

Kant's Excessive Tenderness for Things in the World, and Hegel's Dialetheism

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1 Introduction

Dialetheism is the view that some contradictions are true. The very opposite has been high orthodoxy in Western philosophy since Aristotle's muddled but influential defence of the Principle of Non-Contradiction in the *Metaphysics*.¹ Drawing on modern developments in paraconsistent logic, the view has now become more palatable than before. The history of Western philosophy has, however, produced a few thinkers who stood up against the orthodoxy, the most notable of these being Hegel. But he did not get there alone. The ground was laid by Kant in his account of the Antinomies in the first *Critique*. In the end, Kant was not prepared to follow the logic of his arguments into dialetheism, and suggested somewhat unsatisfactory ways out of their contradictory conclusions. Hegel was made of sterner stuff. He rejected what he saw as Kant's 'excessive tenderness for things of the world', and promoted dialetheism to the centre-stage of his philosophical thought: his logical dialectics.² In this essay, we will look more closely at the details of how this happened.³

2 Hegel the Dialetheist

First of all, let us be clear that Hegel was a dialetheist. Hegel explicitly claims that reality may be contradictory. For example, in the *Logic* he says:⁴

... ordinary experience itself declares that at least there are a number of contradictory things about, contradictory arrangements, and so forth, the contradiction being present in them, and not merely in an external reflection.

And in case one might suspect that he does not mean by 'contradiction' something of the form $A \wedge \neg A$, he says a few lines later:

External, sensible motion is itself its [Contradiction's] immediate existence. Something moves not because it is here at one point of

¹See Priest (2006a), ch. 1.

²Contemporary developments in dialetheism tend to be motivated by quite different considerations, a major one of which is the paradoxes of self-reference. For a review of dialetheism, see Priest, Berto, and Weber (2018).

³The following essay draws heavily on Priest (1990), and (2002), chs. 5-7.

⁴Quotations from the *Logic* are taken from Johnston and Struthers (1929). The following comes from Vol. II, p. 67.

time and there at another, but because at one and the same point of time it is here and not here, and in this here both is and is not. We must grant the old dialecticians the contradictions which they prove in motion; but what follows is not that there is no motion, but rather that motion is existent Contradiction itself.

For what it is worth, Hegel also espouses a dialetheic solution to the Liar paradox—just as many of the contemporary dialetheists do. In his comments on Eubulides in his *Lectures on the History of Philosophy* (part 1, chapter 2, C.1.b) he says that the liar sentence:⁵

both lies and does not lie... For here we have a union of opposites, lying and truth, and their immediate contradiction...

He also berates the error of those who have tried, futilely, to give a ‘one sided’ answer to the question of the status of the liar.

Of course, a number of Hegel exegetes, who themselves could not countenance the possible truth of a contradiction, mis-applied the Principle of Charity, and insisted that Hegel cannot be interpreted literally here. In his mouth ‘contradiction’ must mean something else.⁶ And in all fairness, it must be agreed that Hegel does use the word in a variety of ways. However, to insist that he never means ‘contradiction’ in the logician’s sense does such violence to the text that this can only result in misinterpretation.

This will become clear if we chart Hegel’s path into dialetheism. The path is via Kant; and, in particular, what he says in the section of the first *Critique* termed the *Antinomy of Pure Reason*. However, before we can get to this, we need to start further back, and look at Kant’s views concerning phenomena and noumena.

3 Kant: Phenomena and Noumena

For Kant, phenomena are, essentially, those things that are perceivable via the senses. I use ‘thing’ in a fairly loose way here, to include objects such as buildings, countries, and stars; and events such as the extinction of the dinosaurs, plane journeys, and the death of Hegel. Noumena are things

⁵Haldane and Simpson (1955), p. 460.

⁶See, e.g., Acton (1967), esp. p. 444.

which are not phenomena. To the extent that they can be “brought before the mind” at all, they can be conceived, but not perceived.

