

HEGEL'S CRITIQUE OF KANT

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ONE OF THE PROBLEMS TO BE FACED by anyone seeking to understand and to evaluate Hegel's treatment of other philosophers is that he never seems to regard their thought as having any tenure beyond the framework of his own philosophical account of the history of philosophy.¹ All philosophical standpoints and systems are understood by him in terms of his own comprehensive philosophy of spirit. To a large extent, of course, every philosopher proceeds in this way; how else are we to interpret and assess a given position except in terms established by our own view of what is real and what is true? But in Hegel's case which is, admittedly, extraordinary because of his having made history decisive for philosophy, one feels both the presence and the force of his philosophical vision to a peculiar degree at just those points where he considers the thought of others. His treatment of Kant is no exception, and, in fact, he sees Kant as most penetrating in his understanding at precisely those points where he most nearly approximates Hegel's own position. For example, according to Hegel, the singular merit of Kant's *Critique of Judgment* is that in his treatment of the Ideas of nature and freedom, he approached genuinely "speculative" thought, in contrast to criticism, and at the same time caught a glimpse of the Idea as a self-determining reality. Or again, he claims that Kant was, in his treatment of the categories, closest to the truth when he grasped their interrelationships

¹References to Hegel's *Geschichte der Philosophie* are found in *Werke*, ed. Hermann Glockner, Stuttgart, 1959, vols. 17-19; the corresponding English references are found in *Hegel's Lectures on the History of Philosophy*, edited and translated by E. S. Haldane and F. H. Simson, 3 vols., London, 1896. The text of the *Logik* which forms the first part of Hegel's *Enzyklopädie* is found in Glockner, vol. 8; references are to the numbered sections in the original and the corresponding English references are found in *The Logic of Hegel*, trans. W. Wallace, 2nd ed., Oxford, 1892. References to *Glauben und Wissen* are to the Felix Meiner edition. All references to Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* are to the Kemp-Smith translation.

and attributed their triadic arrangement to the fact that the third category results from the application of the first category to the second, which, if we take the unity, plurality, totality triad as an example, means that as we proceed in the analysis of something from unity to plurality, we must understand its totality as the unity of the plurality which resulted. It is clear that Hegel approved of Kant's account because it is in accord not only with his own self-reflected triadism, but also with Hegel's persistent attempt to develop the categories from each other based on his demand that they not be accepted from without "as they are classified in ordinary logic."²

I am calling attention at the outset to Hegel's procedure in interpreting the thought of others not to suggest that he simply failed to represent their views, but rather to indicate that he invariably sets them down in the midst of his own systematic idealism and judges them in accordance with the adequacy of their response to questions posed by his own position. One consequence of this approach is that Hegel views a philosophical position not primarily in terms of its own unifying intention, but from the standpoint of the Idea and his own logic of the Notion plus the assumption that this logic is working itself out through the history of thought. If we apply this principle to his treatment of Kant, it becomes clear that the central point of Hegel's critique must be that Kant failed to hold fast to the actuality of reason and the

² *History of Philosophy*, Glockner 19.567; English trans. Haldane, 438.9. It is worth noticing on this point that despite Kant's claim of completeness for the table of categories (B 105–107), there is very little indication in the *Critique* as to how one would even go about answering the question, "Why these categories and no others?" Hegel, on the other hand, although we may find fault with his particular results, does propose to answer this question through the "labor of the notion," i.e. by "showing" through the actual development of the categories from each other in the dialectical attempt to think Being, how the totality of Being is actually articulated through those categories and no others. In the end, of course, the argument takes the form of claiming "this or nothing" and, on his view, anyone who objects then has the task of providing an alternative "this," that is, an alternative system of categorial articulation. But in any case the actual working out of a consistent and coherent, all-encompassing scheme with a set of categories does provide some ground for answering the initial question; one can say, "Look, we have articulated the whole with these categories and no others are required because there is nothing more to include."

force of the Idea because he opted for the primacy of the understanding and its knowledge of finite reality over all speculative thought. In short, Kant was attacked for subordinating what Hegel made paramount. In this sense the ultimate validity of Hegel's critique of Kant is made to depend on the viability of Hegel's own system.

Hegel's examination of Kant's philosophy is spread over many of his writings starting with *Glauben und Wissen*. Major comments are found in *Phenomenology*, the *Encyclopedia*, in the *Lectures on the History of Philosophy* and in the *Philosophy of Right*. I shall have to limit myself and, therefore, I have decided to confine attention to the treatment of theoretical reason and to exclude the moral philosophy, not because that criticism is not also instructive but rather in view of the fact that it follows largely from principles developed by Hegel in his analysis of Kant's theory of knowledge based on the distinction between understanding and reason. Moreover, in the interest of focusing issues for discussion, I shall not attempt an historical account of the development in Hegel's treatment of Kant from beginning to end. The central points stand out in the later writings through repetition, although it is clear that certain points much emphasized in *Glauben und Wissen* such as the identification of the transcendental imagination with "reason itself," do not figure largely in Hegel's later discussion of Kant's thought.

