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KNOWING THE WORLD "IN ITSELF":
CRITICISMS OF METAPHYSICAL ANTIREALISM

Abstract

A number of contemporary philosophers hold – as Kant did in his days – that we cannot know the world “in itself”, and I argue that this claim is unwarranted. I grant that we cannot know the world without thereby entering in relation with it, and that knowledge differs from the world in important ways (such as in being *conceptual*). But I deny that these peculiarities prevent knowledge of the world in itself, understood as a meaningful correspondence of some sort between our beliefs or descriptions and the way the world is independently of us. Accordingly, I examine and criticize a number of arguments purportedly establishing this conclusion: I argue that it doesn’t follow from the impossibility of independently comparing our descriptions with the world in itself, nor from the alleged fact that we know through representations, nor from the “*a priori*” nature of the concepts involved in our knowing processes. In particular, I reject the idea that either perception or representation or conceptualization constitute a “veil” between the knowing subject and the world; that criticisms of the “myth of the given” show that no information concerning independent reality is available to us; and that since we cannot think or talk but in conceptual terms, we cannot describe a world which is not in itself conceptual. In the last part I discuss Goodman’s and Putnam’s claim that the impossibility of knowing the world in itself may be inferred from the existence of alternative but equivalent descriptions, often encountered in contemporary science and philosophy.