

NIETZSCHE'S CRITIQUE OF THINGS-IN-THEMSELVES

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Amongst the many fascinating aspects of Nietzsche's criticism of traditional conceptions of truth and his critical analysis of knowledge, his attack upon the Kantian idea of "things-in-themselves" is both interesting and illuminating as an aperture that gives us access to his own thought. Although it is often said that the concern with epistemology that is found, in incomplete form, in his notebooks or *Nachlass* represents speculations in his "later" thinking, this is not correct. As early as 1866, Nietzsche was very much excited by the implications of 19th century science and its significance for the theory of knowledge. He was particularly impressed by the marriage of neo-Kantianism and a kind of burgeoning conventionalism in the natural sciences.¹ There is little doubt that Nietzsche's earliest reflections on the question of the origin, nature and limits of human knowledge were stimulated by F.A. Lange's *The History of Materialism*. It was in his careful study of this work that Nietzsche first encountered critical analyses of Kant's philosophy and especially of the concept of things-in-themselves. The relation between Kant and Nietzsche is central, I believe, to an understanding of his theory of knowledge or his critique of knowledge. For, even though Nietzsche spills quite a bit of ink lambasting Kant's account of human knowledge, his own thinking emerges out of the matrix of Kantian conceptions and analyses. Nietzsche's attitude towards Kant is ambivalent and charged with an antagonism that attests to the seriousness with which he approached Kant's philosophy.

In order to understand the background of Nietzsche's critical

¹ In a letter to his friend von Gersdorff (dated August, 1866) Nietzsche praises F.A. Lange's *Geschichte des Materialismus* and specifically mentions Lange's comments on "the true essence of things," as well as his criticism of "das Ding an sich." *Werke in Drei Bänden*, Munich, 1966, III, p. 970.

negation of the notion of things in themselves, a statement of the problem in Lange's terms would be useful. In a chapter on "Kant and Materialism" Lange emphasizes the Copernican revolution in Kant's thought and states his viewpoint in the following way:

the objects of experience are only *our* objects. . . the whole objective world is . . . not absolute objectivity, but only objectivity for man and any similarly organized beings, while behind the phenomenal world, the absolute nature of things, the 'things-in-themselves,' is veiled in impenetrable darkness.²

Lange goes out of his way to argue that Kant's notion of a phenomenal world receives confirmation from the "physiology of the sense-organs." He contends that just as our senses condition or determine the world for us, so, too, does our "intellectual organization" condition the "whole system" of phenomena that we can know. Throughout his discussion of Kant, Lange stresses the agnostic nature of his conclusions and specifically refers to the *Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics* in order to point to the phenomenal nature of scientific understanding. The physical sciences, Kant claims, will never discover the "internal constitution of things" or any ultimate ground of explanation that transcends our sensory experience. Scientific explanation must be based upon the objects of sense that "belong to experience" and are understood according to "the laws of experience."³ Whatever is known is shaped and formed by sensibility and understanding and any claims to 'truth' that seek to go beyond these capacities are either "regulative principles" of reason or speculations that cannot be justified as legitimate knowledge-claims. Lange quotes with approval the assertion that "All cognition of things based upon pure understanding or pure reason is nothing but appearance, and truth is in experience only."⁴ After discussing at length the question of the synthetic *a priori* nature of mathematical propositions, Lange turns his attention to a "dark point in the Kantian system" that arises because of the assumption that in every act of knowledge *a priori* elements cooperate in a process that conditions our experience. Lange assumes that this notion generates a dilemma: either the *a priori* elements of our thought are deduced from a valid *a priori* principle or they are

² F.A. Lange, *The History of Materialism*, trans. E.C. Thomas, London, 1925, ii, p. 156.

³ *Prolegomena zu jeder künftigen Metaphysik*, Riga, 1783, 8, p. 167. Cited in Lange, *op. cit.*, ii, pp. 162-163.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 204.

searched out in an empirical manner. The principle from which the *a priori* is deduced is not really produced and an empirical process can yield no necessary results. Lange charges that the method employed in order to "discover" the *a priori* or the origin of the *a priori* had to be none other than "the method of induction."⁵ The upshot of Lange's analysis of Kant's thought is that the "necessity" of *a priori* knowledge is shaped before experience by what is called "the physico-psychological organization of man." This "phenomenon" is assumed in order to avoid transcendental assumptions introduced to account for *a priori* knowledge and law-like experiences. Inventively, Lange offers his resolutions of problems in the *Kritik* in terms of physiological determinations of our experiences and psychic interpretations of our conceptions. Emphasizing the common, but unknown, root of sensibility and understanding, Lange claims that in the most rudimentary sensory processes there are "logical" connections that correspond to the activity of "conscious thought,"⁶ Without commenting on the validity or invalidity of Lange's psycho-physical co-opting of Kant's account of knowledge, it is quite clear that it is precisely this interpretation of Kant that finds its way, thinly disguised, into Nietzsche's speculations concerning the "origin" of the categories of the understanding.

Aside from his brief attempt to resolve internal problems in Kant's *Kritik*, Lange points to several questions that haunt the philosophy of Kant. He asks, "What is all the knowledge of experience if we only find the laws created by ourselves again in these things, which are no longer things at all, but only 'phenomena'?"⁷ In the course of his philosophical life Nietzsche will echo this refrain a number of times and will raise the question whether our (Kantian) construction of the world of phenomena is "knowledge" at all. At any rate, the probing of the notion of things in themselves concludes Lange's critical interpretation of Kant. He argues that the thing in itself can have no causal efficacy insofar as the concept of causality has no applicability to it.⁸ How, Lange asks, can things in themselves be represented since they are outside space and time and, in a strict sense, inconceivable? Why, in effect, should we concern ourselves with so-called things in themselves insofar as they are simply inconceivable? Finally, it is held that the claim that things in themselves exist cannot be proved by Kant in accordance

⁵ Lange, *op. cit.*, ii, p. 192.

⁶ *Ibid.*, ii, p. 196.

⁷ *Ibid.*, ii, p. 200.

