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Hegel's Critique of Kant: An Overview

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My title suggests that there is a single Hegelian critique of Kant, even though Hegel's discussions of Kant's various doctrines seem to indicate a wide variety of complaints. At least at first glance, there is no discernible connection between, for example, his critique of Kant's account of moral motivation and his claim that Kant failed to provide a satisfactory deduction of the categories of pure understanding. Nor is it obvious that Hegel's charge that the categorical imperative is an "empty formalism" shares anything in common with his objection to the question-begging nature of Kant's treatment of the antinomies. My reference to a (single) critique of Kant is in part a concession to economy. In so short a chapter, I cannot but do injustice to what is distinctive about Hegel's separate treatments of Kant's various doctrines. But I also believe that there is unity in the diversity – that underlying Hegel's apparently disconnected criticisms is a dissatisfaction with Kant's philosophical orientation overall, with his account of the conditions of philosophical reflection and what it can achieve, and with his commitment to a particular understanding of the activity we are engaged in when we perform critique.

My chief objective in this chapter is to cast Hegel's critique of Kant in a charitable light, and in doing so to identify points on which he and Kant substantively disagree. Commentators not uncommonly assume that Hegel directs this complaint at Kant's account of the role played, in our knowledge, by sensible affection and the a priori forms of intuition through which we are sensibly affected. They claim that Hegel discovers subjectivity in Kant's idealism only because he misunderstands the implications of Kant's restriction of human knowledge to objects given via our forms of intuition. I present this interpretation of Hegel's critique in section I and then go on, in section II, to suggest an alternative to it. The reading I defend in the remaining sections of the chapter redirects our focus. I argue that, for Hegel, the subjectivity of Kant's idealism has to do not with Kant's views about our reliance on sensible affection and on the a priori forms space and time, but with his account of the nature of human thought.

I.

Let's begin by considering some typical passages in which Hegel complains of the "subjectivity" of Kant's idealism. In his 1830 *Encyclopedia Logic* (*EL*), for example, he tells us that the

> Kantian objectivity of thinking is . . . only subjective insofar as, according to Kant, thoughts, although universal and necessary determinations, are *only our* thoughts and separated [*unterschieden*] by an unbridgeable gulf from what the thing is *in itself*. (*EL*, §41z2)

In his 1801 essay, "The Difference Between Fichte's and Schelling's System of Philosophy," he writes that the Kantian views nature from the limited standpoint of a "discursive human understanding," and that this "human perspective" is supposed to express nothing about the "reality of nature . . ." (1977a: 163; 1968: 69).

Not surprisingly, commentators rush to Kant's defense in response to these kinds of remarks. Kant does, of course, deny human cognition knowledge of things in themselves, but this does not mean that he denies us knowledge of "reality." For Kant, these commentators remind us, things in themselves are precisely those objects that *cannot* have reality for us. Things in themselves are not possible objects of our experience, according to Kant; they cannot be, for us, empirically real. They are not possible objects of our experience because, on his account, they are not given to us via our forms of intuition, space and time. For Kant, only objects that can be given to us in space and time are possible objects of our experience and as such possible objects of empirical knowledge. He calls these objects "appearances." He does not mean by "appearances" the empirically ideal (secondary or sensible) properties of things, the merely accidental effects of objects impinging upon our sense organs (*CPR*, A 29). In limiting our knowledge to appearances, then, Kant is not claiming that the objects we know are somehow less than real or mere illusions. (See also chapter 31 below.)

Critics thus charge that Hegel's interpretation of Kant as a subjective idealist is mistaken. Hegel's mistake, in essence, is to equate Kantian idealism with empirical idealism. Given this mistake, they argue, his interpretation of Kant does not merit serious consideration. Some critics take their attack on Hegel a step further. They react no more favorably to what they suppose is his proposed alternative to Kant. They take his insistence upon the knowability of things in themselves to imply that, in his view, our theoretical or scientific knowledge extends even to those objects, such as God, immortality, and freedom of the will, that transcend the limits of space and time. It is as if Hegel is convinced that dropping the intuitive constraint Kant places on the scope of our knowledge counts as an instance of philosophical progress. But if we drop the intuitive constraint, these Kantians point out, we essentially revive the dogmatic rationalist view that knowing an object is merely a matter of thinking it, of analyzing its concept. We reduce the conditions of knowability or "real possibility" to the conditions of mere thinkability or "logical possibility" (*CPR*, B xxvi [a]). We abandon the important Kantian distinction between objects of knowledge and objects of faith. If this is what Hegel has in mind in claiming for human cognition the capacity to know the "absolute" his alternative to Kant should be rejected.

