

## CHAPTER III

### ON THE GROUND OF THE DISTINCTION OF ALL OBJECTS WHATEVER INTO PHENOMENA AND NOUMENA

THIS chapter, as Kant himself states,<sup>1</sup> can yield no new results. It will serve merely to summarise those already established in the *Analytic*, showing how they one and all converge upon a conclusion of supreme importance for understanding the nature and scope of human experience—the conclusion, that though the objective employment of the categories can be justified only within the realm of sense-experiences, they have a wider significance whereby they define a distinction between appearances and things in themselves. This is the conclusion which Kant now sets himself to illustrate and enforce in somewhat greater detail. It may be observed that the title of the chapter makes mention only of grounds for *distinguishing* between phenomena and noumena. That things in themselves really exist, Kant, as we shall find, never seriously thought of questioning.

Kant begins by recalling a main point in the preceding argument. The categories apart from the manifold of sensibility are merely logical functions without content.<sup>2</sup> Though *a priori*, they require to be supplemented through empirical intuition.

“Apart from this relation to possible experience they have no objective validity of any sort, but are a mere play of the imagination or the understanding with their respective representations.”<sup>3</sup>

As evidence of the truth of this conclusion Kant now adds a further argument, namely, the impossibility of defining the categories except in terms that involve reference to the conditions of sensibility.<sup>4</sup> When these conditions are omitted,

<sup>1</sup> A 236 = B 295.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. above, pp. xxxv-vi, xxxviii, 185-6, 191, 195-6, 257-8, 290-1, 325 ff., 339.

<sup>3</sup> The mathematical illustrations which Kant proceeds to give (A 239 = B 299) are peculiarly crude and off-hand in manner of statement. Cf. *per contra* A 140 = B 179 for Kant's real view of the distinction between image, schema, and concept.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. above, pp. 195-6, 198, 339-42.

the categories are without relation to any object and consequently without meaning. They are no longer concepts of possible empirical employment, but only of "things in general." When, for instance, the permanence of existence in time, which is the condition of the empirical application of the concept of substance, is omitted, the category reduces merely to the notion of something that is always a subject and never a predicate.

"But not only am I ignorant of all conditions under which this logical pre-eminence may belong to anything, I can neither put such a concept to any use nor draw the least inference from it. For under these conditions no object is determined for its employment, and consequently we do not at all know whether it signifies anything whatsoever."<sup>1</sup>

In abstraction from sense-data, the categories still remain as concepts or *thoughts*, logically possible; but that is not to be taken as signifying that they still continue to possess meaning, *i.e.* reference to an object.<sup>2</sup> And in the absence of ascertainable meaning they cannot, of course, be defined.

In A 244<sup>3</sup> Kant states his position in somewhat different fashion. In abstraction from sense the categories have meaning, but not determinate meaning; they relate not to any specific object, but only to things in general. In this latter reference, however, they possess no objective validity, since in the absence of intuition there is no means of deciding whether or not any real existence actually corresponds to them.

But whichever mode of statement be adopted, the same conclusion follows.

"Accordingly, the transcendental *Analytic* has this important result, that the most the understanding can achieve *a priori* is to anticipate the form of a possible experience in general. And since that which is not appearance cannot be an object of experience, the understanding can never transcend those limits of sensibility within which alone objects are given to us. Its principles are merely rules for the exposition of appearances; and the proud title of an *Ontology*, which presumptuously claims to supply, in systematic doctrinal form, synthetic *a priori* knowledge of things in general (*e.g.* the principle of causality), must therefore give place to the modest claims of a mere *Analytic* of pure understanding."<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> A 243 = B 301.

<sup>2</sup> A 242 = B 302.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. A 248 = B 305.

<sup>4</sup> A 246.7 = B 303.4. A 247.8 = B 304.5 (beginning "Thought is the action," etc.) is merely a repetition of the preceding argument, and probably represents a later intercalation.

