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I. KANT'S DOCTRINE OF THE "THINGS IN THEMSELVES" AND NOUMENA*

F. Jacoby, one of the first critics of Kant, originated the winged expression: "The 'thing in itself' is the kind of concept without which it is impossible to enter Kant's system, but with which it is impossible to get out of the system."¹ Stating the antinomy of the Kantian understanding of things in themselves, Jacoby saw in it nothing but logically inconsistent statements. He opposed to Kantianism the intuitivist doctrine of faith as the only conclusive way of understanding metaphysical reality; that is, he rehabilitated everything which Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* refuted.

The contradictoriness of the Kantian doctrine of things in themselves is indubitable. Its source is the desire to reconcile materialism and idealism. Jacoby's mistake, however, was that he appraised in a negative way the contradictions which he noted. These contradictions are extremely significant, and it can even be said that they testify in an indirect manner to the profound formulation of a problem. Dialectical materialism, in distinction from the metaphysical mode of thought, substantiates the necessity of positively evaluating contradictions, which are a feature of outstanding philosophical doctrines. Substantive contradictions, which contain attempts at overcoming the limited, one-sided construction of a problem, are not merely defects, but in a certain sense the value of these doctrines. Recall that K. Marx saw in the contradictions of D. Ricardo's theory of value the initial premises of the correct construction of a most complex economic problem. Indeed, a certain analogy (of course, only in gnoseological and methodological foreshortenings) between the Kantian doctrine of things in themselves and Ricardo's theory of value seems to us not only justified, but also fruitful. In places in both authors' works it is a question not only of mistakes, of great mistakes of genius, but also of contradictions existing in objective reality.

Consequently, we are very far from merely accusing Kant of inconsistency, in that he did not understand or notice something and fell into contradictions that were very evident even to his immediate

*This article originally appeared in *Voprosy filosofii*, 1974, no. 4, pp. 117-128.

¹F. Jacoby, *Werke*, Bd. II, Leipzig, 1912, S. 304.

successors. Such a mode of analysis of an outstanding philosophical doctrine must be considered antiphilosophical. If Kant had interpreted things in themselves merely as absolutely transcendent or, on the contrary, had viewed them only as gnoseological phenomena, he would have been, despite all the determinateness and "consistency" of this view, not a great, but a mediocre thinker.

V. I. Lenin formulated in a profound way the problem of the need to overcome the vulgar-materialist mistakes in the criticism of Kant's philosophy. Scientific criticism of Kantianism does not simply reject his arguments from a threshold, but *corrects* them. V. I. Lenin wrote in this connection: "Marxists criticized (at the beginning of the twentieth century) the Kantians and Humists more in the manner of Feuerbach (and Büchner), than of Hegel."² In the light of this indication, which has great methodological significance, the necessity of investigating the diverse, real content of the contradictions of Kantian philosophy with the aim of their actual scientific solution becomes evident.

It is well known that in the "precritical" period Kant created an essentially materialist cosmogony, which completely agreed with the laws of mechanics, satisfactorily explained the established astronomic facts and provided an interpretation that was scientific for his time of both the "systemic arrangement" and the origin and development of our solar system. Elucidating the principles of his investigation, Kant wrote: "It seems to me that we can say here with intelligent certainty and without audacity: '*Give me matter, and I will construct a world out of it!*' i.e. give me matter and I will show you how a world shall arise out of it." But is it possible, wrote Kant several lines below, "to boast of the same progress even regarding the lowest plant or an insect? Are we in a position to say: '*Give me matter, and I will show you how a caterpillar can be produced?*' . . . It should not therefore cause astonishment if I presume to say that the formation of all the heavenly bodies, the cause of their movements, and, in short, the origin of the whole present constitution of the universe, will become intelligible before the production of a single herb or a caterpillar by

² V. I. Lenin, *Complete Collected Works* (in Russian), volume 29, p. 161.

mechanical causes, will become distinctly and completely understood." (*Kant's Cosmology*, p. 17)³

The development of Kant's views in the "precritical" period led him to the conviction that the origin of life, and moreover of consciousness and thought, cannot be explained by the movement and development of matter. Of course, he meant mechanical movement, the mechanically interpreted process of development. But, Kant, and all of the outstanding scientists of his time, generally did not know of other natural processes, conditioned by nonmechanical regularities. For Kant, the fact that mechanical materialism did not reveal the genesis of life and consciousness was the basis for the denial of materialism in general. The mechanistic form of this doctrine was for Kant not its historically transient limitation, but rather the essence of the materialist (and natural scientific) explanation of the phenomena of nature.

