Hegel's Critique of Kant

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In this essay I argue that Hegel criticizes Kant for failing to carry out a thorough critique of the categories of thought. In Hegel's view, Kant merely limits the validity of the categories to objects of possible experience, but he does not challenge the way in which the 'understanding' (*Verstand*) conceives of those categories and other concepts. Indeed, for Hegel, Kant's limitation of the validity of the categories itself presupposes the sharp distinctions, drawn by understanding, between concepts such as 'form' and 'matter' or 'subjective' and 'objective'. I note that Hegel does not do complete justice to Kant's concept of the 'thing in itself' or to his conception of 'critique', but I argue that his criticism of Kant is none the less correct.

I

The Limits of Kantian Critique. In his *Science of Logic* Hegel seeks to 'clarify' (*reinigen*) the categories 'instinctively' at work in consciousness (LS 17/SL 37).[1] He does so by deriving them anew from the thought of pure being. This derivation also provides a *critique* of the way categories have been conceived by past metaphysicians, such as Christian Wolff, and continue to be conceived by the understanding (*Verstand*) (see, for example, LS 51/SL 64).

Hegel acknowledges, however, that by carrying out this critique he is following in the footsteps of Kant. 'The *Critical* Philosophy', he writes, also 'subjects to investigation the validity of the *concepts of the understanding* that are used in metaphysics' (EL §41).[2] Moreover, Hegel is clear in his praise for Kant's critical intentions: 'Subjecting the determinations of the older metaphysics to investigation was without doubt a very important step' (EL §41 A). Yet Hegel's praise is by no means unqualified: in his view, Kant's critical exami-

[1] Hegel (2008) is cited as LS, and Hegel (1999a) as SL, both by page number. Note that throughout this essay I have occasionally modified translations.

[2] Citations of Hegel (1970a) and its translation in Hegel (1991), both abbreviated as EL, are by paragraph number and, where necessary, the attached Remark (R) or Addition (A).

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nation of the categories is ultimately unsatisfactory because it is not *critical* enough.

The problem is that Kant merely limits the validity of the categories—namely, to objects of possible experience—but does not examine how categories should be conceived in themselves. He does not seek to discover their proper logical 'content' and whether understanding conceives of that content correctly. 'What they [the categories] are in themselves', Hegel writes, 'and their relationship to each other, this has not been made an object of consideration' (LS 49–50/SL 63). For all his critical intent, therefore, Kant does not challenge the way understanding conceives of the categories. He also retains a *verständig* conception of other concepts, such as 'subjective' and 'objective', or 'form' and 'matter', that are not, for him, categories in the narrow sense. And, of course, he also preserves the principles of formal logic.

In Hegel's view, the new 'spirit' of the age demands a thorough revision of logic and our basic concepts and categories (LS 3, 5/SL 25–6). Yet Kant remains wedded to understanding's conception of the latter, and gives no further critical thought to their logical 'content'. Indeed (though Hegel does not cite this passage), Kant states explicitly in the first *Critique* that it is not his task in that work to consider precisely *how* categories should be conceived. He admits that in a 'system of pure reason' he would have to consider this; in the *Critique* itself, however, 'I deliberately spare myself the definitions of these categories' (KRV B 108).[3]

Kant fails, or declines, to provide such 'definitions', because, as Hegel puts it, 'the interest of the Kantian philosophy was directed to the so-called *transcendental* aspect of the categories' (LS 49/SL 63). In other words, Kant's concern in the first *Critique* is to disclose the *source* of the categories, however they might be conceived. That source, for Kant, is thought itself, and more especially (in Hegel's words) the '*original identity* of the "I" in thinking' (EL §42). Categories are thus not abstracted from empirical experience (as Locke would maintain), but belong 'to the spontaneity of *thinking*' and so are 'a priori' (EL §40).

According to Hegel, Kant goes on to argue that categories are employed by thought to unify our sensuous intuitions. Such intuitions

[3] Citations of Kant (1990) and Kant (1997), both abbreviated as KRV, are given by the A and B edition page number.

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are '*manifold* with regard to their *content*' and 'equally manifold through their form', that is, through being dispersed in space and time (EL §42). As such, they lack intrinsic unity. Yet the thinking I regards this manifold of intuitions as its own; moreover, it understands itself to be a unity, to possess the 'unity of self-consciousness'. To think of the manifold as belonging to it, therefore, the I has to think of the manifold as falling *within* its unity. This means in turn that the I must think the manifold *itself* as unified (VGP 4:153/LHP 175).[4] Kant's categories, Hegel explains, are the concepts *through which* we understand the manifold to be such a unity—to be united, for example, in one 'quantity' or as 'cause' and 'effect' (see VGP 4:154/LHP 177). In Kant's own words, the categories constitute the 'condition' under which alone my manifold representations '*can* stand together in a universal self-consciousness' (KRV B 132–3). At the same time, Hegel notes, categories, for Kant, are 'concepts which refer *a priori* to *objects*', that is, concepts through which what we intuit is understood to be *an object* (rather than just a play of sensory data) (LS 48/SL 62). The categories thus do double duty: they enable intuitions to belong to the unity of self-consciousness *and* also to present us with empirical objects (see KRV B 138).[5]

This idea that experience of objects requires both categories and intuitions is one that Hegel endorses. In this respect, he is a disciple of Kant: 'this bonding of the categories with the stuff of perception is what Kant understands by "experience". *And that is quite correct*' (VGP 4:154/LHP 177, emphasis added). Hegel also agrees with Kant that categories have their ground in *thought*—albeit not just in the thinking I, but in thought 'in the absolute sense', that is, in the reason that informs both the I and 'the objective world' (LS 35, 49/SL 51, 63). Hegel does not, however, endorse Kant's account of the *limitations* of the categories.

