

A Comparative Analysis of Hegel's and Kant's Philosophical Views - Based on §§40-52 of the *Encyclopaedia Logic*

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Abstract

Since §§40-52 of Hegel's *Encyclopaedia Logic* constitutes a critique of Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*, this paper conducts a comparative analysis between these sections and the relevant passages in Kant's work. It examines the key differences and divergent perspectives between the two philosophers, identifies certain instances where Hegel misreads Kant, and thereby arrives at a deeper understanding of their respective philosophical conceptions.

Keywords

Thought, Being, Unity, Critique

Introduction

In §§42-52 of the *Encyclopaedia Logic* - specifically, in the section on the second attitude of thought toward objectivity, namely Critical Philosophy - Hegel criticizes what he regards as Kant's subjective idealism, agnosticism, and the three "Ideas" in the *Critique of Pure Reason*. The following discussion will comparatively analyze Hegel's criticisms in this passage alongside Kant's own views [1].

Hegel's critique of Kant's theory of cognition

In §41 of the *Encyclopaedia Logic*, Hegel states: "Here there is certainly something correct - namely, that the forms of thought themselves must be taken as objects of cognition." But a misunderstanding arises immediately: One wants to engage in cognition before actually carrying out cognitive activity, or, as it were, refuses to enter the water before having learned how to swim. Admittedly, the forms of thought should not be employed without examination. Yet this very examination is already a cognitive activity. Thus, the application of the forms of thought and the critique of them must be combined within the process of cognition itself. The forms of thought must be examined in and for themselves; they are objects at once and the activity of those very objects - they examine themselves, determine their own limits from within, and reveal their own deficiencies [2]. This is the cognitive activity that will later be specially considered under the name of dialectic.

At this point, we can only indicate provisionally that this activity must not be regarded as something externally imposed upon the determinations of thought, but rather as inherent in the determinations of thought themselves. This passage primarily addresses Kant's project of examining the limits of cognition. Hegel criticizes Kant for failing to recognize that the examination of cognition itself already constitutes a cognitive act. Given Kant's dualistic framework - which rigidly separates subject and object - Hegel argues that Kant cannot achieve the objective knowledge he seeks. From Hegel's dialectical standpoint, subject and object must not be severed; rather, they are unified within Absolute Spirit, sharing a common origin. Consequently, the subject's cognition of the object is, in essence, Absolute Spirit's self-cognition. Hegel agrees that "the forms of thought" should be treated as objects of cognition, but only on the condition that the act of cognition and the reflection upon it are fundamentally unified. The entire process is Absolute Spirit coming to know itself, thereby revealing and subverting its own limitations. As Hegel reiterates: "This is the cognitive activity that will later be specially considered under the name of dialectic. At this point, we can only indicate provisionally that this activity must not be regarded as something externally imposed upon the determinations of thought, but rather as inherent in the determinations of thought themselves."

In §41 of the same work, another passage merits discussion - namely, Hegel's treatment of "subjectivity" and "objectivity". Kant's usage of these terms differs significantly from their ordinary meanings. In everyday language, "objectivity" means that our subjective cognition must correspond to the object itself in order to count as objective [3]. In Kant's terminology, however, "objectivity" is equivalent to universality and necessity - and this universality and necessity reside within our thinking itself. Yet, in ordinary usage, ideas and representations that exist within the mind are typically regarded as subjective. Conversely, Kant's notion of "subjectivity" primarily refers to the mutable sensory manifold, thereby distinguishing itself from the everyday view that treats everything occurring within our minds as subjective.

Hegel greatly appreciates Kant's distinctive usage of these terms. Nevertheless, he criticizes Kant for regarding his own categories as "subjective" precisely because they are grounded in the distinction between the thing-in-itself and appearance. Hegel illustrates this point with an analogy: When confronted with a work of art, what is normally demanded is an "objective" critique. Such objectivity, Hegel argues, stems from our rational capacity for abstraction, the universals abstracted in this way are stable, not subject to the fluctuating impressions of sense [4]. Hegel employs this example of art criticism to support Kant's redefinition of "subjectivity" and "objectivity".

