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It is a common remark, that the most characteristic feature of modern thought is its subjectiveness. In the natural reaction which followed the dogmatism and formalism,—the ultra objectiveness of the preceding period, the confidence of the mind in all authorities and all affirmatives, was severely shaken; and a contest ensued between Skepticism, on the one hand, and the abiding instinct of Existence in the human mind, on the other, which turned the attention of all philosophers to the foundation and principles of our knowledge.

Modern speculation, therefore, has returned to the fundamental problem of human science; and asks, first of all, "Can we know anything?" To this question, the common man readily answers in the affirmative; and if asked how he knows it is so, refers to the actual knowledge which we have of the outward world. He has a head on his shoulders; the sun is shining; or the like,—to which he expects your ready assent.

In this affirmation, as in those systems of metaphysics which, like the Common Sense philosophy, &c., consist of careful statements of the convictions of the vulgar * consciousness,—we see the original prejudice of the human mind, *that something exists*: the unshapen and unsyllabled Fact (including all other facts) of the Consciousness,—sometimes lost sight of for a moment, but never permanently shaken off. The universality of this prejudice assures us that it *encloses a vital truth, and demands*

* I use the word vulgar in its strict sense, as signifying the *natural* as opposed to the *philosophical* consciousness.

explanation at the hands of the philosopher. Reduced to its strict terms, the assertion of the vulgar consciousness amounts to nothing more than this. "I am aware of phenomena." In this sense we see the correctness (from this point of view) of Locke's principle, that we derive all our ideas from sensation and reflection. For he is evidently speaking only of our perceptions of phenomena, of which we can be aware only in consequence of two actions, — in one of which we are passive, and recipient of impressions — Sensation: — in the other, active and creative, — Reflection, the grasping of the object by the mind. Neither the blind man nor the insane behold the blue sky; the former because he cannot *see* — the latter because he cannot *comprehend* it.

But we cannot rest long contented with the popular solution of the problem; — but admitting all it asserts, we ask farther: — Whether this, after all, touches the point in question? Whether our being aware of phenomena, proves that we have any actual objective Knowledge. Plainly it does not necessarily; for a phenomenon is not any fact itself, but the *appearance* of a fact under certain relations; and these relations being accidental and varying, the same fact may very well appear in different and even antagonist phenomena, — as the same degree of caloric may appear warm to one man, and cold to another. Here we may easily see the origin of Berkleyism; for, starting with the tacit assumption that we can know nothing but phenomena, and soon finding out the superficial and accidental nature of phenomena in themselves, we naturally transfer this character to our knowledge. The same idea is typified in the Hindoo doctrine of Maya, the delusive Goddess of Phenomena. And even if we were willing to receive phenomena as facts, still this would not bring us much farther; for they would still be mere detached existences, unrelated except by accidental position, and consequently we could not reason from one to the other, nor even classify them, without at the same time acknowledging the accidental nature of our classification. This is the skepticism of Hume, — the natural consequence of Locke's philosophy.

The general dismay and resistance with which Hume's doctrine was received by his contemporaries, is attributable to its peculiar excellence as an expression of the thought

of his age. So keen was the unconscious feeling of the correctness of the results at which he had arrived from the general data, and so violent the resistance against these results of the inmost nature of man, that a convulsion was produced which opened new depths in the human consciousness. In Hume the national mind of Great Britain may be said to have uttered itself for once, though it silenced its own rational voice forthwith by tumults of inane babble. But the question which Hume had put, in a manner so direct and manly, had to be answered somewhere; and it was answered in the "Critical Philosophy."

"It was the hint given by David Hume," says Kant,* "which many years ago waked me from my dogmatic slumbers, and gave quite another direction to my researches in the field of speculative philosophy." Hume had clearly shown, that in the instance of the idea of Cause and Effect, the phenomenon which we call the Cause does not of itself involve the conception of the subsequent phenomenon which we call the Effect, and he concluded from this that their connection is empirical and imaginary; which, from Locke's point of view, is evidently the case. Herein is contained the rudiment of the idea developed by Kant, which we are about to examine, namely, — that of anything essentially foreign to our mind, an absolute object, we could have no objective knowledge. A feeling of the imperious necessity with which the two conceptions of Cause and Effect are seen in every case to be united, led Kant to perceive that their union must depend upon some law of our mind. For their necessary connection could not be deduced from experience, which gives only probability, — never the universal and invariable feeling of necessity, which is the evidence of certain knowledge; and beyond experience we have no source of knowledge except the mind itself. This led him to make a critical review of the consciousness, *a priori*, — or, as he calls it, a Critique of the Pure Reason.

In this review he postulates nothing more than the universally admitted proposition above mentioned, — the common perception of phenomena, which he calls Experience; and seeks, according to the principle above hinted at, to

* Prolegomena zu jed. künft. Metaphys. Vorr. p. 13.

discover, amid the ever varying shadow-dance of phenomena, something constant and necessary:—for this evidently must be the character of all the elements of true knowledge.

But phenomena, as we have already seen, do not claim to be *things*, themselves—but only *appearances*; that is, impressions on our minds. Hence we cannot pretend to say whether phenomena have any existence at all, out of our perception, or not, without leaving the ground to which we are restricted by our postulate. Leaving untouched, therefore, the question as to the objective existence of outward things, Kant finds that every phenomenon is presented to the mind as occupying a portion of time or space. All our perceptions of material objects have extension, either as duration or as size.*

The universality and necessity of these attributes show that they depend upon certain laws; laws, however, not of the object, since in phenomena we have no object, but only subjective impressions:—laws therefore of the subject of the mind in its relation to phenomena;—or, as Kant styles it, the Understanding.