To understand how this distinction functions for Kant, it is necessary to be very clear about his views concerning perception. Kant thinks that objects in themselves cannot be perceived, or intuited, in his jargon; what are perceived are our mental representations of such objects. As he explains (A109):⁷

Appearances are the sole objects which can be given to us immediately, and that in them which relates immediately to the object is called intuition. But these appearances are not things in themselves; they are only representations, which in turn have their object—an object which cannot itself be intuited by us, and which may, therefore, be named the non-empirical, that is, transcendental object = x .

The phenomena, or representations, perceived are a result of something contributed by the things in themselves, but also of the *a priori* structure our mind employs to constitute the representations (intuitions). In particular, space and time are not features of things themselves, but are a most important such structure. For Kant, a horse is a spatio-temporal representation of an object; but what the representation is a representation of (which the rest of us might call a horse) is neither perceived nor in space and time. As he puts it (A30=B45):

The transcendental concept of appearances in space ... is a critical reminder that nothing intuited in space is a thing in itself, that space is not a form inhering in things themselves as their intrinsic property, that objects in themselves are quite unknown to us, and that what we call outer objects are nothing more than mere representations of sensibility, the form of which is space. The true correlate of sensibility, the thing in itself, is not known, and cannot be known, through these representations; and in experience no question is ever asked in regard to it.

⁷Quotations from the *Critique* are taken from Kemp Smith (1933).

4 The Categories and their Applicability

Next, we must turn to Kant's views on the Categories. Categories are concepts of a certain kind. Kant calls them 'pure', meaning that they have no empirical content (unlike, for example, the concept *horse*). Kant abstracts them from what he took to be the logical forms of judgments, or statements as we might now put it. In the neo-Aristotelian logic he endorsed, every judgment has a quality, quantity, relation, and modality. And it may have each of these in one of three ways. Corresponding to each of these ways is a Category. In the *Prolegomena to any Future Metaphysics*, these are listed as follows follows:⁸

	Logical Form	Category
<i>Quantity</i>	Singular Particular Universal	Unity Plurality Totality
<i>Quality</i>	Affirmative Negative Infinite	Reality Negation Limitation
<i>Relation</i>	Categorical Hypothetical Disjunctive	Substance Cause Community
<i>Modality</i>	Problematic Assertoric Apodictic	Possibility Existence Necessity

To illustrate: consider, for example, the judgment 'Some capitalists may not be compassionate.' This has particular quantity, negative quality, categorical relation, and problematic modality. It thus deploys the Categories of plurality, negation, substance, and possibility. Or again, the statement 'If a piece of metal is heated then, necessarily, it expands' has universal quantity, affirmative quality, hypothetical relation, and apodictic modality. It thus deploys the Categories of totality, reality, cause, and necessity.

⁸Quotations from the *Prolegomena* are from Beck (1950). The list is from Section 21, except that I have reversed the order of the three quantities, following Bennett (1966), p. 77. It is perhaps stretching the point a little to say that the Category of modality is matter of logical form in the modern sense, for Kant takes this to be semantic rather than then syntactic. See A74=B100 ff. However, we may ignore this subtlety here.

The precise details of this matter are not very important for our purposes. The main point to note here is that the Categories are abstracted from the logical forms of judgments, and, crucially, that each Judgment deploys one or more such Category, as Kant himself remarks in the following corollary (A245=B302):

[The Categories] cannot themselves be defined. The logical functions of judgments in general, unity and plurality, assertion and denial, subject and predicate, cannot be defined without perpetrating a circle, since the definition itself must be a judgment, and so must already contain these functions.

Having sorted out the Categories, the next point to note is Kant's view that they can be (meaningfully) applied only to phenomena. As Kant puts it in the *Prolegomena*:⁹

even if the pure concepts of the understanding are thought to go beyond objects of experience to things in themselves (noumena), they have no meaning whatever.

He comes back to this point again and again in the *Critique* (for example, A95, B147, A139=B178, A239=B298).

Perhaps his major argument for this concerns the criteria for the application of the Categories. Kant notes that to apply a Category it is necessary for us to have some criterion, or *schema* in his jargon, for its applicability. In the 'Schematism of the Pure Understanding' Kant gives what he takes to be these criteria. He does not deny that, logically, there could be other criteria; but, as a matter of fact, these are the only criteria that we have, or that beings constituted like us could have.

