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Metaphysik nach Kant?

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From *Vorstellung* to Thought: Is a "Non-Metaphysical" view of Hegel possible?

Is Hegel a metaphysician? The question might seem absurd — if not Hegel, who? "Logic, therefore, coincides with metaphysics, the science of things grasped in Thought", he writes in the *Encyclopaedia*¹. What could be clearer than that? But it all depends, of course, on what one means by "metaphysics", and that, as philosophers know, can be practically anything. For a term which entered philosophy by the back door, "metaphysics" has turned out to be an exceptionally elusive as well as tenacious house-guest.

In this paper I shall describe and criticize an interpretation of Hegel (or, to be more accurate, a family of interpretations) which has been proposed in the light of two related conceptions of metaphysics.

The first of these is Kant's. No interpretation of Hegel can ignore the degree to which Hegel's system was developed in the shadow of the Critical Philosophy. But this is not to say that Hegelianism simply represents the continuation of the Copernican Revolution by other means. I shall argue that there is an important sense in which Hegel's philosophy constitutes a return to a pre-Kantian ideal of philosophical knowledge, albeit one which is informed in important respects by the legacy of the Kantian system. The second is the criticism of metaphysics mounted by the analytical philosophers of language. It was this critique which gave the specific impetus to the family of interpretations which I call "non-metaphysical"²; although, as we shall see, it is the Kantian conception of metaphysics on which the "non-metaphysical" strategy draws most heavily.

The Kantian and the analytical criticisms of metaphysics are related.

¹ G. W. F. Hegel, *Enzyklopädie der Philosophischen Wissenschaften*, edited by E. Moldenhauer and K.-M. Michel (Frankfurt a. M.: Suhrkamp, 1973), para. 24, my translation.

² The name is Klaus Hartmann's. (See K. Hartmann, "Hegel: a Non-Metaphysical View", in A. MacIntyre (ed.), *Hegel: a Collection of Critical Essays* (Notre Dame: U. of Notre Dame Press, 1976), pp. 101–25.)

But there are important differences between them: most significantly, the fact that Kantianism contains within itself the promise of a more positive attitude towards metaphysics. While W. H. Walsh was verily right to call the *Kritik der reinen Vernunft* "the most thorough and devastating of all anti-metaphysical writings"³, it should be remembered that the function of the *Kritik* is, as Kant says, propaedeutic, to clear the ground for "the science which exhibits in its systematic connection the whole body... of philosophical knowledge arising out of pure reason, and which is entitled metaphysics" (B 869)⁴. Contrast this with the famous dismissal of metaphysics by A. J. Ayer in *Language, Truth and Logic*:

Our charge against the metaphysician is not that he attempts to employ the understanding in a field where it cannot profitably venture, but that he produces sentences which fail to conform to the conditions under which alone a sentence can be literally significant.⁵

According to Ayer, all metaphysical propositions, without exception, violate the "criterion of significance", by which to know the meaning of a factual proposition is to know the means of verifying it (p. 41). There are, in fact, two ways in which Kant's view of metaphysics is less destructive than this: in his attitude towards traditional metaphysics and in the "post-Critical" alternative he proposes to it. Traditional metaphysics does indeed, Kant charges, "venture with speculative reason beyond the limits of experience" (Bxxiv); it believes itself to be dealing with a domain of supersensible objects whose nature is discoverable by purely conceptual investigation, despite the fact that, as Kant says, "all attempts to extend our knowledge of objects by establishing something in regard to them *a priori*, by means of concepts, have ended in failure" (Bxvi). The analytic method is "useless" for the purposes of metaphysics, Kant says, "since it merely shows what is contained in its concepts" (B 23) rather than making the genuine contribution to the extension of our *a priori* knowledge which is required. In contrast to this, "metaphysics consists, at least in *intention*, entirely of *a priori* synthetic propositions" (B 18).

The Kantian objection to traditional metaphysics focuses, then, on its method — the assumption that it is possible, purely analytically, to gain substantive knowledge beyond the limits set by experience. Yet this still holds the promise of a positive alternative: the possibility of meta-

³ W. H. Walsh, *Metaphysics* (London: Hutchinson, 1963), p. 38.

