

Georg W. F. Hegel (1770–1831)

Responding to Kant

Hegel, in agreement with Kant, proposed that necessary truth must be imposed by the mind but he rejected Kant's thing-in-itself as unknowable (Flew, 1984). All that existed, he would argue, is mental and is consequently accessible to individual consciousness. Hegel, as does every idealist, had to answer the difficult problem of how, if everything is in the mind, one can distinguish what is objective from what is subjective, and what is true from what is false. Hegel, in answering such questions, would develop a philosophy in which truth is a system that is the unfolding of Reason, of Absolute Mind, which results in the blossoming of the objective universe from the world of pure idea (Horstmann, 1998). Reason is the fundamental principle underlying all of reality; reason is reality, reality is reason. Kant had failed in his endeavor, in Hegel's estimation, because he did not provide a complete account of the whole of reality. It is Hegel's intention to correct this error and provide an idealist account of just that. His completed system and explanation would be a unified whole and would exemplify a *coherence theory of truth* (Flew, 1984). Coherence theories are epistemological theories which take the view that the truth or believability of any statement depends upon how that statement coheres, or holds together, with all of the other beliefs within the person's belief system (Pollock and Cruz, 1999).

On Kant's Categories

Hegel, in particular, took issue with Kant's twelve categories (pure concepts) because they were pure forms (as in the Platonic sense) and were without matter or content, they were *a priori*, provided by the mind rather than external sources (Stace, 1924/1955). Unlike the universal forms of Plato, Kant's categories were not considered objective; they were subjective, not intended to explain the world, nor derived from that world, being *a priori*. Kant's categories were epistemological categories, or principles of knowing, rather than ontological categories of being. In Hegel, reason will not just have an epistemological function, it will underlie the world in totality; hence it is also ontological in its nature, it is that of which the world is made up.

For him, “reason” is not merely the name for a human faculty which contributes in a specific manner to our gaining knowledge; he also uses “reason” to describe that which is ultimately and eminently real. This is the ontological connotation. Reason is reality, and that alone is truly real which is reasonable. (Horstmann, 1998, p. 264)

In his system, Hegel would attempt to demonstrate, logically, how the world of objective phenomena is due to the rational unfolding of pure Reason and how it results in the objective universe. In this process Reason is, in effect, engaging in a process of self-discovery.

One of the main Hegelian contentions is that everything in the universe can be understood only in terms of an **objective or absolute mind**, which has been evolving throughout the world’s history into a transcendent, self-contained being. . . . each stage in the world’s development is the expression of the inner struggle of the absolute to achieve complete self-realization. In the process of evolving, it has been striving toward a stage of complete understanding and intelligibility. (Popkin and Stroll, 1993, p. 133, emphasis in original)

For our purposes, how Hegel achieves this goal is not important and we will not, therefore, be dealing with it. On the other hand, Hegel made, what some would consider, a very important contribution to how we think about natural phenomena. It would be a contribution that would have considerable bearing on how some psychologists think about psychology and its subject matter. Before getting to that, however, some preparatory information is required in order to provide what will follow with an intellectual context.

Cause or Explanation

Against First Causes

In developing his philosophical system Hegel had to address a couple of issues before he set to that task. He first found that it was necessary for him to make a distinction between

explanation and causality (Stace, 1924/1955). Hegel reasoned that if there is a cause of the universe, such a cause is an effect of a prior cause or it is not. One is faced with the possibility that there is an infinite chain of prior causes, one that extends without end, or, at some time, there was a first cause that is not the effect of a prior cause. This, of course was the situation that Newton faced and he resolved it, to himself at least, by invoking the concept of God the creator. The sort of solution that was arrived at by Newton is not one that appealed to Hegel. Hegel argued that if the explanation of a thing means assignment of a cause, a first cause would not prove satisfactory, as it would be inexplicable; it would have no prior cause to assign to it. An explanation of the universe by something that, itself, is a mystery would not be an explanation as far as Hegel was concerned. Causation may prove valid in the explanation of particular facts but it would not, could not, explain the whole universe.

Rational Explanation

Having rejected the notion of first cause, Hegel wonders whether a genuine explanation of the universe might be a reason rather than a cause, a demonstration that the universe itself is rational (Stace, 1924/1955). Unlike the disadvantages associated with the cause–effect sequence, the reason–consequent sequence does not require an antecedent cause as it will be self-explanatory and self-justified. The reason itself would provide a rational account of the consequent. The first principle does not have to be a cause if it can be demonstrated to be the reason for the world in its totality, if the world can be deduced from it logically.

