

The Need for a Science of Logic

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In these notes I discuss why Hegel deems his project in the *Science of Logic* necessary. One of the central interpretive issues is whether Hegel's project begs any important questions against Kant. We'll also look at the sense in which Hegel construes Kant's idealism as "subjective".

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Though there are many questions one might ask concerning Hegel's metaphysics and the project of the *Science of Logic*, certainly on immediate question concerns why it is necessary. Why do we need the *Logic*? Answering this question will help us understand not only Hegel's aims and method for his metaphysics, but also the extent to which the project can be considered a "post-critical" one.

1 Categorialism

Hegel, like Kant and Aristotle, is an advocate of *categorialism*, which is the claim that existence or being has a structure, and the categories delineate that structure. Hegel, also like Kant and Aristotle contends that this structure is *thinkable* and thus that the fundamental structure of reality is capturable in thought and ultimately knowable.

Given that we already have two categorialist accounts (and many others, such as Descartes, Locke, Leibniz, Wolff, and Fichte) why do we need a further one? Hegel's account has a negative and a positive aspect. The negative aspect consists of two criticisms concerning

their derivation. The first criticism concerns the way in which Kant and predecessors specify *which* concepts are fundamental, i.e. which divisions count as genuine *categories*. This element of Hegel's negative argument largely derives from criticisms made by Fichte with respect to Kant's account of which divisions or concepts are fundamental.

The second criticism concerns the ground or *origin* of the categories—from what do such divisions originate? Here Hegel is critical of the entire tradition in metaphysics that precedes him, though perhaps most especially of Kant and Fichte. The latter two, Hegel contends, derive the categories from subjective acts (even if necessary ones). This subjective origin of the categories renders any epistemic assurance of their validity beyond the mind impossible, resulting in a wholly subjective idealism.

Finally, Hegel's positive project consists in providing an account of the categories that articulates *which* concepts are fundamental, explains *why* they are fundamental, and does so in a manner that shows that such divisions are *also* reflected in reality. Hegel is thus advocating a wholly realist form of categorialism. There is structure to reality or being, and our (fundamental) concepts (at least in principle) correctly articulate that structure. In this sense there is an identity between thought and being. In what follows I primarily discuss the negative aspect of Hegel's position. We'll look further at the positive aspect in other notes.

2 Which Categories?

Putting aside, for the moment, the question of the basis from which the categories are derived, how do we know which of the divisions we might make with respect to being are the right *categorial* divisions, which is to say, the *fundamental* ones?

Kant derided Aristotle's answer to this question as “rhapsodic”. In Kant's estimation, Aristotle failed to provide a principled and a priori basis for *exhaustively* determining which are the fundamental concepts. As Kant notes, there are a variety of pure apriori concepts (e.g see his discussion of the “predicables” at A82/B108). So we need some account of which pure a priori concepts are fundamental to our cognition of objects. Kant thus wants an account that

has not arisen rhapsodically from a haphazard search for pure concepts, of the completeness of which one could never be certain, since one would only infer it through induction, without reflecting that in this way one would never see why just these and not other concepts should inhabit the pure understanding. (A81/B106-7)

Kant's charge is that the right account of the categories (whether worldly or conceptual) must also explain why just *these* categories, and not some others, are correct. Moreover, it must do so in a way that ensure that the characterization of the categories is complete or exhaustive.

Ironically, Hegel indicts Kant for a similar failing. Hegel acknowledges that Kant's account is not "rhapsodic", but he contends that it is similarly unsystematic insofar as it is "empirical" or "historical". That is, it fails to give an account of which categories there are that is both complete and requisitely fundamental. As Hegel puts it,

It is well known that the Kantian philosophy made it very easy for itself in locating the categories. The *I*, the unity of self-consciousness, is quite abstract and entirely indeterminate. How is one then to arrive at the *determinations* of the *I*, the categories? Fortunately, the *various forms of judgment* are already listed empirically in ordinary logic. Now to judge is to *think* a determinate object. The various forms of judgment that had already been enumerated thus provide the various *determinations of thought*. (EL §42A)

What could Hegel mean here by saying that the forms of judgment are "listed empirically"? After all, Kant is quite insistent that his procedure is *a priori*, even if it isn't at all clear exactly how each category is derived from judgment¹ In order that we may understand Hegel's charge it is best to see him as inquiring after the nature of "reflection" as Kant understands that activity, in the acquisition of the categories. On the one hand, if "reflection" just means taking up the historically received characterization of forms of judgment in logic and then connecting them with conceptual/categorical forms, Hegel's charge of empiricism is a charge of uncritical acceptance of a historical fact (i.e. the fact of a certain take on which categories there are). And indeed, this seems to be a not uncharitable way of reading Kant's claim that Aristotelian logic is a "secure science" and,

[that] from the earliest times logic has traveled this secure course can be seen from the fact that since the time of Aristotle it has not had to go a single step backwards, unless we count the abolition of a few dispensable subtleties or the more distinct determination of its presentation, which improvements belong more to the elegance than to the security of that science (Bviii)