In what follows, three basic issues will be presented and, while in the nature of the case, they are not independent of each other, they can be given separate treatment. *First*, there is the matter of Hegel's understanding of Kant's enterprise including the question whether there can be a critique of knowledge and, if so, how it is to be carried out. *Second*, there is Hegel's criticism of the "thing-in-itself" doctrine and the consequent charge against Kant of "subjectivism," which Hegel sometimes expressed in the thesis that the Kantian categories are "meaningless" (*bedeutungslos*) apart from the materials of sense. *Third*, there is the examination of the grounds upon which Kant opted for the priority of the finite knowledge of the understanding over the claim of reason, which at the same time raises the question of the relation between experience and the transcendental ideas. Limitations of space do not permit an equally detailed account of all these issues,

but each is important and must figure to some extent in any discussion of Hegel's critique of Kant.

I

One of Hegel's most fundamental criticisms of Kant concerns the basic enterprise of making a critique of the cognitive faculty itself as distinct from, in Hegel's language, proceeding at once to think the Absolute.³ It has been suggested that what divides the two thinkers can be summed up by saying that Kant believed in the priority and necessity of *criticism*, whereas Hegel did not and consequently was forced to proceed with his own system in a fashion which, in Kant's view, could only be described as *dogmatic*. This summary is not entirely correct; a more adequate expression of the relation between the two positions on this head would make it clear that both believed "the forms of thought must be made an object of investigation,⁴ but that they differed considerably in their conceptions of the manner in which the investigation should be carried out. And since the two alternatives they manifest reflect a fundamental division in modern philosophy, some consideration of this issue will at the same time call attention to the contemporaneity of both thinkers.

In the *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*,⁵ Hegel credits Kant with having taken an important step forward in focusing on knowledge as a subject for analysis. And he expresses a similar view in the long *Zusatz* to Section 41 of the *Encyclopedia*, commending Kant for making the concepts through which the old metaphysics was expressed the subject of criticism. Hegel, therefore, was by no means opposed to the aim of making thought and its categories the object of critical scrutiny. But, as was suggested previously, everything depends upon how this is to be done. "In particular," says Hegel, "he [Kant] demanded a criticism of the faculty of cognition as preliminary to its exercise."⁶ But, he continues, there at once arises the "misconception of already knowing before you know," since on Hegel's terms the analysis of

³ See *Glauben und Wissen*, Meiner edition, p. 14.

⁴ *Encyclopedia* 41; Wallace p. 84.

⁵ Glockner, 19.556; English trans., p. 429.

⁶ *Ibid.*

knowledge and the faculty of cognition must itself constitute an instance of cognition. This point is, of course, crucial for the Kantian program; what, it may be asked, is the logical status of criticism, and, more specifically, of the conclusions arrived at by transcendental philosophy with regard to such issues as the relation between the categories and the sensible manifold, the relation between understanding and reason, and, finally, the limitation of reason's legitimate employment to the empirical sphere? Although Kant regarded criticism as proceeding with certainty because its problems can be stated and resolved from the standpoint of the rational faculties themselves, it is curious that there are not many passages in the *Critique* where its pronouncements are specifically referred to as "knowledge." And, indeed, he must have been aware that critical philosophy itself does not locate itself within the confines of either of the two bodies of thought—mathematics and general science of nature—which stand for him as the paradigms of actual knowledge. Critical philosophy, presumably, is on another level from that occupied by the knowledge which stands in need of justification,⁷ and its own justification must rest in the end on the claim that it marks out those necessary conditions without which there could be no experience at all. Kant could reply to Hegel's charge that we are seeking to know before we know in the Kantian enterprise by saying that this preliminary "knowing" represents a peculiar mode of cognition vis a vis, for example, knowing a proposition describing the behavior of a physical system or knowing that a given geometrical theorem can be deduced from Euclid's axioms. The peculiarity would consist in the fact that the critical knowing purports to specify the conditions requisite for all knowing. But Hegel insists that the knowing involved in the examination of knowledge, whatever particular form it may take, be an actual knowing and not merely a propaedeutic to actually knowing.

The dividing line between the two thinkers, however, need not be drawn at the "knowing before you know" issue; more important

⁷ There is, of course, a problem involved in speaking of "justification" since Kant did not regard mathematics as standing in need of a certificate from philosophy (B 199ff.), but it is clear that, in the case of knowledge involving the dynamical categories, he thought otherwise.

is Hegel's objection to the *separation* of the activity of criticism from what might be called the "first order" knowing which is the subject of criticism. This, I take it, is Hegel's more fundamental objection to Kant's procedure. He interpreted Kant's analysis of judgment and of the table of categories derived therefrom as an attempt to find the ground of knowledge in universal and necessary conditions which are, in the nature of the case, abstract and separated not only from their content, but from their *activity* in constituting what we have called "first order" knowing as well. Hegel, by contrast, claimed that criticism and the knowing which is under criticism must be together in a dynamic process of development. The point is well expressed in the same passage of the *Encyclopedia* to which we have referred:

So that what we want is to combine in our process of inquiry the *action* of the forms of thought with a criticism of them. The forms of thought must be studied in their essential nature and complete development: they are at once the object of research and the *action* of that object. Hence they examine themselves: in their own *action* they must determine their limits, and point out their defects. This is that *action* of thought, which will hereafter be especially considered under the name of Dialectic, and regarding which we need only at the outset observe that, instead of being brought to bear upon the categories from without, it is immanent in their own *action*.⁸

Hegel's fundamental complaint, then, is that Kant analyzed the categories as functions of thought, not when they were functioning in actual knowing, but only in their status as necessary conditions for knowing contained in the formal structure of the understanding for the purpose of providing the ground upon which objectivity is based. Hegel wanted to see the categories at work, as it were, in the determination of what is to be known, whereas on his view, Kant considered them only when they were "idling" in the understanding as conditions for the possibility of experience without exhibiting themselves as operative in actual knowing.

