

Kant's Idealism

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According to J.N. Findlay, central to philosophical idealism is the contention that “the mind really can only come into the relation we call knowledge, if reality stands in an essential relation to, and is inseparable from the knowledge which is of it, and that even if the mind gains access to an independent reality, it must modify the latter in the process, so that it is only known in relation to knowledge and not as it is in itself.”¹ Findlay rejects idealism as incompatible with the existence of knowledge. The concept of knowledge, Findlay maintains, “unconditionally presupposes that the reality known exists independently of the knowledge of it, and that we know it as it exists in this independence.”² Without, he continues, the presupposition that the objects of our knowledge are independent of our knowledge of them, we could hardly conceive that there is a distinction between truth and falsehood, or between reality and appearance. But if we could not conceive these distinctions, we could not conceive that we know something.

Kant, by Findlay's criterion, is an idealist. Kant certainly holds that the reality we can know stands in an essential relation to the sort of knowledge we can have of it, and that this, in turn, means that reality is known only in relation to knowledge and not as it is in itself.³ But is

¹ J. N. Findlay, “Kant and Anglo-Saxon Criticism,” *Proceedings of the Third International Kant Congress*, Lewis White Beck, ed. (Humanities Press; New York, 1972), p. 134.

² *Ibid* (Findlay is quoting Prichard).

³ However, it is not clear that, for Kant, minds can ever *gain access* to an independent reality. If they cannot, then they cannot *modify* the latter; but even if there is a sense in which they *can* gain access, it seems wrong to say that, for Kant, they can modify it—an independent reality would presumably remain as it is, whatever a mind with access to it does—rather than know it, or be affected by it, in a particular way.

Findlay right that, given his idealism, Kant must fail to allow that we could not conceive that we know something?

Kant, of course, accepts the gist of Findlay's claim about the concept of knowledge, for he has applied something like Findlay's critique of idealism to other philosophers. He rejects Berkeley's "dogmatic idealism" precisely by charging that, on Berkeley's views, since things can be nothing but seemings, semblances without substance, the agent attempting to know them can be neither right nor wrong about them (B274). But, since it is possible for us, as investigators of the world to distinguish between objects and seemings, Berkeley's idealism must be false. However, that Kant takes this tack might mean only that he is trying to have it both ways, affirming that reality is independent of our knowledge when criticizing the metaphysics of others, but affirming that reality is known only in relation to knowledge, and, thus, not as it is in itself, when constructing his own metaphysics. And, indeed, in my view, he is trying to have it both ways. What saves him from simple contradiction, though, is his contention that the two claims he affirms are not in conflict. If this contention is true, then transcendental idealism cannot be dismissed as easily as Findlay thought. Is Kant's contention true?

According to Kant, in intuiting a manifold, one represents objects in space and time—one represents, that is, *determinate* objects. In Wilfrid Sellars's words, one represents in intuition "this-suches."⁴ Significantly, the "this-suches" given in intuition do not have a form analogous to the subject-predicate form of sentences; we do not intuit anything of the form, "This is a such-and-such." The term "this-such" is to be understood instead on the model of the grammatical subject only.⁵ No propositional content is given in the intuition itself. But this, for Kant, is not to say that

⁴ Wilfrid Sellars, *Science and Metaphysics: Variations on Kantian Themes* (Humanities Press; New Jersey, 1968), p. 7.

⁵ *Ibid*, pp. 4-7. See also Wilfrid Sellars, "Kant's Transcendental Idealism," *Proceedings of the Ottawa Congress on Kant in the Anglo-American and Continental Traditions*, Pierre Laberge, Francois Duchesneau and Bryan E. Morrisey, eds. (University of Ottawa Press; Ottawa, 1976), p.

a this-such is not a conception; indeed, it must be, for to be determinate it would have to be a representation of something as a particular in space and time.

