NOTES ON KANT
by K.R. Dove

Kantian philosophy (Stoicism or 'epistemology'[1]) is a peculiar use of language. Ordinarily we do not project the structure of our medium for communication into the subject matter we seek to communicate. But that is the predisposition invoked when we reflect within the post-politan 'problem of knowledge', within 'epistemology'. This problem emerged when philosophers developed a notion of language itself as a totality of formal structures (first completed, in the West[2], in Stoic grammar). In politan thought there had been articulations of distinctions such as those between nouns & verbs (Plato), subjects & predicates (Aristotle). But it was only with the Stoic distinction between propositions (pre-uttered discourse, the inner *logos*) & sentences (uttered discourse, the outer *logos*[3]) that the formal structure of language came to be introjected into the subject matter of 'theoretical' discourse. The general name for this now pervasive philosophical temptation is 'formalism'. Its formula is that the basic clue to an objectively valid understanding of things is the structure of the language in which the knowledge of things is articulated. Thus understood, *things* are (in epistemologically valid discourse) *objects* of knowledge and the guarantee of validity is to deflect all discourse of things to discourse concerning objects. In epistemology the medium is the message and the essential structure of the medium is called 'logic'.[4] This is the essence of "Philosophy in the World of Language".

Logic is formal because the place-holders in a 'logical' argument are variables.[5] These may be either term variables, as in syllogistic (predicate calculus), or propositional variables, as in Stoic (and later Fregean) logic (propositional calculus). The distinctive feature of a propositional variable is that its substitution instances are bearers of truth or falsity (it makes no sense to assert that a term is true or false). Propositional logic in turn makes it intelligible to speak in general terms about an asserter (as true) or a negator (as false) of a proposition. Such a general capacity of asserting (or negating) propositional variables, independent of the content of what is asserted, the Stoics called the '*hegemonikon*', the ruling part of the soul, or what the tradition has come to call mental activity or simply 'mind'. Hence the development of formalism in logic may be seen to have facilitated the invention of a new metaphysical

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[1] The term 'epistemology' is not Greek. It was coined, in English, from Greek roots by the British writer Ferrier in 1856. In the meanwhile it has come to stand for doing philosophy in the Kantian way. Its counterpart in German is *Erkenntnistheorie*, which likewise stems from the mid-19th century.

[2] The case of Panini (? fourth century BC.), whose Sanskrit grammar exceeds in elegance and detail that for any other language up to the present time, remains a puzzle, especially in view of the fact that he acknowledges the work of a large number of predecessors. It nevertheless remains true that grammar in the European tradition dates from the Stoics—most notably from Dionysius Thrax (late 2nd century BC).

[3] Documentation of the emergence of the distinction between the inner *logos* (*logos endiathetos*) and the outer *logos* (*logos prophorikos*) may be found in Sextus Empiricus, *Against the Logicians*, II, 275–277. The contrast recurs throughout Hellenistic (especially Stoic), Greco-Roman (esp., Philo, Plotinus, and Proclus) and early Christian (esp., Clement of Alexandria) thought until it was anathematized by the Synod of Sirmium in 351 AD.

[4] In twentieth century philosophy there have been partial rebellions against the Stoic distinction between 'propositions' (meanings) and 'sentences' (sayings) by Quine and Davidson.

[5] A beautifully clear account of the role of variables in logic may be had from Jan Łukasiewicz, *Aristotle's Syllogistic from the Standpoint of Modern Formal Logic*, Oxford: OUP, 1957, pp. 7–10.

entity, the mind. The distinguishing characteristic of the mind is that it is presumed to have an 'inner' and 'outer' aspect.

The most sophisticated attempt at a formalist and mentalist philosophy is to be found in Kant. His first *Critique* is organized on the basis of two principal distinctions: (A) *logical*, between intuitions and concepts, and (B) *metaphysical*, between receptivity and spontaneity.[6] The point of his argument is to show how our objects of knowledge may be objectively valid. His strategy is to demonstrate that the conditions necessary for the possibility of our having any objects of knowledge whatever (*Gegenstände überhaupt*) are at the same time conditions for the possibility of our having objectively valid (*objektive gültige*) knowledge. The demonstration consists in a deployment of his logical and metaphysical distinctions.

