

McDowell's Hegelianism

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In his book *Mind and World*, John McDowell writes that '... Kant should still have a central place in our discussion of the way thought bears on reality'.¹ But McDowell also claims that Kant is ambivalent about the nature and implications of his idealism; the value of his idealism is for that reason uncertain, in McDowell's view. For a *consistent* elaboration of what is valuable in Kant, McDowell recommends that we turn our attention to Hegel. He makes no secret of the impact of Hegel on his own thinking; indeed, in his Preface he informs us that *Mind and World* is his 'prolegomenon to a reading of [Hegel's] *Phenomenology*'. (MW ix)

Although McDowell reveals his admiration for Hegel, *Mind and World* contains no extended discussion of Hegel's work. This is perhaps because McDowell is preoccupied with views he wishes to contrast with his own: the views of Davidson, Evans and in a certain respect also Kant. This preoccupation leaves the nature of his Hegelianism mysterious.

One of my objectives in this paper is to fill in the details of McDowell's Hegelianism. I do so because I believe that McDowell's views *are* Hegelian, and because I wish to enlist the help of his treatment of the relation of mind to world in suggesting that there are good reasons for taking Hegel's idealism seriously. I begin by providing a brief review of the central questions of *Mind and World* and by exploring McDowell's portrayal of Kant and of Hegel's relation to Kant. I then clarify what I believe is the basis of McDowell's interest in Hegel and argue that his interest in Hegel is well founded.

I

McDowell begins *Mind and World* by asking us to consider a problem concerning our claim to knowledge: If we accept, as he thinks we should, the Kantian assumption that human minds have the faculty of spontaneity and therefore the freedom or capacity to generate concepts, we might be led to wonder whether we have any warrant in supposing that such concepts inform us about 'a reality external to thought'. (MW 5) This is a reasonable worry, McDowell claims, for anyone looking for reassurance that our empirical judgments bear on reality, for reassurance that the activity of spontaneity is more than just, as he puts it, 'a frictionless spinning in a void'. We crave what he calls an 'external friction'. (MW 11)

One attempt to satisfy this craving (an attempt McDowell finds unsatisfactory) is to argue that our empirical judgments can be verified by means of an appeal

outside the realm of the conceptual, *outside* what McDowell calls the 'space of concepts'. According to this view, we appeal outside the space of concepts by 'pointing to something that is simply received in experience'. (MW 6) The hope is that by means of such an appeal we can show that at least some of our concepts are responsive to the content of experience, to the unconceptualized 'Given'. The appeal is supposed to reassure us, in other words, that our empirical judgments can make contact with extra-conceptual reality.

But McDowell argues that the idea that we can invoke the Given for justificatory purposes is based on a myth. If we transcend the 'space of concepts', we transcend the 'space of reasons' as well, in his view. (MW 53) The appeal to the Given assumes that what is outside the space of concepts can serve as evidence or justification for what is inside – that a relation such as implication or probabilification can hold between the extra-conceptual Given and our empirical judgments. But relations such as implication or probabilification, McDowell claims, hold only *within* the space of reasons or only *within* the domain of rational inquiry. We cannot therefore both suppose that experiential content is *outside* the space of reasons and expect that content to provide *reasons* in support of our empirical judgments. As McDowell puts it, the 'space of reasons does not extend further than the space of concepts . . .' (MW 14)²

So McDowell thinks that the appeal to the Given is based on a myth (the myth that the Given can ever serve as a reason, can ever be rationally accessible). Nevertheless, the appeal is based on a legitimate wish, in his view: the wish for reassurance that spontaneity is subject to external constraint. Although we ought to recognize that the appeal to the Given is based on a myth, we ought not to give up what in his view is the reasonable wish that the activity of spontaneity is more than just a 'frictionless spinning'. (MW 67)³

As I understand it, the central aim of McDowell's book is to convince us that it is possible to accommodate the motive which gives rise to the Myth of the Given without subscribing to the Myth itself. This is possible, McDowell argues, provided we adopt a new conception of the Given or of experiential intake. (MW 10) It is with reference to this point that he notes his debt to Kant. For Kant, McDowell tells us, empirical knowledge depends on the *cooperation* of the faculties of receptivity and spontaneity. Moreover, for Kant, in McDowell's words, 'receptivity does not make an even notionally separable contribution to the co-operation'. (MW 9) Without concepts, on McDowell's reading of Kant, there is for us no experiential intake. It is not that, in experience, we apply concepts to some extra-conceptual content (given in receptivity). Rather, Kant's insight, established in the transcendental deduction of the *Critique of Pure Reason*, is that what is given to us in receptivity *already has a conceptual content*.⁴

With this revised understanding of the Given, McDowell argues, we also get a new way to satisfy our craving for 'external friction'. We can get friction from the constraints on spontaneity by receptivity without having to attempt what Kant showed in the transcendental deduction to be impossible – without, in other words, trying to appeal *outside* the space of concepts. Friction is provided, McDowell tells us, thanks to the fact that there is a *passive* component to recep-

tivity over which we have no control. (MW 10) Although on this revised or Kantian account of the Given there is no content of receptivity that is not already determined by concepts of spontaneity, spontaneity does not simply *create* the content of experience. The facts to which we appeal in justifying our empirical judgments are not, that is to say, produced out of our cognitive activity; our control 'over what happens in experience', McDowell writes, 'has limits'. (MW 10n, 28) Even though the passive component of receptivity does not originate from outside the realm of the *thinkable*, it does originate, he claims, from outside the activity of our *thinking*. (MW 28) We can guarantee that spontaneity is not a 'frictionless spinning in a void' thanks to this passive feature of experience. Thanks to this passive feature, we can legitimately take our empirical judgments to have a bearing on features of the world without having to rely on the myth that our justifications of those judgments depend upon an appeal to extra-conceptual content.⁵