A 248-9<sup>1</sup> opens a new line of argument which starts from the results obtained in the *Aesthetic*. The proof that space and time are subjective forms establishes the phenomenal character of everything which can be apprehended in and through them, and is meaningless except on the assumption that things in themselves exist. This assumption, Kant argues, is already involved in the very word 'appearance,' and unless it be granted, our thinking will revolve in a perpetual circle.<sup>2</sup> But, he proceeds, this conclusion may easily be misinterpreted. It might be taken as proving the objective reality of noumena, and as justifying us in maintaining a distinction between the sensible and the intelligible worlds, and therefore in asserting that whereas the former is the object of intuition, the latter is apprehended by the understanding in pure thought. We should then be arguing that though in experience things are known only as they appear, through pure understanding a nobler world than that of sense, "*eine Welt im Geiste gedacht*," is opened to our view.

But any such interpretation, Kant insists, runs directly counter to the teaching of the *Analytic*, and is ruled out by the conclusions to which it has led. Categories yield only "rules for the exposition of appearances," and cannot be extended beyond the field of possible experience. It is true that all our sense-representations are related by the understanding to an object that is "transcendental." But that object, in its transcendental aspect, signifies only a something =  $x$ . It cannot be thought apart from the sense-data which are referred to it. When we attempt to isolate it, and so to conceive it in its independent nature, nothing remains through which it can be thought.

"It is not in itself an object of knowledge, but only the representation of appearances under the concept of an object in general, viewed as determinable through the manifold of those appearances."

Kant is here again expounding his early doctrine of the transcendental object.<sup>3</sup> Evidently, at the time at which this passage was written, he had not yet come to realise that such teaching is not in harmony with his Critical principles. It is, as we have seen above, a combination of subjectivism and of

<sup>1</sup> Beginning "Appearances, so far as . . .," which was omitted in the second edition. It probably constitutes, as Adickes maintains (*K*, p. 254 n.), the original beginning of this chapter. The "as we have hitherto maintained" of its second paragraph, which obviously cannot apply to the pages which precede it in its present position, must refer to the argument of the *Analytic*.

<sup>2</sup> A 249, 251.

<sup>3</sup> Above, p. 204 ff.

dogmatic rationalism.<sup>1</sup> The very point which he here chiefly stresses was bound, however, when consistently followed out, to reveal the untenableness of the doctrine of the transcendental object; and in the second edition Kant so recast this chapter on phenomena and noumena as to eliminate all passages in which the transcendental object is referred to.<sup>2</sup>

But to return to Kant's own argument: the reason why the mind is "not satisfied with this substrate of sensibility,"<sup>3</sup> and therefore proceeds to duplicate the phenomenal world by a second world of noumena, lies in the character of the agency whereby sensibility is limited. Sensibility is limited by the understanding; and the understanding, overestimating its powers and prerogatives, proceeds to transform the notion of the transcendental object =  $\alpha$  into the concept of a noumenon, viewed in a manner conformable to its etymological signifi-

<sup>1</sup> In large part it represents the Critical position as understood by Schopenhauer, who never succeeded in acquiring any genuine understanding of Kant's more mature teaching (cf. above, p. 366 n.). Schopenhauer is correct in maintaining that one chief ground of Kant's belief in the existence of things in themselves lies in his initial assumption that they must be postulated in order to account for the given manifold. Schopenhauer is also justified in stating that Kant, though starting from the dualistic Cartesian standpoint, so far modified it as to conclude that the origin of this manifold must be "objective, since there is no ground for regarding it as subjective" (*Parerga und Paralipomena*, 1851 ed., p. 74 ff.). But for two reasons this is a very incomplete, and therefore misleading, account of Kant's teaching. In the first place, Schopenhauer fails to take account of Kant's implied distinction between the sensations of the special senses and the manifold of outer sense. When Kant recognises that the sensations of the special senses are empirically conditioned, he is constrained in consistency to distinguish between them and the manifold which constitutes the matter of all experiences (cf. above, p. 275 ff.). Things in themselves, in accounting for the latter, account also, but in quite indirect fashion, for the former. Though sensations are empirically conditioned, the entire natural world is noumenally grounded. Secondly, Kant's subjectivism undergoes a similar transformation on its inner or mental side. The analysis of self-consciousness, which is given both in the *Deductions* and in the *Paralogisms*, indicates with sufficient clearness Kant's recognition that the form of experience is as little self-explanatory as its content, and that it must not, without such proof as, owing to the limitations of our experience, we are debarred from giving, be regarded as more ultimate in nature. The realities which constitute and condition our mental processes are not apprehended in any more direct manner than the thing in itself. When, therefore, Schopenhauer asserts in the *World as Will and Idea* (*Werke, Frauenstädt*, ii. p. 494, Eng. trans. ii. p. 6) that Kant proves the world to be merely phenomenal by demonstrating that it is conditioned by the intellect, he is taking part of Kant's teaching as equivalent to the whole. Schopenhauer's occasional identification of the intellect with the brain—the nearest approximation in his writings to what may be described as phenomenalism—itself suffices to show how entirely he is lacking in any firm grasp of Critical principles.

