

# Thought and Experience: Robust Conceptions of Phenomenology

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**ABSTRACT:** In this paper, I argue that Hegel's critique of Kant's theory of experience aims at defending a thick (or robust) account of experience: whilst both Kant and Hegel oppose the Myth of the Given and a non-conceptualist understanding of the content of experience, Hegel's disagreement with Kant is centred on the fact that Kant only provides this conceptualist account of experience on the basis of transcendental (and hence subjective) idealism. The paper begins with a discussion of Hegel's charge that Kant has a 'thin' conception of experience, and what this means. I then move on to discuss a Kantian rebuttal of Hegel's criticisms, one which I ultimately conclude does not adequately overturn the Hegelian critique. Having discussed the interpretive dimensions of Hegel's charge of 'thinness,' the paper turns to the Hegelian critique in relation to the contemporary debate between conceptualists and non-conceptualists in analytic philosophy of mind in an effort to explicate its enduring philosophical importance and relevance. I argue that one can interpret Hegel's critique of Kant as a proto-McDowellian critique of modern philosophy. For, like John McDowell, Hegel is concerned with providing a robust conception of phenomenology, one which sees both our environment and our experience of our environment as conceptually articulated in and of itself.

**KEYWORDS:** Kant; Hegel; empiricism; experience; idealism.

1.

Frederick Beiser has recently written that Hegel aims to extend the concept of experience "beyond its narrow Kantian limits, where it applies exclusively to sense perception."<sup>1</sup> I take the idea of Hegel treating Kant's conception of experience as 'limited,' which I think is correct, to mean that Hegel can be read as charging Kant with a 'thin' conception of experience. Such a charge is best expressed in the following passage, where Hegel writes: "the empirical is not only mere observing, hearing, feeling, perceiving particulars, but it also essentially consists in finding species, universals and laws."<sup>2</sup> For Hegel, the realm of experience does not just include particulars, but crucially universals and nomological properties as well. The motivation for widening the scope of the empirical lies to a large extent in Hegel's underlying dissatisfaction with certain aspects of Enlightenment philosophy

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<sup>1</sup> BEISER, F.C. *Hegel*. New York & London: 2005, p. 171.

<sup>2</sup> HEGEL, G.W.F. *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*. Translated by E. S. Haldane. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1995. p. 176.



and natural science which he sees expressed in Kant's transcendental philosophy. Hegel's main criticism is that particular features of Enlightenment philosophy and natural science have resulted in a disenchantment of nature. This disenchantment is caused by an impoverished understanding of how our minds work, and an impoverished understanding of the content of experience. Hegel's fundamental principle here can be expressed in the following way: 'Only a rich and robust conception of the empirical world will deliver an accurate representation of both the empirical world and our experience of it. If the empirical world is conceived of in limited ways, then our representation of the empirical world is inaccurate and our view of experience of it is impoverished.' The early modern natural philosophy of Newton, Boyle, Descartes and others had regarded extension to be the essence of matter, and had understood nature in purely mechanical terms.<sup>3</sup> However, Hegel – along with Schelling, Herder, and Schiller – was fundamentally opposed to these tenets of Enlightenment natural philosophy: he was committed to a Romantic conception of nature,<sup>4</sup> which regarded force to be the essence of matter, and understood the empirical world dynamically.<sup>5</sup> *Pace* the traditional interpretation of Hegel's natural philosophy as *a priori*

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<sup>3</sup> As Descartes concisely expresses the essence of mechanism: "I should like you to consider that these functions (including passion, memory, and imagination) follow from the mere arrangement of the machine's organs every bit as naturally as the movements of a clock or other automaton follow from the arrangement of its counter-weights and wheels." (DESCARTES, R., *Treatise on Man*. In: **Philosophical Writings of Descartes**, 3 vols. Translated by J. Cottingham; R. Stoothoff; D. Murdoch; A. Kenny. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984-91; vol. 1, p. 108.).