⁸ *Ibid.*, ii, p. 193, n. 25.

with his principles because this would be a transcendental, negative, 'knowledge' of the properties of the 'thing in itself,' a mode of knowledge prohibited by his theory.⁹ Since the notion of things in themselves is a *Grenzbegriff* or a negative, limit-concept, it is refined away into a mere *Vorstellung* or "representation." The conceptual dissolution of the *Ding an sich* grants to phenomena a gain in reality insofar as "It embraces everything that we can call 'real.'"¹⁰ The world that is constituted by our cognitive and sensory "organization" is a realm of phenomenal appearances that is the only reality we can be said to *know*. Lange synthesizes phenomenalism and an agnosticism about the ultimate nature of things in a way that deeply impressed Nietzsche. For, the following conclusion is paraphrased in a letter written in 1866:

The true essence of things, the last cause of all phenomena, is . . . not only unknown to us, but even the idea of it is nothing more and nothing less than the last outcome of an antithesis determined by our organization, and of which we do not know whether, beyond our experience, it has any meaning at all.¹¹

This agnosticism concerning what may be imagined as transcending our phenomenal knowledge is emphasized by Lange in order to support his phenomenalism and by Kant himself in order to avoid materialism. That this is the case is clear when we find Kant maintaining that what things in themselves may be is neither known nor something that we need to know. For, all 'things' are presented to us as phenomena. What the "internal in matter" is is unknown except in terms of the "phenomena" disclosed by the further advance of the natural sciences. The thing in itself that "appears" as matter is "a mere chimera."¹² By proclaiming that the internal dynamics of matter are inaccessible to us, Kant seems to be concerned with blocking the possibility that our sensations and sensory experiences (that we "receive" in sensibility) might be said to be caused by internal material changes. By holding that the advances of the natural sciences (in regard to the "structure" of matter) are themselves determined by the constitutive, spontaneous activity

⁹ *Ibid.*, ii, p. 200-201.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, ii, pp. 217.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, ii, p. 218. "... das wahre Wesen der Dinge. . . ist uns nicht nur unbekannt, sondern es ist auch der Begriff desselben nicht mehr und nicht weniger als die letzte Ausgeburt eines von unsrer Organisation bedingten Gegensatzes, von dem wir nicht wissen, ob er ausserhalb unsrer Erfahrung irgendeine Bedeutung hat." *Werke in Drei Bänden*, II, p. 970.

¹² *Ibid.*, ii, p. 218. Lange quotes from the section in the *Critique* entitled *Amphibolie der Reflexionsbegriffe*.

of the mind (insofar as only "phenomena" determined by sensibility and understanding are disclosed), Kant has protected the priority of mind or the "transcendental unity of apperception." On the other hand, by tracing the origin of sensibility and categorical thought to our physiology and our psychic processes Lange embraces a form of materio-idealism. However, the important point, for our discussion, is that Lange offers a psychologistic account of Kant's theory of knowledge that certainly had considerable influence on Nietzsche's epistemic reflections. In this regard, it is certainly true that Nietzsche himself did want to be a phenomenalist.¹³ In addition, it is quite correct that Nietzsche intends to do away with the distinction between phenomena and things in themselves and that, in doing so, he is following "the extreme views of Lange."¹⁴

Armed with the background I've sketched, we are prepared to look at the way that Nietzsche deals with the thorny question of "things in themselves." Apparently Lange's influence did not outweigh that of Schopenhauer when *The Birth of Tragedy* was composed. For, Nietzsche refers there to an *Urwille*, a "primal will," that lies behind or beneath the phenomena encountered in the world. There is a mysterious "primal unity" that is manifested in the world and in our "empirical existence."¹⁵ Nietzsche mentions the need to distinguish between phenomena and things in themselves and makes numerous claims to have an intuitive grasp of a metaphysical or metempirical "reality." The irrational "Dionysian" ground of the world cannot be grasped conceptually since it is transfigured by the "Apollonian" power of mind and art. There is no doubt that Nietzsche does retain a residual Kantianism in *The Birth of Tragedy* that he emphasized the distinction between the phenomenal world and things-in-themselves. It is quite correct that:

in this earliest work he held, as Schopenhauer had, that there was a way of going beyond the Kantian agnosticism about the nature of the in-itself. He held that music, art generally, and some Dionysian states of intoxication gave us insight into the ultimate reality which expresses itself in phenomena; and that the ultimate reality was of the nature of will.¹⁶

However, it is not only Nietzsche's early "romanticism" that encourages him to speculate about the primordial "reality" that is

¹³ R.J. Hollingdale, *Nietzsche*, London, 1973, p. 138.

¹⁴ W.M. Salter, *Nietzsche the Thinker*, New York, 1917, p. 497, n. 8.

¹⁵ *Die Geburt der Tragödie*, 4.

¹⁶ J.T. Wilcox, *Truth and Value in Nietzsche*, Ann Arbor, 1974, p. 100.

manifested to us in the empirical world. For, it is Lange who gave thinkers such as Nietzsche *carte blanche* to create a poetic, imaginary portrait of the "unknowable." Lange viewed Kant's theory of knowledge as confirmed by the agnosticism of the sciences in the middle of the nineteenth century and insisted, with Kant and the consciously or unconsciously Kantian scientists, that knowledge must be restricted to phenomena. However, he believed that "No thought is so calculated to reconcile poesy and science as the thought that all our 'reality'... is only appearance."¹⁷ For, the *terra incognita* of ultimate mystery cries out for poetic creation of a "world of values." That is, "free poetry... may... make use of myth in order to lend words to the unutterable."¹⁸ If the 'reality' we can know is a system of appearances, then it is not "absolute reality". In conceptual thought, no matter how imaginative it may be, we are only able to create another speculative system of thought (such as the later thought of Schelling) that seeks to penetrate the ineffable and ends by claiming to 'know' things in themselves. No, what Lange calls "the standpoint of the ideal" can only be presented in poetic, mythical form, an artistic imagery that may stir the imagination of men through the creation of "conscious illusions." In order to avoid "spiritual impoverishment," there is a need for new "aesthetic conceptions" that would bring "the world of existence into connexion with the world of values."¹⁹ Even in *The Birth of Tragedy* Nietzsche had already adopted Lange's "standpoint of the ideal" insofar as he offers a mythopoetic interpretation of the "primal will" that acts through the world. It is perhaps for this reason that he does not exclude his own tragic vision of life from classification as a "conscious illusion." Nietzsche is not inconsistent, then, when he refers to "the Socratic love of knowledge," "art's seductive veil of beauty" and the metaphysical assumption that "beneath the whirl of phenomena eternal life flows indestructibly" as illusions.²⁰

In both *The Birth of Tragedy* and his unpublished essay, "On Truth and Lying in an Extra-Moral Sense," Nietzsche retains and alludes to the distinction between phenomena and things in themselves. Although quite aware of Lange's criticisms of the idea of things in themselves and the paradoxes this idea generates, Nietzsche

¹⁷ F.A. Lange, *op. cit.*, ii, p. 234.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, iii, p. 343.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ *Die Geburt der Tragödie*, 18. Cf. J.T. Wilcox, *Truth and Value in Nietzsche*, p. 109.

argues, in the latter essay, that language, by its very nature, cannot "picture" things in themselves. Language embodies images that are metaphorical. Words are construed as "metaphors" representing images. Concepts are understood as metaphors that are remote from our immediate experience and its uniqueness. On the assumption that language rests upon the metaphorical translation of immediate experiences into other media, then language is unable to give us access to the way things are in themselves. The metaphorical nature of words and concepts precludes a correspondence between judgments and actuality as it is in itself.²¹ Nietzsche would have disagreed with the Wittgenstein of the *Tractatus* that "language pictures the world." Neither language nor conceptualization enable us to discover the *Wesen der Dinge*. The 'truth' that language tries to express is comprised of metaphors and "anthropomorphisms." An assumption that runs through "On Truth and Lying in an Extra-Moral Sense" is that there is a true nature of things that is posited and that we *know* that linguistic-conceptual representations of it are "false." Furthermore, there is the suggestion that immediate experience gives us acquaintance with "truths" that are somehow "falsified" by transformation into linguistic-conceptual "signs." Later, Nietzsche will hold that our sensory modalities simplify, arrange, and select out of a chaos of impressions what concerns us, is of interest to us or, simply, the phenomena which our senses are capable of responding to in experience. Nietzsche seems to follow Lange in this early essay insofar as he is aware of the paradox of claiming to know that there are "things in themselves" and yet, at the same time, sees that Kant's thought points to a transphenomenal realm unconditioned by the *a priori* intuitions of space and time, sensibility and the categories of the understanding.