On the other hand, if reflection is a kind of perceptual activity of the mind with respect to its acts of judging, how should we characterize that? It cannot be "observational" in the sense of an exercise of inner sense, for that would run afoul of the putatively intellectual

¹ See (Guyer 1993, 187) for one expression of bewilderment at Hegel's claim.

and a priori origin of the categories. Hegel's worry seems to be that the only other option left is that the activity through which the categories arise is a kind of intellectual "seeing" or "scrying" insofar as one pays attention to one's mental acts and then abstracts from them to form concepts. Kant strongly encourages this quasi-perceptual aspect of the generation of the categories when he says:²

this unity of consciousness would be impossible if in the cognition of the manifold the mind could not become conscious of the identity of the function by means of which this manifold is synthetically combined into one cognition. [...] the mind could not possibly think of the identity of itself in the manifoldness of its representations, and indeed think this a priori, if it did not have before its eyes the identity of its action, which subjects all synthesis of apprehension (which is empirical) to a transcendental unity, and first makes possible their connection in accordance with a priori rules. (A108)

Though Kant does not explicitly appeal to attention here, he does at the very least suggest this by appeal to what the mind has "before its eyes". However, Kant does explicitly appeal to attention in his characterization of our awareness of the unity of the act of drawing a line in the construction of a figure. He says,

We cannot think of a line without **drawing** it in thought, we cannot think of a circle without **describing** it [...] and we cannot even represent time without, in **drawing** a straight line, [...] /attending merely to the action of the synthesis of the manifold through which we successively determine inner sense, and thereby attending to the succession of this determination in inner sense/. (B154, my emphasis; see also B137-138 and A162-163/B203-204)

Kant's point would seem to be that the mind's ability to direct its attention, even in the purely intellectual case of the act of synthesis *itself* (and not just the *result* of that act), is a necessary condition of achieving cognition. We see this again in terms of Kant's account of the "original acquisition" of the categories via acts of reflection on the logical forms. Such acts of reflection presuppose that one can *attend* to one's act of judgment, where presumably Kant means the act itself and not mere result of that, which is available in inner sense. Kant speaks of the "givenness" (A728-9/B756-7) of the categories, as "reflected concepts" for which the subject's experiences stand as the "occasional causes of their generation" (A86/B118), which at least

² See also B154, B137-138, and A162-163/B203-204.

suggests that such experience gives the subject the opportunity to attend to its acts insofar as those acts are constitutive of its experience.³ But again, this seems to encourage a kind of “intellectual experience” in which one acquires the categories via abstraction the some given intellectual material. But from such acts how can we be sure that we gotten the fundamental ones, or have gotten all of them, and do so without falling back on the horn presented by the first, historical, challenge. Thus does Hegel acknowledge the sense in which the categories are intellectually acquired but nevertheless “empirical”.

3 The Origin of the Categories

In addition to Hegel’s worry about the historical-empirical manner in which the categories are determined, he also objects to the basis from which they are derived in Kant and Fichte’s system—viz. from the reflecting on the activity of the subject. Here let me focus on Kant’s view in particular.

In the *Dissertation* Kant distinguishes between what he terms the “logical” and the “real” uses of the understanding (ID §23, 2:410–11). He says,

in pure philosophy, such as metaphysics, the use of the understanding in dealing with principles is real; that is to say, the fundamental concepts of things and of relations, and the axioms themselves, are given in a fundamental fashion by the pure understanding itself; and, since they are not intuitions, they are not immune to error.

In the first *Critique* Kant maintains the view that the concepts of metaphysics come from the understanding. In this sense the understanding has a “real use”. However, Kant significantly alters the method by which these concepts are derived from that which he used in the *Dissertation*. Specifically he now closely links the categories with the logical forms of judgment. Indeed, Kant often goes so far as to say that the latter are not just a “clue” to the organization of the table of categories (as the title of the section indicates), they *are* the categories, at least in their “logical” use. The central texts making this plain are as follows.

The same understanding, therefore, and indeed by means of the very same actions through which it brings the logical form of a judgment into concepts...also brings a transcendental content into its representations by

³ For discussion see (Allison 1973; Vanzo 2018). See also R4172 (1769–1770), 17:443; *Metaphysik L*₁, 28:190, 233–234 (1777–80); *Metaphysik Mrongovius*, 29:762–763 (1782/3); *Metaphysik Volckmann*, 28:373–374 (1784/85).

means of the synthetic unity of the manifold in intuition in general...(MD §10, B105)

[The categories] are concepts of an object in general, by means of which its intuition is regarded as determined with regard to one of the logical functions for judgments. (TD Transition, B128)

That action of the understanding...through which the manifold of given representations (whether they be intuitions or concepts) is brought under an apperception in general, is the logical function of judgments. ... But now the categories are nothing other than these very functions for judging, insofar as the manifold of a given intuition is determined with regard to them (TD §20, B143)