Although he did not reject the mechanistic methodology, and even justified and substantiated it, Kant stressed its limitation. This entailed the conclusion about the unrealizability in principle of philosophical monism: the diversity of reality cannot be understood by proceeding from one fundamental position. But following the thesis of the insufficiency of the materialist (in fact, mechanistic) point of departure, Kant argued the thesis of the unsoundness of idealist monism, i.e., the derivation of the external world from consciousness, from the subjective in general. Moreover, Kant had in mind not only the "dream-like" and "dogmatic" (in his words) idealism of G. Berkeley, but also the "problematical" idealism of Descartes, who derived our knowledge of the existence of the external world from the *cogito*, from self-consciousness. The latter was adopted by Descartes as the fundamental premise that makes all other premises superfluous. Kant maintained that the existence of self-consciousness is the *proof* of the existence of the external, sensually perceived world, because "the consciousness of my existence is at the same time an immediate consciousness of the existence of other

³ In references to Kant's works, the following editions were used: *Kant's Cosmology* (Tr. W. Hastie), New York: Greenwood Publishing Corporation, 1968; *Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics* (Ed. Lewis White Beck), New York: Bobbs-Merrill Company, Inc., 1950; *Critique of Practical Reason* (Tr. Lewis White Beck), New York: Bobbs-Merrill Company, Inc., 1956; References to the *Critique of Pure Reason* are given in the standard way. In references to *Kant's Works in Six Volumes* (in Russian), Moscow: Mysl', 1963-1966, the first numeral refers to the volume, the second numeral to the part of the volume.

things outside me." (B276). This position contains the recognition of the independence of consciousness from the external world, but Kant did not express this idea in a clear form.⁴

We quote here from the section, "The Refutation of Idealism," written by Kant for the second edition of the *Critique of Pure Reason* as a response to those reviews of this work which not without reason saw a subjective idealist tendency in it. Emphasizing his differences with Berkeley, Kant resolutely insisted on the fact that the manifold of ideas organized by a definite image and understood as sensually perceived nature or the world of appearances, necessarily presupposes the acknowledgment of things in themselves, which form the substratum of the world of appearances and are completely independent of the knowledge of the world. The subjectivity of the sensually given is conditioned by the specified mechanism of human knowledge. But sensual perceptions that form the content of thought are not arbitrary, since they are evoked by the action of things in themselves on our sensibility. Thus, the fact of consciousness testifies to the existence of the external world. And sense perceptions directly point to the existence of things in themselves, which should be considered as the causes of sense perceptions and which condition to some degree not only the multiplicity of sense data, but also the particularity of their content.

The world of appearances, Kant suggested, by the very fact of its incontestable existence, proves the existence of things in themselves. The very word "appearance" already contains an indication of something else, not an appearance, which is conceivable only as the sensually perceived basis of the appearance. In other words, "appearances always presuppose an object in itself and therefore suggest its existence . . ." (Prolegomena, p. 103).

Hence, Kant, in rejecting both the materialist and idealist resolution of the basic philosophical problem, founded the necessity of the dualist point of departure: on the one hand, consciousness, the knowing subject, and on the other hand, the world isolated from it of things in themselves. The latter world is absolutely opposed not only to knowledge, but also to the object of knowledge, to the world appearances.

⁴ In another place in the *Critique of Pure Reason*, Kant even more definitely points to the connection of consciousness (and self-consciousness) with objective reality, with things in themselves: "I am just as certainly conscious that there are things outside me, which are in relation to my sense, as I am conscious that I myself exist as determined in time." (BXL1).

pearances. Kant placed appearances or phenomena in a correlative relation to the activity of knowledge. Precisely the dualist opposition of the subjective and objective, the spiritual and the "thing-like," the appearance and the things in themselves, comprises the initial point of Kantian agnosticism.

In distinction from materialism, which confines the absolute opposition of the spiritual and the material to the limits of the basic philosophical problem (that is, the problem of the primacy, the priority of either the material or the spiritual), dualism rejects this resolution, i.e., interprets the opposition of the spiritual and the material as absolute in all respects. However, Kant's doctrine of the unknowability in principle of things in themselves does not rest merely on the dualist opposition of the spiritual and the material. It expressed and subjectivistically interpreted a historically determinate situation in natural science and also certain general features of the process of knowledge. In Kant's time, Engels pointed out, "knowledge of natural objects was indeed so fragmentary that he might well suspect, behind the little we knew about each of them, a mysterious 'thing in itself.'"⁵ Engels noted that even in the first half of the nineteenth century, organic substances represented mysterious "things in themselves" to chemists. Consequently, Kant philosophically formulated the convictions of a rather broad circle of natural scientists of that era.

