major contribution to the realism-debate in that he offers a third way, i.e., empirical realism, which can neither be classified as metaphysical nor scientific realism nor as anti-realism but represents a unique third realist option. It has been widely overlooked that Kant, in the *Critique of Pure Reason*, lays the foundations of modern realism. He not only invents the now common philosophical term ‘realism’ but also provides an original classification of ‘realisms’ as they are still present in contemporary philosophy.<sup>2</sup> There, Kant introduces empirical realism. Empirical realism is not

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. Dummett 1996: 265, 241, cf. 269.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. KrV, A 370-371. To my knowledge the first mention of the concept of ‘realism’ in the history of philosophy is in KrV, A 369. Cf. Heidemann 2021. References to the *Critique of*

a rival but a close ally of transcendental idealism. Transcendental idealists argue that objects as we *represent* them in space and time are appearances and not things-in-themselves. This implies empirical realism, i.e., the view that the represented objects of spatio-temporal experience exist as extended, real beings outside us. Whereas transcendental idealism lays out the way we represent objects possible for us, i.e., the *a priori* conditions of our cognition of them, empirical realism specifies that objects, as cognized under these conditions, exist in space and time outside us.

Compared to transcendental idealism, empirical realism has received little attention.<sup>3</sup> This comes as a surprise all the more that Kant, in the Fourth Paralogism of the *Critique of Pure Reason* (KrV, A 366-380), offers a detailed account of different forms of realism by means of which he specifies his own kind of realism. The main reason why there is little interest in empirical realism is that from the outset Kant's commitment to transcendental idealism seems to rule out the possibility to seriously argue for realism. The kind of realism, some maintain, that Kant endorses in his critical philosophy, i.e., empirical realism, can by no means count as a *genuine* form of realism. Empirical realism rather is dressed-up idealism.<sup>4</sup> In this paper, I contest this claim. In what follows, I argue for empirical realism as a *genuine, authentic* form of realism that goes beyond the standard divide between metaphysical realism and anti-realism. The question of whether empirical realism is a genuine form of realism is of general philosophical interest since it concerns the problem of a unified science. For Kant, 'science' (*Wissenschaft*) is an umbrella term. Although there are many sciences like the natural sciences,

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*Pure Reason* follow the standard format KrV, first edition = A, second edition = B, for all other writings I follow the standard format of Kant's *Gesammelte Schriften*, ed. by the Royal Prussian (later German) Academy of Science, Berlin: De Gruyter 1900ff, AA = Akademie-Ausgabe, volume and page number.

2000.

<sup>3</sup> This is not to say that no work has been done on empirical realism. A major study is Allais 2015. Allais provides a substantial overview of the debate on Kant's distinction between appearances and things-in-themselves. On her own reading, this distinction is metaphysical since things-in-themselves, while not existing in space and time, bear two kinds of properties, i.e., cognizable manifest properties in relation to our perceptive capacities, and unknowable properties. The second book-length study of Kantian realism is Abela 2002. Abela argues that empirical realism results from the theory of judgment Kant offers in the second edition of the *Critique of Pure Reason*. In particular, Abela denies that empirical realism implies representationalism and that it amounts to anti-realism. Cf. Abela 1996. For criticism of this view see Allais 2003: 387–8. On empirical realism as anti-realism, see also Stevenson 1983 and Walker 1983: 157–9. Moran (2000) provides an instructive discussion of empirical in relation to Putnam's internal realism while emphasizing that internal is not a form of anti-realism (see below).

<sup>4</sup> Cf. e.g. Devitt 1997 and Walker 1983.

the social sciences, the human sciences etc., there is, for Kant, one overarching normative concept of ‘science’ that applies to all sciences alike. On the one hand, Kant provides a clear-cut criterion for what counts as science: ‘What can be called proper science is only that whose certainty is apodictic’ (Prol, 4:468). That is, science must establish a system of cognition on *a priori* reasons, not on empirical grounds or observation.<sup>5</sup> In the first *Critique* (KrV, B 10–23), Kant, to a certain extent, restricts science to theories built on synthetic *a priori* cognition like mathematics or transcendental philosophy itself. On the other hand, however, all *given* objects of scientific inquiry are, for Kant, empirically real spatio-temporal objects. In view of his criticism of metaphysics, human cognition is possible only of objects that are possible objects for us in space and time. In principle, this includes macroscopic objects of perception in outer sense as well as objects of empirical self-awareness in inner sense, such as my own conscious mental states. Unextended simple parts or thinking mental substances outside space and time cannot be objects of scientific inquiry because such things cannot possibly exist. By means of empirical realism, Kant draws a common realist picture of our world such that the objects of physics, as well as the objects of psychology, anthropology or history, are fundamentally objects of the same spatio-temporal system of experience, i.e., reality. This does not imply that the latter are sciences in the same sense as physics. For example, *historical* events cannot be seen as necessitated by mechanical causes, although we might *regard* them as if they follow a teleological plan. But as occurrences in our world, historical *events* are objects of the same spatio-temporal experience as the objects of physics or ordinary perceptual experience. And as we will see below, Kant even believes it is necessary to conceive of them as if they were rule-governed events in empirical reality or nature. This is the lesson to be learned from empirical realism.

To demonstrate how Kant succeeds in providing the common ground for the natural as well as human sciences, I will first discuss Michael Devitt’s criticism of empirical realism. Devitt’s criticism helps to appreciate the contemporary relevance of empirical realism. Devitt profiles the kind of realism he advocates, not least by criticizing Kant for his, as he coins it, ‘Weak, or Fig-Leaf, Realism’. According to ‘Weak, or Fig-Leaf, Realism’, ‘[s]omething objectively exists independently of the mental.’ For Devitt, this kind of realism ‘is so weak as to be uninteresting’ such that in the end it turns out to be nothing over and above a kind of anti-realism.<sup>6</sup> I argue that the ‘Fig-Leaf’-objection does not do justice to empirical realism and, as a first step of my

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<sup>5</sup> Cf. KrV, B 24–28.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. Devitt 1997: 23, 72.

