

Sally Sedgwick: *Hegel's Critique of Kant. From Dichotomy to Identity.* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012. xii, 194 p. ISBN 9780199698363.

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Since the early 1990s, Sally Sedgwick has devoted many essays and articles to the important, controversial and still vigorously debated topic of Hegel's complex relation to Kant. Some of these essays have been revised and expanded to form her first monograph on the subject, the excellent *Hegel's Critique of Kant*, which is under review here. The book contains six substantive chapters that deal exclusively with Hegel's criticisms of Kant's theoretical philosophy. Of course, Hegel is also known for his critique of Kant's practical philosophy, but as Sedgwick is right to point out, a proper assessment of his critique of the latter, which is often 'extremely sketchy and vague' (7), depends to a large extent on understanding Hegel's motivation for criticising the main assumptions of Kant's *theoretical* philosophy, in particular his putative pervasive dualism and formalism.

With a keen sense of the landscape, and insight into the details, of Kant's theoretical philosophy, Sedgwick attempts to provide Hegelian answers to standard Kantian rejoinders to the Hegelian critique, without falling into the usual Hegelian trap of siding with Hegel beforehand. Again and again, Sedgwick reminds us of the importance of distinguishing between, on the one hand, what Kant intended and how Hegel himself is perfectly aware of this and, on the other hand, what Hegel criticises about Kant's strategies and solutions. Sedgwick is thus very much sensitive to Kant's own intentions and thereby shows solid knowledge of the central planks of his thought. I especially found her accounts of systematic unity in the Appendix to the Transcendental Dialectic in the first *Critique* and of natural purposiveness in the Critique of Teleological Judgment in the third *Critique* outstandingly clear and illuminating.

Nevertheless, Sedgwick believes that Hegel 'offers us a compelling critique of and alternative to' Kant (1). She relies mostly, but not exclusively, on the early Hegel of *Glauben und Wissen* and the *Differenzschrift*. I agree with her position that Hegel does not significantly alter his view on Kant over the course of his later mature work (13). One does wonder, though, after reading Sedgwick's defence of Hegel against Kant, to what extent Hegel can still be seen to build on Kantian critique rather than return to a pre-Critical form of speculative metaphysics, which tells us the truth of things in themselves (cf. 152). My impression is that Sedgwick's Hegel is not enough of a Kantian transcendental philosopher (unlike Robert Pippin's, say) to pose a real threat to orthodox Kantianism. This has mainly got to do with how Sedgwick construes Hegel's critique of Kant's so-called 'metaphysic of

subjectivity' (73), in other words, with how she weighs his critique of Kant's allegedly merely *subjective* idealism, whereby Hegel's own continued stress on the centrality of subjectivity seems to be downplayed. The main problem that Hegel, according to Sedgwick, diagnoses in Kant is his persistent reliance on dualism, which is manifested at various levels of his thought. And often it seems that Hegel's insistence on overcoming dualism – at any rate in the way that Sedgwick reads this – just begs the question against Kant's careful formal differentiations.

In the well-argued and insightful first chapter, Sedgwick considers Kant's theory of discursivity, in particular in relation to the account of the regulative principles in the *Dialectic* of the first *Critique* and his discussion, in §§ 76 and 77 of the *Critique of Judgement*, of the intuitive intellect and natural organisms, which piqued the interest of the German idealists. The pivotal point here, in regard to the discursivity thesis, is that we 'do not generate the objects or content' of our cognition, so that there are 'no grounds for assuming that a perfect harmony or fit obtains between our concepts and that given content' (8), in contrast to how a putative intuitive intellect cognises. This appears to be one of the main problems of Kant's thought against which Hegel protests: he criticises Kant for assuming the 'absolute heterogeneity' of form and content (8, 10, *et passim*). In Chapter 2, Sedgwick considers in more detail Hegel's enthusiasm for Kant's notion of the intuitive intellect, for which, in Hegel's view, there is a 'true' or 'organic unity' or 'identity' of form and content, a 'unity in which the relation between the whole and its parts' is one of purposive 'reciprocal determination' (9–10), and 'in which the dualism or "heterogeneity" of concepts and sensible intuitions is overcome' (15–16).

In Chapter 3, it is argued that 'what prevents Kant from appreciating the identity of concepts and intuitions' and what commits him to the "externality" of conceptual form' is his 'subjective idealism', which leads to scepticism about knowledge of reality (10–11; cf. 80). In Chapter 4, Hegel's appreciation of the putative speculative content of Kant's Transcendental Deduction, more specifically the notion of the productive imagination, is expounded. Hegel takes Kant's notion of productive imagination to indicate a potential speculative way out of the dualism between form and content, between concept and intuition, since the imagination is neither the faculty of concepts (the understanding) nor a faculty of intuition. But unfortunately, in Hegel's eyes, Kant does not follow through on this speculative promise, since he appears to reduce the imagination to being a function of the understanding after all. It thereby loses what potential it had to bridge the gap between concept and content.

