

II. Propositional Activity and Propositional Acts

The view presented thus far suggests that one has to think of the radically subjective self-conscious I not as an isolated and self-contained phenomenon but as an essential element within the special context of conscious propositional states: one has to take the self-conscious I to be the result of an activity of a conscious subject that is constitutive of a constellation in which both the self-conscious I and a propositional content is established. One could now go on to pursue the question as to what this means in detail for the role and the function the self-conscious I has in propositional contexts. This would lead to a more extended discussion of topics some of which already addressed incidentally in the previous part, i.e. one would have to deal more extensively with issues like identity, distance, the relation of the self-conscious I to the conscious subject, ontological implications etc. However, I do not want to take up this route because these issues cannot be treated independently of other aspects of conscious propositional states which were alluded to in the foregoing considerations. Instead I want to focus at first primarily on one of the other components that are crucial for the occurrence of conscious propositional states.

According to the picture outlined above the very possibility of a conscious propositional state depends on the intricate and complex interplay between three factors: (1) an activity that is constitutive of (2) the self-conscious I and (3) the propositional content. Whereas the factors (2) and (3) may be taken to have a firm footing (though obviously no clear and distinct meaning) in our thinking about propositional states the first factor, i.e. the constituting activity, sounds a bit mysterious. Because of the claim that without this activity there would be neither a self-conscious I nor a propositional content one definitely has to become somewhat more specific concerning its features and characteristics. From now on I will name this activity 'propositional activity' and the manifestations or realizations of this activity by a subject I will call 'propositional acts'.¹ Hence the question I want to tackle now is: what can be said about this propositional activity?

To start with the obvious: if there is such an activity at all there must be a subject to which it can be attributed. What are the conditions a subject has to satisfy in order to qualify for being a subject of a propositional activity? This subject has to be a conscious being because this activity is to account for conscious propositional states of this subject. But consciousness is not enough for this activity to occur because consciousness in itself as conceived of here lacks propositional structure: consciousness is just the basic and unarticulated mode of awareness a subject has of its (inner and outer) environment.² The conscious subject of this propositional activity must also have the ability to deal with the content it is aware of in such a way that it can transform it into propositionally structured content and at the same time to form its own self-conscious I.³ After all, propositional

1) These terms have a tradition: Edwards *Encyclopedia* 'Proposition'.

2) The conception of consciousness relied on here is very well expressed by J. Searle in his article in *The Blackwell Companion to Consciousness*, ed. by Susan Schneider e.a. though I believe that even in dreamless sleep one is conscious in a rudimentary way.

3) A small note for the purpose of clarification: One could get the impression that this means that Kant has to distinguish between two subjects which are numerically distinct, i.e. between

structure and, synchronous with it, self-consciousness are supposed to be the characteristic achievements of this activity, and thus the subject has to be able to accommodate them. Though these requirements sound rather trivial because they just rephrase the subject in terms of the objectives of the propositional activity they emphasize the important point that subjects of a propositional activity have to be self-conscious entities. This is so because of the following: a subject endowed with propositional activity has to be an entity that is capable of conscious propositional states. These states in turn presuppose, according to the conception supported here, a subject that can relate to propositionally structured content. This relating again is dependent on the subject's being self-conscious (in the radically subjective sense explained above) because in the end self-consciousness is nothing but a relating condition. This amounts to a defense of the view deeply rooted in our everyday conceptions of our world that non-human animals or computers do not meet the requirements for subjects of a propositional activity: this is so not primarily because of lack of self-consciousness but because of the inability to be conscious of propositionally structured content and thus to have propositional states.

This result could be seen to have some beneficial effects two of which should be mentioned: the first is that it could give rise to the hope that all discussions as to whether non-human animals and machines can have self-consciousness turn out to be pointless as long as they focus on other criteria than susceptibility to propositional content. The second is that it could give some plausibility to the claim that though there might be many creatures that have consciousness not all of them have to have self-consciousness: it is self-consciousness (and not consciousness alone) which makes a creature an 'animal propositionale', and not every conscious creature has to be such an animal. It also might be worth mentioning that the approach outlined here is completely compatible with a naturalist or a realist view with respect to mental (in this case: propositional) states because it relies on consciousness as a necessary condition of everything mental and does not exclude the conviction that in the end consciousness is a natural phenomenon.