⁴ I. Kant, *Kritik der reinen Vernunft*, translated by N. Kemp Smith (London: Macmillan, 1933).

⁵ A. J. Ayer, *Language, Truth and Logic*, Second Edition (London: Gollancz, 1946), p. 35.

physics based on a method for the discovery of synthetic *a priori* propositions *other than* by rational inspection of the necessary properties of objects outside space and time. Kantian metaphysics is not analytic but transcendental: concerned "not so much with objects as with the mode of our knowledge of objects in so far as this is to be possible *a priori*" (B 25). It is to explain both "how there can be knowledge *a priori*, and, in addition, to furnish satisfactory proofs of the laws which form the *a priori* basis of nature" (Bxix).

This contrast between Kant and the verificationists is important for my purposes and it requires particular emphasis for it has become somewhat obscured in recent Anglo-American Kant interpretation, dominated, as it has been, by P. F. Strawson's brilliant and path-breaking *The Bounds of Sense*.⁶ Strawson's reading of the *Kritik der reinen Vernunft* takes as its point of departure what he calls Kant's "principle of significance". This, he says, is "the principle that there can be no legitimate, or even meaningful, employment of ideas or concepts which does not relate them to empirical or experiential conditions of their application" (p. 16). It is the principle of significance which, according to Strawson, entails "Kant's complete repudiation of transcendent metaphysics" (p. 16). The echo of Ayer's "criterion of significance" is deliberate: as Strawson puts it: "In his espousal of the principle of significance ... Kant is close to the tradition of classical empiricism ... which has probably, at least in England, received its clearest modern expression in the writings of A. J. Ayer" (p. 18).

What is potentially misleading in Strawson's interpretation is the way in which it blurs the distinction between what it is to use a concept to form significant beliefs and what it is to use it to make judgements and yield knowledge. The verificationist, of course, argues that there is no such distinction: to know the meaning of a term is just to know the contribution it makes to determining the truth of an utterance of which it forms part. But, for Kant, the two are not equivalent. Kant does indeed believe that concepts can only yield knowledge in relation to empirical intuitions, but this is *not* because, in the absence of such intuitions, they are meaningless. Kant's criticism of transcendent metaphysics depends, I shall argue, on a theory of judgement, not a theory of meaning — a point which has a substantial bearing on how we should understand his relationship to Hegel.

As regards meaning, it is — ironically, perhaps — the very closeness of Kant's view of the mind to the classical empiricism of Locke, Berkeley and Hume which separates him from the modern empiricist, Ayer.

⁶ P. F. Strawson: *The Bounds of Sense* (London: Methuen, 1966).

According to empiricism in its basic form, beliefs or judgements were combinations of ideas which took their intelligibility from the simple ideas out of which they were formed. Meaning was, in essence, a matter of possessing the ideas with which words were associated.

The empiricists used the term "idea" generically — not in the Platonic sense of an ideal archetype but to denote whatever formed the immediate object of consciousness. Kant, however, as is well known, disputed this usage most vigorously:

I beseech those who have the interests of philosophy at heart ... that ... they be careful to preserve the expression "idea" [*Idee*] in its original meaning, that it may not become one of those expressions which are commonly used to indicate any and every species of *Vorstellung*, in a happy-go-lucky confusion, to the consequent detriment of science. (B 376)

But, while Kant rejects the empiricist terminology, his own conception of the mind and its contents has recognisably empiricist origins. *Vorstellung*, the word Kant uses in the *Kritik der reinen Vernunft* to designate mental contents in general, was, it should be noted, the original word used for "idea" in German translations of the British Empiricists, and though, in deference to Kant's strictures noted above, it has been translated back into English as "representation", the affinity between Kantian *Vorstellung* and empiricist "idea" remains close. *Vorstellungen* are, quite literally, whatever are "placed before" the mind; there is no gap between *having* a *Vorstellung* and understanding it.

Vorstellungen are classified according to an ascending hierarchy. At the lowest level are sensations and intuitions; above them come concepts, either pure or empirical; finally, Kant says, there are ideas proper, "concepts of reason" which are "formed from [pure concepts] and transcending the possibility of experience" (B 377).