II

I now turn to consider more closely McDowell's account of his debt to Kant. He alerts us to the fact that his debt is complicated because of what he believes is Kant's ambivalence about the respective contributions in experience of receptivity and spontaneity. From the "good" side of Kant (which McDowell calls Kant's 'standpoint of experience'), McDowell derives the lesson we have just been considering: that our experiential intake is already determined by forms of spontaneity. In this view, our conceptual capacities are 'inextricably implicated' or 'drawn on' in receptivity. (MW 10, 87) However, Kant has another, 'transcendental' side, McDowell claims, according to which the contribution of receptivity is 'isolable' or separable. (MW 41) According to this 'transcendental' standpoint, spontaneity imposes its forms, in the constitution of experience, onto the 'prior deliverances of receptivity' – deliverances, that is, which are not taken to already have a conceptual content. (MW 9f.)

According to Kant's 'standpoint of experience', then, the content given in receptivity already possesses a conceptual form; according to his 'transcendental' standpoint it does not. This is how McDowell characterizes Kant's ambivalence about the contribution of receptivity. And this ambivalence about the contribution of receptivity of course has implications for Kant's views about the contribution of spontaneity as well. The 'transcendental' side of Kant, McDowell points out, entails that the freedom of spontaneity is without constraint. This is because, for the transcendental standpoint, the contribution of receptivity is supposed to be entirely separable from that of spontaneity: a mere content without form. If receptivity's contribution is separable, its constraint on the freedom of spontaneity must derive from *outside* the space of concepts, from the unconceptualized Given. But since for McDowell it is a myth to think it is possible to appeal outside the space of concepts for justificatory purposes, it is equally a myth, in his view, to think that the transcendental standpoint implies any constraints on spontaneity.

ity at all. This is why he claims that the transcendental standpoint offers us no way out of the impasse with which we began, when we worried about lacking the means to guarantee that our concepts bear on reality. Instead, the freedom defended by the transcendental standpoint guarantees only that we have no way to bridge the gap between our thoughts and things.

Why does McDowell think that Kant was tempted by the 'transcendental' standpoint? Why, that is, does he tell us that Kant gravitated towards the view that the contribution of receptivity is a bare content without form; and why does he furthermore claim that Kant tended to award reason or spontaneity an unfettered or 'frictionless' freedom? McDowell suggests that Kant was held back from consistently carrying out his 'standpoint of experience' at least in part because of his views about nature, views which conceded too much to the 'pressures of modern naturalism'. (MW 96) For the radical naturalist such as David Hume, on McDowell's reading, nature is a realm devoid of both law and meaning. Both the causal regularities and moral imperatives we take to be objective are for Hume no more than subjective fictions deriving from the effects of custom and habit on our faculty of imagination. Kant was of course committed to saving morality as well as science from Hume's scepticism; he therefore set for himself the task of providing an *alternative* to Hume's naturalized account of reason. But because he borrowed too much from Hume's conception of nature, according to McDowell, saving reason had to mean for him locating the source of its requirements in a transcendent or extra-natural realm. Kant in other words could see no way to ground a distinction between reason and nature without going *outside* nature. Reason or spontaneity for him could not be an expression of a special natural power; if reason was to be more than just a slave to the passions, it had to be transcendent. (MW 78, 97)

On this reading, then, Kant's reliance on a transcendent or supersensible realm was at least in part a consequence of his conception of nature as, in McDowell's words, 'disenchanted'. In contrast to Hume, McDowell tells us, nature for Kant is lawful; but it is nonetheless disenchanted because it is devoid of meaning. Or, nature according to Kant is disenchanted because its laws are purely mechanical and deterministic. For meaning, for the idea of the possible completion or perfection of our knowledge of nature, for a sense of purpose, for normativity, Kant requires that we appeal outside nature to 'ideas of reason': ideas which are regulative of our inquiry rather than constitutive of objects; which secure the completion and harmony of our understanding but cannot themselves be exhibited in nature; which provide for the possibility that we are, not merely causally determined, but also (at least from a practical standpoint) free.⁶

The claim that nature for Kant is disenchanted in this way may seem to ignore the pains he takes in the first *Critique* to convince us, in *opposition* to Hume, that a nature without both law and meaning is not a possible object of our experience.⁷ Surely McDowell is aware of this argument of the *Critique*. He is not suggesting that Kant agreed with Hume that we have no rational warrant for assuming that nature must be lawful and must exhibit systematic unity or harmony. What he is suggesting is that when it came time to account for unity or meaning, Kant agreed

with Hume that any appeal to nature itself would be in vain. Unlike Hume, Kant did not abandon the hope of providing for the objective necessity of meaning; but doing so meant for him locating the source meaning in a supersensible or extra-natural realm.⁸

In my conclusion I will address the merits of this reading of Kant. What is important for us now to bear in mind is that the 'transcendental standpoint', according to McDowell, not only offers us the wrong conception of the relation between mind and nature; it is also in his view incompatible with the insight of Kant's transcendental deduction of the categories. On McDowell's account, what the transcendental deduction demonstrates is that disenchanted nature is not a possible object of our experience. Nature can be devoid neither of law nor of meaning because, as the transcendental deduction establishes, spontaneity is *already implicated in* and therefore *not separable from* the deliverances of receptivity. This means that spontaneity's supposed reliance upon an appeal to the supersensible is based on a myth.

