

Reconciliation in Hegel's Speculative Idealism

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ABSTRACT: In the following, the author argues that Hegel's speculative idealism attempts to reconcile the competing philosophical positions of idealism and realism. Through an examination, first, of current scholarship and, second, of Hegel's critique of the "Ideal of Pure Reason" in Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*, the author shows that one of Hegel's main criticisms is that the exclusion of the thing-in-itself denies realism. The author argues that Hegel's response to the problem of the thing-in-itself is to affirm realism. The author concludes by demonstrating how Hegel's concept of *Geist* reconciles idealism and realism.

1. INTRODUCTION

Providing a clear definition of Hegel's speculative idealism is a difficult matter. Not only do his writings on the subject notoriously push the envelope on obscurity, but the word "idealism" has been used to describe a host of different philosophical positions extending as far back as the Ancients. Although Plato, for instance, does not mention the term, his theory can be categorized as idealism to the extent that it assumes the existence of self-sufficient ideas that are epistemically and ontologically first: to know a thing is to know its idea (*ἰδέα*); to be a thing is to participate (*μετέχειν*) in an idea. This differs quite a bit from Kant's transcendental idealism. Roughly, where Plato claims that the ideas exist independently of thinking, knowing, or any mental state reducible to the human being, Kant assumes that what comes first, in the sense of *a priori*, are the forms of thought, i.e., the forms of human reason. These are only two examples; but there are also other kinds of idealism, each uniquely identifiable throughout the history of philosophy. The diversity of opinion makes any attempt to formulate a positive

definition of idealism problematic. There are, however, commonalities that run through its various incarnations, but they are negative: idealism does not accept that (1) knowledge emerges from or is reducible to natural or material “realities” that (2) exist as self-sufficient things in themselves. Although the terminology is often different with each kind of idealism, the general assumption is the same: idealism is opposed to realism. Plato’s theory of ideas, as formulated in the *Phaedo*, is predicated on the refutation of the realist procedure of the natural sciences in which causes are sought in the things themselves. Analogous to the affect that the eclipse of the sun has on the eyes, the realist procedure blinds the soul from the truth.¹ Similarly, Kant’s concept of the thing-in-itself is opposed to realism insofar as it denies, at a minimum epistemically, that things can be known as they are in themselves. Some also argue that Hegel’s speculative idealism is opposed to realism. A well-known example of this interpretation is the claim that Marx’s dialectical materialism turned Hegel’s dialectic of the *Begriff* “on its head.” The suggestion is that Marx tried to replace Hegel’s logic of purely rational conceptualization with one that could effectively handle the actual material conditions of history, society, and economics. Those who understand Marx in this manner read the shift from the *Begriff* to materialism, for all intents and purposes, as a move from an idealist to a realist oriented position, which Hegel either ignored or did not adequately explain. Contrary to this interpretation, the following will show that Hegel was not satisfied with the one-sided kind of idealism that simply denies realism. Rather, speculative idealism is a two-sided position in which Hegel attempts to *reconcile* idealism and realism.

The claim that Hegel’s speculative idealism involves some kind of reconciliation with realism may seem to equivocate terms. Like idealism, but, in the reverse order, realism can also be characterized negatively as the rejection, to use a specific example, of Kant’s assumption that the forms of thought have priority over the things themselves; where the things themselves signify natural or material entities (the aforementioned ‘realities’) that exist external to and independent of the perception or the cognition of them. Thus, just as idealism presupposes the denial of realism, so realism presupposes the denial of idealism. The equivocation in Hegel’s speculative idealism would therefore seem to reside in his attempt to reconcile two positions that, by definition, are irreconcilable. The focal point of any possible equivocation is the basic tenet of speculative idealism that “reason is all reality.”² At first glance, this may seem to give priority to reason over reality. Although such a position has its own set of problems and is far from self-evident, the problem of equivocation comes from Hegel’s equal acceptance of the opposite claim that reality has priority over reason. Speculative idealism is based on a *dialectical universal* in which reason and reality have equal value and which Hegel envisions as an *identity of opposites*. The side of reason can be understood as the Kantian model of idealism in which the forms of thought

have priority over things; the opposite side of reality is the realist position in which things have priority over reason. In this light, Hegel's speculative idealism may be charged with equivocation because its basic tenet asserts that idealism is realism and that realism is idealism; that is to say, it posits as identical that which should not be identical. Hegel does not view this as an equivocation, but as a dialectical, i.e., speculative identity on par with his claim in the *Philosophy of Right* that "what is rational is actual and what is actual is rational."³ In fact, Hegel believes that speculative idealism, rather than entailing an equivocation, actually resolves one of the more pernicious conflicts in the history of philosophy, which has been formulated in many different ways: e.g., as reason and reality, thought and object, concept and thing, rationality and actuality, logic and being or, as Hegel also frames it, subject and substance, among others. The resolution of this conflict is as much the expressed goal of the *Phenomenology of Spirit* as the realized standpoint of the *Science of Logic*. One could therefore argue with relative safety, without making a judgment about the truth or falsity Hegel's philosophy, that the resolution of this kind of conflict is one of the main goals of speculative idealism. In the *Phenomenology*, for instance, Hegel writes:

In my view, which can be justified only by the exposition of the system itself, everything turns on grasping and expressing the True, not only as *Substance*, but equally as *Subject*.⁴

Also, in the *Logic*:

Thus pure science [of logic] presupposes liberation from the opposition of consciousness. It contains *thought in so far as this is just as much the object in its own self, or the object in its own self in so far as it is equally pure thought*.⁵

Each of the above passages describes the same principle of speculative idealism that "reason is all reality" in which idealism and realism constitute an identity of opposites.

