

Some Passages from *Science and Metaphysics*, Chapter II

Chapter II. **Appearances and Things In Themselves: Material Things**

Descartes, as is well known, found it appropriate to classify the representations of sense with the representations of conceptual thinking proper as *cogitationes*. The fact that both can be characterized as representations...tempted him to apply to the humbler species the epistemological and ontological categories he applied to conceptual thinking proper, not simply in the spirit of analogy, the positive being counterbalanced by the negative, but literally, the negative analogy being construed as specific difference. [2]

The first set of categories distinguishes between:

- (a) A representation *qua* act, i.e. *qua* representing or ‘operation of the mind’;
- (b) The character by virtue of which it represents what it represents; and,
- (c) Where appropriate, the substance or modification of which the representing, *qua* representing what it represents, is true.

Closely related to the above is a contrast between two ways in which things or substances and their modifications can exist:

- (a) They can exist ‘in’ mental acts of representing—i.e. they can be, in Descartes’ phrase ‘the **objective** reality of an idea’ by which, he tells us, he understands ‘the entity or being of the thing represented by the idea, in so far as the entity is in the idea.’
- (b) They can, as I shall put it, exist *simpliciter*. In Descartes’ terminology, ‘the same things are to be said **formally** in the object of the ideas when they are in them such as they are conceived’. [3] (Emphasis added.)

The first set of distinctions is related to the second as follows:

- (1) For a thing or modification to exist ‘in’ a mental act is for the latter to represent it.
- (2) A mental act representing a modification is true of a substance which exists *simpliciter* if and only if the modification exists *simpliciter* as a modification of the substance. [5]

Two final remarks on these Cartesian categories before we apply them to Kant.

[First remark:] We distinguished above between a representing *qua* act and a representing *qua* representing something. Since the latter tends to be construed on the model of container to thing contained, the question naturally arises as to what character a ‘containing’ act might have in addition to its relational property of ‘containing’ an idea. **The dominant Cartesian view seems to have been that *intrinsically* all basic mental acts are alike—all instances, so to speak, of mental-actness.** (One is reminded of Moore’s diaphanous acts.) [8]

[Second remark:]

Modern philosophers are often tempted to construe Descartes as, so to speak, a ‘thought-is-inner-speech’ philosopher *manqué*—to interpret him, that is, in a way which construes the *inesse* of ideas in mental acts as though it were a matter of acts being tokens (utterances in one’s heart) of Mentalese words and sentences. It is clear, however, that the feeling for the logical forms of thought, so clear in disciples of Ockham, and which revives in Leibniz and, above all, Kant, is almost totally lacking in Descartes and his British successors. A clear interpretation of intellectual *cogitationes* as ‘inner speech’ would have made more difficult, if not impossible, many of the exasperating confusions which are characteristic of pre-Kantian philosophy, and by no means totally lacking in Kant.

Thus it is exactly the ‘containing’ model which permitted the Cartesian blurring of the distinction between sensible and conceptual representations... [10-11]

The root notion of ‘existing in itself’ is that of existing *simpliciter* as contrasted with existing *as represented*, i.e. existing ‘in’ a representing or as ‘idea’. Clearly representings (conceptual or nonconceptual) as well as non-representings may be represented. Thus we can distinguish:

- (1a) non-representings *qua* existing *simpliciter*;
- (1b) representings *qua* existing *simpliciter*;
- (2a) represented non-representings *qua* represented;
- (2b) represented representings *qua* represented. [12]

Let us now introduce the term ‘in itself’ for anything, representing or not, which exists *simpliciter*, *as* existing *simpliciter*; and let us use the term ‘content’ for anything, representing or not, which exists ‘in’ a representing, *qua* so doing. [13]

Thus we must add that an appearance is an individual which, though it exists primarily as represented and secondarily as representable, cannot exist *simpliciter* (i.e. in itself). Thus, an individual which is an appearance cannot be identical with anything which exists *simpliciter*. [22]

But might not representings be merely represented representings? The answer is that whether an item be a non-representing or a representing of a non-representing etc., if it exists merely *as represented*, it must be the content of a representing which, whether or not it is represented, also exists *simpliciter* or in itself. [28]

It has often been noted that when Kant is smoothing the path for his non-critical readers he tends to say *not* that we know *appearances* but that we know things (in themselves) *as they appear to us*. On the whole, however, his considered formulation is that we know appearances. [32]

As we saw in the preceding chapter, our basic representations with respect to the physical world are of the form: this-cube. [34]

“...the states of the empirical self are as much appearances, that is *contents* of conceptual representings, as are the states of material things in Space.” [37]

A ‘transcendental realist’, as Kant uses this term, holds that, misperception aside, intuitively represented objects and events exist *simpliciter* as well as ‘in’ representings. [43]

“...the contents of which we are speaking are *conceptual* contents....They are, in our terminology, represented *non-representings*...” [44]

“Kant’s phenomenalism can be put, in first approximation, by saying that physical objects and events exist *only* ‘in’ certain actual and obtainable conceptual representings... A phenomenalism which construes the physical world as a system of available contents in *this* sense differs radically from a phenomenalism which construes the world as a system of available sense impressions, for it construes physical appearances as *irreducibly* physical. It differs from physical realism by denying that these appearances have more than ‘objective’ or ‘representative’ being.” [46]

And even if we attribute to [Kant] the view that things-in-themselves are analogous in structure to the world of appearance, the analogy would, for him, be one which could only be ‘cashed’ by God...[48]

