

# The Question of System: How to Read the Development from Kant to Hegel

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**ABSTRACT** In order to understand Hegel's approach to philosophy, we need to ask why, and how, he reacts to the well-known criticism of German Romantics, like Novalis and Friedrich Schlegel, against philosophical system building in general, and against Kant's system in particular. Hegel's encyclopedic system is a topical ordering of categorically different ontological realms, corresponding to different conceptual forms of representation and knowledge. All in all it turns into a systematic defense of Fichte's doctrine concerning the primacy of us as actors with respect to any knowledge claim or scientific theory. Hegel's limitations of the principle of causality and of the possibility of using mathematical methods in science show, in fact, how a merely compatibilist solution of Kant's third antinomy can be overcome.

## I. Criticism of philosophical theories

Long before Wittgenstein criticized theory-building in philosophy, Friedrich Schlegel and Novalis, romantic followers of Fichte in Jena, had launched a similar critique against philosophical systems in their writings. Novalis says in a famous text with the working title "Pollen" (Blüthenstaub) that all those who construct ready-made systems in philosophy do so in order to avoid the difficult task of reflection. Furthermore, he adds that the more narrow-minded a system is, the more it will please the public. As examples, Novalis refers to the doctrines of Helvetius and Locke, which he calls "materialistic", and says that Kant's system will always find more adherents than Fichte's.<sup>1</sup>

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These quotations lead me directly to a fairly general question: Why do certain philosophers object to theories, whereas others think that any philosophy worthy of its name must be systematic or even scientific? More or less the same question was posed by Dieter Henrich and Michael Dummett some time ago: Is systematic philosophy possible at all? And even if philosophy can be systematic, should it be?<sup>2</sup> In fact, we can distinguish a romantic type of philosophy from a systematic type: The romantic philosopher argues in a subjective mode. He loves aphorisms, irony, local criticisms and destructive reflections. A systematic philosopher, on the other hand, develops inferentially well-ordered terminological systems and scientific, i.e. formalized (and, hopefully, consistent) theories and tries to prove his theses through such systems. At first glance, it seems fairly clear who belongs to the romantic type: We could begin with Montaigne and Pascal as romantics *avant la lettre*, go via the German romantics or Fichteans to Kierkegaard and Nietzsche, and end in the twentieth-century with Adorno and Wittgenstein. It also seems clear that philosophers like Descartes, Spinoza, Kant and Hegel, Frege and Carnap, David Lewis or Robert Brandom – just to end the list in the present age – belong to the second type. There are obvious affinities within each group, as we can see, for example, in Wittgenstein's affinity to Kierkegaard or Brandom's affinity to the entire second group. But it is not clear whether the romantic or the systematic type of philosophy is more popular – contrary to what Novalis maintained – nor what kind of systematic philosophy, if any at all, we need. Other questions emerge as well: What could be the reason for which Novalis places Fichte's *Wissenschaftslehre* over and above Kant's allegedly more narrow-minded system? And how should we understand and evaluate Hegel's defense of system against romantic criticisms? In fact, according to Hegel, we need more than merely aphoristic philosophizing, what Novalis sometime rather mysteriously calls "Fichtisieren".

Hegel still is widely viewed as one of the last metaphysicians. Even Adorno<sup>3</sup> and Habermas<sup>4</sup>, who apparently defend a kind of Kantianism, follow this trend when they talk about the final collapse of Hegel's system, without chance of revival. But in sharp contrast to such readings, Hegel himself does not allow talk about one's own philosophical system. And his original insights are rather opposed to what Dieter Henrich<sup>5</sup> and his followers claim to be the basic idea of German idealism – and what Ernst Tugendhat<sup>6</sup> and Jürgen Habermas<sup>7</sup> attack as a philosophy of merely subjective consciousness: Hegel sees how empty any philosophy of merely subjective self-reflection is. The same holds for the claim of an alleged irreducibility of the subjective I.<sup>8</sup> Hegel joins Fichte in the idea that there is only one true, i.e. sufficiently professional, philosophy that counts at any given time as a good philosophical argument. But for Hegel, it does not suffice to say, as Fichte did, that it depends on what kind of person you are whether you understand the argument as conclusive or not. For Fichte, a

true philosopher accepts the primacy of the actor over the spectator, and opposes the dogmas of materialism and physicalism. But Hegel is not satisfied with Fichte's "dogmatic" approach to philosophy, nor with Schelling's doctrine of objective idealism. Therefore, when Hegel is attacked for identifying philosophy in general with his version of philosophy, he is erroneously placed in close company with Fichte (or Schelling). For Hegel, philosophy is a general and joint enterprise of critical conceptual or logical analysis. He himself certainly talks about his own contributions to such an analysis. But it is no accident that the later Hegel replaces talk about a system in philosophy with talk of an encyclopedia of the philosophical sciences, and uses Plato's word "dialectic" as a title for his dialogical form of logical analysis.

An encyclopedia is not a system in the traditional sense of an axiomatic-deductive theory. It is, rather, an ordered representation of different realms of knowledge and objects, aiming at a kind of conceptual overview. As is well known, the later Schelling not only notices, but also criticizes, the fact that Hegel does not share his aspiration to build a formal metaphysical system. In particular, Schelling is quite concerned that Hegel's approach does not allow for a sharp distinction between knowledge about the world and conceptual truth. If we reflect on this criticism today, we would be well advised to take Hegel's side. In fact, for Hegel, the philosophical sciences are meta-level conceptual reflections on object-level practices, for example, in the sciences. Hegel's speculations do not assume an absolute or ideal standpoint outside these conceptual schemes but argue from a position within them. Speculation, in Hegel's sense, analyzes the methodological presuppositions or preconditions implicit in human knowledge. Such an analysis aims to give an explicit account of different conceptual systems for different language games and an account of how individual competence depends upon a cultural practice or form of human life.

In the end, Hegel turns Schelling's holistic naturalism from a dogmatic thesis into a holistic form of self-reflection. The idea is this: As an answer to specific problems of understanding a concept we can only give "definitions" and develop the "determinations" of the concept by embedding it into its proper (linguistic) practice. Making a concept clear means making its place in real life explicit. Therefore, embedding a (linguistic) practice into a larger realm of practices is an important method of conceptual (logical) analysis. Hence, we should read Hegel's speculative system in general as a kind of map in which different realms of philosophical reflection are placed. Only when we understand the leading ideas, relevant questions, and problems that motivate his chosen order, will we appreciate the methodological difference between Hegel's idea of a systematic philosophy and the systems of Kant, Fichte, or Schelling.