At least on the face of it this reading of Hegel is not wholly groundless. The passages we considered above seem to support it, as do some of Hegel's further discussions of Kant's philosophy. A good case in point is his expression of admiration for Kant's idea of an intuitive mode of understanding. Kant's discussions of the intuitive intellect are intended to remind us of the limited nature of our cognitive powers. Our form of understanding, on his account, is not "intuitive" but rather "discursive" and "dependent" (*CPR*, B 72). In our efforts to know nature, we depend on being sensibly affected

by an independently given manifold. For this reason, we are not entitled to claim, merely from the exercise of our capacity to think, that our concepts refer to anything real. Our concepts refer to real objects only if they apply to what is given in space and time, to appearances. The intuitive intellect, however, has the capacity to produce its objects merely by exercising its cognitive powers. In contrast to our mode of understanding, the intuitive intellect can therefore justifiably claim to be in immediate cognitive contact with its objects. What is for it logically possible is also really possible. As Kant notes in the *Critique of Judgment*, the intuitive intellect has no objects except actual ones (*CJ*, §76, 5.402; also *CPR*, B 139).

There can be no doubt that Hegel was intrigued by this intuitive model of cognition. In his 1802–3 essay, "Faith and Knowledge," he expresses his impatience with Kant's insistence upon the fact that, for our discursive understanding, the "universal and particular are inevitably and necessarily distinct," and that what must remain "transcendent" for us is "rational knowledge [*Vernunfterkenntniß*] for which . . . the universal and the particular are identical" (1968: 341f; 1977b: 89f). He criticizes Kant for denying us the powers of the intuitive intellect and for regarding discursivity as the "absolute fixed unsurpassable finitude of human reason" (1968: 333; 1977b: 77). Moreover, his fascination with the intuitive model is not only evident in his early Jena writings. He praises the idea of the intuitive intellect in his more mature works as well – for instance, in his 1813 *Science of Logic* (see the section "The Notion in General").

Critics derive from passages such as these the message that Hegel seeks to award human cognition God-like creative powers. Given that he seems to hold that the intuitive model captures the nature of our form of cognition, it must be the case, they argue, that he rejects Kant's account of the sense in which human understanding is dependent. He must be committed to the view, in other words, that we know objects without having to rely on the condition of sensible affection, since we are able to produce them simply by engaging in acts of representation.

The above, in rough outline, represents a typical reading of Hegel's critique of, and alternative to, the subjective idealism he discovers in Kant. Beginning in section II, I tell a very different story. In rejecting Kant's claim that we cannot know things in themselves, in charging that, for Kant, our knowledge of objects is "merely subjective," Hegel no doubt means to express his disapproval of the skeptical conclusions he takes to be implied by Kant's Critical philosophy. What I will argue, however, is that the skepticism he seeks to avoid is not, in his view, a consequence of Kant's insistence that, in our efforts to know, we have to rely on the impingements of an independently given sense content and on a priori forms of intuition. Hegel does not, in other words, take the subjectivity of Kant's idealism to follow from what has come to be referred to as Kant's restriction thesis. Instead, his objections are directed at Kant's account of the nature of our faculty of thought.

II.

To support this thesis I begin with a reconsideration of Hegel's interest in the idea of an intuitive intellect. He clearly holds that the intuitive intellect captures features that may be justifiably attributed to human cognition. But why is he convinced that this is

so? If Hegel is not out to award us the capacity to bring the objects of our cognition into being, if he does not deny that in knowing nature we have to rely on an independently given sense content, what is it about the model of an intuitive understanding that accurately captures in his view the nature of our mode of cognition?