2. OTHER VIEWS ON HEGEL'S SPECULATIVE IDEALISM

Prominent figures in the community of Hegel scholarship take a somewhat different view. Instead of interpreting speculative idealism such that reason and reality have "equal value," the tendency is to assign priority to reason over reality. To be sure, these scholars are not univocal in their presentation of Hegel, but their general interpretive assumption is similar, namely, that Hegel puts forth an idealism in which *self-conscious reason* alone is the governing principle. Charles Taylor is one of the leading advocates of this position. In his influential book, entitled *Hegel*, Taylor places self-conscious reason at the center. By this, he does not mean finite human reason, but an absolute subject that functions as a monistic

principle. Taylor therefore interprets Hegel's speculative idealism as an absolute idealism in which reality is clearly subordinate to reason:

Absolute idealism means that nothing exists which is not a manifestation of the Idea, that is, of rational necessity. Everything exists for a purpose, that of the coming to be of rational self-consciousness, and this requires that all that exists be the manifestation of rational necessity.⁶

The Absolute, what is ultimately *real*, or what is at the foundation of everything, is *subject*.⁷

But now we have seen that the absolute, what is at the foundation of everything, is *Geist*, or subject, and this is not just a matter of fact. . . . Rather it is so in virtue of rational necessity.⁸

The strength of this interpretation is evidenced by Taylor's ability to explain complex and even contentious issues with clarity and persuasiveness. Taylor develops a convincing account of Hegel's speculative idealism in terms of the identity of opposites mentioned above. The monistic interpretation works particularly well with the extended version of this dialectical concept, which Hegel borrowed from Schelling, i.e., the identity of identity and difference.⁹ The doubling of identity is what lends itself nicely to Taylor's monistic interpretation. The lower level identity is finite human reason understood as the self-identical subject, e.g., Kant's apperception or Fichte's "I = I." Over against this is reality, which represents the moment of otherness and, thus, of difference. The second, higher level identity is supposed to explain how finite human reason and reality are reconciled. This is the role of the absolute monistic subject. Similar to Spinoza's substance monism, finite human reason and reality can be reconciled if and only if they are manifestations (Taylor uses the term, "embodiments") of one and the same absolute subject. If this was not the case, according to Taylor's subject monism, then finite human reason and reality would suffer the plight of Cartesian dualism: they would carry the associated burdens of solipsism and skepticism because of their irreconcilability.¹⁰

Taylor's work has been influential enough in the community of Hegel scholarship that traces of it can be found in those who do not advance his monistic interpretation. Relative newcomers to the study of Hegel from the Anglo-American analytic tradition are a good case in point. Robert Brandom, in his essay 'Some Pragmatist Themes in Hegel's Idealism: Negotiation and Administration in Hegel's Account of the Structure and Content of Conceptual Norms,'¹¹ does not address monism. Instead, Brandom examines the extent to which Hegel's idealism can help to explain his own *pragmatist semantic thesis*, which states that "the use of concepts determines their content, that is, that concepts can have no content apart from that conferred on them by their use."¹² Taylor's influence can be seen in what Brandom describes as Hegel's *idealist thesis*. Although Brandom is alluding to a

tradition that extends beyond Taylor, he takes what can be characterized, within the context of Hegel scholarship, as a Taylor-esque position; for, as Brandom construes it, the idealist thesis asserts that “the structure and unity of the concept is the same as the structure and unity of the *self*.”¹³ His language is different, but, again, the interpretive approach is similar insofar as he assumes that Hegel's speculative idealism prioritizes self-conscious reason or, in his terminology, the self. Brandom focuses on the ‘Self-Consciousness’ section of the *Phenomenology* to show that the structure of mutual recognition between self-conscious beings determines the content and value of conceptual norms. Brandom quite effectively argues that mutual recognition takes shape as the practice of negotiation through which a community of self-conscious individuals comes to a consensus about and administers these conceptual norms.

Another brand of Hegel scholarship might be best described as the Kantian school, whose most prominent figure in recent years has been Robert Pippin. In his book, *Hegel's Idealism: The Satisfactions of Self-Consciousness*, Pippin takes an innovative approach to the often discussed relationship between Kant and Hegel. Unlike the majority of work in this field that deals almost entirely with their disagreements, Pippin also examines the many points they agree upon in the attempt to show that Hegel's speculative idealism “completes”¹⁴ Kant's transcendental idealism. However, similar to Taylor and Brandom, Pippin also gives priority to self-conscious reason. In pinpointing the primary agreement between Kant and Hegel, Pippin writes:

I propose to take Hegel at his word when he tells us, in an early work, that it was the argument of Kant's Transcendental Deduction that first came close to and made possible the speculative identity theory he ultimately created, and, in a later work, that his theory of the Notion, and indeed the relation between the Notion and reality, or the basic position of his entire philosophy, should be understood as a direct variation on a crucial Kantian theme, the “transcendental unity of apperception.” . . . [The] issue, as Hegel again tells us, is the apperception theme, Kant's claim about the “self-conscious,” ultimately the “spontaneously” self-conscious, character of all possible experience.¹⁵

