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CHAPTER 21 [Part 1]

Metaphysics in Kant and Post-Kantian Philosophy

"Truth crushed to earth shall rise again"

The seventeenth and eighteenth centuries were times of great system-building in philosophy. The new science, developed by Galileo, Kepler, and Newton, rested not only on a new spirit of empirical observation and on new mathematical theories but also on the discovery of physical laws. Every philosopher of the early modern period thought that the new science demanded a new philosophy. Descartes, Spinoza, and Leibniz constructed rationalist systems designed to explain a law-governed nature and establish important metaphysical theses as synthetic a priori truths. Locke, Berkeley, and Hume offered empiricist reconstructions of our knowledge of the world in keeping with the new scientific method.

Universality and necessity became primary battlegrounds in the conflicts among these systems. Scientific laws such as Newton's laws of motion exhibit both features. They apply to all objects, in all places and times, in all circumstances. Rationalists charged that empiricists could not explain that, since we experience only particular objects in particular circumstances. Experience is not enough to justify universal and necessary conclusions. Empiricists saw no reason to think that the structure of our thought, as revealed through reflection, matches the necessary structure of the world. So they denied that rational reflection could justify universal and necessary conclusions.

Prussian philosopher Immanuel Kant (1724–1804) devises an ingenious resolution of the rationalist/empiricist conflict. He argues that the regularity and law-governed character of nature have their source, not in nature itself, but in us. In Kant's view, Hume is right to think that we project a law-governed pattern on experience. But Hume is wrong to think of this as strictly a matter of custom, habit, or passion. The very structure of our thought, Kant contends, forces nature into a law-governed mold. We can understand that mold by uncovering the laws of the understanding on which our thought rests.

Kant thinks of the laws of the understanding as universal and unchanging, holding for all people at all places and times. His nineteenth-century successors, however, questioned that assumption, seeing the world as shaped by ways of thinking that change and develop in both rational and nonrational ways.

21.1 KANT'S COPERNICAN REVOLUTION

Immanuel Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* established a new paradigm that dominated philosophy for at least a century. The *Critique's* central character is human reason. Reason develops principles to deal with experience; within the realm of experience, those principles are well justified. Reason finds itself driven, however, to ask questions extending beyond that realm. The very principles it has developed and on which it properly continues to rely in dealing with experience there lead it "into confusion and contradictions."

Kant claims that he uses the ***transcendental method*** and establishes the truth of ***transcendental idealism***. What is the transcendental method? To understand it, we must understand what Kant called his Copernican revolution in philosophy. Copernicus explained the motions of the heavenly bodies as resulting, not just from their own motion, but also from the motion of the observers on earth. Kant seeks the laws governing the realm of experience not in the objects themselves but in us.

Kant is a rationalist, but a rationalist of a peculiar kind. He argues that we have innate concepts—he calls them ***pure concepts of the understanding***, or the ***categories***. We can deduce what they are a priori, independent of experience, from the mere *possibility* of experience. They are revealed by logic, specifically by the logical forms of judgments, and include universality, necessity, and causation. He also holds that there are synthetic a priori truths: truths about the world that we can know independent of experience. But these truths hold only of things as we perceive and think about them, not as they are in themselves.

Kant distinguishes the world of appearance, things as they are known to us—the ***phenomenal*** world—from the world of things-in-themselves—the ***noumenal*** world. We can know appearances by using our senses. Things-in-themselves, in contrast, lie beyond our cognitive capacities. We can know something about the world independent of experience, but our knowledge cannot extend beyond experience. We cannot know the world as it really is.

Just as the Buddhist idealist Dignaga distinguishes actual objects, the causes of perception, from the internal objects of our perceptions, so Kant distinguishes things-in-themselves, ***noumena***—things as they actually exist, unconditioned by our perceiving or thinking about them—from objects of experience, also called ***appearances*** or ***phenomena***, which are objects as they appear to us. Kant denies that we can have knowledge of noumena. Indeed, we never encounter things-in-themselves; everything we perceive or conceive has been conditioned by our faculties of perception and thought. Sensibility, our faculty of perception, imposes the form of space and time on objects perceived. The understanding, the faculty of thought, imposes the categories, which give our thoughts logical form. We can speak of objects or events causing other objects or events; we can

speak of things existing or failing to exist. But we thereby speak solely of appearances. The categories apply only to things as conditioned by sensibility and understanding. We cannot legitimately apply them to things-in-themselves. So we cannot even officially say that that there are things-in-themselves. Much less can we say that they cause us to perceive what we perceive. Like Dignaga, then, Kant begins with the distinction between actual objects (things-in-themselves) as causes of our perceptions and internal objects (appearances) that those perceptions are about. But, like Dignaga, he finds that he can say nothing about actual objects; we have access only to things as conditioned by our modes of knowledge. Kant's philosophy is thus a large-scale application of Philo's argument from relation.

Both rationalists and empiricists misunderstand the status of objects of experience, in Kant's view. They think that the things we see, hear, etc., are in themselves as they appear to us. But we have no reason to assume that. The phenomenal world can be sensed and known; the noumenal world cannot. With respect to appearances, therefore, the skeptic is wrong; we can have knowledge of objects of experience. In fact, some of this knowledge is independent of experience. With respect to things-in-themselves, however, the skeptic triumphs. We can have no knowledge of things as they are, independent of us.

Kant reverses the traditional conception of the relation between thought and its object, or, as he puts it, between object and concept. Philosophers traditionally hold objects causally responsible for our perceptions of them. We see a circle because a circle is there. We think of some events as causing others because they do. Kant turns this around. He holds that thought is causally responsible for constituting the object. A circle is there because we see it. Some events cause others because we think they do. Our minds construct the world, but in a universal and rule-governed way. That is what makes knowledge of objects possible. Indeed, it makes a priori knowledge of them possible, for we can understand the rules according to which we constitute them.