An object represented, however, would seem truly to be an object, and to be represented, only if it is represented as a bevy of specific qualities or attributes. Now for the object to be known as anything, for it to be described as this or that, having something or other, its qualities and attributes must be conceived as specific instances of universals, of properties. Present also, along with space and time, in the conceptual representation of any this-such that might be an object of experience, then, are general concepts of properties. These, unlike the concepts of space and time supplied by sensibility, are concepts supplied by the understanding. Specifically, the conceptual spatial/temporal particular this-such represented in intuition is infused with quantity and quality in accordance with the understanding's constitutive principles. This is to say that, still in the form typified by the concept of a grammatical subject, as a conceptual representation of a this-such, one's representation is of a determinate thing, located in space and time, a whole made of parts whose various characteristics or qualities all obtain in some degree. As an entity, the representation, in a basic, ontological sense, is a particular of which general characteristics obtain. And yet it is a conceptual and, thus, mind-made entity, as regards both its form and (at least some of) its content.

Even as so constituted by sensibility and the mathematical principles of the understanding, the representation at this point of our reconstruction is a theoretical entity, not an entity the representer may experience. It cannot yet be an object of knowledge. Though it might be true that a knowing mind would, at this point, be able to relate an object it represents to other possible representations in virtue of the general characteristics instantiated in that object that might obtain in others, there are two reasons for thinking that this ability is not enough to produce experience.

First, no object would be represented whose qualities could appear as anything more than bits in an indeterminate flux, if that. Without causal relations, objects and their qualities would yet be undifferentiated from each other. Second, even supposing that two determinate time-slices of intuition could be extracted so as to be compared with each other, without causal interaction few if any of an object's properties would be manifest in it; objects reveal themselves in their qualities only as they are causally affected and maintain reciprocal relations with other objects. These two considerations force us also to challenge the possibility raised above that one could have comparative or otherwise knowledge-producing abilities at this stage. The possibility of experience requires more than has been given so far. Some means is needed to unify experiences so that things may, with propriety, be compared and related generally.

For a knower to experience a representation, the regulative concepts of the understanding--at least those of the analogies of experience--must also be applied to it. "An analogy of experience," Kant writes, is "only a rule according to which a unity of experience may arise from perception" (A180/B222). These rules ensure the determinacy of knowledge by, as their title suggests, regulating the manner in which the mind may understand objects to be related to each other, and how it may, then, understand their interactions.

For the purposes of Kantian ontology the distinction between constitutive and regulative principles of the understanding is not too significant. Properly, the constitutive principles apply to the objects as represented themselves, while the regulative apply to our experience of these objects. The constitutive, then, have ontological force, the regulative only epistemic: objects of representation *are* how they are constituted; they merely, though, are *known* as substantial, causally interactive, mutually reciprocal. On this account of the distinction, one might be tempted to urge that objects as represented are not necessarily causally interactive, but that we, nonetheless, given the second analogy, have no choice but to presuppose that they are. For Kant, though, we do not merely presuppose that each and every object we encounter is causally determined; rather,

we know that each is. And we know so not empirically (we can and often are wrong about what causes what), but a priori. This a priori knowledge is possible because representations, qua conceptual beings, are essentially bound up with the rules by which we represent them. In describing these rules we describe how representations necessarily stand to each other. The epistemic necessity captured in the analogies therefore carries ontological force. In saying that we know, by necessity, that an object is, say, causally determined, we are saying something about its being, and not only about the conditions under which we might come to know it.

One might propose here, though, that the regulative principles nonetheless do not carry ontological import, but just, as it were, filter out that which itself is not already, say, in some causal sequence. We would then simply “not see” the random event, much as the lecturer who sees everybody present does not see the hockey coach—without some rule through which “hockey-coachness” can be identified, hockey coaches in the hall do not exist for the lecturer. This thought, however, is the result of being misled by the manner in which our exposition of Kant’s conception of representation has proceeded. A manifold intuited as a manifold is not something that rumbles off an assembly line. It is constituted as the intuition it is, the particular conceptual representation it is, by sensibility and understanding at once—its assembly is not piece-meal; and, as has been indicated, the constitutive principles are themselves without force save as the objects of representation can be perceived as substantial, causally efficacious, and mutually reciprocal. There is, as we shall see, plenty of something that might be called filtering going on in Kantian idealism, but it occurs in a logical space prior to that which separated the constitutive from the regulative principles.