Ironically, neither Lange nor Nietzsche seem to have known that Kant continued to wrestle with his notion of *Ding an sich* in his *Opus postumum*, reaching conclusions that, in some respects, anticipate Nietzsche's fictionalist interpretation of the idea. In his posthumously published works Kant regards the notion of things in themselves as an "*ens rationis*." It is not an objective state of affairs, but a subjectively determined "thought-entity" or an indefinite concept. What "corresponds to the Things-in-themselves is not a separable counterpart. . . ." of phenomena for us. Furthermore, the distinction between objects and the thing in itself is "only a scientific (ideal) distinction, for the subject."²² There is no doubt that Kant

²¹ *Werke*, ed. by G. Colli and M. Montinari, Berlin, 1967f., III, 2, p. 373.

²² R. Reicke, ed., *Opus postumum*, in *Altpreussische Monatschrift*,

virtually characterizes the conception of things in themselves as a "fiction," a fictional posit. If Vaihinger is right in maintaining that Kant came to recognize that the *Ding an sich* was a fiction and regarded the separation of phenomenal appearances from things in themselves as "fictive,"²³ then it would seem that Nietzsche's similar views were an ironic duplication of Kant's later reflections on his most thorny conception. Or, perhaps, a theory of fictions may be said to have been obscurely present in Kant's theory of knowledge as originally presented.

The repudiation of metaphysics in *Human, All-Too-Human* is often seen as a renunciation on Nietzsche's part of romanticism and the misguided attempt to acquire transcendent knowledge of things in themselves. The implied scepticism about "things in themselves" during his so-called positivistic stage of thought is attributed to the fact that Nietzsche has begun "to sober up."²⁴ Even though this may seem to be the case, we already know that Nietzsche was deeply impressed by Lange's agnostic conclusions in his interpretation of the philosophical implications of nineteenth century 'philosophy of science,' as well as by the "standpoint of the ideal." *Human, All-Too-Human* does not signify a "new" epistemological viewpoint, but, rather, Nietzsche's adaptation and revision of the scientific picture of the world presented by Lange. Instead of seeking 'Truth,' Nietzsche now advises, we should be satisfied with "the little unpretentious truths" that have been discovered by scientific methods.²⁵ Having studied the sciences of his day, he is convinced that "strict method" is absolutely important for a precise, if restricted, understanding of the world and ourselves. Having drunk at the well of Lange's neo-Kantian phenomenalism, he has come to see that "There are many kinds of eyes. Even the Sphinx has eyes—and consequently there are many kinds of 'truths,' and consequently there is no Truth."²⁶ This respect for "the severest methods of knowledge" entails a rejection of aesthetically tinged metaphysics or metaphysical hypotheses in the name of a hard-headed scientific

(1881-1884), XIX, pp. 573, 578, 567, 585. Cited in H. Vaihinger, *The Philosophy of 'As-If'*, trans. C.K. Ogden, London, 1924, pp. 313-315.

²³ Vaihinger, *op. cit.*, p. 313. Another coincidence in the relation between Kant and Nietzsche is pointed out by Vaihinger. He notes that in two of the suggested titles for his last writings Kant uses the name of Zarathustra. He also adds that these projected works came to light in 1884 at the time that Nietzsche was working on *Thus Spake Zarathustra*. *Ibid.*, n. 1.

²⁴ Wilcox, *op. cit.* p. 110.

²⁵ *Menschliches, Allzumenschliches*, 3.

²⁶ *Werke in Drei Bänden*, III, p. 844.

attention to detail that puts all attempts to transcend the empirical world "on ice." The belief that our language enables us to express a knowledge of things in themselves is, as we mentioned previously, an illusion. The "enigmatical Thing-in-itself" eludes linguistic determination because of the metaphorical nature of language. Neither through language, nor conceptualization nor sensory experience do we gain access to "original essentials" "the real world," "the essence of things." Throughout his writings Nietzsche repeatedly returns to this central conception of things in themselves, attacking it most forcefully in his notes or *Nachlass*.

Nietzsche's antagonism to the assumption of a "noumenal self" (a kind of self-in-itself or "transcendental consciousness") and a noumenal thing-in-itself is based upon his belief that such notions were introduced in Kant's theory of knowledge as a way of allowing for religious faith (belief in that which transcends the limits of reason) and morality or free moral agency. Certainly, he must have been familiar with Kant's admission that he had attacked reason "in order to make room for faith." And he certainly saw that if Kant were not allowed the postulation of a noumenal self, then he could not develop a moral philosophy. Nietzsche views Kant's epistemology as an inconsistent phenomenalism that is distorted by his incorporation of transphenomenal things in themselves (both at the subjective pole and the objective pole). Furthermore, Nietzsche sees the Kantian assumption of a realm of things in themselves as a reinforcement of the Platonic-Christian belief in a transcendental "true world" that implies the denigration of this world as a system of appearances. He goes so far as to contend that the negation of the previously believed idea that there is a realm of the in-itself is a contributing factor in the emergence of "radical nihilism." This is the reaction to the "untenability" of our existence when we realize "that we lack the least right to posit a beyond or an in-itself" that might be construed as "divine" or as incarnate morality.²⁷ What Nietzsche seems to mean in this fragment of what may be called his 'phenomenology' of European nihilism is that Kant perpetuated the 'false' belief in a transcendental world (thereby undermining the value of this world of time and becoming) and fostered a morality rooted in the 'fallacious' notion of a noumenal self that is not *in the world*. Once these assumptions are put in question, man begins to feel that *this* world has lost its value or the foundation of its value. Hence, the emergence of nihilism. Again, the hypothesis of things in

²⁷ *The Will to Power*, trans. W. Kaufmann and R.J. Hollingdale, New York, 1967, p. 9.

themselves feeds the metaphysician who seeks true reality or the thing in itself and denigrates this world as merely apparent. The outcome of this tendency is that "our apparent world, being so plainly *not* the expression of this ideal, cannot be 'true.'"²⁸ Again and again, Kant's basic conceptions are criticized because of their indirect effect upon the devaluation of this world. In effect, Kant is attacked because he did not "remain faithful to the earth," because his very phenomenalistic restriction of knowledge encouraged the *belief* in transphenomenal "realities." We shall see whether Nietzsche himself can entirely avoid the haunting, residual presence of a "reality-in-itself" in his own experimental speculations.

