

we are approaching a knowledge of the thing in itself, we are met by the assertion constantly made that things in themselves are not only unknown, but unknowable, and it therefore becomes necessary to consider carefully what this assertion really means. Mr. Lewes, in his remarks upon Kant, sets down as the first result of the critical Philosophy, that a knowledge of things as they are in themselves is impossible, and consequently ontology, as a science, is impossible. But though Kant in terms denies the possibility of a knowledge of pure object, yet it has been pointed out that he does in fact make many assertions about it. He affirms that noumena exist, and thus applies to them the category or conception of existence. He affirms that they really exist; thus applying to them the category of reality. He affirms that they are noumena, or objects of our *nous*, thus applying to them the category of relation. He affirms that they are objects of our belief, thus applying to them the conception of credibility. He supposes that there are noumena existing besides himself, thus applying the category of plurality. The peculiar merit of his doctrine is held to be that he distinguishes noumena from phenomena, thus applying to them the conception of difference.¹ In like manner, Herbert Spencer makes many positive assertions about that which he declares to be unknown and unknowable. And Mr. Lewes himself tells us that the fundamental principle of classification is that it should be objective and founded on the relations of objects, not subjective and founded on their relations to us.² But how can this be, if we really know nothing whatever about objects except their relation to us? The inference from this inconsistency is that in this matter we are very liable to be misled by ambiguity of terms. Knowledge itself is a relation between the thing known and the person knowing, and therefore it follows of necessity that all our knowledge must in this sense be relative, and we can have no knowledge of the thing as it is in itself, out of all relation. But this is a mere truism. To say that all our knowledge is in this sense

¹ *History of Philosophy*, ii. 485.

² *Ib.*, i. 233.