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Between Kant and Hegel: A Study of the Antinomies

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**Summary**

In this thesis, I compare the positions of Kant and Hegel regarding the antinomies of pure reason. I demonstrate that the antinomies are central to both thinkers. Kant distinguishes between the transcendental use of the categories – which he rejects in the analytic – and the use of pure concepts in the arguments discussed in the chapters on the antinomies in the *Critique of Pure Reason*. I show that these arguments are based on an implicit assumption of pure reason that “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 called “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 and unavoidable illusion which does not cease even after it turns out to be an invalid assumption.

Kant adds further assertions that reinforce his claim that illusion is a specific problem that arises from the assumption of reason. First, the number of antinomies is exactly four. Second, he presents the illusion as resulting from applying 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. He claims that Kant does indeed present assumptions and conclusions but that these are pseudo-proofs, because what is supposed to be proven is always already contained in the presuppositions.

According to Hegel, this analysis leads to the understanding that antinomy is not a result of the illicit manipulation of principles of reason on the concepts of the understanding. Rather, the antinomies are intrinsic to the categories themselves even before their application to the phenomena.

Hegel raises a series of criticisms against Kant. As stated, he claims that the 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, the solution that Kant proposes does not solve the antinomy, but rather shifts it 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, “if the condition is given the unconditioned is also given,” within the arguments of antinomies. In so doing, I reject Hegel’s criticism that Kant’s arguments suffer from the fallacy of “begging the question.”

I summarize the controversy between Kant and Hegel regarding the origin of the antinomies in the following manner: 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.