The most general criticism of Kant's analysis of human knowledge pertains to the project as a whole. Somewhat unfairly, Nietzsche mocks the notion of a "knowledge of knowledge." The original error that Kant makes is his presupposition of the "fact" of knowledge and his assumption that he is already acquainted with 'knowledge.' If we do not already understand what knowledge is, how can we answer the question whether there is knowledge? What is operative, *ab initio*, is that "Kant *believes* in the fact of knowledge."²⁹ Even though this brief criticism has some validity, it is not as damaging as Nietzsche assumes insofar as *any* philosophical argument must begin with undemonstrated presuppositions and any account of knowledge (including Nietzsche's version) must start with the provisional belief that there is knowledge. We may sympathize with Nietzsche's irritation in the sense that Kant does, in point of fact, begin his exploration of the nature and limits of human knowledge with a questionable optimism. Thus, he remarks that "I am concerned with nothing except reason itself and its pure thinking; and to gain complete knowledge of these, there is no need to go far afield, since I come upon them in my own self."³⁰ Again, Nietzsche's point is well taken especially when we see that Kant assumes that his analysis of knowledge is not seen as hypothetical or provisional, but as necessary and *a priori*. After saying that he wants to avoid "hypothesis," he contends that

Any knowledge that professes to hold *a priori* makes a claim to be regarded as absolutely necessary. This applies *a fortiori* to any *determination* of all pure *a priori* knowledge, since such determination has to serve as the measure and, therefore, as the example of all apodictic, philosophical certainty.³¹

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 15.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 286-287.

³⁰ I. Kant, *Kritik der reinen Vernunft*, Hamburg, 1956, p. 9.

³¹ *Ibid.*

This confidence is understood by Nietzsche to be based upon belief insofar as judgments are construed as expressions of the "belief" that such and such is the case. Quickly rushing to defend his own views, Nietzsche says that the belief in judgments (or the belief in their truth) is a psychological question. The presuppositions of logic that inform meaningful judgment are not, for Nietzsche, "forms of knowledge." Rather, they are "regulative articles of belief" that are derived from psychic fictions or from the selective simplifications operative in the physiology of sensory experience. Warming to his subject, Nietzsche argues that if judgments are expressions of "belief," they also assume "identical cases." But the assumption that "identical cases exist" is itself traceable to the putative sameness of sensations. The primitive awareness of similar, familiar sensations occurs within sensation itself. Therefore, Nietzsche concludes, even before judgment occurs "the process of assimilation must already have taken place . . . there is an intellectual activity that does not enter consciousness."³² What Nietzsche seems to be saying is that the *a priori* does not have its origin in pure reason, but is rooted in sensory experience. This unconscious *a priori* is then preserved in language and eventually comes to be seen as a structure of the mind. In order for Nietzsche's criticisms of Kant (and, by implication, rationalism in general) to be effective, he must assume to *know* a great deal about the *origin* of knowledge. Turning his own criticism back upon him, we may say that in order to undermine traditional conceptions of knowledge, Nietzsche must assume a positive "knowledge" about the essential origin of knowledge.

As we have seen, Nietzsche attacks the concept of things in themselves not as purely analytical exercise, but because he believes that such a conception has done damage to our appreciation of the world of phenomenal "becoming." He maintains, with some justification, that Kant postulated the existence of things of which we know nothing precisely because there was an advantage in preserving the realm of the unknowable. He attributes to Kant "moral-metaphysical" motives.³³ There is nothing esoteric in this interpretation of Kant since he makes quite clear that he posits things in themselves at least in part in order to preserve the assumption of human freedom. In a long, strained argument Kant maintains that even though we cannot know things in themselves, we can "think" them. If we could not make this distinction between objects as they appear to us and as they are in themselves, then we

³² *The Will to Power*, p. 289.

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 307.

could not say of the "soul" that it is free and, at the same time, subject to causality. Even though we cannot know it, we can "think" freedom. If we could not assume that the "will is free," then the ends of morality would be negated because the "soul" would be subject to the "mechanism of nature."³⁴ What is peculiar here (amongst other things) is that the "free soul" is construed as a "thing" in itself. But what is this "thing" that is not subject to the *a priori* intuitions of space and time and not constituted as a "substance" or a "cause" of ostensibly free action?

Aside from his comments on the cultural-intellectual effects of the idea of things in themselves, Nietzsche offers a number of arguments against this conception that are quite powerful. In the first place, there cannot be a "thing" in itself simply because (a) there are no "things" and (b) even if we assumed a "thing" apart from our constitution of it, it would be a mysterious something that is not a "substance" (though the very concept of a thing incorporates the notion of substance), not causally efficacious and exists outside space and time! It is said that "the psychological derivation of the belief in things forbids us to speak of 'things-in-themselves.'"³⁵ The assumption that we can "think" of a thing in itself is denied. For, this relationless something cannot be referred to without employing categories of reason or incorporating spatial or temporal terms. A thing that exists in itself is unintelligible or contradictory. If the idea of a "thing" is a psychistic fiction, then there are neither things nor things in themselves. Since Nietzsche labors over this first criticism of Kant, we should discuss his analysis of the origin of the concept of "thing."

Historically, the concept of thing became entrenched in philosophical language in the thought of Descartes. The mind (as well as material substances) is conceived of as a *res* or a "thing." Berkeley took a step towards the fictionalism of Nietzsche and Vaihinger when he contended that a "thing" is a synthesis or conglomeration of sense-ideas. Kant seems to have ignored suggestions that a "thing" is an experiential construct insofar as his conception of "objects" of our experience suggests that they are "things" that we know. And the "thing" as it is in itself is presumed to be unknowable, but thinkable. We search the *Kritik* in vain for a definition of "thing," even though the use of the expression "thing in itself" presupposes an understanding of what a thing is. The diachronic development of

³⁴ Kant, *op. cit.*, pp. 27-78.

³⁵ *The Will to Power*, p. 263.

the word "thing" is curious when we consider that the "thing-ontology" implanted in Western thought by Descartes (as Heidegger claimed in *Being and Time*) and, in a way, perpetuated by Kant is quite removed from the original meaning of the word. In Old and Middle English, as well as Dutch, *ding* meant an assembly or the name given to a collection of individuals at a meeting. The Icelandic word "thing" also had precisely the same meaning. And the German word *Ding* originally referred to a meeting or an assembly. Presumably, the transference of this word to philosophical discourse served to designate a collection or "assembly" of qualities or properties. The conception of a "thing" as an objective, enduring entity in philosophical language seems to have involved the reification of a word that did not originally refer to something over and above, or independent of, a "collection" or "assembly" of individuals, properties or qualities. In this sense, I believe that Nietzsche is quite correct in holding that the belief in a "thing" as an isolated, independent, substantial object is a fictional idea or a "regulative fiction."