Moreover, Hegel articulates three distinct senses of "objectivity": "First, in the sense of what exists externally in reality, as opposed to what is merely subjective, imagined, or dreamed. Second, in the sense affirmed by Kant - namely, what is universal and necessary, as opposed to what is sensory, contingent, particular, and subjective. Third, in the sense just mentioned - namely, what is thought as being-in-itself, which is real and thus distinct from what is merely thought by us, and hence also distinct from mere facticity or self-differentiated being."

Hegel identifies the first sense as corresponding to the ordinary understanding of "objectivity". Yet he considers this conception mistaken - not because it misrepresents common usage, but because, in his view, it equates objectivity with correspondence between cognition and the thing itself (a representational or "correspondence-theoretic" model). For Hegel, however, something is

"objective" simply by virtue of standing externally as a given entity. He dismisses this notion as philosophically vacuous. What he overlooks, however, is that this kind of "objectivity" is not only meaningless for him but also lacks significance for naïve consciousness and ordinary discourse. Indeed, when we merely assert "There is..." about an external object that simply stands there, we gain no cognitive insight. This sense of objectivity is useful only in proving the reality of external things - but here the discussion concerns epistemic objectivity, not ontological existence.

The second sense of objectivity, as illustrated by Hegel's example of art criticism, suggests that we are "objective" when we evaluate artworks according to stable aesthetic principles. But what this really expresses is that applying universal laws to objects constitutes an objective procedure - since such laws are universal and necessary, they are thereby "objective". Here, "universality and necessity" is equated with "objectivity", precisely following Kant's usage. One caveat must be raised, however: aesthetic principles are far more permeated by subjectivity than natural-scientific laws. The "objectivity" exhibited by aesthetic norms reflects only a consensus among most people, without addressing whether such judgments correspond to the artwork itself [5].

The third sense of objectivity is Hegel's own. He holds that "objectivity" signifies both the real existence of a thing and its character as universal and necessary. This conception diverges sharply from both naïve consciousness and ordinary language, as it entirely bypasses the correspondence question - i.e., whether our cognition matches the thing itself.

The thing-in-itself and the self-movement of the concept

In §42, Hegel criticizes Kant for merely *listing* the categories, whereas the correct approach - pursued by Fichte and Hegel himself - is to *deduce* them systematically, demonstrating their inner necessity. In this section, Hegel labels Kant's position "subjective idealism", but not in a dismissive tone. He writes: "One might at first suppose that placing the unity of objects within the subject would deprive them of reality. Yet the mere assertion that objects exist neither gains anything for them nor for us. What matters is the content - whether or not it is true."

It is clear that Hegel's strategy for overcoming common-sense assumptions lies in showing that even if objects reside within our subjective thought, this does not render them "unobjective". However, Hegel never directly addresses the correspondence-theoretic question: whether our cognition corresponds to the real object standing concretely before us - not whether the object exists, but whether our representation matches its intrinsic nature.

Hegel's central claim is the unity of thought and being. He believes existence can be derived from the Concept; yet this "existence" is purely logical - it is conceptual existence, not the concrete, empirical existence of real things. Although Hegel can indeed derive the concept of existence through the self-movement and self-sublation (*Aufhebung*) of thought, what emerges is still only an existence within the realm of logic, not actuality in the world.

On the question of existence, Kant clearly adheres to common sense: he explicitly argues that the existence of a thing cannot be inferred from its concept alone but requires intuition [6]. For Kant, existence is not a predicate deducible from pure thought.

Hegel, in effect, dissolves the correspondence problem altogether. But if he did not dissolve it - if he retained the question of whether human cognition can grasp the essence of things - he would face an enduring epistemological challenge. Theoretically, Hegel simply presupposes that humans *can* know the essence of things. Yet this presupposition remains dogmatic, for it cannot be proven within theory itself. That said, we are not entirely without grounds: although theoretical proof may be unattainable, our practical-experiential domain offers confirmation. The success of practice validates the efficacy of theory, and this efficacy suggests that our knowledge can indeed act upon the thing-in-itself. The remaining issue is whether theoretical efficacy can be equated with cognitive correspondence to things as they are.