We are not in a position, reverting again to the model of the grammatical subject, partially to describe a particular intuition as, say, that of “this-clear-quiet-sad-day-of-frost-and-snow” (“partially” because our description may be indeterminately long). These full this-suches are no longer theoretical entities, but rather the intuitions we experience. The problem of how, exactly,

from a particular conceptually represented here-and-now this-such, one comes to have propositional knowledge about it (that is, the problem of how, from representing in intuition “this-clear-sad-day” one can come to the judgement “this is a clear, sad day”) is one we can avoid; what we need to remark is that knowledge on this account is had in reproducing some of the descriptive content of a this-such, something that one has a belief *in*, in a predicative position, thereby forming a belief *that*.⁶ In attributing some predicate truly to some subject, in cases of empirical, observational statements, both the subject and predicate are contained in the conceptual representation of the this-such intuited. Where one puts the copula, that is, what one makes subject and what predicate (“*that* is a blue pen”; “*That pen* is blue”) depends on contextual factors involving why one makes the judgement; the point here, however, is that the precise knowledge reported by the sentence is already conceptually contained in the representation the judgement is about. The judgment, to the extent it is true, mirrors in words what is conceptually present as given in the representation.

What is germane to our concerns about this is that what one gets out of the representation in making a true judgment about it is nothing more than what one has put in it (this statement will be slightly modified below). Knowledge consists of conceptual judgments that mirror conceptual representations the mind has constructed. As Kant writes, “intuitions of manifolds contain the very categories which can be found in the general concepts which we apply to these intuitions (and which we have, indeed, by ‘analytic thinking’ derived from them)” (A79/B105). This speaks to Kant’s idealism: what we have knowledge of are themselves conceptual, and thus also epistemic, items, products of the mind that knows them. We thus find in Kant the contention Findlay cites, that knowledge involves an essential—in this case a formulative—relation between knowledge itself and that which it is about.

⁶ Sellars, “Kant’s Transcendental Idealism,” p. 171.

But is this not just to agree with Berkeley, that ideas can only be about ideas? Isn't it to embrace a phenomenalism so severe that there is not even the Cartesian hope that maybe there are objects corresponding to some of our ideas? Unless he has Berkeley's trump card in hand—an omniscient god to ensure the continuing being of that which might for an instant otherwise go unperceived—Kant seems committed to an unforgiving phenomenalistic empiricism in which the individuation of objects, their reidentification, their causal interactions, and the ability of someone to be either right or wrong about them, becomes problematic.

The following passage from Kant will help to sum up where we have been so far, and point us in the direction we must now go:

We have representations in us and can become conscious of them. But however far this consciousness may extend, and however careful and accurate it may be, they still remain mere representations, that is, inner determinations of our mind in this or that relation of time. How, then, does it come about that we posit an object for these representations, and so, in addition to their subjective reality, as modifications, ascribe to them some mysterious kind of objective reality. Objective meaning cannot consist in the relation to another representation (of that which we desire to entitle object), for in that case the question again arises, how this latter representation goes out beyond itself, acquiring objective meaning in addition to the subjective meaning which belongs to it as determination of the mental state. If we enquire what new character *relation to an object* confers upon our representations, what dignity they thereby acquire, we find that it results only in subjecting the representations to a rule, and so in necessitating us to connect them in one specific manner; and conversely, that only in so far as our representations are necessitated in a certain order as regards their time-relation do they acquire objective meaning. (A197/B242-3)

The notion of subjecting representations to a rule refers to the regulative principles of the understanding. Indeed, our recent mention of the problems phenomenalistic empiricism encounters should put us in mind of what Kant thought he had demonstrated in the analogies, as well as in the Aesthetic. Experience is possible only if it is sometimes of spatial, temporal objects, and is guided by concepts of substantiality, causality, and interaction. This provides us with the concept of experience as consisting of two streams, the subjective and the objective. Neither can

exist without the other, and neither truth nor error could be had if either was to collapse, or be reduced, into the other.