Now, it turns out that the criteria for all the Categories involve time. To give a couple of the simpler examples (A143=B183 ff.): 'the schema of substance is permanence in real time', 'the schema of necessity is existence of an object at all times'. It follows that it makes sense to apply the criteria only to those things that are in time: phenomena. As Kant puts it (A145=B184 ff.):

We thus find that the schema of each Category contains and makes capable of representation only a determination of time ...

⁹Beck (1950), Section 30.

The schemata of the pure concepts of the understanding are thus the true and sole conditions under which these concepts obtain relation to objects and so possess significance. In the end, therefore, the Categories have no other possible employment than the empirical.

The correctness of Kant's criteria is not beyond argument; but what he takes them to be is not.

5 The Transcendental Illusion and the Antinomies

With this background, we can now move to Kant's discussion of the Antinomies of Pure Reason.

The section of the *Critique* called the *Transcendental Dialectic* concerns certain objects, which Kant calls *Transcendental Ideas*. Given some phenomenon, we can consider its conditions of a certain kind. According to Kant, Reason then forces us to construct the totality of all conditions of that kind. As he puts it (A409=B436):

Reason makes this demand in accordance with the principle that *if the conditioned is given, the entire sum of the conditions, and consequently the absolutely unconditioned ... is also given.*

The resultant totality does not itself possess conditions of the appropriate kind—or it would not be the totality of all such conditions. This is why Kant calls it the unconditioned. It is therefore a noumenon (if it is anything at all): any phenomenon must have conditions of space, time, etc. The unconditioneds are exactly the Transcendental Ideas. According to Kant, there are three ways of totalising, corresponding to the three kinds of syllogism: categorical, hypothetical, and disjunctive (though the correspondence is tenuous to say the least). We thus come to three Transcendental Ideas: the Soul, the Cosmos, and God. (One should note, though, that this is somewhat misleading, since it is going to turn out that there are four distinct Cosmological unconditioneds.)

Each Transcendental Idea brings in its wake a family of arguments, which Kant calls, respectively: the Paralogisms, the Antinomies, and the Ideal. The

arguments appear to establish profound metaphysical truths, but are (for reasons that we will come to in the case of the Cosmological Idea) fallacious. (For this reason Kant calls them ‘dialectical’.) Despite this, the fallacies are, in some sense, ones into which we inevitably fall: a ‘natural and unavoidable illusion’ (A422=B450). A visual illusion (such as the seeing of black dots at the interstices of a white grid on a black background) is an inherent product of our (correctly functioning) sensory apparatus. Moreover, even when we know this to be an illusion we cannot help seeing it. Similarly, the illusion concerning the dialectical arguments, which Kant calls ‘the Transcendental Illusion’, is an inherent product of our (correctly functioning) conceptual apparatus; when we know that the arguments are fallacious, still we cannot help seeing them as correct. Kant’s explanation as to why it is that this illusion arises is rather obscure; but the basic idea is that our possession of Transcendental Ideas performs the essential regulative function of forcing us to acknowledge that any determination of conditions is bound to be incomplete, and so motivate us to determine further conditions.

Of the three families of dialectical arguments, only one will concern us here: the Antinomies—those concerning the Cosmological Idea(s). According to Kant, there are four Antinomies, corresponding to the four kinds of Categories (quantity, quality, relation, and modality), though the correspondence is, again, exceptionally tenuous.¹⁰ Each Category produces a kind of condition, and so a corresponding kind of unconditioned, *u*.

Now, what is characteristic of the dialectical arguments in the Antinomies is that they come in pairs, each pair establishing—or appearing to establish—the conclusion that *u* has certain contradictory properties. The statements of these contradictories Kant calls the *Thesis* and the *Antithesis*. The argument for the Antithesis turns on the fact that it is always possible to apply the operation corresponding to the condition again. In his words, *u* is ‘too small’ for the concept which generates it. The argument for the Thesis turns on the fact that it is not possible to apply it again. As Kant puts it, *u* is ‘too large’ for the concept which generates it (A486=B513).