Necessary connections, Hume observed, cannot be found in experience. We are aware of a succession of things but not of the connections between them. Our concept of necessity, Hume concludes, must come from us, not from what we experience. Hume attributes the source of our concept of necessity to the passionate side of our nature, to a feeling of expectation. Kant, in contrast, finds necessity's source in the unity of objects. We experience objects, not just a whirling mass of sensations. And it is a necessary truth that all objects are unified. The source of the unity of objects, moreover, is also the source of the concept of an object in general. It underlies our experience of any object.

It also underlies universality, necessity, and our concept of substance. Finding no experience from which the ideas of universality and necessary connection can be derived, Kant postulates them as a priori necessary conditions of experience. We do not abstract them from experience; they are an inborn part of our mental toolbox. The same is true of substance as the ground in which the qualities of objects inhere. We have experience only of the qualities; we do not perceive anything underlying them. Still, we organize our perceptions and thoughts around objects. That must then reflect a basic organizing principle of our thinking. Hume would agree, to an extent; the concepts of causality and substance, he would say, are not in the world but in us. Kant turns this around: They are in the world because they are in us. All rest on the unity of the self.

The transcendental ground of the unity Kant terms *transcendental apperception.* When we reflect on the contents of our own consciousness, as Hume stresses, we are aware only of a succession of mental states; we do not confront a unified self. The contents of consciousness are always changing. Thus, we find no unity in what Kant calls *empirical apperception* or *inner sense.* But, for me to be conscious of things, there must be a *me.* There must be a ground of unity in us. Consciousness itself is unified; each of us is a single self. Hume's view leads him to the conclusion that there is no self. But that, Kant thinks, is absurd. There is a single, unified self. It comes with the concepts that organize our experience into objects. We can know certain truths about objects independent of experience, therefore, for we can uncover the pure concepts of the understanding relating to the form of an object in general. These concepts do not arise from experience; they underlie its possibility. So we can know a priori that any experience will conform to them.

Kant concludes that "appearances have a necessary relation to the understanding." We can experience something as an object only if it meets certain conditions. Those conditions are specified by the categories. Kant therefore characterizes the understanding as the faculty of rules. We can know objects because we construct them according to those rules: "Thus the order and regularity in the appearances, which we entitle nature, we ourselves introduce. We could never find them in appearances, had not we ourselves, or the nature of our mind, originally set them there." The understanding, consequently, is nothing less than "the lawgiver of nature."

21.1.1 Immanuel Kant, from *Critique of Pure Reason*

Preface to the Second Edition, 1787

Metaphysics is a completely isolated speculative science of reason, which soars far above the teachings of experience, and in which reason is indeed meant to be its own pupil. Metaphysics rests on concepts alone—not, like mathematics, on their application to intuition. But though it is older than all other sciences and would survive even if all the rest were swallowed up in the abyss of an all-destroying barbarism, it has not yet had the good fortune to enter upon the secure path of a science. For in it reason is perpetually being brought to a stand, even when the laws into which it is seeking to have, as it professes, an a priori insight are those that are confirmed by our most common experiences. Ever and again we have to retrace our steps, as not leading us in the direction in which we desire to go. So far, too, are the students of metaphysics from exhibiting any kind of unanimity in their contentions that metaphysics has rather to be regarded as a battleground quite

Source: Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason.* Translated by Norman Kemp Smith. New York: Macmillan, 1929. Reprinted by permission of Palgrave Macmillan.

peculiarly suited for those who desire to exercise themselves in mock combats. No participant has ever yet succeeded in gaining even so much as an inch of territory, not at least in such manner as to secure him in its permanent possession. This shows, beyond all questioning, that the procedure of metaphysics has hitherto been a merely random groping and, what is worst of all, a groping among mere concepts. What, then, is the reason why, in this field, the sure road to science has not hitherto been found? Is it, perhaps, impossible to discover? Why, in that case, should nature have visited our reason with the restless endeavour whereby it is ever searching for such a path, as if this were one of its most important concerns? Nay, more, how little cause have we to place trust in our reason, if, in one of the most important domains of which we would fain have knowledge, it does not merely fail us, but lures us on by deceitful promises and in the end betrays us! Or if it is only that we have thus far failed to find the true path, are there any indications to justify the hope that by renewed efforts we may have better fortune than has fallen to our predecessors?