It is in his account of the mutual relations between *Vorstellungen* that Kant most clearly parts company with the empiricists. Where they had tended to treat judgements as mere complexes of ideas, Kant emphasizes the judgement's fundamentally asymmetric structure. Judgements, Kant says, are "functions of unity among our *Vorstellungen*" (B 93); what gives them this unity are *concepts* — *Vorstellungen* themselves, but *Vorstellungen* of a particular kind. Concepts do not relate immediately to an object but "to some other *Vorstellung* of it, be that *Vorstellung* an intuition or itself a concept" (B 93). In judgements, intuitions are not simply associated with concepts; they are "thought through" them. Neither intuitions nor concepts alone can determine an object, from which it follows that, for knowledge (which Kant defines as "the determinate relation of given *Vorstellungen* to an object" [B 157]) both are required:

We cannot think an object save through categories; we cannot *know* an object so thought save through intuitions corresponding to those concepts (B 165).

Thus it can be seen that what lies behind Kant's rejection of transcendent metaphysics is not a principle of significance (as to what can be meaningfully thought) but a principle of judgement: the dual requirements of the condition for knowledge exclude the possibility of purely conceptual knowledge beyond the scope — at least, potentially — of a corresponding intuition. The traditional metaphysician violates this principle, but that is not to say that his claims are unintelligible. In fact, Kant believes, metaphysical discourse quite properly directs itself to a domain of transcendent objects — though these are far fewer in number than once populating Plato's realm of ideas. *God, freedom and immortality* represent, as it were, the rational kernel of metaphysics' subject-matter. It is not the content of traditional metaphysics which disqualifies it but its method: the attempt to gain knowledge analytically rather than synthetically.

Positively, then, metaphysics, like all attempts to extend our knowledge, must consist of synthetic propositions. But that is not to say that, for Kant, all synthetic *a priori* propositions are metaphysical. In the view of philosophy developed in the *Kritik der reinen Vernunft* synthetic *a priori* propositions figure in two ways. First, there are the prospective principles of that future metaphysics to which the Critical Philosophy provides the "prolegomena". But there is, too, what Kant takes to be the already existing body of *a priori* knowledge: mathematics and "pure science of nature". Without themselves being metaphysical (though the dividing line between metaphysics and pure science of nature, in particular, is not at all clear) the latter have an important philosophical function. The fact that such propositions exist invites the central philosophical question: how are synthetic *a priori* propositions possible?, the answer to which, it is supposed, will illuminate not just their own nature but will establish the possibility of metaphysics in general. Once again, the answer derives from Kant's doctrine of judgement: since knowledge requires both intuitions and concepts, synthetic *a priori* knowledge is possible only in relation to the "formal conditions of *a priori* intuition" (B 197); it is established "not ... directly from concepts alone, but always only indirectly through relation of these concepts to something altogether contingent, namely, *possible experience*" (B 765).

Thus it is the principle of judgement which both disqualifies the analytic method of traditional metaphysics and entails that, if metaphysics is to be possible, it must develop its propositions in relation to some "third thing" — possible experience. But the principle of judgement is not a principle of significance: the propositions of traditional metaphysics

sics are intelligible by virtue of the *Vorstellungen* with which their contents — God, freedom and immortality — are associated.

From the point of view of the interpretation of Hegel, then, Kantianism offers the prospect of a moderate response to the verificationist onslaught. It may be possible to deflect the verificationist attack by showing that Hegel's philosophy can meet at least Kantianism's more limited standards and it is this strategy which is to be found in the work which initiated the "non-metaphysical" approach to the reading of Hegel, J. N. Findlay's *Hegel: a Re-examination*.⁷ As its title makes clear, Findlay's book set out to reopen a case which the vast majority of Anglo-Saxon philosophers took to have been long since settled. Writing with the verificationist critique of metaphysics very much in mind — Findlay acknowledges the assistance of his London colleague Ayer in the composition of his book — Findlay explicitly rejects the view of Hegel as a metaphysician:

... despite much opinion to the contrary, Hegel's philosophy is one of the most anti-metaphysical of philosophical systems, one that remains most within the pale of ordinary experience, and which accords no place to entities or properties lying beyond that experience or to facts undiscernable by ordinary methods of investigation (p. 340).