In the metaphysical deduction the origin of the a priori categories in general was established through their complete coincidence [*völlige Zusammentreffung*] with the universal logical functions of thinking (TD §26, B159)
the pure concepts of the understanding are, of themselves, nothing but logical functions, but that as such they do not constitute the least concept of an object in itself but rather need sensory intuition as a basis, and even then they serve only to determine empirical judgments (Pr §39, 4:324)

These texts communicate two important points. First, they indicate Kant's pursuit of a strategy for explaining how the pure categories, or fundamental concepts of metaphysics, arise from the intellect. This strategy avoids commitment to any form of content nativism. Pursuit of this strategy means that, second, the very logical functions for combining representations (concepts) in judgment, and which constitute the basis of study in what Kant calls "pure general logic", are also the functions for combining representations (intuitions) in our experience of objects. Thus for the understanding as a faculty of judging (A69/B94), each logical function of thinking (e.g. categorical judgment), when applied to a multiplicity (or "manifold") of intuitions, results in a distinctive way of relating to, or "experiencing" in Kant's technical sense, an object e.g. a substance.

The upshot of Kant's view is that categories are derived from the intellect's activity insofar as it judges—they are reflected forms of this activity.⁴ Now why might this be objectionable to Hegel? Hegel's worry, in short, is that Kant's method of deriving the categories from the subject's discursive activity ends up limiting the applicability of those categories to the subject and its acts (e.g. its representational acts). But if categorialism in metaphysics aims at elucidating the structure of being, then (again this is Hegel's contention) Kant's theory of the

⁴ For extensive defense of this view see (Longuenesse 1998; Engstrom 2018).

origin of the categories lies in the structure of judging ends up foreclosing, in a question-begging way, the possibility of metaphysics as traditionally understood. Put in terms of the architectonic of the first *Critique*, Kant's anti-metaphysical or "critical" move comes not in the Dialectic's discussion of reason, but rather in the Metaphysical Deduction itself.

Much of the content of Hegel's animadversions here against Kant has been rejected by contemporary Kant scholars as based on misunderstandings (willful or not) of Kant's philosophy.⁵ In particular, one might worry that Hegel's objection to Kant itself begs the question. We might put the worry this way: even if we grant to Hegel the contention that Kant's derivational basis restricts the application of the categories to (the content of) discursive acts of the subject, it isn't clear that this is a question-begging move so much as a clarification of what any reasonable form of categorialism could be. Further, it isn't even clear that Kant's categorialism is "subjective" in this manner. Perhaps it is true that we may not be able to get certain kinds of justification or warrant for claims that mind-independent reality is categorial in the sense required, but why think means that our categories are merely subjective? It certainly seems at least possible that our categories correctly delimit the structure of being or reality itself. So something like the following from Hegel would seem overwrought.

although the categories (e.g., unity, cause and effect, etc.) pertain to thinking as such, it does not at all follow from this that they must therefore be merely something of ours, and not also determinations of objects themselves. But, according to Kant's view, this is what is supposed to be the case, and his philosophy is *subjective idealism*, inasmuch as the Ego (the knowing subject) furnishes both the form and also the material of knowing—the former as thinking and the latter as sensing subject (EL §42 Z3).

According to Hegel here, because Kant conceives of the forms of cognition as entirely derived from the subject, he thereby unavoidably restricts all thought, cognition, and knowledge to the subject. One common reply to this criticism is to emphasize the fact that the categories are restricted in their use for *cognition* to the "schematized" content of the representation of phenomenal nature.⁶ But Kant allows that the categories may be used to think of an "object in general" via the unschematized (i.e. non-temporal) categories, as in his famous claim that,

⁵ For argument that Hegel misunderstands Kant on various fundamental issues see (Ameriks 1985, 2015; Guyer 1993). For defense of Hegel against such criticism see (Bristow 2007, chaps. 1-2; Sedgwick 2012, chap. 3; Houlgate 2015; Kreines 2015, chaps. 5.2).

⁶ See (Ameriks 1985, 23–24; Guyer 1993, 187–89) for a clear statement of this strategy; cf. (Ameriks 2015, 51–52). For criticism of this strategy see (Bristow 2007, secs. 1.4; Sedgwick 2012, chap. 3); cf. (Kohl 2015, 98–100).

[t]o **cognize** an object, it is required that I be able to prove its possibility (whether by the testimony of experience from its actuality or *a priori* through reason). But I can **think** whatever I like, as long as I do not contradict myself, i.e., as long as my concept is a possible thought, even if I cannot give any assurance whether or not there is a corresponding object somewhere within the sum total of all possibilities. (Bxxvi)

It may well be correct that at least some of Hegel's criticisms of Kant's supposed "subjectivism" derive from an erroneous, or at least incomplete, view of Kant's conception of the categories, their content, and their use in thought. Specifically, it may well be that Hegel, at least at times (e.g. EL §48A), seems not to appreciate the way in which the unschematized categories can figure in ostensibly coherent thought of a supersensible reality, even if we will never be in an epistemic position to render any verdict concerning the specific truth values of such thoughts.⁷ But whatever the outcome of this longstanding debate, Hegel provides another, entirely internal, critique of Kant's position that deserves attention.