McDowell urges us to think of spontaneity as *partially naturalized*: as neither transcending nor reducible to a disenchanted nature. Because it is not merely a slave to the passions, spontaneity on this model retains some measure of autonomy; but because, even on Kant's admission, spontaneity must be passively affected and cannot simply create the content of experience, its autonomy is subject to constraint. We can still be platonists about reason, McDowell insists; but if our platonism is to be consistent with the argument of the transcendental deduction, it must, in his words, be 'naturalized' rather than 'rampant'.⁹ It must, that is, be modified by the recognition that any attempt on the part of spontaneity to derive either law or meaning from the realm of the supersensible is based on a myth. This partially naturalized conception of reason, according to McDowell, is what is implied by Kant's good side (Kant's 'standpoint of experience'); and this is the side of Kant which McDowell claims we can find consistently elaborated in the idealism of Hegel. (MW 111)

III

We can now begin to piece together an account of McDowell's Hegelianism. Since we know that he believes that Hegel offers us a consistent development of the good side of Kant, we can venture some educated guesses about the features of Hegel's idealism he finds particularly persuasive. In light of the above discussion, we have good reason to suppose that McDowell both discovers in Hegel a 'naturalized' form of platonism about reason and thinks that nature for Hegel must be 'partially enchanted'.

If this is indeed McDowell's reading of Hegel, it challenges some well established stereotypes. Take, for example, two common interpretations of Hegel's frequently quoted declaration in the Preface to the *Elements of the Philosophy of Right* that, 'What is rational is actual; and what is actual is rational'. For some, this is an expression of Hegel's positivism – of his project of deriving purportedly

rational requirements from actually accepted norms and practices. On this interpretation, the claims of reason for Hegel derive from the demands of a disenchanting nature and have no autonomy. For others, however, Hegel's assertion of the identity of the rational and the actual implies a commitment to what McDowell calls 'rampant platonism'. Since nature on this reading of Hegel is supposed to reduce (somehow) to mind, nature places no constraint on mind or its system of categories. To put the point differently, since Hegel transforms the realm of concrete being into (in Feuerbach's words) a mere 'predicate of thought', the determinations of reason or spontaneity, for the Hegelian idealist, must be without friction.¹⁰

Of course McDowell denies that Hegel commits either of these reductions. But how are we to determine whether he is right? My aim in the remaining pages is to provide support for McDowell's interpretation by drawing attention to some features of Hegel's treatment of Kant.

First, what can be said in defence of the view that Hegel is not a positivist? The short answer to this question is that there is no way to reconcile the charge of positivism with Hegel's appreciation for the argument of Kant's transcendental deduction. We can spell this point out by taking a moment to review passages in the *Encyclopaedia Logic* where Hegel compares the theories of knowledge of Locke, Hume and Kant. The moral of the story he tells us there is that the transcendental deduction of the first *Critique* provides a promising alternative to the empiricisms of Locke and Hume.

In empiricism lies the 'great principle', Hegel writes, 'that what is true must be in actuality and must be there for our perception'.¹¹ In place of the lofty determinations of 'abstract metaphysics', it seeks a 'concrete content' or a 'firm footing' in experience. (EL §37 A) Although Hegel finds this rejection of abstract metaphysics 'entirely justified', he also asserts that empiricism rests upon a 'fundamental illusion'. It uses 'metaphysical categories of matter, force, as well as those of one, many, universality . . . etc.', he says, but it does this without knowing that in so doing, it 'contains a metaphysics . . .' (EL §38) The illusion of empiricism, in other words, is that of supposing that when it describes or analyses objects of perception, it 'leaves them as they are'. In fact, however, analysis, Hegel writes, is 'the advance from the immediacy of perception to thought'; in analysis, we transform 'what is concrete into something abstract'. Although matter, for example, is supposed to be 'the foundation of everything sensible' for the empiricist, matter, in Hegel's words, 'is itself already something abstract, something which cannot be perceived as such'. (EL §38 A)

In this passage, Hegel has in mind Hume's critique of Locke's conception of substance. He believes that Hume was right to argue that since our ideas about matters of fact invariably extend beyond the data of sense, we cannot hope to discover in sense impressions justificatory grounds for our empirical judgments. But Hegel's admiration for Hume is not without reservations. Scepticism follows from the thesis that our ideas about matters of fact extend beyond the data of sense only if we adopt the wrong conception of the content of our cognitions – only if we assume, in other words, that the proper content of our cognitions is the

extra-conceptual Given. What Hegel suggests we should learn from Hume's critique of Locke is that in so far as the data of sense is a possible object of cognition, it is *already* 'something abstract', it *already* has a 'conceptual content', as McDowell would put it. Instead of scepticism about matters of fact, what we ought to conclude, according to Hegel, is that we need a new understanding of what can be the content of our knowledge.

This brings us back to the point I mentioned earlier about Hegel's appreciation of Kant's transcendental deduction. As early as in the *Differenzschrift* of 1801, he remarks that the transcendental deduction furnishes the key to a 'genuine' form of idealism.¹² Minimally, this is because, at least if interpreted along the lines of what McDowell calls Kant's 'standpoint of experience', the transcendental deduction calls into question the adequacy of the empiricist's account not just of the origin of our concepts but also of the content of our empirical cognitions. Hegel was persuaded by the argument of the transcendental deduction that pure concepts or categories are necessary rules or forms of all thought – rules without which no content or manifold can be taken by us to refer to objects. Moreover, he believed that Kant made a great advance beyond empiricism in insisting that as conditions determining the unification or synthesis of a given manifold into possible objects of experience, the categories cannot themselves derive from our perception of objects of sense.¹³ As we will see below, Hegel (like McDowell) was not convinced that Kant was consistent in heeding the lesson of the transcendental deduction; but he nonetheless held that, in insisting in the transcendental deduction upon the role of spontaneity in determining the content of receptivity, Kant provided the key to a new and more adequate way of thinking about the content of our cognitions. What we learn from the transcendental deduction is that the 'raw' or unsynthesized data of sensation is not a possible object of thought for us; it therefore has no role to play in the justification of our empirical judgments. The transcendental deduction in other words demonstrates that the empiricist's appeal to the Given is based on a myth. The Given is not a possible object of cognition because, as Hegel writes, 'man is always thinking, even when he simply intuits; if he considers something or other he always considers it as something universal, he fixes on something singular, and makes it stand out, thus withdrawing his attention from something else, and he takes it as something abstract and universal. . . .' (EL §24 A1)

