

Hegel's Sublation of Kant's Transcendental Philosophy: Absolute Idealism as a Non-Metaphysical or Rational Metaphysics¹

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ABSTRACT: The aim of my paper is to give an interpretation of Hegel's critique of Kant in the vein of the recently so-called "revised metaphysical reading" of Hegel. I will try to show indeed that Hegel neither remains within the Kantian limits, nor, by contrast, surpasses Kant's restrictions on thought, but rather attempts to deny those very restrictions on the basis that they are only remains of that very old metaphysics that Kant himself pretended to overcome. Since Kant's concept-intuition schism – ground of his notion of thing-in-itself, and consequently of his entire critique of metaphysics – is based on what Hegel calls understanding, and insofar as the understanding is the very ground of the old dogmatic metaphysics, the emergence of reason, by means of a complete critique of the understanding (and therefore of the Kantian concept-intuition schism), may be well thought of as a critique of Kant's metaphysical remains, and hence as a radicalization of Kant's own critique of metaphysics. This emergence of reason gives rise with Hegel to a renewed and rational notion of the thing-in-itself, and thereby to what might be called the non-metaphysical or rational metaphysics of absolute idealism.

KEYWORDS: Kant, Hegel, Metaphysics, Critique, Reason.

Dann hat er die Teile in seiner Hand,
Fehlt, leider! nur das geistige Band.

¹ I cite Hegel's works according to the following editions and abbreviations: Hegel: E. Moldenhauer and K. M. Michel (eds.). **G.W.F. Hegel: Werke in 20 Bänden**. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1970-1: vol. 2. *Glauben und Wissen* (GB); vol. 3. *Phenomenologie des Geistes* (PhG); vols. 5-6. *Die Wissenschaft der Logik* (WdL); vols. 8-10. *Enzyklopädie der philosophischen Wissenschaften im Grundrisse* (Enz); vols. 18-20. *Vorlesungen über der Geschichte der Philosophie* (VGPh). Consulted English editions: **The Encyclopaedia Logic (With the Zusätze). Part I of the Encyclopaedia of Philosophical Sciences with the Zusätze**. Trans. T. F. Geraets et al. Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Co., 1991; **Hegel's Philosophy of Nature**. Trans. M. Petry. London: George Allen and Unwin, 1970; **The Science of Logic**. Trans. G. Di Giovanni. Cambridge, Mass.: Cambridge University Press, 2010; **Faith and Knowledge**. Trans. W. Cerf and H. Harris. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1977; **Phenomenology of Spirit**. Trans. A. V. Miller. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977; **Lectures on the History of Philosophy. The Lectures of 1825-1826**. 3 vols. Trans. R. Brown and M. Stewart. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990 (LHPH); **Lectures on the History of Philosophy**. Trans. E. S. Haldane and F. H. Simson. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1995. Consulted Kant's works: **Critique of Pure Reason**. Trans. P. Guyer and A. W. Woods. Cambridge, Mass.: Cambridge University Press, 1998; **Critique of the Power of Judgment**. Trans. E. Matthews, P. Guyer. Cambridge, Mass.: Cambridge University Press, 2000; **Metaphysical Foundations of Natural Science**. Trans. M. Friedman, Cambridge, Mass.: Cambridge University Press, 2004; **Critique of Practical Reason**, in **Practical Philosophy**. Trans. M. J. Gregor, A. Wood, Cambridge, Mass.: Cambridge University Press, 1996.

Encheiresin naturae nennt's die Chemie,
Spottet ihrer selbst und weiß nicht wie.
(Goethe, *Faust*, pt. 1, lines 1938-41)²

1. Introduction³

Why do we need today a new exposition and interpretation of this very well known issue in Hegel's philosophy, namely, his critique of Kant? Let's be Hegelians from the outset; this critique is not something fixed and complete once and for all. It must be considered on the contrary as a moment of Hegel's overall project. The way in which this critique is to be conceived is intrinsically related thus to the way in which we understand Hegel's philosophical project in general.⁴ If the issue of the Kantian restriction of our knowledge, and thereby that of the thing-in-itself, brings us to the core of the difference between Kant and Hegel, as it is doubtless the case, everything then depends on what we think Hegel did with this thing-in-itself.⁵

There are nowadays three main approaches to Hegel's philosophy:⁶ 1) the traditional or metaphysical reading,⁷ 2) the post-Kantian or non-metaphysical interpretation,⁸ and 3) the so called revised metaphysical reading.⁹ All of them conceive Hegel's relation to the Kantian thing-in-itself in very different ways, and thus they all view Hegel's critique of Kant in very different ways. In order to give a brief characterization of these interpretations, I will take here a

² This passage is quoted by Hegel twice in the *Enzyklopädie* (cf. §§38 Z, 246 Z).

³ I would like to thank my friend John Christopher Kern for both correcting my English and his critical and very useful comments.

⁴ More than forty-five years ago Ivan Soll stated: "Hegel's entire program and conception of philosophy depended upon refuting Kant's limitation of reason." (SOLL, I. **An Introduction to Hegel's Metaphysics**. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1969, pp. 48-49).

⁵ The relation between Hegel's overall philosophical project and his critique of Kant was very recently re-emphasized by John McCumber. See his **Understanding Hegel's Mature Critique of Kant**. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2014, pp. 1 ff.

⁶ Cf. REDDING, P. Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel. **The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy**, summer 2012.

⁷ Cf. TAYLOR, C. **Hegel**. Cambridge, Mass.: Cambridge University Press, 1975.

⁸ Cf. PIPPIN, R. **Hegel's Idealism: The Satisfaction of Self-Consciousness**. Cambridge, Mass.: Cambridge University Press, 1989; PINKARD, T. **Hegel's Phenomenology: The Sociality of Reasons**. Cambridge, Mass.: Cambridge University Press, 1994. For a more analytic perspective see STEKELER-WEITHOFER, P. Hegel's Logic as a Theory of Meaning. **Philosophical Investigations**, n. 19: 4, 1996; BRANDON, R. **Tales of Mighty Dead: Historical Essays in the Metaphysics of Intentionality**. Cambridge, Mass.: Cambridge University Press, 2002; and BERTO, F. Hegel's Dialectic as a Semantic Theory: An Analytic Reading. **European Journal of Philosophy**, n. 15: 1, 2007.

⁹ Along this line we find the works of Robert Stern (1990, 2009), Kenneth Westphal (1989), and James Kreines (2006, 2007, 2008).

suggestion by James Kreines:¹⁰ the metaphysical reading sees Hegel as pretending to surpass Kant's restrictions on knowledge, i.e. to know the thing-in-itself. The non-metaphysical reading, on the contrary, asserts that Hegel 'not' only did not try to surpass Kant's limits, but that he even tried to deny such a thing as the thing-in-itself. The third possibility, finally, would be like an *Aufhebung* of the two previous ones, or a 'rational' metaphysics grounded on a completely reformed notion of the *Ansich*. Hegel's absolute idealism, in fact, did try to surpass Kant's restrictions, but he did it by way of a complete and radical reconstruction of the notion of a thing-in-itself, and thereby, all that which for Kant was 'illegal', so to say. This is the view from which I will read here Hegel's critique of Kant. However, at the same time, this overall notion of Hegel's philosophical project should emerge from his critique of Kant's philosophy itself.

I will divide this work into three main sections. In section one I will deal with Kant's arguments for transcendental idealism, trying to show how these arguments are grounded on one and the same source: the abstracting activity of the understanding (*Verstand*). In the second section I will tackle Hegel's treatment of immediacy, and thereby his critique of the understanding. In the final section I will try to show the main consequences of this critique for our understanding of Hegel's general philosophical project, sketching what I think are the basic outlines for a renewed notion of metaphysics, namely, the rational or 'non-metaphysical metaphysics'¹¹ of absolute idealism.