<sup>4</sup> There is an important qualification to make on the subject of Hegel and Romanticism. The German Romantics, as Beiser (BEISER, F. German Romanticism. In: Craig, E. (ed.) **The Routledge Encyclopaedia of Philosophy**. London and New York: Routledge, 1998; BEISER, F. **German Idealism: The Struggle against Subjectivism, 1781-1801**. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002) and Stone (STONE, A. Friedrich Schlegel, Romanticism, and the Re-enchantment of Nature. **Inquiry**, n. 48, 2005) correctly note, regarded the modern era to have alienated man from the natural world and disenchanted nature by applying a very narrow and analytic form of cognitive enquiry. The Romantics believed that the Enlightenment had ultimately stripped nature and humanity off any beauty or real intrigue. As Beiser writes, "[Romanticism] hoped to restore the beauty, magic and mystery of nature in the aftermath of the ravages of science and technology" (BEISER. German Romanticism, p. 349). Furthermore, as Alison Stone writes, "[f]or Schlegel ... humans 'disenchant' (*entzaubern*) nature if they perceive it as not at all mysterious but completely intelligible by reason. Conversely, humans would 'enchant' (*bezaubern*) nature by perceiving it as partly mysterious, not fully rationally comprehensible" (STONE. Friedrich Schlegel, Romanticism, and the Re-enchantment of Nature, p. 4). For Hegel, though, the Romantic appeal to mystery and rejection of reason is just as pernicious as narrow analysis. Therefore, Hegel's 'Romanticism' only consists in sharing the 'broad' Romantic concern to account for nature in rich and enchanting ways. *Contra* the Romantics, Hegel believed that only a rich conceptualisation of nature will enable humanity to be re-encharmed with the natural world. Furthermore, Hegel should be seen as taking some distance from Romanticism, given his criticisms of certain ways of conceiving force, and also in how force is not as crucial for Hegel's philosophy of nature as it is for Schelling's philosophy of nature.

<sup>5</sup> Kant can be seen as following Boscovitch, given that in the *Metaphysical Foundations of Natural Science*, he argues against the idea that extension is the essence of matter, cf. §§ 496-7 and 499. For an excellent overview of Kant's anti-mechanistic theory of matter, see BEISER. **German Idealism**, who argues that Kant's critique of the Enlightenment places him as an important influence on the Romantic philosophers of nature, such as Herder,

speculative science, the justification for rejecting Enlightenment mechanism was Hegel's synthesis of Aristotle's conception of 'phusis' (nature) with the developments in dynamics, electricity, and the central principles of magnetism.<sup>6</sup> What this means, then, is that the charge of thinness is tantamount to claiming that Kant's idealism could not escape from the Cartesian-Humean epistemic framework, to use the expressions of Paul Abela (2002) and Graham Bird (2007). The 'Cartesian-Humean epistemic framework' refers to the early modern idea that there is a fundamental distinction between thought and experience and that experience only functions as a causal process which has as its content atomistic sense-contents and sense-data. The significance of such an interpretation, I think, is a much larger philosophical difference between Hegel and Kant: Hegel regards the mind-world relation as one of cognitive intimacy not voyeurism, whereas Kant is regarded as either a halfway house between the two relations or just as a member of the Cartesian school of thought – i.e. that Kant either could not truly escape from the Cartesian tradition or just that he was squarely committed to that tradition. We first need to determine whether or not it is appropriate to treat Kant as being part of the early modern epistemic framework.

*Prima facie*, there is good reason to think of Kant as being focused on issues concerning sense-experience and the phenomenology of perception, given his frequent talk of intuitions being the inputs of cognition, his doctrine of synthesis in the A-Deduction (cf. A100-2), and the argument of the Anticipations of Perception. This is why Kant can often be interpreted in Humean ways, as a philosopher principally concerned with the psychological processes that govern how we receive and process perceptual content. However, it would be premature to regard one of Kant's interests – the (transcendental) mechanisms behind perceptual experience and apprehension of sense-qualities – to be how Kant fundamentally conceives of the nature of experience as such.