The contradictory pairs in each case are as follows (A427=B455 ff.):¹¹

¹⁰The arguments are all versions of arguments to be found in the Leibniz/Clarke debate. See Al Azm (1972).

¹¹In the first Antinomy *u* is the whole cosmos; in the second it is the simple. In the third and fourth is not immediately clear exactly what *u* is supposed to be. But it is something like the totality of all things caused, and the totality of all contingent things, respectively. See Priest (2002), ch. 6.

First Antinomy

- *Thesis*: The world has a beginning in time, and is also limited as regards space.
- *Antithesis*: The world has no beginning, and no limits in space; it is infinite as regards both.

Second Antinomy

- *Thesis*: Every composite substance in the world is made up of simple parts, and nothing anywhere exists save the simple or what is composed of it.
- *Antithesis*: No composite thing in the world is made up of simple parts, and nowhere exists in the world anything simple.

Third Antinomy

- *Thesis*: Causality in accordance with the laws of nature is not the only causality from which the appearance of the world can one and all be derived. To explain these appearances it is necessary to assume that there is another causality, that is freedom.
- *Antithesis*: There is no freedom; everything in the world takes place solely in accordance with the laws of nature.

Fourth Antinomy

- *Thesis*: There belongs to the world, either as part of it or as its cause, a being that is absolutely necessary.
- *Antithesis*: An absolutely necessary being nowhere exists in the world, nor does it exist outside the world as its cause.

6 Kant's Solution

This is not the place to discuss the details of the arguments which are supposed to establish each contradictory pair. Of more importance is what Kant takes to be the upshot of matters. One might have thought that, in virtue of

the arguments, Kant would become a dialetheist. He did not. He diagnoses a subtle fallacy in the arguments, which is as follows.¹²

The limit object, *u*, *qua* phenomenological object, does not exist. This makes both of the apparently contradictory claims false. Thus, for example, in the First Antinomy, both of ‘the World has a beginning in time’ and ‘the World has no beginning in time’ are false, since the World does not exist (A497=B525 ff). If it existed, these claims would be contradictories; but if it does not exist, they are mere contraries. In contemporary jargon, we might say that we have here a case of presupposition failure.

Fair enough (one might suppose), but where exactly do the arguments given fail, and why? Kant does not explain in detail, but the reason becomes clear when one starts to scrutinise the arguments through Kantian eyes. Take, for example, the argument for the Antithesis of the Second Antinomy. This goes as follows (A435=B463):

Assume that a composite thing (a substance) is made up of simple parts. Since all external relation, and therefore all composition of substances, is possible only in space, a space must be made up of as many parts as are contained in the composition which occupies it. Space, however, is not made up of simple parts, but of spaces. Every part of the composite must therefore occupy a space. But the absolutely first parts of every composite are simple. The simple therefore occupies a space. Now, since everything real, which occupies a space, contains in itself a manifold of constituents external to one another, and is therefore composite; and since a real composite is not made up of accidents (for accidents could not exist outside one another, in the absence of substance) but of substances, it follows that the simple would be a composite of substances—which is self-contradictory.

As a moment’s consideration shows, we are reasoning about simples and applying the Categories to them—in particular, the Category of substance. (See, for example, the last sentence.) Now we do not meet simples in experience. They are therefore noumena. The application is therefore illicit: Categories apply only to phenomena. So the reasoning is illegitimate.

¹²Actually, Kant gives two solutions to the paradoxes. The first is supposed to apply to all of them. The second, which is actually inconsistent with the first, is supposed to apply only to the third and fourth. (See Priest (2002), 6.7.) I will discuss only the first here, since it is the more general.

The point generalises to all of the Antinomies. Each one is about an unconditioned thing, a noumenon. Yet in the course of the arguments, we apply the Categories of substance, causation, necessity—and in the case of the First Antinomy, the forms of space and time, to boot. These things cannot be meaningfully applied.

7 The Instability of Kant's Solution

Kant's resolution of the contradiction, then, depends crucially on the distinction between phenomena and noumena, and on the fact that the Categories apply only to the former. But this resolution of the contradiction is unstable, precisely because of Kant's own views about the Categories. Let us see why.