Hegel's early Jena writings contain his most informative reflections on this topic. In "Faith and Knowledge" he calls our attention to various features Kant associates with the intuitive intellect, relying on Kant's discussions especially in §§76 and 77 of the third *Critique*. For our purposes, one feature is of particular interest. Quoting from §77 (5.406), Hegel singles out Kant's claim that, for the intuitive intellect, there is no "contingency" in its "agreement" with "nature's products" (1968: 340; 1977b: 88). This passage is important because, as I shall argue, Hegel's critique of the subjectivity of Kant's idealism is essentially an attack on Kant's assumption that there *is* contingency in the relation of our discursive understanding to "nature's products."

What kind of contingency does Kant have in mind? In the above-mentioned sections of the Critique of Teleological Judgment, Kant in fact identifies *two* kinds of contingency with which our discursive intellect must contend. First, for our discursive form of understanding, he says, "the variety of ways in which [the given particulars] may come before our perception is contingent" (*CJ*, §77, 5.406; translations from Kant 1929, 1987, 1996, 1998). This contingency, in his view, is a consequence of the fact that a nonintuitive or discursive understanding must, in its efforts to know nature, rely on sensible affection. Its objects are not derived from or produced out of its concepts; rather, they are given to it in sensation. In Kant's words, the concepts of a discursive understanding do not "determine" anything regarding "the diversity of the particular" (*CJ*, §77, 5.407).

Kant is also convinced, however, that from this contingency in the way in which sensible intuitions "may come before our perception" follows another: namely, the contingency he refers to in the passage Hegel quotes. This is the contingency in the *relation* between "nature's products" (or "the particular in nature's diversity") and the "intellect." Since our mode of understanding lacks the intuitive intellect's power to give the existence of the object "through itself," Kant argues, it is not only incapable of determining the way in which the manifold presents itself to us in sensation; it can also cognize that independently given manifold only by means of concepts or universals (*CJ*, §77, 5.407). We must subsume sensible particulars under concepts, and we do this by dividing nature into species and genera. Since we cannot, however, determine how particulars may be given, we have no way of knowing that our classifications are in keeping with "nature's products." The fact that "our understanding has to proceed from the universal to the particular" thus has the "following consequence" according to Kant: "In terms of the universal [supplied by the understanding] the particular, as such, contains something contingent" (*CJ*, §76, 5.404). For the intellect that is intuitive, however, and "does not (by means of concepts) proceed from the universal to the particular . . . there would not be that contingency in the way nature's products . . . harmonize with the understanding" (*CJ*, §77, 5.406).

This is the skeptical gap Hegel is worried about, this gap that Kant discovers in the relation between our concepts and "nature's products." As Hegel puts it in the "Difference" essay, Kant derives from his reflections on the nature of human discursivity the conclusion that, for us, "concepts remain contingent with respect to nature just as

nature does with respect to the concepts" (1968: 70; 1977a: 164). As we have just seen, Kant's view is that there is contingency not just in how sensible particulars are given; he is also convinced that it follows from the fact that we have to rely on an independently given content, that there is contingency in the relation between our concepts and that content. We can express the basis of Hegel's objection as follows: he finds unpersuasive this inference from the first form of contingency to the second.

Note that the thesis about the first form of contingency is one that even the Lockean realist could grant. It merely asserts that, in our efforts to know nature, we think about a sense content we do not make. But, again, Kant derives from this fact about our reliance on an independently given sense content the conclusion that any supposed harmony between our concepts and the given particulars has to remain, for us, a mere idea. Locke would not go along with this conclusion, and neither does Hegel.