2. *Kant's Two Ways Towards Transcendental Idealism*

I would like to start by directly stating the following thesis: Kant's transcendental idealism is entirely grounded on one crucial and original difference, namely, the distinction between intuition and concept. This intuition-concept schism is in fact so fundamental for Kant's philosophy that without it some of his main theses lose their very ground. Thus, for instance, the thesis of the ideality of the categories completely depends on their difference from intuitions. It is

¹⁰ Cf. KREINES, J. Between the Bounds of Experience and Divine Intuition: Kant's Epistemic Limits and Hegel's Ambitions. *Inquiry*, n. 50: 3, 2007, p. 307).

¹¹ I have taken this expression from Stephen Houlgate. Cf. his Hegel's Logic. In Beiser, F. (ed.). **The Cambridge Companion to Hegel and the Nineteenth-Century Philosophy**. Cambridge, Mass.: Cambridge University Press, 2008, p. 124.

indeed the thoughtlessness of intuitions that from which Kant 'infers' the subjective character of the former, grounding thus the possibility of synthetic *a priori* judgments. Now, if we take the opposite direction, i.e. starting now from thoughts, and not from intuitions as before, we arrive at the crucial point of Kant's destructive attack directed against dogmatic metaphysics. Insofar as the concept contains no immanent intuition (or it is mere contentless thought), then no reality follows from the consideration of thoughts or concepts alone. Therefore, metaphysics, the attempt to grasp reality from thoughts only, has become simply impossible.

In his *Critique of Pure Reason* Kant offers us two different, though intrinsically related, arguments for transcendental idealism.¹² Both of them share the same starting point: *Erfahrung*. In experience we find an object, a singular being, as containing universality or thought-determinations, that is to say, an object entangled in multifarious and different relations to other objects.¹³ Experience thus gives us a unity, a relation between singularity and universality, or, in more Kantian terms, between intuition and concept. The question raised by such an object concerns the kind of relation between its two different constituents. It seems we have here two possibilities: either the constituents are extrinsically related, having hence no essential or immanent connection, or they are rather immanently united, as being a unity by itself. If we start considering the former alternative, we have Kant's first argument for transcendental idealism;¹⁴ the second alternative, on the contrary, leads us to his second proof.

The first argument attempts to show that only the distinction between intuition and concept is able to give a clear account of the possibility of synthetic *a priori* knowledge.¹⁵ If the concept is really different from intuition, then the former comes to the latter from without, as an other. Now, since intuition is what is given in our knowledge, and insofar as intuition does not provide by itself the element of universality and necessity we found in *Erfahrung*, it follows that this element could only come from the remaining extreme of the cognitive activity, i.e. the intuiting subject. It is possible for us to have universal and necessary knowledge of *phenomena* insofar as

¹² Cf. KREINES. Between the Bounds of Experience, p. 312.

¹³ Cf. KrV, Bxvii-xviii.

¹⁴ On the definition of transcendental idealism see B518-9: "Everything intuited in space or in time, hence all objects of an experience possible for us, are nothing but appearances, i.e. mere representations, which, as they are represented, as extended beings or series of alterations, have outside our thoughts no existence grounded in itself. This doctrine I call *transcendental idealism*."

¹⁵ Cf. KrV, Bxvii-xix.

we ourselves have already posited such universality and necessity into them. In other words, since perception itself does not give us any universal and necessary knowledge,¹⁶ as Hume has showed,¹⁷ it must come from another source: transcendental subjectivity.¹⁸

Let's take a look now at the second argument,¹⁹ which could be presented as some kind of *reductio ad absurdum* of the thesis that the empirically given objects are mind-independent beings.²⁰ Once a conditioned is given, it is completely legitimate, argues Kant, to conceive the demand for its condition equally as given. That is to say, it is perfectly valid to always pursue the condition of a given conditioned. It is in fact reason's requirement itself: to state, for a given conclusion, its complete premises. But there is here no necessary demand for an unconditioned. On the contrary, such a demand only arises once we have thought of the given conditioned object as if it were a thing-in-itself, that is to say, an immanent relation between intuition, the empirical manifold, and the concept, as its universal or unifying form. If this conditioned object were indeed a mind-independent being, then I have made abstraction from all the conditions of any possible intuition, namely, that such objects of intuition must be given temporally, i.e. successively, one after the other. In abstracting this way, I am thinking the conditioned and its

¹⁶ Cf. KrV, Bxvii: "If intuition has to conform to the constitution of the objects, then I do not see how we can know anything of them *a priori*; but if the object (as an object of the senses) conforms to the constitution of our faculty of intuition, then I can very well represent this possibility to myself." Cf. also B5, 123-4: "If one were to think of escaping from the toils of these investigations by saying that experience constantly offers examples of a regularity of appearances that give sufficient occasion for abstracting the concept of cause from them, and thereby at the same time thought to confirm the objective validity of such a concept, then one has not noticed that the concept of cause cannot arise in this way at all, but must either be grounded in the understanding completely *a priori* or else be entirely surrendered as a mere fantasy of the brain"; B 127-8; Proleg., 4/257.

¹⁷ The connection between Hume and Kant was not only expressly stated by the latter in his famous assertion that it was Hume who awakened him from his 'dogmatic slumber' (cf. Proleg., 4/260), but Hegel himself saw the Kantian philosophy in some way at the same level of the Humean Empiricism. In Hegel's *Enzyklopädie* indeed, Kant's philosophy appears side by side with Empiricism, being both conceived by Hegel as one and the same position of thought regarding objectivity (cf. §§38 ff). The clearest relating point is to be found in the topic of the 'analysis' of experience, both in Empiricism and in Kant (cf. Enz §§38 Z, 40, respectively; see also VGPh, 20/333).

¹⁸ On Kant's criticism of Hume's custom and his own alternative, namely, the *a priori* as posited by the transcendental subject, see especially KrV, B217-8. In this passage Kant refers to Locke's attempt to ground concepts on experience as an extravagance. See also KrV, B3-5, 11-12, 19-20, 793.

¹⁹ Cf. KrV, Bxviii-xxii, 534-5.

²⁰ There have been at least two different interpretations of Kant's general thesis regarding the thing-in-itself. For some commentators, this is an epistemological thesis that states that, due to the particular constitution of our faculties of knowledge, the 'idea' of a thing-in-itself is unavoidable. On the other side, others have supported a metaphysical reading of this same thesis, according to which Kant's has asserted the 'real existence' of a thing (or things) beyond any possible human knowledge (cf. ALLAIS, L., *Transcendental Idealism and Metaphysics: Kant's Commitment to Things as They are in Themselves*. In: Heidemann, D. (ed.). **Kant Yearbook: Metaphysics**. Berlin/New York: De Gruyter, 2010). However, I think that the way in which I interpret Hegel's critique of Kant is beyond and immune to such a debate.

condition at the same time, or even better, out of time, simultaneously. Once this has been done, the whole series of conditions is also given, or, what is the same, the unconditioned has been given together with that very first conditioned.²¹

From this point the necessary linkage between a thing-in-itself and the unconditioned immediately follows. Given a thing-in-itself, the unconditioned is, in fact, immediately posited as well, whether the former is itself the unconditioned, or not. To think any individual object of experience as if it were a thing-in-itself, no matter how it is constituted, no matter which or how many qualities it has, immediately implies thinking of the whole world as unconditioned; and conversely, to think the unconditioned implies thinking of the individual objects which populates the world as independent beings. Since the thought of the unconditioned necessarily produces contradictions, antinomies, the thing-in-itself too necessarily leads us, according to Kant, to those very antinomies.²²

Now, insofar as the thing-in-itself could not be self-contradictory, namely, could not have contradictory thought-determinations within itself, it follows that those thought-determinations do not really inhabit the thing itself, but come rather from the outside, and this outside is for Kant our own subjectivity, and more precisely, reason. The unconditioned in this way is revealed to be what cannot be known by us, and hence posits a restriction to our knowledge. That which could not be known, that which lies beyond our cognitive capabilities, is the thing as it is in itself, in contrast to the thing as it is for us, i.e. as *phenomenon*.²³ In this way, we have reached the foundation of that which was the starting point of the first argument: concepts and intuitions are extrinsic and indifferent to each other.

