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[81]

Literature.

Claudius Wilkens: *Erkendelsens Problem. Et Forsøg paa positiv Kriticisme* [The Problem of Knowledge: An Attempt at a Positive Criticism]. Copenhagen 1875.

The author of the work before us makes it very difficult, even for sympathetic readers, to grant him the approval his work really deserves, because in the writing itself he has beforehand taken up and assigned to himself far more than even those readers can concede him. It has done his work great harm. The reviewer knows several instances of readers who were frightened off from making themselves acquainted with the book on account of the preface. Philosophical investigations ought, especially in these skeptical times, and especially when one, like the author, expressly proclaims that one stands on an exact standpoint, to appear with greater modesty; that is to the benefit both of science and of its devotees.

But this must not distract attention from the fact that the author is working in a direction and in a field that may be said to be on the order of the day. Ever since the dissolution of the Hegelian school the conviction has been making its way that idealist speculation actually regarded itself, wrongly, as the consummating consequence of Kant's great philosophical reform. This speculation was a natural reaction against Kant's subjective and revolutionary standpoint, but it has far from exhausted, or even merely had a full eye for, the significance of his doctrine. Recent natural science, especially the physiology of the senses, and the realistic school in England have also awakened attention to the great significance of Kant's fundamental thought in all its simplicity. That we do not apprehend things as they are in themselves, but as they present themselves to us on account of our organization, on this there is now ever
[82] more agreement, and no investigator has seen it as clearly as Kant. It was the problem of the origin of knowledge that led Kant to this insight. Over against the realistic doctrine that all knowledge, all content of consciousness, was impressed from without into consciousness, stood the idealistic doctrine of innate ideas, which, if they did not lie ready in the soul from the first, yet gradually, as it were, uncovered themselves from their wrappings. Kant settled the dispute by holding that we take nothing up into our consciousness without its undergoing a transformation conditioned by our whole organization, but that on the other side nothing is innate in us except this

organization itself. Space, time and necessity and similar determinations therefore belong to things only in and for our knowledge; but the intuition of space does not lie ready in us from the first; not it, but the ground of it, is innate in us, just as the idea of the color red is not innate in us, whereas it has its ground in our innate nature that we get the sensation of red when we see cinnabar.

The author calls his theory criticism, because like Kant he teaches that we do not know things in themselves. But he calls it *positive criticism*, because he believes he can fill up the gulf between knowledge and the thing in itself. For though we do not know things in themselves, we do yet, in his opinion, know their relations, we have "an absolute knowledge of the relations of things". The Kantian theory of knowledge is corrected by this, that a subjective and an objective side is ascribed to the forms of knowledge as well as to its matter". — This last expression is unfortunate. Kant ascribes "an objective side" to the forms of knowledge too; that we intuit things in space is, according to him, just as much grounded in things as in our own nature; but we do not know what it is in things that corresponds to our intuition of space. Since our forms of intuition and of thought spring from our nature, so that we can never abstract from them but see everything under the presupposition of them, Kant had complete right to conclude that we do not know what things in themselves are. Since space is a *form of intuition*, it is self-contradictory to assert that things *in themselves, i.e. abstracted from every observer* are in space. Had the author known the discussion carried on about this in Germany in recent years, he would hardly have spoken so confidently of Kant's fallacy here. In particular Hermann Cohen, in a uniquely thorough and acute work ("Kants Theorie der Erfahrung", Berlin 1871), has shown Kant's consistent line of thought on this point.

The self-contradiction mentioned comes out clearly in one of the author's own *[83]* examples. If we have two sticks, the one twice as large as the other, then the relation between them — says the author — must surely be 1/2, whether we look at them or not, thus in itself. But a relation exists only on the presupposition of a comparison; when there is no one who compares, one can therefore not speak of the relation 1/2 either. That it has its ground in the essence of things that we apprehend them in mathematical relations, Kant does not, as said, deny. But the author maintains an *absolute* knowledge of the relations of things; things themselves we apprehend, by his concession, only through symbols, but the relation between the symbols and the relation between the things are supposed to be one and the same, so that the author even wants to have it expressed by a mathematical equation. Kant could concede that

our intuitions correspond to the relations of things, but not that they resemble them, let alone that they are equal to them ("gemäss", not "ähnlich", let alone "gleich").