overall argument, that Kantian empirical realism cannot be reproached with not being a *genuine* form of realism. This step is required to not let the consideration of empirical realism in the contemporary debate stop for the merely strategic allegation that Kantian realism cannot enter the debate because it is not realism (sec. 1). To show what empirical realism amounts to, I will then discuss the relation between empirical and transcendental realism. Kant's juxtaposition of empirical and transcendental realism demonstrates that for the natural and human sciences to operate on a common ground these objects must be objects of the same kind, i.e., the same spatio-temporal system of experience. In the second step of my overall argument, I show that, unlike transcendental realism, empirical realism can provide the theoretical framework based on which the natural and human sciences contribute to the same common realist worldview (sec. 2). At least until the late 1990s, Hilary Putnam subscribes to major ideas of empirical realism. Putnam sees in Kant's empirical realism the paradigm of his 'internal realism'. Internal realism is the view that the question about the existence of the external world cannot be meaningfully formulated and answered from a God's eye perspective but only relative to a conceptual system, i.e., to a theory or conceptual scheme. To further profile Kant's concept of realism, I will examine the connection between Kant's and Putnam's concepts of realism. Comparing empirical and internal realism is extremely helpful to understand in what sense Kant lays the foundation for our contemporary conception of a realist worldview that does not eliminate but has the potential to integrate the human sciences (sec. 3). The final step of my argument will be a sketch of how Kant conceives of this realist picture of an integrated science. More specifically, I will indicate how Kant understands history as a *human science* and how the *human sciences* fit into the one realist picture of the world we live in (sec. 4).

## 1. The Fig Leaf-Objection to Empirical Realism

In response to Garve's and Feder's allegation in their review of the first edition of the *Critique of Pure Reason* that transcendental idealism ultimately comes down to Berkeleyan immaterialism, Kant writes in the *Prolegomena* that '[...] what I called idealism did not concern the existence of things [...], for it never came into my mind to doubt that' (Prol, 4: 293). Already in the first edition of the first *Critique* Kant insists on the independent existence of external reality. Accordingly, 'transcendental idealism' 'allows that the objects of outer intuition are real [...] just as they are intuited in space' (KrV, A 491/B 520). Although, '[n]othing is really given to us except perception and the empirical progress from this perception to other possible perceptions', all objects of human spatio-temporal experience exist independently of us:

That there could be inhabitants in the moon, even though no human being has ever perceived them, must of course be admitted; but this means only that in the possible progress of experience we could encounter them; for everything is actual that stands in one context with a perception in accordance with the laws of the empirical progression. (KrV, A 492-493/B 521, translation altered).

Considering this realist commitment, Michael Devitt's *Fig-leaf*-objection to empirical realism is unjustified. In more general terms, Devitt describes Kant's philosophical 'approach' as 'deep, dark, and difficult'.<sup>7</sup> Although he is fundamentally at odds with Kant's critical project of establishing transcendental conditions *a priori* of the possibility of cognition, he is somewhat sympathetic towards the rigor of Kant's diagnoses of the realism dispute as such. To Devitt's mind, one of the main reasons why the Kantian project goes in the wrong direction is that Kant believes in *a priori* epistemology constituting objects and 'determining metaphysics'. The problem with *a priori* epistemology is that it functions as 'first philosophy', transcending science' and letting realism result from it. For Devitt, it is rather inverse: realism comes first, epistemology only afterwards.<sup>8</sup> In this section, I am not concerned with Devitt's arguments for the kind of realism he defends. I rather focus on his interpretation of empirical realism as *Fig leaf*-realism, which in the end amounts to the claim that Kant's realism cannot count as a *genuine* form of realism and does not contribute anything of value to the contemporary debate. As we will see, this diagnosis is mistaken. Empirical rather is a *genuine* form of realism and even paves the way for a unifying realist worldview that connects the sciences and the humanities.

Devitt's criticism of empirical realism starts off from Kant's fundamental question, 'How is knowledge possible?'<sup>9</sup> He then turns to the distinction between appearance and thing-in-itself, which he basically takes to be Kant's answer to this question. Thus, cognition is only possible of appearances whereas things-in-themselves are cognition-transcendent. Devitt argues correctly, I think, that the 'two-worlds interpretation' of this distinction, i.e., of transcendental idealism, is mistaken. Kant rather holds the 'one-world view'.<sup>10</sup> Initially, Devitt is on the right

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<sup>7</sup> Cf. Devitt 1997: 71.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. Devitt 1997: 72–3.

<sup>9</sup> Devitt 1997: 71.

<sup>10</sup> Cf. Devitt 1997: 72. See also Devitt 2010: 101–2. On more details why the relation between appearance and thing-in-itself cannot be conceived in terms of a 'two world'-view, according to which the latter cause the former, see Heidemann 2010. As we will see further below, the

track for he specifies his ‘one-world view’-interpretation along the lines of a non-causal reading of the distinction between appearance and thing-in-itself:

An appearance is not a mental sense datum, but an external object *as we know it*. By contrast, the thing-in-itself is the object *independent of our knowledge of it*; it is not a second object and does not – indeed, could not – cause an appearance, for causation has its place only in the phenomenal world. Appearances are familiar objects like stones, trees, and cats. Our knowledge of these objects has two elements, both of which are essential: a perceptual, or experiential, element and a conceptual element. The conceptual element consists in the mind’s imposition of *a priori* concepts (e.g. causality) and a spatio-temporal setting on objects.<sup>11</sup>

So far Devitt’s reading of Kant’s distinction between appearance and thing-in-itself is persuasive. The consequences, however, he draws from this reading resulting in the *Fig leaf*-interpretation of empirical realism, are not because he now turns the tables and makes things-in-themselves objectively existing objects, which they are clearly not for Kant: ‘External objects exist objectively [...] only as things-in-themselves. As we know them – that is as familiar objects – they exist partly in virtue of our imposition of concepts and a spatio-temporal setting. To a degree, we *create* the world we live in.’<sup>12</sup> Leaving aside the question of what it could possibly mean to ‘*create* the world’, the main difficulty now arises from Devitt’s allegation concerning ‘Kant’s metaphysics’, which he explains with the help of the ‘cookie-cutter metaphor’. Accordingly, ‘Kant is a Weak Realist’ because the ‘dough (things-in-themselves) is independent of the cook (us).’ The ‘cook imposes cookie cutters (concepts) on the dough in order to create cookies (appearances).’<sup>13</sup> The ‘cookie-cutter metaphor’ is a strongly misleading explication of the ‘one world’-view. For in transcendental idealism, things-in-

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‘two world’-view has sceptical consequences with respect to the existence of things-in-themselves for we cannot with certainty infer the existence of external causes from representations of external objects as their inner effects. Sceptical doubts are, however, a consequence not only of the ‘two world’-reading. They equally occur in Allais’ metaphysical ‘two-aspect’-view, which is a ‘one-world’-view. For if I cannot cognize a certain kind of property of things, as Allais (2015) claims, I cannot know that this kind of property exists. For any existence-claim with respect to *x* means, for Kant, that *x* is cognizable. Cf. KrV, A 225/B 272–A 226/B 274.