For Findlay, Hegel — though far from being a logical positivist — neither deals with objects beyond the range of experience nor employs a relentlessly *a priori* method, "seeking to deduce the detail of nature and history from the relationship of abstract concepts" (p. 23). It should be made clear, however, that there is an important sense in which Findlay's view of Hegel is not Kantian. Findlay rejects what might seem to be a temptation: to read Hegel's philosophy as an extension of transcendent idealism. To interpret Hegel's Absolute Idealism along these lines would be to see Hegel as taking Kant's claim that our knowledge of objects is confined to appearances a stage further. From this perspective, as Findlay writes, "the main merit of Hegel lay in thoroughly liquidating the 'transcendental object' or 'thing in itself' of Kant, the thing as it exists *apart* from thought or consciousness" (p. 22). Hence Kant's contention that the conditions of the possibility of experience are the conditions of the possibility of the objects of experience becomes the claim that they are the conditions of the possibility of reality *schlechthin*. But, for Findlay, "This 'objective idealism' is more the position of Hegel's predecessors than of Hegel himself: to attribute it to him is to ignore ... the extent to which for him 'the Idea' is objective after the manner of Plato and Aristotle and not after the manner of Kant." (p. 22)

The rejection of this "neo-Kantian" way of understanding Hegel

7 J. N. Findlay, *Hegel: a Re-examination* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1958).

leaves the "non-metaphysical" interpreter with a problem, however: if Hegel's method is *neither* that of describing a supra-empirical, Absolute reality by *a priori* means, *nor* that of identifying reality's necessary structure by reflecting on the conditions of the possibility of experience of it, how is it to be understood? Findlay's answer is highly significant, for the outlines of the strategy he adopts were to become standard in the *revival* of interest in Hegel which followed the publication of his book.

On Findlay's view, Hegel's philosophy is, above all, a *reconstruction* of the material it deals with: an attempt to discern structure in — not impose it on — external reality. It is in this sense that Findlay refers to "Hegel's genuine empiricism and freedom from *a priori* presuppositions" (p. 24). It is worth noting three consequences of Findlay's approach.

First, and most important, is the relation between Hegel's conceptual structure and the material with which it is intended to deal. "As regards the application of Hegel's peculiar method to the facts of nature and history, it is plain", Findlay believes, "that the fit is loose and intended to be loose" (p. 23).

From which it follows that the "abstract argument" of the Dialectic is to be understood in a less rigorous way than is common. Interpreters are wrong, Findlay believes, to see in Hegel's procedures for the connection and transition between thought-determinations a form of deductive necessity:

They are rather precepts which urge us to pass from notions in which some principle is latent, to other notions in which the same principle will become manifest. (p. 23)

Finally, Findlay rejects the idea that the celebrated motive power of the Hegelian method — the notion of contradiction — should be interpreted with full logical force. Here, Findlay believes, Hegel himself is analytic tradition that one consequence of Findlay's defence of Hegel may *say* in regard to the presence of contradictions in thought and reality" his use of the term does not amount to the logical absurdity of asserting both A and not-A:

By the presence of "contradictions" in thought and reality, Hegel plainly means the presence of opposed, antithetical *tendencies*. (p. 77)

From all of this it will be apparent to philosophers from outside the analytic tradition that one consequence of Findlay's defence of Hegel is to draw him into close proximity to another avowedly non-metaphysical conception of philosophy: the hermeneutic conception.⁸ But I shall

⁸ For hermeneutic philosophy of the kind which has been dominant within German philosophy for the last thirty years the dividing line between metaphysical and

not pursue this point here, for my concern is not to produce a detailed typology of readings of Hegel but with the broad structures which certain of them have in common.

As I see it, "non-metaphysical" interpretations of Hegel share two essential features. First, as regards the content of Hegel's system, the "non-metaphysical" interpretation claims that Hegel does not attempt to deal with objects beyond the range of sensible experience. Second, as regards its method, the "non-metaphysical" interpretation denies that Hegel's philosophy is *a priori* in the sense in which Kant attacks dogmatic metaphysics for being *a priori*istic.