Moreover, Hume reminds us that practical success is not guaranteed in every instance. But does this merely indicate that our knowledge is incomplete - rather than entirely devoid of any contact with the thing-in-itself?

Finally, is Kant's idealism objective or subjective? This must be assessed from two angles. First, although the thing-in-itself stimulates us, our sensibility is a receptive capacity: What we receive is not the thing-in-itself, but

the sensations it produces in us. Once these enter the domain of sensation, they are already subjective. The material constitution of the thing-in-itself can never enter our cognition - just as when one uses a wooden seal to stamp an impression, the wood itself never appears in the imprint. Second, however, if we acknowledge that our knowledge does not concern the thing-in-itself - and bracket the thing-in-itself entirely - then, within the realm of appearances, Kant's system is objective.

In §44, Hegel criticizes Kant's thing-in-itself as an abstract entity - a product of thought - and argues that the thing-in-itself can be known once essence and appearance are dialectically unified. In §45, he equates Kant's "thing-in-itself" with a purely ideal, conceptual existence of essence: "Yet one can just as easily reflect that this *caput mortuum* ('dead head' or 'skeleton') itself is merely a product of thought - specifically, the product of thought that has advanced to the stage of pure abstraction, namely, the empty self, which takes its own hollow identity as its object."

Here, Hegel treats the "thing-in-itself" as an abstracted, ideal existence of essence. However, this involves a misunderstanding: For Kant, the thing-in-itself is not merely conceptual but possesses substantive reality - it exists in a manner analogous to Platonic Ideas, as something genuinely real beyond appearances.

Hegel, by contrast, is fundamentally an idealist. The world he envisions is a humanized world. He holds that objective being, in itself, is meaningless - it merely stands there, offering humanity no utility whatsoever. It is spirit (*Geist*) that endows objective beings with essence and meaning; only through the humanization of nature does nature acquire significance. Consequently, Hegel dismisses the correspondence question - whether our cognition matches objective being - because, on his view, objective being without spirit is devoid of meaning. There is no need to ask whether our knowledge corresponds to a meaningless externality, since it is precisely our cognition that bestows meaning and essence upon it. In other words, without human spirit, concepts such as "meaning" and "essence" would not even exist.

This position actually resonates with Kant in one respect: from the standpoint of common sense, knowledge of the Kantian thing-in-itself is likewise devoid of practical utility [7]. For Hegel, a thing becomes truly real only when it develops into concept and meaning. If a being

remains at the level of mere existence - failing to attain the stage of essence and falling short of what the Concept demands - it is, for Hegel, unreal.

In §45, Hegel further criticizes Kant for assigning only subjective significance to “phenomena”, since Kant holds that we can never cognize the thing-in-itself. Hegel counters: “In truth, the genuine relation is this: the things we immediately know are not merely phenomena for us, but are, in their very nature, nothing but phenomena. The inherent fate of these finite things is that the ground of their existence does not lie within themselves, but in the universal divine Idea. Thus, for Hegel, it is the Idea that provides the ground of existence for all things; spirit imparts essence and concept to them, driven by the self-development of the Absolute. Without these Ideas, things “in themselves” are nothing - they merely stand there, meaningless and incapable of yielding useful knowledge or benefit.

Of course, if spirit is viewed as distinct from nature, then spirit is what grants nature its essence and ground. But if spirit is understood as externalizing itself as nature - and if nature’s development is oriented toward spirit as its telos - then this process is nature’s own self-development. Natural and objective things develop and sublate (*aufheben*) themselves, ultimately fulfilling their purpose, ground, and meaning through their own immanent self-realization [8].

Hegel on Kant’s rational psychology

In §47 of the *Encyclopaedia Logic*, Hegel offers his commentary on Kant’s treatment of the Paralogisms of Pure Reason in the *Critique of Pure Reason*, specifically regarding the soul. He writes: “Kant rightly exposes the flaw in this transition from empirical determinations to determinations of thought - namely, the conflation of two distinct kinds of determinations (a *petitio principii*), that is, the confusion of empirical determinations with categories. He regards it as illegitimate to infer the latter from the former or to substitute the latter entirely for the former.”