In Chapter 5, Sedgwick considers Kant's claim to the universality and a priori nature of Kantian critique, independently of contingent factors such as history, and the question why Hegel thinks that cognition should not be treated as a means. In this chapter, Sedgwick addresses Hegel's more positive claims,

in particular of the *Phenomenology*, and the difference between the Kantian and Hegelian methodologies. Lastly, in Chapter 6, she tackles Hegel's critique of the Antinomies as 'a particular instance of a fundamental and persistent Hegelian complaint against Kant – the complaint, namely, that his arguments presuppose content and are therefore insufficiently critical' (11–12).

In Chapter 1, Sedgwick introduces one of the key points of her reading of Hegel, namely that Hegel is interested in Kant's notion of the intuitive intellect, not because Hegel thinks, in contrast to Kant, that we have such a capacity with which to generate the content of our cognition and wholly spontaneously produce objects (Sedgwick quite adamantly rejects such a reading of Hegel's interest in the intuitive intellect; see 43f), but because it shows the way to conceiving of a form of *human* cognition for which there is no *absolute* distinction between the particular and the universal (56), between what is possible and what is actual (20f), and for which the relation between concepts and sensible content is not contingent (16, 23). For Kant, there is contingency in the relation between concepts and sensible content as well as in 'the ways in which that content is given to it', for, as Sedgwick quite rightly points out, a 'discursive understanding such as ours [...] cannot rest assured that the given manifold is *susceptible* to its conceptual arrangements' (24). Hegel appears to want to get rid of this contingency (159). Paradoxically, Sedgwick makes it clear that, on the other hand, Hegel criticises Kant precisely for claiming *universality* and *a priori necessity* for the forms of knowledge in abstraction from contingent and external factors such as historical reality, that is, that they have 'a pre-given and fixed nature' (150; cf. 11, 138, 159) and are 'split off from the empirical sciences' (140). These two criticisms stand in tension.

Moreover, the idea that the possible and the actual are not distinct (as is the case for intuitive intellects) does not sit well with the idea that the cognition that Hegel has in mind is, according to Sedgwick, still *human* cognition (159), which relies on an irreducible sensible content, i.e. a sense content that the understanding does not make, and which is given *independently* of the understanding (44, 85, 158). If the possible and the actual are conflated, then every object of cognition is necessarily actual, as indeed it would be for an intuitive intellect. Contingency, then, no longer has a role to play, just as there is 'no contingency or lack of fit' between parts and synthetic whole for the intuitive intellect (55); there is only absolute necessity, or necessity tout court. However, unlike an intuitive intellect, which does not rely on given sense content, for human cognition the irreducible givenness of sensible content independently of concepts is linked with the contingent relation between them (as Sedgwick herself emphasises, 85). That means that the necessity in their relation is merely *conditional*, namely, only insofar as concepts must be of empirical objects must they be connected to sensible content.

One might want to claim, as Hegel seems to, absolute necessity or necessity tout court for the relation between concepts and sensible content, so that sensible content *necessarily* entails conceptuality and conceptuality *necessarily* depends on sense content (cf. 68), but then one needs to give up the thesis that cognition relies on *independently given* sensible content. Sensible content and conceptuality would then, on such a reading, be merely *relatively* distinct (as Hegel indeed appears to claim in *Glauben und Wissen*, in Hegel, *Gesammelte Werke*, Band 4, ed. H. Buchner and O. Pöggeler, Hamburg, 1968, 327), much in the same way as it was for the rationalists – the difference between understanding and sensibility would be merely one of degree.

But Sedgwick does not want to read Hegel in such a rationalistically reductive way: she stresses that Hegel does not collapse the distinction between sensibility and understanding. However, she does not shed light on these conflicting theses of absolute identity and the independent givenness of content for human cognition, the latter of which also holds for Hegel, as Sedgwick claims: namely the conflict that lies in the claim that concepts rely on given sense content that is not produced by the intellect, to which the sense content is nonetheless *necessarily* related. This is a particularly acute issue, since Hegel does appear to criticise Kant for claiming that the opposites sense content and conceptual form ‘exist for themselves’ in abstraction from one another (58); if Hegel means to say, as a critique of Kant, that sense content and conceptual form *do not exist* in abstraction from another, that seems to come close to some form of reductive idealism and a collapse of content and form.

This is at least what Hegel seems to be implying, when, in Sedgwick’s words, he claims that our intuitions ‘are given not as bare “being” in need of subsumption under concepts’ but rather ‘as “identity of concept and being”’ (60). If, then, intuitions are *already given* as identity of concept and being and intuitions thus come as already unified, then it would appear that there is no need for an *additional* conceptual form that *determines* that content, precisely as it would be the case for an intuitive intellect that need not rely on discursive means to process given material manifolds of representations. But if this is the case, then it would undermine the Hegelian idea, which Sedgwick emphasises, that concept and content are *reciprocally* determining (68). We would then just intuit the given whole, in fact just as an intuitive intellect would. Sedgwick, again and again, insists that Hegel sees the idea of the intuitive intellect merely as a *model* for a reformed notion of human cognition (cf. 85), against Kant’s discursive conception of cognition, but it does not become clear in Sedgwick’s account what Hegel’s in-between model precisely amounts to. And this is largely due to the fact that Hegel himself (or at least the early Hegel) is unable to clarify his position on the precise relation between content and form, between absolute necessity and con-

tingency, between possibility and actuality etc. Just stipulating that opposites cannot be considered in abstraction from each other won't do.

