

Immanuel Kant,
 "Permanence of Substance,"
 from *The Critique of Pure Reason*

beautiful

where the fuck are you talking
 about

Immanuel Kant (1724–1804), German Critical Idealist, is sometimes thought to have brought about a "Copernican Revolution" in philosophy by his claim that the human mind determines the structure of appearances. Our first text is taken from *The Critique of Pure Reason* and is a reply to Hume. Our second text, taken from the same volume, shows that all our concepts, including that of substance, apply only to appearances, not to the reality behind them. This veiled ultimate reality, which Kant calls the "noumena," is utterly unlike anything we can conceive of.

In all variation by appearances substance is permanent, and its quantum in nature is neither increased nor decreased.

Proof

All appearances are in time; and solely in time, as substrate (viz., as permanent form of inner intuition), can either *simultaneity* or *succession* be presented. Hence time, in which all variation by appearances is to be thought, endures and does not vary. For time is that in which, and as determinations of which, sequentiality or simultaneity can alone be presented. Now time by itself cannot be perceived. Hence the substrate which presents time as such, and in which all variation or simultaneity can in apprehension be perceived through the appearances' relation to it, must be found in the objects of perception, i.e., in the appearances. But the substrate of everything real, i.e., of everything belonging to the existence of things, is *substance*. In substance alone, and as determination, can everything belonging to existence be thought. Hence the

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permanent in relation to which all time relations of appearances can alone be determined is substance [contained] in appearance, i.e., the real of appearance that as substrate of all variation remains always the same. Since, therefore, substance cannot vary in its existence, its quantum in nature can also be neither increased nor decreased.

Our apprehension of the manifold of appearance is always successive, and therefore is always varying. Hence through apprehension alone we can never determine whether this manifold considered as object of experience is simultaneous or sequential. We cannot determine this unless something underlying in experience is there *always*—i.e., something *enduring* and *permanent* of which all variation and simultaneity are only so many ways (modes of time) in which the permanent exists. Hence all time relations (for simultaneity and succession are the only relations in time) are possible only in the permanent. I.e., the permanent is the *substratum* of the empirical presentation of time itself; all time determinations are possible only in this substratum. Permanence expresses time as such as the constant correlate of all existence of appearances, of all variation and of all concomitance. For variation concerns not time itself, but only appearances in time (just as simultaneity is not a mode of time itself; for in time no parts are simultaneous, but all are sequential). If we wished to attribute to time itself a succession or sequentiality, then we would have to think yet another time wherein this succession would be possible. Solely through the permanent does sequential *existence* in different parts of the time series acquire a *magnitude*, called *duration*. For in mere succession by itself existence is always vanishing and starting, and never has the least magnitude. Without this permanent, therefore, there is no time relation. Now time cannot in itself be perceived. Therefore this permanent in appearances is the substratum of all time determinations. Hence it is also the condition for the possibility of all synthetic unity of perceptions, i.e., the possibility of experience; and all existence and all variation in time can only be regarded, by reference to this permanent, as a mode of the existence of what is enduring and permanent. Therefore in all appearances the permanent is the object itself, i.e., the (phenomenal) substance, whereas whatever varies or can vary belongs only to the way in which this substance or these substances exist, and hence to their determinations.

I find that in all ages not just philosophers but even the common understanding have presupposed this permanence as a substratum of all variation of appearances; and they probably always assume it, moreover, as indubitable. The only difference is that the philosopher

expresses himself somewhat more determinately on this point than does the common understanding, by saying that in all changes in the world *substance* endures and only the *accidents* vary. Yet nowhere do I encounter so much as an attempt to prove this quite synthetic proposition. Indeed, only seldom is the proposition put, as surely it deserves to be, at the top of the laws of nature that are pure and hold completely a priori. The mere proposition that substance is permanent is indeed tautological. For merely because of this permanence do we apply the category of substance to appearance, and people ought to have proved that in all appearances there is in fact something permanent wherein the mutable is nothing but a determination of its existence. Such a proof, however, can never be conducted dogmatically, i.e., from concepts, because it concerns a synthetic a priori proposition; and people never thought of the fact that such propositions are valid only in reference to possible experience and hence can be proved only by a deduction of the possibility of experience. It is no wonder, then, that although this proposition has been laid at the basis in all experience (because in empirical cognition one *feels* the need for it), yet it has never been proved.