The examples of mathematics and natural science, which by a single and sudden revolution have become what they now are, seem to me sufficiently remarkable to suggest our considering what may have been the essential features in the changed point of view by which they have so greatly benefited. Their success should incline us, at least by way of experiment, to imitate their procedure, so far as the analogy which, as species of rational knowledge, they bear to metaphysics may permit. Hitherto it has been assumed that all our knowledge must conform to objects. But all attempts to extend our knowledge of objects by establishing something in regard to them a priori, by means of concepts, have, on this assumption, ended in failure. We must therefore make trial whether we may not have more success in the tasks of metaphysics if we suppose that objects must conform to our knowledge. This would agree better with what is desired, namely, that it should be possible to have knowledge of objects a priori, determining something in regard to them prior to their being given. We should then be proceeding precisely on the lines of Copernicus' primary hypothesis. Failing of satisfactory progress in explaining the movements of the heavenly bodies on the supposition that they all revolved round the spectator, he tried whether he might not have better success if he made the spectator to revolve and the stars to remain at rest. A similar experiment can be tried in metaphysics, as regards the intuition of objects. If intuition must conform to the constitution of the objects, I do not see how we could know anything of the latter a priori; but if the object (as object of the senses) must conform to the constitution of our faculty of intuition, I have no difficulty in conceiving such a possibility. Since I cannot rest in these intuitions if they are to become known, but must relate them as representations to something as their object, and determine this latter through them, either I must assume that the concepts, by means of which I obtain this determination, conform to the object, or else I assume that the objects, or what is the same thing, that the experience in which alone, as given objects, they can be known, conform to the concepts. In the former case, I am again in the same perplexity as to how I can know anything a priori in regard to the objects. In the latter case the outlook is more hopeful. For experience is itself a species of knowledge which involves understanding; and understanding has rules which I must presuppose as being in me prior to objects being given to me, and therefore as being a priori. They find expression in a priori concepts to which all objects of experience necessarily conform and with which they must agree. As regards objects which are thought solely through reason, and indeed as necessary, but which can never—at least not in the manner in which reason thinks them—be given in experience, the attempts at thinking them (for they must admit of being thought) will furnish an excellent touchstone of what we are adopting as our new method of thought, namely, that we can know a priori of things only what we ourselves put into them.

This method, modelled on that of the student of nature, consists in looking for the elements

of pure reason in what admits of confirmation or refutation by experiment. Now the propositions of pure reason, especially if they venture out beyond all limits of possible experience, cannot be brought to the test through any experiment with their objects, as in natural science. In dealing with those concepts and principles which we adopt a priori, all that we can do is to contrive that they be used for viewing objects from two different points of view—on the one hand, in connection with experience, as objects of the senses and of the understanding, and on the other hand, for the isolated reason that strives to transcend all limits of experience, as objects which are thought merely. If, when things are viewed from this twofold standpoint, we find that there is agreement with the principle of pure reason but that when we regard them only from a single point of view reason is involved in unavoidable self-conflict, the experiment decides in favour of the correctness of this distinction.

This experiment succeeds as well as could be desired and promises to metaphysics, in its first part—the part that is occupied with those concepts a priori to which the corresponding objects, commensurate with them, can be given in experience—the secure path of a science. For the new point of view enables us to explain how there can be knowledge a priori; and, in addition, to furnish satisfactory proofs of the laws which form the a priori basis of nature, regarded as the sum of the objects of experience—neither achievement being possible on the procedure hitherto followed.

But this deduction of our power of knowing a priori, in the first part of metaphysics, has a consequence which is startling and which has the appearance of being highly prejudicial to the whole purpose of metaphysics, as dealt with in the second part. For we are brought to the conclusion that we can never transcend the limits of possible experience, though that is precisely what this science is concerned, above all else, to achieve. This situation yields, however, just the very experiment by which, indirectly, we are enabled to prove the truth of this first estimate of our a priori knowledge of reason, namely, that such knowledge has to do only with appearances and must leave the thing in itself as indeed real per se but as not known by us. For what necessarily forces us to transcend the limits of experience and of all appearances is the unconditioned, which reason, by necessity and by right, demands in things in themselves, as required to complete the series of conditions. If, then, on the supposition that our empirical knowledge conforms to objects as things in themselves, we find that the unconditioned cannot be thought without contradiction and that when, on the other hand, we suppose that our representation of things, as they are given to us, does not conform to these things as they are in themselves but that these objects, as appearances, conform to our mode of representation, the contradiction vanishes; and if, therefore, we thus find that the unconditioned is not to be met with in things so far as we know them, that is, so far as they are given to us, but only so far as we do not know them, that is, so far as they are things in themselves, we are justified in concluding that what we at first assumed for the purposes of experiment is now definitely confirmed....

Book I: Transcendental Analytic of Concepts

Chapter II: The Deduction of the Pure Concepts of Understanding

Section 2...The A Priori Grounds of the Possibility of Experience At this point we must make clear to ourselves what we mean by the expression "an object of representations." We have stated above that appearances are themselves nothing but sensible representations. As such and in themselves, they must not be taken as objects capable of existing outside our power of representation. What, then, is to be understood when we speak of an object corresponding to, and consequently also distinct from, our knowledge? It is easily seen that this object must be thought only as something

in general = x. For outside our knowledge we have nothing we could set over against this knowledge as corresponding to it. Now we find that our thought of the relation of all knowledge to its object carries with it an element of necessity. The object is viewed as something that prevents our modes of knowledge from being haphazard or arbitrary and determines them a priori in some definite fashion. For insofar as our thoughts are to relate to an object, they must necessarily agree with one another. That is, they must possess that unity which constitutes the concept of an object.

But it is clear that, since we have to deal only with the manifold of our representations, and since that x (the object) that corresponds to them is nothing to us—being, as it is, something that has to be distinct from all our representations—the unity the object makes necessary can be nothing other than the formal unity of consciousness in the synthesis of the manifold of representations. It is only when we have thus produced synthetic unity in the manifold of intuition that we are in a position to say that we know the object. But this unity is impossible if the intuition cannot be generated in accordance with a rule by means of a function of synthesis that makes the reproduction of the manifold a priori necessary and renders possible a concept in which it is united. Thus we think a triangle as an object, in that we are conscious of the combination of three straight lines according to a rule by which such an intuition can always be represented. This unity of rule determines all the manifold and limits it to conditions which make unity of apperception possible. The concept of this unity is the representation of the object = x, which I think through the predicates, above mentioned, of a triangle.

