

SUBJECTIVISM IN THE COPERNICAN PROJECT OF KANT

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Reason in its rationalist-empiricist polemic was what Kant had to face. He designated himself as a serious mediator. So, his mission was to reconcile the two opposing trends-one viewing reason as a priori, innate, and the other taking reason as a posteriori, empirical. Rationalists took self-evident principles, internal to mind as truths of analytic certainty. Empiricists considered experience as the sole content of knowledge. For empiricists, there is nothing called self-evident truth.

As it was Hume who awakened him from his dogmatic slumber, Kant rightly took experience as an element of truth. He accepted this element for giving universality to knowledge so that it can be free from subjectivism. This was his device against rationalism. At the same time, Kant thought, an element of certainty (*a priori* certainty for Kant) also has to be provided to plug the empiricist loophole. Thus Kant advanced a reconciliation, a solution to both what Kant calls the rationalist dogmatism and empiricist skepticism.

The possible knowledge, for Kant, is only a phenomenology realized through the unity of concepts and percepts. There are other elements of mediation and also conditions that make possible this knowledge. The whole incredible edifice he builds up to substantiate the reconciliation that he himself has advanced forms only an element of fictional magneticism with which he attracted a philosophy audience. Kant was very successful in realizing this aim, and we also have no other way but to go through these bricks and plaster where and when we need.

Kant called this reconciliation, this third form of philosophy, critical philosophy. He called it also as transcendental idealism or sometimes

as critical idealism. We would see in the course of this treatment whether Kant could really reconcile the trends. However, we shall first see what he means by transcendental.

Kant uses 'transcendental' not in the usual sense of 'not immanent'. He accords to it a unique meaning. This, in essence, means 'related to objects, but not yet empirical' or 'relating to objects in an *a priori* way'. This is the meaning in which transcendental philosophy or transcendental idealism is used.

Kant says:

I entitle transcendental all knowledge which is occupied not so much with objects as with the mode of our knowledge of objects in so far as this mode is to be possible *a priori*.¹

Again,

...What can alone be entitled transcendental is the knowledge that...representations are not of empirical origin, and the possibility that they can yet relate *a priori* to objects of experience.²

Or again,

The term 'transcendental'...signifies such knowledge as concerns the *a priori* possibility of knowledge, or its *a priori* employment.³

It is a strange meaning; but this is the sense in which Kant tries to explain his reconciliation. When Kant unites the *a priori* and a *posteriori* elements of knowledge, what he wants is not a *contingent* synthetic *combination* of intuitions.⁴ The synthesis is done at a conceptual level, not in an empirical level.⁵ That means, the synthesis is done *a priori*. This unity or synthesis is transcendental.

How is it possible to add something new to the *a priori* analytic knowledge without taking something from the empirical realm? True, the addition is taking place. But it is because of the active extension from the side of the *a priori*. This is because of the ampliative principles involved in synthesis.⁶ The difference between analytic and synthetic essentially lies

in the fact that while the identity of subject and predicate in the analytic is immediate, this is mediate in the latter. And this mediation involved in the synthesis is just an espousal of what is already conceived *a priori*.

It is to give necessity and certainty to the knowledge that Kant avoided empirical synthesis. The experimentation, here, has no other way but to agree with the *a priori* conceptions. In the system of concepts/categories and percepts/sensible intuitions also, the former are the active participants. Thus, one thing is clear that Kant's emphasis is on the subjective; all experimentations and all the processes attached to the a posteriori/empirical elements are supposed only to vindicate the subject; predicate is just the subject. But, such a mediation allowed by Kant amounts to no mediation. Here, we find his subjectivism; the Copernican turn, the claim of Kant's revolution in philosophy is also the same.

Kant himself has declared that the concern of his transcendental idealism is not on the relation of knowledge to its object.