Criticism, for Kant, had a positive and a negative side; on the positive side it meant the transcendental determination of those a priori elements which guarantee objectivity in knowledge by virtue of the fact that nothing can be thought as an object except

⁸ *Encyclopedia* 41, Wallace, pp. 84-5. Emphasis added.

through the one universal and necessary set of categories which structure the faculty of understanding possessed by the transcendental subject. On the negative side, criticism has to set the limits of knowledge and of the employment of human faculties and also explain satisfactorily how it happens that reason finds itself inevitably asking questions which it is unable to answer in a cognitive form. Kant clearly regarded criticism as a preliminary to the further exercise of our rational faculties in knowing what is other than themselves and this point is established by his claim that in transcendental philosophy we consider questions "obliquely" and are not directly concerned with knowledge of objects, but rather with the relation between an idea and an object insofar as it can be thought a priori. For Hegel, on the other hand, criticism is no preliminary, but an immanent affair in which the meaning, scope and validity of a category are to be determined by discovering what feature and how much of reality it can express in relation to other categories through the actual process of knowing the world. The difference between them is quite fundamental and presents itself as a gulf which seems impossible to span. Kant, not unlike Descartes, is a *foundationalist* who demands criteria and wants to establish knowledge on the universal and necessary, albeit in transcendental terms, which means the argument to the conditions rather than any appeal to the intuitively self-evident. By contrast, Hegel looked to *outcomes* and *results* so that for him the emphasis in criticism falls not on the structure or contemporaneous pattern of cognitive faculties, but rather on the action of thought in actually interpreting reality and in expressing its intelligible structure. In the former case one looks not to the particular content manifested in some actual process of knowing, but to formal and transcendental criteria which are meant to define knowing as such. In the latter case, one starts with particular determinations of things for the purpose of discovering, through a critical analysis of the interrelation between the categories involved, just what and how much of reality these categories actually express. An atomistic philosophy, for example, has, from this standpoint its element of truth, but its inadequacy and relative abstractness is brought to light only when it is forced to face the task of expressing the whole of reality including actual togethernesses of things which manifest the organic feature of existence.

The Kantian type of criticism focuses on the entrance requirements to the arena of knowledge, the Hegelian type on the critical examination of actual interpretations that have already been entered.

The truth in the Kantian approach is that no philosophical position can remain naive and avoid the exposure and critical examination of either its fundamental categories or its basic program. The Kantian insight exposes the error of those who claim that they are just "doing" philosophy and who stare in amazement at anyone who asks for a critical account of what they are doing or of what they assume. But the chief difficulty of the Kantian approach is the risk of never reaching the discussion of actual philosophical theses, since all the dialectic is devoted to consideration of the preliminaries in the form of what you would, could, might mean or know if you were to propose any such theses—which you often do not. The truth in the Hegelian approach is that it sees the necessity of proceeding directly to *die Sache selbst*, since there is no presuppositionless philosophical preliminary which is neutral with respect to the question of the nature of knowledge or indeed of anything else. The problem posed by this approach is that it may fail to make explicit the existence of immanent criteria—concreteness, consistency, comprehensiveness—which are indeed invoked by the system, and were this not the case, there would be no ground for judging the *outcome* of a process of thought.

Another facet of Hegel's treatment of the critical philosophy as a program is represented by his persistent lumping of it together with the epistemology of Locke and describing both as "empirical psychology." Hegel was, I contend, mistaken in this view, even if it is true that Kant retained some of the assumptions of the classical empiricism he aimed to attack. In *Glauben und Wissen*⁹ Hegel describes Kant's task as identical with Locke's, namely, to discover the limits of understanding so that it will not become hopelessly involved in matters which it does not have the power to resolve. Moreover, throughout the exposition of Kant in that work, Hegel calls his position "psychological" idealism.

⁹ Meiner edition, p. 15.

Much later in the *History of Philosophy*,¹⁰ Hegel was still claiming that Kant proceeds “psychologically, i.e., historically, in describing the modes of the knowing faculty.”¹¹ And in reference to Kant’s categories, Hegel contends that Kant accepted both the forms of intuition and the categories “in an empiric way.”¹² Still further on in the discussion of Kant’s treatment of reason, Hegel claims that Kant is still following the “psychological method” and that consequently he comes upon reason by the merest chance as if it made no difference whether it were a reality or not.¹³ Exactly the same point is made in Introduction to the *Encyclopedia*, but there the emphasis falls on the order of Kant’s exposition of the a priori elements of thought; this order, Hegel claims, “is solely based on psychological and historical grounds.”¹⁴

Now it is obvious that no full scale account of what it is to be a transcendental philosophy as over against a “psychological” theory is possible here, but several crucial points may be made which will serve to place Kant’s unique enterprise in proper perspective. Despite the force of current attacks on the viability of transcendental arguments, it cannot be denied that Kant had hit upon an ingenious and entirely novel approach to the nature of knowledge in terms that go beyond and between an ontologically rooted position like that of Leibniz and Spinoza, and a psychologically oriented approach like that of Hume and Locke. In seeking to delineate what Paton has called a “metaphysic of experience,” Kant was defining knowledge in terms of a validity furnished by a priori elements without which there could be no experience at all. The approach is not to be confused with a genetic account and it is erroneously called “psychological” as was made clear by Kant in the statement, “though all of our knowledge begins with (*anheben*) experience, it does not follow that it all arises out of (*entspringen*) experience.”¹⁵ The key question concerning the

¹⁰ Glockner, 19.561; English trans. pp. 432–33.