Having thus discovered the two original and necessary forms under which the mind perceives material objects, Kant endeavored to complete a Natural History of the Understanding, by drawing up a table of its other laws or forms, which he calls the Categories, and reduces to several classes. But herein he does not confine himself to the legitimate province of the philosopher, the elucidation of obscure facts of consciousness, but casts about among empirical perceptions, and endeavors to classify them, *a posteriori*; thus introducing an empirical element into this Critique. His table of categories is consequently both incomplete and redundant.

* It must be kept in mind, that the necessity of the laws of Time and Space does not depend upon invariable experience (which can never give certainty, but only strong probability), but upon our distinct consciousness that, independent of these laws, phenomena (with which alone is our present concern) could not exist. Thus, supposing that all bodies appeared to us of a red color, all our experience might bear witness that this was the constant attribute of extended surfaces; but though this might induce us to surmise some necessity in the case, still there would be no essential difficulty in separating the notion of red from our conception of body. But a body which does not occupy a portion of space, is to us a nonentity.

From this survey of the Understanding, it is evident that our experience of material objects is subject in Form to certain laws. The subject-matter of phenomena is of course empirical, being out of the reach of the Understanding, and must be supplied by Experience. Of material objects, therefore, we can know *a priori* only the laws of possible experience.

Thus far our attention has been occupied exclusively with the examination of the mind in its relations to phenomena. Of course our only concern has been with the subjective forms of phenomena (as being all that we can know with certainty about them), neglecting the question as to whether we can know anything in its objectivity, or essential existence. Our inquiry has been into the How, not into the What, of our knowledge of material objects.

The latter question, however, is vastly the more interesting, since it is this in fact to which the original, instinctive belief in Existence, points. This, therefore, is the all-important inquiry.

In seeking to go behind Phenomena, we quit the sphere of the Understanding, and come into the region of the Pure Reason, which has to do only with Fact and Essence, neglecting entirely Phenomena and Accident. The affirmations of the Pure Reason, Kant calls the Transcendental Ideas, since they *transcend* the Understanding and its perceptions; and he divides them into three classes, according as they affirm the existence: 1. Of the I, or Soul,—Psychological; 2. Of the Not-I, or Nature,—Cosmological; 3. Of the Supreme Being,—Theological. This division however is empirical, and all the Transcendental Ideas may be reduced to one,—the affirmation that something *is*. Kant proceeds to examine the results arrived at by the Pure Reason, and finds that in every instance in which we attempt to derive objective knowledge from them, a contradiction is produced between them and the laws of the Understanding. This he calls the Antinomianism of the Pure Reason. Now all objects, according to him, can be perceived only according to the laws of the Understanding; therefore the results of the Pure Reason, as far as they claim objective or theoretical application, must be erroneous. Their only value, accordingly, is subjective (practical).

Here it seems, at first sight, as if Kant had fallen into

the error of confounding the perceptions of the Pure Reason with those of the Understanding; or of confining our knowledge to mere sensuous knowledge. And it appears as if he might have pursued, in spiritual phenomena, a course parallel to that adopted in the examination of sensuous perceptions. Indeed, Kant's instinctive Realism overpowers his system in many particulars. As, for instance, in his allowing to the Pure Reason a *regulative* use, even in matters of theory; and in fact in his whole Practical Philosophy, which leaves the practical authority of the Pure Reason entirely unexplained.

But the errors of a man like Kant do not lie so near the surface. An examination of the nature of the Reason, will show us what he was (unconsciously) aiming at in his separation of Theoretical and Practical Philosophy.

If we consider the Reason (as Kant considered it, and as the most still consider it,) as a faculty of perception of outward facts — an organon for acquiring knowledge of the Not-I, — it is evident that we can know (as in the case of the Understanding) only its subjective Forms, and we cannot depend on its results, since it can give us no certainty. For having, in this case, no control over its object, the subject-matter of its perceptions will of course be entirely accidental, as far as the Reason is concerned, and we shall again find ourselves cheated of the reality of our Knowledge, and presented with the empty shells instead. In this event it is of little consequence whether these merely subjective Forms be those of the Understanding or not, — they must at all events be analogous to all intents and purposes.

Kant perceived, however, that the Transcendental Ideas, contrary to the perceptions of the Understanding, claim to include both Form and subject-matter; which subject-matter he could not place out of the Reason, since this would be virtually destroying it, — but placing it in the Reason, he thought the destruction of its objectivity the necessary consequence. The contest between this result of his iron logic and the dictates of his realistic instinct, produced a puzzle which he thought (not unnaturally) insurmountable.

His adherence to his system of course deprives his Practical Philosophy of its fundamental principle, and rendered it necessary for him in all cases to postulate precisely that

which it is the duty of Philosophy to explain, — thus in his Ethics, Law, &c.

His main principle, however, which he so courageously and philosophically upholds throughout — that we can know nothing out of ourselves, — contains the leading idea of Modern Philosophy; and to him belongs the praise of having been the first to bring it into distinct consciousness.