Pippin finds a good deal of textual support from some of Hegel's more significant works. The “early work” to which he refers is *Faith and Knowledge*, where Hegel clearly singles out Kant's transcendental unity of apperception as important, not only to him, but also to the development of German Idealism as a whole.¹⁶ There are many other such references throughout the Hegelian corpus, but one that particularly stands out is the ‘Force and the Understanding’ section of the *Phenomenology*. In the middle third of this section, Hegel introduces the supersensible realm of laws.¹⁷ At issue there is the ability (or inability) of law to unify the disparate and even opposed elements of its own content. This is certainly reminiscent of the Kantian problem of the heterogeneity between the understanding and sensibil-

ity addressed in the Transcendental Deduction.¹⁸ What makes Pippin's approach convincing is that Hegel's solution to the heterogeneity problem, similar to Kant, is self-consciousness. The emergence of self-consciousness is not an unimportant event in the phenomenological progression. Hegel himself declares that its emergence heralds the subject matter of what he calls "Science," which is another term for speculative idealism:

This apprehension of the difference as it is in truth, or the apprehension of infinity as such, is for us, or in itself [i.e., is merely implicit]. *The exposition of its Notion belongs to Science.* . . . Since the Notion of infinity is an object for consciousness, the latter is consciousness of a difference that is no less immediately cancelled; consciousness is for its own self, it is a distinguishing of that which contains no difference, or self-consciousness.¹⁹

Self-consciousness marks the first explicit appearance of what will become, at the end of the *Phenomenology*, the standpoint of the *Science of Logic*, which will itself culminate in nothing less than the absolute idea.

The three above interpretations of Hegel possess their own relative strengths. But, as a group, each has the same interpretive shortcoming of prioritizing self-conscious reason. Be it Taylor's absolute subject, Brandom's selfhood, or Pippin's Kantian apperception, this kind of exclusive priority is not dialectical in the Hegelian sense of the term and, as a result, does not sufficiently grasp the *speculative* nature of his idealism. One scholar who makes this point, without explicitly saying so, is Thomas Wartenberg. In his essay, 'Hegel's Idealism: The Logic of Conceptuality,' Wartenberg argues against scholars such as Taylor and Pippin, among others, on the grounds that prioritizing what he categorizes as the "modern European"²⁰ concept of subjectivity does not take Hegel's critique of subjectivism as seriously as it should. Wartenberg understands this critique to mean that Hegel was entirely opposed to the "theory that the human mind constitutes the objective realm."²¹ Instead, according to Wartenberg, Hegel advances a non-subjectivist logic of conceptuality in which "concepts determine the structure of reality."²²

Despite what I think is a worthy attempt to criticize the prioritizing of self-conscious reason, Wartenberg fails to get beyond this interpretive approach. His claim that Hegel's speculative idealism presupposes that "concepts determine the structure of reality" places him squarely within the Kantian school. There are a number of passages in his essay that confirm his Kantian bias. For example, Wartenberg writes:

Hegel conceived speculative logic as a successor discipline to Kant's transcendental logic. That is, from Hegel's point of view, the goal of speculative logic is *the same* as the goal of transcendental logic, namely the determination of the concepts by means of which objects are determined in an a priori manner.²³

Wartenberg reads like Pippin in this passage. Interpreting speculative logic as a successor discipline to transcendental logic is not much different from Pippin's completion claim. Pippin even refers to Hegel similarly as "a successor to Kant."²⁴ Wartenberg does not seem to appreciate the assumptions that come with making a connection to Kant like this. Specifically, such a connection situates Hegel firmly in the tradition of the Copernican revolution where Kant demonstrates the priority of self-conscious reason over the reality of the things in themselves.²⁵ Transcendental logic is impossible without this assumption. Wartenberg cannot have it both ways: he cannot affirm Hegel's transcendentalism, but, then, deny the priority of self-conscious reason that necessarily accompanies it. Thus, to argue that speculative idealism is a logic of conceptuality that shares *the same goal* as transcendental logic binds Hegel to the same "modern European" concept of subjectivity to which Wartenberg claims he is not bound.

One of the merits of Wartenberg's interpretation is his emphasis on logic. He is right to do so, if by logic he means the *dialectic*, in the attempt to make sense of speculative idealism. The dialectic provides the key to understanding why the prioritizing of self-conscious reason is insufficient as well as what kind of priority Hegel actually had in mind. The dialectical identity of identity and difference will shed some light on this. Earlier, we saw how this concept seemed to fit well with Taylor's monistic interpretation. But there is more to this dialectical concept than may initially meet the eye. Hegel was deeply concerned that its apparent simplicity would be misleading. In the *Encyclopedia Logic*, he warns against the tendency *not* to assign equal priority to difference. The significance of this warning may not have been recognized because Hegel uses another formulation. Rather than *Idenität*, he uses the German for "unity," *Einheit*. That Hegel means the same dialectical concept of identity above is clear from the second part of the opening sentence, when he associates unity with abstract identity:

When we say that ground is the unity of identity and difference, this unity must *not* be understood as *abstract identity* . . . which we have recognized to be untrue. So, in order to counter this misunderstanding, we can also say that ground is not only the unity *but equally the difference* of identity and difference.²⁶

Hegel is not simply reversing priority here, as if we should now understand difference as more fundamental. The operative term is "equally." This indicates that the genuinely dialectical significance of this all-important concept is the *equal value* shared by identity and difference. Thus, Hegel wants us to regard the identity of identity and difference as equivalent to the difference of identity and difference. This has direct ramifications for Taylor's monistic interpretation. The equal value of identity and difference suggests that Hegel is as much a dualist as a monist. To allocate priority to one over the other simply does not do justice to Hegel's dialectic. This applies to any kind of one-sided prioritizing, including self-conscious reason

over reality. In principle, it can just as equally be said of Hegel's speculative idealism that reality has priority over reason. This is not in any way to say that reason is subordinate, but that reason and reality are *mutually constitutive*.