Both of Kant's principal distinctions pertain to what he calls *Vorstellungen* ('representations', as in the standard translations, or 'ideas', as in Locke, or 'perceptions', as in Hume). The logical distinction between intuitions and concepts is that between a simple representation (an unrepresented representation) and a compound representation (a representing representation). The metaphysical distinction between receptivity and spontaneity is used to differentiate between the mental capacities of accepting representations from outside the mind and of producing representations within the mind. The logical and metaphysical elements are joined in the axioms that the (human) mind is only capable of receiving unrepresented representations (intuitions, *always plural*, a manifold) and that the (human) mind is only capable of producing represented representations (concepts, *always unitary*, a combination). The distinctive Kantian argument is that intuitions and concepts function at parallel correlative *levels*: what is represented (conceptual) at one level must be understood as unrepresented (intuitive) at the next level. At the level of sheer givenness, unrepresented representatives are unknowable—to be knowable they must be mathematically constructed in accordance with the categories of Quantity and Quality. These constructions in turn yield unrepresented representations (empirical intuitions) at the level of experience, at which such empirical intuitions are connected into objects of experience in accordance with the categories of relation and modality.

Reason, Kant's generic term for mental activity, stands in need of a critique because of epistemology's propensity, as a general theory of the mind, to presume to know things in general as the special sciences presume to know particular kinds of things. But, as a general theory of mind, epistemology's claims to know must be constrained by the nature of its distinctive subject matter, things in general. An epistemological theory of knowing must therefore be geared to this generality. Hence the topics of epistemology are like the subject matter of traditional formal logic, sc., variables. Given the two-fold nature of variables in traditional formal logic, terms and propositions, the question immediately arises as to which provides the paradigm for knowable things according to an epistemological, i.e., general theory of knowing.

Prior to Kant the *tacit* assumption had been that the logical paradigm for the object of philosophical knowing was the term variable. Hence Locke's notion of the 'idea' and Hume's of the 'perception' (subdivided into 'impressions' and 'ideas'). As this tacit assumption became more *explicit*, skepticism

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[6]   This distinction is drawn most clearly in *Immanuel Kants Logik: ein Handbuch zu Vorlesungen* (1800), A 45.

about any theory of knowledge grew. If the things to be known are like logical terms, there is no way that these can be shown to be related to one another in any but an adventitious manner. Why? Because the mind would have to 'receive' from the extra-mental sphere not merely the representation of a thing at 'this' space-time, but also of the connection between the thing at 'this' and 'that' space-time. While acknowledging that we customarily do make such connections in our special fields of inquiry, a general basis for them could not be derived from our receptivity to what is 'outside' us (our minds). For if it is assumed that what we know has the logical form of the term, then we are systematically removed from any possibility of receiving any idea of a connection between terms. Any such connection would have to be added by the mind on the basis of the contingent expectations to which any particular (not general) mind had been habituated in its *subjective* career of experience. Clearly no general account of truth in knowing could be based upon such foundations.

The point of departure for Kant's critique is an acceptance of this skeptical conclusion and a generalization from it. For, he argued, it is not merely the case that the mind cannot *objectively* connect this and that representation or idea as, say, a cause and its effect; the very idea of receptivity to a (single) representation is logically insupportable. To be singular a representation must be represented. But intuition, as the logical term for that to which we are (metaphysically speaking) receptive, consists of unrepresented representations, that is, something inherently plural because infinitely (not divided but) divisible. What we *can* say about such intuition is that it is divisible in just two ways, spatially and temporally. As non-unitary, intuition is particular and, as a divisible particularity, it must be divisible in terms of either synchronic (spatial) or diachronic (temporal) juxtaposition. It follows that something *can* be known about the intuition (logical) to which we are receptive (metaphysical): human receptivity or sensibility is conditioned by the two forms of divisibility, space and time.

