



Kant's Refutation of Idealism

Henry Sidgwick; Edward Caird

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“dream” takes place without the second stage of objective reproduction.

Dr. H. Jackson concludes this paper by touching on other kinds of nervous affection which show something analogous to permanent “barrel-organism” (recurring utterances) of speechless patients. In these cases where temporary unconsciousness results from some injury, we find that operations going on when the unconsciousness supervened remained nascent during the period of total unconsciousness, and became active again during the restoration to consciousness, at the end of which stage they ceased. Such restoration means the return of control from higher centres, which is impossible in the case of “speechless” patients in whom the higher centres are destroyed.

JAMES SULLY.

KANT'S REFUTATION OF IDEALISM.

Professor Caird's answer, in the last No. of MIND, to my note in the preceding No., will at any rate be useful in preventing that confusion between his own doctrine and Kant's which his previous note seemed to me likely to cause. But on the historical point which I was further concerned to establish I have unhappily failed to make my argument plain to Mr. Caird; at least I cannot perceive that he has seriously attempted to meet it. Fortunately the amount of agreement between us—as I infer from his language and his silence taken together—is so considerable that I ought to be able to explain quite clearly the exact nature of our disagreement; which I may then leave to the judgment of the reader.

To prevent any necessity of referring to previous Nos. of MIND, I will begin by stating the points on which (as I understand) we are agreed.

(1) We agree in holding that, as soon as Kant became aware that Idealism had been imputed to him, on account of the doctrine expounded in the First Edition of the *Kritik*, he was seriously concerned to repel the imputation; not in consequence of any change of opinion, or any desire to conceal his real view, but because he honestly did not regard himself as an Idealist, and therefore did not wish to be so regarded.

(2) We agree in recognising that, in this attitude of mind, two different lines of reply to the charge of Idealism would naturally present themselves to him.

In the first place, he might say:—“I am not an Idealist, because I acknowledge the real existence of things-in-themselves, independent of our consciousness. I maintain, no doubt, that the manner of this existence is altogether unknown to us; but that has nothing to do with the question of its reality. And though I have called my doctrine Transcendental Idealism, that is no reason for confounding it with Idealism in the ordinary acceptation of the term; for the latter has been always understood to relate to the *existence* of material

things, whereas my so-called Idealism only relates to the notions (*Vorstellungen*) of them that we derive from their impressions on our senses." This I will call the Realistic answer.

The second, which I may call the Transcendental, answer, I will give, to avoid dispute, in Professor Caird's own words. Kant might say:—"I am not an Idealist, because I insist that we do know things out of ourselves; *i.e.*, things that are different from that series of inward states which constitutes the empirical self. The main aim of my Transcendental Deduction is to show that we are conscious of objects, and of a world of objects, not through mere sense, but only in so far as the one self manifests itself as a synthetic principle, which binds together the manifold of sense by means of the Categories. But the complementary truth is, that we are conscious of the permanent unity of the self in the succession of its feelings or conscious states, only in distinction from, and in relation to, a world of objects so determined."

(3) We agree in regarding these two answers as essentially distinct. Mr. Caird, as I understand, accepts the Transcendental answer as sound; while he considers it due to the "incompleteness" of Kant's system that he makes the Realistic answer at all.

(4) We agree in holding that, in one of the two main passages in which Kant replied to the charge of Idealism, the Realistic answer is undoubtedly given, *viz.*, in the *Prolegomena zu einer jeden künftigen Metaphysik* (§. 13; Anm. ii., iii.); while, on the other hand, the Transcendental answer is undoubtedly given in the 'Refutation of Idealism,' inserted in the Second Edition of the *Kritik*. Mr. Caird does not dispute the former of these propositions; and I certainly had no intention of disputing the latter.

The question on which we disagree is whether Kant himself distinguished the two answers as Mr. Caird and I agree in distinguishing them. I hold that he did not; and the ground I gave for holding this was not—as Mr. Caird seems to have understood—the language used in the 'Refutation' considered merely by itself, but a comparison of this with the language used in the corresponding passage in the *Prolegomena*. For the convenience of the reader I will place side by side the most important portions of the two passages; only adding that I think the case will appear even stronger to any one who compares the two contexts:—