Since the time of Kant, the outstanding conquests of science and the practical achievements of humanity based on them have convincingly refuted the basic premises of Kantian and of all other types of agnosticism. But the contradictions of the process of knowledge, the process of the transformation of unknown things in themselves into things for us, of course, has not disappeared. These contradictions are usually reproduced in a qualitatively new form at each historical stage of developing knowledge. The distinction of things for us from things in themselves is not merely a gnoseological distinction between the known and the unknown. V. I. Lenin emphasized: "The thing in itself is distinct from the thing for us, for the latter is only a part, or only one aspect of the former."⁶ What is known, consequently, is part of a more expansive, still unknown whole and finds itself in a certain dependence upon it.

⁵ K. Marx and F. Engels, *Works* (in Russian), volume 22, p. 304.

⁶ V. I. Lenin, *Complete Collected Works* (in Russian), volume 18, p. 119.

Each new stage of knowledge reveals new phenomena that were previously unknown. This discovery of the unknown is also the progress of knowledge. The idea of the decrease of the range of the unknown, which correctly specifies the determinateness of a particular process of knowledge, should not be extended to the entire process of knowledge, to all of its not only present, but also possible, not yet discovered, objects. Indeed, the object of the entire aggregate process of knowledge in the entire range of its historical development is in the final analysis the infinite, about which Engels wrote: "The infinite is just as much knowable as unknowable."⁷ In knowing the finite we also know the infinite, but this does not erase the qualitative distinction between them.

The philosophy of Marxism is equally incompatible both with the agnostic disbelief in the knowability of things in themselves and with the opposite metaphysical conviction in the attainability of absolute, universal, all-exhaustive knowledge. The latter view, founded by the creators of the metaphysical systems of the seventeenth century, was revived by Hegel, insofar as he also created a metaphysical system. This view always attracted theologians, since they argued that the holy scripture is the receptacle of all truth, including, of course, absolute truth.

It is well known that such outstanding representatives of philosophical skepticism as P. Bayle and M. Montaigne played a great role in the struggle against theology and metaphysical system building. It would therefore be unhistorical to ignore the connection of Kantian agnosticism (and, in particular, his thesis of the scientific unsoundness in principle of all existing and possible "proofs" of the existence of God) with a definite (though inconsistent and extenuated by many reservations) antitheological position. It is no accident, of course, that Kant's works were entered by the Vatican in the list of forbidden books. One of the foundations of the theology of Catholicism is the dogma of the logical substantiation of the existence of God.

In our popular works, Kant's declaration is frequently quoted: "I have therefore found it necessary to deny *knowledge*, in order to make room for *faith*."(BXXX). This statement, in spite of the difference of the Kantian understanding from the theological understanding of faith, is a clear concession to fideism. But, usually one does not cite another statement of Kant from that same *Critique of Pure Reason* and on that very same question: "we limit reason, lest in leaving the guiding-thread of the empirical conditions it should go

⁷ K. Marx and F. Engels, *Works* (in Russian), volume 20, p. 549.

straying into the *transcendent* . . ." (A562 = B590). In other words, Kant proposed here to limit the metaphysical and theological pretensions of reason.

The comparison of the cited statements shows the immediate orientation of the agnosticism of Kant and of the whole of his philosophical doctrine against the speculative metaphysics of the seventeenth century. In particular, Kant's doctrine is directed against the successors of speculative metaphysics, who construed rationalist attempts to create a theoretical method that would overcome the inevitable limitation of present experience, found the possibility of supersensual, superexperiential knowledge, and arm theology with a rationalist methodology.

Kant rejected the rationalist dogma of the identity of real and logical foundations, with the aid of which speculative metaphysics "proved" the existence of transcendental entities, the existence of God, the immortality of the soul, the absolute free will, and the like. He rejected also the rationalist thesis of the superexperiential meaning of a priori positions. Kant opposed to it a new interpretation of the a priori, which he characterized only as a form of knowledge, inapplicable in principle beyond the limits of experience and possessing only an empirical content. Such an interpretation of the a priori, in spite of Kant's subjectivistic interpretation of the forms of knowledge, approximates a rational understanding of the nature of theoretical knowledge. It is therefore clear why the celebrated Kantian question formulated in the transcendental analytic, "How is pure science possible?" is at bottom a question about the possibility of theoretical natural science, a question to which Kant unambiguously gave a positive response.⁸

⁸It should be emphasized that despite his polemics with the metaphysical system-builders of the seventeenth century, Kant to a certain degree was their successor. The theological implications of speculative metaphysics by no means comprise its basic content. The rationalist doctrine about a priori thought and knowledge is rooted in the attainments of mathematics and mechanics of the seventeenth century, in the specific features of the development of these deductive sciences. The position of these sciences was distinguished by apodictic universality. What is the source of this, as it would seem at that time, indisputable universality? The generalization of experiential data always remains an incomplete induction which cannot give judgments an apodictic character. The rationalists of the seventeenth century, following the logical form of mathematical presuppositions, arrived, as it seemed to them, at the only possible conclusion: these presuppositions are independent of experience, a priori. Following this was the more general main conclusion regarding the possibility of superexperiential knowledge. Kant rejected this later conclusion, interpreting the a priori as preceding experience, applicable only to experience and not having therefore a superexperiential application.

