

SCHOPENHAUER ON KANT AND OBJECTIVITY

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In this paper I argue in favour of Schopenhauer's criticism of Kant's account of objectivity as advanced in the celebrated Second Analogy in Kant's first *Critique* (henceforth, *CPR*). The criticism that I shall be looking at is presented as the first of Schopenhauer's four objections against the Second Analogy, deployed in section 23 of his *On the Fourfold Root of the Principle of Sufficient Reason* (henceforth, *FRSR*). All the references are to the second, enlarged, edition of this book, originally published in 1847.

I. Kant's Position

The starting-point of Kant's Second Analogy—held to be proven by the Transcendental Deduction—is that we have consciousness of an objective order in time, and, consequently of the objective as such. The problem that he sets out to solve is *how* we distinguish this order from a purely subjective one. Kant's solution is as follows:

The objective relation of appearances that follow upon one another is not to be determined through mere perception. In order that this relation be known as determined, the relation between the two states must be so thought that it is thereby determined as necessary which of them must be placed before, and which of them after, and that they cannot be placed in the reverse relation, (Kant, *CPR*, B 234).

As an illustration of his position, Kant cites the case of a subject seeing a ship moving down stream (Kant, *CPR*, B 237, A 192). He says that the subject's perception of the ship's lower position is consequential upon the perception of its position higher up in the stream. It is impossible in the apprehension of this appearance that the ship should first be perceived lower down in the stream and afterwards higher up. By contrast, Kant says that the subject's perception of a house could begin with the apprehension of the roof and end with the basement but it need not. For there is no determinate order specifying the course of the subject's perception. In other words, in the case of the ship, unlike the case of the house, the subjective succession of apprehension is derived from the objective succession of appearances, which Kant calls an event.¹ This recognition of a necessary order of appearances enables the subject to distinguish between an objective order in time—and consequently the objective as such—and a purely subjective order in time—and consequently the subjective as such.

II. Schopenhauer's Objection

Schopenhauer objects that the two cases are not different at all because both involve events, the knowledge of which is objective, i.e., one of changes in real objects which are recognized as such by the subject. That he is entitled to claim this will become clear after we have examined the background of his claim.

Unlike Kant, Schopenhauer believes that the subject's grasp of the objective is "built into" his sensory perception of objects, a process that Schopenhauer calls intuitive perception. It is not triggered by any temporal sequences, i.e., successions, be they grasped as irreversible by the subject or not. Sensation, claims Schopenhauer, cannot give objects to the subject unless he has assumed an external cause to account for his sensations as effects. That is, the subject's sensations give rise to *objects* in virtue of his positing an external cause for the former.² This occurs by an operation which is not conceptual but rather immediate:

For only by this operation and consequently in the understanding and for the understanding does the real, objective, corporeal world, filling space in three dimensions, present itself; and then it proceeds, according to the same law of causality, to change in time and to move in space. Accordingly, the understanding itself has first to create the objective world, for this cannot just step into our heads from without, already cut and dried, through the senses and the openings of their organs. Thus the senses furnish nothing but the raw material, and this the understanding first of all works up into the objective grasp and apprehension of a corporeal world governed by laws, and does so by means of the simple forms . . . namely space, time and causality, (Schopenhauer, *FRSR*, p. 78).

Like Kant, Schopenhauer takes space and time to be forms of sensibility but unlike Kant, he believes that the law of causality is the sole form of the understanding and that its application is intuitive and immediate rather than conceptual. It is part of this view that the subject's body is also objective for him: it is for him only "an object among objects," (Schopenhauer, *FRSR*, p. 124). And the movement of his body is "for him merely an empirically perceived fact."

Consider now Schopenhauer's objection to Kant. He says that there is no difference between the ship case and the house case because both involve events, the knowledge of which is objective:

Both are changes in the position of two bodies relatively to each other. In the first case one of these bodies is the observer's own organism, and indeed only a part thereof, namely his eye, and the other is the house; with respect to the parts of the house, the position of the eye is successively changed. In the second case the ship alters its position relatively to the river, and so the change is between two bodies. Both are events; the only difference is that in the first case the change starts from the observer's own body whose sensations are naturally the starting-point of all his perceptions (Schopenhauer, *FRSR*, p. 124).