However, this interpretation involves a partial misunderstanding of Kant. In the section on the Paralogisms, Kant’s central point is not primarily about illicit inference from empirical to conceptual content, but rather that we possess only fluctuating states of inner consciousness - states that, in themselves, prove nothing

about the soul. This limitation arises because we lack any intuition of the soul itself.

Although Kant indeed inherits Hume’s insight - that universal and necessary knowledge cannot be derived from sense experience due to its finitude - his argument in the Paralogisms hinges on a different issue. As he consistently emphasizes throughout the *Critique*, just as one cannot infer God’s real existence from the mere concept of God, so too does our cognition of the soul fundamentally differ from our knowledge of external objects precisely because we have no intuition of the soul. As Kant explains:

“The reason lies in this: Although both are appearances, the appearances before outer sense nevertheless possess something fixed or permanent, which provides a substratum for grounding those ever-changing determinations. And thus, this yields a synthetic concept - namely, the concept of space and of the phenomena within space. By contrast, time, as the sole form of inner intuition, contains nothing permanent; it presents only a succession of determinations and therefore yields no determinate object for cognition.”

At the very least, external objects, supported by enduring corporeal substrata, allow for a priori synthetic knowledge akin to physics. But our grasp of the soul is insufficient to ground a rational psychology, precisely because - ultimately - we lack any intuition of the soul itself. As Kant further clarifies: “For this ‘I’ to make possible any pure rational cognition concerning the general essence of a thinking being, it would have to be an intuition - an intuition that, since it would be presupposed in regard to thinking in general (prior to all experience), would thereby provide synthetic propositions as an a priori intuition.”

Thus, Kant’s point is not - as Hegel suggests - that we cannot legitimately infer a universal concept from empirical self-consciousness. Rather, it is that we lack the requisite intuition of the soul altogether. And even if, as Hegel claims, one could derive a universally valid concept of the soul, such a concept would still bear no relation to a soul as a substantial, existing entity. This is explicitly stated by Kant in the first edition of the *Critique* in the section “Examination of the Entire Rational Doctrine of the Soul in Accordance with These Paralogisms.”

Kant’s theory of knowledge requires the synthesis of sensible intuitions (both material content and the priori

forms of space and time) with the categories. Hegel, however, rejects this dual-component model of cognition.

The objective status of contradiction

In §48 of the *Encyclopaedia Logic*, Hegel acknowledges that Kant's recognition of contradiction is a merit. However, he criticizes Kant for adopting what he calls a "sentimental" attitude toward the world: Kant attributes the emergence of contradiction solely to the limitations of human reason, as if the world itself were free of contradiction. Hegel firmly rejects this view. For him, contradiction is inherent in the thing-in-itself itself; every real entity - including thought - is structured by antinomies. As Hegel states: "Generally speaking, the true and positive significance of the antinomy lies in this: every real thing contains opposed determinations within itself. Thus, to cognize an object - and more precisely, to grasp it - is precisely to become conscious that the object is the concrete unity of opposed determinations."

Hegel's assertion of the universality of contradiction has profound practical and theoretical significance. It also reflects his fundamental view on the unity of thought and being. For Hegel, thought and being are inherently unified. The task of cognition is to grasp the essential feature that subjectivity and objectivity are both distinct and inseparably interconnected. One must not sever subject and object or presuppose their dualism from the outset. Hegel criticizes precisely this initial bifurcation, arguing that it is this very presupposition of subject-object duality that produces the apparent rift between thought and being.

He insists that we must not separate the finite from the infinite, nor the subjective from the objective, because both are ultimately unified in Absolute Spirit. The human spirit's proper vocation is precisely to discover and comprehend this "concrete unity of opposed determinations" that resides in all things.

The ontological proof and the unity of concept and being

In §50 of the *Encyclopaedia Logic*, Hegel offers a counter-critique of Kant's rejection of the cosmological and physico-theological (natural theological) proofs for God's existence. Hegel claims that here Kant adopts Hume's position - namely, that universal necessity cannot be inferred from empirical or finite things.