It is my contention that, while "non-metaphysical" interpretations of Hegel have certainly been valuable in highlighting the issues surrounding Hegel's method, the picture that they give of Hegel's philosophy is seriously misleading. In the remainder of this paper, I shall argue that — whether one likes it or not — Hegel's speculative philosophy plainly corresponds in its central aspects to what, from the Kantian point of view, would be counted as "dogmatic metaphysics". But Hegel is not inconsistent. While the Kantian critique of dogmatic metaphysics depends on Kant's theory of judgement, Hegel holds a view of judgement which, while sharing Kant's opposition to empiricism, differs from him at crucial points. It is this which underpins Hegel's much more ambitious assessment of the possibility of philosophical cognition, both as regards its objects and its methods.

As we saw, for Kant the starting point for the possibility of metaphysics is the question: how are synthetic *a priori* propositions possible? The answer is both a condition for and a clue to philosophical knowledge: by understanding how those synthetic *a priori* propositions which, as a matter of fact, *do* exist are possible we will be in a position to develop the strictly philosophical synthetic *a priori* propositions which form the content of metaphysics. Thus philosophical knowledge is parallel to other forms of synthetic *a priori* knowledge but it is not derivative from or in competition with them. For Hegel, on the other hand, the sciences themselves contain an immanent deficiency — an inadequate

non-metaphysical philosophy is set not so much by the attempt to deal with objects beyond the reach of experience as by metaphysics' aspiration to be a *prima philosophia*: a source of presuppositionless and timeless valid truths. Because philosophy — like all fully linguistic thought — is a matter of interpretation, the hermeneutic philosophers believe, philosophy's results will be relative to the cultural material that it takes as its subject-matter. Only at the end of time would final truth be possible. The readings of Hegel which this conception of philosophy has stimulated — not least by Hans-Georg Gadamer himself — have a great deal in common, it seems to me, with the "non-metaphysical" approach described here.

quacy which moves us from the empirical sciences to philosophy. There are, in Hegel's view, two main defects in the methods of empirical science:

First, in this mode of science the universal which is contained in it — the species, etc. — is on its own account undetermined and does not relate autonomously [*für sich*] to the particular. Each is external and accidental to the other, as the particulars connected together are likewise mutually external and accidentally related. And further, its beginnings are in every case immediate elements, received data or presuppositions. In both these respects the form of necessity fails to get its due. (Enz. para. 9)

It is these defects — the lack of necessity in its connections and the contingent character of its starting-point — which provide the motivation for philosophy:

The empirical sciences, on the other hand, carry with them the impulse to vanquish that form in which the richness of their content is presented as something merely immediate and received — a merely mutually juxtaposed (and thus entirely accidental) multiplicity — and to raise this content to necessity. This impulse drags thought away from this form of universality and its innately (*an sich*) provided satisfaction and impels it into a development from its own self. The latter is, on the one hand, only an absorption of the content [of science] and the determinations it provides; on the other hand, it gives them the form of original Thought emerging only according to the necessity of the *Sache selbst*. (Enz. para. 12)

Philosophy, then, has a necessary function in fulfilling the cognitive aspirations of the empirical sciences. Indeed, Hegel goes so far as to say that:

Whatever truth there may be in the content of any discipline or science, it can only deserve the name if such truth has been engendered by philosophy.⁹

The empirical sciences provide data, it is true. But data, as such, are not the end of the story. Any account of the nature of reality — even one which sets out with wholly scientific intentions — which ends with a simple statement of empirical facts has a kind of explanatory inadequacy:

Philosophy, then, owing its own development to the empirical sciences, gives their content in return that most essential form, the freedom of Thought: an *a priori* character. These contents are now warranted as necessary instead of depending on the evidence of facts merely as found and experienced. The fact becomes a presentation and a copy [*Darstellung und Nachbildung*] of the original and entirely independent activity of Thought. (Enz. para. 12)

So, for Hegel, there is an overlap between philosophy and the empirical sciences in a way in which, for Kant, there is not. One might,

⁹ G. W. F. Hegel, *Phänomenologie des Geistes*, edited by J. Hoffmeister (Hamburg: Felix Meiner, 1952), p. 55, my translation.

perhaps, take this to support the "non-metaphysical" reading of Hegel: it is not, on this view, their material which separates the sciences from philosophy for Hegel but their form. But to say this is to address only one part of Hegel's claims for philosophy. Because philosophy is intended to take up material from the empirical sciences it does not follow that it is intended to deal *only* with that material — a point which Hegel makes quite clear:

However satisfying this [empirical] knowledge may be in its own field, there shows itself . . . another sphere of objects which it does not include, namely freedom, *Geist*, God . . . The reason is that these objects by their very content show at once that they are infinite. (Enz. para. 8)

This trio of freedom, *Geist* and God echoes, of course, Kant's three objects of transcendent metaphysics — God, freedom, and immortality (the reason behind Hegel's substitution of *Geist* for immortality would be well worth pursuing). For Hegel, it is, quite explicitly, part of the task of philosophy to "know absolute objects" (Enz. para. 10), not simply to *think* them — a task which collides with the "prejudice" (as Hegel calls it) that "the infinite cannot be grasped in concepts" (Enz. para. 9). Speculative philosophy is, then, just as much rational theology as it is rational sciences of nature:

To know God by means of reason is the highest task of Science. (Enz. para. 36)

Thus Hegel's conception of philosophy is more inclusive than Kant's in two directions: it extends, as it were, "downwards" to overlap with the material of the empirical sciences as well as "upwards" to include objects which, for Kant, were only to be thought, not known. The "non-metaphysical" interpretation of Hegel stresses the former but neglects (or weakens) the latter aspect of his work.

The contrast between Hegel and Kant is more marked still when it comes to their view of the status which philosophy seeks to give its subject-matter: to give the content of the empirical sciences "an *a priori* character", to "raise its content to necessity", as Hegel wishes, crosses the very dividing line which Kant has carefully drawn between *a priori* reflection and empirical knowledge. So it is not surprising or inconsistent to find Hegel taking the side of traditional metaphysics against Kant as regards the scope of *a priori* knowledge:

This [metaphysical system] regarded Thought-determinations as the fundamental determinations of things; in virtue of this presupposition — that that which is known as it is by being Thought — it stood at a higher level than the subsequent Critical Philosophy. (Enz. para. 28)

To appreciate why Hegel's attitude does not merely represent a return

to a pre-Kantian conception of philosophy, however, it is necessary to compare the two philosophers' conceptions of judgement.

For Kant, the alternative between analytic and synthetic judgements is set by whether "the predicate B belongs to the subject A, as something which is (covertly) contained in this concept A; or [whether] B lies outside the concept A, although it does indeed stand in connection with it" (B 10). It was the error of dogmatic metaphysics to imagine that it could arrive at substantive knowledge by the former route. While Hegel to a large extent concurs in Kant's characterization of the aims and aspirations of traditional metaphysics, his own criticism of its method is quite different:

... it should be noted that the procedure consisted in *attributing* predicates to the object to be known (e. g. God). That, however, is an external reflection on the object; for the determinations (predicates) are ready and at hand in my *Vorstellung* and are only attributed externally to the object. Whereas the true cognition of an object must be in such a fashion that the object determines itself from its own self rather than receiving its predicates externally. (Enz. para. 28)

On Hegel's view, traditional metaphysics does not simply mistake for analytic a task which is, in fact, synthetic: the conception of philosophical judgements as a matter of assigning predicate-terms to subjects, and, indeed, the very antithesis between analytic and synthetic method which it presupposes is out of place:

The method of absolute cognition is thus analytic. The absolute objectivity of the notion, whose certainty the method is, lies in finding the further determination of its initial universal in that universal alone. But it is equally *synthetic* to the extent that its object, determined immediately as a simple universal, shows itself as another by means of the determinacy which it has itself in its immediacy and universality. This relationship to something different, which it is in its own self, is, however, no longer what is meant by synthesis in finite cognition. The very fact of its analytical determination, that it is relationship *within* the notion, distinguishes it entirely from such synthesis.¹⁰

How can Hegel suppose that philosophical knowledge is of such a kind that "the object determines itself from its own self"? What is it to find "the further determination of its initial universal in that universal alone"?

Such things are certainly impossible so long as we think of mental life simply in terms of *Vorstellungen*. But for Hegel — and this is indeed his whole point — *Vorstellungen* are not the end of the story:

¹⁰ G. W. F. Hegel, *Wissenschaft der Logik*, edited by G. Lasson, 2 vols (Hamburg: Felix Meiner, 1934), II, p. 497, my translation.