Kant reduced the metaphysical doctrine of existence (ontology) to the doctrine of the categories of perceptual thought, to the doctrine of the categorial synthesis of sense data. The gnoseological interpretation of categories, despite its subjectivistic character, poses a genuinely dialectical problem. Indeed, it is no accident that in the transcendental analytic Kant argued the necessity of a new, nonformal logic which he called "transcendental."

The division on the transcendental dialectic, one of the most important divisions of the *Critique of Pure Reason*, was directly devoted to the proof of the unsoundness in principle of the metaphysical pretensions to superexperiential knowledge. The basic ideas of metaphysics—the psychological, cosmological, and theological—are deprived of objective content and do not even indirectly point to the existence of transcendent entities. Reason has to do only with the concepts of the understanding, the substance of which is obtained from experience. Synthesizing these concepts of the understanding, reason does not enrich them with a new, superexperiential content. Therefore, the metaphysical ideas of reason are nothing more than ideas in which is expressed the aspiration of reason "to carry the synthetic unity, which is thought in the category, up to the completely unconditioned." (A326 = B383). An idea such as that of the substantial soul contains the idea of the absolute unity of the thinking subject, and the idea of God contains the idea of the absolute unity of the conditions of all objects of thought in general, etc.

If the metaphysicians of the seventeenth century understood noumena as transcendent entities comprehended by the supersensible cognitive ability of reason, then, Kant, who resolutely rejected superexperiential knowledge, defined noumena as a priori ideas of pure, i.e., not depending upon experience, reason. He wrote: "But nonetheless we are unable to comprehend how such noumena can be possible, and the domain that lies out beyond the sphere of appearances is for us empty. That is to say, we have an understanding which *problematically* extends further, but we have no intuition, through which objects outside the field of sensibility can be given, . . . The concept of a noumenon is thus a merely *limiting concept*, the function of which is to curb the pretensions of sensibility; and it is therefore only of negative employment." (A255 = B311). But if the concept of noumenon is deprived of positive content, then the assumption of the existence of metaphysical reality is put in doubt. Even Kant emphasized that "the division of objects into phenomena and noumena, and the world into a world of the senses and a world of

the understanding, is therefore quite inadmissible in the positive sense." (*Ibid.*)

Kant's doctrine of the problematic nature of the transcendent as an object of metaphysics allows one to understand more deeply his agnosticism. Kant thought that the knowledge of the world of phenomena, of nature, that is, of everything studied by the sciences, is unlimited. Only the transcendent is unknowable. In this sense, Kant's agnosticism can be called antimetaphysical (if, of course, one has in mind not the dialectical sense of metaphysical, but the doctrine of metaphysical reality). One should emphasize, however, that Kant's agnosticism is organically connected with the ambivalent interpretation of objective reality and the subjective idealist conclusions that result from this interpretation. In the concept of the transcendent, the metaphysical, Kant included all that is objective, outside and independent of consciousness, and that precedes knowledge. Thus, he did not restrict himself to the antimetaphysical assertion of the unprovability of the existence of metaphysical entities, of noumena: he converted the physical, what exists outside and independently of knowledge, into the metaphysical, the transcendent. Therefore, even things that act on our sensibility, that evoke sensations, and this also means, that exist before knowledge and independently of it, are characterized as supersensual things in themselves. What, then, is accessible to knowledge? Where are the boundaries of the agnosticism proclaimed by Kant, if the sensations evoked by things in themselves give no knowledge of the latter, and do not even provide the material from which this knowledge could be obtained? Kant attempted to resolve the problem formulated by him through a subjectivist interpretation of knowable reality as existing inside experience and by means of it. He asserted that "The objects of experience, then, are *never given in themselves*, but only in experience, and have no existence outside it." (A492 = B521). From this point of view, the world being sensually perceived turns out to be a phenomenon of knowledge which is formed only in the process of knowledge. The knowledge of the object and the object of knowledge, in essence, are identified, insofar as things in themselves are excluded from the sphere of knowledge. The content present in our sensations is independent of consciousness. But, the sensually perceived things like appearances represent the product of a synthesis made by reason's unconscious productive power of the imagination with the aid of transcendental schemes and categories. Kant wrote: "Appearances are not things in

themselves, but are the mere play of our representations, and in the end reduce to determinations of inner sense." (A101).