However, Hegel's reading of Kant involves a partial misinterpretation - though it may well be deliberate, for Hegel likely understood Kant's argument but targeted something different, precisely because they approach the ontological proof from fundamentally divergent standpoints [9].

Hegel's position remains one of deriving "concept from concept". He maintains that universal cognition can be derived from our thinking about empirical things - a claim that does not address Kant's actual concern, since Kant focuses on real existence, not merely ideal or conceptual existence. Indeed, Hegel denies that real existence possesses any philosophically significant meaning. He regards knowledge of such "objectivity" - i.e., the mere fact that something stands externally before us - as superficial and unworthy of serious consideration. This divergence in basic orientation underlies their disagreement.

Kant's discussion appears in §§4-6 of the section "The Ideal of Pure Reason" in the *Critique of Pure Reason*. There, Kant argues that although the cosmological and physico-theological proofs appear to begin from experience and thus conform to ordinary reasoning, they are not genuinely empirical. In truth, both ultimately rely on the ontological proof. At most, an inference from experience can establish only that "an absolutely necessary being" must exist - but it cannot determine the attributes of this being. As explained in the literature: "Thus, in the second step, reason completely departs from experience and turns to pure concepts to seek those indispensable attributes. It then assumes that the conditions or mode of existence (requisita) required by absolute necessity can be found only in the concept of a 'most real being', thereby concluding that the most real being is the absolutely necessary being. But this is precisely the thesis of the cosmological proof - the very proposition that the cosmological proof verbally rejects yet secretly presupposes. For the first step (starting from experience) is entirely superfluous; the second step proceeds solely by inference from concepts."

To infer from concepts alone is, for Kant, tautological - since the two concepts ("absolutely necessary being" and "most real being") are extensionally equivalent. Moreover, Kant holds that the physico-theological proof rests on the cosmological proof, and both ultimately depend on the ontological proof. Thus, despite the

appearance of three distinct arguments, refuting the ontological proof alone suffices to undermine them all.

The ontological proof - originating with Anselm in the Middle Ages - claims that real existence can be deduced from the concept of God. Hegel, notably, endorses this proof. Here lies the fundamental divide between Kant and Hegel: Kant insists on the indispensability of intuition. No matter how perfect the concept of God may be, one cannot infer from it that God exists in reality, because real existence requires intuitive evidence.

Conversely, Hegel believes that existence can be fully derived from the concept of God - but the "existence" thus derived is purely ideal: It is the concept of existence, or existence as a moment within thought. Hegel himself acknowledges this limitation and even criticizes Anselm for failing to show how subjective intellect overcomes itself to transition into actuality: "It has not revealed the transition whereby subjective intellect sublates itself and advances to reality."

For Hegel, the passage from logic to reality is accomplished through the self-externalization of Absolute Spirit into nature. The "existence" he affirms refers not to brute empirical presence, but to the purpose, essence, meaning, or ground of nature - which, as moments of the Idea, are indeed real.

In short, Kant and Hegel are not speaking of the same thing. Hegel elevates the notion of existence, focusing on spiritually meaningful being - the kind of existence that matters to human self-understanding. His premise is that a merely external, objective reality standing before us is devoid of significance; such knowledge is universally recognized as trivial and superficial. Kant, by contrast, concerns himself with the real existence of things - existence that is intuitively given. His question is whether God, like ordinary objects, stands before us in reality.

Their positions differ, yet each holds philosophical value. Natural science largely aligns with Kant's standpoint, whereas reflective, conceptual knowledge tends toward Hegel's. Importantly, Hegelian philosophy does not need to compete with natural science for its domain of inquiry - they operate on different planes.

In §51 of the *Encyclopaedia Logic*, Hegel criticizes Kant as follows: "Leaving aside for the moment that calling something like a hundred thalers a 'concept' may justly be regarded as crude, those who continually object to philosophical ideas on the grounds that thought and being

are different should at least finally assume that philosophers are not equally ignorant of the distinction between thought and being. Indeed, what could be more superficial than such knowledge? But one must then go on to consider that when we speak of God, we are dealing with an object fundamentally unlike a hundred thalers, any particular concept, representation, or whatever else one might call it. All finite things are, in fact, precisely this: their existence differs from their concept. God, by contrast, is evidently that which can only be 'conceived as existing' - whose concept inherently includes existence. It is precisely this unity of concept and existence that constitutes the concept of God."