Nevertheless, it must be stressed that, in both cases, Kant has got in fact a pretty good insight into the unity of the above opposed terms, giving expression thus to the reconciliation of the contradiction.²⁴ On the one hand, the unconditioned necessarily leads to contradictions, or it

²¹ Cf. KrV, B526-8.

²² Cf. KrV, Bxx.

²³ This result has led Kant to the conception of a hypothetical higher understanding, an intuitive – unlike our merely discursive – understanding, that would be capable of knowing things as they really are in themselves (cf. KrV, B135, 138-9, 145, 307-8, and specially KU, §77). As James Kreines has rightly suggested, Hegel's position should be conceived as some kind of half-way or conciliation between both a discursive and an intuitive understanding (cf. Kreines, 2007).

²⁴ Cf. VGPh, 20/333, 381; WdL, 5/52, 6/264; Enz §55 A. Hegel also praises as very valuable Kantian insights the transcendental unity of apperception (cf. LHPh, 3/224-5; VGPh, 20/344; WdL, 6/254, 260-1; Enz §42 Z2), the idea

implies the conditioned, being thus both of them moments of one and the same unity;²⁵ on the other hand, *Erfahrung*, grounded on the transcendental unity of self-consciousness, already contains both, concept and intuition.²⁶ But, as it is well known, Kant has made of both merely a subjective unity: the contradictions are only 'ours', and *Erfahrung* gives us knowledge only of *phenomena*, of things as they are 'for us'. This is exactly why Hegel complains that Kant, in front of the very truth, has made of it something merely subjective or untrue.²⁷ And Hegel himself explains the reason of this inverted conception: the fixed abstraction of the understanding is here understood as the absolutely first, a fixed and unmovable starting point.²⁸ It has been because of this very abstract thinking that Kant, according to Hegel, – and despite his very valuable insights – could not fully take the ultimate step towards reason (*Vernunft*), and therefore, the ultimate step outside that very dogmatic metaphysics he himself tried so desperately to abolish.²⁹ “This is—says Hegel—a complete *Verstandesphilosophie*, which renounces reason.”³⁰

of synthetic *a priori* judgments (cf. VGPh, 20/336-7; WdL, 5/240, 6/260; cf. GW, 2/304 ff.), the triplicity in the ordering of the categories (cf. LHPH, 3/226, VGPh, 20/345), the notion of freedom in the second *Critique* (cf. LHPH, 3/244-5; VGPh, 20/338, 367; Enz §53), the notion of *Zweckmäßigkeit* (cf. LHPH, 3/246-8; VGPh, 20/374-5), and that of an intuitive understanding (cf. VGPh, 20/347-8; VGPh, 20/379-80; WdL, 6/264, 266; Enz §55), among other topics.

²⁵ Cf. LHPH, 3/238; VGPh, 20/353, 358; WdL, 5/39, 52; Enz §48 A, Z.

²⁶ Cf. KrV, B138: “The synthetic unity of consciousness is therefore an objective condition of all cognition, not merely something I myself need in order to cognize an object but rather something under which every intuition must stand *in order to become an object for me*, since in any other way, and without this synthesis, the manifold would *not* be united in one consciousness.” On Hegel’s account of *Erfahrung* see WdL, 6/ 43: “abstraction could indeed extract the principle of identity through analysis; but, in actual fact, it would not then leave *experience* as is but would have *altered* it, since in *experience* the identity was rather in unity with difference. And this is the *immediate refutation* of the claim that abstract identity is as such something true, for what transpires in every experience is the very opposite, namely identity only united with difference.” Cf. also Enz §38 Z; VGPh, 20/349-50.

²⁷ Cf. VGPh, 20/333, 379, 381; cf. WdL, 6/260-1, 264. Kant, says Hegel, has not really conciliated the contradictions he has found, but he has only transferred them into subjectivity, letting be there just as they were in the object (cf. WdL, 5/40, 276; Enz §48 A; VGPh, 20/359).

²⁸ Cf. VGPh, 20/381 (translation slightly modified): “He will not therefore sublimate his limits in the moment in which he posits them as limits. This is the perpetual contradiction in Kant’s philosophy: Kant exhibited the extremes of opposition in their one-sidedness, and expressed also the reconciliation (...) But at this point also Kant says that we must remain at what is one-sided, at the very moment when he is passing out beyond it.” This priority of the understanding or the finite over reason or the infinite has been already emphasized by both John Smith (see his *Hegel’s Critique of Kant. Review of Metaphysics*, n. 26, 1973, p. 456) and John Findlay (see his *Hegel: A Reexamination*. London: George Allen and Unwin, 1958, p. 253) as one of the more distinctive features of Kant’s philosophy over against that of Hegel.

²⁹ Cf. WdL, 5/131 (italics are mine): “This is a distinction—he says, talking about the distinction between the “in itself” and the “posited” —that belongs only to the dialectical development and one unknown to metaphysical philosophizing (*to which the critical also belongs*).” Cf. also WdL, 6/264; Enz §60 A; VGPh, 20/379, 380.

³⁰ VGPh, 20/385; cf. WdL, 5/38; Enz §52 Z.

Let's advance now just a few lines on the reasons of this assertion. Naïve, dogmatic metaphysics is for Hegel that which deals with finite thought-determinations, that is to say, according to the understanding's principle of abstract self-identity, dealing thus with, for instance, substances, absolutes, things, and self-enclosed and unrelated things, determinations, thoughts, and so on. This metaphysics is what is unaware of the spiritual, or, logically expressed, the Concept (*Begriff*). It is therefore the thinking of the understanding, and so exactly the same as a *Verstandesmetaphysik*.³¹

Now, it is true that Kant's critical philosophy has very strongly rejected all concerns with mind-independent or transcendent substances, precisely what the former metaphysics attempted to accomplish,³² but, in return, it has kept such 'substances' within subjectivity itself. Both empirical matter and thought-determinations of knowledge have been considered by Kant as having a fixed and isolated validity, as subsisting on their own account. Their mutual relations and connections are for him contingent and extrinsic; they are just put side by side, without any real and immanent connection between them. In this framework, the beyond was not truly set aside nor annihilated, but only emptied from all determinacy, since all determinacy falls now within subjectivity itself. The basic structure of the old metaphysics, namely, the world as it is in itself as against the knowing subject, remains exactly the same. Kant has not considered the thought-determinations in and for themselves, but only regarding their subjective or objective nature, leaving them thus exactly as they were understood by the dogmatic metaphysicians.³³ The difference lies now only in our supposed inability to grasp the world, insofar as it has been emptied of any possible thought-determination, or, what is the same, these thought-

³¹ Cf. Enz §§26-36, specially §27.

³² Maybe the most significant instance of this critique is to be found in Kant's critique of the ontological proof and his very famous argument of the one hundred Thalers. I will not enter here in the details of this argument, but I just would like to highlight that, as it was suggested before (cf. supra p. 3), the ground of this critique lies in Kant's distinction between intuitions and concepts. In fact, that no reality could be deduced from a mere concept means precisely that no intuition—the only way to reach reality according to Kant—is contained in the nude concept. On Hegel's treatment of this Kantian argument see WdL, 5/88 ff. For a more detailed approach to this issue see FERREIRO, H. El argumento ontológico y la muerte de la metafísica. Dos visiones complementarias: Kant y Hegel. *Veritas*, n. 57: 3, 2012.