IV

So Hegel is not a positivist because positivism ignores the role of spontaneity in determining the content of our cognitions. Perhaps what he means when he identifies the rational and the actual, then, is not that mind reduces to nature but that nature in some way reduces to mind or is nothing but a form of consciousness or a category of the faculty of spontaneity. Hegel seems to propose this latter kind of reduction when he tells us in the first section of his Introduction to the *Philosophy of Right*, that 'it is the concept alone . . . which has actuality . . .' – or later in that section that, '[n]othing lives which is not in some way Idea'. He seems

to support this view in passages of the *Encyclopaedia Logic* as well, for example when he praises those philosophers who assert that, 'thought alone constitutes the essentiality of what is'. (EL §36 A) What grounds could McDowell then have for *not* taking Hegel's idealism to imply a 'rampant' form of platonism?

It will be useful to take a look at a standard version of this reading of Hegel, according to which he is understood to defend the thesis that the realm of nature owes its very being to human cognition because human cognition possesses the God-like capacity to materially produce nature out of its own activity. The strongest support for this interpretation may perhaps be drawn from those passages in which Hegel asserts that Kant was mistaken to deny us the powers of an intuitive form of intellect. Hegel even goes so far as to imply that if we have correctly grasped the argument of the transcendental deduction, we will recognize that it is the intuitive model of cognition which most accurately captures the capacities of the human mind, and not – as Kant would have it – the merely discursive model.¹⁴

We know from Kant's discussions in both the *Critique of Pure Reason* and the *Critique of Judgment* that the intuitive intellect on his definition is able to create objects out of its own representations, out of its own power of intuiting; indeed, there is for it no content which is not the product of its intuiting activity. Its creative power therefore exceeds that of human cognition which is merely discursive, Kant claims, and as such dependent, for the application of its concepts to empirical objects, on some sensible manifold first being given. An intellect which is discursive cannot merely by virtue of its conceptual activity bring nature into being. An intuitive understanding, in contrast, is in Kant's words one 'through whose representations the objects of the representation should at the same time exist . . .'¹⁵

So even though Hegel admires Kant's insistence in the transcendental deduction that the empiricists fail to acknowledge the role of spontaneity in determining the content of cognition, he apparently is also convinced that, in insisting that human cognition is discursive rather than intuitive, Kant did not award the faculty of spontaneity creative power enough. But if this is Hegel's view, we again have the problem of explaining the appeal of his idealism for McDowell. In particular, it is not yet clear what grounds McDowell could have for believing that spontaneity, as Hegel construes it, has friction.

The first thing to be said in defence of McDowell's reading of Hegel is simply that Hegel's admiration for the Kantian intuitive intellect is not unqualified. Although the intuitive intellect indeed plays a key role in the development of his own idealism, it does so only in modified form. On Kant's definition, as we have just seen, there is for the intuitive intellect no content which is not the product of its intuiting activity. Unlike the discursive understanding, the intuitive intellect in Kant's view does not, in its cognitions of nature, have to be sensibly affected. But although Hegel claims that the intuitive intellect best provides the model of human cognition, he also tells us that Kant was right to argue that spontaneity is responsible for imposing a unity 'not contained in immediate sensation'. (EL §42 A3) Hegel in other words acknowledges that, in human experience, spontaneity must be affected by a sense content that it does not make.

Perhaps all this suggests is that Hegel wishes to award us incompatible cognitive capacities. The intuitive model, he says, is implied by an accurate interpretation of the transcendental deduction and best captures the nature of our form of cognition; yet he also grants that in its cognitions of experience, human spontaneity must be affected by a given sensible content. We might well be tempted to conclude at this point that Hegel is simply inconsistent, but I think we do him more justice if we proceed on the assumption that, as I suggested earlier, his insistence that human cognition is intuitive need not imply that he believes our form of cognition resembles that of the intuitive intellect *in every respect*. What we need, then, is a more precise account of the features Hegel claims our cognition shares with the intuitive model.

V

In response to the charge that Hegel is a positivist, I have been emphasizing his Kantianism – in particular, his claim that the transcendental deduction provides just what we need if we seek to move beyond the assumption shared by Locke and Hume that the proper object of empirical knowledge is the undetermined or pre-conceptualized content of sensation. In response to the charge that Hegel espouses a ‘rampant’ form of platonism, I have proposed that we proceed with caution in interpreting those passages in which he characterizes human cognition as intuitive and not forget that he also agrees with Kant that the possibility of experience for us depends in part upon our being affected by a sensible content.

Surely what Hegel is after is some way of combining features of both the intuitive and discursive models of cognition into a new and better alternative. But how? How should we understand his interest in the intuitive model if not as motivated by a repudiation of the Kantian point that for us empirical knowledge requires, in addition to the categorial determinations of spontaneity, the forms of receptivity through which we must be sensibly affected? Moreover, how should we understand Hegel’s assertion that our form of cognition is intuitive if not as implying a rejection of Kant’s insistence upon the limits of the powers of spontaneity – limits which follow from its necessary dependence, in experience, upon what is given in receptivity, and which restrict spontaneity’s valid employment to what appears in space and time?

