

## HEGEL, FINITE, AND INFINITE IDEALISM

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### I

TYPICAL METAPHYSICAL QUESTIONS INCLUDE: is the universe composed of dimensionless, windowless monads, or is it one infinite, eternal substance, or are there many substances but in real relations with each other? Is there free will or are all events determined? Is the mind a separate, immaterial substance? Is there an immortal soul, a God? Do abstract objects, like sets and universals and possible worlds exist? And so forth. These are not typical Hegelian questions and he does not show much interest in them. As he frequently makes clear in compliments to Kant, Hegel does not want to be enlisted in the tradition of rational dogmatism, or in any project that holds that we can settle questions about «the furniture of the universe» by appeal to the light of reason or to tests of conceivability and inconceivability.

It turns out, though, that it can be quite misleading (I have discovered) to label Hegel somewhat casually a «non-metaphysical» thinker, as Klaus Hartmann long ago suggested. For example, in my view, Hegel held that agency was an achieved social status, ascribed in differing ways with differing scope over time; that assumptions about individuality behind methodological individualism in modern political philosopher were incompletely thought out; that acting freely involved the establishment of a determinate self- and other-relation; that explanations of the activities of some organic beings in complex social conditions would be inadequate if restricted to the material, or neuro-biological properties of such organisms. There is a perfectly good sense in which all these sorts of claims could and should be called «metaphysical». Hegel is purporting to tell us *what agency is*, *what individuality is*, *what freedom is*, and so forth, and he thinks of his answers as *distinctly philosophical*, not empirical or natural scientific. The key difference between these latter sorts of questions and the former sort comes down to how one understands Hegel's claim that his «metaphysics» is a «logic». (These three issues in particular have to do with the logical differences between and the relations between a

philosophy of nature and a philosophy of spirit. Such a logic is primarily an account of the status and content of categories and a theory about explanatory adequacy). No one in the history of philosophy had claimed anything like this before Hegel, although the ancients and the scholastics certainly had many things to say about categories. But for them, metaphysics was something different from and more important than such a category theory. In the following I propose to review the core issues in the logic-metaphysics relationship as Hegel understands it, and then discuss in detail a slogan recently used to describe Hegel's thinking about thinking and therewith his metaphysics. This is John McDowell's phrase, the «unboundedness of the conceptual».

The immediate temptation in trying to understand why Hegel thinks his logic is also a metaphysics is to take one's bearings from Kant, who inaugurated what a later commentator called a «metaphysics of experience», and who himself said many things that sound like Hegel's Schellingean «identity theory» about the relation between pure concepts and objects in the world. (Such as «The conditions for the possibility of experience [pure concepts] are at the same time the conditions for the possibility of objects of experience. [constitute what could be an object]» A158/B197) But this can be misleading too, as I have also found. It is clear that Hegel is not a transcendental philosopher, restricting the «reality» which concepts constitute to some limited domain, the sphere of distinctly human experience, and inapplicable to things in themselves. (The subtitle of my paper, echoing one by Richard Rorty, might have been: «What do you say when they call your Hegel 'a mere transcendental philosopher'?») So we need to start at the most basic issue and work up from there.

## II

Throughout his life Hegel characterized his own position by partly invoking and appropriating, and partly criticizing, what he took to be the Kantian understanding of the relation between understanding and sensibility, concept and intuition<sup>1</sup>. All the passages clearly indicate that what Hegel is out to criticize is not the distinction itself, but the way Kant understands the nature of concept-intuition unity in knowledge

<sup>1</sup> *Hegel's Idealism: The Satisfaction of Self-Consciousness* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989). (HI hereafter.)

claims. A «mechanical» sort of application or inductive reflection, as he calls it, is what is being rejected in favor of what he calls an «organic» understanding. But all the passages in Kant already have a dialectical and somewhat unstable form, as if already foreshadowing Hegelian logic. *Both* distinctness *and* necessary intertwining (inseparability in any claim to knowledge) are emphasized. This Kantian position raises two huge problems. The first is the issue of the right way to state the implications of the twin claims for any analysis of empirical knowledge. This will take us directly into the issues of the various myths (of the given and of the mental) that what was originally the Kant-Hegel disagreement have raised in contemporary discussions. The other is the issue of idealism; whether the inseparability claim as Hegel understands it, in his major difference from Kant, idealizes or relativizes to *us* any philosophical claim about objects.