That the Categories can be applied only to phenomena entails that there can be no knowledge of noumena. As Kant explains (Bxxv f.):

that we have no concepts of understanding, and consequently no elements for knowledge of things, save in so far as intuition can be given corresponding to these concepts; and that we can therefore have no knowledge of any object as thing in itself, but only in so far as it is an object of sensible intuition, that is, an appearance—all this is proved in the analytical part of the *Critique*. Thus it does indeed follow that all possible speculative knowledge of reason is limited to mere objects of experience.

This appears to put Kant in a very strange situation. For here he is, after all, writing a large book at least purporting to inform us about, inter alia, noumena. But he doesn't know what he is talking about! Kant tries to soften the blow. The passage I have just quoted goes on:

But our further contention must also be duly borne in mind, namely, that though we cannot know these objects as things in themselves, we must yet be in a position to at least think them as things in themselves; otherwise we should be landed in the absurd conclusion that there can be appearances without anything that appears.

Hence, though we cannot know anything about things in themselves, noumenal objects, we can at least think things about them.

But the matter cannot be resolved so easily. To say that we cannot know anything about noumena is, whilst true, rather misleading; for it suggests that the impossibility of having knowledge is due merely to our lack of epistemic access. The impossibility of knowledge arises for a much more profound reason, however: a lack of conceptual access. The reason that we cannot have knowledge of noumena is precisely that we cannot even make statements about them: any (meaningful) statement about them would have to apply the Categories, and so is impossible.

However, as is quite evident, this fact is belied by Kant's own discourse, which itself makes numerous assertions about noumena, applying various Categories. For just one example, Kant talks of noumena causing our sensations (e.g. A288=B345):

Understanding accordingly limits sensibility, but does not thereby extend its own sphere. In the process of warning the latter that it must not presume to claim applicability to things-in-themselves but only to appearances, it does indeed think for itself an object in itself, but only as transcendental object, which is the cause of and not itself appearance.

And this is but the tip of the iceberg. When Kant says that noumena may be supposed to exist (A253=B309) he deploys the Category of existence; when he says that they are not in time, he deploys the Category of negation. Even the statement that the Categories cannot be applied to noumena deploys the Categories of possibility and negation.

Kant is well aware of the contradiction involved here, and is very uncomfortable about it. This is clearest in the chapter of the *Critique* called 'The Ground of the Distinction of all Objects in General into Phenomena and Noumena' in which he tries to avoid the contradiction by distinguishing between an illegitimate positive notion of noumenon and a legitimate negative, or limiting, notion. This does not help: according to Kant, the negative notion is there to place a limit on the area in which we can apply the Categories, and so make Judgments (A255=B311). But to say that there are (or even may be) things about which we cannot judge is precisely to make a judgment about them; specifically, it quantifies over them, and applies the Category of plurality. The "legitimate" notion is therefore just as illegitimate as the legitimate one.

So unsuccessful was this chapter of the *Critique* that Kant completely redrafted it for the second edition, but without doing anything to remove

the fundamental contradiction. As Kemp Smith puts it:¹³

But beyond thus placing in still bolder contrast the two counter-assertions, on the one hand that the Categories must not be taken by us as other than merely subjective thought functions, and on the other that a limiting concept is indispensably necessary, Kant makes no attempt in the new passages to meet the difficulties involved. With the assertion that the Categories as such, and therefore by implication, those of reality and existence, are inapplicable to things in themselves, he combines, without any apparent consciousness of conflict, the contention that things in themselves must none the less be postulated as actually existing.

Kant's solution to the Antinomies of Pure Reason, is therefore distinctly problematic, in his own terms—to say the least. Which brings us, at last, to Hegel.

8 Hegel's Critique of Kant

According to Hume's empiricism, both knowledge and meaning must be derived from sensory experience. Kant rejected this: knowledge may be *a priori*; and the Categories of reason do not derive in any way from experience, but are imposed upon it. However, Kant still gave experience a privileged position in relation to meaning. For, though the Categories might not be derived from experience, they have applicability, as we have seen, only when schematised, that is, only when taken as the forms of *possible* experience.

