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Between Kant and Hegel: A Study of Antinomies

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**Summary**

In this thesis, I compare Kant’s position regarding the antinomies of pure reason to Hegel’s. I demonstrate that antinomies are central to both thinkers. Kant distinguishes between transcendental use of the categories – which he rejects in the analytic – and use of pure concepts in arguments discussed in the chapters on antinomies in the *Critique of Pure Reason*. I show that these arguments are based on an implicit assumption of pure reason, namely: “if the conditioned is given then the unconditioned is also given.” Kant claims that this assumption is valid in relation to an epistemological position he calls “Transcendental Realism,” and he claims that the assumption of reason leads to it. At the same time, this assumption leads to contradictions (the various arguments in the antinomies), thereby revealing its illusory nature. This assumption is a natural, unavoidable illusion that does not cease to exist even after it turns out to be valid.

Kant adds further assertions reinforcing his claim that illusion is a specific problem arising from the assumption of reason. First, the number of antinomies is exactly four. Second, he presents the illusion as resulting from application of the subjective principles of reason to the objective rules of understanding. Finally, according to Kant, the solution to the antinomies is found in “Transcendental Idealism” – his epistemological position. According to this position, the supposition that “if the conditioned is given the unconditioned is also given” is not valid.

Hegel criticizes Kant’s position on the issue of antinomies. He argues that Kant’s treatment of the antinomies is question-begging. According to Hegel, Kant does indeed present assumptions and conclusions, but these are pseudo-proofs, because what is supposed to be proven is always already contained in the presuppositions.

On Hegel’s account, this analysis leads to the understanding that antinomies do not result from illicit manipulation of principles of reason on the concepts of the understanding. Rather, antinomies are intrinsic to the categories themselves – even before they are applied to phenomena.

Hegel raises a series of criticisms against Kant. As stated, he claims that Kant’s arguments suffer from the fallacy of “begging the question.” Second, the number of antinomies is not limited to four but rather each category involves an antinomy. Moreover, antinomies are already raised in the realm of reason even before the principles of reason are applied to the world of phenomena – the world of space and time. Finally, according to Hegel, Kant’s proposed solution does not, in fact, resolve the antinomy. Rather, it transfers the antimony from the objective to the subjective level – that is to say, the antinomy remains in the realm of reason.

In this thesis I argue that Hegel did not grasp the essential role of the assumption of pure reason, according to which, “if the condition is given the unconditioned is also given,” within the arguments of antinomies. In so doing, I reject Hegel’s criticism of Kant’s arguments as suffering from the fallacy of “begging the question.”

I summarize the controversy between Kant and Hegel regarding the origin of antinomies as follows: Kant’s antinomy is the result of an illicit manipulation of the assumption of reason. Antinomies arise when one thinks about the relationship between things in the wrong way. Conversely, according to Hegel, the antinomies belong to the intrinsic essence of things themselves.