In other words, according to Schopenhauer, the subject perceives *both* successions as objective. For he is perceiving all the relata involved, including his own body as *objects*. As discussed above, he does this by *positing* external causes for his sensations according to the operation of the understanding.

If we accept Schopenhauer's theory of perception he is entitled to claim that in the case of the house the succession of the subject's perceptions (representations) depends on a sequence of impressions made by other objects upon his body, and is therefore an *objective succession*. And, such a succession can be recognized quite easily without the objects that successively act upon the subject's body standing in a causal relation to one another.³

III. Plausibility of Schopenhauer's View

So far, I have shown that Schopenhauer's view of objectivity entitles him to claim that the two cases are analogous, i.e., that the subject's perception of the house is as objective for him as that of the movement of the ship. However, his case is further strengthened once we notice that his view accurately captures our intuitive insights into the workings of our visual perception. When under a normal course of circumstances we open our eyes we simply assume that we see three-dimensional *objects* regardless of whether they are perceived as relata in an irreversible, or for that matter reversible, spatio-temporal succession. By contrast, Kant's account, as outlined above, implies the implausible thesis that we take ourselves as perceiving objects only when we perceive irreversible spatio-temporal successions.

In other words, Schopenhauer's insistence that the understanding creates the objective world is based on, and supported by, the plausible intuitive insight that every perception involves *objects*. By contrast, Kant's claim that the subject's grasp of objectivity is not determined through mere perception but is instead a matter of the subject's application of concepts (Kant, *CPR*, B 234) runs counter to this insight, and to this extent undermines his explanation.

It should be noted that the positing of *objects* that occurs in every act of perception is a *condition* of perception rather than its subject-matter. This point is captured in answer to the question "What do you see there?" As Wittgenstein noticed in his *Philosophical Investigations* (henceforth, *PI*), this question can be replied to in either of the following ways:

"I see *this*" (and then a description, a drawing, a copy). The other: "I see a likeness between these two faces"—let the man I tell this to be seeing the faces as clearly as I do myself.

The importance of this is the difference of category between the two "objects" of sight. (Wittgenstein, *PI*, part II, sect. xi).

The difference between each of these two categories on the one hand, and the subject's positing of *objects*, on the other, is the difference of levels: the subject's ability to say either "I see *this*" or "I see a likeness between these two faces" presupposes that the referents of the demonstrative expressions contained in these two statements are posited as *objects* in the process of his perception. Moreover, both these statements involve the linguistic and conceptual articulation of the subject-matter of one's perception. However, the positing of objects proceeds at a *non-conceptual* level, and this is accounted for by Schopenhauer's theory. Having discussed at great length various details concerning vision in order to show that understanding is predominantly active therein, Schopenhauer sums up his view as follows:

By conceiving every change as an *effect* and referring this to its cause the understanding brings about the cerebral phenomenon of the objective world on the basis of the fundamental a priori intuitions of space and time, and for this purpose sensation supplies it with only a few data. In fact the understanding carries out this business solely through its own form, the law of causality, and thus quite directly and intuitively, without the assistance of reflection, i.e., of abstract knowledge by means of concepts and words. These are the material of *secondary* knowledge, i.e., of *thought*, of the faculty of *reason* (*Vernunft*) (Schopenhauer, *FRSR*, p. 103).

This view differs from Kant's in the following ways. For Kant, (a) the law of causality is essentially *conceptual* whereas for Schopenhauer it is *non-conceptual*. For Kant, (b) the law of causality, despite being conceptual comes under the faculty of *understanding*. For Schopenhauer all concepts come under the faculty of *reason*.

IV. Problem with Phantasms

Schopenhauer's view that every perception posits *objects* is logically independent from another view embraced by him, which I believe is false:

We are always able to distinguish objective representations from subjective, real objects from phantasms (Schopenhauer, *FRSR*, p. 127-8).⁴

That this view is false is made obvious by recalling various cases in which the subject takes a phantasm for an *object* or *vice versa*, or when he simply suspends his belief as to whether a certain occurrence is objective or not. As Schopenhauer accounts for this distinction only in terms of the subject's discernment between his dreaming and waking experiences, it is possible that his intention was that the foregoing claim be considered only in connection with this particular kind of case which he tackles as follows:

. . . while dreaming, we take phantasms for real objects, and only when we wake up, . . . do we recognize the error . . . (Schopenhauer, *FRSR*, p. 128).