³³ Cf. LHPH, 3/225; VGPh, 20/333, 345; WdL, 5/40, 60; Enz §§41, Z2, 42 A, 48 A, 60 A. The same psychological and historical procedure in finding, conceiving and ordering the categories is, says Hegel, at the base of the distinction between sensibility, understanding, and reason (cf. LHPH, 3/222; VGPh, 20/339, 351), the different ideas of reason (cf. VGPh, 20/353), the meaning of space and time (cf. VGPh, 20/333, 342-3, 379-82), and the relation between Kant's three critiques (cf. VGPh, 20/385).

determinations are only 'ours'.³⁴ Kant's philosophy may be called hence a 'subjective' metaphysics, as against the objective or transcendent metaphysics of the dogmatic tradition, as Hegel himself suggests.³⁵

According to Hegel, there are two ways of escaping from Kant: we could go either backward or forward.³⁶ The latter is, of course, Hegel's choice. To go forward means for him nothing but to refute certain position from the inside, or it must be self-refuting,³⁷ and thereby advance to a higher standpoint.³⁸ The ultimate step beyond this metaphysics of the understanding, the pursuit and realization of Kant's incomplete project, is therefore the main task of reason and Hegel's absolute idealism. As Hegel says at the very beginning of his *Logic*,

once the substantial form of the spirit has reconstituted itself, it is of no avail to want to retain the forms of an earlier culture. These are like withered leaves pushed aside by the new buds already being generated at their roots.³⁹

3. *Hegel, Reason, and the Self-sublation of the Understanding*

As a first approach to Hegel's main critique of Kant, I would like to suggest a somewhat heterodox, and even weird, image thereof: Hegel's treatment of the cosmological argument. Briefly exposed, the argumentative structure of this proof is as follows: we find the world as existing; but the world, nevertheless, since it is a mere aggregate of contingent and finite beings,

³⁴ Cf. Brady Bowman (2013: 6-7).

³⁵ Cf. VGPh, 20/233 (italics are mine): "This philosophy made an end of the *Verstandesmetaphysik* (cf. VGPh, 20/385; WdL, 6/539) as an objective dogmatism, but in fact it merely transformed it into a *subjective dogmatism*, i.e. into a consciousness in which *these same finite determinations of the understanding persist*, and the question of what is true in and for itself has been abandoned"; cf. 20/379-82; Enz §48 Z.

³⁶ Cf. Enz §41 Z1.

³⁷ It is very well-known Hegel's claim regarding the history of philosophy and the relation between the different philosophies. The opposite of a true philosophy, he says, is not a false, but a one-sided one, so that there is only 'one' philosophy developing itself through its own history (cf. WdL, 6/249-50; Enz §13; PhG, 3/20; VGPh, 18/36-8).

³⁸ Cf. WdL, 6/249-50; PhG, 3/20. We should dismiss here Karl Ameriks' suggestion that Hegel's entire critique of Kant is based on his own absolute idealism as a presupposed starting point (cf. his *Hegel's Critique of Kant's Theoretical Philosophy. Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, n.46: 1, 1985, p. 22; see also **Kant and the Fate of Autonomy: Problems in the Appropriation of the Critical Philosophy**. Cambridge, Mass.: Cambridge University Press, 2000, p. 280).

³⁹ WdL, 5/15.

could not be existent just by its own means. Therefore, its existence comes from without, i.e. from a necessary being, that is to say, God.

Now, Hegel's critique of this proof says:

The relation of the starting point [the world] to the point of arrival [God] is represented as *affirmative* only, as a concluding from *one* [reality] that *is*, and *remains*, to an *other* that equally *is as well*. But this is a great mistake: wanting cognition of the nature of thinking only in this form that is proper to the understanding.⁴⁰

The reason of this mistake lies in first recognizing the nullity, finitude and contingency of the world; but then, in isolating it from the necessary element or being, it becomes, on the contrary, something firm and subsisting by itself, in opposition to its 'cause', which subsists by itself as well. This procedure is thus unaware of the 'negative' moment of this elevation (*Erhebung*), or, as Hegel says, "it is only the *nullity* of the being of the world that is the bond of the elevation; so that what does mediate vanishes, and in this mediation, the mediation is sublated."⁴¹ That is to say, the initially opposed and external extremes become united or idealized, moments of one single movement and process.

The general procedure of this proof is exactly the same we considered before as Kant's main movement in both arguments for transcendental idealism.⁴² The first argument, as we saw, begun by tearing experience apart into two different elements, that is, intuitions and concepts. Now, since this difference has been thought of as absolute, namely, making those two opposed

⁴⁰ Enz §50 A.

⁴¹ Enz §50 A. See Enz §246 Z: in talking about "how the infinite issues forth into finitude," he says that "the insensibility of the understanding consists in its precise cancellation of the determination which it establishes, and so in its doing the opposite of what it intends. The singular is supposed to be separated from the universal, but it is precisely on account of this separateness that it is posited within the universal, so that what is present is merely the unity of the universal and the particular."

⁴² It is absolutely true that Kant himself rejected the cosmological proof (cf. KrV, B631 ff). Nevertheless, his is not a rejection of the proof as such; it is rather an indirect rejection founded on the negation of the ontological proof, which, as Kant says, serves as its basis. According to him, our proof does start, unlike the ontological version, from experience; but then it elevates itself, in the conclusion, to a necessary being – and hence out of the reach of any possible experience –, whose possibility has not been proved by this argument, but is rather presupposed. It is in this sense that our argument presupposes and is grounded on the ontological proof. As we see, Kant's critique is not specifically directed against the elevation from one unsatisfactory or incomplete being to another as its ground, but rather against the elevation to a very specific kind of ground: a necessary being. That is the reason why if we dispense with this necessary being, then the proof would show no more motives to give in to Kant's criticism. His own version of the cosmological argument, indeed, does not mention at all, nor even needs of, any necessary being, but only a source of necessity and universality, that is to say, the I.

elements self-subsistent and self-enclosed beings,⁴³ the conclusion follows immediately: the one could not be contained in the other, their relation is only extrinsic and contingent, and concepts belongs hence only to us. Unlike this first, the second argument does begin by conceiving an immanent unity between concept and intuition. However, as soon as this unity or thing-in-itself reveals its intrinsic relation to the unconditioned, both, the conditioned and the unconditioned, are conceived again as absolutely distinct from each other. But since they are intrinsically related, the contradiction emerges. Kant's conclusion: we cannot know things as they are in themselves, but only as they appear to us.

Both the intuition-concept schism and Kant's conception of the unconditioned have one and the same root: *Verstand*.⁴⁴ Since the understanding consists, according to Hegel, in abstracting, fixating and isolating the different elements,⁴⁵ the schism between concept and intuition, unity and manifold, or universality and singularity, on the one side, and that unconditioned that, in order to be, excludes contradiction, i.e. the juxtaposition of opposed determinations such as finitude and infinity, on the other side, are both products of the same abstracting activity of the understanding. While for Kant unity is really subsequent and therefore subordinate to that which has become united,⁴⁶ in Hegel we have precisely the opposite attitude: unity is in fact the ground of difference, which as such is only abstract, ideal, or a moment.⁴⁷ And it is precisely here where Hegel's main criticism of Kant should be found, namely, in the critique of the abstract identity of the understanding.⁴⁸ In other words, the immanent critique of the understanding, and of Kant

⁴³ Cf. WdL, 6/258, 264; Enz §51.

⁴⁴ Inasmuch as the understanding's procedure lies at the basis of Kant's entire philosophy, there is no need to discuss each of Hegel's criticisms of Kant individually, as if they were a mere series of isolated complaints. They should be viewed on the contrary as different expressions of one and the same main criticism, which is what we have here in mind as the general task of our work. For a discussion on the implications of Kant's thesis of the intuition-concept distinction for his philosophy see SEDGWICK, S. **Hegel's Critique of Kant: From Dichotomy to Identity**. Cambridge, Mass.: Cambridge University Press, 2012, pp. 24-40.

⁴⁵ On Hegel's notion of the understanding see Enz §80; see also Enz §§20 A, 25; WdL, 5/28-9, 38; PhG, 3/36.

⁴⁶ Cf. VGPh, 20/360; cf. WdL, 6/256, 261.

⁴⁷ Cf. WdL, 5/70: "*progression* is a retreat to the ground, to the origin and the truth on which that with which the beginning was made, and from which it is in fact produced, depends. —Thus consciousness, on its forward path from the immediacy with which it began, is led back to the absolute knowledge which is its innermost truth. This truth, the ground, is then also that from which the original first proceeds, the same first which at the beginning came on the scene as something immediate." Cf. also WdL, 6/259; Enz §159 A.