I have said that the relevant passages in Hegel make clear that he is very much in agreement with Kant about the necessary *cooperation* of such elements in knowledge (thus accepting that there are such elements). But one should be careful. Interpreters who are interested in this line of thought have been portrayed several times as having Hegel «collapse» the distinction between concept and intuition, and Michael Friedman has charged that the post-Kantian idealists «rejected» outright Kant's *distinction* between concept and intuition, and that they embraced a wholly self-determining *Vernunft* operating without empirical constraint<sup>2</sup>. (Friedman characterizes as «traditional» what I would consider quite a bizarre thesis to attribute to anyone, that the «idealist doctrine that the world to which our thought relates is a creature of our own conceptualization». This ascription to Hegel of such a doctrine of intellectual intuition is one familiar way in which commentators understand Hegel's «metaphysics»)<sup>3</sup>. But the passages are quite clear: Hegel never denied this *distinctness* claim, indeed he insisted on it (for example, in the passage before about an «organic» and not «mechanical» unity of such *different* epistemic dimensions of experience)<sup>4</sup>. What is true is that Hegel wished to stress *more*, make more out of, the organic unity

<sup>2</sup> Michael Friedman, «Exorcising the Philosophical Tradition», in *Reading McDowell: On Mind and World*, ed. Nicholas Smith (Routledge: London, 2002):25-57, especially p. 33.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid, p. 464.

<sup>4</sup> HI 85.

or organic inseparability of such elements than Kant, where organic just means what it always has: that a severed hand is not any longer a *hand*, an intuited content considered separated from or in isolation from its role «inside» the act of judging cannot be a contributory element to knowledge. This amounts to claiming that the «blindness» of intuitions considered apart from conceptualization has different implications than Kant allowed, and changes what one can claim about a non-derived concept having an intuited content, being objectively valid.

This organic unity claim is the first manifestation of the claim that the conceptual is unbounded, that conceptual content cannot be understood as supplied «from without» by epistemologically distinct intuitions, or is the Hegelian version of the familiar attack by Wilfrid Sellars on «the myth of the given». But it calls immediately to mind an understandable hesitation about the direction already suggested. The first is the worry that the unboundedness claim amounts to a kind of «intellectualism», that understanding consciousness itself as an *activity* and purport as a *result* must mean that such activity must *be* apperceptive judging. Since there are obviously many sorts of relatively unreflective engagements that clearly do not fit such a model, the suspicion is that such a position greatly exaggerates the «intellectual» dimension of experience.

But this notion of an unbounded conceptual articulation need not be committed to such an exaggeration. Consider the case of the practical domain. What gets attended to in praxis as salient, of ethical significance, what goes unnoticed in a well functioning egalitarian society (eye color, race, gender etc.), what occurrence raises a question, demands attention, what does not, who is taken to be of relevance to the moral community (humans, animals, the severely disabled), who is not (plants), and so forth can all be imagined to be of great and «unreflective» weight in our practical world, some so deeply unreflective that it is hard even to imagine ever «questioning» them, and yet it is highly implausible that such historically and culturally quite variant elements could be said to have any immediate, direct presence in our experience, as if pressing on our attention in themselves, «on their own», from the «outside». A highly complex conceptual or normative interpretive framework is at work, without it being the case that such a being at work is a matter of explicit «reflective endorsement», or the result of articulated moral evaluation.