Hegel's Kant does not examine how the categories should be conceived in themselves but simply inherits them from the tradition. His examination is meant to be critical, however, because, in contrast to previous metaphysicians, he declares categories to be limited in two

[4] Hegel (1986–96) is cited as VGP by volume and page number, and Hegel (2009) as LHP by page number.

[5] I disagree, therefore, with Karl Ameriks's charge that Hegel neglects the role played by Kant's categories in making the cognition of objects possible in favour of their role in enabling representations to belong to one self-consciousness. See Ameriks (2000, pp. 280–5).

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senses. First, he takes them to have legitimate application only to objects of experience, rather than that which is purely intelligible. Second, he takes them to be further limited by the fact that such objects are mere 'appearances', that is, objects *for us*, rather than things in themselves. Hegel takes issue with Kant on both counts.

First, although Hegel agrees that categories are needed for experience of objects, he does not agree that they should be restricted to sensuous, empirical experience. He thinks that they also disclose—by themselves—the purely intelligible structure of the world. In Hegel's view, Kant limits the application of the categories because of the *abstract* way in which he conceives of them: he regards them as 'empty' logical forms that acquire content only from the sensuous material to which they are applied (see EL §43, LS 28/SL 45).[6] Without this content, Kant maintains, the categories would mean little or nothing to us; they thus have legitimate application only within sensuous, empirical experience.

By calling Kant's categories 'empty', Hegel is not denying that each has a distinct *logical* form. In the first *Critique*, Kant states that even 'if one leaves out the sensible determination of persistence' the category of substance still has its own logical form: 'substance' signifies 'a something that can be thought as a subject (without being a predicate of something else)' (KRV B 186). Similarly, all the other 'unschematized' categories have their logical forms, as Hegel is well aware (see VGP 4:153–4/LHP 175–7). Kant also insists, however, that a category would remain 'without *sense*' (*ohne* Sinn), if it were not made '*sensible*' (*sinnlich*) (KRV B 299). The category of substance would thus mean nothing to us if we did not think of substance as persisting *in time* (see KRV B 183). Furthermore, categories must not only be thought together with their schemata in this way if they are to yield cognition, but they must also be 'related to empirical intuitions, i.e. to *data* for possible experience'; otherwise, Kant writes, 'they have no objective validity at all, but are rather a mere play' (KRV B 298). Categories mean something to us and enable us to know something, therefore, only when they are conceived in temporal terms through their schemata—when substance is thought as that which *persists*—and when they are used to connect empirical intuitions with one another. It is this claim of Kant's that I take Hegel to have in mind when he describes Kant's categories as 'empty'.

emptiness of the categories

[6] See also KRV B 75: 'Thoughts without content are empty'.

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Now Hegel's *Kant* considers the restriction of the categories to empirical experience to result from his critical examination of them. For Hegel himself, by contrast, Kant's position stems from his *uncritical* adherence to the standpoint of understanding. As Hegel sees it, the idea that categories derive their content and meaning from sensuous intuition goes hand in hand with—indeed, *is*—the thought that they are themselves empty forms; but this reduction of categories to empty forms without their own content is the work of *understanding* that sharply separates 'form' and 'content' from one another (LS 15, 17–18/SL 36–9). Accordingly, Kant limits the application of categories in the narrow sense because he adheres firmly to a conceptual distinction belonging to '*reflective* understanding' (LS 28/SL 45).

Hegel takes his *Logic* to present a more thorough critique of the categories than that offered by Kant; and in that work he shows that categories are not just empty forms that need to be given sensuous content but concepts with a concrete *logical content* of their own. Such content, Hegel states, consists in the 'concretion' (*Konkretion*) of the categories themselves; that is, in their being, not one-sided abstractions, but complex unities of opposing determinations (LS 31, 33/SL 48–9). Since categories have their own logical content, independent of sensuous intuition, they are not restricted in their use to empirical experience. This means, however, that they are not prevented by any such restriction from disclosing the purely *intelligible* structure of things, or what Hegel calls the '*Begriff der Dinge*' (LS 18–19/SL 39)—though more would need to be said to justify Hegel's positive claim that categories can, indeed, disclose that intelligible structure, can reveal the nature of being (see, for example, Houlgate 2006, pp. 129–31). (In the doctrine of essence Hegel also considers the concepts of 'form' and 'content'—and 'form' and 'matter'—directly and shows how they are dialectically united. This further undermines the sharp distinction between the concepts that Kant takes for granted; see Hegel 1999b, pp. 68–78, and SL 447–56.)