Already this difference is hinted at in Hegel's avoidance of the use of words such as "a priori" and "transcendental". Hegel does not follow

Kant's approach of classifying singular sentences as "empirical", "analytical", or "synthetic a priori"; nor does he employ the idea of transcendental deductions. Of course, such deductions are not, as we may think today, schematic derivations of sentences along logically-valid rules of inference. They are, as Kant says clearly enough, justifications of sentences and principles by which we make necessary conditions of a certain competence explicit. Hegel agrees with the idea of "transcendental analysis" if it is understood as making presupposed forms of actions and judgments explicit; but he criticizes Kant's subjective, or – what amounts to the same – merely epistemological, approach to such a conceptual reflection on preconditions of, for example, empirical judgments and scientific experience.

Kant starts, in a way similar to Descartes, by reflecting on the very concept of (articulated) empirical knowledge, or rather, on our competence to know something by experience. Later, he reflects on the form of moral deliberation. In doing so, Kant constructs a system of categories, logical forms, and principles. Hegel agrees with Descartes, Kant, and Fichte that logical reflection has to begin with the fact that any act of speaking or thinking, assertion or skeptical questioning, must be understood as the performance of an individual subject from a first person perspective. He also acknowledges that certain categories or principles are already being used when the competence in question is performed in a proper way. But he sees that Kant's transcendental method remains subjective in its whole mode of reflection on "individual" experience. We rather have to analyze the objective preconditions that make individual performances of intelligent acts, individual knowledge, and experience in a thick sense possible. Hegel finds these preconditions in social practices, which in turn depend on a corresponding historical development. He labels this development with the term "Absolute Reason" or "Spirit" with capital letters. These terms stand for the general conditions that make intelligent judgment or action at a certain time or in a certain epoch possible in the first place. As a result, Hegel replaces Kant's transcendental system with a much more concrete analysis of a methodological or presuppositional order in the development of our intellectual faculties and competence. The main result of Hegel's analysis is not merely to replace Kantian dualisms with Fichte's doctrines on the primacy of action, the acting I, or the personal subject, but also, once Fichte's doctrines have been properly understood, to give an analytical account of this primacy.

## II. Kant's system

One of the central problems of philosophy at least since St. Augustine, Luther, or Calvin in the context of theology, and since Hobbes and Descartes, Helvetius, or Hume in the context of philosophy is the antinomy of free will and causal pre-determination of actions and events. Kant's own

system of transcendental idealism can and must be understood as a kind of master plan for a solution of this main dialectical problem, known as his third antinomy, together with related dilemmas in the areas of cosmology and psychology. Ultimately, Kant wants to convince us of the kind of compatibilism that follows.

According to Kant, the principle of causal connectedness, according to which any event has sufficient reasons in the Aristotelian sense of efficient causes necessarily producing the event, is neither a law in a metaphysical or transcendent world of natural things in themselves, nor a merely subjective form of pragmatic expectation that the future will somehow resemble the past. Hume and his empiricist followers claim that causal explanations are only stochastic and subjective. This is a nice claim. Because now, no categorical difference can be formulated between the vague degrees of certainty with which I expect some future behavior of, say, the movements of the planets, a cat, or a man. Hence, there is no categorical difference between believing or knowing something about nature at large and about ourselves, i.e. about human behavior. All in all, Hume solves the problem of freedom and determinacy in a way which cannot, and should not, satisfy us, because he gives up the very distinctions that would allow us to formulate the original problem in the first place. Therefore, although Hume is correct in attacking presuppositions about the world of things in themselves, Kant realizes that Hume's criticisms of cause were too far-reaching. Like Sextus Empiricus, Hume hastily presupposes that concepts like cause and freedom are always dogmatic or metaphysical in a bad sense of the word. We need an immanent – not a transcendent – understanding of these concepts. This includes understanding the difference between (knowledge of) causal relations between natural events, on the one hand, and (knowing about) our faculty of free and responsible actions, on the other.

Kant sees, moreover, that Hume's skeptical worries infect key concepts in the natural sciences. Hume does not give a sufficient account of the role that the notion of causal necessity plays in the realm of objective experience or empirical knowledge, in contrast to merely subjective expectations. Therefore, he does not give a sufficient account of the special form of human knowledge at all. The problem we should have with Hume's empiricism is that it ignores the categorical difference between animal behavior and human action supported by human knowledge, as well as between a merely subjective estimation of probabilities, based on observed sequences of events in the past, and objective explanation. That is, a Humean neither accounts for the difference between sensation-guided orientation of animal behavior and sapience-guided human actions, nor for that between subjective expectations and a complex practice of working with stochastic models.<sup>9</sup>

According to Kant's transcendental reflections on our experience of objects, we do not just bring some arbitrary subjective order into a given

flow of individual sensations (or perceptions). We use general laws in our objective experience with its object-related reference to the real world. Kant's analogies of experience hold a prominent and foundational place in his account of these laws. The analogies are dynamical postulates, which refer essentially to lawful changes of properties and relative movements of objective physical bodies. The most general principle is this: "Experience is possible only through the presentation of a necessary connection of perception."<sup>10</sup> Accordingly, I read the three analogies of experience, roughly, as follows:

The first analogy says that the very concept of an empirical object in an empirical judgment presupposes the identity of the object at different times and from different spatial perspectives. That is, the empirical object must be a substance, which means that the category of substance applies in a sufficiently appropriate way to an empirical object that can be identified in space and time: "In all variations on the part of appearance, substance is permanent and its quantum in nature is neither increased nor decreased."<sup>11</sup>

The second analogy runs as follows: "All changes occur according to the law of the connection of cause and effect."<sup>12</sup> It tells us this: When we say that an empirical event  $e$  occurs or would occur under the condition that another event  $e^*$  should occur, we presuppose certain natural laws that regulate the irreversible order of cause and effect. The lawful relation of causation is, in a sense, constitutive for an objective ordering of the sequence in which the events occur – in contrast to a merely subjective ordering of our individual sensations. It is also constitutive of the very possibility of identifying a body, if the body leaves the realm of direct observation and later returns to this realm. But the causal principle is nevertheless only a regulative principle. The constitutive definition of the identity of the body is mathematical. This means that, whatever laws we actually use when we identify a substance, i.e. an empirical object or thing in time, its identity is already defined by the mathematical principle of continuity according to the axioms of observation and the anticipations of sensation (or rather, of perception), not by the dynamical laws of cause and effect.<sup>13</sup>