## III

This is all not, I take it, a revelation to anyone interested in Hegel; the opening argument of the *Phenomenology* famously starts us down that different, Hegelian path that will eventually lead to a much different understanding of the «subject-object» relation than that typical in so-called «reflective» philosophies like Kant's. But going further into the contrasting Hegelian claims about idealism immediately encounters two forbidding sorts of formulations. The first are frequent claims about not a concept-intuition relation but about *thought's self-negation*, and the second involve just as frequent formulations about the Concept *giving itself its own content*, the Concept being Absolute or in that term that McDowell has made well known, «unbounded». To be fair to critics like Friedman, this can certainly sound like we are talking about concepts unbounded *by* intuitions, that Hegel has rejected the «discursivity thesis»<sup>5</sup> according to which human thought can give itself no content but only categorize content provided «from without». What I would like to do in the following is to present a brief gloss on the first of the two issues (which, once placed in the context of the language developed by Kant's successors, is not as mysterious as it sounds), and then spend the rest of the time trying to understand what a concept giving itself its own content means, which is somewhat mysterious if it does *not* mean collapsing the distinction between concept and intuition, and so proposing a metaphysics in which the basic structure of reality is conceptual, a kind of neo-Platonic monist realism. Such a position, in the terms introduced here would mean insisting on not just inseparability in cognition between concept and intuition but actual indistinguishability.

Here is a typical statement about negation from his *Berlin Phenomenology*, as challenging to an interpreter now as they must have sounded then to his first readers.

The I is now this subjectivity, this infinite relation to itself, but therein, namely in this subjectivity, lies its negative relation to itself, diremption, differentiation, judgment. The I judges, and this constitutes it as consciousness; it repels itself from itself; this is a logical determination<sup>6</sup>.

<sup>5</sup> H.E. Allison, *Kant's Transcendental Idealism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004), pp. 12-16 and passim.

<sup>6</sup> G.W.F. Hegel: *The Berlin Phenomenology*, transl. M. Petry (Dordrecht: Riedel, 1981), p. 2. (BPhG hereafter)

There are scores of other passages throughout various works where Hegel appeals to this notion of the subject of thought, the «I» that thinks, as a negative self-relation, a self-diremption, or original self-separating or self-repelling. And in a general sense this abstract formulation is not foreign; it is well known from Spinoza's insistence that all determination is negation (*omnis determinatio negatio est*). Determinate relation to an object or content is an exclusion or *negation of all that such a content is not*, a restricting or fixing of content that excludes. The peculiarity of the Kantian and post-Kantian formulation is the insistence that a fixing and negation is a *result*; that consciousness is a *self*-negating. Since it is such a self-negating, any determinate take on the world is also implicitly and potentially self-transcending. Since intentional consciousness is a resolving and fixing of attending, such an activity is also potentially self-negating in a broader sense; defeasable and reformulatable.

With respect to our problem, what I think Hegel is struggling to make clear here is that for him denying a separability to intuition does not damn us to reside within our own conceivings, as if shut up inside a «world of our own conceiving». When we are so attentive to this rather Fichtean point –that any conscious take on the way things are should be understood as potentially self-negating, not in any matter of fact way restricted, restrained or negated «from the outside»,– we see that no cognitive form of mindedness could ever be a matter of *BEING* merely «positively» *IN* a doxastic state, or merely *being* in any mode at all, as if a judgment could be a thing caused. To affirm is simultaneously to hold open the possibility that what one is affirming is not true, and holding this open in this way means that judging is always potentially self-transcending, aiming at the world as it is, not somehow confined as if as a matter of some fact within a world view.