Ich bin meines Daseyns als in der Zeit bestimmt bewusst. Alle Zeitbestimmung setzt etwas Beharrliches in der Wahrnehmung voraus. Dieses Beharrliche aber kann nicht etwas *in mir* sein; weil eben mein Daseyn in der Zeit durch dieses Beharrliche allerererst bestimmt werden kann. Also ist die Wahrnehmung dieses Beharrlichen nur durch *ein Ding ausser mir*

Ich dagegen sage: es sind uns *Dinge als ausser uns befindlichen Gegenstände unserer Sinne* gegeben, allein von dem, was sie an sich selbst sein mögen, wissen wir nichts, sondern kennen nur ihre Erscheinungen, d. i., die Vorstellungen, die sie in uns wirken, indem sie unsere Sinne afficiren. Demnach gestehe ich allerdings, dass *es ausser uns Körper* gebe, d. i., Dinge, die,

möglich. Folglich ist die Bestimmung meines Daseyns in der Zeit nur durch die Existenz wirklicher Dinge, die ich ausser mir wahrnehme, möglich. Nun ist das Bewusstsein in der Zeit mit dem Bewusstsein der Möglichkeit dieser Zeitbestimmung nothwendig verbunden; also ist es auch mit der Existenz der Dinge ausser mir, als Bedingung der Zeitbestimmung, nothwendig verbunden; d. i., das Bewusstseyn meines eignen Daseyns ist zugleich ein unmittelbares Bewusstseyn des Daseyns anderer Dinge ausser mir.—(Kritik der reinen Vernunft, 'Elementarlehre,' II. Th., 1 Abth. ii. Buch, 2 Hauptst., 3 Absehn.)

obzwar nach dem, was sie an sich selbst sein mögen, uns gänzlich unbekannt, wir durch die Vorstellungen kennen, welche ihr Einfluss auf unsre Sinnlichkeit uns verschafft, und denen wir die Benennung eines Körpers geben, welches Wort also bloss die Erscheinung jenes uns unbekanntem, aber nichts desto weniger wirklichen Gegenstandes bedeutet.—(Prolegomena zu einer jeden künftigen Metaphysik, § 13, Anm. ii.)

I have italicised certain words in each passage, in order to show the complete identity of the cardinal terms used ("wirkliche Dinge ausser mir" or "ausser uns"). These, according to Mr. Caird's view, Kant must have consciously used in entirely different meanings in the two passages.

Now it seems to me in itself very strange that Kant should consciously adopt two essentially distinct modes of purging himself from the charge of Idealism, should put forward each separately in one of the two chief passages in which he expressly deals with the question, and yet should nowhere point out to the reader the fundamental difference between his two lines of reply. But, granting that he might have adopted this strange procedure, I maintain that it is more than strange—that it is simply incredible—that he should in the two replies have used the same cardinal terms in different senses, with a perfect consciousness of their equivocality and yet without giving a hint of it to the reader. This is the point to which I wished to direct attention in my former note; and to which—so far as I can see—Mr. Caird's remarks do not even suggest an answer.

But further I cannot understand how, without some such confusion of thought as that which I attribute to him, Kant could ever have regarded his Transcendental answer as a 'Refutation' of the problematical Idealism of Descartes. For when we conceive this answer with the distinctness with which Mr. Caird and I agree in conceiving it, it must be obvious that, as addressed to the Cartesian position, it involves a plain *ignoratio elenchi*. Descartes says: "I maintain what you call a 'problematical' Idealism; that is, I have in my mind the notion of a material world, substantially distinct from mind, but I have no clear and certain intuition that such a non-mental world actually exists; while I have a clear and certain intuition that I, as a Mind, actually am. I know that Matter *may* exist independently of mind; but that it does so exist requires proof." Kant answers: "I will supply the proof. What you call Matter is doubtless in its

elements mental: indeed, I show you exactly how it is constructed by the synthetic action of your thinking self out of your passive feelings: but I show too that you are necessitated to think of it as something distinct from your individual mind." Will not Descartes rejoin: "It will take a good deal of argument to make me accept this perplexing and self-contradictory position. But supposing I accepted it, I should regard myself as a 'dogmatic' and no longer 'problematical' Idealist; for in spite of this invincible necessity of conceiving matter as distinct from my mind, I should, as you say, philosophically know it to be something made by mind out of mental elements. Call you this refuting Idealism? I call it confirming Idealism."

And surely Professor Caird must so call it; otherwise why does he wish to fix on Kantism, as he interprets it, this designation so vehemently repudiated by its author?