The correct way to answer these questions requires bearing the following two points in mind: First, we should take Hegel at his word when he states (in agreement with Kant) that in experience we do not simply create but have to be affected by sensible content. Second, we should understand his appreciation for the intuitive intellect to derive from his frustration with implications he believes Kant associates with the contribution of spontaneity. What implications are these? Hegel provides a clue in the following passage:

Now, although the categories . . . pertain to thinking as such, it does not at all follow from this that they must therefore be merely something of

ours, and not also determinations of objects themselves. But according to Kant's view, this is what is supposed to be the case, and his philosophy is *subjective idealism* . . . (EL §42 A3)

Here Hegel challenges not Kant's insistence that the categories derive from the faculty of spontaneity rather than from sensation, but the restrictions he places on their validity. More precisely, Hegel challenges Kant's inference from the fact that the categories must be the contribution of the thinking subject to the conclusion that they cannot therefore also be 'determinations of objects themselves'. Hegel makes this point again when he writes that, 'according to Kant, thoughts, although they are universal and necessary determinations, are still *only our* thoughts, and are cut off from what the thing is *in itself* by an impassable gulf'. (EL §41 A2)

These passages are not unambiguous and they have been the cause of a great deal of confusion. They have encouraged the view that in criticizing Kant for awarding the categories only limited validity (i.e., validity only for objects of experience or for 'appearances'), Hegel implies that we should collapse the Kantian distinction between appearances and things in themselves by abandoning the thesis that there are intuitive constraints on what may appear to us in perception. Hegel is in other words read as recommending that we think of the metaphysical and epistemological status of objects of experience as no different from that of objects of faith and morality. Of course for the Kantian, if we think of objects of experience in this way, we ignore the a priori conditions governing how they must appear to us and thereby assume that we can know them by mere acquaintance with the content of their concepts. We regress to a pre-Critical or 'dogmatic' metaphysics according to which we are supposed to be able to know not just God and the moral law but also nature, by reflecting upon the determinations of thought alone.¹⁶

I suspect that the attractiveness of this reading of Hegel's critique has to do with the fact that it appears to explain his fascination with the intuitive intellect. For if in recommending that we think of the categories not as 'merely something of ours' but as 'determinations of objects themselves' Hegel intends for us to collapse Kant's distinction between appearances and things in themselves in the above sense, this would seem to explain his claim that our mode of cognition is intuitive rather than discursive in nature. Kant's restriction of human knowledge to appearances is, as we have seen, entailed by his ascription to us of a specifically discursive form of understanding – one which cannot, in experience, create objects out of its own thinking activity but which must be affected by a given sensible content. If what Hegel is proposing is that we abandon the view that we must, in experience, be sensibly affected, then he can easily be read as also recommending that we abandon the conception of human cognition as merely discursive.

But this interpretation of Hegel's critique cannot be correct. In charging Kant with subjective idealism, Hegel is not recommending that we collapse the distinction between appearances and things in themselves – at least not in the sense that

requires us to treat our knowledge of appearances as subject to no more restrictions than our speculations about objects of faith and morality. For one thing, Hegel never argues that we know appearances solely by way of conceptual analysis. As we have seen, he acknowledges that experience requires, not just the determinations of spontaneity, but the deliverances of receptivity as well. Furthermore, were Hegel interested merely in urging us to think of our knowledge of objects of perception on the model of our speculations about objects of practical reason or faith, his complaints about subjective idealism would be directed at the limits Kant places on theoretical knowledge alone. But this is not so. In commenting on Kant's practical philosophy, for example, Hegel remarks that the highest good which Kant posits as the final purpose of the world and as the harmony of nature and freedom, is determined (for Kant) 'simply as *our* good, or as the moral law of *our* practical reason . . . [T]he harmony is determined as something merely *subjective* – as what only *ought* to be; i.e., [as] what does *not* at the same time have *reality*'. (EL §60) So, it cannot be accurate to portray Hegel's critique as implying that he thought Kant should have permitted science or theoretical philosophy the epistemic and metaphysical liberties of our speculations about faith and morality, because in his view Kant's approach to faith and morality suffers from subjective idealism as well.¹⁷

VI

What does Hegel then have in mind when he protests that, for Kant, the categories are valid merely for us and not also for 'objects themselves'? What is it about Kant's restriction of knowledge to appearances that concerns Hegel if not the intuitive constraints Kant places on objects of experience? And what kind of extension of knowledge is Hegel proposing if his aim is other than to revive the pre-Critical claim that we can know nature by means of thought alone?

The first thing to point out in answering these questions is that the extension of knowledge Hegel seeks does not require lifting the *a priori* constraints Kant places on how objects of nature must be given to us. Instead, what it requires is that we reject the limitations Kant associates with the fact that there are also *a priori* conditions governing how objects must be *thought*. As noted above, Hegel is concerned about the implications for our knowledge that Kant associates with the contribution not of receptivity but of spontaneity. If we bear this point in mind, we can begin to see how closely his critique of Kant resembles McDowell's.