⁴⁸ Cf. VGPh, 20/349, 385; Enz §52 A; WdL, 5/148: "The philosophy of Kant and Fichte holds out the *ought* as the resolution of the contradictions of reason—though it is rather only a standpoint that remains fixed in finitude and therefore in contradiction." Cf. also WdL, 5/216. Cf. DUQUETTE, D. Kant, Hegel and the Possibility of Speculative Logic. In: Di Giovanni, G. (ed.). **Essays on Hegel's Logic**. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1990, p. 7.

thereby, should lead us to the standpoint of Hegel's absolute idealism: the speculative *Vernunft*, the realm of the *Begriff* proper. Or in Hegel's own terminology: absolute idealism should be understood as Kant's 'truth'.⁴⁹

It could be said that each and every aspect of Hegel's philosophy rests upon this transition from *Verstand* to *Vernunft*, more famously expressed as the transition from the substance to the subject. However, the heart of this movement finds its more appropriate expression in the logical realm, namely, in the *Science of Logic*. The beginning of the *Logic* is being, pure being or the moment of the understanding. This being is just indeterminate immediacy, or, if we like, the purely given, and as such, since what it is is exhausted by the given or immediate, it is an unrelated, that is, positive identity with itself, absolute lack of negativity, lifeless, in-different and motionless, or, as Hegel also says, the *Geist-* or *Begrifflose*. Being, as immediacy itself, represents identity in its more traditional form: $A = A$, that is to say, substance. The understanding, as abstraction and fixation of differences, is, Hegel says, "the most astonishing and mightiest of powers, or rather the absolute power."⁵⁰ Despite this fact, Hegel often refers to it in much less glowing terms. In his *Phenomenology of Spirit* the understanding is compared to anatomy, that is, the science that, wanting cognition of human body, just finds before it a corpse on the dissection table, death instead of life. The understanding, in fact, stops movement by imposing its deadly ties, by absolutizing the moments and preventing thus their movement towards their other or negation.

Nonetheless, the first logical movement consists precisely in the sublation of this being, sublation by means of which this latter passes over (*übergehen*) by itself and through itself into nothing, that is, into its own negation.⁵¹ The precise meaning of this transition could be briefly expressed as follows: being is what it is only in its other, for that absolute indeterminacy that being pretends to be is itself a 'determination', or being determines itself as indeterminate.⁵²

⁴⁹ As John McCumber states, it is not a matter of 'Kant oder Hegel', but of 'Kant und, or durch Hegel'. "Kant—he says—only becomes himself, for Hegel, when Hegel comprehends him." (**Understanding Hegel's Mature Critique of Kant**, p. 9).

⁵⁰ PhG, 3/36.

⁵¹ As Terry Pinkard has rightly remarked "the logic of the concepts of being and nothing form the logical structure of the work [viz. *The Science of Logic*]." (*The Logic of Hegel's Logic. Journal of the History of Philosophy*, n. 17: 4, 1979, p. 424)

⁵² Cf. WdL, 5/82: "the very indeterminateness of being constitutes its quality. It will therefore be shown that the first being is in itself determinate"; cf. also WdL, 5/104. On this reading see HOULGATE, S. **The Opening of Hegel's**

Being is hence its very opposite, namely, nothing, or contains within itself its own negation, or is mediated. In other words, being is dialectical.⁵³

What this mediation exactly means should be found however, neither in the Doctrine of Being, nor in that of Essence, but rather in the Doctrine of the Concept. In the sphere of Being mediation is understood as a passing over, as a transition to its 'other'; being indeed passes over into nothing, and there it stops being what it was, being. In Essence, by contrast, this passing over becomes a shining into another (*Scheinen in Anderes*). Being do not passes over into nothing anymore, but it is in its other – now Essence – as in its ground, or it is reflected upon it, which, nevertheless, is still considered as an other.⁵⁴ To the one-dimensional object of Being, the Essence responses with its two-dimensional objectivity. In the Concept, on the contrary, where movement must be grasped now as development (*Entwicklung*),⁵⁵ otherness will be finally internalized as an essential moment of the logical movement of being, in some kind of three-dimensional structure, so to say. It is here, in the Concept, where reason, speculative reason, properly emerges.

Hegel's notion of reason could be understood from the dialectic of what he calls 'the determinations of the concept', namely, universality (*Allgemeinheit*), particularity (*Besonderheit*) and singularity (*Einzelheit*).⁵⁶ Being and Essence are the "genesis of the Concept";⁵⁷ it is their truth, and as such, they are contained within it as its moments. As the negation of the first negation constituted by Essence, the Concept appears as Being's return into itself, opening thus the doors of the kingdom of the Concept and speculative reason. As such return, the Concept has

Logic: From Being to Infinity. Wes Lafayette: Purdue University Press, 2006, p. 277-8. For other accounts of the beginning of the *Logic* see MAKER, W. **Philosophy without Foundations: Rethinking Hegel.** Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994, pp. 87 ff.; CARLSON, D. **A Commentary to Hegel's Science of Logic.** New York: Plagrave, 2007, pp. 9 ff., 32); NUZZO, A. Dialectic, Understanding, and Reason: How Does Hegel's Logic Begins? In: Limnatis, N. (ed.). **The Dimensions of Hegel's Dialectic.** London/New York: Continuum, 2009; and ROSEN, S. **The Idea of Hegel's Science of Logic.** Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2014, p. 84.

⁵³ Cf. WdL, 5/111: "This form of argumentation that falsely presupposes the absolute separation of being and nothing, and insists on it, should be called not *dialectic* but *sophistry*. For sophistry is an argumentation derived from a baseless presupposition rashly accepted without critique; but we call dialectic the higher rational movement in which these, being and nothing, apparently utterly separated, pass over into each other on their own, by virtue of what they are, and the presupposition sublates itself. It is the dialectical immanent nature of being and nothing themselves to manifest their unity, which is becoming, as their truth." Cf. also Enz §238.

⁵⁴ Cf. WdL, 6/81.

⁵⁵ See Enz §161.

⁵⁶ Cf. Enz §§163-5; WdL, 6/273 ff.

⁵⁷ WdL, 6/245.

first the form of being, that is, immediacy, and, at the same time, indeterminacy. This indeterminate immediacy (that which Being was) is in the sphere of the Concept what we usually call 'universal', i.e. that in which everything is contained. However, this universality is necessarily a self-sublating instance. In fact, the indetermination is precisely its determination, that which it is, or it is what it is only in its other. In this way, difference and negativity have been introduced into the Concept itself. The truth of universality is then particularity, or universality 'determined' as universality. The universal is hence universal just as a particular, its other (that which Essence was). But, at the same time, the particular is itself the universal, and not an other before it, starting thus its way back to the source. The universal identifies itself with itself through its negation, or it is a 'negative' self-identity. Through this movement however, the universal is not that first universal anymore, but individuality, 'this' determinate being. Each determination of the Concept has become thus the totality or the Concept itself.⁵⁸ In its self-development its movement is nothing but a self-differentiating activity, where negation is contained within the negated itself as identical to what is negated. That is to say, the negation or determination of being can only be the negative inward reflection of the Concept, or what Hegel calls its dialectic.

This way, being or substance, that is, the absolutization of the finite, the fixation and isolation of the determinate, has become also spirit, subject, the 'Bacchanalian riot' which consists in Being's alienation in its other (Essence) and the return to itself mediated by this very alienation, that is, as the unity of opposites, or, as Hegel says, the negation of the negation, the concrete or the Concept.⁵⁹

In more concrete terms this means:

Any determinate concept—says Hegel—is empty in so far as it does not contain the totality, but only a one-sided determinateness. Even when it has otherwise concrete

⁵⁸ Cf. Enz §160.