The basis of Hegel's internal critique stems from connecting two strands in Kant's thinking that might otherwise be left unconnected. The first concerns what I will call the "agreement condition" in Kant's theory of cognition.⁸ The second concerns Kant's conception of a non-discursive or intuitive intellect. I'll take these in turn.

3.A Truth as Agreement

In the *Critique of Pure Reason* Kant provides a "nominal" definition of truth in terms of the "agreement [*Übereinstimmung*] of cognition with its object" (A58/B82).⁹ Representations

⁷ (Bristow 2007, 43–44) attempts to defend Hegel against precisely this charge by emphasizing Kant's claim that the pure categories are devoid of "*Sinn und Bedeutung*", and thus cannot be meaningfully applied outside of sensory conditions (e.g. B149; A155/B194; A240/B299; B307–8); cf. (Kohl 2015, 99–100). But it is at least questionable whether Kant is making such a strong claim, and thus denying that the unschematized categories have any content, or whether he is merely making a point about their uselessness for *cognition* (where cognition differs from thought) and positive substantive knowledge outside of the conditions for sensory experience. One virtue of the objection I attribute to Hegel is that, unlike these more standard interpretations of Kant, it allows Kant the point that pure categorial thought of reality is a coherent possibility on its own, while nevertheless showing that this possibility is incompatible with reality conceived as the object of intellectual intuition.

⁸ See also (Vanzo 2010, 148).

⁹ There has been some disagreement as to whether, given his idealism, Kant can and does endorse a view of truth in terms of agreement, conformity, or more broadly, "correspondence", at all. For discussion and citation of the relevant debates see (Vanzo 2008, 2010). Here I simply assume that it is coherent for Kant, despite his idealism, to endorse a view of truth in which object and cognition can conform, agree, or correspond.

that are cognitions are such as to be able to agree with their objects, and Kant construes such agreement as truth.⁵

Since Kant regards the agreement of cognition with its object as a *nominal* definition of truth, he must regard agreement as sufficient for discriminating the true from the false. Since the agreement condition provides a merely nominal as opposed to *real* definition, Kant denies that the agreement condition articulates that feature in virtue of which something is true or false—i.e. agreement does not explain the nature of the true or the false, but merely provides a criterion for its demarcation.¹⁰ Moreover, Kant regards judgment (i.e. a specific sort of non-associative unity of concepts) as the bearer of truth, while also denying that sensory intuition is the sort of thing that can be true or false.¹¹ What this indicates is that (sensory) intuition alone cannot satisfy the agreement condition on cognition, and that judgment is necessary for securing a proper vehicle for truth.

Thus the agreement condition on cognition requires that a cognition must agree with its object, that this agreement is truth, and that in discursive cognizers the agreement of cognition with its object depends on the structure of discursive thought—i.e. judgment.

3.B The Non-Discursive Intellect & Intellectual Intuition

The second strand of Kant's view that Hegel takes up is the conception of the intuitive intellect.¹² Kant construes the intuitive intellect as a non-discursive intellectual faculty—"an understanding which should cognize [*erkennen*] its object, not discursively through categories, but intuitively in a non-sensible intuition" (A256/B312). There are four key fea-

¹⁰ Kant gives the clearest articulation of the notion of a nominal definition in the *Jäsche Logik*.

By mere definitions of names, or nominal definitions, are to be understood those that contain the meaning that one wanted arbitrarily to give to a certain name, and which therefore signify only the logical essence of their object, or which serve merely for distinguishing it from other objects. Definitions of things, or real definitions, on the other hand, are ones that suffice for cognition of the object according to its inner determinations, since they present the possibility of the object from inner marks. (JL 9:143; cf. LL 24:268-9; R2995, 16:607, R2999, 16:609 (c. 1770-1); C 11:53 (Letter to Herz, 26 May 1789)).

So, if we want to provide a definition that allows us to distinguish one thing from others, as <two-legged animal with broad nails> might allow us to distinguish human beings from other animals, then Kant concedes that we are able to do so (cf. LL 24:270-1, 919-20). But giving a real definition is something much more difficult, and, with respect to the true and the false, is not something we're clearly in a position to provide. Cf. (Vanzo 2010).

¹¹ For discussion and defense of the claim concerning judgment see (Heis 2013, 277–78); for sensory intuition see (McLear 2016).

¹² For discussion of the German rationalist conception of an intuitive intellect see (Winegar 2017).

tures of the intuitive intellect—viz. it is intellectual, comprehensive, productive, and non-discursive. Let's examine what each of these means.

First, a non-sensible intuition, as *intellectual*, would be active, its representations a product of its “absolutely spontaneous” pure “self-activity” (*Selbsttätigkeit*). This means that the intuitions of an intuitive intellect would be self-produced rather than derived from affection by independent beings (or distinct faculties of onself, as with affection in inner sense; see B72).