Nietzsche's argument for the derivation of the idea of "thing" is basically the following: the idea of a unitary, identical thing or object is modeled upon an equally fictional notion of a "subject" or an "ego" that is an atomic, unitary being. We transpose the idea of a subject as a unified "thing" into the external world and assume the causal effectiveness of such "things." If, Nietzsche argues, we can get rid of the fictional belief in the "effective subject," then we also remove the conception of things acting upon one another in cause and effect relations. Finally, of course, the paradoxical notion of "things in themselves" would be eliminated because we have denied the existence of analogous "subjects-in-themselves." If we assume that the independent, unitary subject is a fiction, so, too, is the objective thing, as well as the purely fictional "thing" in itself. This, in turn, would enable us to negate the deleterious notion of a "distinction" between appearances and "things in themselves." Then, the implicit denigration of the phenomena we experience and conceive of as "appearance" will disappear. We will come to see that the so-called "apparent world" is the "true world."³⁶ Another way of expressing this is to say, as Merleau-Ponty does, that *le monde pour nous*, "the world for us", is the only world we can 'know' or experience. Again, we shall see whether Nietzsche can consistently maintain such a position.

The next argument that Nietzsche mounts against the Kantian

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 298.

view is an abbreviated, but insightful, one. Developing an analogy between "facts in themselves" and things in themselves, Nietzsche avers that, against the nineteenth century positivists, there are no pure facts. Rather, there are only "interpretations" of phenomena already constituted by the understanding and our selective sensibility. We cannot discover any "fact-in-itself" because we cannot refer to such hypothetical facts apart from our "subjective" constitution or interpretation of them.³⁷ In this regard, Nietzsche is in agreement with Karl Popper (in *The Logic of Scientific Discovery*) that there are no pure, uninterpreted 'facts.' The supposition of a thing in itself is just as unjustified as the notion of a sense or meaning in itself. There can be no facts in themselves because we must project a sense or meaning into phenomena before we designate them as "facts." The imposition of meaning on experienced phenomena takes place from a particular perspective. Before Husserl, Nietzsche emphasized the meaning-giving activity of the mind in the recognition of, and selection of, facts. Now, if there are no given facts, then, *a fortiori*, there are no "given" (or hidden) things or things in themselves.³⁸ We may, for purposes of simplification and communication, speak of a "thing," but this must be understood as construing a phenomenon as something. Describing experienced phenomena as "things" is a meaning-giving, intentional, interpretive process that invents such a fictional notion solely for the sake of the instrumental value of doing so. The belief that things have a constitution *in themselves* is false. Nietzsche argues that the belief that things have a constitution in themselves apart from "interpretation and subjectivity" is absurd. For, this would "presuppose that interpretation and subjectivity are not essential, that a thing freed from all relationships would still be a thing."³⁹ In a similar vein it is claimed that the "distinction between the thing-in-itself and the thing-for-us is based upon the older, naive form of perception" that assumed energy in things. But, it is now seen that "force" is projected into things and they are construed as substances that "affect" a subject. Following Hume and going beyond him, Nietzsche remarks that this projected equation of "thing" and "substance" does not correspond to any essential feature of phenomena, but, rather, it is an idea that is preserved in our "language."⁴⁰ Grammar and the sedimentation of belief gave rise to

37 *Ibid.*, p. 267.

38 *Ibid.*, p. 301.

39 *Ibid.*, p. 303.

40 *Ibid.*

the idea of substance, an idea that was reinforced by our fallacious understanding of ourselves as substantial "subjects." The concepts of substance and thing are regulative fictions that are retained in language and ultimately derived from an analogy to an equally fictional positing of a "subject." Even though such notions have a proper use in our language and are pragmatically valuable, they refer to nothing in the world and represent no existing entities. Ironically, this conclusion is really only a hyperbolic form of Kantianism. For, Kant had said that our 'knowledge' is restricted to phenomena that are conditioned or constituted by our particular mode of sensibility, the *a priori* intuitions of space and time, and our categorical understanding. Taking a cue from Lange, Nietzsche more or less accepts the view that the world is the "product of our organization," is determined by our selective perceptual functions and capacities and our *psyche*. Despite the fact that Nietzsche repeatedly emphasizes the predominant role of the senses in experience, the impact of our physiology on our experience, and the reality of the body, the Kantian and Langean aspects of his thought tend to lead him, occasionally, into a form of idealism. If the "world" we know is conditioned and constituted by our sensory-cognitive "organization," if phenomena are interpreted by means of "psychistic fictions," then the "world" is our idea or representation. If we stop Nietzsche at this point, we see that he has denied any access to a transphenomenal "reality," has denied, in effect, that there is such a "reality." The world structured by our sensory-cognitive nature is a world for us, the only "reality" we can know, an elaborate fabrication built with the bricks of Kantian categories of the understanding that are described as "fictions" or "inventions." What is interesting is that Nietzsche still thinks within the framework of Kantian categories despite the theoretical obliteration of the concept of "things in themselves." For, the categories of reason are said to be pragmatically useful, useful fictions, that may be *necessary* for the preservation of the species.⁴¹ Implicitly agreeing with Lange that Kant did not succeed in giving a plausible account of the "origin" of *a priori* categories, Nietzsche offers his own version of their origin. His most succinct claim is that "All our categories of reason are of sensual origin: derived from the empirical world."⁴² What he means

41 *Ibid.*, pp. 277, 278, 313, 314. At one point, *a priori* 'truths' are characterized as "provisional assumptions." And, in the manner of Hume, the concept of causality is seen as a "habit of belief" that we must accept if we would not perish. Of course, Nietzsche adds that such pragmatically useful *a priori* notions are not 'true' in any strict sense. *Ibid.*, p. 273.

42 *Ibid.*, p. 270.

by the "empirical world" is our sensory experience and the psychic accretions that develop in relation to such experience.

In his own way, it could be said that Nietzsche has given us his own "deduction" of the categories of the understanding, an anthropomorphic and pragmatic one. Before Sartre, he averred that "the world is human." In addition, he seeks to explain *why* the Kantian categories have emerged as dominant ways of organizing our experience of the world. The fictional, fabricated "world he refers to so often is the world according to Kant minus "things in themselves." For, "the world with which we are concerned is false, i.e., is not a fact but a fable and approximation on the basis of a meager sum of observations."⁴³ But it is, of course, much more than this: it is a "world" comprised of limited, selective "observations" and subsumed under the Kantian ("fictional") categories of understanding. Our "knowledge" of such a world extends only up to the point at which it is useful for the preservation and continuation of the species, as well as for our "mastery" of it. In a sense, Nietzsche accepts the Kantian restriction of our knowledge to phenomena or 'objects' that are constituted by ourselves, but denies that it is "pure" and gives it his own alternative interpretation. Even the inspiration for the conception of central categories or principles as "fictions" was suggested to Nietzsche by his reading of Kant. For, he once said that "when Kant says: 'reason does not derive its laws from nature but prescribes them to nature,' this is, in regard to the concept of nature, completely true."⁴⁴ Furthermore, the theory of the regulative, hypothetical and fictive nature of *all* philosophical categories was clearly derived from Nietzsche's sceptical interpretation of Kant's regulative principles of reason or his inchoate philosophy of "as-if." The following passage sums up Nietzsche's position quite well and suggests that what he did in his critique of "knowledge" was to turn the screw of Kant's thought a few notches further. It has been said that

The forms of our thought-process... do not reflect in any way the reality of things, but only serve to co-ordinate the chaotic elements of our experience. Far from reproducing the conditions of reality, they tend rather to falsify the content of our experience. *The categories of the understanding are nothing but the humanisation of our experience...* They... are not caused or motivated by psychophysical shortcomings, by the weakness of our organs of sense, of our memory, of our language. Imagination is the real origin of the categories. Having thus been produced, they become fixed by selection

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 330.