The distinction between the transcendental and the empirical belongs therefore only to the critique of knowledge ; it does not concern the relation of that knowledge to its object.⁷

Again,

By *transcendental idealism* I mean the doctrine that appearances are to be regarded as being, one and all, representations only, not things in themselves, and that time and space are therefore only sensible forms of our intuition, not determinations given as existing by themselves, nor conditions of objects viewed as things in themselves.⁸

The two quotes above together speak that neither the philosophy is concerned with the knowledge of reality, nor are we in a position to know the objects viewed as things in themselves. Let us ponder on the question why Kant has taken such a negative attitude. Kant's main concern in the mission of the historic reconciliation turned out to be "a science of the mere examination of pure reason, of its sources and limits."⁹ Kant preferred to call this a critique, not a doctrine:

...it should be called a critique, not a doctrine, of pure reason. Its utility, in speculation, ought properly to be *only negative*, not to extend, but only to clarify our reason, and keep it free from errors - which is already a very great gain.¹⁰

Kant's whole project is negative because he is satisfied in 'better not extend knowledge than speculate errors'. Such an attitude could keep Kant only in a fix and that way make him commit negative errors. And Hegel's criticisms of Kant clearly established this truth.

Kant's choice to remain a philosopher of negative reason makes Hegel call him 'philosopher of the understanding' distinct from that of speculative and positive reason. The sides understanding (abstract) and negative reason (dialectical) are only two 'moments' or premises which take us to the 'truth' or conclusion, in Hegelian logical traid. Hegel regards the speculative side (positive reason) as rich in content, and as something worthy of philosophical endeavour. It is through a critique of Kant that Hegel comes to the position of a speculative philosopher expounding positive reason. When we criticise Kant, one should not forget that we also uphold the trends of positive reason and speculation instrumental to the idea of a dialectical totality hidden in Kant despite his refusal of them. Now we shall go through the facts of subjectivism and the inherent empiricism in Kant's transcendental/critical idealism, of the subjectivism in the Copernican revolution and Kant's inability in overcoming this in a sublated objectivism, of Kant's separation of method from content, i.e., separating the process of examination of instruments of knowledge from knowledge itself, and of the onesidedness in his defense of formal logic. In all through this treatment we should see that reason in Kant is subjectivistic.

To begin with, Kant's project was similar to Hume's. Nicholas Capaldi points out the similarities in Hume's introduction to his *Treatise* and Kant's preface to his first *Critique*. In both Hume and Kant we can see (i) a need to put metaphysics in the right track, (ii) an attempt to make human reason as the centre of study and (iii) an appeal to experience to

reject transcendental explanations as unscientific.¹¹ This similarity of project could retain Kant a Humean to a certain extent, despite the strong differences between them. Hume's fatal attacks on causality influenced to a great extent Kant. And Kant gives credit to Hume for wakening him from the 'dogmatic slumber' lulled by the Leibnizian and Wolffian rationalism. At the same time, Kant took much care not to fall a victim to Hume's empiricist, skeptical nihilism. As a precaution, Kant transferred causality from empirical realm to an *a priori* area making it a category of relation; he kept necessity also *a priori* category. In this attempt of subjectivisation, Kant could not escape internalising a bit of empiricism from Hume. Hegel also sometimes terms Kant an 'empiricist'.

Kant's system was against both rationalism and empiricism. Also what Findlay talks of Logico-mathematicism and Radical Empiricism amounts to the same. According to Findlay, Kant erected a system against these two related errors.¹² Findlay is right in holding Kant for committing the same mistakes which he tries to refute.

...The wonderment with which he regards what he calls the synthetic *A Priori*, his own discovery...is a wonderment derived in part from a superstitious reverence for a supposedly complete Formal Logic and in part from what one may call a deep seated crypto-empiricism. It is the latter which leads Kant to resort to the most fantastic hypotheses, themselves cryptically empiricistic and psychologistic,....¹³

Kant's empiricism lies in his refusal to accept anything behind the representations, appearances and phenomena. The initial unity of the discrete appearances are not cognized from the real objects or the things in themselves, but supplied externally to it through the *a priori* categories of the subject, the knower. The objects for Kant are only what is *given* to us. This division of appearances and reality took Kant to resort to various hypotheses of introducing limiting concepts like noumena or of unsuccessfully attempting to bridge the gap between these two realms. In fact, subjectivism and empiricism are strongly linked in Kant, and we would see this again and again on the way of our appreciation for Kant.

Again, we can see the subjectivism in the very conception and execution of Kant's Copernican project. In the pre-Copernican astronomy, earth is generally taken passive. Copernicus took earth an active participant in the solar system. The factor of the movement of spectator on earth or, for that matter, the movement of earth itself was taken into account in observations and conclusions regarding astronomy. This is the Copernican revolution in astronomy. Taking human faculty as an active element in the knowledge formation is Kant's Copernican revolution in philosophy. True, he took *a priori* concepts as the active component and treated intuitions (sensible intuitions, percepts) as passive component of appearance. Already, we saw that the synthetic a priori judgements are just ampliative principles resulting from *a priori* extension to objects (not things in themselves). One should note that this extension is from the side of the *a priori*, and it is only an *a priori* checking of the data (still, strangely, not empirical) where the intuitions are only to agree with the *a priori* concepts. Intuitions just 'apply' to concepts, while concepts 'apprehend' a priori the intuitions, not empirically.