Second, being perfectly active in this manner the intuitive intellect would also thereby be perfectly *comprehensive*, in cognizing all things from their grounds or causes rather than their effects, for only a receptive faculty would cognize something from its effect(s) (*Religion Pölitz* 28:1111 (1783/84); *JL* 9:65).¹³

Third, the intuitive intellect is productive of its objects. The productivity of the intuitive intellect is a correlate of the two features just discussed. Since the intellectual intuitions of the intuitive intellect are purely a function of its spontaneous self-activity, and intuition is defined by Kant as a relation to an actuality (*Pr* 4:481-2), the intuitive intellect must be able to produce the very beings it intuits. And since this intuitive intellect would be completely comprehensive and creative, the things (actualities) it represents would be represented entirely from their grounds rather than their effects, and indeed as being grounded in the intuitive intellect itself.¹⁴

God cognizes all things by cognizing himself as the ground of all possibility (*Religion Pölitz* (1783/4), 28:1052; cf. *Metaphysik L₁* (mid-1770's), 28:328-9; */Metaphysik L₂* (1790/1), 28:606).

In cognizing things from their very grounds of possibility, the intuitive intellect would represent what is essential to any thing—i.e. in terms of that essence or nature that grounds

¹³ God's representation of all things is thus a priori in the “archaic” sense of representing a thing from its grounds. The influential *Port Royal Logic* of Arnauld and Nicole includes a definition of the a priori in terms of the “demonstration of effects by their causes” (Arnauld and Nicole 1683, 233). A version of this view arguably is accepted by Leibniz (Adams 1994, 109; cf. Smit 2009; Hogan 2009, 53–54). Closer to Kant, Wolff provides a general definition of ground in terms of “that through which one can understand why something [i.e. what is grounded] is the case” (Wolff 1720, sec. 29). Moreover, Kant's pre-critical conception of an antecedently determining ground, as articulated in the *New Elucidation* and elsewhere also seems connected with these older notions (for discussion see (Longuenesse 2001, 69–70; Hogan 2009, 53)). For extensive defense of the critical Kant's acceptance of an “archaic” explanatory requirement on the notion of an a priori ground see (Smit 2009, 191–217).

¹⁴ The conception of God as the ground of the very possibility of any actual being is a tenet faithfully held by Kant at least from his 1763 *Bewesgrund* essay on the existence of God. For discussion see (Fisher and Watkins 1998; Adams 2000; Chignell 2009; Yong 2014; Stang 2016).

all of a thing's other possible properties. Moreover, in representing created things from their essences, the intuitive intellect represents those things as they are in themselves. Kant therefore plausibly thinks that the only being that might have such an intellect is God. God would thus intuit reality as it is in itself. Indeed, Kant often characterizes God's intuition in this manner in his lectures—e.g., “God cognizes things in themselves” (29:833; cf. B71-2; A256/B311–312; A279–280/B335–336).

Finally, an intellect capable of non-sensible intuition would also be non-*discursive*. What does this mean? Kant characterizes intellectual activity as 'discursive' to denote the manner in which our discursive understanding acts—viz. moving to and fro, from part to part, in building a whole—rather than merely as a synonym for 'conceptual', 'linguistic', or 'rational'.¹⁵ It is this notion he means to indicate in his talk of “running through” and “gathering together” (A99) representations. A non-discursive intellect, in contrast, exhibits a whole-to-part grasp of its representations.¹⁶ This means that in an intellectual intuition the content of any representational component is determined by the content of the whole, which the intuitive intellect apprehends “all at once” (*Religion Pölitz* (1783/4), 28:1051) via grasp of what Kant sometimes calls a “synthetic universal” (CPJ 5:407; cf. RP 28:1267; *Metaphysik L₁* 28:328; R 4270, 17:489 (1769–76); R6174 18:478 (1780s)). So the intuitive intellect is non-discursive because it would not engage in the manner of part-to-whole unification characteristic of discursive activity, instead representing all things via its holistic comprehension of the synthetic universal.

When we bring Kant's thinking about the nature of cognition together with his conception of the intuitive intellect a worry starts to emerge: if the intuitive intellect represents reality as it is in itself then its representations would be in complete agreement with that reality. Intuitive representations are different in kind from discursive representations. Since we are discursive rather than intuitive intellects, whatever agreement our representations can achieve with respect to reality will thus be different in kind from that enjoyed by the intuitive intellect. This leaves room for the worry (though, as put this way, it does not *entail* it) that *only* an intuitive intellect may enjoy representations that are in complete conformity with their object, and thus absolutely true.

¹⁵ So, *pace* (Westphal 2000), Kant's conception of the intellect (or the understanding in particular) does not require conceiving of it as a faculty for *concept* generation. Only discursive faculties are faculties for concept generation (and, correspondingly, for judgment and inference); cf. JL 9:36; CPJ 5:406.

