

relative, is merely to say that we can never know anything without knowing it. And yet it is difficult to see in what other sense it can be affirmed that the thing in itself is unknowable. We must admit that at present it is unknown, but why except in this paradoxical sense should it be unknowable? In our first crude observations we attribute to the object much that we afterwards find to be really due to ourselves; but from the very first Philosophy assures us that there is a true object, which is the external or objective cause of those phenomena of which we ourselves are the subjective cause; and as our knowledge increases, we continually learn how to eliminate from our conception of the object more and more of its subjective elements, and in so doing we continually approach nearer to the conception of the object as it is in itself. To say that we have no knowledge whatever of the thing in itself is a mere paradox. We know that it exists. This, according to Herbert Spencer, is the most certain of all our knowledge.¹ Also, if the thing produces effects of which our sight, hearing, or touch can take cognizance, it follows—and, indeed, it is but the same statement in other words—that the thing has power to produce those effects.² So much, at least, we already know about the thing in itself; and if we keep clear of the unwarranted supposition which so long barred the way to progress—that the properties of things must be *like* the effects produced in us—what is to hinder us from ultimately knowing more about it? It is sometimes argued that we can never free ourselves from the illusion of the senses, because we can never obtain any standpoint of observation out of or beyond our senses. But this would seem to prove too much. An exactly similar *à priori* argument would show that we never could have learnt the true motions of the planets, because we can never obtain any standpoint of observation out of and beyond our earth, which moves with them, and therefore all that we can ever see is their relative, and not their actual motion.

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¹ Spencer's *System of Psychology*, Part i. chap. iii., iv.

² Mill's *Examination of Hamilton*, p. 14.