While physical objects and events exist “in” actual conceptual representings, because they are not reducible to those representings, physical objects and events retain all their aspects, especially their spatial, temporal and causal qualities, even when they are not being represented; that is to say, they exist “in” actual and *obtainable* (to use Sellars’s word⁷) conceptual representations. As Kant writes, “The postulate bearing on the knowledge of things as *actual* does not, indeed, demand immediate *perception* (and, therefore, sensation of which we are conscious) of the object whose existence is to be known. What we do, however, require is the connection of the object with some actual perception, in accordance with the analogies of experience, which define all real connection in an experience in general” (A225/B272).

The analogies further provide adequate content for a notion of nature to be developed: “By nature, in the empirical sense, we understand the connection of appearances as regards their existence according to necessary rules, that is, according to laws” (A216/B263). Nature is made possible through the laws described in the analogies. Only through these a priori laws can empirical laws exist, although to discover empirical laws, empirical investigation is required. “Taken together, the analogies thus declare that all appearances lie, and must lie, in *one* nature, because without this *a priori* unity no unity of experience, and therefore no determination of objects in it, would be possible” (A216/B263). Sellars captures succinctly the move from glimpses to glimpse-free things and nature (not an inferential move) in the following:

...physical appearances may exist *primarily* as the content of *actual* intuitive representing, they exist *secondarily* as the content of *obtainable* intuitive representings, and still more remotely, as the abstractly represented system (Nature in its physical aspect) of which *this* and *that* intuitive representeds are constituent parts. In this context, the more ‘primary’ is that which is closer to the

⁷ Sellars, *Science and Metaphysics*, p. 42.

actual as contrasted with the *potential* or *hypothetical*. In another dimension, of course, Nature is primary and our glimpses of it secondary.⁸

The subject or knower him or herself is, thus, involved reciprocally in the construction of the system within which he or she is embedded, the system nature. Though sensible representations of an empirical self who represents the world belong to nature, as it is the thoroughgoing, comprehensive system of actual and obtainable representings, they are only a vanishingly small part of that system. Yet they mark the spot where that system is both ontologically constructed and epistemically represented, the spot which provides the only access to that system. Two parallel and, as we have seen, intimately related strands of appearance are represented at this spot—material things with the empirical self among them, and the subjective flow of experience. We are, thus, as knowers, possessed of all the conceptual tools needed to navigate the empirical world and to explore it scientifically.

The temptation to conclude at this point that Kant's idealism does not run afoul of the presupposition about knowledge Findlay cites—that objects of knowledge are in some way independent of our knowledge of them, and that this independence has something crucial to do with our ability to distinguish between the objective and subjective, between reality and appearance—should be resisted, despite what we have concluded about the analogies in regard to the concept of an objective nature. A major problem needs first to be addressed. It concerns the possible arbitrariness of our representations. There seems to be no ground to experience outside of mind, as if experience is spun of whole cloth straight out of the mind. Is the conceptual all that there is? This is not merely a metaphysical worry about ontology to be made from within Kant's philosophy, but concerns the qualitative aspect of our representations as they are experienced by us. For, despite the Aesthetic and the Transcendental Analytic as they have so far figured in our discussion, no account has been given of how we come to represent the specific secondary

⁸ *Ibid.*

qualities that any particular object must display, or such qualities as joy, anger, beauty, or sublimity that objects or thoughts might be said to possess. Objects display quality and quantity, we have said, but quality and quantity of what? And no account of why we experience the precise, specific causal web we do experience has been given. Allow, though, for a minute that all of this has been taken care of—it still cannot but be an arbitrary fact that the first representation that we fashioned, which, given causality, rendered all successive ones determinate, was that specific representation it was, given that we reached back no further than mind. Kant would appear to need to ground the conceptual on something outside of itself, somehow, at least so that the conceptual might have a determinate beginning, but also so that it might generally be uncapricious in its content.

