

Hegel on Kant's Transcendentalism

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Abstract

This paper outlines Hegel's early critique of Kantian transcendental project. As we will see, Hegel is undeterred by the idea of the transcendental. What he denounces in the idea of the transcendental is not the risk of excessiveness that it involves and that will reappear in Husserl's transcendental philosophy; rather, to the extent that this theory implies dualism/pluralism, he attacks its very excess of measure, its dullness and insipidity. Only the affirmation of the identity of subject and object is to be respected from Hegel's speculative point of view; and this is only from this point of view that he eliminates Kantian transcendental project. I will resume his sketch as basically appeared in the first part of his book *Faith and Knowledge* (1927). I will articulate his argument through three moments: the psychological, the moral and the imaginary; then I will see how this argument eliminates Kantian transcendental project.

1. The First Moment: The Psychological

The aim of Hegel's analysis of Kantian transcendentalism is to exert his special "speculative reflection" from one hand, and to show how he surpasses and eliminates Kantian notion of "transcendental" and its implications (e.g. pluralism, constitution, etc.) in the benefit of a monism, from the other. The speculative reflection is opposed to transcendental reflection as absolute knowledge is to critical knowledge. (Hypolite 1953:122) This is because Hegel terms "speculative" the thought concerning the identity of subject and object, and this is the form that absolute knowledge assumes in "philosophy". To this end, Hegel tries to show the psychological tone of Kantian transcendentalism. Even in his earliest reflections on Kant, Hegel denounces the psychologism menacing the Copernican revolution:

"The absolute identity of subject and object has become a formal relation (though manifested as a causal relation), and transcendental idealism has become a formal, or more

accurately, a psychological idealism.”(Hegel 1927: 304)

The constitutive subject exercising this mental causality is opposed inasmuch as subjective, to the object:

“The entire system of principles is subjective. . . . The objectivity of categories in experience and the necessity of relations drive from the contingent and the subjective. This understanding is a human understanding. . . .” (ibid:306)

And yet, Hegel says that the reduction of the transcendental to the anthropological may open the way to the speculative.

“Already from the simple fact that the understanding is posited as subjective, it is recognized as something non- absolute, and it should be indifferent to formal idealism whether the understanding- - which is necessary and known according to the dimensions of its form- is posited subjectively or objectively.” (ibid:308)

If so, the understanding is already viewed by Kant through the lens of reason- i. e. , the sort of thought that considers itself identical with its object and that assumes and surmounts contradiction: in short, the dialectical identity of the concept as thing and of the thing as concept. Nevertheless, Hegel says that the treatment of reason in the *Transcendental Dialectic of Critique of Pure Reason* belies these promises.

“Reason for Kant makes no claim to autonomous dignity or to auto- generation; it remains a prisoner of its own sterility and of its unworthy resignation to the dualism of a pure unity appearing to reason and a multiplicity pertaining to understanding, and it does not realize the necessity of a middle term or of an immanent knowledge.” (ibid:311)

This middle term can be found through another interpretation of the notion of the understanding, by conceiving of an understanding whose content would be immanent in its form and with which “nature is in harmony, and not by chance,” (Kant 1987). Such is the idea of an archetypal “intuitive understanding,” “absolute intermediary,” as Hegel says; we can add: an intermediary between nature and

mind, between object and subject. This is an understanding which ceases to be human in order to be both human and natural, or rather, if we are to surpass this opposition, to be logos. (Hegel, 1929, II,: 227)

2. The Second Moment: The Moral

Hegel finds in Kant's ethical writings another forerunner of the speculative reflection. The notion of autonomy signifies for Hegel both the abolition of the duality of nature and reason and the final identification of self-consciousness with object-consciousness. "The pure volition that wills itself is being in general or being." (HypPolite, 1946, II: 454) This is why Hegel denounces the postulates of practical reason as a vice of the Kantian system postulating, instead of affirming, a synthesis of nature and morality implies a step backwards, a return to the separation of form and content. Yet this is a retreat only in Hegel's eyes. Kant never thought that nature and morality, object and subject, could be identified at the outset; he never said that the pure will is being. Certainly one wonders whether the postulates are necessary- that is, whether we must interpret the finitude of knowledge as a limitation imposed by faith, or whether the totality of being must be conceived as God. But the contradiction to which the postulates offer a solution is not a contradiction "in thought"; it is the contradiction inherent in morality itself. The moral consciousness