I have been suggesting that, for Hegel, closing the gap between our concepts and nature's products is not a matter of rejecting Kant's view about our dependence, in cognition, on sensible affection. Hegel nowhere asserts, in opposition to Kant, that our understanding has the power to produce matter or content from its acts of representation. He does not attribute to our understanding, then, literally all of the cognitive powers of the intuitive intellect. What fascinates him about the intuitive intellect is the fact that it experiences no contingency in the relation of its representations to their objects. Hegel resists Kant's claim that a harmony between concepts and sensible particulars is unavailable to the experience of a discursive understanding such as ours. He is unconvinced by Kant's insistence that it follows from the fact that we must bring concepts to our cognition of an independently given sense content, that we have to conclude contingency in the relation between our concepts and that content. He urges us to raise the following kinds of questions: Why should it follow from our employment of concepts in our cognitions of an independently given sense content that we have no warrant in taking that content to be susceptible to our conceptual determinations? On what account of the faculty of thought and its forms does this inference depend – on what account of the subject doing the thinking?

III.

Relying on passages in which Hegel conveys his interest in the intuitive model of cognition, I have so far offered an interpretative suggestion as to how we should understand his charge that Kant's idealism is subjective. This charge, as I have portrayed it, does not call into question the assumption that we have to rely in cognition on an independently given sense content, nor does it call into question the Kantian thesis that the given sense content must appear to us via the a priori forms, space and time. Instead, Hegel's charge is directed at Kant's account of our faculty of thought. I turn now to provide further evidence in support of this interpretation. One piece of evidence is provided in the Introduction to Hegel's 1807 *Phenomenology*. This is an early work, but the themes I highlight are not unique to it. They reappear in some of Hegel's later writings as well, including his 1831 Preface to the *Science of Logic*, published in the final year of his life.

In the Introduction to the *Phenomenology* (*PH*), Hegel is once again preoccupied with the thesis of the unknowability of things. By "things," in this context, he means

that content we suppose to be "on the other side" of cognition (*PH*, para. 74). He refers to this content in these paragraphs, alternatively, as: the "thing itself," "the true," "the absolute," "the in itself," "the absolute essence." He sets out to explain how it happens that the thesis of the unknowability of things comes to seem forced upon us. It seems forced upon us, he suggests, because of our commitment to a mistaken view about the nature of thought. Hegel tells us that the mistaken view he has in mind is held by "natural" consciousness. He mentions no philosopher by name in these pages, but there are indications in his discussion here and elsewhere that he includes Kant among those taken in by this mistaken conception (see, e.g., the 1831 Preface to his *Science of Logic*, and the section on Kant in his *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*).

The aim of natural consciousness, as Hegel characterizes it in these paragraphs, is to employ thought in the service of getting at the truth of things. Hegel never calls this aim into question; indeed, he seems to think it is the one thing natural consciousness gets right. What interests him, rather, is the assumption that prevents natural consciousness from achieving its aim. He tells us that the assumption in question is that thought is a "means" (*Mittel*).

On Hegel's account, natural consciousness takes thought to be a means in either of two ways. For some, he says, thought is a *tool* or *instrument* (*Werkzeug*) "by which to seize hold of the absolute essence." For others, thought is a *passive medium* (*passives Medium*) "which the light of truth passes through in order to reach us" (*PH*, para. 73). The problem with both of these versions of thought as a means, he suggests, is that neither in the end serves natural consciousness in achieving its aim. The aim of ordinary consciousness is to employ thought to get at the truth of things. If thought is an active instrument, however, thought reshapes or alters the thing; it does not let the thing be what it is for itself. If thought is a passive medium, on the other hand, our cognitive access to objects cannot be direct or immediate; we know objects, on this account, only through the medium.

Hegel goes on to argue that natural consciousness fares no better in achieving its aim by adopting the following strategy: by first informing itself about the rules or laws (*Wirkungsweise*) that govern the very functioning of the means. Here the hope is that once we are familiar with the nature of thought itself and with the concepts it contributes in the act of knowing, we will then be in a position to subtract (*abziehen*) that contribution away and thereby lay bare the thing itself. In Hegel's view, however, this strategy is equally unsuccessful in satisfying the aim of natural consciousness. Natural consciousness seeks knowledge of things. It is committed to the view that we only gain knowledge of things by employing thought as a means. It thus defeats its own purposes by subtracting away precisely what it deems to be its mode of access to things.

