

Kant's world according to Jauernig

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Review of: Jauernig, Anja, *The World According to Kant: Appearances and Things in Themselves in Critical Idealism*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2021, xiv +pp. 384 ISBN. 13:978-0-19-969538-6

The main aim of the six chapters of the book is to provide an understanding of the ontological implications of Kant's theoretical philosophy, by clarifying the relation and distinction between things in themselves and appearances. In contrast to neo-Kantian interpreters, who considered Kant as the main opponent and destroyer of metaphysics, Jauernig follows the path of Friedrich Paulsen, Max Wundt and Martin Heidegger, by regarding Kant as having introduced a new kind of metaphysics. It is Kant himself, as the author stresses, who declares that his efforts are not directed against the metaphysics of Wolff and Leibniz, but rather they have the very same destination (see Letter to Kästner, August [?] 5, 1790, 11:186).

The research is led by six questions concerning the relation between things in themselves and appearances and their classification. More specifically, the author inquires: if things in themselves and appearances are numerical and ontological identic; the status of the transcendental distinction and empirical objects; in which sense Kant is an idealist and if things in themselves exist.

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In the first chapter, the author already reveals very clearly her position, which can be classified as a two-world view, i.e. the realm of appearances and the realm of things in themselves are two worlds which contain different kinds of entities. Besides, they are organized according to different laws, and we have cognitive access to them in different ways. For this, the author's answers to the main questions above-mentioned can be summarized as follows: 1) Appearances and things in themselves are not numerically identical, but rather distinct existents. Also, both things in themselves and appearances are things although not in the same sense. 2) From an ontological point of view, appearances and things in themselves are not the same things even if they are closely related insofar as things in themselves ground appearances. 3) The transcendental distinction must be considered an ontological distinction. 4) Empirical objects are appearances. 5) Kant's position is idealist in the sense that appearances (empirical objects included) are mind-dependent. 6) Things in themselves are mind-independent and they actually exist.

In the second chapter, which deals with the ontological nature of appearances, Jauernig argues that, on the one hand, appearances are mind-dependent existents and have specific features through which they can meet the requirements of objectivity, on the other hand, things in themselves are mind-independent existents. To defend the argument that there are no ontological common features belonging to both of them, the author refers to passages in which Kant states that appearances and things in themselves are distinct or ontologically non-overlapping, e.g.: "these [appearances] really relate to something that is distinct from them (and thus completely dissimilar), insofar as appearances always presuppose a thing in itself and thus give an indication of it..." (Prol, 4:355); "one has to admit and assume behind the appearances still something else that is not appearance, namely, things in themselves..." (GMS, 4:451); "behind the appearances there must still be the things in themselves as grounds (although hidden)" (GMS, 4:459).

In this view, the transcendental distinction means that things in themselves and appearances are numerically distinct existents and that the former are independent from the mind, while the latter is dependent. The world, then, intended as the sum of everything which is real, has different dimensions of reality (es. mind-dependent or mind-independent level). Furthermore, the author inquires about the nature of appearances and objectivity. More specifically, appearances are regarded as a kind of intentional object, which are completely mind-dependent: all their properties and their existence are dependent on the mind (or, at least, on the possibility to be represented by the mind). In contrast, things in themselves are mind-independent because their determinations, ontological features and existence are independent from the mind. Besides, the conditions to represent objects are the conditions for the possibility of experience (time, space, categories): Kant, namely, argues that to have representations of proper objects, these must be presented with some specific properties, namely: to be unified, outside us and included in a system of objects. After having specified further the characteristics of the transcendental object (i.e., an X distinct from the cognizer and the representation, which persists through time), the author focuses on the stages of the construction of experience, which includes, as a fundamental recurring step, the transition

from intentional objects of perception to those of experience and of the correspondent judgements (from perception to experience). In this passage, one moves from mere subjective representations to representations which hold objectivity, i.e., public objects in their relations. This is possible by the application of concepts grounded in Kant's relational categories: for instance, the representation of a blue lily as existing in the empirical world implies my assumption that the lily is the cause of my sensations of the color and the shape of the flower.

Chapter 3 focuses on the main claims of transcendental idealism, namely that empirical objects are not things in themselves and that space and time are forms of sensibility. This leads to a revolution in the way of thinking, which is deeply ontological: concepts, which are intentionally related to objects, are the conditions of possibility of experience. The author compares Kant and Berkeley, and comes to the conclusion that, unlike Berkeley, Kant is both a genuine idealist and a genuine realist about empirical objects. More specifically, Kant is relationalist about empirical space and time in assuming that empirical space and time are constituted by the spatial and temporal determinations of empirical objects. However, this relationalism is more refined than the ordinary one, because Kant's view of spatial and temporal determinations of empirical objects is very rich, since it includes, for instance, pure intuitions of space and time, which are prior to the empirical objects.