¹¹ Hegel’s description harks back to Locke’s “plain, historical account” of knowledge in terms of a literal tracing of ideas to their origins in both sensation and reflection.

¹² Glockner, 19.567; English trans. p. 439.

¹³ Glockner, 19.573; English trans. p. 443.

¹⁴ *Encyclopedia*, Section 41; Wallace, p. 84.

¹⁵ B1; cf. B 166.

a priori synthetic, moreover, points to the uniqueness of the Kantian position in attacking the dogma, based on a complete disjunction between reason and experience, that what is necessary cannot be empirical and what is empirical cannot be necessary. The idea that experience may have a necessary structure to be possible at all is not something which occurred to Kant's predecessors and it has been persistently misunderstood by many of his successors because they have tried to understand the purport of the "transcendental" in terms merely of some dyadic distinction between the "logical" and the "empirical," or even worse, between the "factual" and the "linguistic." The mark of this confusion coincides with the conflation of "a priori" and "analytic" which at once reduces to nonsense Kant's fundamental question. No justice can be done to Kant's position if it is approached on the basis of a dyad; a triadic distinction is necessary involving (a) material of sense, (b) formal logic represented by the principle of contradiction and (c) the transcendental elements which one hesitates to call "logic" because of possible confusion. The crucial point is that (b) and (c) must neither be confused nor lumped together. The best way to clarify the special character of the transcendental approach is to point out that the concepts "object" and "object of knowledge"¹⁶ do *not* properly occur within the framework of formal logic as conceived by Kant. Formal logic is a necessary condition for all thought, but it is *not* a sufficient condition for determining what is meant by an "object" in the quite fundamental sense which the term assumes in the Kantian theory of knowledge. The entire transcendental apparatus of the esthetic and analytic is meant to be definitive of what it is to be an object. This apparatus cannot and must not be put down merely to the "logical" side in contrast with the sensible material taken as "empirical," because the analysis of being an object issues at the same time in the delineation of the general shape of experience, and that is not a matter of formal logic alone. Kant's deduction may be declared invalid, the transcendental approach may be rejected, but the fact remains that Kant's attempt to mark out the necessary conditions which must be met if there is to be any ex-

¹⁶ It seems clear that for Kant the two concepts must ultimately coincide.

perience at all, not only distinguishes his view from all “historical” or genetic accounts, but it also defies legitimate interpretation in terms of a simple “logical”/“empirical” dichotomy. The necessary conditions are transcendental which means that they are neither purely “logical” in the sense of past or present formal logic, nor again are they “empirical” in the sense of sensible material. It is not clear that Hegel fully appreciated Kant’s unique conception of the transcendental¹⁷ as fitting neither into the “logical”/“psychological” dyad nor the “logical”/“empirical” disjunction, and, therefore, he was content to describe Kant’s approach as “psychological” and “historical.” Such a characterization, however, does not do justice to the Kantian position. Perhaps the explanation is that Hegel was less concerned with the justification of empirical knowledge as such and more interested in criticizing Kant for having acknowledged the unity of reason as an idea at the same time that he denied its actuality.

If, however, Hegel’s description of Kant’s view as “psychological” and “subjective” is seen as a fundamental rejection of the thesis that knowledge is confined to “appearance,” that is another matter and the issue should be discussed without turning Kant’s theory into something other than itself. For the peculiar fact about the doctrine of appearance in Kant is not only that the conditions for appearance are said to be universal and necessary, but the object of knowledge (B 236) is defined by him as that in the appearance which determines that it will be apprehended (i.e., judged) in accordance with universal rules. The point is that Kant’s domain of appearance does not have to do with bent sticks in the water or with round coins which “look” elliptical from a certain perspective. In short, Kant’s view on this head should not be discussed in the context of Locke and Hume and Hegel had a tendency to interpret Kant in that way.

II

That Hegel was opposed to Kant’s doctrine of the thing-in-itself and his consequent limitation of human knowledge to the

¹⁷ Hegel seems also not to have grasped the force of the *problem* to which Kant was addressing himself when he insisted on the synthetic character of mathematical judgments. Hegel accepted them as analytic without extended discussion.

sphere of *Erscheinung* is well known and has often been repeated. The limitation in question forms the basis of Hegel's repeated charge of "subjectivism" and his claim that, for Kant, knowledge fails to include the things of the world. Hegel was, in this regard, a thorough-going realist: what we know is the things themselves, their properties, unities and relations. For Hegel, the real is not "behind" or "beyond," but actually *present* in what we apprehend. From this essentially Aristotelian vantage point, Hegel declared Kant's domain of *Erscheinung* insubstantial and subjective. The charge is familiar and does not need to be labored.