Arguments for relativism and sometimes for transcendental idealism often make this mistake, the mistake of thinking of thought or horizons of sense or modes of sense-making or conceptual schemes in this third-person way, as if something one can get trapped inside of unless something exogenous can «break» through it. As it has been put in many contemporary contexts, one source of the confusion is the temptation to think in terms of conceptual schemes and a separable, otherwise neutral, non-conceptual content that is conceptualized by

such a scheme. The temptation is to think of an in principle neutral or indeterminate content or world in itself the accessibility of which is a matter of applying a scheme to such a content and so ending up with something «less» than the world in itself, but rather the world only as so finitely appropriated. Hegel is among the parties denying such a scheme-content distinction, although he is certainly not denying that there can be different, sometimes quite different, aspectual takes on the world. The point of this self-negating language is to distinguish this possible partiality of a «shape of spirit» from the idea of some putatively radical, alternative conceptual scheme, and this view about the inherently possible self-negating aspect of such a «shape» is meant to stress what Gadamer calls the «openness» of linguistic horizons to each other<sup>7</sup>. (Hegel is making a great deal more out of the fact that for him such an openness is not merely a feature of horizons; it is «held open» actively). This all allows a Hegelian distinction between a partial view of the world in some of its aspects, but intelligibly integratable with other partial aspects<sup>8</sup>, and a contrary view of such aspectuality as due to the application of a scheme to a forever in-itself inaccessible content<sup>9</sup>. Scheme and

<sup>7</sup> Cf. McDowell's discussion, especially in relation to the Friedman charge also discussed here, in «Gadamer and Davidson on Understanding and Relativism», in *Gadamer's Century: Essays in Honor of Hans-Georg Gadamer*, Jeff Malpas, Ulrich Arnschuld, and Jens Kertscher, eds., (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2002), pp. 173-93. Besides being right (in my view anyway) about the set of Friedman, Gadamer and Davidson issues, McDowell also broaches the question of what we need to say is «shareable» by a linguistic community in order for this mutual intelligibility and integration to succeed and suggests the beginnings of what I would regard as a Hegelian case for the indispensability of an «I-We» relation beyond the «I-Thou» priority argued for by Brandom and, in effect, by Davidson on the priority of idiolects.

<sup>8</sup> On the issue of integration, see the discussion in chapters one and two of A. W. Moore's *Points of View*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), especially the statement of his Fundamental Principle on p. 21.

<sup>9</sup> This obviously commits Hegel to a very difficult task. Not *every* aspectual view, or conceptual array organized around points of salience, mattering, concerns and so forth are partial in *this* respect, integratable into a more comprehensive position, and Hegel needs to help us sort out what gets to be designated a «Gestalt des Geistes» and what falls short. And contrary to Moore (op. cit). these partial points of view are not for Hegel integratable by «simple addition».

content might be inseparable in any take on the world, but that does not mean they are indistinguishable, as if such partiality could not be noted and corrected, expanded, as if content is wholly «constituted» by the application of a «finite» scheme. I want to suggest that this is the point of difference between a finite and an absolute idealism.

The point I am trying to make here is simply that this highly unusual language about negation and self-repelling is meant to reject this «alternate scheme» picture, and to insist that the distinction between what we take to be the case and what is the case is *one we make*, in response to what we learn about the world, not an intrusion from outside that happens to us, whatever that could mean. (In his practical philosophy Hegel invokes the same sort of point to deny a Humean or any naturalist explanation of action. Insofar as something should be counted as an action of mine, a thing done intentionally, for the sake of a desire or need, it cannot be thought of as a body moved or just «kicked» into motion by a somatic cause. Whatever I am undertaking must be intentionally *sustained* as well, and so to sustain it means always to be able to fail to sustain it, and that failure is also not something that merely happens to me, as if a causal force is just extinguished. I either cancel or sustain a commitment to an end as I enact a deed, and once again (in the «Introduction to the *Philosophy of Right*) Hegel describes this in the abstract language of self-negation or self-diremption). He also sometimes uses the misleading language of «identification» to say this: that we both identify with, or endorse, an assertoric judgment or course of action, even while we have somehow held open its possible negation and so have not, in another sense, identified with it. For Hegel, this is on the way to saying that any determination (say empirical determination) of thought is a determination by thought, a self-determination or even potential self-negation, and this is why, for him, the inseparability claim is so important to stress. But we need to back up a few steps to untangle this progression of claims.