Hegel rejected this vestige of empiricism. Neither experience nor its possibility has any privileged position with respect to knowledge or meaning. Hence, though the distinction between things perceivable by the senses (phenomena) and things not so perceivable (noumena) makes perfectly good sense for Hegel, the former are not categorically distinct from the latter. For example, it is just as possible to know things about noumena as it is to know things about phenomena; it may even be easier. As Hegel puts it in the *Lesser Logic*:¹⁴

The Thing-in-itself ... expresses the object when we leave out of sight all that consciousness makes of it, all its emotional aspects,

¹³Kemp Smith (1923), pp. 413f.

¹⁴Quotations from this are taken from Wallace (1975). Here, at p. 72.

and all specific thoughts of it. It is easy to see what is left—utter abstraction, total emptiness, only described still as in an ‘outer world’ ... Hence one can only read with surprise the perpetual remark that we do not know the Thing-in-itself. On the contrary there is nothing we can know so easily.

Hegel also observes that Kant’s very claim that we cannot make epistemically authoritative judgments about noumena is self-inconsistent:¹⁵

It argues an utter want of consistency to say, on the one hand, that understanding only knows phenomena, and, on the other, assert the absolute character of this knowledge, by statements such as ‘Cognition can go no further’ ... No one knows, or even feels, that anything is a limit or a defect until he is at the same time above and beyond it.

For Hegel, then, nothing substantial can hang on the distinction between phenomena and noumena. In particular, the essential differences between the two realms to which Kant appeals in order to defuse the Antinomies cannot be maintained.

Hegel drew the appropriate conclusion from this. Since there are perfectly sound (according to Hegel) arguments to the effect that the World (that is, the unconditioned object of each Antinomy) has contradictory properties, it does have contradictory properties. Thus, commenting on the Antinomies and Kant’s supposed solution to them, he says:¹⁶

In the attempt which Reason makes to comprehend the unconditioned nature of the World, it falls into what are called Antinomies. In other words, it maintains two opposite propositions about the same object, and in such a way that each of them has to be maintained with equal necessity. From this it follows that the body of cosmical fact, the specific statements descriptive of which run into contradiction, cannot be a self-subsistent reality, but only an appearance. The explanation offered by Kant alleges that the contradiction does not affect the object in its proper essence, but attaches only to the Reason which seeks to comprehend it.

¹⁵Wallace (1975), p. 91.

¹⁶Wallace (1975), p. 77f

In this way the suggestion was broached that the contradiction is occasioned by the subject-matter itself, or by the intrinsic quality of the Categories. And to offer the idea that the contradiction introduced into the world of Reason by the Categories of the Understanding is inevitable and essential was to make one of the most important steps in the progress of Modern Philosophy. But the more important the issue thus raised, the more trivial the solution. Its only motive was an excessive tenderness for the things of the world. The blemish of contradiction, it seems, could not be allowed to mar the essence of the world; but there could be no objection to attaching it to the thinking Reason, to the essence of mind. Probably nobody will feel disposed to deny that the phenomenal world presents contradictions to the observing mind; meaning by “phenomenal” the world as it presents itself to the senses and understanding, to the subjective mind. But if a comparison is instituted between the essence of world and the essence of mind, it does seem strange to hear how calmly and confidently the modest dogma has been advanced by one, and repeated by others, that thought or Reason, and not the World, is the seat of contradiction.

Thus, Kant’s evasion of the contradictions is not on.

And as Hegel goes on to explain in the next paragraph, he thinks that the Kantian Antinomies are just some amongst many. *All* our concepts, and not just the unconditioned of the Antinomies, are embroiled in contradiction.

9 Fichte’s Dialectic

Moreover, these contradictions play a central role in a systematic development of the Categories—not just Kant’s 12, but the other 70 that he missed. Here, Hegel was influenced, not by Kant, but by Fichte. So in this section, let us turn to Fichte.

