

## Hegel's Lectures on the History of Philosophy

### Section Three: Recent German Philosophy

#### B. Kant.

The philosophy of Kant, which we have now more particularly to consider, made its appearance at the same time as the above. While Descartes asserted certainty to be the unity of thought and Being, we now have the consciousness of thought in its subjectivity, i.e. in the first place, as determinateness in contrast with objectivity, and then as finitude and progression in finite determinations. Abstract thought, as personal conviction is that which is maintained as certain; its contents are experience, but the methods adopted by experience are once more formal thought and argument. Kant turns back to the standpoint of Socrates; we see in him the freedom of the subject as we saw it with the Stoics, but the task in respect of content is now placed on a higher level. An endless aiming at the concrete is required for thought, a filling up in accordance with the rule which completion prescribes, which signifies that the content is itself the Idea as the unity of the Notion and reality. With Jacobi thought, demonstration, does not in the first place reach beyond the finite and conditioned, and in the Second place, even when God is likewise the metaphysical object, the demonstration is really the making Him conditioned and finite; in the third place the unconditioned, what is then immediately certain, only exists in faith, a subjectively fixed point of view but an unknowable one, that is to say an undetermined, indeterminable, and consequently an unfruitful one. The standpoint of the philosophy of Kant, on the contrary, is in the first place to be found in the fact that thought has through its reasoning got so far as to grasp itself not as contingent but rather as in itself the absolute ultimate. In the finite, in connection with the finite, an absolute standpoint is raised which acts as a connecting bond; it binds together the finite and leads up to the infinite. Thought grasped itself as all in all, as absolute in judgment; for it nothing external is authoritative, since all authority can receive validity only through thought. This thought, determining itself within itself and concrete, is, however, in the second place, grasped as subjective, and this aspect of subjectivity is the form which from Jacobi's point of view is predominant; the fact that thought is concrete Jacobi has on the other hand for the most part set aside. Both standpoints remain philosophies of subjectivity; since thought is subjective, the

capacity of knowing the absolute is denied to it. To Kant God cannot on the one hand be found in experience; He can neither be found in outward experience — as Lalande discovered when he swept the whole heavens and found no God — nor can He be discovered within; though no doubt mystics and enthusiasts can experience many things in themselves, and amongst these God, i.e. the Infinite. On the other hand Kant argues to prove the existence of God, who is to him an hypothesis necessary for the explanation of things, a postulate of practical reason. But in this connection another French astronomer made the following reply to the Emperor Napoleon: “*Je n’ai pas eu besoin de cette hypothèse.*” According to this the truth underlying the Kantian philosophy is the recognition of freedom. Even Rousseau represented the absolute to be found in freedom; Kant has the same principle, but taken rather from the theoretic side. The French regard it from the side of will, which is represented in their proverb: “*Il a la tête près du bonnet.*” France possesses the sense of actuality, of promptitude; because in that country conception passes more immediately into action, men have there applied themselves more practically to the affairs of actuality. But however much freedom may be in itself concrete, it was as undeveloped and in its abstraction that it was there applied to actuality; and to make abstractions hold good in actuality means to destroy actuality. The fanaticism which characterized the freedom which was put into the hands of the people was frightful. In Germany the same principle asserted the rights of consciousness on its own account, but it has been worked out in a merely theoretic way. We have commotions of every kind within us and around us, but through them all the German head quietly keeps its nightcap on and silently carries on its operations beneath it.

Immanuel Kant was born at Königsberg in 1724, and there studied theology to begin with; in the year 1755 he entered upon his work as an academic teacher; in 1770 he became professor of logic, and in 1801 he died at Königsberg on the 12th of February, having almost attained his eightieth year (Tennemann’s *Grundriss der Geschichte der Philosophie* by Wendt, § 380, pp. 465, 466), without ever having left his native town.

While to Wolff thought as thought was merely positive self-identity and grasped itself as such, we saw the negative self-moving thought, the absolute Notion, appear in all its power in France; and in the *Aufklärung* it likewise made its way to Germany in such a manner that all existence, all action, was called upon to serve a