A philosopher was asked, How much does smoke weigh? He replied: From the weight of the burnt wood subtract the weight of the ashes that remain, and you will have the weight of the smoke. He therefore presupposed as incontestable that *matter* does not pass away even in fire, but that its *form* only undergoes an alteration. Similarly the proposition that nothing arises from nothing was only another consequence inferred from the principle of permanence, or rather from the principle of the everlasting existence of the subject proper [contained] in appearance. For if the [component] in appearance that we wish to call substance is to be the substratum proper of all time determination, then all existence in past as well as future time must be determinable solely and exclusively by reference to it. Hence we can give the name substance to an appearance only because we presuppose the existence of substance at all time. This existence at all time is not even well expressed by the word permanence, since permanence applies more to future time. On the other hand, the intrinsic necessity to be permanent is linked inseparably with the necessity always to have been, and therefore the expression may be allowed to remain. *Gigni de nihilo nihil, in nihilum nil posse reverti* are two propositions that were connected by the ancients as unseparated and that are now sometimes separated. They are separated, through misunderstanding, because of a conception that they

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concern things in themselves and that the first proposition might therefore run counter to the world's depending (even in terms of its substance) on a supreme cause. But there is no need for such worry. For we are here talking only about appearances[, which are] in the realm of experience; and the unity of experience would never be possible if we were to let new things originate (in terms of substance). For there would then no longer be what alone can present the unity of time, viz., the identity of the substratum, by reference to which alone all variation has thoroughgoing unity. On the other hand, this permanence is nothing more than our way of presenting the existence of things (in appearance).

The determinations of a substance, which are nothing but particular ways for the substance to exist, are called *accidents*. They are always real, because they concern the existence of substance. (Negations are only determinations expressing the nonexistence of something in substance.) If now we attribute a special existence to this real in substance (e.g., motion, as an accident of matter), then this existence is called *inherence*, as distinguished from the existence of substance, which is called *subsistence*. From this [attribution of a differentiated existence to the real in substance], however, arise many misinterpretations; and we speak more accurately and correctly if we characterize an accident only as the way in which the existence of a substance is determined positively. Yet by virtue of the conditions of our understanding's logical use we cannot avoid separating, as it were, what can vary in a substance's existence while the substance itself endures, and examining it in relation to what is properly permanent and radical. And hence this category has indeed been put under the heading of the relations, but more as the condition of relations than as itself containing a relation.

Now this permanence is also the basis for the following correction of the concept of *change*. Arising and passing away are not changes of what arises or passes away. Change is a way of existing that ensues upon another way of existing of the same object. Hence whatever does change *endures*, and only its *state* varies. This variation, therefore, concerns only the determinations, which can cease or, for that matter, start. Hence we can say, using an expression that seems somewhat paradoxical: only the permanent (i.e., substance) undergoes change; the mutable undergoes no change but only a *variation*, since some determinations cease and others start.

Hence change can be perceived only in substances; and an arising

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or passing away taken absolutely, i.e., without its pertaining merely to a determination of the permanent, cannot at all be a possible perception. For precisely this permanent makes possible the presentation of the transition from one state to another, and from not-being to being; and hence these can be cognized empirically only as varying determinations of what endures. Suppose that something absolutely begins to be. If you suppose this, then you must have a point of time in which it was not. But to what will you fasten this point of time, if not to what is already there? For an empty time that would precede is not an object of perception; but if you tie this arising to things that were beforehand and that continue up to the something that arises, then this something was only a determination of what, as the permanent, was beforehand. The case is the same also with passing away; for it presupposes the empirical presentation of a time where an appearance no longer is.

Substances ([contained] in appearance) are the substrates of all time determinations. If some substances arose and others passed away, this would itself annul the sole condition of the empirical unity of time; and appearances would then refer to two different times wherein existence would be flowing concurrently—which is absurd. For there is *only one* time, wherein all different times must be posited not as simultaneous but as sequential.

Permanence, accordingly, is a necessary condition under which alone appearances are determinable as things or objects in a possible experience.

Appearances, insofar as they are thought as objects according to the unity of the categories, are called phenomena. But if I assume things that are objects merely of the understanding and that, as such, can nonetheless be given to an intuition—even if not to sensible intuition (but hence *coram intuitu intellectuali*)—then such things would be called noumena (*intelligibilia*).