The third analogy says: "All substances, insofar as they can be perceived in space as simultaneous, are in thoroughgoing interaction."<sup>14</sup> When we say that an empirical state of affairs  $s$  holds or would hold at the same time as another state of affairs  $s^*$  holds or should hold, we presuppose a certain order of spatial coexistence, called "community". The expression "thoroughgoing interaction" refers to a general rule, such as the following: No two physical objects can occupy the same place at the same time. For example, physical objects always show some resistance when we want to remove or touch them. The maxim about the sequence of time (second analogy) has to be seen as closely connected with this maxim about reciprocal interaction or simultaneity (third analogy).

All three analogies explicate, in a sense, what it means to classify as synthetic *a priori* the statement that every bodily thing is heavy.<sup>15</sup> Like Descartes, Kant counts the extension of *res extensa* in three dimensions as a definitional or analytical property of being a body.<sup>16</sup> For both, there are no merely logical or terminological reasons why there could not be extended objects without weight or mass. Having weight means being subject to gravitational forces; and having mass means being subject to the law of inertia. Hegel protests against this all too narrow idea of conceptual or analytical truth.<sup>17</sup> For Hegel, to be a body already means being an object in our system of thing-related experience. This system already includes conceptually relevant knowledge about typical generic movements of bodies.<sup>18</sup> Therefore, it is conceptually unintelligible that a real thing could disappear from one second to another without any cause. Since all real bodies move with a certain velocity and acceleration, relative to other real bodies, and since we have to use the concepts of mass and weight in describing these relative movements (as Leibniz and Newton realized in opposition to Descartes), every body has mass and weight. This is not just an empirical property of bodies, nor is it a synthetic *a priori* statement in the sense of a transcendental feature of our mental or scientific constructions; i.e. it is no merely subjective feature of our system of knowledge about bodies. Having mass and moving about according to some laws is at least no local or individual property of a body.<sup>19</sup> Causation, too, is no local affair. A mechanical cause for a dynamical effect can only be a certain distribution of material substance in space together with at least some history of relative movements and processes in time.

We may be interested in local relations of cause and effect. But in reality, causation is always global. It always refers to a whole state of affairs in the world. This insight, which can be attributed to Spinoza, follows from the fact that the state of movement of a body is not defined independently of a reference system. This was already clear to Galileo. For this very reason, Hegel says that having mass and being prone to gravitational forces is an analytic property of being a body. It is an empirical question how the bodies move, not that they move. As bodies, they belong to a whole system of bodies. In the same vein, a number as such belongs to a system of numbers. Therefore, long before Frege and Carnap did so, Hegel claims against Kant that all arithmetical sentences are analytic: Something is a number named by a number-term only in the whole analytical system of arithmetical terms and propositions.

Kant assumes that the possibility of causal explanation of relative movements of things according to generic laws is constitutive for any object-related knowledge claim. And Kant accepts at least this much from Hume's anti-metaphysical skepticism insofar as he claims that these transcendental conditions do not refer to things in themselves about which we know nothing, but to the realm of possible experience or phenomena as controlled

by us in joint observation or *Anschauung*.<sup>20</sup> But, according to Hegel, Kant remains too dependent on Hume and Descartes, such that, in the end, Kant's merely epistemological system of transcendental idealism or subjective criticism turns into what Hegel calls complete(d) skepticism. Below we shall see a bit more clearly what this means.

But first we have to come back to the main philosophical problem, the problem of determinism, free decision or will, and responsible action. Actions should bring about changes in the world of experience. However, if, as Kant claims, "all changes occur according to the law of the connection of cause and effect", how could free choice (free will and free action) be possible? Kant's answer to this central problem in the *Critique of Pure Reason* runs like this: When we talk about free choice or will, we do not talk about a cause in the world of phenomena. Free will is a pure noumenon, which, by definition, is no object of empirical investigation. Therefore, according to Kant, it is merely tautologous to say that empirical research shall never find anything like a free will. The only thing Kant wants to achieve in his *Critique of Pure Reason* is a proof that we can consistently think of, or talk about, free choice, will, or action. And in his resolution of the third antinomy, Kant thinks he has provided such a proof of consistency.

A proper deduction of free will is not given in Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*, but rather, in the *Critique of Practical Reason*. The argument runs like this: You can act freely according to certain normative principles, by which you can justify subjective maxims as morally correct, because you ought to. Obviously, this argument is question-begging because it presupposes that the ought or normative law of duty does not ask me to do what I cannot do. Kant seems to assume that we have already established a corresponding harmony between our moral duties and what we can do (ought implies can). The problem is not, therefore, that Kant's talk of a realm of noumena, or a world of objects of mere thought, is metaphysical or transcendent; it is not. The problem is how any appeal to such a realm should solve the dilemma of free will in a satisfying way. If the statement, "all changes occur according to the law of the connection of cause and effect", were universally true – for whatever reason, transcendental or empirical – how could we avoid the conclusion that any talk of free choice and responsible action is just a paper tiger, a mere mode of speech, landing us in the "as if" realm, as it is so well described by Vaihinger?

Lewis White Beck and many of Kant's followers ascribe to Kant the doctrine of dual aspects.<sup>21</sup> The doctrine in a sense goes back to Spinoza's differentiation between *natura naturans* and *natura naturata*. The first aspect is "subjective" in the sense that it is the aspect of living beings in living their life, the second constitutes a realm of mere objects of perception and knowledge. As long as we investigate human behavior scientifically, as spectators we are entitled to assume the principle of causal connectedness.



But as performing actors, we have to assume freedom of will in view of our moral duties or, more generally, in view of the normativity of correct judgments and right actions. That is, I have to ascribe responsibilities, and hence the possibility of free choice, to myself. But again, is this self-ascription more than a paper tiger if we hold it up against the light of the claim that we could, in principle, explain our behavior causally – if only we knew enough? In other words, we need a much more rigorous and less rhetorical account of the relation between the first and the third person point of view, i.e. the limitations of free will, on one side, and of causal explanations along the lines of Kant's three analogies, on the other.