<sup>11</sup> Devitt 1997: 72.

<sup>12</sup> Devitt 1997: 72.

<sup>13</sup> Devitt 1997: 72–3.

themselves, i.e., the ‘dough’, do not *exist*. If they did, according to transcendental idealism, Kant would apply *a priori* concepts such as substance and property, community, reality/existence, etc. to cognition-transcendent things-in-themselves, since to be able to ‘create cookies’, the ‘dough’ must be conceived as something that has properties, stands in relation to other things etc. As Devitt himself correctly emphasizes with respect to Kant, *a priori* concepts like causality have their ‘place only in the phenomenal world’<sup>14</sup>. They can, therefore, not function as tools of world creation; that is, they cannot be applied to things-in-themselves as the cognition-transcendent material of the production of cognizable appearances.

If the ‘cookie-cutter metaphor’ would apply, Devitt would be right that Kant’s metaphysics is a ‘deeply mysterious metaphysics’<sup>15</sup>. In this case, Kantian realism could indeed not count as a *genuine* form of realism, for then, as Devitt infers from the one-world view, that which exists objectively are unknowable things-in-themselves, whereas appearances are just knowable phenomenal cut-outs of things-in-themselves. Since ‘objective existence’, that is existence ‘independent of the cognitive activities of the mind’<sup>16</sup>, is one dimension that makes realism genuine realism, according to Devitt, it follows that Kant ascribes objective existence to something that is unknowable. By contrast, appearances are cognizable and exist, although not in the sense of objective, independent existence. This is why, in Devitt’s eyes, empirical realism is not a *genuine* form of realism but ‘Fig-leaf realism’, and Kant himself finally turns out to be ‘one of the greatest antirealists’.<sup>17</sup>

Devitt’s ‘Fig-leaf’-objection to empirical realism is a typical example of an ontological, dualist interpretation of the distinction between appearance and thing-in-itself. From such an interpretation it follows that the objects of science would be appearances instead of reality as it is in itself. This view is against natural expectations we have with respect to a scientific worldview. For science is supposed to inform us about reality itself and not only about its appearance. Also, the objects of science are supposed to be objects of the same kind; hence, objects cognizers like us have access to, and not encapsulated objects we are closed off from. Kant’s empirical realism is to be understood as the attempt to show how to meet these requirements without giving up the critical claim that cognition is restricted to appearances while things-in-themselves are cognition-transcendent objects of *thought*. In what follows, it

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<sup>14</sup> Cf. Devitt 1997: 71.

<sup>15</sup> Cf. Devitt 1997: 73.

<sup>16</sup> Cf. Devitt 1997: 15.

<sup>17</sup> Cf. Devitt 1997: 207. See also *ibid.*, 17. Cf. *ibid.*, 157, where Devitt connects Kant with ‘constructivism’. Constructivism he then conjoins with ‘relativism’ which, however, he does not find in Kant. See *ibid.*, 235ff. and Devitt 2010: 101ff.

will become evident that Devitt's *Fig leaf*-objection to empirical realism does not do justice to this aim. From Devitt's point of view, things-in-themselves really exist while, for Kant, things-in-themselves are merely objects of thought, i.e., *noumena*. The difficulty is, of course, to provide an account of empirical reality that in light of the critical restriction of the possibility of cognition allows for appearances as independent objects in space and time while ruling out things-in-themselves as existing, although unknowable external objects. Kant offers such an account in his discussion of empirical and transcendental realism of the first *Critique*.

## 2. The World as it is

As mentioned in the introduction, Kant not only introduces the now common term 'realism' to philosophy but also provides a groundbreaking analysis of different forms of realism. His distinction between empirical and transcendental realism forestalls the nowadays common division between varieties of non-metaphysical and metaphysical realism. Kant's focus is not on realism in the sciences and physics in particular. The Kantian scope is broader since 'realism' as such is, for him, a metaphysical theme addressing questions about the possibility of cognition of the substantiality of the soul, the finiteness or infinity of the universe and the existence of God. It is within this context that he profiles *empirical realism*.<sup>18</sup>

In the 'Transcendental Aesthetic', Kant says that space and time bear 'empirical reality' insofar as objects appear in them but that they bear 'transcendental ideality' when isolated from the conditions of the possibility of cognition (KrV, A 28/B 44, A 35-36/B 51-53). It is only in the 'Transcendental Dialectic' that he articulates in more detail what empirical realists and transcendental realists claim and why he thinks empirical realism is true and transcendental realism is false. The discussion of empirical and transcendental realism ensues, in the first edition of the *Critique of Pure Reason*, with respect to the more specific problem of the cognizability and ontological status of the soul, i.e., the 'I'. As Kant argues, *rational* psychology cannot be a science because the soul or the I can only be an object of scientific inquiry under

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<sup>18</sup> To be precise, 'metaphysical' and 'scientific realism' are not the same. Whereas scientific realists assume, e.g., that the *sciences* provide the true account of the world, metaphysical realists emphasize that the world exists independently of us such that there might be facts beyond our cognitive (scientific) reach. Metaphysical realists therefore make stronger claims than scientific realists. Although Kant, in a sense, approves the view that the sciences provide the true account of the world, he is not a scientific realist. In the remainder of the paper, I will skip the label 'scientific realism' and exclusively use the contemporary label 'metaphysical realism' for the form of realism that corresponds to 'transcendental realism', i.e., the label Kant uses for the form of realism he disputes. Cf. Moran 2010: 71, 74.

the transcendental conditions of the possibility of cognition, i.e., as given in space and time. Since the objects of rational psychology exist independently of space and time, Kant denies rational (metaphysical) cognition of the soul or the ‘I’ to be possible. This line of criticism implies that, for Kant, our ontological commitments cannot go beyond what we are able to cognize. The systematic place where Kant introduces the distinction between empirical and transcendental realism is the ‘Fourth Paralogism of Pure Reason’ (KrV, A 366–380). The fourth paralogism argues that the existence of objects of outer perception is causally *inferred* from inner perceptions but that the alleged external cause may be produced by imagination or inner sense. The existence of external things is therefore doubtful (KrV, A 366). However, what cannot be doubted is the (Cartesian) object of immediate inner self-perception: ‘I myself with all my representations’ (KrV, A 368). Sceptical doubts about the existence of the external world are unjustified, Kant objects, because not only inner but also outer perception is *immediate*, and the objects of outer sense do not exist ‘independently of us and our sensibility’ (KrV, A 369). To understand (epistemic) immediacy and (ontological) independence is crucial for appreciating why empirical realism advances the contemporary debate.