In a not so veiled reference to Kant, Hegel considers a possible response to this failure of natural consciousness to achieve its aim. Simply put, the response urges us to modify our ambitions. Rather than persist in the futile effort to know things, we should instead adopt the more modest project of acquainting ourselves with the subjective forms we put into them. The recommendation is that we undergo a kind of "Copernican revolution" in what we judge to be the proper objects of our knowledge. We are to redirect our attention away from the effort to know things and undertake instead an examination or critique of our cognitive faculties (*PH*, para. 73).

Hegel has no objection to the general effort to know the nature and limits of our cognitive powers. He is, however, suspicious of the motivation for critique in this particular case. In this case, critique begins where the effort to satisfy the aim of natural consciousness leaves off. It begins, that is, with an admission of defeat; it grants that the aim of natural consciousness cannot be satisfied. It does not consider the possibility that this skeptical result is based on a mistake. It fails to notice that, as Hegel puts it in the first paragraph of his Introduction, what is really "absurd" is that we employ thought as a means at all.

IV.

To summarize the main points of our discussion so far: I have been arguing that, when Hegel protests against the thesis of the unknowability of things, he puts the blame not on our reliance on sensible affection or on the a priori forms through which we are sensibly affected, but on the status we award thought in our cognitions of objects. On his account, it is only because Kant adheres to a mistaken view of the nature and role of thought that he discovers an inescapable contingency in the relation of our concepts to given particulars. I furthermore suggested that Hegel believes a mistaken conception of the nature and role of thought is to blame for Kant's decision to abandon the ambition of natural consciousness. It is what moves Kant to urge us to substitute for the effort to know things, the task of determining the subjective forms we put into them. It is why Kant tells us in the B-Preface to the first *Critique* that we are better off, in our attempt to secure certain material knowledge, if we give up the hope of establishing that our concepts conform to objects, and devote our efforts instead to demonstrating the necessary conformity of objects to our concepts (*CPR*, B xvii).

But even if I am right to suggest that what steers Kant off in the wrong direction is a mistaken conception of thought, in Hegel's view, we still do not know what that mistaken conception is. The label Hegel gives it, namely that thought is a "means," is not terribly illuminating. Hegel presumably intends to give us a clue when, in his Introduction to the *Phenomenology*, he tells us that there is a problem with what natural consciousness takes "for granted." It takes for granted, he says, that the "absolute" is "on one side" and thought or cognition (*das Erkennen*) is "on the other" (*PH*, para. 74). In his discussion of these issues in his Introduction to the *Science of Logic*, he repeats this diagnosis. There he writes that the problem is that natural consciousness assumes that "matter" and "form" occupy "separate spheres." These remarks should strike us as familiar. They are further formulations of the charge we encountered earlier when we reviewed his criticisms of Kant in the Jena writings. In the passages we considered, Hegel's objection was that, on Kant's understanding of the implications of our discursivity, the universal and the particular have to remain distinct. In these various discussions, Hegel's target is the same: he calls into question Kant's commitment to the dualism or heterogeneity of concepts and intuitions. But we still do not know precisely what he has in mind when he complains that, for Kant, thought is "on the other side" of content and inhabits a "separate sphere."

We can get some help if we probe more deeply into his account of how the mistaken conception of thought is responsible for additional features of Kant's philosophy. My

focus in section V will be passages in which Hegel voices his doubts about Kant's general philosophical methodology, the methodology he discusses under the heading of Kant's project of "critique." We have already seen that, on Hegel's reading, Kant's turn to critique is itself a consequence of the mistaken conception. The decision to trade the effort to know objects for the investigation of the contributions of the subject is motivated, he thinks, by Kant's acceptance of the following line of reasoning on the part of natural consciousness: that since thought is a means, we are not in the end entitled to our claims to know things. What I am now suggesting is that Hegel believes the mistaken conception also underlies Kant's expectations regarding what the project of critique can deliver. That is, Hegel seems convinced that at the basis of Kant's understanding of the kind of knowledge we can hope to get from critique are mistaken assumptions about, for example, the conditions of reflection, the degree of abstraction we can achieve as knowers, and the origin of our fundamental thought-forms or categories.