Yet this is to get ahead of ourselves. Hegel sets out much of his critique of Kant in the introductory sections of the *Logic* and *Encyclopaedia Logic* that *precede* speculative logic itself.[7] In these pre-

[7] Though the development of such logic leads to further criticisms of Kant and especially of his treatment of the Antinomies; see, for example, LS 198ff./SL 190ff. Hegel also criticizes Kant in his lectures on the history of philosophy; see Hegel (1986–96) and Hegel (2009).

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liminary texts, therefore, he has not yet proven, and so cannot yet claim, that categories have their own logical content. Accordingly, he cannot draw on this claim to reject the restrictions Kant imposes on the categories. All he can legitimately do is point to the unquestioned *presuppositions* that underlie Kant's incomplete critique of pure reason. Before presenting his speculative logic, therefore, what Hegel can say is this: Kant's restriction of the categories to experience rests on his uncritical adherence to the standpoint of understanding, and this ill befits a truly *critical* philosopher.

Not only does Kant restrict the categories to empirical experience, but he also regards experience itself as the realm of *appearance*. The second sense in which categories are limited, for Kant, is thus that they apply to, and yield knowledge of, appearances only, not things in themselves. In Hegel's view, Kant reduces knowledge of the empirical world to knowledge of appearance because he takes its two principal components—sensible intuition and the categories—to be *subjective* (see VGP 4:155/LHP 178).

Hegel does not object to the idea that sensations are subjective. He accepts that hardness, for example, is my subjective sensation, and that I locate hardness *outside* myself in space only through 'intuition' (see VGP 4:152/LHP 174). Yet Kant also takes the forms of intuition, namely space and time, to be subjective. Space, for Kant, is the 'subjective condition of sensibility', so we can 'speak of space, extended beings, and so on, only from the human standpoint' (KRV B 42); and the same is true of time. In Hegel's view, by contrast—which will be justified in his philosophies of nature and spirit—space and time are not just subjective, but are imparted to things by reason, or 'the creative eternal Idea': 'things are [thus] in truth *themselves* spatial and temporal' (Hegel 1970b, §448 A, p. 253; Hegel 2007, p. 181). In the same vein, Hegel disputes Kant's claim that categories are subjective.

For Hegel's Kant, categories turn what we see into something *objective* by investing it with necessity and universality: through categories we understand what we see to be what *must* be seen by *every* finite rational being. What we encounter may be some quite singular event; but we think of it as objective in so far as we think that every finite rational being would *have* to experience it in the same way. Hegel praises Kant for equating objectivity with necessity and universality in this way: 'Kant calls what conforms to thought (the universal and the necessary) *objective*; and he was certainly quite right

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to do this' (EL §41 A2).[8] Hegel criticizes Kant, however, for reducing the objectivity constituted by categories to *subjective* objectivity, objectivity *for us* (EL §41). Kant performs this reduction, Hegel argues, because he identifies the I, or the 'unity of self-consciousness', as the source of the categories and concludes from this that they are '*only our* thoughts'. Since the categories have their source in the I—albeit the I we all share—they do no more than enable *us* to understand the world in certain ways, and so do not disclose what things are in themselves; indeed, they are 'distinguished from what the thing is *in itself* by an impassable gulf' (EL §41 A2). The categories turn what we see into something objective; yet, since they and the forms of intuition are themselves subjective, the sphere of objectivity they constitute remains at one remove from things in themselves and is no more than *appearance*.

subjective objectivity

In Hegel's view, Kant restricts categories to empirical experience because he takes them to be empty forms that acquire content through sensuous intuition. He restricts them to mere appearances because he regards them (together with the forms of intuition) as *subjective*. Once again, however, Hegel notes that Kant's position relies on a distinction made by the understanding: in this case, that between 'subjective' and 'objective'.

three meanings of 'objective'

Hegel maintains that the term 'objective' can have three different meanings. It can mean, first, what lies outside us in space; second, what is universal and necessary; and, third, what something is *in itself*, 'what is there, as distinct from what is only thought by us' (EL §41 A2). Hegel's Kant takes the categories to be compatible with objectivity in the first two senses, but not the third: through the categories we understand things in space and time to have a necessary structure for all finite beings, but we do not bring to mind what those things are *objectively* in (what Hegel considers to be) the strong sense, namely what they are *in themselves*. Kant limits the categories in this way because—despite his insight into the connection between objectivity, universality and necessity—he thinks that what is subjective and what is objective are, ultimately, distinct from and opposed to one another. Categories that have their source in the *subject*—the I—cannot bring to mind what is *objective* in the sense of being independent of thought. Hegel's charge against Kant is thus, in Sally Sedgwick's words, that he adheres to the 'thesis of ab-

the thesis of absolute opposition

[8] 'What conforms to thought' translates '*das Gedankenmäßige*'.

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solute opposition' (Sedgwick 2012, pp. 71, 94).