“The thesis I wish to defend, but not ascribe to Kant, though it is very much a ‘phenomenalism’ in the Kantian (rather than the Berkeleyan) sense, is that although the world we conceptually represent in experience exists only in actual and obtainable representings of it, we can say, from a transcendental point of view, not only that existence-in-itself accounts for this obtainability by virtue of having a certain analogy with the world we represent, but also that in principles *we*, rather than God alone, can provide the cash.” [49]

“If, however, as I shall propose in Chapter V, we replace the static concept of Divine Truth with the Peircean conception of truth as the ‘ideal outcome of scientific inquiry’, the gulf between appearances and things in themselves, though a genuine one, can in principle be bridged.” [51]

The doctrine of ‘double affection’ is an essential feature of Kant’s thought. Correctly understood, it simply tells us that the transcendently conceived non-spatial, non-temporal action of the non-ego on human receptivity, generating the manifold of sense (which action is required to explain how the *esse* of the experienced world can be *concipi* and yet non-arbitrary and intersubjective) has as its counterpart in the represented world the action of material things

on our sense organs, and through them, on the sensory faculties of the empirical self. Thus, of the two ‘affections’ one has representative being only, while the other has both representative being ‘in’ transcendental thought *and* also being *simpliciter* or ‘in itself’. This can be put by saying that the one ‘affection’ is the appearance of the other, but unless this is supplemented by a properly Kantian analysis of appearance it acquires the air of intolerable paradox (a ‘two-world’ theory) which has led an essential part of Kant’s mature teachings to be the subject of fruitless and uninformed controversy, and to be regarded as suspicious by many of his more sympathetic students. [57]

“But why should we not be transcendental realists? Why should we hold that the *esse* of the material world is *concipi*—more accurately, that it exists only ‘in’ actual and obtainable representings?...Since I am going to defend a closely related thesis, I emphasize those facets of his argument which serve this purpose.” [58]

“Kant tells us in the metaphysical deduction that:

The modality of judgment is a quite peculiar feature. Its distinguishable character is that it contributes nothing to the content of the judgment...but concerns only the value of the copula in relation to thought in general (B100).

Crudely put, Kant’s thesis is that the modalities are metalinguistic, or, less outrageously, meta-conceptual. It might be put by saying that modal attributes are attributes of propositional representables (judgeables) as such, and not of things or events.” [66]

“Kant does not distinguish the transcendental[ly] ideality due to ideal-ness from the transcendental[ly] ideality due to modality.” [68]

The upshot of these remarks is that although Kant was right to claim that the individual or logical subject, Space, is transcendently ideal, he has not shown that particular states of affairs involving *non-ideal* spatial relations must be transcendently ideal. Correspondingly, though he *has* shown that the ideal material things of Newtonian mechanics are transcendently ideal, he has *not* shown that perceptible physical objects standing in perceptible spatial relations are transcendently ideal. If he was right about this, he was right for the wrong reasons. [fnt 1] [71]

Fnt 1: “I shall tip my hand by saying that the true ground for the transcendental ideality of the perceptual world lies in **the distinction between perceptible physical objects and the objects of theoretical science**, a distinction which was blurred by Kant. Thus, his concept of physical appearance runs together not only the idealized counterparts of perceptible things (e.g. systems of point-masses whose velocities and accelerations are amenable to differential equations) but also the object(s) of micro-physics which are as imperceptible as ideal objects, though for radically different reasons.” [71]

Section IX of Ch. II explains why the primary/secondary quality distinction is a bad model for the transcendental ideality he will champion:

Another theme in the Kantian attack on transcendental realism mobilizes an old friend, the distinction between primary and secondary qualities. [73]

Thus Kant should have recognized that color itself and not something which ‘corresponds’ to it, is as essential a feature of the objects of outer intuition as is shape. If, therefore, a sound case can be made for the idea that the colors we conceptually represent in perception are transcendently ideal, i.e. exist only as conceptually represented, then it would follow that the world of perceived object is, after all, in the Kantian sense, ‘appearance’.” [75]

Ftnt 1: “Notice that this is, of course, compatible with the idea that certain counterpart attributes, conceived by analogy with them, are transcendently real, though, perhaps, only as in some sense states of the perceiver. [75]

“Perhaps the most interesting argument for the transcendental ideality of the represented world is what might be called the argument from the transcendental ideality of the categories. It goes somewhat as follows:

Premise I: The categorial forms are forms of what exists in representings, as so existing.

Premise II: What exists in itself does not, as so existing, exist in conceptual representings.

Conclusion I: The categorial forms are not forms of what exists in itself, as so existing.

Premise III: The physical world exists ‘in’ conceptual representings.

Conclusion II: The physical world as existing ‘in’ conceptual representings has categorial form.

Conclusion III: The physical world has categorial form.

Conclusion IV: The physical world does not exist in itself.

I have spelled out the argument in such a way as to make it clear that it is formally fallacious.

The invalid step is the move from Conclusion II to Conclusion III. Yet although the argument is fallacious, and, more interestingly, *although Kant never uses it*, it is one of the persistent myths of Kant scholarship. Most of the puzzles about ‘Do the categories apply to things in themselves?’ rest on a tacit appeal to the following ‘principle’:

Nothing which as conceptually represented has categorial form can exist *simpliciter* or in itself. [76]

This fallacious and quite un-Kantian principle would require, for example, that since things-in-themselves have categorial form as represented, they cannot exist in themselves!” [77]