The First Principle

Hegel's first principle would have to be one that he could deduce the world from as its reason and that reason would have to be universal if it was to apply to all that is (Stace, 1924/1955). This universal would have to be the absolute first of everything, not by its prior existence but by its logical priority. The first principle would have to be that which is not logically dependent upon anything prior to it—its independence is a logical independence. As the universal, first principle, it is before all worlds and is the source of all worlds and all things.

The existence of the universal, to be clear, however, is not a causal existence, it is a logical existence. To Hegel, from his rationalist perspective, the world flows from the universal as the conclusion flows from the premise—a logical consequence rather than a temporally causal effect.

The universal that Hegel is seeking is only separable from things in thought, not factually. The universal has a *logical being* but things have *factual being* (Stace, 1924/1955). Having recognized this, however, Hegel contended that the principle that he was seeking would have to be the reason of things and, because an explanation cannot contain any of the things that it was meant to explain, the first principle or reason had to be separated from the things that it was meant to explain.

In Hegel's judgment, any first principle that is intended to explain the universe had two conditions that it had to fulfill (Stace, 1924/1955). It, first, had to be capable of explaining the world, to indicate how the world arises from it of necessity. As was indicated, and to reiterate, this condition had to be satisfied by a principle of first reason but not a principle of first cause. The first principle, secondly, had to explain itself; it had to be self-explanatory. A first cause, as we saw, was lacking in just this quality of self-explanation. Hegel further reasoned that the world's first principle as reason will not be "a reason," some particular reason, but the principle of reason, reason itself. It would only be of rationality itself that one could not demand a further reason.

The first principle required, as a characteristic, logical priority over things but not a temporal priority since being first in time would be a causal sequence. Reason is without temporal precedence, only logical precedence. It is upon the basis of these presuppositions that Hegel will attempt to provide us with a coherent system that starts from a first principle and from which he will logically deduce the categories of the mind.

Hegel's Categories

The history of categories, according to Stace (1924/1955), begins, in modern philosophy, with Kant. In Kant the categories are treated as concepts, as subjective mental processes. In Hegel the categories are transformed into objective, ontological entities that have a being that

is independent of any particular mind, yours or mine for instance. The categories that emerge, unlike the categories that Kant identified when he examined the judgment process, had to be logically interrelated and deducible from the first principle. Given that the categories are of reason, one cannot say where the categories are, they are simply nowhere; they are not things, they are neither psychic nor material in nature. The categories have never existed and never will. They are pure abstractions that, albeit without existence in a psychic or material sense, are, nonetheless, real. The category system constitutes reason and that reason is its own reason, it is self-determined, self-explained, and dependent upon itself, but reason, no matter what, is real. Taken separately, each universal, each category, is a mere abstraction not an individual, not an existent. While categories are real, they do not exist.

In Hegel's system, as was noted, there is required a unity of ideas (a coherence). Every separate Idea (in the sense of form), must involve every other separate Idea such that the world of Ideas is an organic whole that is self-determined and self-explained. It is this unity of Ideas that Hegel aims to arrive at and, finally, having done so, to deduce from it, logically, the actual world. If this can be achieved Hegel's first principle would be one and many, singular and plural; singular in that it is the first and only, yet plural because the remainder will be deduced from it and hence it contains them logically. It would be, this first principle, self-determined, it would be a self-contained totality, a unity, and yet, a multiplicity of ideas within that unity. Hegel, thus, intends to identify a first principle and then to deduce all else from it.

Being: The First Category

The first category was not something that could be selected willy-nilly, at random. It would have to be identified through a rational search. The categories are systems of reason and the essence of reason is that the whole process is necessary. The first category will be the one that comes first, logically, first in order of thought; its priority will be a logical priority and its progress, its development, will be fixed rationally. What Hegel seeks to do is to identify that abstraction from things from which there is no further abstraction (similar to the idea of substance as a first principle in metaphysics). *Being* is the highest possible abstraction, reasoned Hegel, one that is common to all possible objects in the universe, even if immaterial. For us to know the qualities of anything, to know anything about it at all, there is one thing above all else that is required and that requirement is that it be, that it exist. The quality of "*isness*," of being, must therefore be, logically, the first category; any category, if it

is to be a category, must “be.” Being is the highest possible abstraction and is, therefore, for Hegel, the first principle and the first category.