There is, however, an aspect of Hegel's criticism with regard to Kant's treatment of things which has not been given the attention it deserves. When, says Hegel, Kant proposed to interpret knowledge of an object in terms of an identity of consciousness and sensible appearance, he in fact failed to include the things themselves because in attributing to consciousness the properties of the thing, the thing itself is reduced to a mere abstract form of unity. But, Hegel contends, the properties are as essential to the thing as the unity. "It is more reasonable," says Findlay representing Hegel's view, "to treat the 'I' of self-consciousness as a self-reflected unity indifferent to what it cognizes, than to do so in the case of the thing and its properties."¹⁸ Although Kant was undoubtedly correct in insisting on the spontaneity exhibited by the experiencing subject in contrast to those accounts of experience which reduce the knower to a passive recipient, there is reason to believe that he exaggerated what appeared to him as a clear asymmetry in the subject thinking the object. The subject judges the object in accordance with the a priori categories of the understanding and the unity, identity and objectivity of the object thought is established through the transcendental unity of apprehension. The subject, in short, *thinks* or judges, and the object *is thought* or judged. While, however, it is true that the object does not "think" the subject, it is also true that *only through thinking the object does the subject apprehend itself as a unified thinking subject* capable of exercising the functions represented by the categories in the formation of judgments. The subject, according to Kant, cannot legitimately think of itself as an object, but only

¹⁸ Findlay, *Hegel, A Re-examination*, London, 1958, p. 202.

as subject—a point on which Hegel in many places expressed agreement with Kant—and it is able to grasp itself as subject only to the extent that it finds that very subjectivity reflected in the transcendental analysis of the subject thinking or judging an object. Hegel's point is that a mutual or reciprocal relation should be acknowledged in which there is due recognition of the "I" of self-consciousness as a *self-reflected unity* which comes to light in the thinking of the object, whereas Kant placed all the emphasis on the unity bestowed on the object in virtue of its being thought by the subject. The unity of the subject for Kant, the unity of apperception which, as he says, is higher than the category of unity, is in fact a reflected unity apprehended solely through transcendental analysis. A proper regard for this fact, on Hegel's view, would have enabled Kant to do greater justice to the things themselves, both their unity and their properties, precisely because the spontaneous activity of the subject would then be counterbalanced by a recognition of the role played by objects in bringing the reflected unity of self-consciousness to light. When, moreover, undue emphasis is placed on the one-way relationship of the subject thinking the object, the relations of *the things themselves to each other* are likely to fall from sight and these relations form an important means whereby the unity and properties of the things become manifest.

Another feature of Hegel's indictment of the Kantian position as "subjectivism" is expressed in his oft repeated claim that the categories are "meaningless" (*bedeutungslos*) apart from the sensible manifold to which they are applied. Whereas I find myself in agreement with much of Hegel's critique of Kant, I do not believe that Hegel was entirely correct in this charge and I am prepared to break a lance in Kant's behalf even if it becomes necessary at the same time to defend Kant against himself. For what complicates the situation is that Kant provided some of the evidence to be used against himself when, at times, he described the pure concepts of the understanding as "purely logical" (or as *sinnlos* apart from the empirical manifold) when he should have written "transcendental." Let us begin with Hegel's own statement from the *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*:

For their own part, the categories are empty, unfilled, and they belong to thought. In order for them to be filled, material is re-

quired. They have content (*Inhalt*) only through the given manifold material of intuitions . . . and they have meaning (*Bedeutung*) only through their combination with this material.¹⁹

The principal question to be raised is whether Hegel means to assert that meaning is identical with reference or with the existence of the sensible content to which the category is applied. It would seem more plausible to say that for Kant, while the category is "empty" without intuition, it is not thereby meaningless, as if its meaning were indeed identical with the existence of the sensible content.

In B 284 Kant draws a clear distinction between the "formal conditions of experience" and some particular perception for the purpose of explaining that whatever is in agreement with these conditions is possible, whereas the actual requires, in addition, a connection with perception. We need not concern ourselves here with problems peculiar to the modal categories; the important point is that there is no warrant for supposing that the "meaning" of the elements expressing the a priori conditions—the forms of intuition and the categories—is uniquely furnished by the singular perception as if these elements had no meaning apart from their instantiation. Again, in B 252 (=A 207) where Kant is discussing the second analogy, he distinguishes the *form* of alteration from a specific content. He writes, "But apart from all question of what the content of the alteration, that is, what the state that is altered, may be, the form of every alteration . . . can still be considered a priori according to the law of causality and the conditions of time." From this it would seem clear that the concept of causality is not "meaningless" apart from its application to particular, actual forces. And, indeed, were this not the case, it would make no sense to distinguish, as Kant did at many points, between *thinking* and *knowing* an object (e.g., B 146, among many). Though no sensible intuition were actually given, we can still think and understand the general form or shape of experience. To adopt an example suggested by Russell, we do not know whether in the year 2000 there will be any people in London, but if there are and any three of them stand in a row, one of them will be "between" the

¹⁹ Glockner, 19. pp. 568–69.

other two. This assertion is perfectly intelligible quite apart from reference to actual individuals standing in that relation. The meaningfulness of the pure spatial concept is *not* identical with the intuitional material which instantiates it on some actual occasion.