All knowledge demands a concept. That concept may, indeed, be quite imperfect or obscure. But a concept is always, in form, something universal that serves as a rule. The concept of *body*, for instance, is the unity of the manifold which is thought through it. It serves as a rule in our knowledge of outer appearances. But it can be a rule for intuitions only insofar as it represents in any given appearances the necessary reproduction of their manifold and thereby the synthetic unity in our consciousness of them. The concept of *body*, in the perception of something outside us, necessitates the representation of extension and therewith representations of impenetrability, shape, etc.

All necessity, without exception, is grounded in a transcendental condition. There must, therefore, be a transcendental ground of the unity of consciousness in the synthesis of the manifold of all our intuitions. This must consequently also be a transcendental ground of the concepts of objects in general and so of all objects of experience—a ground without which it would be impossible to think any object for our intuitions. For this object is no more than that something the concept of which expresses such a necessity of synthesis.

This original and transcendental condition is no other than transcendental apperception. Consciousness of self according to the determinations of our state in inner perception is merely empirical and always changing. No fixed and abiding self can present itself in this flux of inner appearances. Such consciousness is usually named *inner sense* or *empirical apperception*. What has necessarily to be represented as numerically identical cannot be thought as such through empirical data. To render such a transcendental presupposition valid, there must be a condition which precedes all experience and makes experience itself possible.

There can be in us no modes of knowledge, no connection or unity of one mode of knowledge with another, without the unity of consciousness that precedes all data of intuitions. By relation to it representation of objects is alone possible. This pure original unchangeable consciousness I name *transcendental apperception*. That it deserves this name is clear from the fact that even the purest objective unity, namely, that of the a priori concepts—space and time—is only possible through relation of the intuitions to such unity of consciousness. The numerical unity of this apperception is thus the a priori ground of all concepts, just as the manifoldness of space and

time is the a priori ground of the intuitions of sensibility.

This transcendental unity of apperception forms, out of all the possible appearances that can stand alongside one another in one experience, a connection of all these representations according to laws. For this unity of consciousness would be impossible if the mind in knowledge of the manifold could not become conscious of the identity of function whereby it synthetically combines it into one knowledge.

The original and necessary consciousness of the identity of the self is thus at the same time a consciousness of an equally necessary unity of the synthesis of all appearances according to concepts, that is, according to rules. This not only makes them necessarily reproducible but also in so doing determines an object for their intuition—that is, the concept of something in which they are necessarily interconnected. For the mind could never think its identity in the manifoldness of its representations, and indeed think this identity a priori, if it did not have before its eyes the identity of its act whereby it subordinates all synthesis of apprehension (which is empirical) to a transcendental unity, thereby rendering possible their interconnection according to a priori rules.

Now, also, we are in a position to determine more adequately our concept of an object in general. All representations have, as representations, their object and can themselves in turn become objects of other representations. 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 nonempirical, that is, transcendental object $= x$.

The pure concept of this transcendental object, which in reality throughout all our knowledge is always one and the same, is what can alone confer upon all our empirical concepts in general relation to an object, that is, objective reality. This concept cannot contain any determinate intuition and therefore refers only to the unity which must be found in any manifold of knowledge that stands in relation to an object. This relation is nothing but the necessary unity of consciousness, and therefore also of the synthesis of the manifold, through a common function of the mind that combines it in one representation. This unity must be regarded as necessary a priori—otherwise knowledge would be without an object. So the relation to a transcendental object, that is, the objective reality of our empirical knowledge, rests on the transcendental law that all appearances, insofar as through them objects are to be given to us, must stand under a priori rules—those of synthetic unity whereby the interrelating of these appearances in empirical intuition is alone possible. In other words, appearances in experience must stand under the conditions of the necessary unity of apperception, just as in mere intuition they must be subject to the formal conditions of space and of time. Only thus can any knowledge become possible at all....

But the possibility, indeed the necessity, of these categories rests on the relation our entire sensibility, and with it all possible appearances, bear to original apperception. In original apperception everything must necessarily conform to the conditions of the thoroughgoing unity of self-consciousness—that is, to the universal functions of synthesis. This synthesis is one according to concepts in which alone apperception can demonstrate a priori its complete and necessary identity.

Thus the concept of a cause is nothing but a synthesis (of that which follows in the time series, with other appearances) according to concepts. Without such unity—which has its a priori rule and which subjects the appearances to itself—no thoroughgoing, universal, and therefore necessary unity of consciousness would be met with in the manifold of perceptions. These perceptions would not then belong to any experience. Consequently they would be without an object, merely a blind play of representations, even less than a dream.

All attempts to derive these pure concepts of understanding from experience and so to ascribe to them a merely empirical origin are entirely vain and useless. I need not insist upon the fact that, for instance, the concept of a cause involves the character of necessity, which no experience can yield. Experience does indeed show that one appearance customarily follows upon another, but not that this sequence is necessary, nor that we can argue a priori and with complete universality from the antecedent, viewed as a condition, to the consequent. Consider the empirical rule of association, which we must postulate throughout when we assert that everything in the series of events is so subject to rule that nothing ever happens save insofar as something precedes it on which it universally follows. Upon what, I ask, does this rule, as a law of nature, rest? How is this association itself possible? The ground of the possibility of the association of the manifold, so far as it lies in the object, is named the *affinity* of the manifold. I therefore ask, how are we to make comprehensible to ourselves the thoroughgoing affinity of appearances, whereby they stand and must stand under unchanging laws?