However, this is also false as there are cases in which we are not aware that we have nodded off and as a result we take creations of our dreams to be real objects.

It should be noted though, that this failure on Schopenhauer's part does not favour Kant since the Kantian view of objectivity is equally incapable of dealing with this matter. To claim that the subject's grasp of an irreversible (or for that matter reversible) spatio-temporal succession suffices as a distinguishing mark of his grasp of the objective is to expose oneself to a similar objection:⁵ While dreaming or hallucinating, the subject can experience a sequence of his phantasms as irreversible; yet, he would be wrong in believing that he is perceiving an objective succession.

V. Ewing's Interpretation and Its Shortcomings

In the light of our discussion in section III above, we need to approach with caution Ewing's claim that the proofs of causality given by Kant and Schopenhauer cannot really be separated but are, at the most, different aspects of the same proof (Ewing, *Kant's Treatment of Causality*, p. 90). Schopenhauer's proof of causality amounts to his foregoing claim that sensation cannot give objects for the subject unless he has assumed an external cause to account for his sensations as effects. On the other hand, Kant's contention, according to Ewing (Ewing, *Kant's Treatment of Causality*, p. 88), is that, when we recognize a succession as objective, we, ipso facto, recognize it as causally determined by some (unspecified and unknown) antecedents.⁶ From this it then follows that both Schopenhauer and Kant maintain that unless we assume causality, knowledge of the objective world is impossible. Furthermore, Ewing concludes that the inference from our sensations to an external cause, advocated by Schopenhauer, is nothing but the recognition of certain elements in our experience as necessarily determined by that cause, and hence, in so far as thus determined, "irreversible" in order. But, Ewing believes, it is just this irreversibility in experience on which Kant insists as a necessary prerequisite of knowledge (Ewing, *Kant's Treatment of Causality*, p. 90).

Though it can be granted that through the process of the intuitive inference to external causes of our sensations we recognize certain elements as *irreversible*, if simultaneous rather than successive,⁷ we should be very cautious about Ewing's conclusion that the irreversibility implicit in Schopenhauer's proof of causality amounts to that in Kant, and that consequently the two proofs of causality cannot be separated. That is, this conclusion appears to hold true if the irreversibilities in Kant and Schopenhauer, respectively, are considered with regard to the *function* they play in these two proofs of causality. However, if they are considered in the context of the *cognitive levels* at which they are involved, the difference is vast. For Schopenhauer the irreversible relation at issue is

grasped at the *non-conceptual* level of the subject's positing of *objects*; for Kant the corresponding irreversible relation is grasped at the level of the subject's application of concepts to spatio-temporal sequences. But, we have seen that it is Schopenhauer's rather than Kant's view that is based on, and supported by, our intuitive insights.

VI. Human Body and Perception

Further evidence in favour of Schopenhauer's view of objectivity can be provided by considering the background against which it has been advanced. Unlike Kant, Schopenhauer ascribes an essential role to the human body in the process of perception: the organic body is the starting-point for the intuitive [i.e., sensory] perception of all other objects and therefore helps to bring this about . . . (Schopenhauer, *FPSR*, p. 121). In other words, this is to say that our perception of the world is such that it could only be a perception of an embodied agent, which brings us close to some recent claims in philosophy. Charles Taylor in discussing Merleau-Ponty's argument from the nature of perception to the conception of the subject as an embodied agent has argued that this move should be valid for perception is basic to us as subjects. To be a subject is to be aware of the world and this is achieved only by our perceiving it from where we are, i.e., with our senses. Taylor believes that this is basic, first because the world is always there, as long as we are aware at all; and second because it is the foundation of other ways of having the world. "Now our perception of the world is essentially that of an embodied agent, engaged with, or at grips with the world" (Taylor, "The Validity of Transcendental Arguments," p. 154).