⁵⁹ It is very interesting to note that these three moments, namely, universality, particularity, and individuality, reflect within the Doctrine of the Concept the more general structure of the entire *Logic*, that is, Being, Essence, and Concept, which, at the same time, reflect the main structure of Kant's first critique: sensibility, understanding, and reason. Now, while Kant made of these faculties just an external and contingent relation (cf. *supra*, n. 30), Hegel conceives them in a dialectical way, insofar as the one emerges, and at the same time grounds, the other. In this way, Hegel's *Science of Logic* could be considered as a dialectical or rational reconstruction of Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*. Let us remind that Hegel himself calls his logic a "System der reinen Vernunft" (cf. WdL, 5/44).

content such as, for instance, humankind, the state, animal, etc., it remains an empty concept inasmuch as its determinateness is not the principle of its differentiation.⁶⁰

Despite the fact that 'any concept', no matter what its content is, has certainly a determinacy, it does not have this determinacy due to its abstract and immediate nature, but by virtue of its mediation or as a moment of the totality that is the Concept as such.⁶¹ The abstract, it could be said, is what it is as 'the tip of the iceberg,' for it is there, on the surface, just by the means of its own submerged mass. Abstractly conceived, the given, the immediate, is sheer determinateless, pure void lacking any possible meaning.⁶² Therefore, pure being, as indeterminate immediacy, expresses what any concept is insofar as it is considered only by itself, abstractly or as an immediate, i.e. excluding any possible other.

This exclusion however, is just an apparent exclusion, because, precisely insofar as the abstract singular has in fact a content (it is always this or that), its own mediation and negativity is implicitly working as from the bottom or from the darkness.⁶³ The truth of being, the abstract singularity or immediacy, is thus the Concept, the self-sublation or manifestation of the constitutive negativity and mediation of being, the going-into-itself of being⁶⁴ or the self-concretizing movement of what is abstractly immediate, the making for-itself (*für sich*) what being or the immediate was only in-itself (*an sich*). In other words, the Concept is being-in-and-

⁶⁰ WdL, 6/285.

⁶¹ Cf. Enz §42 Z1; WdL, 5/29, 79, 6/264: "The demonstrated absoluteness of the concept as against the material of experience and, more exactly, the categorial and the reflective determinations of it, consists in this, that as this material appears *outside* and *before* the concept, it has no *truth* but that it has it only in its ideality or in its identity with the concept."

⁶² Cf. Enz §13 A: "Taken formally, and put *side by side* with the particular, the universal itself becomes something particular too. In dealing with the objects of ordinary life, this juxtaposition would automatically strike us as inappropriate and awkward; as if someone who wants fruit, for instance, were to reject cherries, pears, raisins, etc., because they are cherries, pears, raisins, but *not* fruit."

⁶³ This issue has been matter of a long-standing controversy since the last thirty years among the Anglophone analytic thinkers, especially since Wilfred Sellars's most influential work, *Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind* (1956). This work, which has directed his criticism against the so-called 'Myth of the Given', has opened a strong case for the rehabilitation and reconsideration of some Hegelian issues among analytic philosophers, initially very hostile, and even completely indifferent, to Hegel and the post-Kantian idealism in general. For a more detailed account on this topic see REDDING, P. **Analytic Philosophy and the Return of Hegelian Thought**. Cambridge, Mass.: Cambridge University Press, 2007. Cf. also MCDOWELL, J. Hegel and the Myth of the Given. In: Welsch, W. and Vieweg, K. (eds.). **Das Interesse des Denkens: Hegel aus heutiger Sicht**. München: Willen Fink Verlag, 2003, and HYLTON, P. Hegel and Analytic Philosophy. In: Beiser, F. **Cambridge Companion to Hegel**. Cambridge, Mass.: Cambridge University Press, 1993.

⁶⁴ Enz §84.

for-itself (*an-und-für-sich-Sein*),⁶⁵ or the self-sublation of the understanding into reason, the realm of the self-developing concept.

4. *The Rational Notion of the Thing-in-itself and the Renewal of Metaphysics*

Now, if we consider Kant's aforementioned arguments in the light of our previous results, we will see that from reason's standpoint (i.e. for Hegel), there is not such a hard gap, as Kant supposed, neither between intuition and concept, nor between the conditioned and the unconditioned. The first antithesis was for Kant the ground for the possibility of synthetic *a priori* judgments, i.e. universal and necessary knowledge of experience. It is worth noting that this very question for such a possibility already depends on an abstract presupposed distinction. In fact, inasmuch as intuitions are supposed to be completely thoughtless, neither universality nor necessity could ever emerge from them, giving rise thus to our question: how is possible an *a priori* knowledge of experience? Kant's answer was, as we know: because we find in experience what 'we' have already posited in it. In other words, Kant admits that everything *a priori* is ideal, posited by the transcendental subjectivity itself.

But for Hegel, there is no need for such a conclusion. Though he 'does' recognize, just like Kant, that the universal is not 'immediately' contained in perception,⁶⁶ this does not mean for him that this universality is only subjective, as Kant thought.⁶⁷ On the contrary, universality belongs also to the objects themselves.⁶⁸ The concept, the universal, is indeed that which grounds and determines what the immediate object is, its essence, so to say, or what the object is implicitly, *an*

⁶⁵ Cf. Enz §238: "*being*, which appears as abstract affirmation for the beginning as such, is on the contrary *negation*, *positedness*, mediatedness in general, and *presupposedness*."

⁶⁶ Cf. VGPh, 18/33, 20/335; Enz §§42 Z3, 246 Z: "If physics were based only on perceptions however, and perceptions were nothing but the evidence of the senses, the activity of a natural scientist would consist only of seeing, smelling, hearing etc., so that animals would also be physicists."

⁶⁷ This point has been also highlighted, though in a somewhat different way, by John McDowell, who says: "Kant's Deduction points towards a proper idealism, which would be achieved by overcoming the limits of Kant's of apperceptive spontaneity into the territory of the Aesthetic" (**Having the World in View**. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2009, p. 85).

⁶⁸ Hegel points out in this context to Schelling's image of nature as "petrified intelligence" (cf. Enz §§24 Z1, 247 Z; on Schelling's expression see SW, 4/546), and to the Greek notions of Logos and Nous (cf. Enz §24 Z1, WdL, 5/30, 43; VGPh, 12/23). Cf. also Enz §§41 Z2, 42 Z3, 246 Z: "This universality of things is not something subjective and belonging to us; it is, rather, the noumenon as opposed to the transient phenomenon, the truth, objectivity, and actual being of the things themselves. It resembles the platonic ideas, which do not have their being somewhere in the beyond, but which exist in individual things as substantial genera."

sich. Knowledge 'does' starts from the immediate, from perception,⁶⁹ but it does not finish there, and Kant was completely right here. We must advance in fact to the universal, to the concept, or as Michael Rosen has put it, "from *Vorstellung* to Thought."⁷⁰ However, this thought is for Hegel, unlike Kant, contained in the very immediate things. We just have to think them over (*nachdenken*), says Hegel, in order to grasp their immanent thought-determinations as what is universal in them,⁷¹ namely, relations to other objects, universal laws, and kinds.⁷² That is why Hegel states that there is only 'one' thinking throughout all human activity.⁷³ Feelings, intuitions,

⁶⁹ Cf. Enz §§1, 8; LHPH, 3/172; WdL, 6/259: "Philosophy assumes indeed that the stages of feeling, intuition, sense consciousness, and so forth, are prior to the understanding, for they are the conditions of the genesis of the latter, but they are conditions only in the sense that the concept results from *their dialectic* and *their nothingness* and not because it is conditioned by their *reality (Realität)*." Cf. also MCDOWELL. **Having the World in View**, p. 87 and my Hegel y la pluma del profesor Krug: La *Erfahrung* como principio del movimiento lógico. In: Ferreiro, H., Hoffmann, T. S., and Bavaresco, A. (eds.). **Los aportes del itinerario intelectual de Kant a Hegel: Comunicaciones del I Congreso Germano-Latinoamericano sobre la Filosofía de Hegel**. Porto Alegre: Editoria Fi-edipUCRS, 2014, pp. 25-44.

⁷⁰ Cf. ROSEN, M. From *Vorstellung* to Thought: Is a 'Non-Metaphysical View of Hegel Possible? In Henrich, D. and Hortsman, R.-P. (eds.). **Stuttgarter Hegel Kongreß 1987**. Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1988. See also his **Hegel's Dialectic and its Criticism**. Cambridge, Mass.: Cambridge University Press, 1982, pp. 57 ff.