This charge, in my view, is correct (with a qualification to be added below in §11). Indeed, Kant's insistence on the *conceptual* distinction between 'subjective' and 'objective' can even be seen in his account of the forms of *intuition*. For Kant, categories are required for there to be 'formal intuitions' of spaces and times, but they do not belong to the forms of intuition themselves (KRV B 161n.). The latter are thus subject to their own limitation that has nothing to do with categories in the narrow sense. These forms are limited by the mere fact that they are a priori: for this means that they are subjective and so cannot belong to things in themselves. The objects conditioned by these forms, while no illusions, are thus merely the objects of *our* possible experience and in that sense 'appearances'.

Yet, from a Hegelian viewpoint, this limitation is not intrinsic to the forms of intuition as such, but arises because Kant adheres to the sharp conceptual distinction, drawn by understanding, between 'subjective' and 'objective'. Kant's argument, put simply, is that what is a priori and so grounded in the *subject* cannot at the same time belong to things *objectively* (in the strong sense). To put the point another way: no 'determinations' can be intuited by the subject '*prior* to the existence of the things to which they pertain' (KRV B 42); what we do intuit prior to things thus cannot belong *to* the latter themselves, and so must be merely subjective. Implicit in this claim is the further one, endorsed by empiricists, that we can know something *of* things themselves only *from* those things 'a posteriori'. Kant makes this claim explicitly in the *Prolegomena*:

> If our intuition had to be of such a nature that it represented things *as they are in themselves*, no intuition *a priori* would ever take place and intuition would be empirical every time. For I can only know what is contained in the object in itself if the object is present and given to me. (Kant 1953, §9; 1976, §9)

What belongs *to* the object must be known *from* the object; ergo, what is known from the *subject* cannot belong to the object. This, however, assumes that there is a clear distinction between ourselves and things, between subjects and objects: it assumes that we are, as it were, 'over here', and objects are 'over there'. Kant never justifies this assumption, but simply takes it for granted without a further thought.

Kant puts forward the same argument about the categories. It is

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impossible, he contends, to know anything of things themselves through a priori concepts or, as he puts it, 'to have any a priori concepts of them at all':

> For whence should we obtain them? If we take them from the object …, then our concepts would be merely empirical and not *a priori* concepts. If we take them from ourselves, then that which is merely in us [*bloß in uns*] cannot determine the constitution of an object distinct from our representations. (Kant, KRV A 128–9)

Once again: we can know *about* objects themselves only *from* those objects; so what we draw from within ourselves cannot tell about what is distinct from us.

This last quotation confirms Hegel's charge that Kant considers categories themselves to be, ultimately, subjective. Categories, for Kant, yield no knowledge of things in themselves, not only because they are limited to empirical objects whose spatiotemporal form is subjective, but also because they are themselves subjective.

Hegel points out, however, that what is subjective and what is objective do not need to be opposed to one another in this way: 'although the categories (e.g., unity, cause and effect, etc.) 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' (EL §42 A3).[9] Kant insists on the sharp distinction between the subjective and the objective, but in Hegel's view he provides no justification for doing so; he simply *presupposes* the distinction—uncritically—and uses it to reduce the realm of experience, structured by the categories, to appearance.

Hegel, by contrast, will undermine this distinction in his *Logic* (specifically, in the doctrine of the concept). Furthermore, even before entering speculative logic, he contends that a properly critical approach to understanding may not just take the latter's distinctions for granted: we may not simply *assume* that categories, whose source is in the subject, are '*only our* thoughts' and so quite distinct from 'what the thing is *in itself*' (EL §41 A2). As Hegel puts it, the sharp separation of subject and object is not only undermined within philosophy, but it must be discarded *before* we enter philosophy: it is '*vor derselben abzulegen*' (LS 27/SL 45). If we discard this dis-

[9] The same point is made by Paul Guyer: the 'neutral fact that we can know objects only if they conform to certain conditions does not imply that those objects or any other objects do *not* in themselves conform to those conditions' (Guyer 1987, p. 338).

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tinction, however, we cannot but conclude that the categories of thought *can* disclose the nature of what is truly objective. The categories of quantity, causality, and so on, disclose the quantity and causality in being itself, and so in that sense belong to being as much as they do to thought.[10]

This does not mean, by the way, that Hegel makes knowledge of being in itself possible through mere fiat: he does not just arbitrarily declare that the distinction between thought and being in itself must go and that the latter is therefore directly knowable by the former. His claim is more subtle than that. It is that truly *critical* thought must discard all assumptions about thought itself, but that this leaves us merely with the indeterminate being of thought;[11] the latter, however, is so indeterminate that it is just indeterminate being *as such*; this being then proves on further consideration to be, among other things, 'being in itself' (*Ansichsein*); thought thus brings itself to the thought of being in itself through setting aside, in an act of radical self-critique, all determinate assumptions about itself (see Houlgate 2006, pp. 129–31, 331–47). This argument needs further elaboration which I cannot provide here; what we should note, however, is this: for Hegel a thorough *post-Kantian* critique of understanding leads us back to the *metaphysical* position 'that what *is*, by being *thought*, is known *in itself*',[12] and that the categories of thought thus disclose 'the *fundamental determinations of things*' (EL §28).[13] In contrast to Kant, Hegel will suspend the sharp distinctions and oppositions of metaphysical understanding—at least at the start of his logic—but, also in contrast to Kant, he will retain the metaphysical conviction that thought by itself can disclose what is.