¹⁶ Kant understands the whole-to-part mereological structure of representation as a distinguishing feature of intuition as opposed to conceptual representation, which is part-to-whole. See (Aquila 2001; McLear 2015; Onof and Schulting 2015; McLear and Pereboom OBC) for discussion. As we'll see, I take the intuitive understanding, or intellect, as a faculty for generating intellectual intuitions. For an alternative reading of Kant that sees these as two distinct faculties see (Förster 2012, chap. 6). While I give reasons for thinking of these as a single faculty, it won't matter for the purposes of understanding Hegel's objection.

Hegel seems to have just such a worry in mind in his discussion of Kant and truth in the *Science of Logic*. Hegel argues,

If Kant had held the idea of an intuiting understanding up to this definition of truth [viz. as agreement], he would have treated that idea which expresses the required agreement, not as a thought-thing, but rather as truth. (SL 6:266)

If Kant is committed to God's intuition capturing (in Hegel's terms) the "absolute truth" of things then, Hegel argues, a serious problem results. Immediately prior to the above quoted text Hegel says,

[for] such a reason [i.e. a discursive faculty of reason employing the categories], one which is incapable of setting itself in agreement with its subject matter, and the things in themselves, such as are not in agreement with the rational concept – a concept that does not agree with reality and a reality that does not agree with the concept – these [the categories] are untrue representations [*unwahre Vorstellungen*]. (SL 6:266)

It is clear from Hegel's discussion that he thinks the categories would be "untrue" if God's intuitive intellect sets the standard for what counts as "agreement" between representation and object. What is less clear is *why* Hegel thinks this.¹⁷ Why is it that categorial representation (and so ultimately, all discursive representation) would be untrue? Why wouldn't it be possible for noumena/things-in-themselves to be *both* most adequately captured by God's intellectual intuition *and* categorial?¹⁸ In Hegel's estimation, if we admit an intuitive intellect, then the categories must fail to capture how things fundamentally are, and thus, in Hegel's terms, must fail to capture the "absolute truth" of things. However, since the categories purport not just to capture features of things, but their *fundamental* features, the categories, as representations of reality, are "untrue representations." In the next section I examine the sense in which the categories must be, if accurate at all, representations of

¹⁷ (Tolley 2018, 87–88) presents an answer to this question in terms of Hegel charging Kant with "placing the truth itself beyond our consciousness...as something which cannot be known in or through consciousness". I take my proposed reading of Hegel's argument to be compatible with this but as also pushing a stronger semantic claim—viz. not just that the truth concerning reality cannot be known, but in fact our thoughts of it *cannot be true*.

¹⁸ I take it that Kohl (Kohl 2015) leaves this question unanswered, which leaves open the possibility of a straightforward way for Kant to sidestep the challenge, as evinced by (Stang 2016, chap. 10; Marshall 2018; Winegar 2018). But the problem is not simply the completeness of God's intuitive cognition, but rather also the way in which the categories must pick out *fundamental* features of reality if they are to be in conformity with reality at all.

fundamental features of objects. I then go on to reconstruct Hegel's argument and briefly defend it from objections.

3.C Hegel's Objection Restated

What is important to recognize about Kant's position is that the justification for construing the categories as designating fundamental ways of being derives entirely from their connection to the fundamental forms of judgment—this is entailed by Kant's "metaphysical deduction" of the categories from the logical forms. Now consider the question of fundamentality as it concerns God's intuitive intellect. God's intellect is not discursive—it is not conceptual or linked with forms of judgment—and therefore does not represent objects via the categories. But God's intuitions are, by their nature, in perfect conformity with their objects. So God's intuitions intellectually represent their objects in some way other than as their having categorial structure, and in doing so are nevertheless true of those objects. Because God's intellect is perfect, God has complete and perfect comprehension of all that he represents. Hence, there is nothing represented by God that is not represented from its ground. Further, since God's intellect comprehends all things from their grounds, does so non-discursively, and is in complete agreement with what he represents, we can conclude that what is fundamentally true of any object is something that does not require categorial unification for its representation. So whatever the fundamental ways of being are that God intuits, there is no guarantee that they are in fact the ways of being designated by the categories.

At this point, we have merely a kind of skeptical worry—maybe the possibility of an intuitive intellect shows that the fundamental ways of being are not categorial—but we don't yet have a reason for endorsing Hegel's stronger claim that the categories are "untrue conceptions." Is there a way to get from the skeptical claim to the stronger claim? I believe there is. If I have described Kant's position correctly then it cannot be possible for the categories to be correctly applied in thought and yet there be some possibility that the ways of being picked out by the categories are not fundamental ways of being. But this is exactly the possibility that is left open given the existence of an intuitive intellect.

Hence, in being unable to foreclose the skeptical scenario as Hegel articulates it (or that I've attributed to him above), either Kant must concede that the categories do not accurately describe (fundamental) reality, or he must reject the idea of an intuitive intellect, despite his system being in part constructed around its possibility.