## 2.1. Immediacy and independence

In his account of ‘naïve’, i.e., metaphysical realism that he attributes to a variety of early modern philosophers, Dummett blames Descartes and Locke for believing in ‘*immediate* knowledge, knowledge by direct apprehension of that which renders the proposition true.’<sup>19</sup> Epistemic immediacy, for Dummett, pertains to (contemporary) metaphysical realism, not to anti-realism. For Kant, too, immediacy is as such a distinctive epistemic feature of realism and cannot be separated from independence. As we will see, on Kant’s account of realism, immediacy is what singles out non-metaphysical, i.e., empirical realism. As a matter of principle, the acceptance or denial of immediacy of outer perception defines what Kant terms *empirical dualism*, consisting of transcendental idealism and empirical realism, and *transcendental dualism*, consisting of transcendental realism and empirical idealism (KrV, A 369–377). For transcendental idealists, the objects of outer perception are appearances and not things-in-themselves, and space and time are not things-in-themselves or their properties either but forms of our sensible intuition. As forms of intuition they account for the fact ‘that outer experience is really immediate’ (KrV, B 276), rather than causally mediated by things-in-themselves

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<sup>19</sup> Cf. Dummett 1996: 274–5.

outside space and time.<sup>20</sup> Transcendental idealism is closely tied to empirical realism, the view that objects of outer sense are real insofar as they are objects of possible experience, i.e., cognizable objects according to the transcendental conditions of cognition as defined in transcendental idealism. It follows that since things-in-themselves are ‘separated from our sensibility’, in empirical realism they correspond to no reality whatsoever (KrV, A 370).

The dependence relation between empirical realism and transcendental idealism indicates the systematic connection Kant establishes between truth and reality. *Prima facie*, this connection carries the traits of a merely coherentist theory of truth. As is well known, Kant withholds in the *Critique of Pure Reason*, and elsewhere also, definitive, elaborate explanations concerning truth so as not to leave himself conclusively tied to one of the two classical alternative, well-established grounds of either the correspondence or coherence theory of truth. It is clear, however, that he presumes as ‘granted’ the traditional theory of correspondence’s ‘nominal definition of truth’, which consists in the ‘agreement of cognition with its object’ (KrV, A 58/B 82). However, ‘granted’ here does not mean that Kant accepts as unproblematic the correspondence theory of truth but instead that he considers it a matter of course, one to which theories must conform anyway. For evidently the *agreement with the world* is a necessary condition for true judgments about the world.<sup>21</sup> A general criterion of truth does not exist, however, and Kant essentially leaves it here in the *Critique of Pure Reason*, since there could not be anything general ‘which was valid of all cognitions without any distinction among their objects’ (KrV, A 58–59/B 83).

In several passages of the *Critique of Pure Reason*, Kant refers to what he coins ‘transcendental truth’. ‘Transcendental truth’ consists of the objective reality of the pure concepts of the understanding and ‘precedes all empirical truth’ (KrV, A 146/B 185). The pure concepts of the understanding or the principles of pure understanding, respectively, must be conceived as truth conditions of (empirical) statements about the world. True statements about the world must correspond to the world, but for Kant correspondence is possible only insofar as *empirical* truth is conceived in connection with coherence, for

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<sup>20</sup> Bear in mind that, for Kant, things-in-themselves do not exist in space and time since they are pure objects of thought (*noumena*). For a convincing analysis of Kant’s argument for the non-spatiality of things-in-themselves, see Buroker 2006: 64–8.

<sup>21</sup> Bauer (2021) makes a convincing case for why Kant cannot be conceived as plainly holding coherence since there is plenty of evidence for correspondence in his work.

the empirical truth of appearances is satisfactorily secured, and sufficiently distinguished from its kinship with dreams, if both are correctly and thoroughly connected up according to empirical laws in one experience [...] for everything is actual that stands in one context with a perception in accordance with the laws of the empirical progression. (KrV, A 491–3/B 520–1).

This claim reflects the ‘Second Postulate of empirical Thinking’: ‘That which is connected with the material conditions of experience (of sensation) is actual’ (KrV, A 218/B 266, A 225–6/B 272–5). According to this *a priori* principle, we are justified in applying the concept of reality or actuality (existence) to objects, if and only if these objects are possible objects of our spatio-temporal system of experience. Therefore, only that is *actual*, or *real*, and a possible object of true world-directed judgments what coheres with the *a priori* cognitive concepts and forms that govern experience. Consequently, objects of classical metaphysics, such as unextended souls or monads, cannot be objects of any scientific inquiry since they are not objects of possible experience and thus cannot be actual.

The first intermediary conclusion, then, is that empirical realism cannot count as anti-realism. For anti-realists dismiss *correspondence* as well as *immediacy* and *independence*. By contrast, empirical realists hold that our knowledge of the existence of external things does not need to be causally (mediately) inferred from perception but is *immediate* even though the world exists *independently* of us. The second intermediary conclusion is that empirical realism cannot count as a form of metaphysical realism either since metaphysical realists dismiss *coherence*. However, on the face of it, metaphysical and empirical realists agree on *independence*. This cannot be denied but, as we will see next (2.2.), *independence* is ambiguous: either epistemic or ontological. Empirical realists hold ontological *independence* and deny epistemic *independence*, whereas metaphysical, i.e., transcendental realists, defend both ontological as well as epistemic *independence*.

## 2.2. Mediacy and Independence

On Dummett’s semantic account of realism, metaphysical realists are mistaken in believing that the world exists independently of us as if true statements about the world were true whether we know it or not.<sup>22</sup> Dummett’s anti-realist diagnosis seems to come close to Kant’s analysis of transcendental dualism, i.e., transcendental realism and empirical idealism. Transcendental

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<sup>22</sup> Cf. Dummett 1996: 230–276.

realists conceive of outer objects as things-in-themselves outside us, i.e., ‘which would exist independently of us and our sensibility’ insofar as space and time are ‘given in themselves’ (KrV, A 369). For transcendental realists, objects of outer perception exist in themselves independently of us in the sense that the meaning of the concept ‘reality’ does not depend on truth conditions or on conceptual schemes that determine the conditions of its legitimacy. Unlike in empirical realism, there is, in transcendental realism, no justificatory link between what we take to be real and what we can cognize at all. For transcendental realists conceive of outer perception as real no matter what, i.e., as representations caused by things in themselves in space outside us. As we have seen, transcendental realists cannot avoid sceptical consequences because they cannot be sure that the mediately inferred external cause of perception really exists (KrV, A 368). Empirical realists can, of course, face sceptical consequences, too. However, because of epistemic immediacy they at least avoid causal inferences from the inner to the outer, which essentially motivate the sceptical uncertainty in question. Transcendental realists, by contrast, cannot avoid empirical idealism, the view that we in fact have outer perception but cannot know with certainty whether ‘the object corresponding to it also exists’ (KrV, A 371). Transcendental realists must concede empirical idealism and thus cannot *prove* the causal connection between the representations in us and the represented objects outside us mainly because they hold independence, mediacy, and correspondence.<sup>23</sup>