⁴⁴ *Werke*, Leipzig, 1901, II, p. 36f.

and... become universally valid, and in this sense, in their relation to every individual experience, they become *a priori*. As conditions of the maintenance of life they are also conditions of all 'knowledge.' They form a series of acquired errors, suitable to the persistence of species; the world which they postulate is not [reality]; however, once one knows the history of the origin of the categories, there is no sense in supposing them to possess any validity as expressions of reality.⁴⁵

Except for the slip of the pen that first suggests that the categories are *not* derived from experience, and apart from the need to amplify the claim that the "imagination" is the origin of the categories, this is a fair statement of Nietzsche's assertions. However, at the same time, it highlights a residual problem in Nietzsche's radical transformation of Kant's theory of knowledge. That is, the lingering assumption that runs through Nietzsche's notes in the *Nachlass* that there is a transphenomenal "reality" that is ostensibly "falsified" by our constitution of the world in accordance with Kantian "fictions" such as 'unity,' 'cause,' 'substance,' 'accident,' 'thing,' and 'object.' Even though Nietzsche holds that "we have no categories" by which we can distinguish a "world-in-itself" from a "world of appearance,"⁴⁶ there is a sense in which he does precisely this. If we approach Nietzsche's fragmentary theory of knowledge from the point of our constructive, creative, inventive, imaginative structuring of a "world" for us, even if we grant the fictive nature of our basic concepts, we cannot, in a strict sense, affirm that this constituted "world" is a *falsification* of a presumed "reality." If we hold Nietzsche to the phenomenalism he seems at times to espouse, then the world interpreted from our perspective, described in terms of categories of reason, shaped by the limited range of our senses, suffused with beliefs derived from our own psychology (or the psychological assumptions of previous men), is the "humanized world," the only

⁴⁵ Rudolf Eisler, *Nietzsches Erkenntnistheorie und Metaphysik*, Leipzig, 1902, p. 21. Cp. Martin Heidegger, *Nietzsche*, Pfullingen, 1961, II, p. 127: [Nietzsche's philosophy is an] "anthropomorphy—the shaping and viewing of the world in accordance with man's image."

⁴⁶ *The Will to Power*, p. 306. Cp. The very opposite opinion in regard to the 'truth' of *a priori* notions: 'As if the preservation of man were a proof of truth.' *Ibid.*, p. 273. Since Nietzsche asserts that 'truth' is an expression of our will to power and its "criterion" is the "enhancement of the feeling of power," that it is *created* or willed and not discovered, and since his account of knowledge ultimately reduces 'truth' to truth for us (accepting something as if it were 'true'), then survival in an "interpreted" world might very well be a relevant factor in an argument for the "proof" of such a belief that is assumed to be 'true.' If we follow Nietzsche's arguments about truth to their ultimate endpoint, we see that there could be no "proof" of a 'truth' or of the 'truth' of any *a priori* notion.

world we can be said to *know*. If, as Nietzsche seems to say, appearance is reality (for us), then he cannot contrast the world organized, simplified, schematized and shaped by our sensory-cognitive "organization" with "reality-in-itself" without falling into the Kantian trap he so gleefully exposes. Even though there are some isolated passages in which Nietzsche seems to accept the phenomenalistic restriction of knowledge and even suggests that a world that is true for us is, in a sense, a 'true' world, these are not typical. Thus, as a case in point, it is contended that "appearance" belongs to reality, is, in fact, a form of its being. A "calculable world of identical cases" is created through appearance. "Appearance," then, "is an arranged and simplified world, at which our practical instincts have been at work; it is perfectly true for us; that is to say, we live, we are able to live in it; proof of its truth for us—."⁴⁶

Typically, it is asserted that knowledge, especially of the Kantian variety, entails "falsification." Our intellect functions with conscious symbols, metaphors, images and rhetorical figures. Our abstract ideas are simplifications that are "coarse metaphors."⁴⁷ He never really retreats from variations on this theme and notes that "Partial permanency, relative bodies, identical events, similar events —with these we falsify the true state of affairs, but it would be impossible to have knowledge of anything without having falsified it in this way."⁴⁸ Against Parmenides' view that we cannot think what is not, Nietzsche opposes his "extreme" belief that "what can be thought of must certainly be a fiction."⁴⁹ If we hold Nietzsche to such assertions, the outcome is that our senses, our conceptual schema, our very way of experiencing occurrences are such that we simplify, organize, schematize and classify events experienced. The "world" we experience and conceive of is, then, an apparent world for us and not an absolute, independent "reality." Again, if Nietzsche stuck with this radical phenomenalism, he would be quite consistent. But he very often claims that aside from this elaborate system of falsification or fabrication, there is a 'true' state of affairs that presumably transcends the text of our sensibility and understanding. Unfortunately, this assumption only reproduces a slight variation on Kant's notion of things in themselves. For, Nietzsche, like Kant, presupposes that we have some cognitive access to a realm that is beyond our experience. True, he avoids a duplication of Kant's position by denying that there is a "world" in itself, a *thing* in itself or *things* in themselves. This technical point, however, does not

really help his case, For, he has effectively prohibited any claim to *know* what a transphenomenal realm of existence would be like. He would have been consistent with his own analyses of the nature of knowledge if he had assumed that the world for us is a creative invention that, precisely because it is "constituted" by our complex organization, cannot be 'real' or 'true' in any absolute sense. What he should have done then, was to stop here. He should have retained an *agnosticism* about this presumed transphenomenal realm. Since we can never have a cognitive grasp of it, Nietzsche should have taken a Wittgensteinian stance and held that "whereof one cannot speak, one must be silent." Unfortunately, he does not do so.