To be sure, the subject interpretation developed by Taylor, Brandom, Pippin, and even Wartenberg, is so widespread in the community of scholarship because Hegel does, in fact, assign to self-conscious reason a prominent, constitutive role in his speculative idealism. The limitation of the subject interpretation is that it does not *also* recognize that the opposite—i.e., reality—has equal claim to constitutive priority. The remainder of this essay will focus on this other side of speculative idealism by presenting Hegel's case for realism. Although Pippin was entirely justified to have emphasized the positive influence that Kant's apperception had on Hegel, one must never lose sight of their disagreements. Of equal importance is Hegel's critique of Kant. Hegel's case for realism *is* his critique of transcendental idealism. An examination of this critique will show that Hegel, though certainly Kantian in many ways, is also rather un-Kantian in his defense of realism.

3. HEGEL'S CRITIQUE OF KANT: A CASE FOR REALISM

Of the many occasions in which Hegel criticizes Kant, the one most pertinent to his case for realism is the Ideal of Reason in the Transcendental Dialectic of the first *Critique*. Within the framework of Kant's transcendental idealism, the ideal of reason is the subject matter of theology. Textually, the ideal continues the discussion of the fourth antinomy, but with a different issue in mind. The antinomies deal with the cosmological order of the universe. Cosmology considers the quantitative constitution of the world with regard to its temporal beginning and spatial divisibility as well as the qualitative constitution of nature with respect to causality and absolute necessity. Theology, on the other hand, deals with what Kant sometimes describes as the "*being of all beings*"²⁷ and other times as the absolute being, i.e., God. The similarity between the fourth antinomy and the ideal is that both deal with the concept of God. The difference is that the fourth antinomy examines the necessity of such a being and its conflict with the contingency of nature, while the ideal is concerned with its *reality*. The ideal is also not the same as the idea of God. According to Kant, each comes from a different, although related, demand of reason. The idea of God comes from the demand for the complete determination of all things as to their reality.²⁸ Reason is here following the principle of sufficient reason, which requires, in this context, that a complete and adequate explanation be given for each and every thing. From this, reason generates the idea of a completely sufficient ground of all things. What distinguishes the idea from the ideal is the subjective nature of the former. As a product of reason, the idea of God can only ever be subjective; that is, it is only the mere thought of a sufficient ground. The ideal, on the other hand, arises from

a second demand of reason that the idea of God must also have *reality*. Like St. Anselm's ontological argument, the ideal is based on the requirement that God cannot be a subjective idea only, but must also be a *real being*. This also follows the principle of sufficient reason in that God, if He were to remain a subjective idea only, would not be the completely adequate ground of all things. God would be inadequate because He would lack reality. In order to satisfy its own standard of complete determination, reason requires the embodiment of the idea in reality, i.e., it requires the ideal.²⁹

For Hegel, transcendental idealism can only escape the problem of subjectivism that Wartenberg describes—namely, the theory that the human mind constitutes the objective realm—if Kant is able to account for the ideal. However, this is precisely what he does not do; and, what is worse, according to Hegel, he explicitly declares such an account should not even be attempted. Kant argues that the ideal, like the paralogisms and the antinomies, entails a misuse of the ideas of reason. In this context, the problem is that reason falsely assumes that its idea of reality can actually be real. The ideal simply can never be realized. For Kant, the attempt by reason to go beyond the idea in order to establish a foothold in reality has, in fact, the opposite result: rather than realizing the embodiment of the idea in a real being, reason stumbles across an illusion. To avoid this, Kant concludes that reality is and must always remain a subjective idea with no possibility of actually becoming real. Interestingly, the fact that reality can only be a subjective idea not only reflects Hegel's critique of transcendental idealism; it is also one of Kant's very own stipulations:

In any such use of the transcendental idea we should be overstepping the limits of its purpose and validity. For reason, in employing [the idea] as a basis for the complete determination things, *has used it only as the concept* of all reality, without requiring that all this reality be objectively given and be itself a thing. Such a thing is a *mere fiction* in which we combine and realize the manifold of our idea in an ideal, as an individual being. *But we have no right to do this, nor even to assume the possibility of such an hypothesis.*³⁰

Hegel's critique of Kant's transcendental idealism is not without justification. For Hegel, a philosophical position that upholds, as one of its basic tenets, that reality is a fiction generated by the faculty of reason can be nothing more than a subjective idealism.