The difference between *Vorstellung* and Thought is of special importance because philosophy may be said to do nothing but transform *Vorstellungen* into Thoughts. (Enz. para. 20)

Vorstellungen, Hegel says, represent "metaphors of Thoughts and notions" — metaphors which actually obscure their content:

From the fact that one has *Vorstellungen*, however, it does not follow that one knows their significance for Thought — the Thoughts and notions which belong to them. (Enz. para. 3)

There is a common prejudice, Hegel says, that philosophy is incomprehensible, paradoxical or mystical; so it will seem, indeed, so long as consciousness attempts to conceive the nature of Thought according to the received standards and limitations of *Vorstellung*:

It is commonly said by people that they do not know what to *think* in regard to a notion; in regard to a notion nothing is to be thought save the notion itself. But what lies behind this phrase, however, is a longing for an already known, familiar *Vorstellung*. It is as if in losing the mode of *Vorstellung* consciousness were having the ground cut away from under it on which it otherwise had a firm and familiar stance. (Enz. para. 3)

The classical example of consciousness in the mode of *Vorstellung* — or, rather, of a philosophical account of the nature of thought which represents it in *Vorstellung* terms — is, of course, empiricism, with its atomistic conception of the mind as a collection of particular ideas bound by the laws of association (the mental counterpart to the corpuscularian view of nature as particles of matter in motion). From Hegel's perspective, the Kantian theory of judgement represents a half-way house on the way from empiricism — it points towards, but does not attain, the nature of Thought. On the one hand, Kant, like the empiricists, seeks an exhaustive characterization of mental life in terms of *Vorstellungen*. On the other, judgement, for Kant, is more than a simple association of *Vorstellungen*. To judge objectively we must refer our intuitions to the "transcendental unity of apperception" which is "that unity through which all the manifold in an intuition is united in a concept of an object" (B 139). In such a judgement the predicate is neither "contained in" the subject-term (however we are supposed to think of that) nor is it something which is merely associated with it as part of what the empiricists called a "complex idea". For Hegel, the nature of this connection — the propositional link, as it has been called — is crucial. It reveals, he believes, the existence of a special kind of *innate* or *intrinsic* connectedness, quite different from the merely external view of judgement current in traditional logic, according to which, he says:

The subject is assumed as a fixed point to which, as their support, the predicates are affixed by a movement belonging to the knower, and which is not regarded as belonging to the fixed point itself. (*Phänomenologie des Geistes*, p. 23)

The very act of predication, however, Hegel claims, has a force which goes against this:

But, as the copula 'is' utters the predicate of the subject, this external subjective summing is set aside again and the judgement taken as a determination of the *object* itself . . . Of course, the determinations of individuality and universality, subject and predicate, are also distinct, but there remains no less the quite universal *fact* that every judgement expresses them as identical. The copula 'is' comes from the nature of the notion which is to be identical with itself in its externalization. (*Enz.* para. 166)

Thus, for Hegel, judgement has some of the features which are characteristic of analytic judgements — the predicate term is intrinsically related to the subject-term — while, at the same time, like the synthetic judgement, the predicate amplifies the subject's content.

Of course, not all propositions which are called "judgements" in the normal way of things would count as judgements in this full, strong sense. Nevertheless, it is this speculative ideal which connects "the system of pure reason, as the realm of the pure Thought" (*Wissenschaft der Logik*, I, p. 31) to the empirical sciences in such a way as to represent the fulfilment of their innate aspirations. Kant, according to Hegel, fails to follow through the consequences which this insight into the nature of synthesis has opened up:

This *original synthesis of apperception* is one of the most profound principles for speculative development; it contains the starting point for a true grasp of the nature of the notion and is completely opposed to that empty identity or abstract universality which is no synthesis in itself. The later exposition, however, hardly corresponds to this beginning. The very expression *synthesis* easily leads back to the *Vorstellung* of an external unity and mere combination of things which are intrinsically separate. Thereupon the Kantian philosophy came to a halt at the psychological image of the notion and regressed once more to the assertion of the permanent conditionedness of the notion by a manifold of intuition. (*Wissenschaft der Logik*, II, p. 277)

The empiricists, then, have a description of mental life based on *Vorstellung*; its central characteristic is the particularity and mutual isolation of its contents. Kant, who finds this account inadequate, attempts to remedy it by introducing new metaphors to capture the interconnectedness of mental contents: particulars are "contained in" universals; *Vorstellungen* are "thought through" one another by means of concepts. But these metaphors are themselves, Hegel charges, unsatisfactory: to think of a synthesis as if it were a "holding together" of diverse particulars obscures rather than elucidates the primary difficulty — how to

conceive an intrinsic relation between two heterogeneous kinds of mental item.