This does not mean that Hegel turns his back on Kant altogether: he retains Kant's idea that empirical experience of objects requires a priori thought. Against Kant, however, he denies that such thought thereby falls short of anything: thought discloses the inherent structure of objects themselves. This is not to say that every time we judge *X* to *cause Y*, we are correct: Hegel does not deny, any more

[10] Strictly speaking, 'quantity', for Kant, is not itself a category, but the name of a 'class' of category (see KRV B 110). For the purposes of this essay, however, I treat both it and 'quality' as Kantian categories, as Hegel does.

[11] This is Descartes's '*I think therefore I am*' ('*Cogito, ergo sum*') without the thought of the I: the bare thought of thought's bare being. See Descartes (1984–5, vol. 1, p. 196).

[12] '… daß das, was *ist*, damit daß es *gedacht* wird, *an sich* erkannt werde.'

[13] As Hegel notes in the *Logic*, the *Phenomenology* leads to this conclusion too; see LS 32–3, 46/SL 48–9, 60.

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than Kant does, that we can make errors in judgement. In Hegel's view, however, in thinking of things as causally connected *at all*, we are not just thinking of them as understanding requires us to do, but we are bringing to mind what they are in themselves. Furthermore, Hegel thinks that he is led to this position by being more critical of understanding than Kant is, *not* less critical.

II

The Problem of the 'Thing in Itself'. To recapitulate: in Hegel's view, Kant reduces the realm of experience to 'appearance' because he thinks that categories, together with the forms of intuition, are subjective. This means that, for Kant, categories do not bring to mind what things are in themselves, what they are objectively. This conception of the categories rests, however, on the idea that what is *subjective* cannot at the same time be genuinely *objective*, and that idea is merely an uncritical presupposition of the understanding. Note that in making this criticism Hegel takes the concept of the 'thing in itself' to refer, not only to what is objective rather than subjective, but to what things *are* objectively, to what they *really are* in themselves; that is, he conflates the thing in itself with *being*. There is, however, reason to think that in this latter respect Hegel misunderstands Kant's concept of the thing in itself.

In Hegel's view, Kant begins from the idea of a thing that exists in its own right—a thing that is 'not posited [*nicht … gesetzt*] by thinking self-consciousness' (LS 49/SL 62). Kant then claims that thought remains enclosed within itself and so fails to reach this thing. As Hegel puts it (reproducing Kant's position), thinking, in its relation to its object, 'does not go out of itself to the object', and the latter thus remains 'a sheer beyond of thought' (LS 27/SL 45). For Hegel's Kant, therefore, the thing in itself is a real thing that is utterly 'alien and external to thought' (LS 49/SL 62). For Hegel himself, by contrast, Kant's unreachable 'thing' is not *beyond* thought at all, because it is conceived by means of the concepts and categories *of* thought. It is conceived as the 'negative' of determinate thought through the category of negation, and as empty and featureless through the abstract concept of 'identity'. Indeed, the thing in itself is not actually a real unreachable 'thing', but is simply an 'abstraction' *produced by* thought itself (see EL §44 R; LS 15, 49/SL 36, 62).

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Hegel clearly intends this last claim to be a criticism of Kant that is meant to undermine the latter's own conception of the thing in itself. Yet it is not clear that Kant would regard it as a criticism, for he is well aware that the concept of the 'thing in itself' is produced by thought. *Pace* Hegel, Kant does not start from the idea that there is something out there we can't reach; he starts from the objects of experience and examines what Henry Allison calls their 'epistemic conditions' (Allison 2004, pp. xv, 4, 11). That is to say, he starts *within* experience, not by transcending it. As we have seen, he takes the conditions of the objects of experience to include the forms of intuition and the categories. Since both these conditions are a priori, he argues, they must also be subjective; and that in turn means that the objects of experience, while no mere illusions, are mere 'appearances' or 'phenomena', that is, objects for us. Kant also insists, however, that we cannot make sense of the idea of an 'appearance' without 'something' that appears (KRV B xxvii). Accordingly, he writes, 'the understanding, when it calls an object in a relation mere phenomenon, simultaneously *makes for itself* [*sich … macht*], beyond this relation, another representation of an *object in itself*' (KRV B 306, emphasis added). Kant openly acknowledges, therefore, that the concept of the thing in itself is 'made' or produced by thought as the correlate of our subjectively 'objective' experience.

The concept is produced, more precisely, for two reasons. On the one hand, it is designed to 'limit the pretension of sensibility' and so coincides with the thought of the 'negative noumenon' (KRV B 307, 310–11); that is, it enables us to think that the forms of sensible intuition merely condition appearances and do not extend beyond the latter to anything else, to any 'thing in itself'. On the other hand, Kant's concept enables us to think of ourselves as affected *by* something else and so as dependent, sensuous beings. In this respect, the thought of the 'thing in itself' coincides with that of the 'transcendental object, which is the cause of appearance (thus not itself appearance)' (KRV B 344). Note that in neither case does Kant assert dogmatically that there *are* things in themselves. He claims that we must form the *thought* of such things in order to think of 'appearances' *as* mere appearances and *as* caused by that which is not an appearance.