To draw support for this defence of Kant against Hegel, Bird and Abela can appeal, justifiably, to (I) the central thesis of the Refutation of Idealism, and (II) how Kant understands phenomenology at the empirical level, at the level of empirical realism. With

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Schlegel, Schelling, Schiller, Novalis, and Hegel. Beiser supports this claim by regarding Schelling's explicit critique of the physicist Le Sage, a famous exponent of mechanistic natural philosophy, as being directly influenced by Kant's theory of matter, cf. SCHELLING, F.W.J. **Ideas for a Philosophy of Nature: as Introduction to the Study of this Science**. Trans. E.E. Harris & P. Heath. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988, II, p. 231.

<sup>6</sup> See STONE, A. **Petrified Intelligence: Nature in Hegel's Philosophy**. Albany: State University of New York Press, 2004, pp. 48, 103.

regard to (I), Kant thinks that in order for self-consciousness to be possible, one must first be aware of objects existing independently of one's mind – i.e. that outer sense is a necessary condition for inner sense. Such a position rejects the idea that external objects are just bundles of representational content, and that awareness of private mental content is prior to an independent awareness of external objects – indeed, the very point of the argument of the Refutation of Idealism is to undermine the Cartesian-Humean epistemic framework, under which mind and world are separate from one another, by showing how inner and outer sense are closely bound up together.

With regard to (II), whilst at the transcendental level Kantians will have to be committed to the idea that the content received in experience is rhapsodic and then synthesised, when attention turns to how we experience things ordinarily – what Abela regards as counting as an experience of ‘objects,’ rather than just sensation – Kantians will point to the following ideas: (a) Kant is understood as espousing a form of direct realism which rejects the representational realism of Descartes and Locke; (b) the metaphysics of experience accounted for in the Analogies of Experience, in which the things we experience are conceived as a collective causal nexus of interrelated substances, stands in opposition to the Humean understanding of empirical reality; and (c) at the empirical level, Kant does not separate intuition from thought, experience and judgement. To neglect (a), (b) and (c), and to focus solely on the transcendental level, is to incorrectly place Kant within the pre-Critical tradition, which maintains “a purely causal role to experience, depriving it of the conceptual content needed to overcome the apparent gap between mind and world.”<sup>7</sup> However, for the purposes of this paper, I do not have space to detail the direct realist interpretation of Kant. As such, I will assume that interpretation to be correct.

As a direct realist, Kant is committed to the idea that we experience objects and that we experience objects directly. However, whilst such a position lends weight to the Bird-Abela tradition of emphasising the robust realism of Kantian thought, it appears to place Kant in square opposition to Hegel: following Sellars, Hegel is the “great foe of immediacy,”<sup>8</sup> which would mean that Kant's fondness for directness in phenomenology is something that is clearly anti-Hegelian. However, this particular way of rebutting Kant commits the fallacy of

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<sup>7</sup> STERN, R. Going Beyond the Kantian Philosophy: On McDowell's Hegelian Critique of Kant. **European Journal of Philosophy**, n. 7, 1999, p. 249.

<sup>8</sup> SELLARS, W. **Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind**. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1997, p. 13.

equivocation: Hegel's opposition to immediacy is not a commitment to indirect realism; rather, by rejecting the idea that experience is immediate, he just means that the Cartesian and classical empiricist tradition of conceiving experience as non-conceptual is fundamentally inadequate. The only qualm Hegel has with Kant on the subject of perception – though it is a major one – is 'what' kind of object is given to us in sense-experience: for Kant, it is a mechanistic one, whose form is extrinsic; for Hegel, it is a dynamical one, whose form is intrinsic.

In opposing immediacy, though, it would not be correct to interpret Hegel as developing an anti-empiricist philosophical position. This is because Hegel is only critical of how the empiricist tradition focused on sensation and neglected an intrinsically conceptualised Given; in an important sense, Hegel is deeply committed to some form of empiricism, given how he holds the Scholastic axiom, 'There is nothing in the intellect that has not been in sense experience,' in high esteem, cf. *The Encyclopaedia Logic*: §8, 32. Furthermore, the following passages from the *Encyclopaedia Logic* and the *Lectures on the History of Philosophy* respectively indicate Hegel's support for the central tenet of empiricism, and his opposition to the idea of a non-conceptual Given: "What is true must be in actuality and must be there for our perception."<sup>9</sup>