Our discussion of Hegel's attack on Kant's methodology will yield the following, perhaps unexpected, result: it will suggest that, far from rejecting Kant's claim that human cognition is a dependent form of cognition, Hegel is persuaded that Kant does not take this thesis about the dependent nature of human understanding far enough. It is not just that, in our efforts to know nature, we have to rely on an independently given sense content. Hegel believes it is also the case that human thought is *not* "on the other side of" content. By this he seems to mean that thought is incapable of the degree of autonomy or independence Kant awards it.

V.

When Kant uses the term "critique," it is usually with reference to his task in the *Critique of Pure Reason* of exposing the natural tendency of human reason to exceed its proper limits, to claim to know objects that lie outside the bounds of possible experience (*CPR*, A xii, B 763). It is by means of critique, he says, that we establish the "rules and limits" of reason's proper employment (A xvi). Kant recognizes, however, that we cannot successfully carry out a critique of pure reason without undertaking a more comprehensive investigation of our faculties of knowledge. The role and nature of pure reason needs to be carefully distinguished, for instance, from that of understanding and sensibility. Our critique of reason thus necessarily involves us in the larger enterprise of determining the nature of our various faculties and their respective roles. Since the role of our faculties will vary depending on the realm of inquiry in which they are engaged, our investigation will furthermore have to take into account the boundaries separating one domain of inquiry from another. We will arrive at different conclusions regarding the nature of pure reason, for example, depending on whether we are assessing its role for theoretical or for practical inquiry. From the standpoint of theoretical knowledge, reason's employment is quite limited, on Kant's account, since its objects are not strictly speaking possible objects of our experience. But if we turn our attention to the domains of faith or morality, we discover that the objects or ideas of pure reason have an extended and positive use.

Critique aims to discover the *subjective* conditions of a given realm of inquiry, conditions that reflect the employment of our faculties. But the subjective contributions

Kant is chiefly concerned to specify are of a particular kind: they are non-empirical or "a priori." A result of critique, then, is that we learn to identify reason's a priori ideas and maxims; we learn that the faculty of understanding is the source of a priori concepts or categories; and we discover that we intuit objects by means of the a priori forms, space and time. As a priori, these subjective conditions are more than merely contingently related to the form of inquiry they condition. They function as universal and necessary constraints on that domain of inquiry.

A further feature of critique is that it is carried out at a higher level of abstraction than any particular scientific investigation. This is because critique seeks to identify what we might refer to as the a priori framework or form of a science. Its objects, then, are not (directly) physical bodies in motion, divine nature, or the human will, but rather the a priori conditions of the possibility of the domains of physics, faith and morality. This is why Kant describes his objective in the *Critique of Pure Reason*, for example, as that of illuminating the "internal structure" of the science of metaphysics. Critique, he tells us, is a "treatise on method, not a system of the science itself" (B xxii ff.).

I mentioned in section IV that Hegel has reservations about Kant's methodological assumptions. I also said that these reservations are instructive in so far as they shed light on his charge that Kant is committed to a mistaken conception of thought. Hegel's reservations about Kant's methodology reveal themselves in his remarks on Kant's project of critique. He does not have kind words for the project of critique as I have just described it. In effect, he believes that critique rests on a certain illusion – an illusion about the nature of thought. In the section of the *Science of Logic* entitled "With What Must the Science Begin?," he writes: "[T]o want the nature of cognition clarified prior to the science is to demand that it be considered outside the science . . ." This, he notes, is something that cannot be accomplished. Hegel repeats this point in his *Encyclopedia Logic*. The "investigation of cognition cannot take place in any other way than cognitively," he says (*EL*, §10). It is thus a "mistake" to want to "have cognition before having any cognition . . ." (*EL*, §41 A1). Note that Hegel is not claiming in these passages that *any* effort to investigate our cognitive powers is ill-conceived. His point, rather, is that critique is impossible if we assume we can carry it out "prior to" or "outside" some particular form of inquiry or science. When he tells us that the "investigation of cognition cannot take place in any other way than cognitively," he seems to imply that our meta-investigations into the conditions of the possibility of a particular science invariably reflect, in some way, the actual practices and presuppositions of that science. What is incoherent or impossible, then, is not the attempt to abstract to the conditions of the possibility of a particular domain of inquiry, but the assumption that we are able to do so from a vantage point that is completely independent of, and so completely unaffected by, actual scientific practice.