On my principles it is easy to explain. All possible appearances, as representations, belong to the totality of a possible self-consciousness. But as self-consciousness is a transcendental representation, numerical identity is inseparable from it and is a priori certain. For nothing can come to our knowledge save in terms of this original apperception. This identity must necessarily enter into the synthesis of all the manifold of appearances, so far as the synthesis is to yield empirical knowledge. So the appearances are subject to a priori conditions. The synthesis of their apprehension must be in complete accordance with them. The representation of a universal condition according to which a certain manifold can be posited in uniform fashion is called a rule, and—when it must be so posited—a law. Thus all appearances stand in thoroughgoing connection according to necessary laws. They stand therefore in a transcendental affinity, of which the empirical is a mere consequence.

That nature should direct itself according to our subjective ground of apperception, and should indeed depend upon it in respect of its conformity to law, sounds very strange and absurd. But when we consider that this nature is not a thing in itself but is merely an aggregate of appearances—so many representations of the mind—we shall not be surprised that we can discover it only in the radical faculty of all our knowledge, namely, in transcendental apperception. In that unity alone it can be entitled the object of all possible experience, that is, nature. Nor shall we be surprised that just for this very reason this unity can be known a priori and therefore as necessary. Were the unity given in itself, independent of the first sources of our thought, this would never be possible. We would not then know of any source from which we could obtain the synthetic propositions asserting such a universal unity of nature. For they would then have to be derived from the objects of nature themselves. As this could take place only empirically, none but a merely accidental unity could be obtained. That would fall far short of the necessary interconnection that we have in mind when we speak of nature....

Thus the order and regularity in the appearances, which we entitle *nature*, we ourselves introduce. We could never find them in appearances had not we ourselves, or the nature of our mind, originally set them there. For this unity of nature has to be a necessary one, that is, has to be an a priori certain unity of the connection of appearances. Such synthetic unity could not be established a priori if there were not subjective grounds of such unity contained a priori in the original cognitive powers of our mind, and if these subjective conditions—inasmuch as they are the grounds of the possibility of knowing any object whatsoever in experience—were not at the same time objectively valid.

We have already defined the understanding in various different ways: as a spontaneity of knowledge (in distinction from the receptivity of sensibility), as a power of thought, as a faculty of

concepts, or again of judgments. All these definitions, when they are adequately understood, are identical. We may now characterize it as the faculty of rules. This distinguishing mark is more fruitful and approximates more closely its essential nature. Sensibility gives us forms (of intuition), but understanding gives us rules. The latter is always occupied in investigating appearances, in order to detect some rule in them. Rules, so far as they are objective and therefore necessarily depend upon the knowledge of the object, are called *laws*. Although we learn many laws through experience, they are only special determinations of still higher laws. The highest of these, under which the others all stand, issue a priori from the understanding itself. They are not borrowed from experience. On the contrary, they have to confer upon appearances their conformity to law. They thus make experience possible. Hence the understanding is something more than a power of formulating rules through comparison of appearances. It is itself the lawgiver of nature....

21.2 HEGEL'S HISTORICISM

Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (1770–1831) was perhaps the last great philosophical system builder. His distinctively dynamic form of idealism set the stage for other nineteenth-century Western philosophers. Hegel was born in Stuttgart, Germany, and studied at Tübingen, where he formed friendships with two other students who would shape nineteenth-century German thought: the poet Friedrich Hölderlin and the philosopher Friedrich von Schelling. He spent most of his career teaching, first as a private tutor and then at the universities of Jena, Heidelberg, and Berlin.

Hegel, like Kant, is an idealist: Everything depends on mind. The world as we know it is something we construct. But Hegel differs from Kant in important ways. One of the most obvious is his rejection of Kant's realm of noumena—things-in-themselves. Kant distinguishes himself from Berkeley by insisting on the role of things-in-themselves. But in fact, as Hegel sees it, they play no role in his system. The pure concepts of the understanding do not apply to them. So they do not fall under the categories. We cannot say that things-in-themselves, in combination with our cognitive faculties, cause things to appear as they do, for causation is one of the categories. We cannot even officially say that things-in-themselves exist! Hegel speaks of the Absolute—that which is not relative to us or to anything else—initially as Kant's thing-in-itself but, finally, as the ultimate goal of human thought.

Hegel differs from Kant in several other important ways. First, Hegel's thought is historicist. Kant maintained that we could have universal and necessary knowledge of the world by uncovering the laws of the understanding. To give us universal and necessary knowledge, those laws must be constant; they must be the same for each person, in all times and circumstances. Why, however, should we expect human beings to construct the world in the same way, at all times and places, in all circumstances, in all cultures? Hegel contends that the way in which we construct the world develops systematically over time. Philosophy, like other aspects of human thought, thus varies with historical circumstances: "Philosophy is its own time raised to the level of thought." Hegel tells the story of Spirit or Mind (in German, *Geist*), which progresses through a variety of stages to reach Absolute Knowledge.

This is not to say that philosophy cannot express any universal or necessary truths. But they are not the kinds of truths sought by Kant or other previous rationalists. What stays constant across historical circumstances are not a priori propositions or innate concepts but the set of dynamic principles governing the development of our ways of constructing the world. Second, then, Hegel finds some universal and necessary truths, but they are high-level, dynamic principles governing the development of thought. The best known is the thesis–antithesis–synthesis pattern. People adopt a certain way of looking at and thinking about the world (the thesis). Because it is only partially correct, over time people encounter contrary evidence, counterexamples, anomalies, and contradictions. Inspired by these, they shift to a new and contrary way of looking at and thinking about things (the antithesis). That too is only a partial truth, however, so it also gradually confronts contrary evidence, counterexamples, anomalies, and contradictions. The conflict between thesis and antithesis is eventually transcended in a synthesis that draws elements from both while transforming the way people see and think. That becomes a new thesis, and the process begins again.