We must add a remark about the explanation of the origin and formation of concepts that is usually given in the logic of the understanding. It is not *we* who 'form' concepts, and in general the Concept should not be considered as something that has come to be at all. Certainly the Concept is not just Being or what is immediate; because, of course, it involves mediation too. But mediation lies in the Concept itself, and the Concept is what is mediated by and with itself. It is a mistake to assume that, first of all, there are objects which form the content of our representations, and then our subjective activity comes in afterwards to form concepts of them, through the operation of abstracting that we spoke of earlier, and by summarising what the objects have in common. Instead, the Concept is what truly comes first, and things are what they are through the activity of the Concept that dwells in them and reveals itself in them. This comes up in our religious consciousness when we say that God created the world out of nothing or, in other words, that all finite things have emerged from the fullness of God's thoughts and from his divine decrees. This involves the recognition that thought, and, more precisely, the Concept, is the infinite form, or the free, creative activity that does not need a material at hand in order to realise itself.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>9</sup> HEGEL, G.W.F., *The Encyclopaedia Logic: Part 1 of the Encyclopaedia of Philosophical Sciences*. Translated by T. F. Geraets, W. A. Suchting and H. S. Harris. Indianapolis: Hackett, 1991. §38, p. 77.

<sup>10</sup> HEGEL. *The Encyclopaedia Logic*, §163, p. 241.

As to the question in point we must in the first place say that it is true that man commences with experience if he desires to arrive at thought. Everything is experienced, not merely what is sensuous, but also what excites and stimulates my mind. Consciousness thus undoubtedly obtains all conceptions and Notions from experience and in experience; the only question is what we understand by experience. In a usual way when this is spoken of the idea of nothing particular is conveyed; we speak of it as of something quite well known. But experience is nothing more than the form of objectivity; to say that it is something which is in consciousness means that it has objective form for consciousness or that consciousness experiences it, it sees it as an objective. Experience thus signifies immediate knowledge, perception, *i.e.* I myself must have and be something, and the consciousness of what I have and am is experience. Now there is no question as to this, that whatever we know, of whatever kind it may be, must be experienced, that rests in the conception of the thing. It is absurd to say that one knows anything which is not in experience.<sup>11</sup>

The second passage also conveys the general Hegelian critique of Kant, that of rejecting the form/matter distinction as well as charging Kant with subjectivism.<sup>12</sup> However, as Sally Sedgwick correctly writes, “in charging Kant with subjective idealism, Hegel is not recommending that we collapse the distinction between appearances and things in themselves – at least not in the sense that requires us to treat our knowledge of appearances as subject to no more restrictions than our speculations about objects of faith and morality.”<sup>13</sup> I agree with Sedgwick for two reasons: firstly, suggesting that Hegel is advocating a return to a pre-Critical metaphysical position would involve claiming Hegel rejects Kant’s Discursivity Thesis, namely the idea that cognition requires both concepts and intuitions. But this is something that Hegel does not reject, despite his insistence that concepts (*Begriffe*) have priority over intuitions. Secondly, the idea of Hegel believing we can know objects independently of the conditions of sensibility would suggest that we have the faculty of intellectual intuition, namely the ability to ‘create’ objects in the activity of thinking about them. I am happy to concede that in a crucial sense Hegel was sympathetic to the idea of human cognition being intuitive, given his early writings in the *Difference Essay*, where he claimed “intellectual intuition [*intellektuelle Anschauung*] is the absolute principle of philosophy, the one real ground and firm standpoint”<sup>14</sup>, and that “one cannot philosophise

<sup>11</sup> HEGEL. *Lectures on History of Philosophy*, p. 303.

<sup>12</sup> Cf. HEGEL. *The Enciclopaedia Logic*, §41z, 67-68; §42z, 70.

<sup>13</sup> SEDGWICK, S. McDowell’s Hegelianism. *European Journal of Philosophy*, n. 5, 1997, pp. 30-31.