But what evidence is there that Kantian critique is an instance of the effort to investigate cognition prior to having cognition, to know before we know? To answer this question, we need to consider more closely Kant's procedure for isolating the "internal structure" or a priori conditions of a given domain of inquiry. In rough outline, his strategy is this: He begins with some claim or set of claims he believes he has a right to take for granted – claims at least tacitly affirmed even by his chief philosophical opponent. So in the project to determine the internal structure or necessary conditions of theoretical knowledge, for example, he begins with an assumption he believes even

Hume cannot doubt: namely, the fact that we are conscious not just of having sensations in succession but also of perceiving or experiencing objects. His next step is to regress from this fact to the a priori conditions of its possibility. In the course of doing so, he takes himself to establish: first, that experience for us would not be possible without the reproducibility of impressions; second, that reproducibility is not itself given in sensation but is a product of the application to sensation of a priori rules or concepts; and third, that the application of a priori concepts presupposes the synthesizing activity of a transcendental subject identical through time.

The general features of this methodology are at work in Kant's practical philosophy as well. In a remark in his Preface to the *Groundwork*, he once again starts out by specifying an assumption he believes he is entitled to take for granted. He writes:

> Everyone must grant, that a law, if it is to hold morally, that is, as a ground of obligation, must carry with it absolute necessity; that, for example, the command, "thou shalt not lie," does not hold only for human beings, as if other rational beings did not have to heed it, and so with all other moral laws properly so called. (*G*, 4.389)

Regressing to the conditions of the possibility of this assumption, he then tells us he is warranted in claiming that

> therefore, the ground of obligation . . . must not be sought in the nature of the human being or in the circumstances of the world in which he is placed, but a priori simply in concepts of pure reason . . . (*G*, 4.389)

At what point in this procedure does Hegel discover evidence of fallacy or illusion? As is clear from his many discussions of the problem of making a beginning in philosophy, he believes that the suspicious step is the first one, the step in which Kant claims to identify assumptions "everyone must grant." Kant is not entitled to this claim, in Hegel's view, because it rests on a too generous estimation of our powers of abstraction. In effect, Kant awards himself powers of abstraction that no thinker has.

We can clarify Hegel's grounds for suspicion by considering this question: On what basis does Kant consider himself capable of identifying assumptions "everyone must grant"? One thing he assumes is that he is able to draw a clear boundary between the merely contingent assumptions commonly associated with a given domain of inquiry and the assumptions essential to it. He is confident that he can draw this boundary *with certainty*, because he is also convinced that he has the capacity to engage in special acts of reflection. He is convinced, in other words, that he can abstract to the universal and necessary conditions of the possibility of a particular science by engaging in a form of thinking that itself escapes the influence of particular scientific practices or philosophical objectives. He believes, then, that his performance of critique is uncompromised by presuppositions that may themselves turn out to be merely contingent. Critique, for him, is a form of inquiry free of the constraints of history.

Hegel's aim is to persuade us that this kind of critical exercise cannot be carried out. Critique of this nature cannot be carried out, in his view, for the reasons just mentioned: it overestimates the abstractive powers of human thought. Hegel's charge is not just that Kant failed to live up to the high standards of critique, failed to sufficiently