Now, it is possible to cite a list of passages where Kant says, in effect, that «Objects can appear to us without necessarily having to be related to functions of the understanding». (A89/B122; see also A90/B122 and B145). But the question of what Kant means when he claims it is possible to «intuit an object» independently of concepts is not thereby settled. On the face of it Kant only seems to be repeating



that *the intuitional aspects* of any object perceived cannot be attributed to the results of the understanding's determination; he is not saying that a cognitively significant pre-conceptual experience of an object is possible. (He often speaks of a synthesis of apprehension in intuition, and of reproduction in imagination, and at A120 insists that «imagination is a necessary ingredient of perception itself»). It is thus somewhat misleading to raise the issue in the contemporary terms of non-conceptual content, as some recent commentators have done. Kant is not really talking about non-conceptual or any sort of intuitional *content* in the passages at issue, but rather only about the non-conceptual, *formal* aspects of any *relation* to an object. Precisely because of this restriction, there are no indications he takes such items to be cognitively significant when considered in isolation. And no conceptual holist need affirm that reference must be fixed wholly conceptually, where conceptually is understood roughly as descriptively. There is a *demonstrative use of concepts* too.

But if we want to retrace the Hegelian path from these reflections, we need another component not prominent in McDowell. Indeed, given interpretations like Friedman's, this aspect of Hegel's position is by far the most important to notice when considering the question of what the denial of a strict separability between concept and intuition actually means or amounts to. For even though Hegel has in effect given up the Kantian strategy for demonstrating the objective validity of the categories, he still maintains that the very possibility of objective purport requires a conceptual projection of possible experience, the normative authority of which cannot be tied to an empirical derivation (or empirical «deduction» as Kant would say), but just thereby such *authority* still remains a *question*. (He also thinks that principles or norms for *action* are not in some way rationalized strategies for the satisfaction of desires and interests, nor are they formal legislations by pure practical reason. Yet the question of their normative status also remains). So the issue of the authority or legitimacy of non-derived (and non-instrumental) norms, once this mind-world model changes from Kant's (or the genuine «spirit» of Kant is emphasized) extends very far in Hegel. The main point now is that this shift leaves in place reflective question about the status of the normative authority of concepts and principles understood in this way. Does that mean we are left with some (for

Hegel quasi-psychological) claim about subjective indispensability, an enterprise of frictionless spinning? Or a metaphysical claim about the «conceptual structure» of reality in itself? It should not since the outcome of Hegel's take on the deduction is supposed to involve an altered way of seeing the «subject and object» relation, such that that interpretations like these will seem to have made several distorted assumptions. The course of his attempt to convince us of this and to illuminate this altered sense of the mind-world relation is the task of the *Phenomenology of Spirit*.

As the *Phenomenology's* Introduction also makes very clear, Hegel realizes that his own version of, let us say, the (*avant la lettre*) Sellarsian side of all this, creates its own distinct problem, the problem of grounding in some other way (other than by appeal to pure intuition, the separable form of all givenness, or empirically or pragmatically) the normative authority (what Kant called the «objective validity», Hegel the «reality» or *Wirklichkeit*) of non-derived, normatively constraining (or, in praxis, action-directing) elements in experience<sup>10</sup>. In a general sense the «experience» of consciousness contributes toward breakdown or loss of normative authority in what had functioned as empirically unchallengeable and something like Kant's problem about synthetic a priori judgments must be addressed, but now without Kant's account of the pure (separable) forms of intuition.