It is difficult to form a definite idea of how the author actually wants his doctrine of the absolute knowledge of the relations of things to be understood. At the oral defense of the dissertation he declared it to be his opinion that the relations between the ideas were the same as (=) the relations between the things. But in the dissertation itself he expresses himself very vacillatingly. Pag. 25 (cf. P. 118) it is said that we get indeed only a subjective picture of the world, but a correct picture of the relations of existence as if knowledge could not be correct because it is subjective! Is it not correct, e.g., that cinnabar is red, and yet this is a subjective sensation, for cinnabar is red only for our eyes. — Pag. 131, 177 and 182, on the other hand, call the apprehension of the relations of things symbolic, which is the same as subjective; here the author has then forgotten his theory. — Pag. 29 the author appeals to positivism, as agreeing with his theory, and Pag. 117 it is said: "a predictive knowledge is absolute". Here the author confuses an exact, i.e. perfectly distinct and quantitatively determinate knowledge with an absolute knowledge in the sense of one that is not bound to the phenomenal but concerns that which is in itself. Exact science concerns only phenomena, but gives us a completely distinct insight into their relations; positivism
[84] seeks to gather the results of all exact sciences in one system; but neither does it go beyond the phenomenal. — This vacillation and obscurity is a natural consequence of the self-contradictory character of the theory.

The author's "correction of Kant" is thus both superfluous and incorrect. But he believes he still has another door open to the knowledge of the Absolute, of the thing in itself. "Self-observation", "self-feeling", "the feeling of life" open for us a bridge to the essence of existence. Our own being we sense immediately and have thus here one point of existence opened up for us; we know how we ourselves fare by being, and infer by the way of analogy from that how other existing beings fare. This appeal to feeling in order to stop a hole in the theory does not augur well. The author has himself sketched this point so indistinctly that it has surely only been his intention to feel his way forward. What ambiguity lies not in a sentence like this: "The deepest understanding is in reality that of feeling" (Pag. 140)! The author here takes "understanding", as one of his opponents at the oral disputation pointed out, in a quite different sense than elsewhere in the dissertation; to understand is now no longer to comprehend in a rational manner, but to sympathize in a poetic way: in this sense one may well say with the author that we understand the animal better

than the stone; but of a concept there is then no longer any question. It is an illusion to think that we should better comprehend the mental than the bodily, because the former is given to us immediately in our consciousness. To comprehending belongs seeing the matter in its relation to everything else, but then precisely that immediacy is a hindrance. The psychological phenomena are just as much phenomena as the bodily ones; and there exists no special logic for them.

Pag. 123 the author defines "feeling one's being" by "apprehending the worth of one's being" and declares that a being that neither possesses nor is itself the object of such a feeling is "worthless, meaningless, i.e. senseless". Here we are referred to the practical field. Morally and historically we are indeed interested only in that which has "value and meaning"; but what vouches for us that this is something Absolute? The highest standard that we can lay at the foundation of valuation is after all only relative, drawn from the demands and tasks of human nature, and it is a bold dogmatism that the author here plunges into by identifying these with the core of existence, a dogmatism of a similar kind to that into which Kant's "moral faith" led astray so many Kantians and which the young Schelling combated in his interesting "Briefe über *[85]* Dogmatismus und Kriticismus". The sentence just cited is found almost in the same terms in Lotze (Mikrokosmus I, Pag. 407). But it is worth noting with what caution this clear and acute thinker proceeds on this point. It is not in the theory of knowledge that he utters this sentence; it is not even in metaphysics. When metaphysics is to have scientific character as a rational development of the fundamental determination of our view of the world, it cannot take up practical, aesthetic-ethical postulates. Therefore, according to Lotze (Metafysik Pag. 135), "the expression the true being, which is only of aesthetic significance [i.e. expresses a determination of value] is to be excluded from metaphysical usage". Such circumspection the author does not observe, although he fights (or wants to fight) under the banner of criticism.

There are certainly points enough where Kant's theory must be corrected. Recent English psychology has opened a series of elementary investigations which partly rectify, partly carry through, what Kant wanted. Recent natural science and inductive logic have brought forward entirely new problems. But on the whole and in the large the old Königsberger will certainly for a long time yet stand with unassailed greatness as the central thinker of modern times. His ideas form a firm core, around which everything that the later development in the various scientific fields has brought to light will be able to gather.

Harald Høffding.