What is more, Taylor's further explanation of this claim resembles Schopenhauer's view in that he assumes that perception does not involve our application of concepts. Having remarked correctly that our perceptual field has an orientational structure, a foreground and a background, an up and down, he goes on to make these plausible remarks:

Now this orientational structure marks our field as essentially that of an embodied agent. It is not just that the field's perspective centres on where I am bodily—this by itself doesn't show that I am essentially agent. But take the up-down directionality of the field. What is it based on? Up and down are not simply related to my body; up is not just where my head is and down where my feet are. For I can be lying down, or bending over, or upside down; and in all these cases "up" in my field is not the direction of my head. Nor are up and down defined by certain paradigm objects in the field, such as earth or sky: the earth can slope for instance . . . Rather up and down are related to how one would move and act in the field (Taylor, "The Validity of Transcendental Arguments," p. 154).⁸

Although Schopenhauer does not deal with the role of the human body

in perception in these terms, it is important to note that this plausible analysis perfectly supplements his view. By the same token it also renders groundless Kant's view that our perception of the world is that of a *disembodied* agent to which he was led by his disregard for the human body.

VII. Concluding Remark

In this paper I have argued that Schopenhauer's view of objectivity is more plausible than Kant's. My main reasons for this conclusion are the following. Firstly, unlike Kant, Schopenhauer accurately captures our intuitive insights into the workings of our visual perception. Secondly, and again in contrast to Kant, Schopenhauer recognizes that our sensory perception is essentially that of an embodied agent.⁹

1 This can be further accounted for along the lines of Walsh's suggestion: "An event is a happening at a determinate point in time; it is something which belongs not just to the private experience of a single individual, but to the common experience. It is part of the objective order, the order which is the same for each of us, or for each of us in so far as he is rational" (Walsh, *Kant's Criticism of Metaphysics*, p. 136).

2 As is well-known Schopenhauer on his own principles is in difficulty saying that objects are posited as causes. On this issue see White, *On Schopenhauer's Fourfold Root of the Principle of Sufficient Reason*, chapter four, for his suggestion as to how this difficulty can be met.

3 Yet, Ewing has claimed that Schopenhauer is mistaken in believing that the case of the ship and the case of the house are analogous since in the case of the subject's perception of the house the movement of the subject's body is still subjective in reference to the object of cognition. That is, in so far as the subject's perceptions are determined by such movements and not by the object observed, they are, claims Ewing, not referred to that object (Ewing, *Kant's Treatment of Causality*, p. 87).

It is, however, clear by now that on Schopenhauer's view both the subject's perception of the house and his perception of the movements of his own body are *objective* for the subject, thus rendering Ewing's claim groundless. A similar proposal is made by Bennett. Discussing the two cases he remarks: "Since the distinction between perceiving a process and surveying an object requires that the percipient shall have a body, or at least a 'point of view' which he can control, Kant's analysis—in which bodies are not even mentioned—was bound to fail. His neglect of the fact that humans have bodies connects with his failure to see that when I survey an object an objective process is involved, namely my own movements" (Bennett, *Kant's Analytic*, p. 222).

4 It is understood that this is a distinction that the subject makes between two different kinds of feature of experience rather than one between the subjective versus "objective" which would lie beyond experience.

5 Note that I am not saying that Kant is in fact making this claim. This is in line with Paton's insistence (Paton, *Kant's Metaphysics of Experience*, II, p. 239) that Kant is not arguing from the observed irreversibility of the subject's sense-perceptions to an objective succession but rather from an assumed objective succession to the irreversibility of the subject's sense-perceptions, a point that has been acknowledged in the present paper.

6 I will here ignore problems pointed out by Schopenhauer further in section 23 of *FPSR* that Kant might be facing in relating irreversibility with causality.

7 That is, the subject's assuming of external causes to account for his sensations as effects can be seen as involving his assuming that this causal order cannot be reversed. But, as he intuitively takes both to occur at the same time, the irreversibility in question appears as simultaneous rather than successive.

8 See also Evans, *The Varieties of Reference*, section 6.3. Compare this also with Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, part II, section viii, as well as with Husserl, *Die Krisis die europäischen wissenschaften*, sections 28 and 47, and Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, part one, sections 3 and 4.

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