Kant's talk of a causality of freedom shows the problem even more clearly. Causality was explainable, recall, only for processes in the empirical realm of phenomena. How could a merely intelligible entity with a mode of existence outside of space and time, similar to the mode of existence of abstract numbers, have any real causal effects? Schelling and Hegel see the problem clearly. In the end, it will turn out that what they say agrees with what Peter Strawson later says as well; namely that a perspectivist dual world of actors and spectators does not lead us out of this problem. Therefore, it is doubtful, too, that the reality of free choice can be shown by transcendental arguments at all, namely as a presupposition of the very fact of normative and moral judgments.

Nevertheless, I think that by making a distinction between the constitutive rules in the mathematical conditions of objectivity and merely regulative norms for a framework of causal explanation,<sup>22</sup> Kant clears the ground for Fichte's next step and for Hegel's solution to the problem of freedom: They both defend the primacy of action and attack the dogmatic belief in an allegedly universal causal nexus. For them, the very fact that we can distinguish between human actions and mere events shows that there are gaps in causation.<sup>23</sup>

### III. Fichte's fundamental insights

Many things that are later attributed to other philosophers, especially to Nietzsche, already follow from Fichte's insights. Basically, these insights are twofold. The first could be labeled as perspectival pragmatism. It can be sketched like this: Any reference to objects presupposes performative acts and, hence, the perspective of the speaker or actor. The second insight concerns the problem of the identity of subject and object in judgments of self-reference or self-knowledge. In such judgments, we distinguish between the performative subject or speaker who judges and the object or grammatical subject of the judgment, and identify them at the same time. That is, notwithstanding what Henrich says about Fichte's account of the never-ending reflection of a subject already allegedly identical to herself,<sup>24</sup> Fichte realizes that, in judgments of the form, "I have the property E", the

word “I” has two functions at once: It refers deictically to me as the speaker, and it is also the syntactical subject, i.e. the semantical object I am talking about. In a judgment about myself, I attribute properties to myself. Fichte expresses this fact by saying that I, as a performative subject, make myself into the object of a judgment. Thus, I refer in judgments about myself at the same time to some semantical object and to myself.

As we can see, this reflection on the very form of reflection on myself is fairly formal. Nevertheless, a corollary to this subject-object structure should be acknowledged as a basic insight of the early German Romantics, including Friedrich Schiller. It can be called the paradox of analysis with respect to self-reflections or statements about myself. It says that it is systematically impossible to make the implicit totality or *pleroma* of my performative and practical attitudes as a whole explicit. A famous epigram by Friedrich Schiller expresses this indeterminacy of myself with respect to my subjective states of mind in quite a nice way:

“Why is it that the mind cannot appear to the mind? If the soul starts to speak, not the soul, alas, is speaking any more.”<sup>25</sup>

In performances of generic actions, especially in performances of speech acts, the real subject is not the individual body, but rather the I as a concrete personal subject, who actualizes a general form. Therefore, in any attempt to express myself, it is, so to speak, not a totally singular I but already a general We, who is, in a sense, the real subject who speaks.<sup>26</sup> Or rather, it is not that I say that p, if I express something by uttering a sentence S, but the sentence S uttered says that p – as Wittgenstein says in the *Tractatus*.<sup>27</sup> In precisely this sense, the word “I” refers in any speech act at the same time to me as a singular speaker in a particular situation and to any of us, to any possible speaker. This, and only this, is the reason why the content of what I say, properly reconstructed, can be understood by anyone. In the same vein, Hegel says that what I mean and what only belongs to me, in the sense of a purely singular Me and my uniquely individual meaning, is the most unimportant thing. It is not at all, as Schiller’s verse and Dieter Henrich’s philosophy would lead us to believe, the most important thing.

It is true that we always have problems expressing ourselves. But it is only a sentimental idea to deplore the conceptual limits of making ourselves understood because of the perspectivity, finitude, and conceptual indeterminacy of our own being. Perspectivity is a necessary feature of experience and understanding as such. We must accept it as a brute and basic fact. It is the reason why any attempt to have exactly the same feelings (sensations or perceptions) as other subjects or creatures is futile. It is important to distinguish between the conceptually impossible enterprise of having (exactly) the same feelings as other subjects and the human practice of referring to the same object of experience from different perspectives.

Fichte’s idea of the primacy of the actor and speaker with respect to any object of knowledge and judgment can be reconstructed as a kind of speech

act theoretic transformation of Descartes' original insight into the primacy of the thinking subject, the *res cogitans*: Any performance of a judgment or action presupposes a speaker as an actor. For Fichte and his followers, this consideration gains its importance within the context of an anti-empiricist or anti-Humean distinction between merely animal perception and human apperception. In fact, we can read Kant's transcendental principle of apperception thus: "For any *Vorstellung* (in the sense of a presentation or a spontaneously produced symbolic representation of something) it must be possible for it to be accompanied by an 'I think of it'". The word "apperception" just means a perception to which a conceptual determination of that which is perceived is, or can be, added. It is a perception, presentation, or representation that is, or can be accompanied, implicitly or already explicitly, by a corresponding concept. Therefore, Kant says that the principle is analytic with respect to the very concept of apperception itself. It is transcendental insofar as apperception is a necessary condition for observation or *Anschauung* (of real objects).

Hegel shifts the focus from the apperceptive I, from the individual subject who perceives a conceptually determined object, to the generic form of conceptual thinking and the generic form of common apperception or *Anschauung*. That is, Hegel does not stress in this context the subjective and individual I. He rather sees that the I is the form of conceptual thinking and the possibility of a change of perspective while referring to the same object that is responsible for the categorical difference between animal perception and human *Anschauung* in the sense of (possibly common) observation of an object, a *gestalt* or thing or present process. This is an anti-Cartesian move against Kant and Fichte. According to Hegel, the I, as the subject of my (speech-)acts, is not a mysterious entity with mysterious powers of individual thinking or inner intuitions. The I is my competence to take part in a common practice of conceptual determination that makes all the difference between animal sensation and perception on the one hand, and human apperception and *Anschauung* in a present situation with its possibilities of demonstration or deictical showing, on the other.<sup>28</sup>