<sup>2</sup> As we have noted (above, p. 204 ff.), the doctrine of the transcendental object was entirely eliminated from those main sections that were rewritten or substantially altered in the second edition, namely, the chapters on the *Transcendental Deduction*, on *Phenomena and Noumena*, and on the *Paralogisms*. That it remained in the section on *Amphiboly*, in the *Second Analogy*, and in the chapter on the *Autonomies* is sufficiently explained by Kant's unwillingness to make the very extensive alterations which such further rewriting would have involved.

<sup>3</sup> A 251.

cance, as something apprehended by reason or pure intuition, *i.e.* as intuited in some non-sensuous fashion. For only by postulating the possibility of a non-sensuous species of intuition, can the notion of a noumenon, thus positively conceived, be saved from self-contradiction. Otherwise we should be asserting the apprehension of an object independently of appearances, and yet at the same time denying the only means through which such apprehension is possible. Statement of the postulate suffices, however, to reveal its unsupported character. We have no such power of non-sensuous, intuitive apprehension;<sup>1</sup> nor can we in any way prove that such a power is possible even in a Divine Being. Though, therefore, the concept of noumena is not self-contradictory, it involves more than we have the right to assert; the process whereby the empty notion of a transcendental object =  $x$  is transformed into the positive concept of a noumenon is easily comprehensible,<sup>2</sup> but it is none the less illegitimate. We must, Kant insists, keep strict hold of the central doctrine of Critical teaching, namely, that the categories are applicable only to the data of sense. We can still employ them as pure logical functions, yielding the notion of objects in general (of the transcendental object =  $x$ ). But this does not widen the sphere of *known* existences. It only enables us to comprehend the limited and merely phenomenal character of the world experienced.

At this point<sup>3</sup> Kant's argument takes a strange and misleading turn. The concept of object in general (the transcendental object =  $x$ ) has been proved to be involved in the apprehension of appearances as appearances, and in this capacity to be a limiting concept (*Grenzbegriff*), which, though negative in function, is indispensably involved in the constitution of human experience. Now, however, Kant proceeds to ascribe this function to *the concept of the noumenon*. That concept is, he repeats, purely problematic. Even the mere possibility of its object, presupposing as it does the possibility of an understanding capable through non-sensuous intuition of apprehending it, we have no right to assert. That the concept is not self-contradictory is the most that we can say of it. None the less, it is to this concept that Kant here ascribes the indispensable limiting function.

"The concept of a noumenon is a merely limiting concept, the function of which is to curb the pretensions of sensibility; and it is

<sup>1</sup> Not even, as Kant teaches in his doctrine of inner sense, in the inner world of apperception, cf. above, p. 295 ff.

<sup>2</sup> Kant claims in the *Dialectic* that this process is also unavoidable, constituting what he calls "transcendental illusion."