Evidently, empirical is not transcendental realism because both deviate on mediacy and correspondence, at least insofar as empirical realists combine correspondence and coherence. What about independence, then? Since empirical and transcendental realists alike accept independence, both seem to agree on a core realist feature and substantially overlap. To identify where exactly empirical and transcendental realism diverge, I suggest isolating their main differences with respect to three major commitments realists are expected to make: the *ontological*, the *epistemic*, and the *veridical* commitment. The *ontological* commitment tells us whether a form of realism takes the world to be mind-dependent or mind-independent. The *epistemic* commitment tells us whether we have direct or indirect mental access to external objects. The *veridical* commitment specifies what theory of truth underlies our external world

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<sup>23</sup> According to the Kantian taxonomy, Devitt’s metaphysical or scientific realism would count as a form of transcendental realism because he maintains that external world beliefs do by no means depend on epistemic claims we make. Putnam (1982: 142ff.), in his reappraisal of Kant, interprets the distinction between empirical and transcendental realism as the distinction between ‘internal’ and ‘metaphysical realism’. He conceives of metaphysical in terms of scientific realism. See section 3.

beliefs.<sup>24</sup> These three commitments jointly profile the kinds of realism at issue: Empirical realists defend *ontological independence* because they hold that the world is mind-independent and that objects exist in space outside us. They deny, however, epistemic independence and instead endorse *epistemic dependence*, for they believe that mental access to reality is immediate and that what is real depends on what we can cognize in general. Finally, they hold *veridical coherence* in combination with *correspondence* because for empirical realists external world beliefs can only be true in accordance with transcendental principles of cognition as their truth conditions. Although for different reasons, transcendental realists, too, subscribe to *ontological independence* because they take external objects to be mind-independent and determined in themselves. They argue, however, for *epistemic independence* since for them our mental access to reality is causally mediated such that what is real does *not* depend on what we are able to cognize. Thus, they are committed to *veridical correspondence*, that is, (causal) truth-theoretical correspondence proper between mind and world.<sup>25</sup>

Given their ontological, epistemic and veridical commitments, the vital difference between these two forms of realism is that according to empirical realism, *reality* cannot go beyond what we are able to cognize, whereas transcendental realists claim it can, i.e., there can be true propositions about the world whether we know them or not. Also, while the former argues that there is no causal inference from inner perception to outer existence for we have immediate cognitive access to external reality, the latter claims that there is in fact causal inference from the inner to the outer such that our cognitive access to external reality is only indirect.<sup>26</sup> For

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<sup>24</sup> I am more explicit on these three commitments in Heidemann 2021: 3244–6. The debate over realism has often been reduced to questions about truth, or at least a connection between the concept of ‘existence’ and that of ‘truth’ is approved or denied. Cf., e.g., Devitt 1997: esp. ch. 2; Putnam 1988: 107; Van Cleve 1998: 212ff. To conceive of the realism debate merely in terms of theory of truth is, however, much too narrow. For, as Kant’s analysis demonstrates, what is essentially at issue in realism is the connection between what humans can cognize and the scope of what can possibly exist. Whereas Kant acknowledges this connection, e.g., Devitt denies that cognitive structures have any impact on what we conceive as being *real*.

<sup>25</sup> Abela (2000: 6) differentiates between three aspects a ‘minimal description of realism’ must entail: ‘(1) our statements about the world are rendered true or false by a mind-independent reality, (2) warranted belief is determined by truth conditions, and (3) there are recognition-transcendent truths about the empirical world.’ Moran (2000: 75) makes a similar distinction but includes – with respect to Putnam – what he calls the ‘Uniqueness Thesis’, according to which ‘there is exactly one true description of the world’, and the ‘Bivalence Thesis’.

<sup>26</sup> Epistemic mediacy is unavoidable for metaphysical realists because they take space and time to exist in themselves. As to metaphysical realism, Dummett is right in attributing the immediacy claim to Descartes and Locke, but only insofar as basic propositions or principles are concerned that are directly accessed or perceived by the mind. All other (empirical)

these reasons, transcendental realists take appearances to be things-in-themselves while for empirical realists appearances are not things-in-themselves. As a consequence, empirical dualism, i.e., transcendental idealism and empirical realism, and transcendental dualism, i.e., transcendental realism and empirical idealism, are disjunct, such that the truth of transcendental idealism and empirical realism falsifies transcendental realism and empirical idealism by indirect proof. This is exactly Kant's strategy in his 'Critique of the Fourth Paralogism': Empirical and transcendental dualism are mutually exclusive in major respects. For instance, empirical realists hold epistemic immediacy, whereas transcendental realists hold epistemic mediacy. By indirect proof, the one falsifies the other, i.e., empirical realism falsifies transcendental realism.<sup>27</sup> That empirical realism is true, follows, for Kant, directly from the arguments of the 'Transcendental Aesthetic' and 'Analytic'. That transcendental realism is false results *quasi* indirectly from the fact that this form of realism operates on the bivalence-principle. Transcendental realists must presuppose that every (meaningful) proposition about the world is either true or false, whether we know it or not, which in turn is only possible if the world is not just determinable but determined in itself, that is, if appearances are things-in-themselves. For appearances are only determinable whereas things-in-themselves must be conceived as theory-independent and thus determined in themselves: 'The proposition *Everything existing is thoroughly determined* signifies not only that of every given pair of opposed predicates but also of every pair of possible predicates, one of them must always apply to it' (KrV, A 573/B 601). For transcendental realists, the world is hence ready-made in the sense that, e.g., it is determined whether the world is finite or not or whether bodies are composed of simple parts or not. However, as Kant demonstrates, assuming that the world is in itself determined gives rise to the 'fourfold antinomy', which is grounded on the transcendental realist's 'presupposition that appearances [...] are things in themselves' (KrV, A 507/B 535, cf. KrV, A 491/B 519). Consequently, the rival of empirical realism, i.e., transcendental realism, must be dismissed because if it were true, the antinomies would be not only unavoidable but also irresolvable.<sup>28</sup>

At this point, we do not need to dive into Kant's doctrine of the antinomies of pure reason. What is, in fact, remarkable is Kant's far-sightedness that any response to the quest of realism

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knowledge is inferential for metaphysical realists such as Descartes and Locke. On this matter, cf. Heidemann 2024: 59–79.