Third, Hegel sees human thought as essentially social. Kant's theoretical philosophy reverses the traditional relationship between concept and object, between knower and thing known. The laws of the understanding that provide the basis for synthetic a priori knowledge are those governing the individual knower and are the same for each knower. The social and historical context of the knowing makes no difference. For Hegel, however, both dimensions of context are crucial. We learn our language, which provides our basic categories of thought, from other people, at a particular time, in the context of a particular society. What Kant and other rationalists take as stemming from our nature as knowers Hegel sees as reflecting a specific social background.

Fourth, Hegel stresses the dynamics of the self. Kant sees the realm of appearance as rule-governed because it is one realm. My experiences are all *mine.* They all relate the same underlying self, transcendental apperception—a thing-in-itself that exists beyond experience. Hegel, rejecting things-in-themselves, sees the unity of the self not as a given but as an *achievement.* His *Phenomenology of Spirit* (phenomenology = study of phenomena, that is, appearances) traces the development of the self through a variety of stages, including one he famously terms "unhappy consciousness." In that stage, the self is divided, alienated from itself. We overcome that alienation socially, achieving self-consciousness by recognizing other people as self-conscious agents, by being recognized as selves by them, and recognizing that recognition ourselves. We become integrated selves by being seen as such by others we recognize as selves.

Fifth, Hegel rejects what he refers to as *immediacy*, the sharp divide in Kant and other (especially empiricist) philosophers between sensibility and understanding—that is, between perception and conceptual knowledge. Traditionally, philosophers have thought of experience as supplying data—"the given"—which is preconceptual. We then sort the data, using concepts, logic, and perhaps other cognitive means, and obtain knowledge. Hegel denies that we can distinguish any given, preconceptual portion of our experience. The concepts we have shape the way we perceive the world.

21.2.1 G. W. F. Hegel, from *Phenomenology of Mind*

Introduction

73. It is natural to suppose that, before philosophy enters upon its subject proper—namely, the actual knowledge of what truly is—it is necessary to come first to an understanding concerning knowledge, which is looked upon as the instrument by which to take possession of the Absolute, or as the means through which to get a sight of it. The apprehension seems legitimate, on the one hand, that there may be various kinds of knowledge, among which one might be better adapted than another for the attainment of our purpose—and thus a wrong choice is possible: on the other hand, again that, since knowing is a faculty of a definite kind and with a determinate range, without the more precise determination of its nature and limits we might take hold on clouds of error instead of the heaven of truth.

This apprehensiveness is sure to pass even into the conviction that the whole enterprise which sets out to secure for consciousness by means of knowledge what exists per se, is in its very nature absurd; and that between knowledge and the Absolute there lies a boundary which completely cuts off the one from the other. For if knowledge is the instrument by which to get possession of absolute Reality, the suggestion immediately occurs that the application of an instrument to anything does not leave it as it is for itself, but rather entails in the process, and has in view, a moulding and alteration of it. Or, again, if knowledge is not an instrument which we actively employ, but a kind of passive medium through which the light of the truth reaches us, then here, too, we do not receive it as it is in itself, but as it is through and in this medium. In either case we employ a means which immediately brings about the very opposite of its own end; or, rather, the absurdity lies in making use of any means at all. It seems indeed open to us to find in the knowledge of the way in which the instrument operates, a remedy for this parlous state; for thereby it becomes possible to remove from the result the part which, in our idea of the Absolute received through that instrument, belongs to the instrument, and thus to get the truth in its purity. But this improvement would, as a matter of fact, only bring us back to the point where we were before. If we take away again from a definitely formed thing that which the instrument has done in the shaping of it, then the thing (in this case the Absolute) stands before us once more just as it was previous to all this trouble, which, as we now see, was superfluous. If the Absolute were only to be brought on the whole nearer to us by this agency, without any change being wrought in it, like a bird caught by a limestick, it would certainly scorn a trick of that sort, if it were not in its very nature, and did it not wish to be, beside us from the start. For a trick is what knowledge in such a case would be, since by all its busy toil and trouble it gives itself the air of doing something quite different from bringing about a relation that is merely immediate, and so a waste of time to establish. Or, again, if the examination of knowledge, which we represent as a medium, makes us acquainted with the law of its refraction, it is likewise useless to eliminate this refraction from the result. For knowledge is not the divergence of the ray, but the ray itself by which the truth comes in contact with us; and if this be removed, the bare direction or the empty place would alone be indicated.

74. Meanwhile, if the fear of falling into error introduces an element of distrust into science, which without any scruples of that sort goes to work and actually does know, it is not easy to understand why, conversely, a distrust should not be placed in this very distrust, and why we should not take care lest the fear of error is not just the

Source: G. W. F. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Mind*. Translated by J. B. Baillie. London: George Allen & Unwin, 1910.

initial error. As a matter of fact, this fear presupposes something, indeed a great deal, as truth, and supports its scruples and consequences on what should itself be examined beforehand to see whether it is truth. It starts with ideas of knowledge as an instrument and as a medium; and presupposes a distinction of ourselves from this knowledge. More especially it takes for granted that the Absolute stands on one side, and that knowledge, on the other side, by itself and cut off from the Absolute, is still something real; in other words, that knowledge, which, by being outside the Absolute, is certainly also outside truth, is nevertheless true—a position which, while calling itself fear of error, makes itself known rather as fear of the truth.

75. This conclusion comes from the fact that the Absolute alone is true or that the True is alone absolute. It may be set aside by making the distinction that a knowledge which does not indeed know the Absolute as science wants to do is nonetheless true too; and that knowledge in general, though it may possibly be incapable of grasping the Absolute, can still be capable of truth of another kind. But we shall see as we proceed that random talk like this leads in the long run to a confused distinction between the absolute truth and a truth of some other sort, and that "absolute," "knowledge," and so on, are words which presuppose a meaning that has first to be got at.