On the other hand, it must be admitted, there are passages in Kant which seem to point in the opposite direction. In B 298 Kant says that, with regard to every concept,²⁰ we grasp its “logical form” and consider the possibility of its having an object. Referring to the concept, Kant says, “In the absence of such object, it has no meaning (*Sinn*) and is completely lacking in content (*Inhalt*).”²¹ Further along in the same discussion, he points out that the categories, apart from intuition, “have even less meaning (*Bedeutung*) than the pure sensible forms.”²² The category, understood as a mode of combination by the understanding, Kant declares, “signifies nothing at all” (*gar nichts bedeutet*), when no manifold is given.²³ Here Kant confuses meaning and reference,²⁴ and writes as if the “meaning” of a category is identical with its reference to an object, but surely he cannot mean to assert this identity, since apart from the sensible manifold, the a priori conditions of both sense and understanding retain their meaning as expressing the necessary shape of experience. Without the sensible manifold, the categories may be “empty,” but they are not on that account meaningless. Kant does greater justice to his position when he writes, “The pure categories, apart from formal conditions of sensibility, have only transcendental meaning.”²⁵

²⁰ B 300 makes it clear that categories and principles are involved along with empirical concepts.

²¹ B 298.

²² B 306.

²³ *Ibid.*

²⁴ It is difficult to find terminology which will not be misleading. The particular version of the *Sinn/Bedeutung* distinction offered by Frege and familiar to us, was, of course, not available to Kant and we must not assume it.

²⁵ B 305; cf. B 166 n. where Kant wants to stress the point that “for thought” the categories are not limited by the conditions of sensible intuition; it is the “knowledge” claim that requires limitation to intuition. “In the absence of intuition,” he continues, “the thought of the object may still have its true and useful consequences. . . .”

But it is precisely this meaning which defines the generic structure of experience.

When Hegel declared that Kant's categories are "meaningless" in the absence of the intuitional manifold, he was correct only if he meant that the categories under those circumstances are empty. If, however, he meant to deny their transcendental meaning in calling the empty categories meaningless, he was mistaken.

It would, however, be unfair to Hegel on this point if we did not take into account the curious section 43 of the *Encyclopedia*, where the question of the nature of the categories is central. There the categories are said to be both the means by which the perceptions of sense reach objectivity, and unities of consciousness which have "nothing of their own" because they are conditioned by the material given to them. In the *Zusatz*, however, Hegel writes: "to assert that the categories taken by themselves are empty can scarcely be right, seeming that they have a content at all events, in the special stamp and significance which they possess."²⁶ This content is not perceptible since it belongs to thought, and Hegel goes on to describe a book or a speech as "full of content" in proportion to the number of "thoughts and general results" contained in it. The categories, it would appear, have "content" in being thoughts which unify data. On the other hand, Hegel can then go on to write: "it is not altogether wrong . . . to call the categories of themselves empty, if it be meant that they and the logical idea, of which they are the members, do not constitute the whole of philosophy, but necessarily lead onwards in due progress to the real departments of Nature and Mind."²⁷

On the basis of these comments, it is not altogether clear that Hegel appreciates the uniqueness of Kant's idea that the significance of the categories as such consists in their helping to define the transcendental shape of experience. Hegel was preoccupied with the fact that, for Kant, the categories stand related to a content which is heterogeneous, given from the outside, and not to be developed from these categories themselves. For if the categories are "empty" in the sense of needing to be filled by the "real de-

²⁶ Glockner, 8.132.

²⁷ Wallace, p. 91.

partments of Nature and Mind," it would appear that, for Hegel, having "content" means developing the content from the categories themselves rather than coming into possession of a content "originally foreign" to the categories. Hegel should have taken his own advice; on numerous occasions he claimed that Kant asked the wrong question—that, for example, he did not ask for the *Begriff* of space and time, but only whether they are subjective or objective. Hegel should have been less concerned to brand Kant's categories as "subjective"²⁸ and more concerned to discover their *Begriff* in Kant's thought, i.e., that they contribute to defining a metaphysic of experience which is basically misunderstood if it is taken either as a Lockean psychology or a Leibnizian ontology. Moreover, it will not do to say—even if Kant sometimes puts it this way himself—that the categories apart from the sensible manifold have only a "logical function" because this language is likely to obscure the transcendental meaning which goes beyond the general or formal logic to the concept of an "object," a concept which does not occur at the level of formal logic. No criticism of Kant should be allowed to obscure the concept of transcendental meaning; it was his unique contribution.

III

Kant himself raised with admirable clarity the question concerning the relation between the transcendental idea and experience which is at the heart of Hegel's fundamental criticism. In his discussion of the cosmological antinomies (B 517–18), Kant writes:

We have said that in all these cases the cosmical idea is either too large or too small for the empirical regress, and therefore for any possible concept of the understanding. We have thus been maintaining that the fault lies with the idea, in being too large or too small for that to which it is directed, namely, possible experience.

Having declared that the fault is with the idea, Kant goes on to ask whether he might not have opted for the opposite position, finding fault not with the idea but with the empirical regress as providing

²⁸ Cf. *Encyclopedia*, 42; Wallace, p. 90.

an empirical concept which is always too small for the idea. Kant's answer is clear, though Kant was probably not fully aware of the gravity of his choice in determining which of the two—the idea and the empirical regress—exists for the sake of the other. “Possible experience,” he says,

is that which can alone give reality to our concepts; in its absence a concept is a mere idea, without truth, that is, without relation to any object. The possible empirical concept is therefore the standard by which we must judge whether the idea is a mere idea and thought-entity, or whether it finds its object in the world.