In this way, the ambivalency of the Kantian conception of things in themselves led to the subjectivist distortion of the concept of nature and the process of knowledge. But this naturally does not justify the neo-Kantian discarding of things in themselves. "The world in itself," wrote V. I. Lenin, "is a world that exists *without us*."⁹ The mistake of Kant, Lenin emphasized, is not in his recognition of the existence of things in themselves, but in his insistence on their transcendent nature, their unknowability. The advocates of the idealist interpretation usually equate the concept of thing in itself with the concept of noumenon.¹⁰ In addition, they rely on the inexactness of the terminology of Kant, who frequently united both of these concepts in the general concept of "intelligible entities" (*Verstandeswesen*) (A252 = B309).

That Kant at times related things in themselves to noumena is obvious, but at the same time requires examination. Actually, Kant never considered noumena as things in themselves. A thing in itself is not from his viewpoint an idea of pure reason. It is the basic premise of the transcendental aesthetic, i.e., the doctrine of sensibility. Things in themselves *affect* our sensibility. As far as noumena are concerned, they have no relation to sense perceptions and to the process of knowledge in general.

Kant's words were already cited above to the effect that the existence of noumena is problematic and unprovable. Things in themselves are another matter; the existence of the latter, according to Kant, is evident from the fact that there is a world of appearances. Kant called the assertion that "there can be appearance without anything that appears," (BXXVII) absurd. What is, is also a thing in itself. This conclusion, Kant suggested, follows necessarily from the

⁹ V. I. Lenin, *Complete Collected Works* (in Russian), volume 18, p. 118.

¹⁰ Thus, Foulquie in his *Dictionary of Philosophical Language*, proceeding from the dichotomy of phenomenon and noumenon, asserted that the concept of "thing in itself" (*chose en soi*) and "noumenon" are synonyms (P. Foulquie, *Dictionnaire de la langue philosophique*, Paris, 1962, p. 483). This is the viewpoint also of D. D. Runes (*A Dictionary of Philosophy*, Ames, Iowa, 1955, p. 215), B. G. A. Fuller (*A History of Modern Philosophy*, volume two, New York, 1955, p. 231), R. Eisler (*Wörterbuch der philosophischen Begriffe*, Berlin, 1928, Bd. 2, S. 271). However, none of these authors goes beyond the limits of the analysis of Kant's terminology or considers in essence Kant's doctrine of things in themselves and noumena.

distinction of things "as objects of experience and those same things as things in themselves." (*Ibid.*) It does remain unclear why things in themselves, if they in fact *exist*, are completely unknowable. But this contradiction does not affect at all the distinction between things in themselves and noumena. God, the absolutely free will, the immortal soul are one matter; all of these are *ideas* of pure reason. Things in themselves, which form the causes of sensations, are another matter. Kant, it is true, declared in the preface to the second edition of the *Critique of Pure Reason* that the existence of "things in themselves" theoretically, alas, is unprovable. But, he immediately emphasized that precisely from them we "derive the whole material of knowledge, even for our inner sense . . ." (BXL). Kant referred to the impossibility of theoretically refuting the skeptical doubt in the objectivity of things in themselves as a scandal. But he rejected the conviction of the metaphysicians, who attempted to prove the objective reality of noumena.

In the *Prolegomena*, wherein Kant attempted to give a popular exposition of the *Critique of Pure Reason*, one might say that he dotted all the *i*'s. He wrote:

Idealism consists in the assertion that there are none but thinking beings, all other things which we think are perceived in intuition, being nothing but representations in the thinking beings, to which no object external to them in fact corresponds. I, on the contrary, say that things as objects of our senses existing outside us are given, but we know nothing of what they may be in themselves, knowing only their appearances, that is, the representations which they cause in us by affecting our senses. Consequently, I grant by all means that there are bodies without us, that is, things which, though quite unknown to us as to what they are in themselves, yet we know by the representations which their influence on our sensibility procures us. These representations we call 'bodies,' a term signifying merely the appearance of the thing which is unknown to us, but not therefore less actual. Can this be termed idealism? It is the very contrary. (*Prolegomena*, p. 36).¹¹

¹¹ Here, as in other places in the article, we speak of the Kantian things in themselves that affect human sensibility. We are not concerned with the circumstance that Kant attached also another meaning to the term, "thing in itself." Kant applied it in particular to human reason (to the subject of knowledge in general), since the latter is considered outside of empirical application. In this connection, Kant indicated that "reason is not itself an appearance, and is not subject to any conditions of sensibility, it follows that even as regards its causality there is in it no time-sequence" (A553 = B581). Reason, he wrote further, "is present in all the actions of men at all times and under all circumstances, and is always the same; but it is not itself in time, and does not fall into any new state in which it was not before." (A556 = B584). There is no need to prove that in this case Kant distinguished thing in itself from noumenon, which is only the idea of reason, having no empirical application or any relation to the world of appearances.