⁷¹ Cf. Enz §§ 5, 12 A: "thinking is in fact essentially the negation of something immediately given"; cf. also WdL, 5/25-6, 43, 6/255, 262; Enz §§19 Z2, 24 A, 50 A, 246 Z: "In the second relation of things to us, they either acquire the determination of universality for us, or we transform them into something universal. The more thought predominates in ordinary perceptiveness, so much the more does the naturalness, individuality, and immediacy of things vanish away (...) By thinking things, we transform them into something universal." Hegel even brings forth here an expression very similar to that famous pseudo Baconian claim on the torture of nature. "Proteus—he says—will only be compelled into telling the truth if he is roughly handled, and we are not content with sensuous appearance." (Enz §246 Z)

⁷² This objectivity of thought entails a great advantage for Hegel over Kant. Since, for the latter, we only know what 'we' have posited in things, we can only know of nature *a priori*, i.e. universally and necessarily, what nature is as such, in general, insofar as it has been constituted according to the general determinations of the *a priori* element of perception: space and time. As Kant's third *Critique* shows, the problem raises regarding particular and empirical laws of nature, and kinds, since they do not seem to be fully reducible or explainable by means of mere space-time determinations. That is why Kant says: "I assert, however, that in any special doctrine of nature there can be only as much proper science as there is mathematics therein" (MFNS, 4/470). The systematic unity of nature, the law-governed character of all natural products, must be conceived, in Kant's view, as a regulative principle or a 'subjective' maxim of our knowledge, but not as if nature were really systematically ordered by itself. Of course, the objectivity of thought prevents Hegel from such a problem. On this issue see WESTPHAL, K. **Hegel's Epistemological Realism**. Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1989, Ch. 10; STERN, R. **Hegel, Kant and the Structure of the Object**. London/New York: Routledge, 1990, p. 110, and by the same author **Hegelian Metaphysics**. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009, p. 28; see specially KREINES, J. *Between the Bounds of Experience*, pp. 316 ff. All of these authors have rightly emphasized the objective reality of universal natural laws and kinds and the enormous significance this has for our understanding of Hegel's metaphysics. However, the neo-Aristotelian reading they support could too easily lead us to conceive a too static, a too hard, or anti-evolutionist notion, so to say, of natural laws and kinds in Hegel. I think it is very important to stress that these laws and kinds, since they are as much finite and conditioned as the very objects they rule, are themselves necessarily submitted to change and transformation (cf. LHPH, 3/177).

⁷³ Cf. Enz §2. See also WdL, 5/20, 25, 29-30, 44.

images, purposes, duties, i.e. *Vorstellungen* in general, “can be regarded as *metaphors* of thoughts and concepts.”⁷⁴ To think is to render that unique objective thinking explicit.⁷⁵

Now, since thought-determinations do not lie anymore only within subjectivity, but also within the object itself, and since, accordingly, the cognitive act consists now in bringing to light or making explicit what the immediate object is *an sich* or implicitly, what we know could not be said anymore to be mere *phenomena*, the objects ‘as they appear to us’, as Kant pretended, but rather what they are ‘in themselves’. This objective grounding activity of thought is that which sets the difference between Kant’s ‘subjective idealism’⁷⁶ and Hegel’s ‘absolute’ idealism.⁷⁷

In this way we have been led to Kant’s second argument. Let’s recall that its starting point consisted of presupposing that the empirical objects we know are mind-independent things, objects containing thought-determinations within themselves. But Kant thought, as we already saw, that once we made of them such things-in-themselves, we are ‘also’ immediately lead to posit the unconditioned as the ultimate ground of the conditioned and finite objects of experience. And insofar as Kant has posed this unconditioned (and accordingly the conditioned as well) in the abstract terms of the understanding, i.e. making each of these opposites self-subsisting beings, he concluded that such a unity of these two opposites is nothing but a sheer contradiction, and therefore, what we thought was a thing-in-itself, actually was not. In this way, the true Kantian thing-in-itself is nothing but the unconditioned insofar as it cannot be known by us, setting thus an absolute limit, an undeniable restriction to the range of our knowledge.

But if we set aside the understanding’s demand for abstract identity, if we stand rather in reason’s standpoint, as Hegel does, we will see that contradiction should not be rejected at all,⁷⁸

⁷⁴ Enz §3 A; cf. also Enz §20 A; WdL, 5/26.

⁷⁵ Hegel’s immanent grounding of the immediate does not mean a rationalization of the ‘actual’, as his famous assertion that “everything actual is rational” has led many interpreters to believe, among which we find, maybe as the most paradigmatic case, Karl Popper and his aggressive case against Hegel’s supposed apology for the conservative Prussian state (cf. the chapter 12 of the second volume of his *The Open Society and his Enemies*). On the contrary, it must be strongly emphasized that in the elevation from the immediate to its immanent conceptual determinacy, the former does not remain just as it was at the beginning, but, as we have seen, is transformed into a moment, or it is idealized. On this issue see the second part of Jon Stewart’s *The Hegel Myths and Legends* (1996).

⁷⁶ On this characterization of Kant’s philosophy as subjective see VGPh, 20/330; WdL, 5/173, 216, 6/135, 261, 407, 503; Enz §§42 Z3, 45 Z, 131 Z.

⁷⁷ Cf. Enz §45 Z.

⁷⁸ Antinomies or contradictions are for Hegel not only proper to the unconditioned, but also to absolutely everything, whether it is a thing, a concept, or an idea, since everything is at the same time determinate, finite, or what it is, and

because the true unconditioned, far from Kant's abstract and absolute notion thereof,⁷⁹ is nothing but the dialectical unity of the conditioned and the unconditioned, immediacy and mediation, being and thought, singularity and universality, intuition and concept, and so on.⁸⁰ The unconditioned could not be such an abstract being, because such a being excludes determinacy altogether, rendering thereby itself finite, non-unconditioned, precisely by means of its very opposition to the conditioned. The true unconditioned by contrast should be here, in this world,⁸¹ as self-differentiated, as the unity of itself and its other.⁸² But it is indeed this very thing-in-itself that was rejected by Kant because of what he considered its unresolved contradictions. The Kantian skepticism (and perhaps misology), grounded precisely in the understanding's despair, has been overcome by the understanding's own self-sublation and the emergence of speculative reason as the dialectical foundation of both thinking and reality.⁸³

It seems clear now that Hegel has no reason to disagree with this so Kantian claim: we cannot know the thing-in-itself. However, this is true only regarding the understanding's standpoint, i.e. insofar as it is thought of as an abstract self-subsisting being lacking finitude or determinacy altogether. But Hegel's unconditioned—or Absolute, as he also calls it—is not Kant's, that 'other'-wordly unconditioned of the understanding. His, on the contrary, as the unconditioned of reason, is the 'this'-wordly self-determining and self-finitizing living concept. He completely rejects hence the unconditioned such as it was conceived by Kant, 'but not the unconditioned as such'.

Hegel undoubtedly intended to surpass Kant's restriction, that is, to know things as they are in themselves. But nevertheless, Hegel says, "something better than an abstraction should be

what it is not. That is the reason why Hegel reproaches Kant for having found only four antinomies (cf. *Enz* §48 A; *WdL*, 5/217).

⁷⁹ Cf. *LHPH*, 3/237; *VGPh*, 20/352, 381; *Enz* §§44 A, 45 Z; *WdL*, 5/26, 29, 130, 6/135.

⁸⁰ Cf. *WdL*, 6/258: "The *concept* is *as such* not yet complete, (...) it must rather be raised to the idea which alone is the unity of the concept and reality (*Realität*)."⁸¹ The need for the reconciliation of Kant's dualisms, and specially that of intuition and concept, was already clearly present in the young Hegel. The very beginning of his 1802/3 *System of Ethical Life* says: "Knowledge of the Idea of the absolute ethical order depends entirely on the establishment of perfect adequacy between intuition and concept, because the Idea is nothing other than the identity of the two."⁸² (Trans. T. M. Knox and H. S. Harris. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1979, pp. 99-100)

⁸¹ Cf. *Enz* §§6, 24 Z3, 213 A.