76. With suchlike useless ideas and expressions about knowledge as an instrument to take hold of the Absolute, or as a medium through which we have a glimpse of truth, and so on (relations to which all these ideas of a knowledge which is divided from the Absolute and an Absolute divided from knowledge in the last resort lead), we need not concern ourselves. Nor need we trouble about the evasive pretexts which create the incapacity of science out of the presupposition of such relations in order at once to be rid of the toil of science and to assume the air of serious and zealous effort about it. Instead of being troubled with giving answers to all these, they may be straightway rejected as adventitious and arbitrary ideas; and the use which is here made of words like "absolute," "knowledge," as also "objective" and "subjective," and innumerable others, whose meaning is assumed to be familiar to everyone, might well be regarded as so much deception. For to give out that their significance is universally familiar and that everyone indeed possesses their notion rather looks like an attempt to dispense with the only important matter which is just to give this notion. With better right, on the contrary, we might spare ourselves the trouble of taking any notice at all of such ideas and ways of talking which would have the effect of warding off science altogether; for they make a mere empty show of knowledge which at once vanishes when science comes on the scene.

But science, in the very fact that it comes on the scene, is itself a phenomenon; its "coming on the scene" is not yet itself carried out in all the length and breadth of its truth. In this regard, it is a matter of indifference whether we consider that it (science) is a phenomenon because it makes its appearance alongside another kind of knowledge, or call that other untrue knowledge its process of appearing. Science, however, must liberate itself from this phenomenality, and it can only do so by turning against it. For science cannot simply reject a form of knowledge which is not true, and treat this as a common view of things, and then assure us that it itself is an entirely different kind of knowledge, and holds the other to be of no account at all; nor can it appeal to the fact that in this other there are presages of a better. By giving that assurance it would declare its force and value to lie in its bare existence; but the untrue knowledge appeals likewise to the fact that it is, and assures us that to it science is nothing. One barren assurance, however, is of just as much value as another. Still less can science appeal to the presages of a better, which are to be found present in untrue knowledge and are there pointing the way towards science; for it would, on the one hand, be appealing again in the same way to a merely existent fact, and, on the other, it would be appealing to itself, to the way in which it exists in untrue knowledge, i.e., to a bad form of its own existence, to its appearance rather than to its

real and true nature (*in und für sich*). For this reason we shall here undertake the exposition of knowledge as a phenomenon.

77. Now because this exposition has for its object only phenomenal knowledge, the exposition itself seems not to be science, free, self-moving in the shape proper to itself, but may, from this point of view, be taken as the pathway of the natural consciousness which is pressing forward to true knowledge. Or it can be regarded as the path of the soul, which is traversing the series of its own forms of embodiment, like stages appointed for it by its own nature, that it may possess the clearness of spiritual life when, through the complete experience of its own self, it arrives at the knowledge of what it is in itself.

78. Natural consciousness will prove itself to be only knowledge in principle or not real knowledge. Since, however, it immediately takes itself to be the real and genuine knowledge, this pathway has a negative significance for it; what is a realization of the notion of knowledge means for it rather the ruin and overthrow of itself; for on this road it loses its own truth. Because of that, the road can be looked on as the path of doubt, or more properly a highway of despair. For what happens there is not what is usually understood by doubting, a jostling against this or that supposed truth, the outcome of which is again a disappearance in due course of the doubt and a return to the former truth, so that at the end the matter is taken as it was before. On the contrary, that pathway is the conscious insight into the untruth of the phenomenal knowledge, for which that is the most real which is after all only the unrealized notion. On that account, too, this thoroughgoing scepticism is not what doubtless earnest zeal for truth and science fancies it has equipped itself with in order to be ready to deal with them—viz. the resolve, in science, not to deliver itself over to the thoughts of others on their mere authority, but to examine everything for itself, and only follow its own conviction, or, still better, to produce everything itself and hold only its own act for true.

79. The series of shapes, which consciousness traverses on this road, is rather the detailed history of the process of training and educating consciousness itself up to the level of science. That resolve presents this mental development in the simple form of an intended purpose, as immediately finished and complete, as having taken place; this pathway, on the other hand, is, as opposed to this abstract intention, or untruth, the actual carrying out of that process of development. To follow one's own conviction is certainly more than to hand oneself over to authority; but by the conversion of opinion held on authority into opinion held out of personal conviction, the content of what is held is not necessarily altered, and truth has not thereby taken the place of error. If we stick to a system of opinion and prejudice resting on the authority of others, or upon personal conviction, the one differs from the other merely in the conceit which animates the latter. Scepticism, directed to the whole compass of phenomenal consciousness, on the contrary, makes mind for the first time qualified to test what truth is; since it brings about a despair regarding what are called natural views, thoughts, and opinions, which it is a matter of indifference to call personal or belonging to others, and with which the consciousness that proceeds straight away to criticize and test is still filled and hampered, thus being, as a matter of fact, incapable of what it wants to undertake.