useful purpose, i.e. the implicit was done away with and everything had to be for another; and that for which everything had to be is man, self-consciousness, taken, however, as signifying all men generally. The consciousness of this action in abstract form is the Kantian philosophy. It is thus the self-thinking absolute Notion that passes into itself which we see making its appearance in Germany through this philosophy, in such a way that all reality falls within self-consciousness; it is the idealism which vindicates all moments of the implicit to self-consciousness, but which at first itself remains subject to a contradiction, inasmuch as it still separates this implicit from itself. In other words the Kantian philosophy no doubt leads reality back to self-consciousness, but it can supply no reality to this essence of self-consciousness, or to this pure self-consciousness, nor can it demonstrate Being in the same. It apprehends simple thought as having difference in itself, but does not yet apprehend that all reality rests on this difference; it does not know how to obtain mastery over the individuality of self-consciousness, and although it describes reason very well, it does this in an unthinking empiric way which again robs it of the truth it has. Theoretically the Kantian philosophy is the "Illumination" or *Aufklärung* reduced to method; it states that nothing true can be known, but only the phenomenal; it leads knowledge into consciousness and self-consciousness, but from this standpoint maintains it to be a subjective and finite knowledge. Thus although it deals with the infinite Idea, expressing its formal categories and arriving at its concrete claims, it yet again denies this to be the truth, making it a simple subjective, because it has once for all accepted finite knowledge as the fixed and ultimate standpoint. This philosophy made an end of the metaphysic of the understanding as an objective dogmatism, but in fact it merely transformed it into a subjective dogmatism, i.e. into a consciousness in which these same finite determinations of the understanding persist, and the question of what is true in and for itself has been abandoned. Its study is made difficult by its diffuseness and prolixity, and by the peculiar terminology found in it. Nevertheless this diffuseness has one advantage, that inasmuch as the same thing is often repeated, the main points are kept before us, and those cannot easily be lost from view.

We shall endeavour to trace the lines which Kant pursued. The philosophy of Kant has in the first place a direct relation to that of Hume as stated above (p. 370). That is to say, the significance of the Kantian philosophy, generally expressed, is from the very beginning to allow that determinations such as those of universality and necessity are not to be met with in perception, and this Hume has already shown in

relation to Locke. But while Hume attacks the universality and necessity of the categories generally, and Jacobi their finitude, Kant merely argues against their objectivity in so far as they are present in external things themselves, while maintaining them to be objective in the sense of holding good as universal and necessary, as they do, for instance, in mathematics and natural science.<sup>(1)</sup> The fact that we crave for universality and necessity as that which first constitutes the objective, Kant thus undoubtedly allows. But if universality and necessity do not exist in external things, the question arises “Where are they to be found?” To this Kant, as against Hume, maintains that they must be *a priori*, i.e. that they must rest on reason itself, and on thought as self-conscious reason; their source is the subject, “I” in my self-consciousness.<sup>(2)</sup> This, simply expressed, is the main point in the Kantian philosophy.

In the second place the philosophy of Kant is likewise called a critical philosophy because its aim, says Kant, is first of all to supply a criticism of our faculties of knowledge; for before obtaining knowledge we must inquire into the faculties of knowledge. To the healthy human understanding that is plausible, and to it this has been a great discovery. Knowledge is thereby represented as an instrument, as a method and means whereby we endeavour to possess ourselves of the truth. Thus before men can make their way to the truth itself they must know the nature and function of their instrument. They must see whether it is capable of supplying what is demanded of it — of seizing upon the object; they must know what the alterations it makes in the object are, in order that these alterations may not be mixed up with the determinations of the object itself.<sup>(3)</sup> This would appear as though men could set forth upon the search for truth with spears and staves. And a further claim is made when it is said that we must know the faculty of knowledge before we can know. For to investigate the faculties of knowledge means to know them; but how we are to know without knowing, how we are to apprehend the truth before the truth, it is impossible to say. It is the old story of the who would not go into the water till he could swim. Thus since the investigation of the faculties of knowledge is itself knowing, it cannot in Kant attain to what it aims at because it is that already — it cannot come to itself because it is already with itself; the same thing happens as happened with the Jews, the Spirit passes through the midst of them and they know it not. At the same time the step taken by Kant is a great and important one — that is, the fact that he has made knowledge the subject of his consideration.

On the one hand this critique of knowledge applies to the empirical knowledge of Locke, which asserts itself to be grounded on experience, and, on the other hand, it also deals with what claims to be on the whole a more metaphysical kind of philosophy — the Wolffian and German — which had also taken up the line of proceeding on the more empiric method which has been depicted. But this last has at the same time kept itself separate from the merely empiric method, inasmuch as its main efforts have been directed towards making such categories of thought as those of potentiality, actuality, God, &c., have as their foundation categories of the understanding, and then reasoning from them. The Kantian philosophy is in the first instance directed against both. Kant takes away the objective significance of the determinations of the Wolffian metaphysics, and shows how they must be ascribed to subjective thought alone. At the same time Jacobi likewise declared himself against this metaphysic, but since he started more especially from the standpoint of the French and Germans, his point of view was different: he asserts that our finite thought can set forth finite determinations alone, and thus can only consider God and Spirit in accordance with finite relationships. On the practical side there reigned at that time the so-called happiness theory, since man's inherent Notion and the way to realize this Notion was apprehended in morality as a satisfaction of his desires. As against this Kant has very rightly shown that it involves a heteronomy and not an autonomy of reason — a determination through nature and consequently an absence of freedom. But because the rational principle of Kant was formal, and his successors could not make any further progress with reason, and yet morality had to receive a content, Fries and others must still be called Hedonists though they avoid giving themselves the name.