Hegel's criticism of Kant's 'thing in itself' thus appears to be mistaken. Kant knows full well that the thing in itself, or the concept thereof, is the product of thought; and he also accepts that this con-

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cept can be further determined using categories such as causality. Kant's 'thing in itself' is not meant, therefore, to be a real thing lying utterly beyond thought, as Hegel contends, but is itself no more than *a thought*.

Yet from another perspective Hegel's criticism is not so wide of the mark: for Kant's thought of the thing in itself is not *just* a thought, but is precisely the thought of an *object* distinct from us: 'an *object in itself*' (KRV B 306–7). This thought does not permit us to claim that such objects exist, but it does permit us to think that they might. Kant insists, however, that 'what the things may be in themselves [*an sich sein mögen*] I do not know' (KRV B 332–3). We can certainly *think* of them as causing appearances (just as we can *think* of the soul as a substance) (see KRV A 350, KRV B xxvi); but this does not amount to knowing anything about them. In this respect, therefore, Hegel is right: Kant does, indeed, argue that our thoughts are separated from the thing in itself 'by an impassable gulf' (EL §41 A2).[14]

Yet even here we must be careful: for what Kant distinguishes from thought is what a thing must be *thought* to be, and so *may* be, in itself, rather than simply, as Hegel claims, 'what the thing is *in itself*' (EL §41 A2). Kant's thing in itself is thus not some indisputable *being* just out of reach, but what is *thought* to be distinct from thought (and in that sense 'objective'). (This is the qualification mentioned above, p. 28.)

As Hegel points out, however, Kant does put being, or existence, itself beyond thought in his critique of the ontological argument. In Kant's view, thought judges things to exist or to be such and such, but it cannot do so on the basis of concepts alone: 'whatever and however much our concept of an object may contain, we have to go out beyond it in order to provide it with existence' (KRV B 629; see also KRV B 142, 157, 626). (This is why the mere concept of God cannot prove the existence of God.) So, even though Hegel mistakenly conflates Kant's 'thing in itself' with *being*, he is right to insist that thought alone, for Kant, cannot bring to mind being that is independent of it.

Thought could do so, in Kant's view, only if it were 'intellectual intuition' (KRV B 72). As finite human beings, however, our intuition is

[14] At KRV B 344, Kant writes that it 'remains completely unknown whether such an object is to be encountered within or without us'. Nevertheless, in so far as it is indeed an *unknown object*, it must still be distinguished from our thinking of it.

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irreducibly *sensuous*, so our thought or 'intellect' cannot be intuitive, but must be discursive (see KRV B 52, 68, 72, 93, 148, 308).[15] Our basic humanity, therefore, prevents us from knowing through thought alone what *is*. This is not the only reason why our thought is limited. It is also limited by the fact that it is a priori (like the pure forms of intuition): for, as we saw above, what is a priori is merely subjective, in Kant's view, and what is subjective cannot disclose what is (thought to be) objective in the strong sense. It is also true, though, that the *discursive* character of our thought prevents the latter from knowing by itself what there *is*.

To Hegelian eyes, however, Kant takes thought to be discursive, and so to require a given sensuous content, only because he takes the categories of thought themselves to be 'empty' forms; and he takes the latter to be empty because he assumes there is a clear distinction between the form and content (or matter) of concepts (see VGP 4:154/LHP 177; LS 28/SL 45; and also Allison 2004, p. 79). Evidence to support this charge against Kant can be found in the Amphiboly chapter of the first *Critique*. There, in the section on 'matter and form', Kant writes that these two concepts are 'inseparably … bound up with every use of the understanding' (KRV B 322). Just how fundamental they are can be seen from the fact that the difference between them grounds the further difference between 'the determinable' (*das Bestimmbare*)—or the matter to be determined—and the 'determining' (*Bestimmung*) of its form. This latter difference in turn underlies the following important claim by Kant: 'the understanding … demands first that something be *given* [*gegeben*] (at least in the concept) in order to be able to *determine* it in a certain way' (KRV B 322–3, emphasis added). The very idea that understanding determines something *given* to it thus rests on the *conceptual* distinction, drawn by understanding, between form and matter. Now earlier in the first *Critique* Kant describes the spontaneity of understanding as 'determining' and 'sense' (*Sinn*) as 'determinable' (KRV B 151–2).[16] This suggests that the very distinction between understanding, which determines something given, and *sensibility*, through which that something is given—the distinction on which Kant's whole critique of pure reason is based—is it-

[15] See also Allison (2004, pp. 12–16, 81) for a fuller account of what Kant means by 'discursive'.

[16] Kant is actually referring here to understanding acting as imagination; but see also KRV B 74.