<sup>27</sup> I leave it open here whether this strategy is promising in the end since there might be forms of realism beyond the Kantian dichotomy.

<sup>28</sup> On bivalence and determination in Kant, cf. Brittan 2001.

requires clarification of a cognizer's relation towards veridical coherence and correspondence (including bivalence), epistemic and ontological independence, as well as perceptual immediacy. As I have pointed out with respect to Dummett, these conceptual tools are still in place in the contemporary debate about realism. – So far, we have seen that empirical realism is a genuine form of realism and, as such, incompatible with transcendental realism. What still needs to be decided is whether it actually goes beyond the standard divide of metaphysical realism and anti-realism and can enrich the contemporary debate in that it provides the common ground for a unified realist conception of the world. In section 3, I discuss this question by comparing empirical and internal realism.

### 3. Empirical and Internal Realism

To a certain extent, Kant's analysis of empirical and transcendental realism has survived the many criticisms that have been raised against the Kantian doctrine ever since the publication of the *Critique of Pure Reason*. It resisted its critics because Kant did not place his discussion of empirical and transcendental realism in any particular historical context by explicitly addressing then prominent philosophical theories. His references to Descartes and Berkeley are rather loose and by no means thought to be historically accurate. Kant's discussion of realism is essentially paradigmatic and can therefore be easily related to systematic debates in a variety of contexts. Someone who appropriates Kant's inquiry of realism in a systematic way is Putnam. Putnam not only agrees with the dichotomy of empirical and transcendental realism as such but also sees in Kant the 'fore-father'<sup>29</sup> of his own internal realism. Whether or not Putnam is justified to refer his internal realism back to Kant is a controversial issue. Concerning this question there are two camps in the literature. These two camps do not just represent mutually exclusive views on an interpretive question within contemporary Kant-scholarship but mark two standpoints of more general interest regarding the question of whether it is at all possible to bring Kant's empirical realism back into the recent discussion. Whereas Devitt (1997: 230–1) and Moran (2000)<sup>30</sup> think there is a close connection between Kant's and Putnam's realism, Abela (1996: 45) denies this connection because 'Putnam's "real within a scheme" model' is not the same as 'Kant's assertion of the independent existence of empirical objects'. Allais points out that '[t]he rejection of "theory-independent reality" has been important to Putnam,

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<sup>29</sup> Cf. Putnam 1987: 43.

<sup>30</sup> Moran (2000: 96–100), however, is ambivalent since he concludes that Hegelian idealism would be the much better candidate for Putnam's reference.

but Kant clearly believes in theory-independent reality, in his views about things as they are in themselves: the way things are as they are in themselves is entirely independent of us and our knowledge of them' (2003: 375). Also, Van Cleve is sceptical about Putnam's invocation of Kant, especially because, contrary to what Putnam maintains, Kant is not rejecting the correspondence theory of truth, which is a cornerstone of metaphysical and transcendental realism. As I show below, it is questionable whether Kant would subscribe to internal realism all the way down since he neither gives up correspondence nor would he accept Putnam's belief in the value-dependence of truth.<sup>31</sup> On the other hand, Allais' view that Kant holds theory-independence of reality is mistaken. For as section 2 has shown, 'reality' (in space and time) cannot legitimately be attributed to things-in-themselves, according to Kant, such that we cannot even meaningfully speculate about the way things-in-themselves are because we cannot call them 'real'. In what follows, I argue that there are, in fact, structural similarities between Kant's and Putnam's analyses of realism. These similarities, however, do not allow for identifying internal with empirical realism, although Putnam's distinction between internal and metaphysical realism clearly corresponds to the Kantian distinction between empirical and transcendental realism. On the other hand, if we take Putnam's analysis to be systematically important with respect to the issue of cross-relations between humanities and the natural sciences, then this structural correspondence implies that Kant's empirical realism is more than a historical snapshot because Putnam, like Kant, aims to show that the philosophically 'successful' realism is *human* as much as it incorporates the humanities without falling victim of the antinomies' self-contradictions. Here, I will concentrate on the references Putnam makes to Kant in general, but I will not be able to consider his various approaches to the realism issue and the changes he made in his theory in a comprehensive way.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Cf. Putnam 1981: 54–5.

<sup>32</sup> Here I cannot do justice to the changes throughout Putnam's intellectual development until his death in 2016. In a nutshell, there are three major phases to be distinguished: Until the mid-1970s Putnam presents himself as an adherent of scientific realism, which distinguishes itself in the philosophy of mind by functionalism and, with respect to realism, by a strong correspondence relation between thought or language and world. The hopelessness of explaining intentionality by means of a correspondence theory of truth then prompted Putnam to give up metaphysical realism in favour of internal realism, according to which the concept of reality is theory-dependent. In the 1990s Putnam then modified internal realism into direct realism to explain the relation between mind and world without making use of the authority of mental agency, i.e., representations mediating between mind and world. Cf. Putnam's intellectual self-characterisation in Putnam 1999: 12ff. There he also emphasizes that he is not quite sure whether direct or common-sense realism is still a form of internal realism (*ibid.*, 17–18, 21–69. See also J. Conant's detailed introduction to Putnam 1990: XVIIff. and Moran 2000: 68–74.

In *Realism with a Human Face*, Putnam states that for him, ‘almost all problems of philosophy attain the form in which they are of real interest only with the work of Kant.’<sup>33</sup> This is particularly true of the problem of realism. In his Kantian phase, Putnam time and again exposes the exemplary function of empirical, or for him ‘internal’, realism. In a similar way Kant does in the *Critique of Pure Reason*, he distinguishes between two concepts of realism, i.e., metaphysical realism and internal realism. To the former, he assigns an external perspective, and to the latter, an internal perspective. For metaphysical realists, the world consists of mind- and theory-independent objects about which there is exactly one true and complete description. Truth itself is grounded in the causal correspondence relation between thought, specifically language, and world. Because on this account, a theory is true if it corresponds to the world as it is completely independent of cognizers, metaphysical realism requires the external ‘God’s eye view’ since a finite, internal perspective will not describe the world as it is in itself but only as it is for someone. From a metaphysically external perspective then, it is thus at least conceivable that our external world beliefs are false even if we consider them to be well founded because truth concerns only facts in the world, not our cognitive ability. Thus, the metaphysical realist advocates the theory of similarity of reference, by which the mental representations of outer objects are mapped onto a relation of similarity between representation and the represented. On this view, which Putnam also terms the ‘magical theory of reference’, empirical knowledge and statements about the world are ultimately made true causally by means of sensations.<sup>34</sup>