"produces its object consciously and by itself, and we do not see it encounter its object as an alien thing. . . . It knows essence to be itself, for it knows itself as producing essence. "(Hegel 1964:629)

But what the moral consciousness thus knows immediately as its essence is duty: the object that it creates here is not God, and it cannot be reproached for positing duty as both beyond the self and produced by means of the self. The contradiction found at the core of the moral problem resides rather in the fact that duty is at once real and unreal. It is real inasmuch as it is an expression of pure will; and its manifestation is an imperative means that dualism can-

not be surpassed, because the moral consciousness encounters the resistance of a nature found both inside the subject-where reason is opposed to sensibility, just as the transcendental is opposed to the psychological- - and outside the subject in an in- itself opposed to the for itself.

Yet the imperative is unreal insofar as it must be realized in the nature that it negates; form must be given an adequate content, but the matter of this content does not arise from form. The dissimulations (*Verstellungen*) of moral consciousness denounced by Hegel spring then from the necessity of reconciling purity and efficacy by surmounting a difference that is not merely verbal as Hegel claims, since it expresses the condition of man as an incarnate Word. (Hegel 1927:312ff) And noetic consciousness is subjected to a similar necessity: it must employ intuition to realize the concept, to think the object in general on the basis of the empirical object, and thus to find for form a content without which it is empty but which it does not engender. At this point the imagination intervenes.

3. The Third Moment: the Imaginary

The third factor that Hegel finds in Kant for speculative identity lies in the experience of beauty, where "the form of the opposition between intuition and concept disappears." (ibid.:317) The aesthetic idea is, as Kant says, "an intuition of the imagination," and the imagination is the privileged place where the mediation required by speculative thought can occur. The idea of an intuitive understanding is clarified by the notion of imagination: such an understanding is 'nothing other than the idea of the transcendental imagination,' (ibid.:318) and in turn, "this imagination is nothing more than reason itself." (ibid.:301) Kant's great merit is to have discovered the imagination.

"One cannot understand anything about the unity of the transcendental deduction . . . without distinguishing what Kant calls the faculty of the original synthetic unity of , apPerception from the self, which, for him, is restricted to

accompanying all representations, or without recognizing this imagination as the unique in- itself- - an imagination conceived not as an intermediary between an absolute, existing subject and an absolute, existing world, but as that which is primary and productive and as that from which both the subjective self and the objective world are derived, giving rise to an appearance and a product that are necessarily counterparts." (ibid.: 209-10)

Thus the imagination is at the origin of the originally synthetic unity. As such, it is the source of the transcendental deduction, grounding the synthetic judgements that express the identity of subject and predicate - - the identity of the particular posited as object and the universal posited as thought- - because it may be said to be the original identity of subject and thought. Hence it is distinguished from the abstract self: it no longer belongs to subjectivity, but is situated instead at its origin as well as at the origin of the object: it is the in- Itself. What does this mean?

Some light may be thrown on the ontology of the transcendental imagination by the psychology of the empirical imagination: the imagination is that which is least human in man. It wrenches man away from himself and plunges him into ecstasy; it puts him in to secret communion with the powers of nature. The genius yielding to inspiration no longer belongs to himself; he is a force of nature; his "I" is an "other". Thus the imagination is an origin because it alienates man to join him to that which he is not. But the imagination conceived ontologically is not this faculty of losing oneself in a strange speech that may end in madness; it is this speech itself, the truth of Being prior to (though expressed by) the distinction between the subjective self and the objective world. Or else, it is "the truth such as, unveiled, it is in itself and for itself . . . [the truth] whose content is the representation of God as he exist in his eternal essence before the creation of the world and any finite mind." (Heidegger 1962, 253) The imagination is the logos itself whose dialectical movement engenders nature and mind.