<sup>14</sup> HEGEL, G.W.F. *The Difference between Fichte’s and Schelling’s System of Philosophy*. Translated by H. S. Harris & W. Cerf. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1977, p. 172.

without intuition”<sup>15</sup>. That being said, though, these sympathies do not translate into a commitment to the idea that human cognition ‘really’ involves intellectual intuition in Kant’s sense; Hegel did not deny that human cognition was discursive, that it relied on some kind of given content. What he argued was that human discursivity could not be fully appreciated ‘under Kant’s understanding of discursivity:’ whilst Hegel agreed with the essence of the Transcendental Deduction, namely the idea that ‘no’ representational content that we could receive in experience can be unconceptualised, what he aimed to reject was the Kantian idea that ‘this’ fact about our cognition meant that the given content we receive is itself unknowable/unintelligible independently of our minds. All that Hegel is committed to in wanting human cognition to be more intuitive is that we should not regard our knowledge as being fundamentally limited, because we can identify determinations of thought in the content we receive in experience. These determinations of thought, moreover, when cognised by us, give us insight into not just the intrinsic rational order of the world as a whole. In this sense, Hegel can be compellingly understood as being critical of Kant’s proposed solution to the Myth of the Given on the grounds that Kantian subjectivism fails to conceive of the content of experience as being in and of itself conceptually articulated. And that because Kant’s idealism is of the transcendental idealist variety, Hegelians will regard Kant as having a paltry conception of experience.

However, it seems unreasonable to think that Kant does not have a rich account of experience just because it does not have the same kind of richness of Hegel’s notion of experience: the Kantian empirical world is a causal nexus of interrelated substances, not a Humean collection of constant conjunctions and representational contents. However, despite the tall-order that Hegel makes for himself, I think Kantians must acknowledge a legitimate aspect of his critique of Kant here: certainly, Kant was a realist of sorts, but his realism comes at a high price, formal idealism, the consequence of which dilutes the strength of the Bird-Abela response to McDowell. This is why pointing to how Kant conceives of phenomenology at the empirical level is ultimately lacking in bite: it fails to acknowledge that the realist phenomenology evoked in the Analogies, etc. is contingent on the idealist transcendental mechanisms, such as the application of *a priori* concepts, and synthesis in the imagination. Indeed, Kant himself frequently stressed (i) how the manifold in experience is fragmented in nature and that it must be unified independently of experience, cf. B129-30, and (ii) how one

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<sup>15</sup> HEGEL. *The Difference between Fichte’s and Schelling’s System of Philosophy*, p. 111.

could not be an empirical realist if one was not also a transcendental idealist, which would suggest that talking about empirical realism independently of transcendental idealism is not acceptable for him.<sup>16</sup>

Having discussed the historical and interpretive dimensions of Hegel's charge of 'thinness,' I would now like to discuss the Hegelian critique in relation to the contemporary debate between conceptualists and non-conceptualists in analytic philosophy of mind in an effort to explicate its enduring philosophical importance and relevance.

2.

Hegel's charge of 'thinness' against Kant can be related to the contemporary debate between conceptualists and non-conceptualists in the philosophy of mind. If we have good reason to think Kant was committed to there being non-conceptual content in experience, then it seems that Hegel's charge of thinness has some justification. However, if we have a better reason to think Kant was a conceptualist, then it could be the case that Hegel's critique does not go through. According to the conceptualist reading of Kant (cf. McDowell (1994), Abela (2002), and Anthony Griffith (2010)), Kant's argument in the Transcendental Deduction and his commitment to the Priority of Judgement, the idea that judgement is the central component of experience, give us reason to regard him as espousing conceptualism: he believes that the activity of the understanding is necessary for empirical perception, and he thinks that 'all' representational content must be conceptualised and that experiential states must be put into propositional form.