Up to this point, we have considered the negative aspect of Hegel's critique of Kant. There is also a positive aspect in which he begins to define his own speculative idealism. Hegel is not, in his sense of the term, a skeptic whose only ambition is to refute Kant; he is a dialectician who believes that the negative character of critique also has a positive result. Hegel's critique of Kant not only negatively shows that transcendental idealism is exclusively and viciously subjective, but also positively shows that one of the defining characteristics of speculative idealism

is its *affirmation* of realism. Against Kant, Hegel believes that the ideal of reason *can* be realized. Hegel's love-hate relationship with Kant is at work here: although Hegel is critical of transcendental idealism, his own speculative idealism—in particular, its basic tenet that 'reason is all reality'—is partly derived from Kant's first *Critique*; that is to say, speculative idealism affirms precisely the kind of realism that transcendental idealism denies. This comes to the fore in a part of Kant's account of the ideal that we have yet to examine. Consistent with the other parts, this one begins with the idea of God, but here formulated in a way that highlights its connection to the basic tenet of Hegel's speculative idealism:

If, therefore, reason presupposes, in the complete determination of things, a transcendental substrate that entails the whole supply of material from which all possible predicates of things must be taken, this substrate is nothing else than *the idea of an all reality* (omnitudo realitatis).³¹

The previous formulation of the idea of God was that of a completely sufficient ground. The above is slightly different in that it now portrays God as a *substrate*, which functions as an underlying subject—a *ὑποκείμενον* in the Aristotelian sense—that contains in itself all possible determinations of things. The standard of completeness required by reason thus leads to the idea of an absolute substrate to which every conceivable determination of things, both positive and negative, can be traced back.³² As an idea, it is only the mere thought or subjective conception of an absolute substrate; but, since this idea also entails the demand that all things be completely determined as to their reality, it can likewise be considered, according to Kant, as the idea of *all reality*. In this light, the ideal, if it were achievable, would consist of the realization of this idea in a *real substrate*. Earlier, the ideal was characterized similarly as the embodiment of the idea in a real being. As Kant now describes it, the ideal would thus amount to the realized idea of an all reality in "an individual being."³³ Understood in this way, the ideal is akin to, but not exactly the same as, the Aristotelian concept of primary *οὐσία* as developed in the *Categories*:³⁴ the ideal represents a fundamental reality to which every possible determination (or *καταγορία*) of things can be traced back. In Kant's terminology, an individual being that is supposed to represent this kind of a fundamental reality is nothing else but the concept of the thing-in-itself: "[T]he concept of an *ens realissimum* is the concept of an individual being. . . . But the concept of what thus possesses all reality is just the concept of a *thing in itself* as completely determined."³⁵ What Kant's transcendental idealism denies by disavowing the realization of the ideal is the realism of individual things or, in a word, of *substances*. Thus, the kind of realism that Hegel's speculative idealism affirms is that of individual substances.

As confirmation of this, one need only look to the *Phenomenology* and, specifically, at the transition to reason. At the point when the development of consciousness would seem to have risen to the heights of pure conceptual think-

ing—some might even say, critically, of abstract metaphysics—the emergence of reason is marked by the return of the ‘Thing,’ i.e., the external other, which seemed to have been lost in the transition from consciousness to self-consciousness:

It [self-consciousness] has the certainty of having truly divested itself of its ‘I,’ and of having turned its own immediate self-consciousness into a *Thing*, into an *objective* essence.³⁶

Those who view Hegel either as indifferent to or even as disdainful of realism need to consider his critique of Kant closely. What Hegel finds problematic is Kant’s intentional exclusion of *things* external to and independent of reason. In fact, on the occasions when Hegel criticizes transcendental idealism, he does so because it has nothing whatsoever to do with the things themselves, but is characterized in entirely subjective terms. The main focus of Hegel’s critique of Kant—which is the difference that makes the difference between speculative and transcendental idealism—is the thing-in-itself. The basic tenet of Hegel’s speculative idealism that “reason is all reality” is a direct response to this all-important transcendental concept. The problem that Hegel sees pervading transcendental idealism is the radical, irreconcilable disconnect between reason and reality, the ‘I’ and the thing-in-itself. Hegel succinctly encapsulates his critique of transcendental idealism in the *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*:

I, as reason or conception, and *the things external to me*, are both absolutely different from one another; and that, according to Kant, is the ultimate standpoint. The animal does not stop at this standpoint, but practically brings about their unity.³⁷

The basic tenet of speculative idealism, like the animal, does not stop at this so-called “ultimate standpoint,” but attempts to bring the things themselves back from the alienated state in which Kant left them and to *reconcile* them with an equally alienated reason. This is not to suggest that Hegel discards Kant, but only that his prioritizing of reason must be balanced with a realism that deals directly with the things themselves.

4. GEIST AS RECONCILIATION OF IDEALISM AND REALISM

Perhaps one of the more well-known, but widely debated passages in which Hegel describes the kind of reconciliation at play in speculative idealism is found in the Preface to the *Phenomenology* (which was also referenced earlier). It is the passage where Hegel claims that “everything” in his philosophical system “turns on grasping and expressing the True, not only as *Substance*, but equally as *Subject*.”³⁸ This specific formulation fits well with the interpretation given in this work. The language of “not only . . . , but . . .” (*nicht als . . . , sondern . . .*)³⁹ suggests that any interpretation which prioritizes either subject or substance over the other will not

be sufficient. The term, “equally” (*ebensosehr*)⁴⁰ seems to confirm that an adequate understanding of Hegel’s speculative idealism must, at least, acknowledge that subject and substance, i.e., reason and reality, have equal value. The matter, however, cannot be so easily settled. There are other passages that fit just as well with the subject interpretation given by Taylor, Brandom, Pippin, and Wartenberg:

That the True is actual only as system, or that Substance is essentially Subject, is expressed in the representation of the Absolute as *Spirit* [*Geist*]—the most sublime Notion and the one which belongs to the modern age and its religion.⁴¹

In order to express the same sense of equality as the first passage, this one would have to stipulate, not only that substance is subject, but also the opposite position that subject is essentially substance. Lacking this, the above seems to prioritize reason over reality. The True, Hegel appears to say, will only be actual when reality proves to be rational, but not the reverse. Despite the ambiguity raised by these conflicting passages, the second one introduces an important concept that may, in fact, resolve the dispute, namely, *Geist*. Regardless of how one ultimately interprets Hegel, he certainly thought that speculative idealism had much, if not “everything,” to do with *Geist*.