Kant does, infamously, ground the conceptual, nature, on something outside of it. In transcendental idealism the concepts of the thing-in-itself and the noumena (related though not identical concepts) serve this purpose. They serve other purposes as well; a number of motivations lie behind their positing. Perhaps their most significant role in Kant's philosophy as a whole has to do with providing for the possibility of freedom and disinterested rationality, possibilities essential to Kantian ethics. This role, however, is logically dependent on it being previously established that here are things which correspond to these concepts, and this must be established either in experience or a priori as a condition of the possibility of experience. In the first *Critique* Kant finds them involved in the conditions of experience.

Kant seems to be of two minds about the nature and ontological status of things-in-themselves. On the one hand, principally in the A Edition, they are those things that do not appear, not because they are hidden, but because they are not themselves appearances in space or time. They are, instead, those things that we do not, or cannot, fashion into the conceptual forms we can know, because they are not, or cannot be, available to us in sense. The A Edition thus divides things or reality into two ontologically distinct worlds, “a world of the senses, and a world

of the understanding,” each defined by the sort of epistemic access one needs in order to come to know it. This distinction “does not refer merely to the logical form of our knowledge of one and the same thing, according as it is indistinct or distinct, but to the difference in the manner in which the two worlds can first be given to our knowledge, and in conformity with this difference, to the manner in which they are in themselves generically distinct from one another” (A249).

The two-worlds model is sanctioned by the thought that, if we can know only that which appears to us because we fashion that which appears to us to fit our a priori conceptions, objects that we do not or cannot make fit our conceptions must remain unknown to us. In this model, though, we have no reason to think that such things as things-in-themselves do exist, although they might; and, further, though they might exist, as so conceived they go little way toward resolving the epistemic problems Kant faces.

The two-worlds model receives supplementation even in the A Edition, and by the B Edition the concept of things-in-themselves is securely fitted to Kant’s edifice. Things-in-themselves, in an obscure sense, stand behind appearances. This is not to say that we know things-in-themselves as they appear to us given our specific conceptual equipment, although some of Kant’s words suggest this reading (for instance, continuing the passage cited above at A249 and also at B300). But appearances, which, according to what seems to be Kant’s considered opinion, are all that we know, and we know *them* as they appear, are nonetheless somehow grounded in things-in-themselves. In B, more strongly than in A, the appearances/things-in-themselves distinction has to do with our concept of objects as irredeemably *for us*, as essentially tied to our own mode of sensible understanding, and this concept requires that we have a further concept of them apart from us, apart from the mind’s enveloping of them in space, time and causality. This is not quite to say that we perceive things-in-themselves as appearances, for we need not think that things of the sensible world pair off one-to-one with noumenal counterparts. Indeed, their individuation as objects for us is essentially a space/time matter as regulated by the analogies, and

so the notion of individuated objects apart from the conditions of experience is a problematic, if anything but a fuzzy, one. But these speculations serve to direct us to an aspect of the thing-in-itself that, for Kant, is crucial—its unknowability.

This unknowability is not to be confused with empirical indeterminateness or undecidability. The license number of the first red car through the Spadina/Bloor intersection in Toronto two years ago today will probably forever remain unknown and unascertainable, owing to the paucity of evidence now available that might determine the matter. No question is here asked that has to do with things-in-themselves, though. In another, related, vein, Kant at least three times remarks that knowledge of any particular object, any part of nature (and certainly nature as a whole) cannot be exhaustive. He writes, "...appearances are not things-in-themselves: they are only representations, which in turn have their object—an object which cannot itself be intuited by us, and which may, therefore, be named the non-empirical, that is, the transcendental object=x" (A109). Further, "We have stated above that appearances are themselves nothing but sensible representations, which, as such and in themselves, must not be taken as objects capable of existing outside our power of representation. What, then, is to be understood when we speak of an object corresponding to, and consequently also distinct from, our knowledge? It is easily seen that this object must be thought of as something in general=x, since outside our knowledge we have nothing which we could set over against this knowledge as corresponding to it" (A104). Finally, the understanding refers our representations "to a *something*, as the object of sensible intuition. But this something, thus conceived, is only the transcendental object; and by that is meant a something=x, of which we know, and with the present constitution of our understanding can know, nothing whatsoever" (A250).