In chapter 4, the author considers Kant's arguments for transcendental idealism and empirical realism. She focuses on the argument from *Transcendental Aesthetic* concerning that we have a priori intuition of pure space and time, which are then to be considered as transcendently ideal and as mere forms of sensibility. More specifically, space and time cannot but be mind-dependent because of the three steps of the argument so resumed by the author: 1) according to the metaphysical exposition any spatial and temporal determination are contained respectively in pure space or pure time, thus leading to 2) spacetime-containment, i.e. any time or space are identical or contained in pure time or space and 3) if x is in space and time, the ontological ingredients of x are the same of the mode of being of space and time, i.e. mind-dependent. To Kant, anything that is regarded as a kind of time or space is the same as or is contained in pure time and space.

Furthermore, in chapter 5 Jauernig discusses Kant's critical idealism, by arguing that things in themselves, which exist, are the grounds for appearances and affect sensibility. She wants to demonstrate that things in themselves and appearances are not the same, but both exist: the former being the supersensible basis of appearances. Besides, Jauernig delves into the distinction and relation between the transcendental and the empirical self in a way which integrates the two-world reading. Kant is described as assuming that everyone has a transcendently real part, the "I" in the formula "I think" or the transcendental mind. This transcendental mind can affect the empirical self and both, together with the body, come to compose human beings.

Chapter 6 delves into Kant's fictionalism about things in themselves and its reconciliation with his realism about things in themselves. The core point seems to be that things in themselves are useful fictional objects, i.e., they have the same status of ideas, namely they are heuristic tools (the reality of which cannot be demonstrated), to provide a coherent and

somehow meaningful account of the world and ourselves. The author, then, asked herself if the conditioning principle addressed by Kant in several passages (such as B364/A307-308) is contained in Kant's view on things in themselves. Among other arguments to support this thesis, Jauernig focuses on passages where Kant seems to suggest that the conditioning principle is a principle concerning a connection of things in themselves, thought through pure reason (20:290).

This work has the merit to provide in a very clear way a two-world interpretation of the world according to Kant. The world, in Jauernig's view, consists of different ontological levels: while the empirical one is mind-dependent, the transcendental (i.e. of things in themselves, according to the author) is mind-independent. Besides, there might be a variety of appearances as intentional objects intended (such as dreams and illusions) but just the ones which conform to the formal conditions of objectivity are existing in a genuine sense and they have as their grounds things in themselves, which provide the matter for appearances. Now, the basis for this account of transcendental idealism is provided by an account of the human mind as finite: it necessarily includes a passive component which produces representations once it has been affected. So, Kant is a realist about things in themselves as the ground of appearances and, at the same time a fictionalist if things in themselves are conceived as objects of pure understanding, i.e. a useful fiction that we need for epistemic purposes.

Still, it remains controversial the way in which the author describes things in themselves as existing. It is true that Kant makes the example of an object as a thing in itself (KrV A 29 / B 45), but he does not use here the notion of things in themselves in a transcendental sense, but just in an empirical commonsensical one. Kant seems to suggest, namely, that the perception of an empirical object, such as a rose, depends on the differences concerning the senses of the perceiving subjects, even if it can be recognized as such (as a thing in itself) by every subject. But this is not the transcendental sense of the term, but rather an empirical one, as Kant puts it: "For in this case that which is originally itself only appearances, e.g. a rose, counts in an empirical sense as a thing in itself, which can appear different to every eye in regard to color". (KrV A 30 / B 45).

Now, Kant is not an absolute idealist, i.e. a priori functions do not create objects, but define the limits of our possible experience. (KrV A 771 / B 799). For this, we need to refer to something which is beyond those limits, it is a natural and necessary movement of our reason. This, however, does not mean that one is obliged to assume an ontological second realm. As Kant states it: "*Das Ding an sich (ens per se) ist nicht ein anderes Objekt sondern eine andere Beziehung (respectus) der Vorstellung auf dasselbe Objekt*" (22:26). Things in themselves are then mere negative concepts used to set boundaries. (KrV A 255 / B 310).

Besides, I am not sure how to understand that things in themselves can be used as heuristic notions: ideas and principles, namely, are heuristic in the sense that they help in finding unity in the empirical experience. But to do so, they have specific content, for instance, the sameness of kind in the manifold under a higher genus (A658/B686). If things in themselves are mind-independent, then it is quite difficult to understand how they can do this job.

In conclusion, these concerns demonstrate the fruitfulness of the book, which regards one of the most controversial topics on which Kant scholars still have a lot of space for debate.