I conclude therefore that Kant, when making his Transcendental reply to the charge of Idealism in the Second Edition of the *Kritik*, did *not* clearly separate it from the Realistic answer to the same charge which he had already given in the *Prolegomena*: so that in the former passage the phenomenal matter, whose permanence he regards as a necessary postulate of empirical thought, must be taken as carrying with it in unsevered connexion the "matter in itself," whose independent existence it "never entered his head to doubt". Nor do I think that any one who knows the *Kritik* will regard the fact, that Kant elsewhere clearly distinguishes his phenomenal from his noumenal object, as presenting any very serious obstacle to the adoption of my view.

One word more on the question of nomenclature. I quite agree with Mr. Caird that there are objections against the application of the term 'Idealism' to Berkeley's system; but I think it would only make confusion worse to call it (as he proposes) 'Sensationalism'; on account of the materialistic associations which are now firmly attached to the latter term. I should myself prefer to call it 'Mentalism'; and I have, in fact, made a mild effort to bring this term into use—but, so far as I know, without success.

HENRY SIDGWICK.

P.S.—Since the above was written, I have discovered that Professor Adamson has taken my previous Note as the occasion of an Appendix (I.) in his recently published book *On the Philosophy of Kant*. Mr. Adamson, however, steers clear of the point of my argument even more completely than Mr. Caird, as he does not even allude to the passage in the *Prolegomena*. Hence the sole answer that I have to make to him at present is to draw his attention again to this passage. I do not see how, with these *Anmerkungen* ii. and iii. to § 13 before him, he can maintain that "the distinction between a thing and the representation or notion of thing" has "never," in Kant's writings, "any reference to the question of Noumena".—H. S.

I do not wish, any more than Mr. Sidgwick, to prolong a controversy, from which the vital point has been almost extracted; but I understand Mr. Sidgwick still to maintain that, in the "Refutation of Idealism," Kant, while proving at best only that external experience is as real as internal experience, supposed himself to be proving also the reality of things-in-themselves as opposed to phenomena. This Mr. Sidgwick maintained (1) on the ground of the language of the passage in the *Prolegomena*; and (2) because he thinks, that, on any other supposition, Kant's argument against Descartes would involve a palpable *ignoratio elenchí*.

On the first of these points I answer that, in the passage in the *Prolegomena*, all that Kant says is that it is his doctrine that bodies, or "things given to us as objects of sense without us," have an existence in themselves, the nature of which we cannot know. In other words, external things are phenomenal of an unknown noumenon. I cannot see that this statement in any way authorises us to conclude that, in a passage written in quite a different connexion, in which Kant expressly and repeatedly declares that he is seeking to prove only that external experience is as real in its object as internal experience, he yet confused this proof with a demonstration of the reality of things-in-themselves. How could Kant, for a moment, suppose, that the permanent in time, which is known under the Category of Substance, is the thing-in-itself? It should not be forgotten that the two senses of the words, "*ausser uns*," are distinguished in a passage of the *Critique* (p. 200) which refers directly to the subject treated of in the "Refutation of Idealism".

Mr. Sidgwick further argues, that, without a confusion of the external object with the thing-in-itself, Kant's argument against Descartes must have been seen by himself to be an *ignoratio elenchí*. Descartes, however, according to Kant's view of him, had maintained that all we know immediately is our own inner experience; and that matter (not merely things-in-themselves, but extended substance or things in space) is known only by inference, as the cause of some of our inner experiences. And Kant's answer is, that external experience cannot be less immediate than internal experience, seeing the latter presupposes the former. That Descartes mistook matter for a thing-in-itself is, in fact, just Kant's charge against him: it is what Kant means when he says, that transcendental realism necessarily leads to empirical idealism. "It is the transcendental realist who is inevitably led afterwards to play the part of an empirical idealist; for, as in the former character, he has presupposed of the objects of sense that, if they are external, they must have their existence in themselves, apart from sense, he is obliged from this point of view to hold that none of the representations of our sense are able to assure us of their reality" (p. 296). In other words, he who takes the externality of matter to mean that it is a thing-in-itself, and not an object of sensible experience, must inevitably be led to the conclusion that its existence is problematical, as being reached only by inference.

That Kant had two ways of opposing Idealism, was an inevitable result of his twofold distinction between phenomena and noumena and between the object of internal and of external experience. I may add that in the passage in the *Prolegomena* there is no argument, but only the assertion of his own belief in the existence of things-in-themselves. The proof of that existence is given elsewhere in the *Critique of Practical Reason*.