These are puzzling passages, but I take them as comments about the empirical object as represented in intuition, which, on the one hand, though a particular this-such, is known discursively only via general terms, and, which, on the other hand, given that all its qualities and

relations, its entire place in nature, could never be wholly discursively known, must be radically under-knowable.⁹ Even in representation, then, objects, though they are conceptual entities, are stubbornly independent of our best knowledge about them. The predicates through which we know an object can never capture its particularity, and never exhaustively describe it. This is to say that the subject/object form of discursive knowledge is never adequate to the conceptual representation of the object.

The unknowability of things-in-themselves is distinctly more radical than that of the transcendental object=x. We can have but *negative* knowledge of things-in-themselves, knowledge of what they are not, and not even much of this, whereas the transcendental object=x is that which outdistances (both asymptotically and linearly) our *positive* knowledge of it.

The concept of things-in-themselves has explanatory power in virtue of the connection between things-in-themselves as noumenal ground and appearances and, thus, representations generally as grounded outside themselves. Given that things-in-themselves stand outside appearances but yet somehow, along with the understanding and sensibility, are responsible for appearances, the problem of the arbitrariness of representations—the bad conscience of any totally idealist conception of reality—is avoided. The noumenal grounding of phenomena (which, obviously, cannot be characterized as causal) gives us the world we experience much, one may suppose, as the compact-disk grounding of the music gives us, via the formative processes of the stereo and our physiology, the sound we experience. No analogy can be any more than suggestive

⁹ I realize that what I've said here is considerably at odds with parts of the first quoted statement. On my view, the transcendental object=x *is* intuited by us, without remainder. My claim is that in Kant's system it cannot, on the one hand, be brought over bodily into a proposition (a proposition cannot *be* it, but must be *about* it), and, on the other hand, no proposition can be about it as it *fully* and *finally* is (though it exists, as intuited, in fullness and finality).

My account of the distinction and relation between the transcendental object=x and things-in-themselves is essentially that given by Gordon Nagel, *The Structure of Experience: Kant's System of Principles* (University of Chicago Press; Chicago, 1983), pp. 27-29.

of what goes on regarding the relation between noumena and phenomena, of course, for we cannot understand both terms in this relationship, only the second. The non-causal grounding relationship between the spatial/temporal, causally deterministic world we experience and the noumenal reality behind it will—in principle—always be mysterious.¹⁰

We may now address directly Findlay's comments. Findlay worries that an idealist, because mind and reality are for him essentially tied together, cannot very well account for knowledge. Given, instead, that objects of knowledge *are* independent of the knower, these objects will not be subject to the demands of the knower *qua* knower. In other words, if this account is correct, objects as such are not known by fiat. Knowledge by fiat, of course, is not knowledge at all; but if objects are created by the mind that knows them, so that they conform to the mind's dictates, the mind might well be thought to be decreeing its knowledge of them by fiat. Error and truth, and reality and appearance, distinctions essential to epistemic experience, become make-believe distinctions, conjured by the mind but not true of anything. Knowledge by fiat is at best a sort of play or sport, when the particular principles by which one's mind works determine how the play will go by constraining it to rules.