We are forced to cite in full this extensive quotation since it convincingly shows Kant's aspiration to delimit things in themselves from noumena, which are a priori ideas of pure reason. In the cited extract Kant spoke of things in themselves literally as things, objects that "correspond," in spite of their unknowability in principle, to sense perceptions. Evidently, this should be understood in the sense that to the difference between sense perceptions "correspond" various "objects of our senses." About these objects, that is, the "things in themselves," Kant also said that they appear or manifest themselves in sense perceptions: "We know only their appearances." It means the existence of things in themselves seemed obvious to Kant; we know about these things through the "representations which they cause in us by affecting our senses."

It would be incorrect to consider this intensification of a materialist tendency as a purely polemical device, not expressing the profound convictions of Kant. The dualist character of his doctrine inevitably caused the vacillation at times to the left and at times to the right. With the aid of the concept of "thing in itself," Kant attempted to limit the subjectivist tendencies of his system, while, by means of subjectivist gnoseology, he strove to overcome the imaginary dogmatism of the materialist recognition of objective reality and its unlimited knowability. All of this clearly is expressed in the contradictions of the Kantian interpretation of things in themselves.

The neo-Kantians, who excluded things in themselves from Kant's philosophy, maintained, however, the world of noumena, thereby recognizing (in an indirect manner) the Kantian demarcation of one from the other. However, they were silent about the materialist subtext of such a demarcation. The irrationalist, L. Shestov, who could not reconcile himself to the fact that for Kant things in themselves (in distinction from noumena) possess an unconditional objective reality, wrote about this with indignation: "There is a striking fact which we all have insufficiently considered. Kant perfectly calmly, even joyfully, I would say, perceived with considerable ease the 'unprovability' of the existence of God, the immortality of the soul and the freedom of the will (what he considers the substance of metaphysics), finding that as beliefs resting on morality they fulfill perfectly their purpose as modest postulates. But the idea that the reality of external things can be held true led him into a true horror

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¹² L. Shestov, *Speculation and Revelation* (in Russian), Paris, 1964, p. 221.

L. Shestov, of course, was revolted at the materialist tendency of Kant's doctrine, which clearly comes from the delimitation mentioned above. Indeed, Shestov angrily asked: "Why must God, the immortality of the soul, and freedom subsist as belief and postulates, and not *Ding an sich*, which is granted scientific proofs?"¹³ This rhetorical question clearly shows that Kant's doctrine is absolutely unacceptable for philosophical reactionaries.

Unfortunately, in our Marxist literature the distinction made by Kant between things in themselves and noumena still has not been the object of a special investigation.¹⁴ At the same time, V. I. Lenin essentially indicated the principal significance of this demarcation with his analysis of the materialist tendency internally specific to Kant's doctrine of "things in themselves."

One of the fundamental theses of Kant's doctrine is the thesis of the inapplicability in principle of categories (like all *a priori* forms in general) to the supersensual. However, Kant applied to things in themselves not only the categories of existence and causality, but also other categories, the meaning of which, according to his doctrine, is limited to the sphere of appearances. The well-known West German investigator of Kant's philosophy, G. Martin, remarked in this connection: "It can be said that nearly all the categories are applied by Kant to things in themselves, in particular the categories of unity, plurality, causality, community, possibility, actuality, and necessity."¹⁵ This, of course, is impossible to say about noumena, to which Kant applied no categories.

It may seem that the opposition of things in themselves to noumena characterizes in a basic way the *Critique of Pure Reason* and is not related to the ethical doctrine of Kant that is expounded in the *Critique of Practical Reason*. The latter, as is well known, is in definite contradiction with his first *Critique*. However, the analysis of Kant's ethics refutes, as will be shown below, this presupposition, confirming the conclusions that result from his doctrine of theoretical

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 222.

¹⁴ This, apparently, explains the fact that the author of the article, "Noumenon," in the *Philosophical Encyclopedia* (in Russian), asserted that in Kant noumenon is a "synonym of the concept 'thing in itself'" (See *Philosophical Encyclopedia* (in Russian), volume 4, p. 100).