The pervasiveness of *Geist* throughout Hegel’s philosophy makes it a rather complex and multifaceted concept that can be examined from a variety of perspectives ranging from the theological to the historical, logical, epistemological, and others. In the specific context of reconciliation, one of Hegel’s illuminating, but terse characterizations of *Geist* is his claim that “the True is the whole.”⁴² Hegel introduces this to establish that *Geist* is a process concept that only shows itself in its complete form at the end: “But the whole is nothing other than the essence consummating itself through its development. Of the Absolute it must be said that it is essentially a *result*, that only in the *end* is it truly what it is.”⁴³ This is often taken to mean that *Geist* can only be fully, and thus correctly grasped at the final stage of the dialectical progression. According to this view, any adequate interpretation of Hegel’s concept of *Geist* would have to focus on the conclusion of the *Science of Logic*, where it appears, in the form of the absolute idea, as the culmination of a progression that started with sense-certainty at the beginning of the *Phenomenology*. If, however, we take Hegel at his word when he says that the True is “the process of its own becoming, the circle that presupposes its end at its beginning,”⁴⁴ then a strong case can be made that *Geist*, as the whole, is already present and entirely operative in sense-certainty. A brief analysis of sense-certainty will bring to light a less studied meaning of Hegel’s concept of *Geist* that will provide enough interpretative data to show how it reconciles idealism and realism.

The goal of sense-certainty is the goal of the *Phenomenology*: the achievement of true knowledge. As a stage of consciousness, not self-consciousness, sense-

certainty proceeds with the assumption that what must be known to realize this goal is the external object. The specific task of sense-certainty is to demonstrate that its own subjective capacity of knowledge, in this case, apprehension,⁴⁵ corresponds to the external object. At this stage of the progression, the external object is a particular sense datum, what Hegel designates as *a This*.⁴⁶ In the course of the progression, however, sense-certainty fails to achieve true knowledge. It is unable to apprehend the *This* as the particular it is supposed to be, but, instead, expresses the universal. This is not the end of sense-certainty. Learning from its failure, sense-certainty tries to correct its mistake by making the opposite assumption: in order to achieve true knowledge, it now attempts to demonstrate that the external object corresponds to its own subjective capacity.⁴⁷ As the progression unfolds, sense-certainty again fails to achieve true knowledge, and for the same reason: it does not apprehend the *This* as the particular, but as the universal. This failure does not mark the end of sense-certainty either, but brings it to an important realization about the achievement of true knowledge. Specifically, sense-certainty learns that such knowledge cannot be achieved solely in accordance with the model of the first attempt or solely in accordance with the model of the second, but must involve both as a whole. In this final case, sense-certainty would achieve true knowledge if and only if its subjective capacity corresponds to the *This* and, at the same time, the *This* to its subjective capacity:

Sense-certainty thus come to know by experience that its essence is neither in the object nor in the 'I'. . . . Thus we reach the stage where we have to posit the *whole* of sense-certainty itself as its *essence*, and no longer only one of its moments, as happened in the two cases where first the object confronting the 'I,' and then the 'I,' were supposed to be its reality. Thus it is only sense-certainty as a *whole* which stands firm within itself.⁴⁸

To be sure, sense-certainty fails once more to achieve true knowledge and thereby gives way to the next stage in the phenomenological progression—perception—where the same project is taken up again. It is important to note that the problem with sense-certainty is not what it learns about achieving the goal of true knowledge, but only its inability to apprehend the external object qua particular. In fact, the positive result of sense-certainty is precisely what it learns about this goal: namely, that knowledge can only be achieved by grasping the whole and not just one of its constituent sides in isolation from the other. It is not surprising, therefore, that Hegel characterizes the result of sense-certainty and the overall goal of the phenomenological progression in a similar manner:

But the goal is as necessarily fixed for knowledge as the serial progression; it is the point where knowledge no longer needs to go beyond itself, where knowledge finds itself, *where Notion corresponds to object and object to Notion*.⁴⁹

The goal is neither one side nor the other—neither the Notion corresponding to the object nor the object to the Notion—but both taken together as a whole. With a view to this kind of whole, the basic tenet of Hegel’s speculative idealism that “reason is all reality” assumes a rather distinctive meaning. It does not mean either that reason is reality or that reality is reason, but must now be understood as a two-sided tenet in which reason is reality *and* reality is reason. *Geist* is this two-sided whole. The subject interpretation of Hegel by Taylor, Brandom, Pippin, and Wartenberg, only considers one side of *Geist*, with the consequence that reason is given sole priority over reality. What actually turns out to be the case is that speculative idealism is a two-sided position where reason and reality have equal value in their mutual determination of the whole. The implication is that any interpretation of Hegel contending that he only advocates an idealism of self-conscious reason is just as incorrect as one asserting that he only advances a realism of individual substance. In accordance with the two-sidedness of *Geist*, Hegel’s speculative idealism consists of both equally; and only as such does it *reconcile* idealism and realism into a dialectical identity of opposites.