A central Hegelian complaint is that Kant's absolutisation of subjectivity – seeing subjective form as external to content – does not reach nature as such, that is, objective or common reality, the 'absolute', or the 'really real' (Hegel, *op.cit.*, 325), committing Kant to scepticism (97). Hegel might be taken here to mean things in themselves (in Kant's sense) and not objects of experience, but this is not always clear, neither with Hegel nor with Sedgwick's account of Hegel. Sometimes, Hegel (and Sedgwick) seem to think that Kant just means that the categories apply to how we *experience* objects or nature, and not to nature or the objects in nature qua their existence as nature or objects. Clearly, without the categories, there would not *be* nature or objects, in Kant's view (cf. KrV, A 126 f). But Sedgwick appears to deny that the categories are sufficient for the objectivity of the content of our cognition. She writes: '[F]rom the necessity of the categories in unifying the given manifold into a thinkable content, it does not follow that the categories [...] conform to the independently given sense content (the matter of experience) itself. It is one thing to claim [...] that we need a priori concepts in order to think or judge some sense content; it is quite another to claim [...] that our concepts can be demonstrated to reflect the nature of that independently given sense content. To claim the latter, according to Kant, would be to overreach the limits of what we can know' (87n.16; cf. 89, 92, 94, 95n.28).

But to say that the categorial form of cognition cannot 'reveal the reality of that content itself' (87 f), because allegedly form is merely subjective, surely reflects a misunderstanding of the goal of Kant's deduction of the categories, which is precisely to demonstrate how the categories apply to the sense content given in intuitions, and so apply not just to our *experience* of, or *judgement* about, objects, but also to the objects of our experience or judging, to sense content itself. The categories are the necessary *and* (formally) sufficient conditions for both experience and objects. So the criticism of the mere subjectivity of Kant's categories, as external to objective reality, is ambiguous about whether the objective reality of empirical objects, that is, the whole of nature, is meant, or the noumenal realm, which on Kant's reading is indeed not knowable; but it is hardly plausible that Hegel thinks that we do know that *noumenal* realm – and Sedgwick herself dismisses the traditional metaphysical reading of Hegel. If it is the whole of empirical nature that Hegel believes the Kantian categories are external to, then it is clear he misconstrues Kant. In that case, the Hegelian critique of Kantian idealism as a merely subjective idealism, as Sedgwick emphasises (Ch. 3), which denies us knowledge of reality itself, is misguided.

This somewhat skewed approach to Kant is also manifested in Chapter 4, which deals with Hegel's reading of the Transcendental Deduction. What appears

to be essential here is that Hegel contradistinguishes the ‘true synthetic unity’ from ‘the “I” that gets connected to the manifold’ (101). Hegel alleges that Kant himself contrasts the abstract, empty ‘I’, which accompanies my representations, with the true ‘I’, which is an a priori synthetic unity, to be associated with the productive imagination. This is an important element of Hegel’s critique of Kant, since by virtue of it Hegel helps himself to the idea that Kant himself provides the speculative means to overcome the absolute heterogeneity between empty form and material content: the true original synthetic identity would be neither the spontaneous understanding nor the receptive faculty of intuition, but would rather lie at the root of both. Sedgwick claims that Kant indeed makes this distinction between two kinds of ‘I’, and that Hegel’s is thus a justified reading of Kant (101). Sedgwick appears to base this on Kant’s argument, in § 16 of the B-Deduction, that the analytic unity of consciousness presupposes the synthetic unity of consciousness (KrV, B 133). But her (and Hegel’s) reading of the relation between these two unities as if it were indicative of the distinction between a true and an abstract ‘I’ is oversimplified.

There are of course no two kinds of ‘I’ that can be distinguished in the way that Hegel has in mind, namely such that the abstract, or empty ‘I’ of the ‘I think’ that accompanies my representations is derivative of a putative true ‘I’ of original synthetic identity, which would somehow be more primordial than the formal ‘I’. What would the relation between the two be: an even more original synthetic unity? This only leads to regress problems. A proper reading of Kant’s argument will show that the original synthetic identity of transcendental apperception is the act of the ‘I think’ itself that accompanies my representations (cf. KrV, A 108). There are no ‘two forms of self-consciousness’ (109, 121) – the ‘I think’ is certainly not *empirical* apperception – and nor is transcendental apperception *prior* to the faculty of spontaneity and the faculty of receptivity, as Sedgwick asserts (106, 109), for transcendental apperception is itself ‘an act of spontaneity’ (KrV, B 132). This seems to remove the primary textual basis for Hegel’s speculative reading of Kant’s Deduction, but perhaps there are ways of interpreting Hegel’s proposals in *Glauben und Wissen* differently, that is, in a way which is much closer to Kant’s intentions.

At any rate, *Hegel’s Critique of Kant* is a well-written attempt to make a plausible case for Hegel’s reasons for diverging from Kant, and it is mandatory reading for anybody interested in the complex, multifaceted relation between Hegel and Kant.