The completeness of the forms of unreal consciousness will be brought about precisely through the necessity of the advance and the necessity of their connection with one another. To make this comprehensible we may remark, by way of preliminary, that the exposition of untrue consciousness in its untruth is not a merely negative process. Such a one-sided view of it is what the natural consciousness generally adopts; and a knowledge, which makes this one-sidedness its essence, is one of those shapes assumed by incomplete consciousness which falls into the course of the inquiry itself and will come before us there. For this view is scepticism—which always sees in the result only pure nothingness and abstracts from the fact that this nothing is determinate, is the nothing of that out of which it comes as a result. Nothing, however, is only, in fact, the

true result, when taken as the nothing of what it comes from; it is thus itself a determinate nothing and has a content. The scepticism which ends with the abstraction "nothing" or "emptiness" can advance from this not a step farther, but must wait and see whether there is possibly anything new offered and what that is—in order to cast it into the same abysmal void. When once, on the other hand, the result is apprehended as it truly is, as determinate negation, a new form has thereby immediately arisen; and in the negation the transition is made by which the progress through the complete succession of forms comes about of itself.

80. The goal, however, is fixed for knowledge just as necessarily as the succession in the process. The terminus is at that point where knowledge is no longer compelled to go beyond itself, where it finds its own self, and the notion corresponds to the object and the object to the notion. The progress towards this goal consequently is without a halt, and at no earlier stage is satisfaction to be found. That which is confined to a life of nature is unable of itself to go beyond its immediate existence; but by something other than itself it is forced beyond that; and to be thus wrenched out of its setting is its death. Consciousness, however, is to itself its own notion; thereby it immediately transcends what is limited, and, since this latter belongs to it, consciousness transcends its own self. Along with the particular there is at the same time set up the "beyond," were this only, as in spatial intuition, beside what is limited. Consciousness, therefore, suffers this violence at its own hands; it destroys its own limited satisfaction. When feeling of violence, anxiety for the truth may well withdraw, and struggle to preserve for itself that which is in danger of being lost. But it can find no rest. Should that anxious fearfulness wish to remain always in unthinking indolence, thought will agitate the thoughtlessness, its restlessness will disturb that indolence. Or let it take its stand as a form of sentimentality which assures us it finds everything good in its kind, and this assurance likewise will suffer violence at the hands of reason, which finds something not good just because and insofar as it is a kind. Or, again, fear of the truth may conceal itself from itself and others behind the pretext that precisely burning zeal for the very truth makes it so difficult, nay impossible, to find any other truth except that of which alone vanity is capable—that of being ever so much cleverer than any ideas, which one gets from oneself or others, could make possible. This sort of conceit which understands how to belittle every truth and turn away from it back into itself, and gloats over this its own private understanding, which always knows how to dissipate every possible thought, and to find, instead of all the content, merely the barren Ego—this is a satisfaction which must be left to itself; for it flees the universal and seeks only an isolated existence on its own account.

81. As the foregoing has been stated, provisionally and in general, concerning the manner and the necessity of the process of the inquiry, it may also be of further service to make some observations regarding the method of carrying this out. This exposition, viewed as a process of relating science to phenomenal knowledge, and as an inquiry and critical examination into the reality of knowing, does not seem able to be effected without some presupposition which is laid down as an ultimate criterion. For an examination consists in applying an accepted standard, and, on the final agreement or disagreement therewith of what is tested, deciding whether the latter is right or wrong; and the standard in general, and so science, were this the criterion, is thereby accepted as the essence or inherently real. But here, where science first appears on the scene, neither science nor any sort of standard has justified itself as the essence or ultimate reality; and without this no examination seems able to be instituted.

82. This contradiction and the removal of it will become more definite if, to begin with, we call to mind the abstract determinations of knowledge and of truth as they are found in consciousness. Consciousness, we find, distinguishes from itself something to which at the same time it relates itself; or, to use the current expression, there is something for consciousness; and the determinate

form of this process of relating, or of there being something for a consciousness, is knowledge. But from this being for another we distinguish being in itself or per se; what is related to knowledge is likewise distinguished from it, and posited as also existing outside this relation; the aspect of being per se or in itself is called Truth. What really lies in these determinations does not further concern us here; for since the object of our inquiry is phenomenal knowledge, its determinations are also taken up, in the first instance, as they are immediately offered to us. And they are offered to us very much in the way we have just stated.

83. If now our inquiry deals with the truth of knowledge, it appears that we are inquiring what knowledge is in itself. But in this inquiry knowledge is our object, it is for us; and the essential nature of knowledge, were this to come to light, would be rather its being for us: what we should assert to be its essence would rather be, not the truth of knowledge, but only our knowledge of it. The essence or the criterion would lie in us; and that which was to be compared with this standard, and on which a decision was to be passed as a result of this comparison, would not necessarily have to recognize that criterion.

84. But the nature of the object which we are examining surmounts this separation, or semblance of separation, and presupposition. Consciousness furnishes its own criterion in itself, and the inquiry will thereby be a comparison of itself with its own self; for the distinction, just made, falls inside itself. In consciousness there is one element for another, or, in general, consciousness implicates the specific character of the moment of knowledge. At the same time this "other" is to consciousness not merely for it, but also outside this relation, or has a being in itself, i.e., there is the moment of truth. Thus in what consciousness inside itself declares to be the essence or truth we have the standard which itself sets up and by which we are to measure its knowledge. Suppose we call knowledge the notion, and the essence or truth "being" or the object, then the examination consists in seeing whether the notion corresponds with the object. But if we call the inner nature of the object, or what it is in itself, the notion, and, on the other side, understand by object the notion qua object, i.e., the way the notion is for another, then the examination consists in our seeing whether the object corresponds to its own notion. It is clear, of course, that both of these processes are the same. The essential fact, however, to be borne in mind throughout the whole inquiry is that both these moments, notion and object, "being for another" and "being in itself," themselves fall within that knowledge which we are examining. Consequently we do not require to bring standards with us, nor to apply our fancies and thoughts in the inquiry; and just by our leaving these aside we are enabled to treat and discuss the subject as it actually is in itself and for itself, as it is in its complete reality.