Although in *Human, All-Too-Human* it had been admitted that a "metaphysical world" is logically possible, but that "nothing could be said of it,"⁵⁰ Nietzsche later waged linguistic warfare against the idea of "another" world "beyond" this one. In another sense, though, he does not avoid the Kantian problem of assuming a "state of affairs" that is not directly accessible to us. It is not the case that Nietzsche is concerned *only* with rejecting knowledge or truth about the Kantian thing in itself or about any transcendent realm.⁵¹ The claim that he wants to preserve "empirical knowledge" is correct, in a sense, but misleading. For, the empirical world disclosed in scientific inquiry is equally a simplification, a constitutive "world," a "falsification" of actuality. Having attacked the Kantian version of "knowledge" by using tools left lying about by Kant himself, Nietzsche applies the same kind of analysis to scientific conceptions as he did to the categories elucidated by Kant. For, the notion of "laws of nature" is a remnant of mythological thinking: "It is our laws and our conformity to laws that we read into the world of phenomena." The presuppositions of mechanics are ideal inventions, are "fictions" that serve to make the natural order intelligible to us.⁵² "Our assumption that there are bodies, surfaces, lines, is simply a consequence of our assumption that there are substances and things and permanency. Just as certainly as our concepts are inventions, so certainly are the constructs of mathematics inventions."⁵³ The sciences operate with "regulative hypotheses," "regulative principles of method," phenomenalistic entities and provisional assumptions. The "ideal, regulative method" is as much based upon "regulative fictions" as is our philosophical (i.e., Kantian) organization of

⁵⁰ *Menschliches, Allzumenschliches*, 9.

⁵¹ Wilcox, *op. cit.*, p. 124.

⁵² *Werke*, XII, pp. 30, 42.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, XII, p. 30.

⁴⁷ *Werke*, Leipzig, 1901, I, p. 171.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, XII, p. 24.

⁴⁹ *The Will to Power*, p. 291.

the "world." Anthropomorphism haunts the sciences as much as it pervades our philosophical principles and conceptions. Science, too, gives us an "apparent world." We find nothing in the external world, Nietzsche maintains, except what we have projected there; and we call this imagined, conceptualized 'knowledge' *science*. It is not the case, then, that scientific principles or concepts yield access to the "true" world. To be sure, Nietzsche is sympathetic to the scientific study of the world and certainly ranks it as a superior kind of knowledge than metaphysical speculation or Kant's "metaphysics of experience." But, in the final analysis, he sees the basic assumptions of the sciences as contributing to a "humanization of nature" that is analogous to the "humanization" of experience in philosophical concept-formation.

Having anticipated Vaihinger's theory of conceptual fictions, as well as Poincaré's conventionalist interpretation of scientific knowledge, Nietzsche could have remained sheltered in a radical phenomenalism. But he is tempted to refer to "reality" and specifically as a temporal process of becoming. His commitment to the belief that actuality is a perpetual flux, an endless becoming in which there is no "being" whatsoever began first with his sympathy with Heraclitus' conception of process and was later reinforced by F.A. Lange and a central aspect of Buddhist thought (i.e., the doctrine of the "wheel of birth and death" that forever turns and the radical "impermanence" (*anicca*) of actuality). Inspired by Lange's assertion that we encounter no "fixed and independent" reality, but only a stream of "relations," he assumed a *becoming* which we seek to grasp with the nets of our senses and thought. But, the "synthetic, creative factor of our knowledge" that pervades even our "sense-impressions" precludes an understanding of becoming *as* becoming.⁵⁴ Throughout his *Nachlass* Nietzsche repeatedly assumes a kind of knowledge of "becoming," an awareness of a "reality" that surpasses our understanding. It is our "will to power" in our knowing activity that imposes a (fallacious) "being" on becoming. Assuming a "world of becoming" as actuality, "knowledge in itself" is impossible.⁵⁵ Our interpretation of the world is a projection of "meaning" into a reality that "is in flux, incomprehensible, elusive."⁵⁶ The "reality" we describe in terms of categorical schema, in terms of our limited sensory experience, is a "simplification for practical ends." It is not the "world of becoming." In one of his strongest statements Nietzsche insists that:

54 F.A. Lange, *op. cit.*, iii, p. 336.

55 *The Will to Power*, p. 330.

56 *Ibid.*, p. 327.

The character of the world is in a state of becoming as incapable of formulation. . . . Knowledge and becoming exclude one another. Consequently, "knowledge" must be something else: there must first of all be a will to make knowable.⁵⁷

Knowing is this structuring, constituting creative synthesis (that begins primitively in our senses) that imposes "being" on a presumed fluctuating reality. However, Nietzsche is making knowledge claims about "becoming" and its independent reality. In terms of his own critique of knowledge or his critical reformation of knowledge, he cannot do so. In the first place, he is assuming a transphenomenal temporal sequence of occurrences that is presumably unaffected by our senses, our *psyche*, our conceptual fictions. Furthermore, it is held that the world of becoming is a "world of relationships." In addition, dynamic "motion" is attributed to the flux of becoming. However, Nietzsche insists that "A world in a state of becoming could not, in a strict sense, be 'comprehended' or 'known.'"⁵⁸ But surely he is claiming to know that there is a world of becoming, that it is temporal, characterized by motion and a dynamic system of relations. What he seems to be reaching for is a process theory of reality that would characterize "entities" as "processes."⁵⁹ This is all well and good except for the fact his own critique of knowledge, as well as his conception of 'knowledge,' prohibits him from referring to, or describing, such an independent "reality." In accordance with Nietzsche's restrictions, we not only cannot conceive of a "world of becoming," but we cannot speak about it either. For, "Linguistic means of expression are useless for expressing "becoming;" it accords with our inevitable need to preserve ourselves to posit a crude world of stability."⁶⁰ If neither conceptual knowledge nor language enable us to grasp becoming, then how can Nietzsche 'know' that there is a world of becoming and how can he also claim to know some of its features? Even though Nietzsche has exposed what he believes to be the fictional nature of Kantian categories such as 'unity,' 'substance' and 'causality,' he seems to employ, in an illicit manner, Kant's category of "community" or the *reciprocity* between active and passive entities or processes. But, according to his own analyses, this must be a "falsification" of the real, a synthetic notion that is projected upon the world or our experience of it. Even if we grant to Nietzsche that he conceives of the relations between processes (or

57 *Ibid.*, p. 280.

58 *Ibid.*, p. 281.

59 *Ibid.*, p. 346.

60 *Ibid.*, p. 330.

complexes of "forces") as *dialectical* rather than causal, he is still using a form of the category of "reciprocity" that must be subjected to the same kind of criticisms that he brought to bear on the other Kantian categories.

The Kantian distinction between a world ordered by our sensibility and understanding and a transphenomenal realm that is the world in itself apart from our interpretation or a "reality-in-itself" that is manifested to us as a system of appearances returns to haunt Nietzsche. Given the obvious truth-claims he makes about the world of becoming, he, too, postulates a 'reality' that is paradoxically unknowable and, in some sense, "known." What might be called "becoming in itself" in Nietzsche's thought corresponds to Kant's conception of "things in themselves" and generates the same kind of paradoxes. Of course, the postulation of a metaphysical principle of explanation—"the will to power"—is, *a fortiori*, subject to the same type of criticism. Why Nietzsche adopts the "hypothesis" of the *Wille zur Macht* and how he conceives of it is an even more complex question that must be put aside in this discussion. What can be said here is that it is obvious that the theory of the will to power violates Nietzsche's restrictions on human knowledge and especially runs counter to his insistence that the assumption of an "unconditioned" reality as the 'cause' of the conditioned world is absurd. Whether the will to power is understood as an "hypothesis" modeled, as Nietzsche says it is, on human action and on our 'willing,' or as a metaphysical truth, it is clearly a claim to have "transcendental knowledge" and, to that extent, subject to his own internal criticisms. In terms of his own critical analysis of 'knowledge,' Nietzsche is not, in a strict sense, justified in assuming a "world of becoming" or a cosmic pervasive force (will to power). Nor is he justified in his apparent truth-claims about the dynamic structure of 'reality.'