## V

The most expansive summary of such claims is that *the forms of judgment, the forms of thought, are the forms of things, of objects and events*. (Not that they *correspond* one to the other; that would be realism. One is the other, as in identity philosophy and Kant's Highest Principle of Synthetic Judgments). At this extreme altitude one is reminded of similar controversial claims by Wittgenstein in the

<sup>10</sup> If concept and intuition are radically inseparable, then not only is a pure or foundational empiricism excluded, but Kant's doctrine of transcendental formality is also being rejected and we will need another way to account for concept determinacy and (especially in Hegel) basic conceptual change. For the relevance of this issue to similar questions in Brandom's appropriation of Hegel, see my «Brandom's Hegel», in the *European Journal of Philosophy* 13:3 (2005): 381-408.

*Tractatus*, as at 5.6, «the limits of my language mean the limits of the world», something Wittgenstein provocatively calls «the truth in solipsism», and expands in 5.61 as «We cannot think what we cannot think; so we cannot think what we cannot say either». Although Wittgenstein appears to be talking only about what Kant would call, «general logic», the point at issue is a broad one and has been put to all sorts of uses. There are parallels in the distinct uses by Wittgenstein of «my» and «we» and Kant's «subject of experience» and «subjective» (and the «I» in the «I think» that must be able to accompany all my representations). For both, these terms refer to nothing *in* the world, but express the limits of the world, set the limits of what could be a world. Any encounter with anything in the world would presuppose, could not «discover», such a subject. The subject is not one more object in the world somehow containing all else.

For both as well, since this last point means that the basic statement of idealism involves no reference to an empirical psychological or actual social subject (is no species, as Bernard Williams notes, of any sort of «Whorfian» claim about language and world-views), or, idealism is not invoked here as an *explanation*, the form of thought or the form of language does not *explain* «why we experience the world as we do», the claim threatens to seem either a tautology or at a deeper level, much more unusual; something, but not even a possible *claim* at all. The first danger is clear enough. The basic statement appears to say: that which we can understand and state, we can understand and state; that which we cannot, we cannot. (This danger is evident in interpretations of Kant as «restricting» knowledge to our «epistemic conditions». Any view like this which is *not* a tautology threatens to introduce a substantive or empirical subject and thus a substantive or material or psychological notion of «limit». That Kant can give this impression is what Hegel most of all is objecting to in his famous attack on the notion of «limit» or finitude).

The latter possibility, that the basic statement is not a claim at all, but still *shows* us something, appears to be the way Wittgenstein understands it. Putting it this way reflects a response to a deep problem in any statement of a non-metaphysical idealism. One statement of such a post-Kantian idealism asserts a dependence of sorts (what sort being the heart of the matter) between the form of that to which our representations answer and some aspect of our

representing capacities, or, in a version that raises the tautology problem, a dependence between the *form of objects-known* and the *form of knowledge*. Hegel is not fond of such dependence language and prefers his own «identity philosophy» statements and so prefers an idealism claim according to which the conceptual is unbounded and self-determining. But in either case, it is obvious that this dependence (or identity) cannot itself be one of the objects to which representations answer. If it were so formulated it would be false. But we need to be able to explain our purchase on something like the worldliness of the world, the possibility of a world of experience, in a way that does not mistake such a target for something our representations could answer *to*, could be a feature of the world. Just calling this dimension transcendental does not help much. Hence the understandable emphasis on «showing».

But thus opens a potential disanalogy between Kant and Wittgenstein. How wide a disanalogy and what the relevance is for Hegel are challenging questions. For Wittgenstein, coming to understand what, say, «comprehending the meaning of a term» amounts to *for us*, is not an empirical report on how we go on, not an element of a socio-linguistics. It is simply coming to understand what comprehending the meaning of a term or a rule could be. (The Kantian parallel would be: all that being an object of our experience could be). Even though Wittgenstein later seems to entertain the possibility of beings minded other than we are, his point seems to be to show ultimately that there couldn't (intelligibly) be beings minded other than us. If we insist: «But the impossibility of entertaining such other-mindedness holds only by *our* lights, for us», then we have not understood what was just explained: that there is no we or I *in* the world «for» which things are; that the point of introducing the notion of «our» forms of thought is to help us see that there could be nothing else but «ours», if *forms of thought*. The truth in solipsism, in a famous Wittgensteinian twist reminiscent of Hegel's style, is the truth of realism; the «we» in Jonathan Lear's phrase, is a «disappearing we»<sup>11</sup>. Kant's idealism is a robust empirical realism; imagining an intuitive, not a discursive intelligence does not render our forms of thought «limits» beyond which there is something in