So, it is clear that the whole Copernican perspective in Kant is a subjectivist one, and the over-enthusiasm shown in the suppression of intuitions to passivity is something that could have been avoided. In essence, the external, objective element of knowledge, i.e., the intuitions are just unwanted ornamental appendices in Kant's epistemology. Analysing the metaphysics and subjectivism involved in this, Hegel says that the subject-object identity in Kant is only formal. We also saw that the mediation involved in the subject-predicate identity in the synthetic apriori statements is no mediation.

Hegel is right in observing that the subject and things exist each for itself in Kant. We are separate, epistemologically separate from things, and the things are separate from us. We only assume or posit that things are. As we are not knowing them (things in themselves of Kant), we only posit them. That means, the objectivity of the external world is just subjective, not made subjective, not made known; things are objective in the sense that

the knowledge of them is denied to us. To use another language of Hegel, there is only a subjective subject-object identity.¹⁴ That is, the *finite* categories of understanding in Kant are not able to clasp the original identity in totality to the point of absolute grasp of it. This is because of the finite and subjective nature of Kant's categories. Here, Hegel terms the idealism of Kant psychological also. Because, in a strict sense, Kant is not able to come out of the Cartesian 'I think'. No sublation of Kant's subjectivism takes place.

Moreover, the natural objectivisation attempts of the subjective reason in Kant are never allowed by Kant as logically and epistemologically legitimate. Again this is a subjective limitation of a conscious Kant. Kant thinks that it is an inherent mistake on the part of human reason to enter into the unauthorised realms of objects and things-in-themselves. In the ascending series, reason which is able to know each and every condition in the series aims, illegitimately in Kant's parlance, to know the totality of conditions and even the Unconditioned. This objectivisation trend of reason is the hidden other in Kant's subjective reason that Hegel later on posits objectively. One can see that this unity of reason in Hegel is inclusive of the illicit reason in Kant. When Jonathan Bennet calls the objective trend of Kant's reason as ascending reason¹⁵ (derived from the ascending series) neither he visualizes any bud of objective reason in it nor he is for it. Bennet sees the ascending reason as only the part of the subjective reason that, for him, is really and shall be legitimately subjective.

Limiting this reason only as subjective and as a method is the manifest attitude of formal logic. While talking about the ascension / objectivisation / transcendentalisation of reason, Kant points out as a misdeed of this reason that this wants to make a systematic unity "necessary, not only subjectively and logically, as a method, but objectively also."¹⁶ I quote this to state that in common philosophy, subjectivity, logic (read formal logic) and method go together. Logic is subjective, formal and a method. When Hegel argued for a content to this, the whole concept

of logic has changed. Hegel opposed the separation of method from content.

Hegel opposed the very idea of first analysing our faculty of knowledge before we gain any knowledge. The very separation of knowledge from the faculty of knowledge, that of content from method, is paradoxical. The paradox is that knowledge is a must to draw limits to knowledge. The idea that instrument of knowledge should be inspected before and without using it is an impossibility. Kant's subjectivism and empiricism can again be sensed here. Kant follows Locke in taking the examination of powers of reason and understanding as prior to the very attempt of making any beginning in knowledge. Empiricists as a whole including Kant, and rationalists as well, not to exclude Kant again, have only part of reason, finite reason at hand; the unity of reason, the infinite reason where the identity of infinite and finite is explicit, which is capable of grasping the totality, the whole, the things in themselves is lacking in these philosophers. That is why Hegel called Kant a philosopher of the understanding with finite reason, the empiricist, the abstract thinker lacking in means to grasp the concrete that is rich in sides.

The so-called testing in abstraction is more or less nothing. This misguided process can reveal an abstract side. But only actions can reveal the concrete full truth. In Lesser Logic (*Logic in Encyclopaedia*), Hegel ridicules Kant's kind of endeavours by resorting to a metaphor. Kant's attempt is like refusing to enter water until one has learned to swim, says Hegel. Hegel positively asserts, and he is right in doing so, that the act of knowing an object and the being of the object are not separable; these cannot be two separate enterprises as Kant has thought. Kant's metaphysical separation of form from content is one and the same folly of his formalism, subjectivism and empiricism.

