

Transcendental Realism Handout

The Classical Positions

Classical Realism: Any position that takes there to be a *real* structure of the world that is **ontologically independent** (and thus distinct from) the structure of thought. This position is exemplified by thinkers such as Aristotle and Locke.

Classical Idealism: Any position that takes there to be a *real* structure of the world that is in some sense identical to (and thus **ontologically dependent** upon) the structure of thought. This position is exemplified by thinkers such as Berkeley and Hegel.

Correlationism: Any position which holds that the real structure of the world is to some extent *unknowable*, insofar as knowledge is always relativised to the **subjective conditions** of knowledge (e.g., forms of intuition, cultures, or language-games, etc.). There is no access to the in-itself, there is only the in-itself-for-us. This position is exemplified by Kant, Heidegger and Wittgenstein.

New Positions

Deflationary Realism: Any position which denies that there is a **thick** sense of reality, and which holds that the structure of the world and the structure of thought are **reciprocally sense dependent**, without being **reference dependent**.

Transcendental Realism: Any position that shows that the structure of thought itself implies that there is a **real** structure of the world in **excess** of the structure of thought.

Definitions

Sufficiency Thesis: the ontological independence of the in-itself from thought is **sufficient** to establish the possibility that the in-itself could be different from the way it appears in relation to thought, and thus to establish epistemic dependence.

Quine Thesis: There is no **thick** notion of reality for entities, but only a **thin** notion. An entity is real in this sense **iff** we take there to be something **true** of it.

McDowell Thesis: There are only **thin** notions of **reality** and **truth**. A property is real **iff** we take some ascriptions of it to entities to be true.

Lewis-Brandom Thesis: There is only a **thin** notion of reality with respect to **aspects** of the world. An aspect of the world is real in this sense if we take there to be **true** claims about it. The nature of this aspect is determined by the **semantics** of those claims.

Sense Dependency: "Concept P is sense dependent upon concept Q just in case one cannot count as having grasped P unless one counts as grasping Q."

Reference Dependency: "Concept P is reference dependent upon concept Q just in case P cannot apply to something unless Q applies to it."

Accounts of Thought

Fichtean Consciousness: The I (subject) **posits** the not-I (object) as **not posited**.

Hegelian Natural Consciousness

There are two basic features:-

- 1) Consciousness **relates itself** to its object, or takes its object to be a certain way. What this means, is that it **makes a claim** about its object.
- 2) Consciousness distinguishes between its relating (or its claim) and the object as it is **in itself**. In essence, consciousness allows for the **possibility of error**.

These then have two implications:-

- 3) Because consciousness *itself* makes the distinction between its claim and the object it is about, the object cannot be truly **in-itself**, but must be **for-consciousness**. This means that consciousness must have a **concept** of its object.
- 4) However, consciousness cannot be aware that the object is for-it without ceasing to be consciousness, and thus must **suppress** this fact. This means that consciousness cannot recognise that the concept of the object is **dependent upon it**, without undermining the possibility of error.

Transcendentalism Definitions

Mind Independence: Something is in-itself if it can **exist** independently of the existence of minds.

Attitude Independence: Something is in-itself if **the way it is** is independent of **the way we take it to be**.

Correlationist Intuition: The suppression of the concept prevents us from ever establishing the **absolute attitude independence** of the object of representation. This means that whether or not our claims about the object are true is never completely up to the object, but is always **mediated** by something that we, either as individuals or as a community, have **authority** over.

The World: What is the case. The totality of what is true.

The Real: What is really the case. The totality of what is objectively true.

The Formal Structure of the Real: The structures of thought in which our picture of the Real consists. This is a **transcendental** (synthetic *a priori*) and thus **non-objective** matter. The object of the **critique of metaphysics**.

The Real Structure of the Real: The **real structure of the world**, as it is **in itself**. This is an **objective** (synthetic *a posteriori*) matter. The object of **metaphysics**.

Objectivity

Objectual Commitments: Claims about specific objects (e.g., 'this liquid tastes sour', and 'everyone in this room has excellent taste in philosophy').

Inferential Commitments: Claims which make explicit inferential rules, which constitute the content of predicate concepts (e.g., 'if something *tastes sour* then it is an **acid**' and 'if something is an **acid** then it *turns litmus paper red*').

Conceptual Revision Example

Two inferential commitments constituting the content of the concept of acid:-

- 1) 'if something *tastes sour* then it is an **acid**'
- 2) 'if something is an **acid** then it *turns litmus paper red*'

An objectual commitment from perception:-

- 3) 'this liquid *tastes sour* and *turns litmus paper blue*'

These can't all be true, and so perception forces us to revise our concept of acid.