A question can legitimately be raised at this point as to what an idealism of self-conscious reason and a realism of individual substance have in common such that Hegel could conceivably give them the status of “equal value.” How, in other words, can these very opposite positions be identical? Another of Hegel’s characterizations *Geist* provides the answer: *Geist*, as the whole, is also “the movement of self-positing.”⁵⁰ The latter is what the idealism of self-conscious reason and the realism of individual substances share in common. This can be verified historically in the figures of Kant and Aristotle. Despite Hegel’s critical attitude toward Kant on the issue of the thing-in-itself, Pippin performed a valuable service for the community of scholarship for having fleshed out some of their agreements. One of these is the concept of the self-positing subject (which Fichte, prior to Hegel, developed in his *Wissenschaftslehre*).⁵¹ In Kant, the self-positing subject has a theoretical and a practical significance. From the theoretical perspective, the movement of self-positing is described as the active spontaneity of self-conscious reason to produce its own objectivity through various acts of synthesis.⁵² From the practical perspective, on the other hand, the same movement of self-positing takes the form of the autonomy of the will, i.e., of practical reason. In this case, the movement of self-positing is the activity of practical reason to give itself law in accordance with which one ought to live.⁵³

The corresponding movement of self-positing on the side of realism can be seen in Aristotle’s concept of substance characterized specifically as $\phi\acute{\upsilon}\sigma\iota\varsigma$:

All things existing by nature [$\phi\acute{\upsilon}\sigma\epsilon\iota$] have in themselves a principle of motion. . . . So nature [$\phi\acute{\upsilon}\sigma\iota\varsigma$] is a principle and a cause of being moved or of rest in the thing to which it belongs primarily and *in virtue of that thing*.⁵⁴

Hegel agrees with Aristotle that substance possesses in itself its own principle of motion. Although the language is different, what Hegel finds compellingly parallel to Kant's idealism of self-conscious reason is Aristotle's premise that substance, qua *φύσις*, has the capacity to move *in virtue of itself*. In the unqualified sense, this describes the self-generating movement of an individual. What distinguishes Aristotle from Kant—and thus makes the basic tenet of Hegel's speculative idealism an identity of *opposites*—is the realist premise that this kind of movement has the logically discernable form of a principle that *belongs to substance*. The latter premise could not be more opposed to Kantian philosophy. Kant would never concede that substance possesses any kind of discernable characteristics. Transcendental idealism is predicated on the assumption that this cannot be the case insofar as nothing can be known of substance qua thing-in-itself. This also highlights what is arguably the main difference between Kant's transcendental and Hegel's speculative idealism: in Hegel's view, *the nature (φύσις) of substance, i.e., what it means to be a thing-in-itself, is to have and express the logic of its own becoming*. Hegel's position is not that logic can be applied to substance from an outer source, as if superimposed onto it from an externally privileged standpoint, but that substance is in itself dialectically constituted. One consequence of this is that the faculty of reason is not the sole proprietor of logic (which, in principle, is very similar to Wartenberg's position). Hegel believes that logical determinations belong to and emanate from substance as much as from reason. This does not mean that Hegel rejects Kant in total on the grounds that transcendental idealism does not recognize the dialectical nature of substance. On the contrary, Hegel equally affirms Kant's idealism as one of the two sides of his speculative idealism. What Aristotle lacks, Kant supplies, i.e., the self-positing activity of *reason*.

It is not insignificant that there is an historical benefit of interpreting speculative idealism in this way. From the start, Hegel's goal was not only to reconcile the opposing philosophical positions of idealism and realism, but also distinct historical epochs. Hegel conceived speculative idealism as the identity of idealism and realism, reason and reality, in the attempt to reconcile the moderns and the ancients. Therefore, the basic tenet of speculative idealism that "reason is all reality" also asserts the reconciliation between modernity and the ancient Greek tradition. This is consistent with Hegel's presentation of *Geist* in the *Phenomenology*, which begins with ancient Greek culture in the form of the ethical substance. The culmination of this section, after a long progression, is modern European culture in the form of Kantian morality. As the *result*, modern European culture is not an independent standpoint totally divorced from ancient Greek culture. The result is the two-sided whole of *Geist* that, qua the end, is reconciled with its beginning.