For internal realists, by contrast, there is more than one true theory or description of the world. From the internal perspective, truth is not based on equivalence or correspondence between beliefs and mind-independent reality. As is implied in the well-known passage from *Reason, Truth and History*, truth is thus ‘some sort of (idealized) rational acceptability – some sort of ideal coherence of our beliefs with each other and with our experience’.<sup>35</sup> Hence internal realism does not take an externalist, divine perspective as its bedrock but indeed an internal, finite perspective, to avoid the semantic shortcomings and internal contradictions metaphysical realism involves. Putnam illustrates such shortcomings and self-contradiction of metaphysical realism by means of the infamous ‘brains in a vat’-hypothesis. As a result, the externalists’ causal semantics is not able to come to terms with intentionality, specifically the reference of thoughts (language) and world. For, like transcendental realists, the externalist assumes a

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<sup>33</sup> Putnam 1990: 3.

<sup>34</sup> Cf. Putnam 1980: 100ff., 104ff., and 1981: 49ff., 72 ff.

<sup>35</sup> Putnam 1981: 49f.; cf. also Putnam 1988: 113ff.

Cartesian scenario, i.e., a world existing in itself that causes representations in us.<sup>36</sup> For internal realists, on the other hand, the meaning of ‘reality’ depends fundamentally on the conceptual scheme, i.e., the theory, on the basis of which we conceptually relate to external objects, so much that the reference of our thoughts and statements does not bear on an uncertain metaphysical causal relation but instead on *internal* relations between empirically justified concepts. In internal realism, ‘truth’ and ‘reality’ are therefore to be conceived in terms of coherence of beliefs (*‘within the conceptual scheme’*<sup>37</sup>), and not in terms of metaphysical correspondence with facts in a world in itself.

Putnam retraces the core idea of this form of realism in Kant’s empirical realism: ‘Kant may properly be called the first, “internal realist”’.<sup>38</sup> As noted above, Kant appears to have already seen that metaphysical or transcendental realism necessarily fails because mental access to the world is not based on causal inferences from representations of objects to their external causes in themselves outside the perceiver, i.e., thought and perception is not grounded in some kind of copy theory of mental representations. This is because representations are not copies of reality but products of our rational interaction with the world.<sup>39</sup> Mental access to the world is only possible if we understand ourselves as empirical or internal realists for whom reality does not exist independently of our rational structure. As Putnam correctly discerns, Kant does not connect the idea of a mind-independent reality, which effects representations (appearances) in us, to the concept of the thing-in-itself. The concept of a ‘noumenal world’ appears to be much more so a ‘boundary concept’ (*‘Grenzbegriff’*, KrV, B 310f.) of thought, not an unnecessary metaphysical element of transcendental idealism. When referring to empirical objects, Kant is not referring to things-in-themselves but instead to things as they are for us, to appearances. According to Putnam, Kant, therefore, dismisses the metaphysical correspondence theory of truth and replaces it with the view that the truth of a statement consists in its acceptance by cognizers like us. In this sense, truth is ‘a radical epistemic concept’ for Kant, i.e., a concept that depends on what we can cognize in general.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Cf. Putnam 1981: 1–21. For the purpose of this paper, it is not necessary to present the argument in detail. In his later work, Putnam (1999: 20ff.) still points out that we should not conceive of perception as being caused by external objects like in metaphysical realism because causation does not tell us how thought in fact refers to the world.

<sup>37</sup> Putnam 1981: 52.

<sup>38</sup> Putnam 1987: 43.

<sup>39</sup> Cf. Putnam 1990: 261f.; cf. *ibid.*, 297: ‘to think a thought just *isn’t* the same thing as running a sequence of pictures through one’s mind.’

<sup>40</sup> Cf. Putnam 1983: 180 and 1980: 167ff.

Now, applying the *ontological*, the *epistemic*, and the *veridical* commitment, internal and metaphysical realism can be profiled as follows: First, internal realists hold *ontological independence*, i.e., the view that the world consists of mind-independent objects for us. Secondly, internal realists argue for *epistemic dependence*, according to which the meaning of ‘reality’ is theory- or cognition-dependent. Thirdly, internal realists hold *veridical coherence*, the view that ‘truth’, in the radical epistemic sense, must be conceived as ideal coherence of our beliefs by means of which the objectivity of mental reference to the world is established. Metaphysical realists, by contrast, hold, first, *ontological independence* since they believe that the world consists of mind-independent objects *in themselves*. Secondly, metaphysical realists hold *epistemic independence*, i.e., the view that reality is independent of what we can cognize in principle. Thirdly, metaphysical realists hold *veridical correspondence*, i.e., the view that ‘truth’ is radically non-epistemic, in the sense that there is a causally governed correspondence relation between mind and world.

Since the profiles of internal and metaphysical realism map onto the profiles of empirical realism and transcendental realism, the pivotal differences between them are likewise analogous to those between empirical and transcendental realism. Their major aberration concerns the meaning of ‘reality’. For internal realists, reality cannot go beyond what we are able to cognize, whereas for metaphysical realists it can. On the face of it, empirical and internal realism, on the one hand, and transcendental and metaphysical realism, on the other, are corresponding theories with respect to the basic commitments they make. Empirical and internal realists hold ontological independence, epistemic dependence, and veridical coherence (ignoring the correspondence worry of empirical realists). Transcendental and metaphysical realists assert ontological independence, epistemic independence and veridical correspondence. As it looks, Putnam is well justified in appealing to Kant when dismissing metaphysical (scientific) realism in favour of internal realism.

Although there are striking similarities between Kant’s and Putnam’s analysis of realism, substantial differences cannot be ignored. For Putnam rejects certain doctrines that Kant considers being constitutive of empirical realism. Above all, he dismisses transcendental idealism. Even though he explicitly concedes to Kant that truth and justification should not be understood as interdependent concepts, he accepts neither the Kantian doctrine of space and time, nor the dualism of appearance and thing-in-itself.<sup>41</sup> Furthermore, Putnam is sceptical about Kant’s *apriorism*. The core Kantian idea, however, that experience comprises cognitive

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<sup>41</sup> Cf. Putnam 1992: 366. See also Putnam 1987: 41–2.

activity is for Putnam of continuous significance for contemporary philosophy.<sup>42</sup> It represents one of the crucial reasons for abandoning metaphysical realism. After having set itself up as scientific materialism, metaphysical realism today claims to be ‘*natural metaphysics*’, which delivers *one* and only one true and complete description of the world. Putnam discards this scientism as one of the ‘most dangerous intellectual currents’ of our times.<sup>43</sup> Only the critique of the metaphysical picture of the absolute totality of things with the help of empirical, i.e., internal realism, provides the adequate foundation to come to terms with mental reference to the world. Despite major differences, in this respect Kant and Putnam agree. But if empirical and internal realism provide the theoretical framework for our modern understanding of what the world consists of and how we should conceive of it in terms of sciences, how then do the humanities fit into this picture? In the concluding section, I address this question with respect to history.