In his *Wissenschaftslehre*, Fichte, like Hegel, started from Kant, and like Hegel criticised the Kantian postulation of the thing-in-itself.¹⁷ This left only the other part of the Kantian ontology: the transcendental ego. The nature of the ego, or self, is to think; but there is nothing to think about

¹⁷See Taylor (1975), pp. 36, 77.

except itself; and it is impossible to think something unless there is something else to contrast it with. (So at least thought Fichte—and Spinoza: *omnis determinatio est negatio*.) Hence, the self had to create something different, the non-self, against which it could conceive itself. It therefore generates a contradiction. Specifically, the non-self must also be self, since nothing else exists. As Fichte puts it:¹⁸

... insofar as the not-self is posited [in the self], the self is not posited in the self

but

... insofar as the not-self is to be posited [in the self], the self must be posited therein.

Thus, the self is both posited and not posited, and the posited is both self and not-self. Or, more pithily, as Fichte puts it a few lines later:

self=not-self and not-self=self.

The self (thesis), by its cunning postulation of the not-self (anti-thesis), comes to understand what it is, viz. both, and the two reside together (synthesis). The synthesis may now, in its role as a new thesis, generate a new antithesis, giving rise to a new synthesis, and so on.

Hegel criticised Fichte. But his criticisms were, essentially, twofold: first, that Fichte had not elevated the transcendental ego into something grander, *Geist*; and second, that he had misunderstood the nature and significance of the synthesis.¹⁹ This aside, Hegel took over Fichte's dialectic wholesale, and, particularly for present purposes, the contradictory nature of the alienated state of the self. As Hegel himself put it—though hardly pellucidly:²⁰

... in being self-conscious [self-consciousness] is independent, but still in this independence it has a negative relation to what is outside self-consciousness. This is infinite subjectivity, which appears at one time as the critique of thought in the case of Kant, and at another time, in the case of Fichte, as the tendency or impulse towards the concrete. Absolute, pure, infinite form is expressed as self-consciousness, the Ego.

¹⁸Heath and Lachs (1982), p.106.

¹⁹Haldane (1892), p. 499.

²⁰Haldane (1892), pp. 549-50.

... Self-consciousness thus ... recognizes its positive relation as its negative, and its negative as its positive,—or, in other words, recognizes these opposite activities as the same, i.e., it recognizes pure Thought or Being as self-identity, and this again as separation.

10 Hegel's Dialectic

In Hegel's hands, Fichte's dialectic morphs into something much grander. At the prompting of Schlegel in his *Lectures on Transcendental Philosophy*, the transcendental ego becomes *Geist*, a sort of cosmic mind. It too, needs to understand what it is, and it needs a concept adequate to the task. It starts with the most basic of concepts, *being*. It then works its way through a series of more and more adequate concepts, till it arrives at *absolute idea*, the idea of the absolute, by which time, that is what it is.

The whole process is one in thought. However, *Geist* is essentially embodied—in people, their social institutions, and even in nature. Hence the conceptual progression is mirrored in a corresponding progression of these things. It is the conceptual progression, which is fundamental, however, and which will concern us here.

This is described by Hegel in his *Logic*. Hegel distinguishes between two notions of logic, which he calls *subjective* and *objective*. The subjective logic is the Aristotelian logic of his day, and is described in the *Logic* where it deals with the progression of the 12 concepts which are Kant's Categories. Objective logic, which is much more important for Hegel, is the structure of the whole progression: the dialectic itself.

The concepts in the progression show a simple pattern. They are structured as a hierarchy of triples, so that each Category (except those at the tips of the hierarchy) has three sub-Categories. (There is one exception: there are four sub-Categories of *judgment*. This is somewhat ironical, since these sub-Categories or at least their sub-Categories are essentially Kant's Categories.) The triples are also structured. The second of each triad is a category opposing the first. Hegel calls the second the *negation* of the first. And, in the simplest cases at least, 'negation' is logician's negation.

By consideration of the contradiction between the first two Categories of the triad, we arrive at the third Category. This is often referred to by Hegel as the *negation of the negation*. What, exactly, this means is somewhat

moot. What is clear is that the third Category is supposed to be, in some sense, the dialectical union of the first and second. Hegel often says that the first and second Categories are *aufgehoben*, or sublated, as it is sometimes translated, in the third. This is a dark term of Hegelean art which it is virtually impossible to translate into English, since it means both *to remove* and *to preserve*—and Hegel means both of these things at once.²¹ In the most straightforward cases, the third Category is the Category of things whose being in the first Category just is their being in the second, and which are therefore in both (since they must be in either one or the other).