To understand this conclusion of Hegel, consider this in your imagination. You have before you some object and, since that is what I am presently working at, let us say it is a computer, in fact, the monitor, to simplify things. Now imagine what attributes that object possesses. It has shape—squareness. It has texture—smooth. It has resistance—it is hard. It is colored—mostly beige, with a bit of blue, red, and yellow on the screen. Now imagine taking away, abstracting, certain of these attributes, color, for instance. We now have an object that is square, smooth, and hard. Next, abstract hardness; one is left with square and smooth. Remove hard, and then remove square and what remains, from this intellectual exercise (which is what Hegel did) is that the monitor *is*, that it has existence as a remaining quality. If, however, you remove the quality of ‘isness’ first, all other qualities would also cease to be and nothing would remain because all of those other qualities had an existence before they were abstracted. We abstracted “is square,” “is hard,” and so on. “Isness” is a property of them all. That is how Hegel determined that his first category had to be, logically, “Being.” All other categories presupposed Being and hence it had logical priority.

The Dialectical Method

Logical connections, Hegel assumed, exist between the categories; they are neither deduced nor created, they are identified, discovered (Stace, 1924/1955). This is what Hegel aims to do with his dialectical method. In Hegel’s system, the most abstract categories are the most general and are always prior to those that are less abstract and less general. This premise not only decides the first category but also the order of the subsequent categories. The dialectical method is then a process of moving from the *genus* (a comprehensive class) to the *species* (a subclass of the genus). Having reached that point the species is treated as a genus and its species is then identified. The process continues from genus to species and from there to “species as genus.” In such a process one is moving ever more from the highly abstract and general to the particular and, ultimately, to particular things and processes in the objective universe.

There is a further aspect of Hegel’s method that is central to appreciating what he did, and which would have an impact on subsequent psychological theorizing. Specifically, I need to

point out the importance of the concepts of *negation* and *determination* in Hegel's logical system (Stace, 1924/1955). Spinoza (1632–1677) had earlier put forward a principle that Hegel would draw upon in his own way. According to Spinoza “*all determination is negation*” (Stace, p. 32). To determine something in this sense is to define it and that involves limiting it. A thing that is determined is cut off; it is separated out of the sphere of being, and has boundaries set up. To limit something to being of one sort is also to say that it is not of another sort. To say that something is hot is also to say that it is not-cold. This idea Hegel drew upon but he reversed it. To Hegel, “*all negation is determination*” (Stace, p. 33). The three ideas of determination, negation, and limitation involve each other and are central to Hegel's whole system.

Hegel discovered that a concept, e.g., hot, may implicitly contain its opposite, cold, within itself and that such opposites can be deduced from it, extricated, and used as differentia (the quality that enables one to distinguish one species from another within the same genus). By such means the genus could be converted into species within his method. This will become more accessible, I believe, when we look at the example of the evolution of the category of Being.

Being, Nothing, Becoming

The First Triad

As was noted, Hegel determined that the most abstract and therefore the most logically prior category was Being (Stace, 1924/1955). Commencing with the category of Being, Hegel was starting with something that is wholly abstract, not any particular being. It is the pure concept of Being, unsullied by concrete existence; it is the “isness” that is common to all things that are. Such Being is without determination since all determinations have been abstracted. It is wholly indeterminate and lacking in features, completely empty of any qualities. The total absence of anything and everything, Hegel determined, is nothing. It is a vacancy, an emptiness, and so Being and Nothing are the same. The pure concept of Being contains that of Nothing. Now, to demonstrate that a category includes another category is to deduce the second from the first. (Remember, however, that to deduce the category is not to create it, it was there from the start; it is a deduction that is a demonstration.) It is only from the purely abstract notion of Being, without determination, that Nothing is deduced. Pure “is” is the

same as pure “not” so Being and Nothing are identical. Now, given that they are identical, the one passes into the other; Being passes into Nothing and Nothing passes into Being. Since each category, Being and Nothing, passes into the other, a third category is revealed out of the first two. The idea of the passage of one into the other gives rise to the category of Becoming. There are now three categories that have been arrived at through deduction from the original Being.

With this deductive process Hegel has arrived at his first “triad.” The triad is something that Hegel used throughout his writing but it was not a universal principle (Findlay, 1964). The triad is composed of a *Thesis*, *Antithesis*, and a *Synthesis*. The idea here is basically that one commences with an initial proposition, a thesis, and then identifies its opposite, the antithesis, and then resolves the opposition, as was done with Becoming, with the synthesis (Flew, 1984). The process may then continue with the synthesis becoming itself a thesis (remember the genus-species-genus sequence). The whole of Hegel’s system does not utilize the triadic, logical unfolding but it is apparent in numerous instances.