It is worth nothing that all the doctrines which attempt to save the transcendental from the psychological by directing it towards the metaphysical stress the role of the imagination. This is undoubtedly because the imagination, representing the inhuman in man, best underlines psychological interpretations, best manifests that man is not the measure of all things, and, by a curious paradox, gives truth the greatest authority by liberating it from subjectivity. We know how much Heidegger has insisted on the imagination; yet he does not give it a central role in the analysis of Dasein, since he interprets the latter as temporality. (ibid.) But long before Heidegger, Schelling had tried to reconstruct Spinoza with the help of Scheller. For Scheller, the philosophy of the imagination guarantees a philosophy of substance; *natura naturans* cannot be grasped by empirical or transcendental reflection, but only by penetrating into, and as it were losing oneself in, the object of knowledge; this is why the imagination is a privileged term, as well as a method, in Schelling's philosophy of the Absolute. Hegel has early adopted Schelling's perspective. (HypPolite 1946:11)

4. Speculative Philosophy as the Philosophy of Identity

Hegel demands that speculative philosophy surpass dualism by conceiving "the absolute identity of thought and being . . . an idea absolutely identical with that recognized by the ontological argument and all philosophy as the first and unique idea, the only one that is true and philosophical." (Hegel 1927:225)

Hegel presents this idea in many ways, but he tends simply to assert the principle of identity rather than to justify the various expressions he gives to it: e.g, the identity of empirical multiplicity and absolute unity, the identity of the particular which is given and of the universal which is thought, the identity of subject and predicate in the absolute judgement of which the synthetic a priori judgement is a first expression (for example, when I say that all perceived alteration has a cause in thought).

The identity may also exist between the finite and infinite, either

of the terms of an infinite opposition being finite or infinite according to whether it affirms or denies the opposition; for example, the "I think" as "an absolute intellectual point . . . is both conditioned by infinite opposition and absolute in this finitude" (ibid.:312) When later, in the *Phenomenology*, Hegel renders justice to Fichte's subjectivism, the identity characterizing the absolute is the identity of certitude and truth- i.e., the equality for consciousness of knowledge and truth. Yet this identity is only produced within consciousness by a mere deepening knowledge; what consciousness must discover in coming to truth is its own identity with the object. When it knows the object, the object knows itself.

In other words, in its own act of knowing, the absolute reflects upon itself and constitutes itself as self-consciousness, that is, the subject; hence consciousness is only the instrument of the Absolute. More exactly, it is the instrument of the advent of the Absolute: for the identity in which the absolute become conscious of itself appears only at the end of the development of consciousness. And this is why such an identity is dialectical. Undoubtedly, the notion of dialectic was already implicit in Hegel's first works. But it is debatable whether the explicit introduction of this notion into his later writings facilitates the understanding of speculative thought. The problem is to know if Hegel here is not perhaps the sorcerer's apprentice, who, in thinking he has tamed contradiction and inserted it into his system, has actually been overcome by it.

Hegel has sufficiently insisted on the seriousness of the negative, on death, and on war. Nevertheless, it remains the case that for him everything has a meaning and even, if we may say so, that everything turns out right: the finite is a moment of the infinite, the sin of particularity is pardoned in the universal, and negation is negated. the scandal of finitude or separation, like the terror of the slave, is whisked away in the movement of history.(Hegel 1964:687) The term "dialectic" signifies that movement is more real than that is moved, and that mediation is more real than the terms it opposes and unites. The Absolute triumphs, but only as Idea. For history is not

the last word, and Hegel becomes they of the very forces of contradiction he has awakened, because dialectic means both the advent of history and its absolutization.

Then the Phenomenology leads to the Logic: mediation- - the moment of rupture and opPosition- - is meaningful only if it ends in a new immediate. If history has an end, this means that there is no history, since the end for Hegel is found in the beginning: the next immediate is already present in the immediate now being set in motion by mediation. Time is once again the moving image of eternity, and any progress in thought since Spinoza appears to be illusory. The logicity of being and history is only a reflection of the being of logic, and the movement of logos is a logical movement.