It is because of his views about spontaneity that Kant is in a certain respect no better off epistemically than Hume, on Hegel's interpretation. Both the Kantian and the Humean theories of mind are taken to imply, for different reasons, the cognitive inaccessibility of the Given. While for Hume 'all our simple ideas . . . are deriv'd from simple impressions', our ideas of objects invariably extend beyond the data of sense.¹⁸ As Hegel might put it, our cognitive access to the Given, on this theory, is invariably mediated by the work of the imagination. For Kant the Given is inaccessible because, as the transcendental deduction demonstrates, any

content which is an object of thought has necessarily been subject to the categories. Neither philosopher is therefore in a position to support the thesis that we can know or even think the Given; both nonetheless assume, according to Hegel, that it is the Given which is the proper object of our knowledge (i.e. the *desideratum*, whether attainable or not). It is clear that both are committed to this latter assumption, Hegel believes, because both experience their discovery of the contribution of subjectivity as entailing an epistemic compromise or loss. For Hume, the discovery that our ideas of objects extend with the aid of imagination beyond the data of sense entails that we lose justification for our judgments about matters of fact; for Kant, the discovery of the role of the categories entails that we lose grounds for asserting that objects as they are known or thought by us (objects of either theoretical *or* practical reason) provide insight into what McDowell calls a 'reality external to thought'.

So we miss the point of Hegel's critique of subjective idealism if we interpret it as an attack on Kant's insistence that our knowledge of objects of experience is subject to intuitive constraints. When he challenges Kant for clinging to unnecessary worries about the limits or finitude of human knowledge, what Hegel has in mind are, again, the implications he believes Kant associates with the role of spontaneity – with the limits spontaneity places on thought, be the content of thought given in perception or not. His objection is that in spite of the argument of the transcendental deduction that there is for our thinking and knowing no unconceptualized content, Kant, like Hume, adheres in the end to the view that genuine knowledge (whether theoretical or practical) consists in the correspondence of ideas to that content.

Like McDowell, then, Hegel derives from the transcendental deduction the conclusion that the appeal to the Given is based on a myth. Like McDowell, he argues that, in place of the Given, the transcendental deduction offers us a new conception of the content of our cognitions as well as a new conception of how our cognitions of experience have friction. Both philosophers believe that if we bear this implication consistently in mind, we will understand why it is inappropriate to characterize the forms of spontaneity as 'merely subjective', or to enlist metaphors of finitude and confinement when referring to features of our conceptual scheme. For both McDowell and Hegel, in other words, the transcendental deduction gives us every warrant for inferring from the premise that the categories are necessary contributions of subjectivity, the conclusion that they are also 'determinations of objects themselves'.

VII

The above account of Hegel's critique of Kant's subjective idealism makes better sense, I believe, of his interest in the idea of an intuitive intellect. There is no evidence supporting the view that, in claiming that the intuitive model of understanding most accurately captures the nature of our cognition, Hegel contradicts his own admission that we must, in experience, be sensibly affected. He seeks

neither to persuade us to think of the content of sense perception as merely a category or creation of consciousness, nor to reduce the faculty of receptivity to spontaneity. He grants that the two faculties have separate roles to play in experience and insists upon their 'identity' only because he challenges Kant's particular account of the nature of their separability.¹⁹ Hegel in other words agrees with Kant that experience requires the cooperation of receptivity and spontaneity, but rejects what he believes is a further assumption Kant associates with our discursivity: namely, that the respective contributions of the two faculties can be isolated.

Without challenging Kant's claim, then, that our understanding is discursive because dependent upon being sensibly affected, Hegel nonetheless insists that there is something about the intuitive model which sheds light on the nature of our form of cognition. More precisely, he believes that the intuitive model sheds light on the nature of our cognition, given the account of spontaneity Kant defends in the transcendental deduction. As noted above, Hegel is interested in a conception of mind which combines features of both discursive and intuitive models. One feature of the intuitive model he wishes to retain is surely this: on Kant's account, the fact of the intuitive intellect's intuiting activity is not taken to bar it from access to the real. Because it produces objects immediately from its own intuiting, there can be for it no worry about a possible lack of fit between its ideas and the objects themselves. For the intuitive intellect, in other words, there can be no gap between mind and world because there is for it no Given which escapes its powers of intuiting. Hegel wants to persuade us that, correctly interpreted, the transcendental deduction likewise implies for our discursive form of cognition this same conclusion about the relation of mind to world. There can be for the discursive understanding no gap between its categories and content, in Hegel's view, because as the transcendental deduction demonstrates, there is for it no Given which escapes its powers of thinking and knowing. Or, there can be for our discursive understanding no Given independent of its powers of thinking and knowing because, as McDowell puts it, 'the [realm of the] conceptual is unbounded on the outside'. (MW 83) This is the lesson of the transcendental deduction which, in McDowell's view, Hegel appreciates with greater consistency than Kant.

Unlike the intuitive intellect, then, our discursive understanding cannot materially produce the content of its cognitions (*we* have to be sensibly affected); but like the intuitive intellect, our cognitions can nonetheless bear on reality. We can rest assured of this, McDowell and Hegel argue, because even though experience for us depends upon the contribution of receptivity as well as spontaneity, the contributions of receptivity and spontaneity are not separable. Sensation as well as thought is indeed necessary for our experience, but sensations without concepts are blind. We are therefore misled if we think of sensations without concepts as capable of providing reasons in support of our empirical judgments, or as rational as well as merely causal (or quasi-causal) impingements from outside the space of concepts. We are also misled if we assume that the contribution of spontaneity necessarily compromises our ability to know. These views about receptivity and spontaneity rely on the Myth of the Given.

VIII

My objectives in this paper have been, first, to draw attention to how closely McDowell's treatment of Kant parallels Hegel's; and second, to use that parallel to present some features of Hegel's idealism in a charitable light. On the interpretation I have offered, Hegel's idealism implies neither a reduction of concepts to intuitions nor a reduction of intuitions to concepts. Like Kant, Hegel argues that experience for us requires both; like McDowell, he conceives of his form of idealism as committed to a denial of their separability. He therefore subscribes neither to the 'rampant' platonism nor to the 'bald' naturalism so often attributed to him.

