Appearance and Reality

- In the Modern philosophical era, we see the appearance-reality distinction as a major epistemological problem. With Descartes’s separation of the mind and its evidentiary states from the physical world and its various actual conditions, we see emerge the problem of demonstrating a clear, reliable epistemic relation between the two.

- Kant’s response to this problem is his “Copernican” turn, the “anthropologization” of empirical knowledge and the empirical world. [You will see both expressions in Doyle.] This involves a form of idealism – i.e., incorporation into the “external”, empirical world of certain elements of the human mind. These *a priori* elements of the empirical world include both conceptual (the *categories*) and intuitive (inner and outer forms of sense, time and space, respectively) elements. Kant postulates that the specific form of human experience can exist only if something external to us appears to us in the ways made possible by these *a priori* mental processes. This amounts to an “anthropologization” of the empirical world insofar as it conditions that world with features of humanity.

- Kant’s account entails the existence of a “thing-in-itself”, an object whose *appearance* we can experience but whose inner or prior nature lies beyond our possible experience or knowledge. Since even what we can think of an object, by means of the categories, remains special to appearances, this means that the ultimate objects of reality are beyond our possible understanding. (Recall that the understanding is the faculty of experience of human-sensible objects in human-conceptual terms.) Thus, while Kant’s scheme may secure knowledge of empirical objects, such knowledge comes at the expense of knowledge of ultimate reality, a reality lying necessarily beyond and unapproachably by appearance.

Nietzsche

- *HAH* 1.9
  - Nietzsche here acknowledges the bare possibility of a “metaphysical world”, by which we may take him to mean the idea of an in-itself reality, completely independent of the forms of human understanding (both conceptual and intuitive). His remark that there might be little left of the world without our view of it (our heads “cut off”) suggests how much of the world that we understand is “anthropologized”, using the above terminology.
  - We see here, too, Nietzsche’s “genealogical” analysis of metaphysical doctrines – i.e., his tendency to ask how we came to have such views.
Given such other difficulties as they may face, suspicious origins might give us enough further reason to reject them.

- Part of what is suspicious in the notion of a thing-in-itself (understood as Kant does) is for Nietzsche its completely “negative” nature. None of our predicates can be assigned to the thing-in-itself. We can know only negative claims about it – e.g., that it does not fall under any of our concepts.

- We also see in this section an expression of Nietzsche’s argument from indifference. A thing to which we can assign no meaningful (positive) predicate is not a thing that can affect or influence us in any way. Such a thing, then, may with impunity be wholly ignored.

- Our world of errors

- Nietzsche sees two errors in the concept of the thing-in-itself. The first of these is the error asserting the identity of the thing-in-itself. This notion of an identity enables the would-be knower to distinguish itself from others, or others from itself – both identities turn out to be useful, e.g., for feeding the self and avoiding or finding others (cf. *HAH* I.18). We have here then two forms of identity, one synchronic and the other diachronic: at a given time, one thing may be identified as “identical with itself” (*HAH* I.18); and given two times, we may identify an object perceived at one time as identical with an object perceived at another. Note that these identities are understood as independent of the given thing’s interaction or interrelation with any other thing.

- The second (related) error is the postulation of a subject distinct from its deeds (or, generally, distinct from its interactions with other things). The error is found in distinguishing a “quantum of power” from its “driving, willing, effecting”. (*GM* I.13) This idea Nietzsche finds in the concept of the atom and in Kant’s concept of the thing-in-itself. This subject (also “soul”) is capable of interaction with other things, but its nature remains utterly unaffected by such interaction. Nietzsche traces this idea (in *GM* I.13) to the premise that humans have a choice as to how they express their basic nature (as between strong and weak).

- *WP* 619, 621

- Nietzsche argues that our understanding of physical force is dependent upon our understanding of our own capacity to move the world, which boils down to our experience of *will*. In §621, he rejects the notion of a force that we cannot understand – whatever force is, it must be familiar to us if we are to have any understanding of it. In §619, he suggests that it is only by “analogy” to our own case that we have any grasp of the motions of other things. He thus ascribes to all things a fundamental “will to power”, which, in conjunction with that above remarks concerning identity and subjects, implies a world whose whole being is willing to power.

- *BGE* 36 and *WP* 636

- A final question for Nietzsche is whether his doctrine of universal will to power is coherent. The question derives from the evident *relationality* of
being that the doctrine implies. If the nature of *all* phenomena is determined solely by some *other* thing, then the doctrine would seem to form a house of cards. If nothing has a prior, intrinsic nature, then it is difficult to see how anything can have any nature at all.

- On the other hand, if Nietzsche accepts that objects have intrinsic natures, then he would seem to revert to Kant’s position, which implies the separation of appearance from reality (i.e., empirical appearance from thing-in-itself).
- Nietzsche might avoid both difficulties if *willing* is not only determined relationally but also involves some intrinsic nature, where this nature, furthermore, is not necessarily divorced from human terms of understanding (and, further, where these terms do not *constitute* experience of the object understood, as in Kant, but merely enable us to understand it). Some suggestion of both points is to be found in these passages.
  - In *BGE* 36, Nietzsche writes of the powers of the material world “holding the same rank of reality as our own affect – a more primitive form of the world of affects in which everything lies contained in a powerful unity….”
  - In *WP* 636, he writes of “this necessary perspectivism by virtue of which every center of force – not only man – construes all the rest of the world from its own viewpoint, i.e., measures, feels, forms, according to its own force…”
  - Further: “… every specific body strives to become master over all space and to extend its force (- its will to power: ) and to thrust back all that resists its extension. But it continually encounters similar efforts on the part of other bodies and ends by coming to an arrangement (“union”) with those of them that are sufficiently related to it: thus they then conspire together for power. And the process goes on – ”