¹⁵ Gottfried Martin, *Kant's Metaphysics and Theory of Science* (Tr. P. G. Lucas), London: Manchester University Press, 1961, p. 198.

reason. In Kant's ethics, the noumena are defined as the postulates of practical reason. This means that the assertions about the existence of the absolutely free will, personal immortality, and God, are deprived of factual and theoretical foundations.¹⁶ Practical reason generally is not concerned with knowledge. Its ideas express only a moral self-consciousness. Therefore, Kant declared, "we cannot say that we know or understand either the reality or even the possibility of these ideas." (*Critique of Practical Reason*, p. 4).

In counterbalance to theology, Kant argued that religion is not the basis of morality, but that morality forms the source of religion. This, of course, is an idealist view, but its antitheological tendency is evident. Therefore, the postulates of practical reason turn out to be not the preliminary conditions of moral consciousness, but its necessary convictions, which coincide with the conviction in the unconditional necessity of requital. But such a conviction is incompatible with the facts of reality, with the this-sidedness of life. However, the moral consciousness remains such only insofar as it is convinced that justice does not know the limits of time and space. Kant wrote: "Belief in the next life by no means is a premise to show the influence of primitive justice on man; rather, the conclusion about the next life is made from the necessity of punishment." (IV, (2), p. 436). Kant, in point of fact, asserted that the recognition of the divine judge was dictated to the moral consciousness by the apparent permanence of injustice on earth. Insofar as the essence of morality consists in the uncompromising consciousness of duty, theological postulates express the irresolvable contradictions between the ought and the is. In Kant's ethics, God is an infinite imperative, necessarily conceivable by pure practical reason. V. F. Asmus correctly noted: "Kant flatly denies the *real ontological* meaning of the supernatural content of religion. . . . The source of the concept of God is not in the connection of concepts and their signs, but in the depths of conscience, in the inability of man to be reconciled to the

¹⁶ It needs to be emphasized that Kant did not consider things in themselves as postulates of theoretical reason. He considered them as facts being attested to by the presence of the world of phenomena. But it is the type of facts with which moral consciousness has nothing to do, because consciousness is only moral insofar as it is not affected by things in themselves, i.e., not determined from outside. Consequently, the demarcation of things in themselves and noumena, formulated in the doctrine of theoretical reason, becomes in Kant's ethics a radical opposition.

reality of evil, to the moral disharmony of the world, to social evil." (IV (2), p. 443).

Among the postulates of pure practical reason, Kant emphasized freedom of the will as an unconditional (and in this sense, preliminary) condition of morality. The very existence of morality is the proof of the presence of this freedom. In addition, however, this is not about the noumenal, so to speak, the ontological, primary freedom, which is conceivable only as an a priori idea, but about relative freedom. The latter freedom is fully sufficient for the explanation of the possibility of morality. "Freedom in the practical sense," Kant indicated, "is the will's (*Willkur*) independence of coercion through sensuous impulses." (A534-B562). This definition of freedom is in principle analogous to those definitions of it which we encounter in Spinoza and other pre-Marxist materialists who understood freedom as the rule of reason over the passions. Although Kant suggested that practical freedom is rooted in the idea of transcendental freedom, he considered the relative independence of the will from sensual impulses as an empirically established fact. He saw the relative independence of the will as both constituting a sufficient basis for actions dependent upon the subject and conditioning the subject's responsibility for the consequences of such actions.

What is the place of the idea of transcendental freedom among other noumena and postulates of practical reason? Theology asserted that absolute freedom of the will, incompatible with the natural order of things, is a direct divine preestablishment. Kant took here an essentially antitheological position; he asserted that the idea of God and personal immortality result from the idea of freedom. Kant was more categorical on this problem than on any other.

The concept of freedom, in so far as its reality is proved by an apodictic law of practical reason, is the keystone of the whole architecture of the system of pure reason and even of speculative reason. All other concepts (those of God and immortality) which, as mere ideas, are unsupported by anything in speculative reason now attach themselves to the concept of freedom and gain, with it and through it, stability and objective reality. That is, their possibility is proved by the fact that there really is freedom, for this idea is revealed by the moral law.

Freedom, however, among all the ideas of speculative reason is the only one whose possibility we know *a priori*. We do not understand it, but we know it as the condition of the moral law which we do know. (*Critique of Practical Reason*, pp. 3-4).