When Capaldi says that

contrary to what critics such as Strawson say, the Copernican model is coherent when properly understood, and where difficulties

arise they are the result of Kant's Aristotelianism and of his not being Copernican enough.¹⁷

it is Capaldi who does not understand that the Copernican model of Kant (subjectivism) and the Aristotelianism (formal logic) in him are one and the same thing. In one way, Capaldi is correct in reading Strawson. Critics like P.F.Strawson¹⁸ are involved in further cutting down Kant who himself has self-edited to the point of unexcisable subjectivism and empiricism. Despite the bulkiness of Kant, thanks to the construction of his big fiction of 'as ifs' regulative ideas, limiting concepts, so on and so forth, the essential Kant, especially in epistemology and logic, is a largely self-edited subjectivist. When we have already established that Kant remained defensive and negative with the self-defeatist aim of 'better not take risk and advance than to commit errors', the preamble of his transcendentalism, that the execution of his whole Copernican project amounted to partial, finite, one-sided abstract, formal, subjectivist and empiricist results, and that we indirectly suggest that Kant could have gone further in sublating himself into a position of positive reason, enabling thus to have a grasp of the total, the concrete, the whole, the empiricist attempts like that of Strawson in further excising an already excised Kant would amount to be meaningless.

Findlay terms Strawson's attempt of reconstructing (or destructing) Kant as what is called Transcendental Excision.¹⁹ He means by this cutting short a thinker, cutting out the inconsistent, incoherent parts. In Kant's case, Findlay also argues for a transcendental excision, though he differs with Strawson in what to cut and what not to cut.²⁰ I argue not for an excision, but instead a sublation of the subjectivism. The implicit attempts of such a sublation can be seen in Kant in the form of hidden unrecognised middles, as flexible conceptions, in mediations and triplicities or even in bridging ventures through the later critiques. Here, we would limit ourselves to conclude that the valid reason in Kant is basically subjective; his categories are subjective; space and time, the forms of intuitions, are subjective; synthetic knowledge is also an *a priori* attempt. The essence of the Copernican revolution is the subjectivisation of reason. And in the

mission of reconciliation, he is a failure to a great extent; his metaphysical separation of subject and object of knowledge allowed all the dichotomies their onesided abstractions; his bridging attempts could not save him from being a dualist.

NOTES

1. N.K.Smith (Tr.), *Immanuel Kant's Critique of Pure Reason*, Macmillan, London, 1958.
2. *Ibid.* p. 96.
3. *Ibid.*
4. *Ibid.* p. 50.
5. *Ibid.*p. 51. "It cannot be experience, because the suggested principle has connected the second representation with the first, not only with greater universality, but also with character of necessity, and therefore completely *a priori* and on the basis of mere concepts."
6. *Ibid.*
7. *Ibid.* p. 96.
8. *Ibid.* p. 345.
9. *Ibid.* p.59.
10. *Ibid.* (emphasis added).
11. Nicholas Capaldi, 'The Copernican Revolution in Hume and Kant' in Lewis White Beck (ed.), *Proceedings of the Third International Kant Congress*, D. Reidel Publishing Co., Dordrecht (Holland), 1970. pp. 234-40.
12. J.N.Findlay, 'Kant and Anglo-Saxon Criticism', in L.W. Beck (ed.), *op.cit.*, pp. 128-48.
13. *Ibid.*

14. Jere Paul Surber (Tr.), *The Difference between the Fichtean and Schellingean Systems of Philosophy*, Ridgeview Publishing Co., California, 1978.
15. Jonathan Bennet, *Kant's Dialectic*, Cambridge University Press, 1974, pp. 260-64.
16. N.K.Smith (Tr.), *Immanuel Kant's Critique of Pure Reason*, Note. 1, P. 536.
17. Nicholas Capaldi, op. cit, p. 239.
18. P.F.Strawson, *The Bounds of Sense*, Methuen & Co., London, 1973.
19. J.N.Findlay, op cit, pp. 130-31.
20. *Ibid.* P. 147. ".....I would wish the last trace of constructive subjectivism to be excised from Kant...."

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