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"[F]irst and foremost, [...] nothing exists; second, [...] even if it exists it is inapprehensible to man; third, [...] even if it is apprehensible, still it is without a doubt incapable of being expressed or explained to the next man."

Gorgias of Leonti (483–375 BCE): On the Nonexistent or On Nature In The Older Sophists (2001), Rosamond Kent Sprague (ed.), Hackett Publishing Company, p. 42

In the quotation above, we encounter a deep probing into metaphysics and epistemology. These two fields share a profound affinity, since an understanding of reality, i.e. the field of epistemology, is conditioned by the nature of this reality, i.e. the field of metaphysics. For example, if reality is fine-tuned to our apprehension of it then we have an adequate grounding to investigate and determine it. However, if reality is something fundamentally beyond our grasp then we are left in an epistemologically compromised position. The quote gives a set of postulates, which in philosophical diction say that things don't possess a real existence, the real existence of things are at any rate inaccessible to man, and had it been accessible it would still not offer itself to articulation and communication between humans. At first the reader is struck by the bombastic nature of these claims: Does really nothing exist? It's clear that the quote deals with fundamental problems, so to explicate it we need to pose fundamental questions. Therefore, we must ask ourselves: What is the nature of reality and is it accessible?

To answer this question, philosophers have usually operated with a fundamental dichotomy about propositions regarding the nature of reality. They have distinguished between analytic propositions, which are true in themselves and need not be referred to sensuous reality, and synthetic propositions, which are demonstrably true from our experience. The analytic propositions are a priori, meaning that they are necessarily true in the manner of mathematical proofs. Synthetic propositions are a posteriori, meaning that they're contingently true in the manner that natural science can confirm its veracity, but it still could've been otherwise. The philosopher David Hume certainly accepted this dichotomy, which led him to even doubt whether philosophy had any value as an intellectual enterprise, since it evades both being an empirical science and committing itself exclusively to intellectual tautologies.

One of the philosopher Immanuel Kant's greatest achievements, however, was to make this dichotomy collapse and thereby save philosophy from Hume's attack. In fact, Kant claimed that there exists synthetic a priori propositions, bridging the rigid dichotomy; Namely things that exist in the experiential world, i.e. synthetic, but are not deduced from the experiential world but always presuppose it, therefore a priori. Examples of synthetic a priori propositions are the existence of time and space; They are not qualities of any sensuous object, but are rather presupposed in the experience of objects. Now, it's with these conditions for possible experience that the Kantian system proves dangerous, since this means humans will always philosophize with some inescapable presuppositions that evade philosophical scrutiny. From this, Kant raises the distinction between things-in-themselves and appearances, where the former is the real metaphysical nature of something and the latter denotes the idiosyncratic way we apprehend things in, which consequently distorts their metaphysical reality. This is the horror of the Kantian system: metaphysical reality is inaccessible to us. This insight takes us back to the quote we started with. As mentioned, the quote postulates that "even if [something] exists it is inapprehensible to man", which Kant's discoveries are in absolute

accordance with. Initially, we are left thinking the whole quote is vindicated. However, we have yet to point out its devastating shortcoming.

Indeed, metaphysical reality is inapprehensible to man, but therefore my opinion is that we have to establish a strict limit of validity; Humans can validly investigate and determine the nature of appearances since this constitute our accessible domain, whilst attempts to characterize things-in-themselves are necessarily nonsensical and invalid. The quote in question seems to disregard this important insight. Specifically, the quote seems to exhibit a lacking caution when dealing with things-in-themselves, that Nietzsche even critiqued Kant for, which leads to antinomies. An antinomy occurs when reason gives results that are contradictory. This is caused by reason's attempt to apprehend transcendent reality, although it only has validity in possible experience as explained above. To specify this antinomy, the quote posits that "nothing exists"; but clearly things do exist all around us and independent of us, but in another sense their existence is constituted by us alone. In other words, the postulate brings us to an impasse. This is because the quote presumes knowledge of something that necessarily eludes being captured in knowledge. Evidently, we are not privileged to say whether "nothing exists" or whether something exists in a metaphysical sense, since it's a domain that is denied us. Therefore, my opinion is that the quote's first postulate is an overreach, and furthermore that it lacks fidelity to its second postulate which is correct.

To return to the quotation, it is entirely true that "even if [something] exists it is inapprehensible to man", which we find grounding for in Kant's philosophical response to Hume. Naturally it follows that the nature of metaphysical reality is precluded from communication, i.e. that it's "incapable of being expressed or explained to the next man", which makes the quote at least partly sound in philosophical terms. Yet, my opinion is that the quote exhibits a dissonance; having already confirmed the inaccessibility of metaphysical reality, in the postulate that "nothing exists" it speaks of things-in-themselves as if it is a valid domain for characterization by us. We cannot unify this with the two preceding claims, which renders the set of postulates self-defeating. So, to answer our original question, namely what is reality and is it accessible, my opinion is that reality per se is beyond our valid domain of investigation, whilst the reality of appearances can validly be determined by means like natural science. Additionally, we must unconditionally respect the inaccessibility of metaphysical reality so as to not engage in futile investigations, like the quotation does.