<sup>11</sup> J. Lear, «The Disappearing 'We'», in *Open Minded* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999), pp. 282-302.

principle knowable, but not knowable by us. The world created by the divine intellect in thinking it is the same world as the world we know, even if God knows it in more dimensions and in a different way. (The main difference: he knows it all at once as it were; our knowledge is partial and infinitely additive). So, in the common-sense way the issue is sometimes put: if the question is, «How could we possibly assume that there can be no gap between ‘all-that-is-knowable’ and ‘our capacity for knowledge’?» the answer is not a demonstration or a deduction that there could not be such a gap, nor is it to misunderstand the question as if it were about empirical capacities. (It is a ridiculous game, of no philosophical interest, to speculate about the possibility that the human brain may never be able to understand, say, the nature of consciousness). The right response is to focus on the confusion implicit in the suggestion that there is some real referent of the «our» in «*our* capacity for knowledge». If it is a capacity for *knowledge*, it is not merely «ours». Or, in Rorty’s apt phrase the skeptical worry about what might be the world in itself, considered independently of any way we might know it, is a «world well lost».

But here the disanalogy (with Kant and ultimately with Hegel) begins. Wittgenstein clearly does not want the limits of language to be the sort of limit which has an other side, a limit like a fence or a barrier. Yet a phrase like «the limits of my language» does imply a *restriction* of some sort. That is why the Wittgenstein version of the basic claim is not a tautology, even if not a claim in the normal sense (not, perhaps it would be clearer to say, an *explanation* of the forms of things by appeal to the forms of thought. This is the same sense in which the claim that mindedness requires a «spontaneity» is not pointing to a non-causal power in order to offer explanations of mental activities). There *is* a point at which nonsense *begins*, something we could not make sense of but can recognize as nonsensical. This restriction however suggests no unknowable world, is only available «from the inside», as Williams puts it by «...finding our way around inside our own view, feeling our way out to the points at which we begin to lose our hold on it (or it, its hold on us) and things begin to be hopelessly strange to us». (160)<sup>12</sup> Strawson’s term has become justly

<sup>12</sup> This is, I think, exactly the Hegelian point, could be an epigraph for the *Phenomenology*.

famous: the «bounds of sense» (a phrase Strawson most definitely did not think as a version of idealism, a *limit claim*. That it isn't and needn't be is his whole point).

Kant does not seem to think of things this way and *does* seem to use the notion of a limit as a barrier with another side, for which he was famously taken to task by Hegel. (One has to straddle the limit, stand on both sides, to understand it as a limit in this sense. In which case it is not a limit in that sense)<sup>13</sup>. Given all of this sympathy by Hegel with these sorts of critiques of limit notions, does this mean that we should understand Hegel's «idealism» to be as little a substantive claim as Wittgenstein's, a way of showing the disappearance of the relevance of any «we»?<sup>14</sup>

It is when we face the issue of the determinateness of what are claimed to be candidates for the enabling «forms of thought», and the unavailability of the Kantian separable forms of intuition, that a new form of «instability» one might call it, emerges, the «power of the negative» that forms the heart and soul of the *Phenomenology* (the «pathway of doubt and despair»). That is, to take the quickest route to the issue in Hegel, if a condition for possible objective purport is some sort of projection of possibility, conditions which cannot be accounted for empirically or deduced by pure reason from the