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self the product of *understanding*.[17]

To Hegelian eyes, therefore, Kant's critical philosophy is by no means as critical as it needs to be: for despite restricting the validity of understanding's categories, Kant never challenges the authority of understanding itself. Indeed, his insistence on the limits of the categories, and of human cognition as a whole, presupposes that authority. First, the idea that the a priori categories and pure forms of sensibility are subjective, and so limited, rests on the distinction, *drawn by understanding*, between what is subjective and what is objective in the strong sense (that is, adding the qualification noted above, the thing as it must be *thought* to be in itself). Second, understanding distinguishes itself from sensibility, for it requires that some matter be *given* to it for it to form.[18] Third, understanding draws a distinction between itself and the being it claims it cannot know by itself. Kant's critique of the categories of understanding thus fails to challenge the authority of understanding as such. He certainly sets limits to the legitimate employment of understanding; but those limits *uncritically* presuppose the conceptual distinctions and oppositions *of* understanding.

III

Categories and Judgement. The charge against Kant so far is that he retains a *verständig* conception of concepts that are fundamental to his thought but are not categories in the strict sense. These concepts include the pairs 'subjective/objective' and 'form/matter' (and, indeed, 'thought/being'). Yet Hegel also charges Kant with preserving a *verständig* conception of his categories proper: Kant restricts the validity of the latter (and associates them with schemata), but he leaves their logical form otherwise unchanged and unchallenged. As Hegel puts it, 'they are left' by Kantian critique 'in the same shape for the subject knower as they formerly possessed for the object' (LS 30/SL 47). For Kant, therefore, 'reality' remains quite distinct from 'negation', which later allows him to formulate the idea of

[17] This is not to deny that the doctrine of incongruent counterparts may also underpin this distinction; see Kant (1976, §13; 1953, §13). Yet this doctrine itself rests on a sharp logical distinction between the structures of pure intuition and understanding; see KRV B 39–40.

[18] Indeed, it also distinguishes the pure form of sensibility from its empirical matter; see KRV B 34–6.

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God as the most real being (see KRV B 300, 347, 599ff.; EL §49; LS 106–7/SL 111–13); and quality remains quite distinct from quantity, which allows him to call the proposition that 'the straight line between two points is the shortest' a 'synthetic proposition' (KRV B 16).

It is true that, for Hegel, Kant's Antinomies begin to challenge such sharp distinctions by implicitly showing the categories to be contradictory. The Antinomies do so by arguing that two mutually exclusive categories must both be applied to the same world (see EL §48 and R; LS 198ff./SL 190ff.). Yet Hegel insists that the Antinomies only provide the 'occasion' (*Veranlassung*) for others to consider anew the content of the categories (EL §46 R). Kant himself seeks to dissolve the Antinomies and so remains wedded to the categories as understanding conceives them.[19]

In Hegel's view, Kant also remains tied to understanding in a further sense: for he follows pre-Kantian metaphysicians, such as Wolff, in assuming that thought is minimally *judgement*, and he derives the categories directly from judgement (EL §42 and R). Hegel's reading of Kant in this respect is clearly correct.

For Kant, the logical 'function' of a judgement is the specific *way* in which it unites its component representations (KRV B 93ff.). So an affirmative judgement states that '*S is P*', a negative judgement that '*S* is *not P*', and so on.[20] Each such function then gives rise to a specific category. The latter itself has two core components. The first is the bare thought of an *object*, of *something*, as such. The second is the thought of that something as '*determined*' (*bestimmt*) in respect of a logical function: as definitely this, not that. Now categories, as we know, are concepts through which we understand sensuous intuitions to form a unity. So, if we put all of this together, we get the following definition: a category is a concept through which we understand what we *intuit* to be *something*—an object—that is *determined* in respect of a logical function of judgement (see KRV B 128, 143). From the affirmative judgement, '*S* is *P*', therefore, we derive the thought of something determined to be affirmative, not negative—the category of *reality*—and so on. Note, by the way, that Kant's derivation automatically distinguishes one category (or moment of a category) from another, since a category determines

[19] This is despite Kant's insight elsewhere into the unity of opposites; see LS 221/SL 209.
[20] Hypothetical and disjunctive judgements are relations between judgements, rather than concepts; see KRV B 98–9, 141.

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what we intuit to be real *or* negative, cause *or* effect. Kant's categories are thus governed from the outset by both judgement *and* sharp difference, just as Hegel contends (EL §§41, 42 and R).

It is also true, in my view, that Kant simply *assumes* that 'the *understanding* in general can be represented as a *faculty for judging*' (KRV B 94). One might argue that he actually derives judgement from his general conception of a concept: for, since a concept as such is an 'analytic unity' that subsumes other representations under it, it can always be expanded *into* a judgement (see KRV B 40, 104–5, 133n.).[21] Yet this does not get Kant off the hook. First, he simply assumes that concepts subsume other representations, but does not show that they have to be understood in this way (and, as becomes clear in the *Logic*, Hegel has a different conception of a concept). Second, judgement is not really *derived* from the structure of a Kantian concept, but is rather built into it from the start: for by subsuming *other* representations, every concept is from the outset a repository of possible *judgements* (KRV B 94). Kant thus not only takes for granted explicitly that understanding is judging, but he takes this for granted implicitly in his conception of a concept. Like his metaphysical predecessors, therefore, Kant never doubted that, and never investigated whether, 'the form of the judgement could be the form of truth' (EL §28 R).