#### IV. Hegel's idea of conceptual analysis

In a sense, Hegel joins the romantic criticism of individual subjectivism and theory building, which I sketched above. And even though he seems to appreciate the importance of Fichte's insights into the primacy of the first person, the actor, he is not satisfied with the all too formal representation of Fichte's ideas.<sup>29</sup> Instead, Hegel goes back to the ancient method of analysis and synthesis as sketched by Pappus. In order to understand this method correctly, we should not follow its axiomatic interpretation in Hintikka and Remes,<sup>30</sup> because the paradigm case for analysis is not abduction in the sense of Charles Sanders Peirce. That is, it is not a search for axiomatic

hypotheses and appropriate schematic rules of inference, which fit a given set of theorems that are deducible from the axioms.<sup>31</sup> The paradigm case for Hegel's method is the solution of elementary planimetric problems (for example, constructing a pentagram with only a compass and ruler). The method of analysis proceeds in the following way: Start with a rough sketch of the problem and a description of a possible or expected result. Then consider necessary presuppositions for arriving at a solution. That is, analyze the whole problem by splitting it up methodically into steps and sub-problems. A resolution is a solution (*Aufhebung*) of such sub-problems. The final synthesis, construction, or theory stands at the end. It places the resolutions (*Aufhebungen*) in an appropriate order. In Plato's *Philebus*, this procedure is the most general method of science. Hegel refers to it in his critique of Newton and Kant's merely synthetic or constructive procedure: Since they forget the corresponding analysis, especially in its relation to limited and local problems, they lose sight of the proper place of the constructed theoretical model in the solution of a well-determined problem. As a result, the claims of their theories and systems turn out to be too sweeping and general.

Hegel's dialectic is a general application of combining methods of analysis and synthesis. It is used in the context of making explicit different realms of experience: phenomena in nature as well as implicit forms of human practices. Its most important feature is that it only answers to concrete, though fairly general, problems.

Here, a short remark on Hegel's reflections on a special category of speech, the category of the Absolute, might be in order. The entities we talk about in this category are abstract, ideal or counterfactual objects. Think, for example, of geometrical forms, infinite sets, a total description of the world, or an absolute idea of causality. The objects of this category are produced by pure thought, i.e., by a formal use of formal logic. Through this form of using language we verbally create a kind of God's perspective. We can see this method clearly in the case of pure mathematics: The entities we talk about in this mode of speech do not exist in reality. They are objects of mere thought. Most readers overlook this fact and blame the messenger when they worry about Hegel's use of the word "absolute". I do not have the space here to explain sentences in this category. I merely wish to claim that Hegel sees that ideal models and theories, expressed in the corresponding category of the Absolute, can only serve a **regulative purpose**. They are important means for making general forms explicit. We make use of them in corresponding forms of reflection on ideas and in practical orientations.

In short, Hegel turns Kant's constructive system into what it really is: He reads it as analysis of forms and categories used in objective experience and practical judgments. Hegel proceeds the same way with Newton's theory. He shows that Newton develops a mathematical solution to the problem of

combining Galileo with Kepler. But he also shows that there are many mystifying interpretations of Newton's success. One interpretation talks about infinitesimal forces that do not exist. Even in mathematics infinitesimals do not exist. Moreover, there are no non-accelerated movements in nature. Clocks are cultural products. The same holds for the very idea of an inert movement. We need clocks and the idea of inert or straight lines in Newtonian space-time when we want to measure time and accelerations of bodily movements – and when we want to give the results a mathematical treatment in analytic representations of curved lines in an already mathematized space-time. Hence, our concept of force, by which we explain the free movements of the planets around the sun, already depends on our practice of measuring straight lengths and time; and it depends on our mathematical practice of determining the lengths of curved lines by linear approximations. In other words, the very concept of gravitational force is a result of our forms of doing mathematical kinematics and dynamics. The force of gravitation does not explain the observed movements in the sense of an efficient cause. It is only part of our system for describing observed and observable movements of bodies. A map of a city does not give causal explanations. The only reason why it is natural to say that (Newtonian) laws of nature explain bodily movements causally lies in the fact that their generic descriptions support law-like (counterfactual) conditionals of the following form successfully: "If a body moves thus ... or is brought into this ... position of movement, then this ... will happen." In this sense, gravitation is, according to Hegel, analytically included in the very concept of a body, which already must be understood as an element of a system of possibly moving objects. Hence the sentence that any body has mass is not, as Kant says, synthetic, but it is – in Hegel's holistic sense – analytic.

Ultimately, Hegel provides a detailed argument for why it is unscientific to believe in Newtonianism or scientism. Newtonianism or scientism is unscientific because it confuses successful explanations in theoretical models with representations of how the world really is. It is unscientific because it does not see that reality just is what shows itself in the success of our theories and actions. Hegel thus shows *ex negativo* that we do not just have to believe in Fichte's idea of the primacy of action in science, since we can make explicit what this idea means and why it is true.

The early German Romantics had already criticized a latent scientism in Kant's conceptual reconstruction of objective experience and knowledge. Kant claims, indeed, that a system of knowledge is really scientific only insofar as it has been brought into mathematical form. This means that the paradigm case for real science is Newtonian physics. Accordingly, Kant is a supporter of a corresponding idea of the unity of sciences. This unity is defended by an appeal to the unity of the one and only objective world of experience.

Hegel joins Kant only in his criticism of Hume's flawed empiricist idea of a unity of knowledge in the context of perception and behavior. But he attacks Kant's sweeping claim that "real" scientific explanations take the form of mathematical mechanics. He thus follows Schelling's philosophy of nature. To Schelling, we can attribute the following insight, which can be seen in turn as a development of Spinoza's ideas: There is one world in which we live, but there are different realms of objects of knowledge, which are characterized by different forms of change, becoming, and movement. Therefore, we need different forms of representations in order to make explicit the different forms of being, say, of bodily things, chemical substances, electromagnetic phenomena, plants, animals and humans.

Hegel's encyclopedic system is, then, at the same time, a topical mapping of ontological realms of being and corresponding forms of human knowledge. The basic insight, which Hegel adds, is this: Any realm of objects, properties, relations and processes already is, in a sense, finite or limited. That is, there is no universe of discourse in which we can talk about all things that really exist in objective experience, namely physical objects. Therefore, there is no theory of everything, not even in principle. The reason is not, as Kant claims, a matter of our limited knowledge as humans. The reason is an (onto-)logical one, not an epistemological or practical one. It lies in the fact that any meaningful reference to a possible realm  $G$  of objects of discourse presupposes the following things:

1. a domain of possible presentations and/or representations for possible objects in  $G$ ;
2. a relevance-dependent equivalence relation " $\sim$ " which defines what are presentations and representations of identical objects;
3. a corresponding set of properties, relations or typical processes (like movements) of the objects. This set is always limited because it does not allow for distinctions finer than what would be allowed by an identity-defining equivalence relation.