Now, this might seem to be a bad inference, moving from the possibility that the categories do not pick out fundamental ways of being to the categories' being entirely false. But the justification for this move comes with Kant's conception of the categories as applying *neces-*

sarily to their objects, which also aligns with Kant's conception of the categories as essential to, or conditions of the possibility of, objects of experience. Hence if the skeptical possibility Hegel raises cannot be foreclosed, the categories cannot be true conceptions of the basic forms reality may take.

Thus, if God's intellectual intuitions of objects present the fundamental standard of agreement of cognition (and ultimately representation) with its object, then there is a possibility that cannot be foreclosed—viz. that the fundamental ways of being are not the ways picked out by our discursive intellect. But this possibility is incompatible with Kant's understanding of the categories as *necessarily* fundamental representations of fundamental ways of being. So Kant's assumption that God's intellect represents in its characteristic manner generates a contradiction with his assumption that the categories are fundamental representations. One of the assumptions has to go, and for Hegel, that is the assumption that the fundamental structure of reality—of objects—is discursively represented.¹⁹

Let me state the argument in premise-conclusion form:

1. God's intuitive intellect represents non-discursively, and thus non-categorially (definition)
2. God's intellectual intuition is in total/absolute/perfect agreement with its object (definition)
3. ∴ God's non-categorial intellectual intuition constitutes an ultimate standard for truth (as agreement of a representation with its object) (1-2)
4. God's intellect perfectly comprehends all things from their grounds (definition)
5. ∴ God truly or perfectly accurately *non*-categorially represents what is metaphysically fundamental about all things (3-4)
6. If (5) then it is possible that the intuited ways of being are not identical to those ways of being picked out by the discursive categories (assumption)
7. ∴ It is possible that the categories, even when applied correctly, do not pick out the necessarily fundamental ways of being (5, 6)

¹⁹ Hegel thus holds that pure thought *is* intellectual intuition (at least in one sense), and that the derivation of the categories thus begins from a consciousness that is indifferently characterized either as intuition or concept of being, which itself

is pure indeterminateness and emptiness. – There is nothing to be intuited in it, if one can speak here of intuiting; or, it is only this pure empty intuiting itself. Just as little is anything to be thought in it, or, it is equally only this empty thinking. (SL59; 21.69)

8. It cannot be possible that the categories, when correctly applied, do not pick out the necessarily fundamental ways of being (assumption)
9. Contradiction (7, 8)
10. Therefore ...

Several of the premises—viz. (1)-(2), (4)—simply state Kant’s definitions regarding God’s intuitive intellect and the nature of the representations and cognitions of which it is capable. I’ve argued for premises (6) and (8) above. I discuss some possible defenses of Kant in the next section.

If the above argument is cogent then Kant faces a severe problem that is entirely internal to the Critical philosophy. Kant thinks we are rationally committed, both theoretically and practically, to belief in the existence of God as having an intuitive intellect.²⁰ On the theoretical side, which is what is most relevant to Hegel’s argument, Kant’s conception of purposiveness in nature, itself required by reflective judgment, presupposes the notion of an intuitive intellect (CPJ 5:405). Kant also construes the intuitive intellect as the straightforward, and at least logically possible, counterpart of the discursive intellect (B71–72; B145–150; B306–310). Moreover, God, as the only possible being who could possess such an intellect, is the object of what Kant calls “doctrinal belief”, as the condition for the unity necessary for the investigation of nature (A826/B854).²¹

Kant thus claims that we are rationally required to believe in the existence of a being the nature of whose apprehension of reality entails that all of our thoughts of such reality must be false. Insofar as this reconstruction succeeds, it thus vindicates Hegel’s indictment of the categories as “untrue representations”.

Hegel also connects his argument against the applicability of the categories to his overall indictment of Kant’s idealism as a merely ‘subjective’ idealism. What is the connection between these two claims? If Hegel is correct concerning the falsity of categorial judgment then he can further object to Kant’s idealism by denying that discursive thought can be *of* reality, if such thought must always be *false*. For it seems that a plausible condition of a thought’s being *about* some subject matter is that the thought could be, at least in principle, *true* of that subject matter. If that is right then Hegel can claim that, by Kant’s own lights, thought cannot be of reality at all, but at best only of its subjective appearance. But this just is what it means to say that Kant is, in Hegel’s terms, a subjective idealist.

²⁰ See also (Kohl 2015, 100–101).

²¹ For discussion see (Chignell 2007, 345–54; see also Stang 2016, secs. 9.6).

Two further things are worth noting about Hegel's argument, as I've interpreted it. First, it makes a semantic, and not epistemic, point. So Hegel is not (question-beggingly) indicting Kant's Critical philosophy for denying the possibility that we can *know* fundamental reality, or reality as it is in itself. Rather, Hegel's objection is that according to the basic structure of Kant's conception of representation it simply turns out that we cannot conceive or think or judge anything of reality at all (or anything correct anyway).²² So the problem isn't that, from Hegel's point of view, Kant asserts that we cannot *know* fundamental reality, but rather that, on Kant's view, we cannot *think* of it at all. This also means that because Hegel's argument is making a semantic point concerning the categorial structure of thought *überhaupt*, and not merely in its schematized form, one cannot here make the now standard move of avoiding Hegel's criticism by appealing to the unschematized categories.