Of course, some will protest that the philosopher in this story who does not get the credit he is due is Kant. It is not obvious, after all, that McDowell and Hegel have grounds for claiming that Kant ever departs from this "good" side, from his 'standpoint of experience'. This is a very large topic which I am not going to say much about here, but I want in conclusion at least to suggest what may have motivated the charges McDowell and Hegel direct at Kant.

On the interpretation of McDowell and Hegel I have provided, we should understand the claim that it is possible to appeal to the Given to imply that we can appeal for justificatory purposes outside the space of concepts.²⁰ The worry is that Kant in effect relies on such an appeal because he takes the contribution of spontaneity to entail that our knowledge is limited. As McDowell and Hegel correctly point out, this inference relies on an appeal to the Given since it presupposes that *genuine* knowledge must consist in the correspondence of ideas to extra-conceptual content.

But what evidence is there that Kant ever appeals to the Given in this way? Where does he suggest that the fact that our thinking is necessarily determined by the categories compromises our ability to know? It can hardly be denied that the *Critique of Pure Reason* contains reminders of the limits of human knowledge, but in what instances does the necessity of these reminders for Kant have to do with his views about the contribution of *spontaneity*? Human knowledge is limited, he argues, not because we can think only through the categories, but because in our efforts to know nature, we are restricted to objects given in space and time. Kant's various references to limits in the first *Critique* are in other words intended to draw our attention to the a priori constraints which derive from the faculty of *receptivity*.

Does Kant ever suggest that the contribution of spontaneity likewise implies a limit on our knowledge? Is there reason to think that he is committed to the thesis that, as McDowell puts it, there is a 'reality outside the sphere of the conceptual'? (MW 44) This does not appear to be the case in section §27 of the B-Deduction where Kant claims that we misunderstand the status of the categories if we take them to be merely contingent or subjective conditions on our thought. Were this the status of the categories, he writes, we would not be justified in claiming that, for example, 'the effect is connected with the cause in the object . . .,' but only that

we are 'so constituted that [we] cannot think this representation otherwise than as thus connected'. To think of the categories as subjective conditions, valid merely for us and not also of objects themselves, Kant continues, is to give the 'sceptic' just what he 'most desires'. We misunderstand the status of the categories, then, if we believe we can imagine what our thinking and what objects would be like without them. Or, as McDowell would put it, we misunderstand the status of the categories if we fail to see that the domain they determine is 'unbounded on the outside'.

In all fairness to Hegel and McDowell, however, this message is less clearly conveyed in other passages in the first *Critique*. In the B-preface, for example, Kant characterizes his 'Copernican Revolution' as replacing the old effort to establish that our knowledge conforms to objects with the new project of demonstrating how 'objects must conform to our knowledge'. Now, the point that objects must conform to our knowledge *could* be understood to imply that, according to Kant, our subjective contribution is separable from the object itself. If we read the point in this way, we encourage speculation about what objects might be like independent of the conditions of our thinking and knowing them, or about what they might be like were they conditioned by different conceptual forms. In suggesting that form and content are separable rather than inseparable elements in what Hegel calls an 'original identity', we do just what Kant in the transcendental deduction warns us not to do: we give the sceptic what he most desires.

But although this passage from the B-preface *might* be read to encourage the sceptic in this way, it is hardly obvious that Kant *intended* it to do so. Rather than infer from passages like this that Kant failed to observe consistently the lesson of his transcendental deduction, we might more charitably conclude that Kant's language occasionally obscures his doctrine.²¹ Perhaps he at times seems to defend a bald naturalism about content and a rampant platonism about form simply because, unlike Hegel and McDowell, he was too close to the philosophical traditions of Locke and Leibniz.²²

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NOTES

¹ McDowell, J. (1994), p. 3. (Hereafter *Mind and World* = MW).

² Here McDowell notes his agreement with Donald Davidson. 'Davidson is clear', he says on p. 14, 'that if we conceive experience in terms of impacts on sensibility that occur outside the space of concepts, we must not think we can appeal to experience to justify judgments or beliefs'. McDowell also discusses this point on pp. 52f, 137ff.

³ On p. 14, McDowell notes his disagreement with Davidson. 'Davidson recoils from the Myth of the Given all the way to denying experience any justificatory role, and the coherentist upshot is a version of the conception of spontaneity as frictionless, the very thing that makes the ideas of the Given attractive'.

⁴ In McDowell's words, '[w]e should understand what Kant calls "intuition" – experi-

ential intake – not as a bare getting of an extra-conceptual Given, but as a kind of occurrence or state that already has conceptual content'. (p. 9)

⁵ McDowell explains what is 'passive' about our experience in this way: 'In experience one finds oneself saddled with content. One's conceptual capacities have already been brought into play, in the content's being available to one, before one has any choice in the matter. The content is not something one has put together oneself . . .' (p. 10)

In claiming that the passive component of experience guarantees that our experience has 'friction', McDowell does not mean to suggest that all our empirical judgments are true. His view is that in light of the passive feature of experience, we are warranted in assuming that our true empirical judgments are true of the world and not merely of our idea or representation of the world.

⁶ See Kant's discussion of 'transcendental ideas' beginning at A321/B377 of his *Critique of Pure Reason*.