Hegel is never very clear about the relationship of the third member of a triad to the first member of the next triad he considers. Sometimes it seems to be identity; sometimes it seems to be sublation; and sometimes it just is not clear what it is supposed to be. But fortunately, we do not need to sort this out here.

However, just to give a feel for the whole thing, let us consider the first phase of the dialectic. As already observed, this starts with the concept *being*. But something that *is*, and about which there is nothing more to be said is no different from nothing. Hence the second Category is *non-being*. The third Category is something that both is and is not, that is *becoming*. As Hegel puts it:²²

Becoming is the unseparateness of Being and Nothing, not the unity which abstracts from Being and Nothing; rather, Becoming as the unity of Being and Nothing is this determinate unity in which there *is* Being as well as Nothing.

Why *becoming*? This is because of Hegel's account of motion—and, more generally, change—which we looked at briefly in Section 2. Something that is in a state of change (*becoming*) is in contradictory state. It is what/where it is, but it is also what/where it is not—what/where it *was* and what/where it *will be*.²³

The next concept is *determinate being*, since something in a state of becoming has some determinacy to its being, unlike something that simply *is*. As Hegel puts it:²⁴

²¹Barry Smith suggested to me that the best translation of *aufheben* is *transcend*—adding that it is the Hegelean equivalent of having one's cake and eating it.

²²Johnston and Struthers (1929), Vol. 1, p. 118.

²³See Priest (2006b), ch. 12.

²⁴Johnston and Struthers (1929), Vol. 1, pp. 121f.)

Determinate Being issues from Becoming; it is the simple oneness of Being and Nothing. From this simplicity it derives its form as something immediate. Becoming, which mediated it, is left behind; it has transcended itself, and Determinate Being therefore appears as something primary and as something from which a beginning is being made. First, then, it is one-sidedly determined as Being; the other determination it contains, that of Nothing, will also develop itself in it, in opposition to the other.

And with *determinate being*, the next triplet in the cycle kicks off.²⁵

It should be stressed that the fact that categories are *aufgehoben* does not make the contradictions in them disappear. We have new and more adequate categories, certainly. But we still have and operate with the old ones. You cannot do philosophy just by talking about the absolute. You have to employ categories such as *becoming, essence, appearance, quantity, quality*.²⁶

11 Conclusion

There is much more, of course, to be said about Hegel, Kant, and the dependence of Hegel on Kant; but here, we have tracked one of the most central connections. Kant's Antinomies provided arguments to the effect that certain noumenal objects have contradictory properties. He, himself, took the arguments to be unsound—though they are subjectively unavoidable, in the sense that the contradictions must arise in thought. His analysis of why the arguments are unsound depends upon his account of the distinction between noumena and phenomena, and the claim that the Categories apply only to the latter. But his own text appears to give the lie to the claim. Hegel recognised this, refused to make a categorial distinction between phenomena and noumena, and so accepted the antinomical arguments as establishing that there were contradictions, not just in thought, but in how things actually are—reality itself.

Under the prompting of Fichte, he proposed a dialectical progression of Categories ever more and more adequate to conceptualise reality. This starts with *being*, ends with *absolute idea*, and wends its way through another 80

²⁵For a logical model of this, see Priest (201+).

²⁶Indeed, arguably, the category of the absolute idea *just is* the dialectical journey through these categories.

categories, including Kant's 12. The progression zig-zags through triples of triples, ever pushed on by contradictions arising and being *aufgehoben*, that is, being subsumed under more adequate Categories.

How much truth there is in Hegel's view is, of course, another, quite different, matter. But whatever one says about that, Hegel is clearly the zenith of dialectic thinking between Aristotle and contemporary dialecticism.²⁷

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²⁷A version of this paper was given at the conference *Logic in Kant's Wake*, McMaster University, May 2016. Thanks go to many people in the audience for helpful comments, but especially to Frederick Beiser and Michael Foster.

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