In the third place, as regards the relation of the categories to the material which is given through experience, there is according to Kant already inherent in the subjective determinations of thought, *e.g.* in those of cause and effect, the capacity of themselves to bind together the differences which are present in that material. Kant considers thought as in great measure a synthetic activity, and hence he represents the main question of Philosophy to be this, "How are synthetic judgments *a priori* possible?"<sup>(4)</sup> Judgment signifies the combination of thought-determinations as subject and predicate. Synthetic judgments *a priori* are nothing else than a connection of opposites through themselves, or the absolute Notion, i.e. the relations of different determinations such as those of cause and effect, given not through experience but through thought. Space and time likewise form the connecting

element; they are thus *a priori*, i.e. in self-consciousness. Since Kant shows that thought has synthetic judgments *a priori* which are not derived from perception, he shows that thought is so to speak concrete in itself. The idea which is present here is a great one, but, on the other hand, quite an ordinary signification is given it, for it is worked out from points of view which are inherently rude and empirical, and a scientific form is the last thing that can be claimed for it. In the presentation of it there is a lack of philosophical abstraction, and it is expressed in the most commonplace way; to say nothing more of the barbarous terminology, Kant remains restricted and confined by his psychological point of view and empirical methods.

To mention one example only of big barbarous expressions, Kant calls his philosophy (*Kritik der reinen Vernunft*, p. 19) a Transcendental philosophy, i.e. a system of principles of pure reason which demonstrate the universal and necessary elements in the self-conscious understanding, without occupying themselves with objects or inquiring what universality and necessity are; this last would be transcendent. Transcendent and transcendental have accordingly to be clearly distinguished. Transcendent mathematics signifies the mathematics in which the determination of infinitude is made use of in a preeminent degree: in this sphere of mathematics we say, for instance, that the circle consists of an infinitude of straight lines; the periphery is represented as straight, and since the curve is represented as straight this passes beyond the geometric category and is consequently transcendent. Kant, on the contrary, defines the transcendental philosophy as not a philosophy which by means of categories passes beyond its own sphere, but one which points out in subjective thought, in consciousness, the sources of what may become transcendent. Thought would thus be transcendent if the categories of universality, of cause and effect, were predicated of the object, for in this way men would from the subjective element 'transcend' into another sphere. We are not justified in so doing as regards the result nor even to begin with, since we merely contemplate thought within thought itself. Thus we do not desire to consider the categories in their objective sense, but in so far as thought is the source of such synthetic relationships; the necessary and universal thus here receive the significance of resting in our faculties of knowledge. But from this faculty of knowledge Kant still separates the implicit, the thing-in-itself, so that the universality and necessity are all the time a subjective conditionment of knowledge merely, and reason with its universality and necessity does not attain to a knowledge of the truth.<sup>(5)</sup> For it requires perception and experience, a material empirically given in order, as

subjectivity, to attain to knowledge. As Kant says, these form its “constituent parts”; one part it has in itself, but the other is empirically given.<sup>(6)</sup> When reason desires to be independent, to exist in itself and to derive truth from itself, it becomes transcendent; it transcends experience because it lacks the other constituent, and then creates mere hallucinations of the brain. It is hence not constitutive in knowledge but only regulative; it is the unity and rule for the sensuous manifold. But this unity on its own account is the unconditioned, which, transcending experience, merely arrives at contradictions. In the practical sphere alone is reason constitutive. The critique of reason is consequently not the knowing of objects, but of knowledge and its principles, its range and limitations, so that it does not become transcendent.<sup>(7)</sup> This is an extremely general account of what we shall now consider in its separate details.

In dealing with this matter Kant adopts the plan of first considering theoretic reason, the knowledge which relates to outward objects. In the second place he investigates the will as self-actualization; and, in the third place, the faculty of judgment, the special consideration of the unity of the universal and individual; how far he gets in this matter we shall likewise see. But the critique of the faculty of knowledge is the matter of main importance.