Deducing Further Triads

Proceeding with this method, Hegel attempts to give an account of the evolving of all categories from the first principle and to proceed onto the emergence of objective phenomena (which are still of mind) and, from there, to give an account of the historical unfolding of the conditions of life. This is the unfolding of Reason and its realization.

From this process a number of opposing concepts are identified that have a dialectical unity between them in that they are opposed and yet they are not wholly separate. There is, in this, what Hegel called a *unity-in-difference*. There is a unity in difference, for instance between unity and plurality. For our purposes, there is one unity-in-difference that will be of major importance very shortly, that of quantity and quality.

The Quantity/Quality Dialectic

The quantity–quality dialectic puts forward the proposition that with sufficient quantitative change a qualitative change may result. We have the transition of quantity into quality (Findlay, 1964). Hegel gave, as examples, the transition of solid to liquid to gas with

quantitative increases in temperature. In other words, water ceases to be a solid, ice, as temperature increases, and, with further increases in temperature, the liquid, water, becomes a gas, steam. These qualitative changes arise solely upon the basis of quantitative changes; numeric increases in temperature underlie the transformations. Another example from Hegel is the change in the quality of a tone as the strings of an instrument have their tension increased or decreased. An alteration in the degree of tension creates differences in tonal quality, from high to low pitch and vice versa. One need only listen to someone tune a guitar to relate to this proposition, or watch the winter ices melt in the spring.

Hegel's logic

Rediscovering an Old Way of Thinking

Hegel, in formulating his dialectical logic, reintroduced a way of thinking that had been lost to the West due, I suspect, to the influence of Aristotelian philosophy and principles of logic. What Hegel reintroduced was the principle of the unity of opposites. This was an idea that had already taken hold in the philosophy of Heraclitus. He had noticed that everything that one encountered in the world could be differentiated into opposites and that change took place between opposites. It is also evident in pre-Christian theology in, for instance, the *Star of David* or *Solomon's seal*. The triangle with its point aimed downward (∇) represents essence or spirit and the triangle pointing upwards (\triangle) represents the body (Burckhardt, 1971). In alchemy the upward-pointing triangle is also said to symbolize fire and the downward-pointing water (González-Wippler, 1974/1977). These triangles also symbolized spirit and matter (Edinger, 1972). I read once that when the two points touch, in a sort of figure-eight configuration, the human is out of touch with the spiritual and there is disharmony. When, on the other hand, the two opposing forces are intertwined so as to form the six-pointed, Star of David \star (the symbol on the Israeli flag) the opposites are in harmony and there is peace.

This is an idea that is central to Eastern ways of thinking (Capra, 1975/1976). All opposites are considered polar in nature, as different aspects of the same phenomenon, e.g. good and bad, dark and light. Such opposites are interdependent. To Capra, this understanding of the “unity of opposites” is a concept that Westerners have difficulty grasping since we have a long conceptual tradition of considering things in their difference and then absolutizing that

difference. This type of thinking is relativistic in nature and is reflected, for instance, in relativity theory, in the idea that space and time form a continuum rather than existing as Newton's absolute space and absolute time (Einstein, 1916/1961). Regarding the Eastern perspective, Capra noted the following:

Opposites are abstract concepts belonging to the realm of thought, and as such they are relative. By the very act of focusing our attention on any one concept we create its opposite. As Lao Tzu says, "When all in the world understand beauty to be beautiful, then ugliness exists; when all understand goodness to be good, then evil exists."
(Capra, 1976, p. 148)

Revising Aristotle's Logic

Central to Aristotle's logic are three related principles or laws: the "*law of identity*," the "*law of non-contradiction*" (or the "*law of contradiction*"), and the "*excluded middle*" (Runes, 1977). According to the "law of identity" a thing or a concept is identical with itself (sometimes expressed as $A = A$). The "law of non-contradiction" proposed that a thing can only be identical with itself not with that which is not it (or $A \neq \text{not } A$). The "law of the excluded middle" proposes that there is nothing between the law of identity and of non-contradiction. There is no way to overcome the opposition between the two concepts. It was this idea that Spinoza suddenly weakened with the suggestion that "determination is negation" and it was Hegel who grasped the significance of it. Now the excluded middle is being questioned, there is an identity of opposites such as quantity and quality or being and nothing. In this lies Hegel's significance.

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