I think we have seen that it was Kant's theory of knowledge in conjunction with Lange's psychologistic interpretation of it and application of it to science that gave rise to Nietzsche's scepticism and his theory of "regulative fictions." Despite his vitriolic criticisms of Kant and his condemnation of his "motives," Nietzsche's epistemological speculations are presented in the Kantian vernacular. In one of his earlier essays (*Schopenhauer as Educator*) Nietzsche remarks that if Kant's thought has any popular influence, it will lead to "skepticism and relativism"; only strong individuals will be able to tolerate a "despair of all truth." He was very sympathetic with the reactions of Kleist to the implications of Kantian thought and quotes them. Kleist believed that the Kantian philosophy led to the view that "we cannot decide whether what we call truth is really

truth, or whether it merely appears as such to us." Accepting this, Kleist laments that his highest goal has evaporated and he has none to replace it.⁶¹ It is clear from his wrestling with the problems of truth and the "thing in itself" that Nietzsche was affected in a similar way when he began to see the ramifications of Kant's agnosticism. If we add to this Lange's scepticism about the scientific search for the reality of the natural world, we can see how Nietzsche tried to accommodate these theories and, at the same time, sought to overcome them. It has been the burden of my discussion to show that Nietzsche, once he started criticizing Kant with his own weapons, was not entirely able to free himself from the puzzle of a world apart from our sensibility and understanding, a "reality in itself."

There is one residual issue that is relevant to the preceding discussion. That is, whether we can be said to have access to the nature of things in themselves such that some of Nietzsche's objections to Kant could be overcome. In his otherwise illuminating analysis of Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* P.F. Strawson offers a critical interpretation of the idea of the thing in itself that is not as penetrating as that of Nietzsche. Strawson is willing to grant to Kant that to a being that is a member of "the world of science and everyday observation the spatio-temporal objects of that world can sensibly *appear* only by *affecting* in some way the constitution of that being." Furthermore, the way that objects appear, the characteristics they appear to have, certainly depend "in part upon the constitution of the being to which they appear."⁶² But Strawson avers that we do know, in a sense, what things are in themselves insofar as these are objects that have the properties ascribed to them "in physical theories."⁶³ Again, in the manner of Lange and Nietzsche, it is held that the phenomena that appear to us are, in part, dependent upon "our physiological make-up." However, Strawson again claims that objects as they really are have "the properties ascribed to them in the physical and physiological theories."⁶⁴ It is curious to see Strawson arguing for scientific knowledge as an exception to the Kantian analysis of knowledge that he is at least somewhat sympathetic to in his study. Lange and Nietzsche, of course, would, as we have seen, beg to differ. What is true, if it is true, of knowledge in general must also be true of scientific knowledge of the natural world. Kant, by seeking to

61 *Schopenhauer als Erzieher*, III.

62 P.F. Strawson, *The Bounds of Sense*, London, 1966, p. 39.

63 *Ibid.*, p. 40.

64 *Ibid.*, pp. 251-252.

provide an epistemological justification for the eighteenth century scientific picture of the world, surreptitiously introduced an agnosticism into science itself (as Lange and Nietzsche saw so clearly). Nietzsche's analysis of the problem of things in themselves is more thoroughgoing than that of Strawson. He believed that the same constitutive, constructive, inventive activity of the mind that shaped the world in terms of *a priori* intuitions of space and time, sensory experience and conceptualization shaped the scientific interpretation of the world. What Nietzsche saw and pursued relentlessly was the metastasization of Kant's agnosticism, its tendency, when viewed from a sceptical perspective, to pervade all claims to knowledge. In this tentative and brief juxtaposition of Strawson's and Nietzsche's analysis of the problem of things in themselves we may turn to the physical scientist to see whether Strawson's optimism about the scientific penetration of things in themselves is justified. From his oft-cited comments on the importance of the constitution of the observer in science and his subjectivistic interpretation of the scientific enterprise, we know that Werner Heisenberg, for example, would not support Strawson's viewpoint. Neither would any of the contemporary physicists who consciously adopt a phenomenalist interpretation of scientific concepts and principles.

Recently, an American physicist has explored topics related to the question under consideration. It has been held that science cannot function without basic "constructs" that are "invented" constructions that we form in the world of our experiences. A construct is said to be partially "determined by the human being, as part of the natural world." Scientific constructs are seen as a "kind of organization" of phenomena. The concept of an electron, for example, is, because of the state of our knowledge of elementary particles, not known to correspond to "the basic structure and processes of matter." Sensory experience and "ideas" are the primary origin of "constructs" that are then applied to phenomena encountered in the natural world. In addition, it is said that "the construct must carry the concept into the world of nature or... fit nature into a world of concepts." Properly formed scientific concepts are, of course, expressed in language and, in a strict sense, are not "comparable with the natural world of things." The constructive activity of the mind is said, practically in Nietzschean terms, to establish "an arrangement of the world of things." All knowledge of nature is necessarily affected by "constructs" used in specific theories and the entities and processes in the natural world are conditioned by our sensory experiences and refined conceptual notions. The provisional nature of a system of descriptive constructs

is a result of the inevitable "incompleteness" of science as such and the simplification necessary to scientific inquiry. Necessarily, science forms abstractions and considers "ideal or limiting cases." It cannot "describe the complexities of nature that are presented to us in our direct experience."⁶⁵ Since these are by no means idiosyncratic depictions of the nature of scientific thinking, it would seem that contemporary physicists do not seem to share Strawson's belief concerning their power to penetrate the veil of phenomena that are, at least in part, constituted by what Lange and Nietzsche loosely call "our organization."

Once we have adopted a Kantian account of the constituting nature of knowing, it is perhaps ineluctable that the shadow of the "thing in itself," "the world in itself," or "reality in itself" will be cast upon our thought. Certainly, this is the case in Nietzsche's brief, but illuminating, analysis of our knowledge and its relationship (or, more accurately, disrelationship!) to the elusive "world of becoming." Despite his heroic attempt to banish Kant's paradoxical conception, Nietzsche was not as successful as he thought he was and certainly not as successful as some recent interpreters of his philosophy seem to think he was.

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⁶⁵ Richard Schlegel, *Completeness in Science*, New York, 1967, pp. 12-26. Cf. Henry Margenau, *The Nature of Physical Reality*, New York, 1950, Chapters 4 and 5. Virtually paraphrasing points that had been stressed by Lange and Nietzsche, Schlegel notes that "our knowledge of nature must involve a whole spectrum of responses to experience, some of which are... more intuitive or subconscious than conceptual or logical. In creative new insights into nature... the scientist... draws upon his total store of perception[s]... rather than only his explicit scientific knowledge." *Ibid.*, p. 30.