#### **4. The World as it is: Realism and History**

In section one of this paper, I have argued that Devitt’s portrayal of empirical realism as ‘Fig-leaf’-realism does not do justice to Kant. Kant’s empirical realism is a *genuine* form of realism and not a kind of pseudo-realism. The discussion of Devitt’s critique of Kant was helpful since it paved the way towards the systematic reconstruction of Kant’s distinction between empirical and transcendental realism in section two. Kant not only invents the philosophical term ‘realism’ but also forestalls and shapes the subsequent debate on the various forms of realism until today, as can be seen in Devitt. Kant’s account of realism makes a major contribution to philosophy, not least because it offers a conception of empirical realism that lives up to the standard of scientific expectations we have in the context of our modern world view while avoiding sceptical consequences associated with transcendental realism. Empirical realism can even serve as the common ground of modern science and humanities (see below). In section three, I have further profiled empirical realism by way of comparing it with Putnam’s arguments for internal realism. Evidently, Kant lays the ground for our contemporary conception of a

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<sup>42</sup> Cf. Putnam 1983: 179.

<sup>43</sup> Cf. Putnam 1983: 180. Although Kant rejects metaphysical or transcendental realism, he clearly believes that there is *one* and only one true and complete description of the world if one conceives of the transcendental conditions of the possibility of experience, i.e., transcendental idealism, as the necessary conceptual framework of such a description: ‘there can be only one true system of philosophy’ (RL, 6:207).

realist worldview that does not eliminate but has the potential to integrate the human sciences as I will briefly sketch in what follows.

It is a major aim of Kant's philosophical project to develop a unified, realist picture of the world that avoids metaphysical, scientific reductionisms like mind-brain identity, determinism, materialism, or atheism, and leaves room for cognizers who can *conceive* themselves as free rational agents while being constrained through the laws of nature. Transcendental or metaphysical realism cannot provide such an integrated realist conception of the world not least because of the sceptical as well as antinomic consequences they are facing. The true realist is the empirical or internal realist who lives in a world of scientific progress while allowing for authentic historical and cultural development. To put it in Putnam's words: 'the mind and the world jointly make up the mind and the world' (Putnam 1981: xi). Putnam realizes 'that many questions cannot be settled by the methods of the exact sciences, ideological and ethical questions being the most obvious examples. And with the increase in our admiration and respect for the physicist, the cosmologist, the molecular biologist, has come a decrease in respect and trust for the political thinker, the moralist, the economist, the musician, the psychiatrist, etc.' (Putnam 1981: 150). Putnam thinks that 'science is not "value neutral"'. However, from value dependence of science it does not follow 'that "ethical" values are objective, or that ethics could be a science'. On the contrary, 'there is no prospect of a "science" of ethics, whether in the sense of a laboratory science or of a deductive science' (Putnam 1981: 135). Although Putnam denies ethics the status of an objective science like physics or mathematics, he believes that 'internal realism' also applies to (Kant's) 'moral philosophy' (Putnam 1987: 43). Putnam makes internal realism the common ground of mind and world that is absent in metaphysical realism because of its inherent reductionist program that he takes to be hopeless and even contradictory.

Like Putnam, Kant does not regard ethics to be an objective science. Moral actions, however, are *actions*, and as such, they are empirically real. In what sense empirical realism can be extended to moral philosophy, and to the humanities in general, is particularly clear from Kant's philosophy of history. Already in the *Idea for a Universal History with a Cosmopolitan Aim* (1784) it is obvious for Kant that history cannot be a science in the proper sense of the word (cf. MAN, 4:468), for history is not a priori. However, Kant makes it clear from the outset that 'human actions are determined just as much as every other natural occurrence in accordance with universal laws of nature' (Anth, 7:17). That laws of nature determine human actions does not mean that history cannot 'discover' within the series of human actions 'a regular course' (ibid.), though. Here Kant is not hinting at a hidden plan history must reveal. Kant's approach

is rather ‘naturalistic’ in the sense that it is ‘nature’ that makes the human being behave in certain ways such that from this behaviour certain historical facts or developments follow, e.g., the bringing about of social relations or of an international federal political system.<sup>44</sup> This is not to say that history becomes a natural science that makes it possible to predict historical development according to laws that function similar to the laws of nature. Kant’s claim rather is that we can conceive of human actions *as if* they followed teleological principles in the large without being able to conceive of aims within history as empirically real purposes. What is empirically real is the series of actions, i.e., causes and consequences, in nature. The teleological conception of history allows only for a retrospective evaluation of historical events as if they resulted from natural predispositions pertaining to the human being. Kant therefore claims, e.g.: ‘The means nature employs in order to bring about the development of all its [the human being’s] predispositions is their antagonism in society, insofar as the latter is in the end the cause of their lawful order’ (IaG, 8:20). The natural ‘antagonism’ as ‘the unsociable sociability of human beings, i.e., their propensity to enter into society’ (ibid.) is, for Kant, not only responsible for historical development as such but also for civilisation, moralisation and the advancement of culture: ‘All culture and art that adorn humanity, and the most beautiful social order, are the fruits of unsociability, through which it is necessitated by itself to discipline itself, and so by an art extorted from it, to develop completely the germs of nature’ (IaG, 8:22). Although Kant conceives of the ‘progress’ humankind makes throughout history in light of the idea of *freedom*, as he does in practical philosophy in general, the teleological conception of history is not contrary to empirical realism. Empirical realism rather makes it possible to conceive of the objects of science and the objects of humanities, like actions in history, as objects of the same kind. As such, they are ontologically independent while being epistemically dependent. Such a conception was not Kant’s primary interest. It nevertheless seems that to work out the idea of the unity of nature and culture based on empirical realism is still an open field of research for future Kant scholarship, i.e., to find out about the world as it is.

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<sup>44</sup> Cf. Propositions 4–6 (society) and 7–9 (federalism) of the IaG.

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