Here, it is clear that Hegel regards knowledge of immediately given objects - such as "a hundred thalers" - as shallow and meaningless. Such "knowledge" remains at the level of mere immediacy and has not yet risen to the level of the Concept. At the same time, Hegel reminds his readers that philosophers are fully aware of the difference between real existence and ideal existence. In this light, Hegel's apparent "misreadings" of Kant are in fact deliberate: He knows exactly what Kant is saying but denies that such a distinction merits the title of "knowledge" worthy of thoughtful philosophical discourse.

For Hegel, the concept of God necessarily includes existence - not in the sense of empirical reality, but in the logical sense that existence can be derived from the divine Concept itself [10]. He considers this kind of knowledge far more meaningful than the trivial "objectivity" of immediately given things. Yet one may also say that Hegel never truly reaches real existence; he remains within the domain of conceptual or ideal existence. His entire discussion never steps outside the bounds of logic.

Notably, Hegel's objection to Kant's example had already been anticipated by Kant himself. It is unclear whether Hegel overlooked this or deemed it unworthy of reply. Hegel's counterargument closely resembles Anselm's response to Gaunilo: namely, that the concept of God is categorically distinct from ordinary concepts, for it necessarily entails its own existence - otherwise, the concept would be imperfect and self-contradictory.

Kant addresses this very point in §4 of "The Ideal of Pure Reason", titled "The Impossibility of an Ontological Proof of the Existence of God". Since the ontological proof is central to the entire debate, Kant considers its

refutation decisive. He writes: "My answer is this: If, in the concept of a thing that you intend to think merely according to its possibility, you have already smuggled in - under whatever concealed name - the concept of that thing's actual existence, then you have fallen into contradiction. If we grant you this move, you may appear to win, but in truth you have said nothing at all; you have merely committed a tautology."

"Reality" (Realität) here refers to actual existence. When discussing God, we are only considering the possibility of existence - not its actuality. To import "reality" into this merely possible concept is self-contradictory. To avoid contradiction, we must treat "reality" solely as a notion possessing only possible existence. Thus, the statement "the most real being is real" amounts to nothing more than: "The concept of the most real being means that this being is the most real - which is a tautology confined entirely within the concept".

Kant insists on distinguishing analytic from synthetic judgments and warns against conflating logical predicates with real (existential) predicates. This is the core of his rebuttal: It is Anselm and Hegel - not Kant - who fall into self-contradiction by confusing a logical attribute (contained in a concept) with real existence. And indeed, as a matter of fact, the position of Anselm and Hegel can at best yield a logically necessary idea of existence, not actual, empirical existence.

Ultimately, however, this dispute reflects a deeper divergence in philosophical stance. Anselm operates from the standpoint of faith. His proof is not meant to convince the secular world of God's existence, but to seek understanding *within* faith ("fides quaerens intellectum"). Hegel, meanwhile, holds that Absolute Spirit develops itself, externalizes into nature, and ultimately transcends nature to achieve self-conscious, self-determined unity.

As Hegel himself notes, Kant reduces God to an indeterminate, abstract identity - a mere logical subject in theoretical reason and a moral postulate in practical reason.

Conclusion

In sum, Hegel's interpretation of Kant is dogmatic: It is grounded in his own philosophical standpoint and directed toward refuting Kant from that perspective. Hegel is not unaware of what Kant actually means; rather, he deliberately avoids engaging Kant on Kant's

own terms. Instead, he critiques Kant from an entirely different conceptual horizon - one shaped by his own system. Consequently, Hegel engages in certain strategic misreadings of Kant, selectively interpreting or reframing Kant's arguments to serve his own philosophical aims.

Nevertheless, Hegel's perspective remains significant. He reminds us that the world is constituted through spirit (Geist): Without spirit, the world would merely stand there as an inert externality - devoid of meaning, essence, or value. In itself, it would be nothing for us. It would offer humanity no intelligibility, no purpose, and no significance.

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