Now one would think that the concept of appearances, as limited by the Transcendental Aesthetic, provides us already by itself with the objective reality of noumena and justifies the division of objects into phenomena and noumena, and hence also the division of the world into a world of sense and a world of understanding (*mundus sensibilis et intelligibilis*). Indeed, one would think that the concept justifies this division in such a way that the distinction here concerns not merely the logical form of the cognition of one and the same thing, viz., as

indistinct or distinct, but concerns the difference regarding how things can be given to our cognition originally and regarding which they are in themselves distinguished from one another in type. For if the senses present something to us merely *as it appears*, then surely this something must also in itself be a thing, and an object of a nonsensible intuition, i.e., an object of understanding. That is, a cognition must then be possible in which no sensibility is to be found, and which alone has reality that is objective absolutely—i.e., a cognition whereby objects are presented to us *as they are* while being cognized in our understanding's empirical use only *as they appear*. Hence there would be, besides the empirical use of the categories (which is limited to sensible conditions), also a pure and yet objectively valid use of them; and we could not assert what we have alleged thus far, viz., that our pure cognitions of understanding are nothing more at all than principles of the exposition of appearance which even *a priori* deal with no more than the formal possibility of experience. For a wholly different realm would here lie open before us: a world, as it were, thought (perhaps even intuited) by the intellect—a world that could engage our pure understanding not less, but indeed much more nobly.

Now it is true that all our presentations are by the understanding referred to some object; and since appearances are nothing but presentations, the understanding refers them to a something as the object of sensible intuition. But this something is in so far only the transcendental object. This, however, signifies only a something = x of which we do not know—nor (by our understanding's current arrangement) can in principle ever know—anything whatsoever. Rather, this transcendental object can serve only, as a correlate of the unity of apperception, for the unity in sensible intuition's manifold by means of which the understanding unites that manifold in the concept of an object. This transcendental object cannot be separated at all from the sensible data, for then there remains nothing through which it would be thought. It is, therefore, not in itself an object of cognition, but is only the presentation of appearances under the concept of an object as such—a concept determinable through the manifold of these appearances.

Precisely because of this, too, the categories present no special object given to the understanding alone, but serve only to determine the transcendental object (the concept of something as such) through what is given in sensibility, in order that we can thereby cognize appearances empirically under concepts of objects.

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substratum of sensibility, have added to the phenomena also noumena that only the pure understanding can think, it rests merely on the following. Sensibility—and its realm, viz., that of appearances—is itself limited by understanding so that it deals not with things in themselves but only with the way in which, by virtue of our subjective character, things appear to us. This was the result of the entire Transcendental Aesthetic; and from the concept of an appearance as such, too, it follows naturally that to appearance there must correspond something that is not in itself appearance. For appearance cannot be anything by itself and apart from our way of presenting; hence, if we are not to go in a constant circle, then the word appearance already indicates a reference to something the direct presentation of which is indeed sensible, but which in itself—even without this character of our sensibility (on which the form of our intuition is based)—must be something, i.e., an object independent of sensibility.

Now from this consideration arises the concept of a *noumenon*. But this concept is not at all positive and is not a determinate cognition of some thing, but signifies only the thinking of something as such—something in which I abstract from all form of sensible intuition. But in order that a noumenon may signify a true object, to be distinguished from all phenomena, it is not enough that I free my thought from all conditions of sensible intuition. I must, in addition, also have a basis for assuming an intuition which is different from this sensible one and in which such an object could be given; for otherwise my thought is empty after all, even though not contradictory. Above, we were indeed unable to prove that sensible intuition is the only possible intuition generally, and were able to prove only that it is this *for us*; but we were likewise unable to prove that a different kind of intuition is also possible. And although our thought can abstract from any sensibility, yet we are left with the question whether this thought is not then a mere form of a concept, and whether after this separation there remains an object at all.

The object to which I refer appearance as such is the transcendental object, i.e., the wholly indeterminate concept of something as such. This object cannot be called the *noumenon*. For I do not know concerning it what it is in itself, and have no concept of it except merely the concept of the object of a sensible intuition as such—an object which hence is the same for all appearances. I cannot think it through any categories; for a category holds only for empirical intuition in order to bring it under a concept of an object as such. Although a pure use of

a category is logically possible, i.e., is without contradiction, it has no objective validity whatever, because the category does not then apply to any intuition that would thereby acquire the unity of an object. For a category is, after all, a mere function of thought; through it I am not given any object, but only think what may be given in intuition.