Conceptualist readers of Kant will naturally argue that Kant's theory of synthesis, under which account empirical intuitions are unified into determinate objects, requires that the synthesis of representational contents must always be directed by rules, and that these rules are concepts. The concepts that play this role are provided by the understanding, meaning that the understanding plays a role in empirical perception, as it is responsible for a necessary

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<sup>16</sup> As Lucy Allais writes: "Kantian appearances depend on us, but at the same time, they constitute the objective, external world: they are empirically real and transcendently ideal. Commentators tend to find room to do justice to only one of these aspects of Kant's position. Those who stress the transcendental ideality in Kant's position tend to see Kantian appearances phenomenally (such as Van Cleve), while those who stress the empirical reality tend not to find any idealism at all (such as Abela). Kant's position must include both. We need an account of appearance which allows the appearances of things to be real, non-illusory, public constituents of an objective world, but which also allows a way in which they are mind-dependent, and can be contrasted with the way things are in themselves." (ALLAIS, L. Kant's Idealism and the Secondary Quality Analogy. *Journal of the History of Philosophy*, n. 45, 2007, p. 463.)



condition of empirical perception, the synthesis of empirical intuitions. With regard to the Priority of Judgement, Kant can be read as claiming that any knowledge attributions place epistemic states in, what Sellars calls, the logical space of reasons. This space is identified with the locus of “justifying and being able to justify what one says.”<sup>17</sup> For that matter, Sellars, in opposing the Myth of the Given, regards Kant as the forbearer of inferentialism, because Kant’s claim that intuitions without concepts are blind underpins Kant’s idea that nothing can count as a legitimate component of experience (or phenomenological state) if it is not subject to concepts, whose function is to structure content in such a manner as to make contents inferentially relevant. In other words, something is epistemically valuable if and only if it is inferentially relevant. Inferential relevance is determined by how the contents are structured so that they can figure as elements of propositions, as being involved in either premise or conclusion; to put this more clearly, concepts are used in the formation of propositional cognition (judgement), and propositional form (form of judgement) articulates experiential states. In articulating experiential states *qua* propositional form, experiential states become inferentially significant, because these states now figure in the space of reasons. Therefore, concepts play a crucial role in the inferential articulation of experiential states, given the relationship between concepts and judgement.<sup>18</sup> An example of inferentialism here is how Kant believes that impressions, which “lie outside the sphere of belief, inference, justification, and evidence,”<sup>19</sup> become epistemically valuable once they are subject to conceptualisation, cf. A111, A112, and A120.

Further reasons for thinking of Kant as a conceptualist come from McDowell’s understanding of perceptual judgement: in his discussion of colour-judgements, McDowell develops a Kantian line of thought, namely that “[propositional] responses reflect a sensitivity to a kind of state of affairs in the world [...]”<sup>20</sup> In other words, in perceptual experience, we are not just producing responses to perceptual stimuli by means of verbal mechanisms, whether these are just atomic or complex propositions, but that in responding to stimuli in such a way, we are articulating the content of perception in such a way as to enable us to

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<sup>17</sup> SELLARS, *Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind*, p. 36.

<sup>18</sup> For support of this idea of assertive judgement being prior in experience, inferentialists can appeal to a basic point about phenomenology, namely that when we experience things like blue billiard balls, we do not say (or think) ‘Blue sense content in location x in physical body y,’ rather we phrase our experience as ‘I see a blue billiard ball.’

<sup>19</sup> ABELA, P. *Kant’s Empirical Realism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002, p. 52.

<sup>20</sup> MCDOWELL, J. *Mind and World*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1994, p. 12.

reflect on it. Because we reflect on the content of our experience, we see ourselves as ‘having the world in view,’ and as such being in some sense answerable to the world. And for us to be in this phenomenological position, the content of our experience must be brought under concepts, because reflection is impossible without concepts. Furthermore, the type of conceptual framework we possess is one where each concept figures as part of a network of concepts, a network which is subject to revision by means of active thinking. This is why McDowell regards his theory of perceptual judgement as a Kantian/Sellarsian account:

The conceptual capacities that are passively drawn into play in experience belong to a network of capacities for active thought, a network that rationally governs comprehension-seeking responses to the impacts of the world on sensibility. And part of the point of the idea that the understanding is a faculty of spontaneity ... is that the network, as an individual thinker finds it governing her thinking, is not sacrosanct. Active empirical thinking takes place under a standing obligation to reflect about the credentials of the putatively rational linkages that govern it [...].<sup>21</sup>

McDowell is claiming that because our cognitive response to the inputs received in sensibility is one of judgement, what it is to actively think about representational content will require us to understand the relations between concepts and the various commitments and entitlements attached to whatever judgement we make. This idea of reflection, which emphasises how the space of reasons can only really be accessed by a rational self-consciousness, is akin to Kant’s idea of subsuming the categorial concepts (our basic concept-network) under a self-consciousness.