<sup>3</sup> A 254-7 = B 310-12.

therefore only of negative employment. At the same time it is no arbitrary invention, and it is bound up with the limitation of sensibility, though it cannot affirm anything positive beyond the field of sensibility."<sup>1</sup>

This confusion, between the concept of a noumenon and the less definite concept of object in general, which is probably due to the combining of manuscripts of different dates, is corrected in the second edition by means of a new distinction which Kant introduces, evidently for this very purpose. The term noumenon may, he there says,<sup>2</sup> be used either positively or negatively. Taken positively, it signifies "an object of a non-sensuous intuition"; regarded negatively, it means only "a thing so far as it is not an object of our sensuous intuition." Only in its negative employment, he states, is it required as a limiting concept; and it is then, as he recognises, indistinguishable from the notion of the unknown thing in itself.

But despite this variation in mode of expression, in the main Kant holds consistently to his fundamental teaching.

"... understanding is not limited through sensibility; on the contrary, it itself limits sensibility by applying the term noumena to things in themselves (things not regarded as appearances). But in so doing it at the same time sets limits to itself, recognising that it cannot know these noumena through any of the categories, and that it must therefore think them only under the title of an unknown something."<sup>3</sup>

Or as Kant adds in the concluding sentence of this chapter:

"... the problematic thought which leaves open a place for [intelligible objects], serves only, like an empty space, for the limitation of empirical principles, without itself containing or revealing any other object of knowledge beyond their sphere."

A sentence in A 258 = B 314 deserves special notice.

"... we can never know whether such a transcendental or exceptional knowledge is possible under any conditions—at least not if it is to be the same kind of knowledge as that which stands under our ordinary categories."

This sentence clearly shows that Kant was willing to recognise that the categories may be inapplicable, not merely owing to lack of data for their specification, but because of their inherent character. They may be intrinsically inapplic-

<sup>1</sup> A 255 = B 310-11.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. below, p. 412 ff.

<sup>3</sup> A 256 = B 312. For A 257 = B 312 on the empirical manner of distinguishing between the sensuous and the intelligible, cf. above, pp. 143 ff., 149 ff.

able, expressing only the *modi* of our self-consciousness. They may be merely the instruments of our human thinking, not forms necessary to knowledge as such.

#### RELEVANT PASSAGES IN THE SECTION ON AMPHIBOLY

Before passing to consideration of the extensive alterations made in this chapter in the second edition, it is advisable to take account of the two passages dealing with this problem in the first edition section on *Amphiboly*: namely, A 277-280 = B 333-6, and A 285-9 = B 342-6. The first of these passages is of great interest in other connections;<sup>1</sup> its chief importance in reference to the present problem lies in its concluding paragraph. Kant there declares that the representation of an object "as thing in general" is not only, in the absence of specific data, insufficient for the determination of an object, but is self-contradictory. For we must either abstract from all reference to an object, and so be left with a merely logical representation; or, in assuming an object, we must postulate a special form of intuition which we do not ourselves possess, and which therefore we cannot employ in forming our concept of the object. *Here again Kant is substituting the concept of a noumenon for the less definite concept of the thing in itself.* This is still more explicitly done in the second passage. The pure categories are, Kant declares, incapable of yielding the concept of an object. Apart from the data of sense they have no relation to any object. As purely logical functions, they are altogether lacking in content or meaning. By objects as things in themselves we must therefore, he contends, mean objects of a non-sensuous intuition.<sup>2</sup> Kant still, indeed, continues to maintain that the categories do not apply to them, and that we cannot, therefore, have any knowledge of them, either intuitional or conceptual.

"Even if we assume a non-sensuous form of intuition, our functions of thought would still have no meaning in reference to it."<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Cf. above, pp. 143-4, 147, 214-15, 291 ff.

<sup>2</sup> Kant here (A 286 = B 342) speaks of this concept of the noumenon as an *object of non-sensuous intuition* as being "merely negative." This is apt to confuse the reader, as he usually comes to it after having read the passage introduced into the chapter on *Phenomena and Noumena* in the second edition, in which, as above noted (p. 409), Kant describes this meaning of the term as positive, in distinction from its more negative meaning as signifying a thing merely so far as it is not an object of our sense-intuition. Cf. below, p. 413.

<sup>3</sup> Kant's meaning here is not quite clear. He may mean either that the categories as such are inapplicable to things in themselves, or that, as this form of intuition is altogether different from our own, it will not help in giving meaning to the categories. What follows would seem to point to the former view.