<sup>13</sup> Cf. the lapidary formulation by Moore, op. cit., «At a more general level, we cannot represent limits to what we can represent. For if we cannot represent anything beyond those limits, then we cannot represent our not being able to represent anything beyond those limits». P. 119. I don't think Moore gets the relation between these issues and the Kantian idealist tradition in proper focus, because he (admittedly) passes over the important «transcendent-transcendental» distinction in Kant. Cf. n. 8, p. 122. (By the *List der Vernunft*, though, the distinction gets a deep hold on his own enterprise in the last third of his book, when he distinguishes between a reflective level of analysis wherein his own Basic Assumption does not hold, and absolute representations are impossible, and a «non-transcendental» level wherein the assumption does hold and absolute representations are possible. The contention with Kant and Hegel is over the claim that the former sort of knowledge is «ineffable». There is no greater opponent of ineffability in the history of philosophy than Hegel).

<sup>14</sup> There is still a lot to say here. If Wittgenstein is taken *sensu stricto*, he is talking about general logic in many of these passages, and pointing to the limits of what is logically expressible is not pointing to a real «limit». But, more seems to be at stake especially in *The Philosophical Investigations*.

possibility of thought at all, normative constraints on what could be conceptual content at all, then we must also have some way of taking into account that the normative authority of such principles not only cannot be established once and for all by a deduction, but that this authority also can break down («internally») and has broken down historically. And we must be able to do this without objectifying, psychologizing, or sociologizing such collective subjectivity. That is, the breakdown involves an experience of partiality and incompleteness, not anything like alternate conceptual schemes and so alternate worlds. Given the inseparability claim, the reassurance we can be said to require given this possibility and this fact cannot at all be the very general and vague reassurance that objects, considered independently of such conditions, can be said to fit or match what we require. But this does not mean that there is *no* problem to resolve, not at least according to many passages in the *Phenomenology's Introduction*. In what we might call «normal» experience, within what Hegel names a «shape of spirit», there are norms which cannot be questioned because the basis for the possibility of any questioning, norms which both Hegel and Wittgenstein say we are «certain» of. That consciousness is direct and immediately presented with determinate objects which it can pick out and refer to indexically is not a theory or claim. It is more like a picture of what experience might be, what the mind-world relation is. As noted above this is not a claim about the mind-world relation, as if about another object in the world. That such a form of thought is the form of objects in such a context must function as a platitude. And Hegel «examines» its sufficiency, he says, by «watching», looking on, as an experience so shaped could be imagined trying to say what it knows. It cannot, and another picture is introduced.

One is tempted to say that this is a Hegelian response to a «skepticism» problem and various schemes. Hegel was tempted to say it that way, and occasionally succumbed to such a temptation. But that is a misleading formulation of the issue, suggesting as it inevitably does a perspective «outside» ordinary empirical and ethical claims, from which the very possibility of such claims can be established. But the *Phenomenology* remains phenomenological throughout, and this means that Hegel treats the way «consciousness suffers violence at its own hands» as part of *what it is to have experience at all*, (and that

means to have a world at all), to be responsive to failures of practices of justification and legitimation, described as if «from the inside», to stay with that image.

To be sure, in the Consciousness-Self-Consciousness-Reason chapters, Hegel is presenting an idealized picture of the education of consciousness about its own possibility, and so the self-negation is idealized, but the point towards which such education leads is a final corollary of sorts to the inseparability of mind and world that was the key point in Hegel's appropriation of Kant's deduction. This inseparability does not mean that transcendental logic, established by philosophical method, simply subjectively constitutes what the form of objects could be. The Hegelian direction, with respect to his infamous «identity» claim, goes the other way. Inseparability for Hegel means that a logic is interwoven in a form of life, a form of actual, historical life, cannot be rightly understood in abstraction from, separate from, the «life» it regulates, and these forms or norms fail or break down in time, in some way lose their grip within such a form of life as a whole, such that all philosophy can be is «its own time comprehended in thought». This is the logic, we might say, of the perpetually re-appearing «We».