In contrast to the conceptualist reading of Kant, Robert Hanna (2005) has suggested that Kant ought to be read as a non-conceptualist, because Kant appears to claim in A90/B122-3 that the representational content of appearances does not have to be related to the functions of thought – i.e. that intuitions without conceptual content are possible. Similarly, Lucy Allais (2009) argues that only space is required to present objects in perceptual experience to us, and that concepts are not involved in this cognitive process.

Though I do not wish to go into the debate in great detail here, the relevant point to be made here in relation to Hegel’s charge of thinness is the following: if Kant is a non-conceptualist – on either Hanna’s or Allais’s reading – then Hegel’s critique appears to have some justification, given how there being no conceptual content or there being no concept-

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<sup>21</sup> MCDOWELL, *Mind and World*, p. 12.

employment would suggest a thin notion of experience. Furthermore, even if Kant is a conceptualist, because he holds that conceptual form is derived from us, the original Hegelian criticism – that transcendental idealism is a high price to pay to refute Hume – will still hold. It is correct to note, of course, that both Kant and Hegel agree that non-conceptual content and non-conceptual awareness (at the level of conscious experience) is impossible for experience, given how both reject the Myth of the Given. However, this amount of amity between the two is dwarfed by a fundamental disagreement: Kant believes that the conceptual content which is partly given to our experience through the use of categories may not be a proper reflection of the world in itself; this is a position which Hegel rejects, given his endorsement of Aristotelian/conceptual realism, according to which such conceptual structures are also to be found in the world. To put it in Sellarsian terms, Hegel's commitment to conceptual realism consists in identifying the realm of freedom (normativity and the space of reasons) with the realm of nature, which is something opposed to Kantianism.

From this perspective, one can understand why McDowell sees himself as developing a Hegelian critique of modern philosophy, because he sees that tradition (from which Kant apparently could not ultimately escape) as incorrectly separating value and fact and meaning and normativity. However, it is unclear whether McDowell regards Kant's position as eventually collapsing into the Cartesian epistemic framework, or just as remaining a coherent but problematic halfway house position between the early modern tradition and the Hegel-Heidegger school; nevertheless, it is more reasonable to suggest that Kant is in the uncomfortable middle-ground between the voyeuristic understanding of the mind-world relation and the being-present-in-the-world (*être-au-monde / In-der-Welt-Sein*) understanding of the mind-world relation rather than see his idealism as collapsing into Cartesianism, given how his views on the transcendental subject and the Refutation of Idealism seem to be in conflict with one another. Such a view is supported by Charles Taylor, who writes “from this point of view, then, Kant has not entirely broken with the epistemological tradition that he overturned ... what separates contemporary rejections of empiricism's doctrine of experience from Kant's refutation of it is the fundamental notion ... that our experience of things is bound up with our interaction with them.”<sup>22</sup> If this is right, then we have a very compelling

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<sup>22</sup> TAYLOR, C. The Opening Arguments of the *Phenomenology*. In: MacIntyre, A. (ed.) **Hegel: A Collection of Critical Essays**. Notre Dame: Notre Dame University Press, 1972, p. 185.

reason to regard McDowell as a ‘genuine’ Hegelian. For, the following passage from McDowell appears to be rather Hegelian in both spirit and letter:

It can easily seem that there is no space to move here. Setting our faces against bald naturalism, we are committed to holding that the idea of knowing one’s way about in the space of reasons, the idea of responsiveness to rational relationships, cannot be reconstructed out of materials that are naturalistic in the sense that we are trying to supersede. This can easily seem to commit us to a rampant platonism. It can seem that we must be picturing the space of reasons as an autonomous structure – autonomous in that it is constituted independently of anything specifically human, since what is specifically human is surely natural ... and we are refusing to naturalise the requirements of reason ... But there is a way out. We get this threat of supernaturalism if we interpret the claim that space of reasons is *sui generis* as a refusal to naturalise the requirements of reason. But what became available at the time of the modern scientific revolution is a clear-cut understanding of the realm of law, and we can refuse to equate that with a new clarity *about nature*. This makes room for us to insist that spontaneity is *sui generis*, in comparison with the realm of law, without falling into the supernaturalism of rampant platonism.<sup>23</sup>

Both Hegel and McDowell reject the idea that developing a liberal naturalist middle-ground between rampant Platonism and bald naturalism means having commitments to spooky cognitive faculty, such as intellectual intuition. Rather, to use a Hegelian turn-of-phrase, the development of such a form of consciousness, which has a new clarity about nature, just means that a discursive consciousness, which takes concepts to be the principal (and in fact, only) means of cognising objects, must go beyond an epistemic framework which has a narrow/thin conception of ‘thought’ and ‘experience.’ As Cinzia Ferrini correctly writes in a way which supports my argument, “[t]he main target of Hegel’s criticism is not empirical science as such, but rather any formal and external method of collecting data.”<sup>24</sup> For Hegel, to ‘properly’ develop a conception of nature, one must go beyond a particular kind of empiricism, namely an empiricism which only “[...] analyses objects by distinguishing and isolating their various features, [where] these features [then] acquire the form of universality by being separated. Yet this highlights the first inconvenience of ‘description,’ the ‘superficiality’ of abstracting universals from particulars and then consequent instability and arbitrariness of these general forms under which things are merely subsumed.”<sup>25</sup> The chapter

<sup>23</sup> MCDOWELL, *Mind and World*, pp. 77-78.

<sup>24</sup> FERRINI, C. The Challenge of Reason: From Certainty to Truth. In: Westphal, K. R. (ed.) *The Blackwell Guide to Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit*. Oxford: Blackwell, 2009, p. 84.

<sup>25</sup> FERRINI, The Challenge of Reason: From Certainty to Truth. pp. 92-93.

‘Observing Reason’ then is where Hegel presents his argument against narrow empiricism.<sup>26</sup> Furthermore, ‘that’ argument of the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, because it is concerned with the respective *Weltanschauungen* of narrow empiricism and a more open empiricism, provides the conceptual resources to enable consciousness to posit concrete universals and arrive at the standpoint of Science. As Robert Stern writes, “[i]n finding itself drawn away from empiricism<sup>27</sup> and nominalism, Observing Reason gains an important insight into how the world incorporates structures that can only be uncovered by thought.”<sup>28</sup> The ultimate advantage of this broader empiricism is that it is a remarkable improvement over emaciated empiricism.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Cf. HEGEL, G.W.F. **Phenomenology of Spirit**. Translated by A. V. Miller. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977, p. 150: “Observation, which kept [its biological categories] properly apart and believed that in them it had something firm and settled, sees principles overlapping one another, transitions and confusions developing; what it at first took to be absolutely separate, it sees combined with something else, and what it reckoned to be in combination, it sees apart and separate. So it is that observation which clings to passive, unbroken selfsameness of being, inevitably sees itself tormented just in its most general determinations – e.g. of what are the *differentiae* of an animal or a plant – by instances which rob it of every determination, invalidate the universality to which it has risen, and reduce it to an observation and description which is devoid of thought.”

<sup>27</sup> My only concern with what Stern has written is that he has not qualified the sense of empiricism in his use of ‘empiricism’. As I have been arguing, Hegel is not rejecting empiricism *simpliciter*, rather he is only rejecting a particular form of empiricism.

<sup>28</sup> STERN, **Routledge Philosophy Guidebook to Hegel and the ‘Phenomenology of Spirit’**, p. 106.

<sup>29</sup> Parallels can be drawn between this expression and Stanley Cavell’s critique of empiricism, cf. CAVELL, S. Thinking of Emerson. **New Literary History**, n. 11, pp. 167-176, 1979.

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