⁷ See, e.g., in the *Critique of Pure Reason*, Kant's appendix to the Transcendental Dialectic, 'The Regulative Employment of the Ideas of Pure Reason'. We must presuppose the systematic unity of nature as 'objectively valid and necessary', he writes, because without it 'no empirical concepts, and therefore no experience, would be possible'. A651/B679, A654/B682. I rely on Norman Kemp Smith's translation of the *Critique of Pure Reason*, (1929).

⁸ It is curious that McDowell suggests that we need to appeal to a supersensible realm to provide for meaning but not law, according to Kant. Laws of nature (what Kant calls 'principles of pure understanding') are as much products of spontaneity, in Kant's view, as the laws or principles that provide for meaning (ideas of theoretical and practical reason). Perhaps the distinction McDowell has in mind when he claims that nature for Kant is disenchanted because deprived of meaning is the distinction Kant introduces in the *Critique of Pure Reason* between constitutive and regulative principles. Regulative principles or ideas derive, Kant writes, 'not from the constitution of an object but from the interest of reason in respect of a certain possible perfection of the knowledge of the object . . . There are therefore maxims of speculative reason, which rest entirely on its speculative interest, although they may seem to be objective principles'. A666/B694 Unlike the categories, regulative ideas are not rules by means of which objects are constituted (rules which unify a manifold into objects of thought or knowledge); rather, they are rules which guide the empirical employment of reason. They are subjective versus objective, Kant explains, not because they are dispensable conditions of possible experience, but only because we can find for them no experiential correlate (no 'schema' in intuition). A665/B693 McDowell's view is that Kant's appeal to 'maxims of speculative reason' amounts to an appeal to the supersensible. But, again, Kant relies just as much on an appeal to the supersensible in providing for law – especially if by 'law' we mean a priori 'principles of possible experience'. The author of such laws (human understanding) no more belongs within the realm of nature than the author of regulative ideas (human reason). (McDowell seems to concede this point on p. 97.)

⁹ See McDowell's discussion of this point in Lecture V.

¹⁰ Feuerbach, L. (1986), p. 47.

¹¹ I rely on the translation of the *Encyclopaedia Logic* (hereafter = EL) by T. F. Geraets, W. A. Suchting and H. S. Harris (1991), §38.

¹² Hegel, G. W. F. (1970), p. 9. For an English translation of this text, see Hegel, G. W. F. (1977), p. 79.

¹³ See EL §41–42.

¹⁴ e.g. Hegel, G. W. F. (1970), p. 325f; in translation, see Hegel, G. W. F. (1977), p. 89f.

Although the frequency of Hegel's references to Kant's notion of the intuitive intellect diminishes after his Jena period (perhaps largely because of the transformations that notion undergoes in Schelling's hands), features of Kant's conception of the intuitive intellect nonetheless make their way into Hegel's mature system. (See, for example, the introductory section of the Subjective Logic of the 1816 *Wissenschaft der Logik*, 'Vom Begriff im allgemein'; see also §55 of the *Encyclopaedia Logic* of 1830, where Hegel identifies Kant's notion of an intuitive understanding as a 'speculative' element of the Critical philosophy.) For a summary of Hegel's reaction to Schelling's idea of the intuitive intellect, see Frederick C. Beiser's introductory essay in *The Cambridge Companion to Hegel*, ed. Beiser (1993), pp. 16ff.

¹⁵ *Critique of Pure Reason*, B139. Also at B135, Kant writes that the intuitive understanding is one in which 'through self-consciousness all the manifold would *eo ipso* be given'. Kant elaborates his account of the intuitive intellect in his *Critique of Judgment*, esp. §§76–77.

¹⁶ Kant defines 'dogmatism', in the B-Preface of the *Critique of Pure Reason* as 'the presumption that it is possible to make progress with pure knowledge . . . from concepts alone . . .' Bxxxv

¹⁷ See also in the *Encyclopaedia Logic* §§54–59.

¹⁸ Hume, D. (1896), Book I, Part I, Section I. In Book I, Part IV, Section II, Hume writes: '... 'tis evident, that whenever we infer the continu'd existence of the objects of sense from their coherence, and the frequency of their union [in sense experience], 'tis in order to bestow on the objects a *greater regularity than what is observ'd in our mere perceptions*' (emphasis mine). It would of course be odd to take Hume to defend the view that what is given is cognitively inaccessible (even in light of the role of the imagination). What we learn from Hume is that, thanks to the work of the imagination, our empirical judgments invariably extend beyond the (cognitively accessible) given.

¹⁹ Hegel speaks of the identity of the two faculties, for example, in Hegel, G. W. F. (1970); in translation see Hegel, G. W. F. (1977), p. 70, 88ff.

²⁰ McDowell confuses matters by representing Kant's effort to appeal to the Given as an appeal, not to the extra-conceptual, but to the 'supersensible' or 'extra-natural'. Obviously, there is nothing about our speculations about the systematic unity of nature, the unconditional condition, or the causality of freedom which imply any intention to transcend the space of concepts. Kant's claim that we can *think* non-phenomenal objects or things in themselves therefore provides no support for the claim that he relies on the Myth of the Given.

²¹ Hegel writes of Kant's 'inconsistency' at §60 of the *Encyclopaedia Logic*. '[I]t is the supreme inconsistency to admit, on the one hand, that the understanding is cognizant only of appearances, and to assert, on the other, that this cognition is *something absolute* – by saying: cognition *cannot* go any further, this is the *natural*, absolute *restriction* of human knowing. Something is only known, or even felt, to be a restriction, or a defect, if one is at the same time *beyond* it'.

²² I am especially grateful to Graham Bird, Catherine Elgin, Robert Fogelin, Terry Pinkard and the editor of this journal for their comments on earlier drafts of this paper.

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