scrutinize or make explicit his most fundamental presuppositions. Hegel directs this charge at Kant, but it is not his deepest criticism. The more serious error committed by Kant (and others) is that of supposing that the high standards of critique are standards human reason can meet. As far as Hegel is concerned, we deceive ourselves if we expect that, in undertaking critique, we achieve our starting point by liberating ourselves from assumptions that tie our thinking to some particular point in time, to what he refers to in the *Phenomenology* as some particular "shape [*Gestalt*] of consciousness" (*PH*, para. 87). This is the illusion of supposing that we can initiate critique from a place "outside" or "prior to" actual scientific and philosophical practice. As Hegel is fond of remarking, thought, rather than "on the other side" of content, is concrete from the start (*EL*, §55). Even our metareflections on the conditions of the possibility of a particular form of inquiry proceed from within and are therefore indebted to some shape of consciousness. Moreover, Hegel takes it to follow from the fact that we perform critique from within that our starting point is not one of perfect self-knowledge. The most basic assumptions that guide our critical investigations are not available to us via introspection; they are too close for us to see. Kant is mistaken, then, when he writes that, "what reason produces entirely out of itself cannot be concealed, but is brought to light by reason itself . . ." (*CPR*, A xx). We know or become aware of the most basic assumptions that guide our inquiries, Hegel suggests, only when they cease to serve their foundational function. We know a limit only when we are beyond it (*EL*, §60).

VI.

There is a real question whether Kant is in fact warranted in his claims to have articulated, via critique, the universal and necessary rules and principles governing our various forms of inquiry. It would be of great interest to know, once and for all, whether critique is capable of the degree of abstraction he awards it, and whether it is indeed possible for us to know before we know. I have not set out to settle these issues here, nor have I tried to defend Hegel's alternative vision of the conditions of reflection and of what critique can achieve. Instead, my aim has been to suggest the essential idea behind Hegel's critique of Kant. I have argued that his complaint about the "subjectivity" of Kant's idealism is not directed at Kant's thesis that human cognition is dependent, in its cognitions of nature, on an independent sense content given to us through forms of intuition. Rather, the subjectivity of Kant's idealism follows, for Hegel, from an overestimation of the abstractive powers of human thought. Hegel's worry (revealed, for instance, in his critique of the thesis that thought is a means) is that as long as we conceive of thought in this way, as on "the other side" of content, we have to live with the result that there can be for a discursive understanding such as ours no harmony between given sensible particulars and the concepts we employ in thinking and knowing them.

The account I have provided demystifies, at least to some extent, Hegel's more specific complaints about Kant's particular doctrines. There is a common theme running through his objections to, for example, Kant's derivation of the categories, his account in the Analogies of Experience of the nature of substance, his theory of human freedom, his formulation of the supreme practical law or categorical imperative. In Hegel's

discussions of these various topics, he singles out Kant's "formalism" for attack. In each case, as I have been arguing, his complaint ultimately calls into question Kant's methodology, Kant's understanding of the conditions of philosophical reflection and of the vantage point he is able to achieve as the philosopher engaged in critique. Underlying Kant's claims to have articulated the formal or a priori principles without which we would have no experience of objects, the formal rules which govern the synthesis of intuitions, the formal law conditioning the possibility of imputations of moral responsibility, is in each case the presupposition that he has successfully purged his own reflections of everything contingent and empirical. He assumes, in addition, that his critical starting point is one of perfect self-knowledge.

The strategy Hegel enlists in exposing the illusion of this self-conception, and in deflating the pretensions of formalism, is always the same. In his discussions of the above topics, he draws our attention to assumptions that escape Kant's critical scrutiny. These are the questions Kant begs, the "content" he "presupposes" (the Newtonian context, for example, that frames his account of the nature of space and time, and the form of empiricism responsible for his conviction that we cannot derive laws of freedom from nature). Hegel's point is not the easily refutable one that Kant was entirely unaware of his intellectual inheritance. His point, rather, is that Kant *could* not have been sufficiently aware of the extent to which that inheritance shaped his very understanding of the problems he needed to solve and of the available options for solving them. The reason Hegel undertakes the exercise of exposing the assumptions that tie Kant's investigations to a particular moment in history is to impress upon us the general lesson that in *every* act of reflection questions are begged. "Every beginning," he writes, "is a presupposition" (*EL*, §1). The evidence he cites in support of this claim is simply inductive; he thinks its truth is revealed in any careful study of the history of ideas. What the evidence suggests so far, then, is that human thinking is *not* capable of acts of pure or unfettered spontaneity. Instead, thought owes a debt to the realm of the actual. This is another way of expressing the point with which we concluded section IV, namely, that the lesson Hegel wishes us to derive from his critique of Kant is that thought does not have the degree of independence Kant awards it.

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