Kant grants this contention. Nonetheless, his appreciation of other problems involved in the understanding of knowledge prevents Kant from taking an entirely realist position. He writes, "If each representation were completely foreign to every other, standing apart in isolation, no such thing as knowledge would ever arise. For knowledge is a whole in which representations stand compared and connected" (A97). Kant's view, then, is that a chaotic system would be

¹⁰ A residual problem concerns the ontological status of these two "realms" vis-a-vis each other. Certainly things-in-themselves are in some sense the ultimate beings of existence, but this does not mean that in no sense are objects, space and time real. Sellars distinguishes in Kant between existence *per se*, which things in themselves have, and actuality, which objects have ("Kant's Transcendental Idealism," p. 176). Though Berkeley correctly understood (from Kant's point of view) that time and space and, therefore, objects could not exist *per se*, still he was unable to allow matter, the stuff of nature, an actual (in Kant's sense) existence.

unknowable. He also holds that sensation before conceptualization *is* chaotic and, thus, that it is not experience at all. If there is to be knowledge, then, the knowable must be united and rule governed. This necessitates an idealistic solution—the mind must impart order. For representations to be able to stand compared and connected, they must be infused ontologically with comparability and connection. The mind thus represents to itself that which it has fashioned according to its own rules. A second Kantian contention seals the need to be idealistic. Given that knowable reality is structured in some way, truth will consist in mirroring that same structure in the form of knowledge. The concepts one puts into representations are the ones one should get back—knowledge, thus, is only of concepts.

How are these two sets of claims about knowledge to be accommodated to each other? Kant's reclamation in an idealistic setting of the contention that the known is independent of the knower involves two interrelated concepts. The first is that of objects as appearances under rules, the second that of things-in-themselves. The first brings the various epistemic distinctions of subjective/objective, etc., to bear on entirely conceptual representations. The second ensures that these distinctions are not just for sport.¹¹ Mind creates, but not *ex nihilo*. Objects of representations, though actual, do not have an ontological foothold *qua* representations outside the knowledge situation; but that situation, though regulated from within, is grounded noumenally in the unrepresentable realm of things-in-themselves. The in-itself underlies the representations constituted by sensibility and understanding, anchoring them in the non-mental. We get out of representations what we put in them, but we are constrained (we know not how) to put in what we

¹¹ Or at least they ensure that one is playing the only game in town. On my reading, because things-in-themselves ground representations rather than just drop out of consideration (the two-worlds model), conceptual relativism is not possible. The idea that different conceptual arrangements would produce different experiences has content only if one is prepared to accept how radical such relativism is. A representer employing a conceptual scheme different from mine could not be identified by me as a representer, let alone understood by me. The other would be in a universe or a dimension separate from mine.

do by something beyond us. Our experience is, thus, non-arbitrary on two sides: our representations accord with our forms of receptivity and our conceptual framework of regulative rules; and our representations stem from what, for Kant, is an ultimate reality. Kant can have it both ways, then, in holding that knowable reality is a mind-made system and yet is an aspect or effect of reality as it is.

In conclusion, I will make a critical comment that, I hope, if what has been said so far has merit, will be useful in further study of Kant. One cannot help but feel that something akin to the imitative fallacy in art motivates the idealist conception of knowledge as a necessarily internal affair. The belief that one can come to know an object only if that object is a conceptual entity related by rules to other concepts, is reminiscent of the belief that only if the world is simple can it be truly represented by a simple statement. Well, “the world is complex” is a simple statement, but true if and only if the world itself is complex rather than simple. What seems difficult in understanding knowledge is the move from sensory experience of the object to be known, to the propositional knowledge of it that one acquires. Making both sides conceptual and similarly rule governed does not really address this problem. Perhaps the notion of things-in-themselves, which helps shore up the idealist account of knowledge and its possibility, is somewhat pernicious in that it provides a contrast between the knowable and the unknowable along the lines of conceptual/non-conceptualizable, which suggests that within the conceptual side there is no issue or problem. But the same gap can exist between the concepts that do the knowing and those that are the known as is present between knowledge in the non-idealistic conception and the non-conceptual world known. The tightness of the fit between the idealist conception of knowledge and the concept of things-in-themselves, both important features of transcendental idealism, requires closer examination. It might be that some notion akin to that of the transcendental object= x will serve to ensure the recognition—in a non-idealistic setting and, thus, without recourse to the concept of the noumenal

world—both that the knower is independent of the known and that the mind possesses constitutive powers.