NOTES

1. Plato, "Phaedo," from *Five Dialogues*, trans. G. M. A. Grube (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Co., 1981), 96a–100e.
2. G. W. F. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. A. V. Miller (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), §§231–9.
3. G. W. F. Hegel, *Philosophy of Right*, trans. T. M. Knox (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1967), 10.
4. *Phenomenology*, §17, Hegel's italics.
5. G. W. F. Hegel, *Science of Logic*, trans. A. V. Miller (Atlantic Highlands, N.J.: Humanities Press International, 1989), 49; Hegel's italics, my brackets.
6. Charles Taylor, *Hegel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975), 110.
7. *Ibid.*, 104, my italics.
8. *Ibid.*, Taylor's italics.
9. The formulation of this dialectical concept varies depending on the text, translation, and interpreter. For example, it can also be expressed as the unity of identity and difference as well as the identity of the difference of subject and object, among others.
10. Taylor, *Hegel*, 109–10.
11. Robert B. Brandom, "Some Pragmatist Themes in Hegel's Idealism: Negotiation and Administration in Hegel's Account of the Structure and Content of Conceptual Norms," *European Journal of Philosophy* 7:2 (1999): 164–89.
12. *Ibid.*, 164.
13. *Ibid.*
14. Robert Pippin, *Hegel's Idealism: The Satisfactions of Self-Consciousness* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 7.
15. *Ibid.*, 6; my brackets.
16. G. W. F. Hegel, *Faith and Knowledge*, trans. Walter Cerf and H. S. Harris (Albany: SUNY Press, 1977).
17. *Phenomenology*, §144.
18. Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. Norman Kemp Smith (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1965). Kant states the problem of heterogeneity as follows: "If the *receptivity* of our mind, its power of receiving representations in so far as it is in any wise affected, is to be entitled sensibility, then the mind's power of producing representations from itself, the *spontaneity* of knowledge, should be called the understanding. Our nature is so constituted that our *intuition* can never be other than sensible; that is, it contains only the mode in which we are affected by objects. The faculty, on the other hand, which enables us to *think* the object of sensible intuition is the understanding. To neither of these powers may a preference be given over the other. Without sensibility no object would be given to us, without the understanding no object would be thought. Thoughts without content are empty, intuitions without concepts are blind." A51/B75; Kant's italics.
19. *Phenomenology*, §164; translator's brackets, my italics.

20. Thomas Wartenberg, "Hegel's Idealism: The Logic of Conceptuality," in *The Cambridge Companion to Hegel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 105.
21. *Ibid.*, 104; my brackets.
22. *Ibid.*, 103.
23. *Ibid.*, 115; my italics.
24. Pippin, *Hegel's Idealism*, 7.
25. *Critique of Pure Reason*, Bxvi–Bxxi.
26. G. W. F. Hegel, *Encyclopädie der philosophischen Wissenschaften, Teil I, Wissenschaft der Logik*, 3rd ed. (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1986), §121, Zusatz; my translation.
27. *Critique of Pure Reason*, A579/B607; Kant's italics.
28. *Ibid.*, A572/B600.
29. The difference between the idea and the ideal explains why Kant examines the Ontological Argument in this section of the first *Critique*. Briefly, the Ontological Argument is the attempt to deduce the reality of God from the idea of Him. One of the crucial parts of the proof is the assertion that God cannot only be an idea in the mind, but must also have reality; otherwise, something greater than God could be conceived—namely, reality itself. The move from the idea to reality in the Ontological Argument, for Kant, comes from the demand of Reason for the ideal.
30. *Critique of Pure Reason*, A580/B608; my italics and brackets.
31. *Ibid.*, A576/B604; my translation and italics—I have altered the Norman Kemp Smith translation to include the phrase, "die Idee von einem All der Realitat." Kemp Smith's translation omits this and simply reads: "the idea of an omnitudo realitatis." One has to wonder why Kemp Smith did not include the idea of all reality, since its inclusion is not awkward, but, quite the contrary, explanatory. I have included the reference to the idea of all reality to emphasize the connection between Hegel's speculative idealism and Kant's transcendental idealism, which cannot be readily gleaned from the Kemp Smith translation.
32. *Ibid.*, A576/B604.
33. *Ibid.*
34. Aristotle, *Categories*, trans. Hippocrates G. Apostle (Des Moines, Iowa: Peripatetic Press, 1980), 2a11–4b20.
35. *Critique of Pure Reason*, A576/B604; Kant's italics, my brackets.
36. *Phenomenology*, §229; Hegel's italics, my brackets.
37. G. W. F. Hegel, *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*, vol. 3, trans. E. S. Haldane and Francis H. Simson (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1995), 455; my italics.
38. *Phenomenology*, §17; Hegel's italics.
39. G. W. F. Hegel, *Die Phänomenologie des Geistes* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1986), 23.
40. *Ibid.*
41. *Phenomenology*, §25; Hegel's italics, my brackets.
42. *Ibid.*, §20.

43. Ibid.
44. Ibid., §19.
45. Ibid., §§90, 94.
46. Ibid., §91.
47. Ibid., §§100–1.
48. Ibid., §103; Hegel's italics.
49. Ibid., §80; my italics.
50. Ibid., §18.
51. Johann Gottlieb Fichte, *Wissenschaftslehre*, Bd. 284 (Meiner: Philosophische Bibliothek, 1986).
52. *Critique of Pure Reason*, A50/B73–A52/B76, A84–A130, B1130–B169. Also, Kant states, “Synthetic *a priori* judgments are thus possible when we relate the formal conditions of *a priori* intuition, the synthesis of imagination and the necessary unity of this synthesis in a transcendental apperception, to a possible empirical knowledge in general. We then assert that the conditions for the *possibility of experience* in general are likewise the conditions for the *possibility of the objects of experience*” (A158/B197).
53. Immanuel Kant, *The Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, trans. Mary Gregor (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 24, 40–1, 47, 52–4.
54. Aristotle, *Physics*, trans. Hippocrates G. Apostle (Des Moines, Iowa: Peripatetic Press, 1969), 192b10–33; my italics and brackets.