The conceptual reason for this is given in Leibniz's proposition, as Hegel calls the logical principle of substitution of equals. This principle of Leibniz's can be represented schematically as follows: If  $g \sim g^*$  holds in  $G$ , we can infer  $A(g^*)$  from  $A(g)$  for all  $G$ -properties or  $G$ -differentiations  $A(x)$ . It is this very principle which limits the expressive power of any well-established (and therefore finite) realm of discourse  $G$ . It shows in which sense identity always must be seen as a relevance-dependent negation of negation – meaning that we cannot make finer distinctions other than those that the corresponding equivalence relation or *Gleichgültigkeit* allows.<sup>32</sup> The same reasoning shows why we need different realms of objects when we want to articulate different phenomena, not only in different granularity, but in different settings of relevant differentiation and orientation. Even when we sometimes reduce the realms, for example when we re-incorporate

electro-magnetism into a comprehensive system of physical dynamics, we still have different realms of experience.

Hegel takes a further point from Aristotle, namely, that any reasonable understanding of nature and natural science presupposes the grasp of some basic categorical distinctions. These distinctions do not just refer to the different things, but also to their different modes of being in time, i.e. to their different processes of change, to different forms of movement and behavior. As a result, talking about human action must be acknowledged as a special logical form, which presupposes clear conceptual distinctions with respect to mere animal behavior and inanimate processes and movements. The first difference can be seen, roughly, from the fact that we refer to intentions and plans about the future when we give reasons for actions, whereas we have to explain animal behavior by present motives. The second difference can be shown thus: A dead corpse is still an object of physics and chemistry, but as a whole it is no longer an object of biology. Therefore, natural science and philosophy have to differentiate, not only between different things but also between different processes; for example, between purely mechanical, chemical and electro-magnetic processes, on the one hand, and biological changes and developments, animal perception and movements, and intentional actions, on the other.

Hegel's further point is that when we come to specific human forms of actions and practices, we need a different concept of science. We need *Geisteswissenschaften*. Actions and practices as such cannot be (fully) described and explained in the methodological framework of the (natural and technical) sciences. The basic reason is that the (natural and technical) sciences neither use, nor analyze, a full-fledged concept of *Vernunft* (Reason with capital R) or *Geist* (Spirit with capital S).<sup>33</sup> There is no use of Reason in science, because technical knowledge as such is rational knowledge or a matter of *Verstand*, i.e. of scientific rationality. The reason for this fact is that Reason in Hegel's terminological sense is used only when we change the forms of joint practices or the norms of human cooperation, including object-level criteria of judgments about truths. There is no explicit analysis of Reason or Spirit in the natural sciences, because any such analysis is heavily historical and philosophical. An analysis of Reason concerns the development of human practices. As such, it cannot be reduced to an empirical investigation of individual competence or behavior. This shows why we obviously cannot translate *Vernunft* without further ado by "reason" (without capitalizing); and why anyone who translates Hegel's *Geist* with "Spirit" should be aware of the fact that Hegel talks about reasonable forms of human life in their development, and not about a merely subjective and individual competence (here and now).<sup>34</sup>

Hegel's account of the natural sciences, as well as of the *Geisteswissenschaften*, may seem fairly traditional today. This is so because it is so influential in our time. It was indeed Hegel who proposed the very

idea of a science of logic as a general reflection on the special form of human knowledge. And even though the word *Geisteswissenschaft* was coined later, it was Hegel's insight that we need categorical distinctions and different methods in different realms of knowledge; one form of investigation for natural events, and a different one for human actions and practices. Different forms of investigation, reflection, argumentation, and presentation are needed because of the differences in the modes of being in the world.

Hegel's general insight is that beings are not just to be taken as bodily objects. Beings must be understood in their way of being. For example, the process of life contrasts with being a dead thing, or the form of human action contrasts with merely animal behavior. It was Spinoza who helped us mark these crucial logically and ontological differences by replacing the word "object" in the sense of *natura naturata* with "being" in the sense of *natura naturans*. If we understand this ontological difference (Heidegger), we might, in the end, see why the different forms of being (which are not just geometrical structures of bodily objects) make different forms of investigation and different linguistic or theoretical forms necessary for representing the different processes, changes and movements of beings. We also need different forms of explaining them. The same holds for making human actions and practices explicit.

With respect to physics, we have already seen that Hegel places some emphasis on the fact that we should distinguish between the method of experiments (of un-free movements) in technical mechanics and the method of observation (of free movements) in celestial mechanics. Moreover, electricity, magnetism and physiology are distinct realms of physics. We may wish to incorporate them into a satisfying general theory. And sometimes we are very successful, as in the case of statistical thermodynamics. But there is no *a priori* ground insuring that we will always succeed in fulfilling such wishes. The same holds for chemistry, biology or the physiology of perception, e.g. of colors: in all these cases, reductionism is just wishful thinking.

In his critique of reductionism, Hegel supports Goethe's idea that the apperception of colors already presupposes a culturally-relativized setting for color-concepts. They include conceptual inferences in our orientation to the world. Therefore, a reduction of colors in a Newtonian setting is one-sided, to say the least. It is misleading to say that in reality color just is refraction of white light. Moreover, Hegel sees that we should accept a special notion of teleological explanations of developments and movements of biological beings, plants and animals, which has to be distinguished, on the one hand, from mechanical movements and dynamical processes, and, on the other, from the notion of explaining individual actions and collective practice by intentions and reasons. It is nevertheless not only a matter of convenience, not only a *façon de parler*, if we connect life-processes with a special logical form of teleological, but non-intentional, explanations.