It is really difficult to find another place in Kant's works in which his understanding of the relation of the ideas of practical reason are

expressed so openly. We emphasize the word "openly," since the moral law, according to Kant's doctrine, prohibits speaking falsely, but permits a position of silence. Kant frequently had recourse to this, since his "religion within the limits of pure reason alone" was the object of official condemnation. Kant asserted in this way that the idea of freedom (in fact, simply freedom) should be thought of as preceding the ideas of God and immortality and as engendering these ideas.

Thus, on the one hand, there is the fact of freedom, whose existence is attested to by practical moral action, and on the other hand, theological ideas, which can be understood only as convictions of a moral consciousness that is free at its foundation. Only practical reason gives, Kant asserted, "through the concept of freedom, the ideas of God and immortality . . . objective reality and legitimacy and indeed subjective necessity (as a need of pure reason)" (*Critique of Practical Reason*, p. 4).

In order to avoid misunderstandings, one should point out immediately that the term, "objective reality," is applied by Kant not for the designation of reality independent of knowledge, but as a specific definition of the ideas of reason (as well as of the forms of knowledge in general), indicating the necessary universal significance possessed by them. Ideas of God and immortality are not deducible, according to Kant, from the material of knowledge and form, as it were, *secondary* postulates of practical reason. They can be explained only from practical reason's subjective need, as a result of its freedom, to realize the moral law. These ideas, consequently, are not the product of arbitrariness. Man creates the ideas of God and immortality not as he thinks fit, but in accordance with his by no means arbitrary needs. L. Feuerbach expressed this thought later with complete determinateness: man, realizing his powerlessness before the external world and searching for at least a ghost of support in his desperate struggle with the elements, creates the idea of the all-powerful. But Feuerbach was an atheist, whereas Kant remained religious "within the limits of pure reason." Nonetheless, his understanding of religion played a significant role in the history of modern atheism.

Thus, the Kantian concept of "thing in itself" stands opposed to the concept of noumenon, despite the fact that the thing in itself is treated as existing outside of space and time. Moreover, the thing in itself, strictly speaking, is not a thing in the usual sense of the word, since the latter, being spatially determined and sensually perceived, represents an appearance. The relation between these mutually ex-

clusive concepts of Kant's philosophy reveals that contradiction between materialism and idealism which the philosopher attempted to overcome. As a result, there is a certain, predominantly terminological, inexactness of demarcation, which provides the occasion for the bourgeois commentators on Kant to transform things in themselves into noumena. This confusion of concepts and the effacement of the fundamental demarcation within the limits of Kantian philosophy represent the negation of its materialist tendency.

The concept of thing in itself in the materialist sense of the word, which, as was shown above, was not alien to Kant, encompasses the whole of reality to the extent that it exists independently of the process of knowledge. The issue is not merely individual things that evoke sensations, but the unlimited multitude of objects which are not necessarily connected with the knowing subject. This constitutes a problem, naturally, not only for Kant. Kant stated the fact that objects that are independent of the knowing subject do not determine directly its theoretical notions in every case. The evolution of these notions is conditioned not simply by the object of knowledge, but by incomparably more complex interconnections of phenomena—natural and social, objective and subjective, physical and psychic.

It would be pretentious and nearsighted to blame Kant for not giving a logically noncontradictory definition of the thing in itself. In this case such a definition would be an escape from the problems that Kant tried to pose and to reveal in their full complexity. Any attempt to give a formal definition of the thing in itself is certainly unsound. A definition of the real, unlimited multitude of things is meaningful only insofar as it unites its numerous abstract, that is, inevitably one-sided definitions. But how can one define this objectively existing multitude, which to a significant (perhaps even predominant) degree does not yet constitute an object of knowledge?

Thus, the antinomy of the Kantian concept of thing in itself reflects the multifaceted content of the problem posed by Kant. Therefore, one should speak not only of the antinomy of the concept of thing in itself, but also of the contradictions of the process of knowledge itself, which Kant discovered to a certain extent. Moreover, the question must obviously involve the contradictions of objective reality itself. So, the opposition between appearance and essence, essence and phenomenon, generally is *presented* completely independently of knowledge. If in Kant the different meanings of the term, thing in itself, were not sufficiently demarcated, then this obviously is explained by the fact that the task of such demarcation was

first understood in his own philosophy. Realizing the real complexity of the problem, it is impossible not to arrive at the conclusion that the inconsistency usually noted in the Kantian doctrine of things in themselves, largely proves to be only the reverse side of the persistent search for an actual solution to the problem. An actual solution is incompatible with the simplification of the heart of the matter for the sake of attaining an illusory solution that satisfies superficial minds. Dialectical materialism, in opposition to the idealistic interpretation of Kantianism, comprehends and solves the problem posed by Kant in the plenitude of its historical development.*

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*Translated by Philip Moran.