Here, it is clear, Kant chooses finite, empirical knowledge as that to which the idea must adapt itself. If, as in the half-humorous case of the ball which cannot pass through the hole, no priority is established, it makes no difference whether we say that the ball is too large or that the hole is too small. But, to use Kant's other example of the man and his coat, we do not say that the man is too tall for the coat, but that the coat is too short for the man, implying, of course, that the coat exists for the man and not vice versa. Having established the priority of the empirical concept over the idea on the ground that possible experience is the only standard for determining the truth of any concept, Kant can say that the fault lies with the idea in being too large for what the understanding can furnish. But it is precisely the establishment of this priority which Hegel contests on the ground that it represents a dogmatic preference for understanding and empirical knowledge over the claims of reason. Why, Hegel asks, may we not maintain the validity of the idea while at the same time pointing out that it cannot be exhibited in the world of sense? The purported “object” of the cosmological idea is obviously not to be found “in the world” which, according to Kant's statement above, is where it would have to be found if the idea is to be other than a mere thought-entity. And, we must add, Hegel is not without help from Kant's own doctrine in advancing his criticism. For had Kant not allowed as legitimate the demand of reason to seek the unconditioned? Had he not claimed that the transcendental ideas “necessarily” arise as the result of reason's demand on the understanding? Moreover, had Kant not said that the ideas can be *thought* even if they cannot be *known* to denote realities? On all these heads, Kant is on shakier ground vis a vis Hegel's position than

are classical empiricists and positivists who, armed with a sense-bound criterion of meaning and a proper *disrespect* for the “demands of reason,”²⁹ can simply declare the Hegelian philosophy of spirit and the notion to be meaningless. This Kant on his own terms could not do because, though he severely restricted the scope of theoretical reason, he nevertheless recognized its reality above and beyond sense and understanding. Having done so, however, he was forced to absolutize the understanding, thereby establishing mathematics and natural science as the paradigms of knowledge in order to restrict reason to its purely regulative function. Hegel’s claim is that if the reality of reason is once acknowledged as Kant had indeed done, the only way in which it can be deprived of its proper status and function in philosophical thought is through the dogmatic claim that understanding and empirical concepts have priority over the idea. Nor is Hegel satisfied with reason being confined to a regulative function since that once again makes it thoroughly subordinate to understanding. Findlay has expressed this point precisely and forcibly in his critical comparison of Kant’s and Hegel’s treatment of the Idea. “But while he [Hegel] agrees with Kant that the Idea has no full expression in sense experience,” says Findlay, “he refuses to treat it as a merely regulative conception, something which it is profitable to aim at, but not possible to reach.” “The Idea,” Findlay continues, “is in fact what all things *truly* are, and to the extent that sensible things fall short of it, it is they, not the Idea, which are defective in ‘truth’ and reality.”³⁰ In Hegel’s early critique of Kant expressed in *Glauben und Wissen*, he claims that an understanding which knows things only as appearance, is itself only an appearance and nothing in itself (Meiner, p. 23.). He takes Kant’s position, however, as implying precisely the opposite; he writes: “But the understanding which knows discursively becomes, on the contrary, something in itself and absolute and the knowledge

²⁹ See Strawson’s critical treatment of Kant’s dialectic in *The Bounds of Sense*, London, 1966 (pp. 157ff). This sort of criticism serves to point out the precariousness of Kant’s position in allowing, on the one hand, the legitimacy of reason as a source of ideas and principles and as a demand for completeness while on the other hand claiming that reason as such has no cognitive reach beyond the sphere of what intuition can supply.

³⁰ J. N. Findlay, *Hegel*, p. 253.

of appearances is dogmatically considered to be the only mode of knowing, while rational cognition (*Vernunftkenntnis*) is denied" (Meiner edition, p. 23). Hegel's aim here is to expose the presence in Kant's view of a selective and differential philosophical claim which might not be identified and evaluated as such because critical philosophy is supposed not to be treating issues directly and "objectively," but obliquely in terms of the pre-conditions for the legitimate exercise of our faculties. "That, however, the understanding is absolute with regard to the human mind," says Hegel, "is something about which Kant never appeared to have the slightest doubt; on the contrary, understanding is the absolutely fixed, not to be transcended finitude of human reason" (Meiner edition, p. 23). Further along in his examination of Kant's position in *Glauben und Wissen*, Hegel emphasized again the choice (*Wahl*) manifested by Kant when, after acknowledging the *necessity* of the idea of an intuitive understanding, he set it aside in favor of a faculty of cognition which knows only appearances wherein possibility and actuality are separated. What troubled Hegel in all this was Kant's repeated acknowledgment of the necessity of the idea of reason, on the one hand, and his denial, on the other, that this necessity has any force in determining the real. "Here," he writes, "Kant has both before him, the idea of a reason in which possibility and actuality are absolutely identical, and the appearance of reason as a faculty of knowledge in which the two are separated. He finds in the experience of his thinking both thoughts; in the choice between the two, however, he scorned his disposition to think the necessity, the rationality, of an intuitive spontaneity and simply decided for the appearance" (Meiner edition, p. 34.). And, according to Hegel, Kant had no other ground whatever for making this choice but "experience" and "empirical psychology."