Explaining animal behavior teleologically is not just a way of speaking in the “as if” mode, which could be reduced in principle to merely mechanical explanations.<sup>35</sup>

In the end, the *Philosophy of Spirit* in Hegel’s sense is a methodological reflection on the *Geisteswissenschaften* and at the same time, topical analysis of their themes and realms. These realms are the state, law, history and education, human psychology and economy, morality, religion, and the arts. The methods of reflection become a central theme precisely because the topic of a *Philosophy of Spirit* is a meta-level reflection on our knowledge about the world including ourselves, and, in the latter regard, about the implicit forms and norms of practices that make individual intentionality and action possible. This is why Hegel’s *Encyclopedia of the Philosophical Sciences* comes full circle. The general idea of logic as the dialectical, i.e., analytic and synthetic method of critical reflection (or speculation) on basic presuppositions of judgments and knowledge had been Hegel’s starting point. Now the whole practice of knowledge, including the practice of logical reflection, becomes a partial topic of the *Philosophy of Spirit*. In other words, the very method of making things explicit by conceptual analysis and theoretical synthesis has to be understood in its important role in human practice. In a sense, therefore, we have to read the *Encyclopedia* twice.

Now the quest for a system in philosophy can be encapsulated in the following questions: Under what conditions, and for what purposes, do we need an argumentative order of sentences rather than a topical order of themes? What, in the end, are philosophical arguments or proofs?

With respect to the basic problem of determinism, the thesis that any event is causally pre-determined, we need only counter-arguments. Although this might count as one of Kant’s insights, it presupposes an extremely charitable reading of his *Critique of Pure Reason*. Rather, I think that is an insight which Hegel develops by starting from Kant. Hegel undermines the belief that in principle for any event or change in the world there is an explanation of a basically mechanistic form – a *causa efficiens*. In Fichte, any such belief is transcendent and dogmatic. There is no empirical or transcendental proof for it. To say that any event is caused by other events would be true, however, if all that is meant is this: Bodies usually move in some sense continuously in space and time and corresponding events in many ways hang together in the one and only world there is, namely the world in which we live and have experiences. To say more than this takes us beyond the limits of reason. Of course, we can wish to explain all events in the framework of a mechanically (i.e. dynamically) determined *causa efficiens* (the stochastic form of modern quantum dynamics included). And we certainly are entitled to look for such explanations in singular and particular cases. But a physicalist or atomist would say that such explanations always ought to be possible in principle and for all events,

even though he would certainly admit that there are limits on our actual knowledge, which, perhaps, will never be surpassed. For Hegel, this ought is an empty ought, *ein leeres Sollen*. It is a dogmatic, totally arbitrary, judgment. As such, it merely verbally fulfills some (secret) wishes of scientists and, at the same time, some (secret) fears of a depressed nineteenth-century, especially apparent in the followers of Schopenhauer. Moreover, any particular search for causal explanations in the sense of *causa-efficiens* presupposes judgments about the possibility of finding such explanations. Ideally, such a claim should always be proven before the search. This possibility should be more than verbal; that is, formal consistency is not enough. And we have to be very careful in using phrases such as, “in principle”. By using them we often talk about **utopian possibilities** – which are, as such, just the same as **impossibilities**. In the same vein, a concept of **pure being** would be empty, if it had no further hold in a practice of making distinctions that somehow refer to real and possible changes and movements of things, i.e., to “Dasein”, “Werden”, and “Qualität”.

The problem is to distinguish between a concept of real possibility and a formal concept of mere logical possibility. In a formal setting, we cannot rule out the possibility that the world came into existence five seconds ago and will end in a minute. In reality, to take such possibilities seriously is utter nonsense. This is the reason why Hegel dismisses the idea that we could define a reasonable concept of possibility on the ground of empirically empty a priori forms and rules, as Kant thinks we can. According to Hegel, the relation between generic knowledge about the world and conceptual truth is much more intricate and complicated than Kant’s picture would lead us to believe, and as mainstream philosophy and science still sees it today. In fact, Kant knows only of an epistemic concept of possibility. But any thick concept of free action needs a concept of real, not only epistemic, possibility with respect to possible outcomes of our deeds. If we can see to it that something happens, this something must be conceptually distinguished in a strict and rigorous way from what we can guess regarding what may have happened, or what may just happen or what will happen. In other words, we urgently need clarification of the conceptual or logical distinction between statements of the form, “e is possible because we do not know if e has happened or is happening right now elsewhere or might happen in the future”, and “it is possible that e might happen in the future not only because we do not know if it will happen or not, but because the happening of e depends on what we will do or see to it that it happens”. If we can know ahead that e will be the case anyway, we cannot see to it that e.<sup>36</sup>

Theories must preserve the phenomena. Scientific explanations cannot contradict real experience, as they are controlled in present *Anschauung* and action. We have only immanent criteria for making a distinction between free action and pre-determined natural events – which are natural

in an old-fashioned sense, namely that they are not results of actions. We should therefore not confuse the fact that there is one world for all beings, including ourselves, with a problematic thesis of naturalism, which says that everything existing is a natural being that can be explained in its being by natural science. The problem is the vagueness and ambivalence of the concepts of nature and natural science. Hegel shows that, and why, we need to maintain systematic differentiations between the natural sciences and what he calls Philosophy of Spirit, out of which the modern social sciences and Geisteswissenschaften develop.

Hegel's deepest insight now seems to be this: Any real understanding is finite and depends on context and relevance. This is so, because explicit reference to the whole space in which understanding is situated is not available; or rather, it is only available by a vague use of the most general speculative titles and headings. Real knowledge is, by necessity, perspectival, situation-specific and the result of free cooperation. It should not be modeled on the idea of grasping pre-determined and fixed meanings, nor of guessing what the author might have meant.

Since Plato or Aristotle, philosophers have tried to resolve dilemmas, paradoxes, and other controversies. They do this, not only by differentiating schematic definitions of expressions (words, sentences), but also by putting whole systems of articulation in their proper places. Hegel sees, for example, that any object of meaningful discourse (or thinking) presupposes a relation of equivalence (*Gleichgültigkeit*) between different presentations and representations of the same thought in an already limited realm. This holds for thinking or speaking about quantities, sets, cardinal numbers, and proportions or real numbers, as well as for bodily things. If no clear realm of such presentations and representations is given, or if no clear equivalence relation is defined such that it can be turned into an identity (respected by relevant predicates), there are no objects to be talked about at all. Leibniz and Newton had wished to talk about infinitesimals or fluxions, but it has turned out to be an empty wish, which we have to replace by new foundations of calculus and mathematical analysis, as Hegel, well-educated by Lagrange, shows without any doubt. In fact, any ontological question must be turned into a question regarding how the realm of objects we want to talk about is constituted. If this insight suffices for calling Hegel's philosophy "idealistic", then we may call it thus. But then, any critical philosophy is idealistic.<sup>37</sup>

## Notes

1. Novalis writes, "Je bonirter ein System ist, desto mehr wird es den Weltklugen gefallen. So hat das System der Materialisten, die Lehre des Helvetius und auch Locke den meisten Beyfall unter dieser Klasse erhalten. So wird Kant jetzt immer noch mehr Anhänger als Fichte finden." *Athenaeum* [1798], (Eds.) Friedrich & August Schlegel, v.1, p.106; cf. also p.83.