IV

From Kant to Hegel. Hegel credits Kant with subjecting the categories of understanding to critical examination, but charges him with failing to challenge the way understanding conceives of those categories and other concepts. Kant restricts the categories to experience, but he does not question the sharp distinctions understanding draws between them or between other concepts, such as form and matter. Hegel himself does not utterly reject such distinctions (LS 22/SL 41), but in his *Logic* he shows that distinct categories, such as reality and negation, are also *united* with one another dialectically. His logic thus constitutes the thoroughgoing critique of the categories of understanding that Kant failed to deliver (see, for example, LS 51/SL 64).

[21] A category as such is the thought of the synthetic unity of manifold intuitions, but as a *concept* it is itself an analytic unity that subsumes other representations under it.

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Yet we should note that, from Kant's perspective, Hegel appears to misunderstand what *critique* involves. The critique of pure reason, as Kant conceives it, is the 'propadeutic to the system of pure reason'—that is, to 'transcendental philosophy' and the metaphysics of nature—and aims to show how the synthetic a priori judgements belonging to the latter are possible (KRV A xxi, B 25–8, 873–6). Moreover, it carries out its task by explaining how the categories of understanding apply a priori to objects. Critique is thus not a sceptical endeavour that calls into question how the categories have traditionally been conceived; it aims to put the knowledge we gain through the categories on a secure foundation (see KRV B xxxvi). There would appear, therefore, to be no obvious motivation within Kantian critique for Hegel's dialectical revision of the categories, and the latter risks looking unjustified to Kantian eyes.

From Hegel's perspective, however, a radically sceptical critique is implicitly demanded by Kant's rejection of *dogmatism*. Dogmatism, Kant tells us, is the 'presumption' (*Anmaßung*) that reason can proceed according to principles 'without first inquiring in what way and by what right it has obtained them' (KRV B xxxv). The purpose of critique is thus to challenge that presumption and to show *how*—under what conditions—reason's principles can be justified. In my view, Hegel also sees in this conception of critique a call to challenge the presumption, made by understanding, that distinct categories and concepts are, indeed, simply distinct. Hegel takes Kant to task, therefore, for failing to carry his own rejection of dogmatism to its logical conclusion: for Kant retains the categorial and conceptual distinctions of the understanding 'without first inquiring in what way and by what right he has obtained them'.

critique must be presuppositionless

Indeed, Hegel thinks that Kant's rejection of dogmatism allows us to presume *nothing whatsoever* about categories and concepts. Kant's anti-dogmatism thereby joins with Greek scepticism and modern freedom in pointing reason towards a philosophy that rests on no assumptions and takes nothing on authority (whether from tradition or formal logic or 'common sense'). Such a philosophy, of course, is presuppositionless, speculative logic. For Hegel, therefore, the latter is the logical outcome of taking Kant's rejection of dogmatism more seriously than he himself did.

Note that Hegel may not himself simply *presuppose* that categories are dialectical, or indeed that thought contains any specific categories at all. A fully self-critical logic, inspired in part by Kant, may

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begin with nothing more than the thought of indeterminate being. This also means that it may not assume from the start, as Kant does, that thought is minimally judgement, or that 'form' and 'matter', or 'subjective' and 'objective', are simply distinct concepts. Most importantly, perhaps, logic may not assume that thought is essentially discursive, and so not a form of intellectual intuition, and so not able to know being by itself. Indeed, as I have suggested above and argued elsewhere, Hegel thinks that suspending all assumptions about thought actually makes it unavoidable that thought both think and know being (see Houlgate 2006, pp. 129–31).

This, of course, is a controversial thesis; but it is one that I stand by: Hegel is led to claim that pure thought *can* know being, not only by the *Phenomenology*, but also by the *critical* imperative not to take for granted, but to suspend, the distinctions and oppositions of understanding. Hegel does not, therefore, just assert his claim dogmatically against Kant's more 'humble' insistence that thought is limited. On the contrary, he sees a lingering dogmatism in Kant's very 'humility': for Kant *presumes* that thought is discursive, and so cannot 'intuit' being directly, without deriving such discursivity 'from thought itself' (*aus dem Denken selbst*) (EL §42 R; see also Houlgate 2006, p. 136).[22] Hegel's critical suspension of this presumption then leads him to conclude that pure thought must be intellectual intuition after all (which is why the *Logic* begins with 'the empty intuition or thought' [*das leere Anschauen oder Denken*] of being and nothing) (LS 72/SL 82). Hegel thus reverts to the *pre*-Kantian, metaphysical idea that thought by itself can know being, because he is *more* radically critical than Kant, not *less* so—though Kant himself would find this very hard to believe.[23]

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[22] To Hegelian eyes, Kant's thought is thus by no means as 'modest' as Ameriks, for example, would have us believe; see Ameriks (2000, p. 286).

[23] This essay was written during my tenure of a Leverhulme Major Research Fellowship (2011–14). I am very grateful to the Leverhulme Trust for enabling me to complete the research required to write it without the usual distractions.

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