⁸² Cf. *Enz* §§45 Z, 52 Z, 82 Z.

⁸³ Cf. *Enz* §11 A.

understood by in «itself» [*Ansich*], namely, what something is in its concept,”⁸⁴ that is to say, the universal as contained within the particular, or the unity of immediacy and mediation.⁸⁵ Hegel's oft-misunderstood Absolute is not therefore a super mind, a ‘cosmic spirit’, as Charles Taylor puts it,⁸⁶ flying and ruling over the world; the absolute is not the totality of the real neither, the whole as such, nor the religious Almighty or the divine Creator of the world.⁸⁷ On the contrary, it is the finite as a necessarily self-sublating being, the immanent negative force of the world (and this world itself) by means of which it is alive, full of movement and change; it is the self-determining infinity or, what is the same, the self-sublating finitude, the immediate singularity as immanently grounded by universality, by thought.⁸⁸

We have no more reasons therefore to keep talking about any unknowable beyond, or about a thoughtless being restricting our knowledge. Hegel has removed this Kantian restriction, he has established knowledge of things in themselves as the immanent and rationally cognizable law-governed-nature of things, but precisely by rejecting the whole idea of things-in-themselves conceived as the abstract and other-wordly unconditioned of the understanding.

5. Conclusion

Much has been said about Hegel's philosophy and its relation to metaphysics. Those advocates of the traditional or metaphysical interpretation have seen Hegel's project as a relapse into pre-critical metaphysics, as pretending knowing of that which was expressly forbidden by Kant. The opposite reading has emerged in recent times, some twenty years ago. According to

⁸⁴ WdL, 5/130 (translation slightly modified).

⁸⁵ Cf. Enz §246 Z.

⁸⁶ Cf. TAYLOR. *Hegel*, p. 87.

⁸⁷ This position has been supported, among others, by Michael Rosen, who even regards Hegel as a quasi-Neo-Platonic thinker (cf. *Hegel's Dialectic and its Criticism*, pp. 84, 86).

⁸⁸ Cf. WdL, 6/79-80: “In customary inference, the *being* of the finite appears to be the ground of the absolute; because the finite *is*, the absolute *is*. But the truth is that the absolute *is* because the finite *is* the immanently self-contradictory opposition, because it *is not*. In the former meaning, the conclusion is that «the *being* of the finite is the being of the absolute»; but in the latter, that «the *non-being* of the finite is the being of the absolute.»” Cf. also Enz §42 Z1. Because the Absolute is the way in which everything finite is, its immanent life and movement, Hegel calls it “method” (cf. WdL, 6/551; Enz §243).

this view, Hegel has nothing to do with metaphysics, but has remained on the contrary within the epistemological limits set by Kant's critique. There are of course textual grounds for supporting both interpretations. But, as Hegel says, following Paul the Apostle, "the written law brings death, but the Spirit gives life."⁸⁹ As expected from Hegel's dialectical philosophy, the truth should reside in some kind of middle position, unifying thus both extremes. This has been the guide for this work, and, we expect, also our result.

A brief sketch of the main stages of reason's historical emergence and development could be expressed as follows.⁹⁰ The supporters of the former metaphysics have pretended to achieve knowledge of the world such as it is in itself, and this of course was for Hegel a great insight.⁹¹ The world was thought here as a mind-independent thing traversed by thought-determinations; it was for them thinkable, cognizable. Thought was here nothing but objective thought, *Lógos*, *Noús*. However, insofar as this metaphysics presupposed, i.e. made an uncritical and non-free use of a finite or dogmatic set of categories, namely the categories as considered by the understanding, the world as such, the unconditioned and substantialized 'thing'-in-itself, became necessarily an impossible *Jenseits*. For whenever thought tried to think of this unconditioned, or to apply to it its finite determinations, the unconditioned itself became accordingly something finite and conditioned, thus giving rise to the exactly opposite assertion, and hence to "a battlefield of endless controversies,"⁹² as Kant himself describes metaphysics.

Modern philosophy, and very especially Kant's philosophy, is the immanent consciousness of this contradiction, it is metaphysics' self-negation. Its main attempt was to free thought from its presupposed pretensions, submitting this thought (metaphysics itself) to criticism, to the "tribunal of pure reason."⁹³ Kant has undertaken a critical examination of thinking, analyzing its claims and pretensions, and this, says Hegel, was also a great and necessary step forward.⁹⁴ The result was: thoughts are only 'our' thoughts, or we know only *phenomena*. The thing-in-itself had become only an unknowable beyond.

⁸⁹ 2 Cor. 3:6; see VGPh, 19/503.

⁹⁰ For Hegel's own account on this issue see WdL, 5/38 ff.; Enz §§26-78; VGPh, 20/61 ff.

⁹¹ In this sense, says Hegel, the former metaphysics has had a higher standpoint than the later critical philosophy (cf. WdL, 5/38; Enz §28).

⁹² KrV, Aviii.

⁹³ KrV, Bxii.

⁹⁴ Cf. WdL, 5/38-9.

But, on the other hand, Kant took for granted the content and truth of these old thought-determinations; he only criticized them in terms of the antithesis between subjectivity and objectivity, remaining thus within metaphysics itself, i.e. in conceiving finite (dogmatic) determinations as if they were the ultimate standpoint. That is why Hegel said that Kant just substituted the objective dogmatism—annihilating thereby the former metaphysics—for a subjective one.

It must be said, however, that Kant did recognize the understanding as limited and contradictory, and he reconciled these contradictions in many different and valuable ways: the transcendental unity of apperception, the beauty, organic beings, the good and God, among other topics. And Hegel gave these realizations high praise. But then, because he has presupposed the abstract and finite determinations of the understanding as an unmovable and fixed ground, he moved a step backwards and grasped this higher unity as a mere, though necessary, product of our mind. Therefore, he has not really sublated, according to Hegel, those limitations, and his philosophy has thus remained only a *Verstandesphilosophie*. The ultimate step outside *Verstand*, the final move towards *Vernunft*, was yet to be taken.

With Hegel, as we tried to show, the understanding finally became a moment of reason, and that very truth dismissed by Kant, the unity of thought and being, ceased to be a mere subjective and impossible dream. Kant's 'restricting' thing-in-itself, the thoughtless or non-conceptual unconditioned of the understanding, the uncognizable beyond, became, through Hegel's critique, just an abstract and one-sided moment of the speculative *Begriff*, namely, the immediate as immanently and implicitly mediated or conceptual, the 'non-restrictive' and this-worldly thing-in-itself of the rational metaphysics of absolute idealism.⁹⁵

The still uncritical speculative character of the naïve metaphysics has been completed by the critique of the understanding. Absolute idealism arises hence, like a phoenix, from the ashes of the older metaphysics of the understanding by the very critical impulse gave by Kant's transcendental philosophy. Since Hegel has rejected the former metaphysics, his project is undoubtedly non-metaphysical. But insofar as he, by means of a radical critique of the

⁹⁵ As Brady Bowman puts it: "Speculative philosophy is a systematic critique and overcoming of traditional ontological (categorical) thought in service of an alternative, revisionary metaphysics Hegel calls 'speculative science.'" (**Hegel and the Metaphysics of Absolute Negativity**. Cambridge, Mass.: Cambridge University Press, 2013, p. 7)

understanding, has sublated even Kant's metaphysical remains, and therefore surpassed Kant's restriction as well, he has thus paved the way to a non-restricted knowledge, to the knowledge of the world as it is in itself; and this should be called, undoubtedly, metaphysics. But this is now a 'non-metaphysical metaphysics', a kind of knowledge grounded on a renewed and rational notion of being and reality. Hegel's critique of Kant should be viewed then as a radicalization of Kant's own incomplete critical project, or as the sublation of the transcendental philosophy.

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