Second, Hegel needs this kind of internal argument in order to advance his other critical points concerning Kant's philosophy—e.g., that it presupposes rather than defends a discursive conception of the human intellect.²³ Hegel's position regarding the possibility of intellectual intuition can seem question-begging without some criticism, internal to Kant, that would motivate accepting the possibility of non-discursive intuition in finite beings. The above argument offers just such an internal criticism. Hegel can reasonably accuse Kant of, without sufficient argument, building into his view of representational faculties conditions that undermine the very possibility of metaphysical knowledge of reality, as opposed to its mere appearance.

Perhaps the most straightforward attempt to defend Kant against the argument above is simply to deny that we can infer that things in themselves do not have categorial properties (e.g., causal properties) from the fact that the divine intuitive intellect does not represent them through categories. One might argue, as Erich Adickes ([Adickes 1924, 72–74](#)) famously does, that there is a distinction between categories as “modes of synthetic unification” (*Arten der synthetischen Vereinheitlichung*), on the one hand, and categorial properties as “ways of being” (*Seinsweisen*), on the other. Given this basic distinction the fact that the divine in-

²² One might argue here that since it is epistemically possible that an intuitive intellect (i.e. God) does not exist, it is at least epistemically possible that our thought could be true of reality, since a reality without God might not have the features it would had an intuitive intellect existed (see ([Winegar 2018](#)) for defense of this kind of position). But Kant's problem here is that he sees finite beings as rationally committed on both theoretical and practical grounds to the existence of God, and that the existence of such a being would entail that our discursive thought cannot possibly be true of reality. This conflict between commitments holds whether or not God in fact exists.

²³ See ([Houlgate 2015](#)) for this kind of objection.

tellekt does not employ categories as modes of representational unification does not imply that objects lack categorial properties as ways of being.²⁴

While I agree that drawing this distinction is a plausible way of replying to at least some versions of the worry that God's intuitive intellect represents reality differently, I do not think it will help with the specific argument I have articulated as made by Hegel.²⁵ As I take Hegel to argue, the problem is not merely that there are two different ways of getting at fundamental reality—viz. intuitive and discursive. Rather, the problem is that the intellectually intuitive manner of getting at reality opens up the possibility that the fundamental ways of being (*Seinsweisen*) are not the ways picked out by the categories, while Kant's assumption about the categories contradicts this. Recall that part of the justification for thinking that the fundamental modes of synthetic unification (to use Adickes' terms) pick out fundamental ways of being depends on Kant's connection, in the argument of the Metaphysical Deduction, of the categories as synthetic modes of unification with the fundamental forms of judgment. The fundamentality of the categories as ways of unifying a 'manifold' of representations of an object is supposed to derive from the *identity* of the categories as modes of unification with the functions for judging anything about an object. This is Kant's point in saying that,²⁶

That action of the understanding...through which the manifold of given representations (whether they be intuitions or concepts) is brought under an apperception in general, is the logical function of judgments. ... But now the categories are nothing other than these very functions for judging, insofar as the manifold of a given intuition is determined with regard to them (TD §20, B143)

So the logical forms of judgment are the most basic ways of judging or thinking of an object, and the categories as modes of unifying representations are the application of these very logical forms to a manifold of representation in intuition. This results, in Kant's view, in the categories' standing as those concepts that pick out the most fundamental ways of being of the intuited object. But if this is correct then skeptical doubt concerning the fundamentality

²⁴ Thanks to Kim Brewer for discussion concerning this point.

²⁵ Specifically, I think that this is one plausible way of replying to Kohl's (Kohl 2015) position that things in themselves lack categorial properties. For Kohl's reply, which to my mind relies on an objectionably strong conception of the emptiness of the unschematized categories see (Kohl 2015, 97 ff). (Bristow 2007, 43 ff) adopts a similar reading as Kohl in defending Hegel. One of the virtues of Hegel's argument, as I read it, is that it does not require such a strong reading of the emptiness of the unschematized categories.

²⁶ See also MD §10, B105; TD Transition, B128; TD §26, B159; Phenomena & Noumena, B305-6; Pr §39, 4:324. I remain neutral here as to whether any such 'logician' reading of the content of the categories as entirely identical with the logical forms of judgment is correct. For extensive defense see (Longuenesse 1998; Engstrom 2018). For doubts about the logicist approach see (McLear 2020).

of such categorial ways of being is a necessary result of the fact that, for the intuitive intellect, the fundamental ways of being are not *in any way* tied to discursive forms of judging. Absent further explanation of why one should think that the intuitive and discursive modes of representing pick out the identical fundamental ways of being, a doubt about the categories is raised that shouldn't be possible, and Hegel's argument goes through.

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