The logical paradigm for Kant's notion of an intuition is, not the subject place-holder but, more generally, the term variable in syllogistic logic. His logical paradigm for a concept is indeed the predicate place-holder—in Greek, the 'category'—but only as the function of unity in a judgment. The logical form of a judgment, "The representation of a representation,"[7] is a sentence or proposition (the word *Satz* does duty for both in German), what is variable in propositional logic.[8] But the concept as function of unity in judgments or propositions pertains not merely to the formation (via the 'composition' = *Zusammensetzung*) of atomic propositions (the quantitative and qualitative aspects of predication) but also to the formation (via the 'connection' = *Verknüpfung*) of molecular propositions (the conjunction, conditionality, and disjunction of atomic propositions), that is, propositions compounded, and of modal propositions (as possible, asserted, or necessary).

To be an object of knowledge is to be, not a representation or idea but, a representing representation. Since all representing is governed by transcendental rules (just as all sentential predication is governed by grammatical rules), and these rules are concepts, there is a necessary

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[7] Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason* (=CPR), A 68=B 93.

[8] The component of propositional logic in Kant's first *Critique* parallels that in Frege's *The Foundations of Arithmetic* (despite Frege's disagreement with Kant on the synthetic vs. analytic character of arithmetic). Compare CPR, A 67–69 and FA Section 62.

conceptual component in all objects of knowledge whatsoever. So just as unrepresented representations (sensible intuitions) are necessarily divisible in just two ways (spatially and temporally), representations are representable (combined into propositional judgments) in a finite number of ways (according to the categories). Since the combined proposition (whether atomic or molecular) is the logical form of an object of knowledge, to specify the functions of propositional unity (the concepts of the understanding), together with the forms of all possible unrepresented representations (the forms of intuition: space and time), would be to give a *complete* inventory of the formal aspects of knowledge. If, further, the formal aspects of intuition and concept should, when considered together, yield more determinate constraints (what Kant calls 'principles'[9]) upon our knowledge, then perhaps a way will have been found to use forms of logic to legitimate the content of our knowledge.

The longest-standing objection to Kant's strategy is Jacobi's: that it both requires and invalidates the notion of a thing-in-itself.[10] Put logically, this objection amounts to the observation that Kant *metaphysically* requires determinate input via sensible receptivity for the content of knowledge whereas his *logical* doctrine of sensible intuition allows him only to claim that the deliverances of sensibility are merely divisible in spatial and temporal ways, hence determinable but not determinate. It is clear that determinate things-in-themselves cannot be known *qua* determinate according to Kant's strategy; they can only be known *qua* appearances, i.e., as indeterminate. If there is a Kantian response to this objection it will have to depend upon the layered fashion (in accordance with the levels indicated above) in which sensible intuitions are integrated into conceptual unifications (the transcendental counterparts of logical propositions). Kant requires some way to introduce empirical determinacy without having to stamp it with the seal of objective validity as immediately delivered (for this would be to claim to have an 'intellectual intuition', a sensible representation which itself represented something beyond itself—in Kant's transcendental logic a contradiction).

The most plausible Kantian answer to this objection derives from his use of the logical form of propositional connection in his 8th category and his second principle under the 'Analogies of Experience'. The key to his argument is that the determinate character of the propositional counterpart under the 'if' clause need not be validated for it to 'guide' the identification of the propositional counterpart under the 'then' clause. This argument strategy directs our attention to the specifics of the 'Second Analogy of Experience' in the first *Critique* and the counterpart discussion of 'Mechanics' in the *Metaphysical Foundations of Natural Science*.

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9   CPR, A 148ff.

10 In Anglophone Kant criticism this objection has been put forward most forcefully by H.A. Prichard, *Kant's Theory of Knowledge*, Oxford: Oxford U.P., 1909.