Kant has brought our conception of mental life, Hegel says, to the level of understanding: the level of an abstract kind of universality which remains essentially separate from the particular. Beyond this there lies the level of the notion:

Now the universal of the notion is not just a common feature which has its own subsistence in relation to the particular, but rather it is what is self-particularizing (specifying) and what in undimmed clarity remains at home in its other. (*Enz.* para. 163)

In a sense, what Hegel has done is to take the difficulty which he finds in Kant's theory and simply stand it on its head. If it is the case that, in considering universals as *abstractions from* or *containers for* particulars, we fail to do justice to the kind of connectedness inherent in judgement, then this shows that there is something fundamentally wrong with this whole metaphorical approach. And, if that is so, then the consequence may also be a liberating one: to show that, when it comes to the nature of Thought as such, we should not regard the claims made on its behalf as absurd or self-contradictory just because they clash with images drawn from the "finite realm".

The most important such claims is that the notion is "self-particularizing" — that genuine content is obtainable at the level of Thought so that "the object determines itself from its own self rather than receiving its predicates externally" (*Enz.* para. 28). If such judgements are indeed possible it opens the way for philosophy to provide speculative knowledge in the full sense: by following through the self-particularizing path of the notion in Thought to reveal a necessary structure of which the facts of nature are, as Hegel says, "a presentation and a copy" (*Enz.* para. 12). It is this doctrine which enables Hegel to be both a "relentless *a priorist*" and to hold that "the Idea' is objective after the manner of Plato and Aristotle and not after the manner of Kant"¹¹. So far from being opposed to one another, as Findlay believes, the two positions follow jointly, for Hegel, from the rejection of the Kantian account of the nature of concepts:

It is an inversion of things to assume that first there are objects, forming the content of our *Vorstellungen*, and that subsequently our subjective activity comes into play, forming concepts by the aforementioned operation of abstracting and colligating what is common to objects. The notion, rather, is that which truly comes first and things are what they are because of the activity of their intrinsic notion, revealing itself in them. This is apparent in our religious consciousness with the effect that

¹¹ J. N. Findlay, *Hegel: a Re-examination*, pp. 23, 22.

we say that God created the world out of nothing, or, to put it another way, the world emerged from the plenitude of the divine Thoughts and decrees. We acknowledge thereby that the Thought, and specifically the notion, is the infinite form — that free creative activity which can realize itself without the need for a material present outside itself. (*Enz.* para. 163)

Absolute Idealism, then, combines conceptual realism (the belief that concepts are part of the structure of reality) with a doctrine of pure speculative knowledge: the notion gives *a priori* Thought the capacity to generate content:

... the notion, insofar as it is not trivial, empty identity, has the different determinations in the moments of its negativity or of its absolute activity of determination; the content is nothing at all other than such determinations of the Absolute Form — posited by itself and therefore its appropriate content. (*Wissenschaft der Logik*, II, p. 231)

Such immanent development of content *a priori* is precisely what the Kantian critique of metaphysics denied: synthetic *a priori* knowledge can be established, Kant argues, "always only indirectly through relation of these concepts to something altogether contingent, namely *possible experience*" (B 765). For Hegel, however, there is no "third thing". While Kant sets a sharp dividing line between analytic and synthetic judgements, his own account of the transcendental unity of apperception — synthesis in an intrinsic sense — undermines, Hegel believes, that very distinction.

The path from this insight (if it is one) to the full ramifications of Hegel's system is, of course, long and complex and it is not my purpose to pursue it here. What I have shown, I believe, is that Hegel's speculative philosophy is radically opposed to Kantianism both in scope and methods. Nevertheless, when we come to examine the theory of judgement on which it is based, it is apparent that Hegel remains — albeit critically — in Kant's debt.