One may however, consider here that temporality is eternal precisely because it is the act of logos, the absolute subject. Everything returns to logos, including the nature and history in which logos becomes alienated. Thus dialectic negates itself once more; it makes itself absolute instead of dialectical. Contradiction lies at the heart of being, but it is being which contradicts itself; opPosition, in the multiple forms revealed by the Logic, is always transcended, and truth is found only in this transcendence. Realizing this is important for our own project. For, though one might think that dialectic would restore dualism, this is not at all the case. If there is a last word to be said, it definitely belongs to identity. Of course, identity is not pure and simple equality, and on this point Hegel transforms Spinoza: identity is mediation, but the mediation that negates immediate terms is itself an immediate. For it is finally the manifestation of the Absolute, and the Absolute is precisely its own manifestations the non- temporal becoming of logos:

“As this movement of becoming explicit which relates itself to itself and then is an absolute identity with itself, the Absolute is manifestation not of something other, but absolute manifestation, manifestation in itself and for itself; thus it is the actual reality” (Hegel 1929,II: 167)

Thus, whether he starts from Schelling or from Fichte, Hegel in-

vites us, unlike Kant, to think the unthinkable, the identity of subject and object. At the core of this identity, subject and object possess only the evanescent existence of dialectical moments, as products of an alienation that must itself be surpassed. This is seen clearly in the fact that absolute reflection, the mediation in which being reflects upon itself, does not originate with man; it is accomplished through man- through the subjective reflection of consciousness as such. To proclaim the identity of subject and object is therefore to slight the subject if by "subject" is meant the concrete human being.

Hegel does say that the absolute is subject; but this elevation of subjectivity to the Absolute involves neither empirical nor transcendental subjectivity. It signifies first of all that the Absolute is a relation of itself to itself and that it negates itself by positing itself and then negates its own negation: thus it is both for- itself and in- itself. It also means that thought remains a privileged element; this is seen in the term "reflection," which is employed by Hegel to designate the dialectical movement of being. This thought must be understood somewhat like thought in the Aristotelian sense: it is universal in itself.

5. Conclusion

As Hegel elaborates his special systematic version of monism, one sees that his doctrine implies the elimination of Kantian ideas of "transcendental", "a priori" and "constitution;" they lose their meaning for Hegel. The idea of an intuitive understanding, which would be both the understanding of consciousness and the understanding of nature, is the purest idea of an understanding that would also be empirical and a postriori.(Hegel 1927:309), because the transcendental is conceived by Kant as a function of dualism; it belongs to a subjectivity which imposes the forms on the object. The determinations of understanding and sensibility are realized and isolated, acquiring from this fact a formal validity.

"[Kant] thinks of the a priori in terms of the formal concepts of universality and necessity...He considers it as a pure unity that is not

originally synthetic" (ibid.: 302)

To be truly synthetic, the synthesis would have to be not only a formal rule for empirical knowledge, but also the absolute identity of object and subject- i.e., the identity of the empirical and the transcendental. Form would have to engender content in order to be identified with it- in other words, the content must appear as a determination of form, as posited and then negated by form in order to actualize itself. Finally, the transcendental would have to exist as the spontaneity of logos in its movement of identification with the empirical. While for Kant the transcendentalism considers the form which determines content without being compromised by it and which makes experience possible without being experience itself, for Hegel there is no need to ground experience in something non- experiential, because experience, grounds itself: the empirical in turn is transcendental. Experience is absolute because it is the experience of the Absolute, that is, the experience enjoyed by the Absolute in manifesting itself as the identity of subject and object.

In this way Hegel eliminates the transcendental; or rather he allows transcendental reflection and subjectivity, but only on the condition that it be finally interpreted as absolute reflection and subjectivity. Thus the Transcendent Analytic instead of setting forth the conditions for the possibility of experience, would show how the understanding discovers itself in experience and recognize itself as the understanding of nature; as a result, Kant's transcendental logic is, properly interpreted an ontology. For the life of logos is nothing more than knowledge of self in the content, the reciprocity of subjectivity and objectivity. Thus conceived, the transcendental retains the empirical because "it expresses, the logicity of being; it goes beyond notions of subject and object, by stating their original identity as it appears in the judgement of existence." (HypPolite, 1953:101) In other words, the transcendental is kept on the condition of being a form of the Absolute, of participating in the dialectal dance which is the Absolute itself. The transcendental is the logos, and this is why logic, pure knowledge or pure truth, is the kingdom of the tran-

scendental; and thereby Hegel does actually/logically eliminate the theory of subsumption or constitution, which presupposes that the transcendental is found outside experience.

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