It is clear that in referring to Kant's position as a "choice," Hegel was pointing to a problem at the heart of a critical or transcendental philosophy. At times Kant described the critical tribunal of the first *Critique* as marking out a standpoint from which "all disputes of pure reason" can be adjudicated. And Kant made strong claims for this tribunal. In B 512 we are told that critical questions can be resolved with "complete certainty;" in B 697 it is asserted that "the highest tribunal" which is the criti-

cal standpoint cannot possibly be the source of illusions and deceptions; and in B 779 the superiority of this tribunal is said to consist in the fact that it is not itself involved in disputes “which are immediately concerned with objects.” Criticism, in short, enjoys advantages denied to reason in its supposedly dogmatic employment.

From these claims it seems clear that Kant was taking transcendental philosophy as occupying a standpoint above and beyond any standpoint from which differential, “dogmatic” metaphysical theses would be advanced. If, for example, someone were to assert with Leibniz that there must be simples because there are complexes, Kant would take that assertion, coming as it does without the benefit of prior “criticism,” as a prime illustration of a dogmatic thesis directly concerned with objects. And he would regard it as incapable of being established on the basis of our human knowing apparatus.³¹ But it is clear that while Kant was viewing dogmatic philosophical standpoints as hopelessly involved in making transcendent claims about the nature of things, he was also regarding his critical standpoint as immune from criticism. Transcendental statements about the nature of knowledge, it would appear, somehow escape involvement in any dialectic, and they exist in another dimension than that of the metaphysics which it was the aim of the *Critique* to examine. And here Kant exhibits in his own thought what must be regarded as a major paradox in the development of modern philosophy, a paradox of which Hegel was fully aware because it is represented in his criticism of Kant from beginning to end. The variety of epistemological examinations of reason which we associate with the Enlightenment and aimed at the determination of the nature, scope and limitations of man’s rational capacity, all come together in one point. From different standpoints and on different grounds the Enlightenment philosophers set forth the limits of reason as coinciding with the bounds of sense and confidently challenged the validity of the great

³¹ I am assuming here, of course, that in the discussion of the question of simples (or any others) in the Antinomy, Kant was manifestly not attempting to resolve the antithetic problems in an “objective” way, but rather to illustrate his thesis that this cannot be done which is why the discussion of the antinomies does no more than illustrate the natural dialectic of human reason.”

philosophical systems of the rationalist tradition. But somehow the form of thought operative in these critical enterprises themselves managed to escape judgment and remain unaffected by the sceptical conclusions thus attained. The critical philosophies, in short, asserted the limitation of reason without limitation. And this was possible because of the assumption not clearly recognized that the analysis of thought, understanding, reason represents a peculiar case quite different from what is involved in first-order knowing of things and events. The official conclusion of such epistemology is that reason has limits, but this assertion itself was put forward as a certainty that is without limit. It was the merit of Hegel's critique to call attention to this outcome, and in two principal respects. First, he pointed to Kant's introduction into the critical philosophy itself of his choice of the appearance of reason in the faculty of cognition which knows only appearances, over the idea of the intuitive understanding, a choice which can be justified ultimately on no other ground than the doctrine of possible experience which in turn presupposes that knowledge is confined to mathematics and natural science. It is Hegel's thesis that in making this claim, critical philosophy assumes a dogmatic stance which absolutizes the understanding. Second, Hegel called attention to the problem implicit in determining the cognitive status of the thesis that the unity of reason is merely subjective and assumes the form of a postulate. He was unwilling to accept this thesis merely as part of a prolegomenon which aims at knowing before one knows. Instead, in *Glauben und Wissen*, he inquired into the nature of a postulate as a means of understanding what the subjectivity of reason amounts to in Kant's thought. Before attending to that section, it is important to notice that Hegel is not here appealing to the well-known and formal argument that to have knowledge of a limitation is *ipso facto* to be "beyond" that limitation. Here he is concerned rather with the purported knowledge and the ground upon which the limitation itself is asserted. At the end of his discussion of Kant in *Glauben und Wissen*, Hegel commends Kant for remaining within the limits of his postulates as, so Hegel claims, Fichte did not. But Hegel wants to know more precisely what is meant by a postulate, particularly with regard to faith and subjectivity. Hegel's analysis is clear and expresses the heart of his criticism. The entire passage is well worth repro-

ducing:

According to Kant himself the postulates and the faith they involve are something subjective; now the only question is how this subjectivity is to be taken. Is it that the identity of infinite thought and being, of reason and its reality, is something subjective, or is it only the postulation and the faith in it [which is subjective]? Is it the content or the form of the postulate? It cannot be the content because its negative content is at once the cancellation (*Aufhebung*) of all subjectivity; therefore it is the form and this means that it is something subjective and accidental that the idea is only something subjective.³²

As was pointed out previously, Hegel is directing attention exclusively to the basis upon which Kant declares the subjectivity of reason, and he came to the conclusion that the ground of Kant's position consists entirely in his having opted for understanding and possible experience over the claim of reason, despite the fact that he saw the necessity of that claim in the idea of the intuitive understanding. Hegel's conclusion at that point is that if the subjectivity of reason depends in the end on a choice and a postulate, it cannot be as well founded a thesis as the critical tribunal is supposed to deliver.

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³² Meiner edition, p. 39.