2. "Can Analytical Philosophy be Systematic, and Should it Be?" in D. Henrich (Ed.) *Ist systematische Philosophie möglich? Hegel-Studien, Beiheft 17*, Bonn (1977), pp. 305–326.
3. Cf. e.g. the final passages of Theodor Adorno's book *Negative Dialektik* (1984) (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp).
4. Cf. e.g. Habermas (1985), p. 33.
5. Cf. Henrich (1982), pp. 57ff. ("Fichtes 'Ich'").
6. Cf. Tugendhat [1979] (1986), Lectures 13 and 14.
7. Cf. Habermas (1985), p.79.
8. Cf. Frank (1991), pp. 18ff, 94ff, and 143.
9. Cf. Brandom (1994), pp. 4–8 et passim.
10. Cf. Kant *Critique of Pure Reason* (CPR) B247 (and B158).
11. Cf. Kant CPR B252. I do not comment here on the gross exaggeration in Kant's formulation.
12. Cf. Kant CPR B259.
13. This distinction between identification and identity refers, in a sense, to the distinction between epistemology and ontology.
14. Kant CPR 276.
15. The postulates of empirical thinking are the combined conditions of meaningful empirical knowledge-claims, contemplations on empirical possibilities, assertions of empirical reality, or statements about universal empirical truths. Kant distinguishes between an empirically possible state of affairs, actual empirical facts, and necessary conditions which must be fulfilled when we want to refer successfully to a possible or actual world of objective things and facts.
16. Cf. Garver (1969), p. 254.
17. Hegel presents fairly similar arguments as Winch (1987), ch. 7.
18. For Kant, it is an "empirical fact" that bodies move (see, for example, "Metaphysische Anfangsgründe der Naturwissenschaften, I. Hauptstück, Erklärung 1, Anmerkung 2"). This is astonishing because matter is defined by its very possibility of spatial movement, which should be understood as relative movement with reference to other bodies, not to some "space".
19. When Hegel says that light is weightless (cf. *Encyclopedia of Philosophical Sciences*, §§275ff including supplements), he not only says that the propagation of light does not fall under the concepts of inertia and gravitation (which we today consider false). He claims that electricity, magnetism and light are physical phenomena that cannot be described in the Kantian-Newtonian system of moving particles.
20. We definitely should avoid the subjective connotations of the word "intuition". Since the words "Anschauung" and "observation" both presuppose (possibly common) reference to the same object, I propose to translate the German word "Anschauung" (at least as used by Kant, Schelling and Hegel) by "common observations" – for lack of better alternatives.
21. Cf. Beck (1975).
22. To see how much Kant himself has achieved on this path of thought would need a longer treatment. Cf. Kant CPR, B161.
23. Cf. Stekeler-Weithofer (2003).
24. Cf. Henrich (1982), p.61.
25. Cf. Schiller, Friedrich (1943) *Nationalausgabe*, v.1, Weimar p. 302; or v.2, p.322. Cf. also W. Franzen, "Spricht die Seele, so spricht ach! schon die Seele nicht mehr. Einige Erwägungen," in Hogrebe (1998), pp. 87–103.
26. This insight is, once again, also shared by Schelling.
27. Cf. Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, §§5.541–5.5422.
28. Hegel's word is "Monstrieren".

29. The fact that Fichte's way of speaking is too formal is nicely shown by the fact that Henrich's representation of Fichtean ideas is much too formal as well.
30. Cf. Hintikka & Remes (1975).
31. The word "deductive" in its modern meaning of formal derivation stands for what Hegel calls "apagogic" – in direct reference to Plato and Aristotle.
32. No matter what a "philological" critic of Brandom's interpretation of Leibniz, Kant or Hegel says, without an investment of all our knowledge about modern developments in logical, conceptual and structural analysis, we do not understand philosophy in its historical and systematic development at all.
33. Hegel's defense of a scientific investigation of "Spirit" (Geist) sets up the task of a structural investigation of the systematic presuppositions, historical preconditions, and teleological reasons of human actions and practices against a fairly weak backdrop of the idea of historical and literary education (Bildung) in the humanities.
34. In fact, there are many, quite different ways of giving and asking for reasons. One important way is to ask for reasons why we can rely on certain assertions as true. The speaker has to tell us, then, how he knows that his assertions fulfill already established conditions of truth or satisfaction. Another way of asking for reasons expects an answer to the question concerning why someone has acted in a certain way; a third asks why we should act in this way or another, a fourth why we should change an established practice or a system of norms according to some particular proposal (put forward by some proponents).
35. To this, cf. the fine and important texts by Thompson (1995) and Rödl (2005).
36. Nuel Belnap's logical analysis of "branching time" and of what it means "to see to it that an event *e* will happen or a state of affairs *p* will be the case" in his "Stit-Theory" presents structural features of "time" and "ontological possibility" which are absolutely important for any realistic logical analysis of the concept of action. One of his central distinctions refers to the difference between events *e* or states of affairs *p* that are settled (here and now) and those that are not. A past or present event *e* or state of affair *p* is always settled. Some future events *e* or states of affairs *p* can be already settled now, but only some are. If *e* or *p* is settled now, statements about the possibility of *e* or *p* (now) can only be interpreted in an epistemic sense. But if *e* (or *p*) is not settled, we must distinguish between the objective (or ontological) possibility that *e* will or might happen (or that *p* will be the case) and merely subjective (or epistemic) attitudes of expectation with respect to the future possibility of *e* or *p*. I do not want to say that Hegel already had a similar insight. But he sees that the notion of possibility is the most difficult notion in logic and critical metaphysics.
37. I would like to express my thanks to Elizabeth Millán-Zaibert and Susan Hahn for valuable suggestions.

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