But to know how a subject of a propositional activity has to look like does not help much to find out how one has to conceive of that activity itself. To be sure, it has to be taken to be a mental activity of a conscious subject. But how does it operate? Is it a creative activity like imagining or rather an assimilating one like translating? In order to find answers to such questions one is well advised to take a look at the history of philosophy (a step which is taken quite automatically, at least if one is educated in the German tradition) because it is here where suggestions have been discussed abundantly. Within the period I am most familiar with there are at least two which come to mind almost immediately and which can be vaguely connected the one with Kant (and in a certain way with Fichte) the other with Hegel. Though I am neither willing nor in the position to give an exhaustive account of their respective suggestions I will use their ideas relevant in the context here as a guideline to explore the characteristics and peculiarities of a propositional activity more closely under the perspective of what exactly is the task the propositional activity is supposed to perform.

As far as Kant is concerned he seems to have thought of the propositional activity as consisting in judging. According to him it is by judging that what he calls 'the understanding'

the conscious subject on the one hand and the self-conscious I on the other. This impression is misleading. There is just one single subject. Rather one has to think of the self-conscious I as the result of the (self-) transformation of the conscious subject as soon as it is propositionally active.

actively brings in whatever manifold of data the subject is consciously confronted with a propositional structure by ordering concepts in specific, ‘objective’ ways. Backing away somewhat from Kant’s terminology it looks as if he endorses an argument along the following line: in order for us to think of the world as a world of experience, and that means as a world of which empirical knowledge is possible, one has to conceive of the subject of experience as a conscious subject that is in the position to form judgments about objects. Now, to form a judgment or to judge means to employ the ability to actively give some conceptual structure to a representational content, i.e. a content the subject is aware (conscious) of, which makes it possible to think of this content as an object. This is done by uniting given representations in such a way that they conform to the rules which are constitutive of the very concept of an object. These rules are established by looking at the different ways in which judgments provide unity to conceptual content. Because for Kant there are exactly nine (twelve) of these ways the number of the object-constituting rules is also strictly limited to nine (twelve). It is this rule-governed operation of judging which according to Kant not just gives rise to the judgment but also and more importantly to the concept of something that can count as an object (cf. B 138). Therefore the act of judging is both responsible for the resulting judgment and for the fact that we take it (the judgment) to be about an object. (Because of this object-constituting function of judgmental acts Kant thinks it necessary to supplement what he calls general logic which only deals with conceptual structure with his transcendental logic which first of all provides us with the concept of an object.)

However, this object-constituting function of the propositional activity of judging can, according to Kant, only be accounted for if one accepts the idea of a radically subjective self-conscious I as necessarily involved in judging. To focus merely on the object-constituting function is to concentrate on only one aspect which is of importance with respect to the activity of judging. Another aspect has to do with the conditions under which this activity can be taken to result in a judgment about an object. It is here where the concept of a radically subjective self-conscious I starts to play a role. This is so because judging means to connect actively or to synthesize representations into the unity of an object. Such an ‘objective’ unity not only has to obey the categorical rules which constitute the representation of an object it also has to be such that it permits the identity in time of an object. Thus the very act of object-constitution by means of judging depends on having available an instance which can provide the idea of unity meaning both spatial unity (togetherness of representations) and unity in time (identity). Because this instance cannot be the object itself – after all, it is constituted by the activity of judging – it has to be the judging subject that endows the object with these characteristics. In other words: Synthesizing a given representational manifold into the spatio-temporal unity of an object presupposes an instance which can function as the center of unification or can be seen as the provider of unity. This center has to be conscious of itself as the subject of unification since unification is a subject-dependant phenomenon: the concept of unity would be empty if there were no subject for whom a manifold is united, and if this subject were not self-conscious there would be no unity for it. If judging consists in bringing actively together divergent representational content into a propositional unity of which the subject is conscious then this subject must also give rise to a self-conscious I for otherwise a conscious unifying center were missing. This is the reason for Kant to claim that the propositional activity of judging not only is constitutive of the concept of an object but also has the function to bring the content to what he calls “the objective unity of apperception” by providing it with a self-conscious I as the radically subjective subject (a subject that can never become an object) of the propositional content (B 135, 141).

Thus in following a Kantian approach and determining the propositional activity as judging one is led to a conception according to which the individual act of judging has a double result: on the one hand it produces the judgment, i.e. a propositionally structured item which is about something, and on the other it gives in the very same instant rise to the self-conscious I as an accompanying representation (*Begleitvorstellung*) which provides unity. Both these results depend on one another: there is no judgment without the self-conscious I and the other way round.

This Kantian version of how to make sense of the idea of a propositional activity is quite compelling because it permits to explain the occurrence of propositional states in a quasi-geneological manner. This explanation is based on merely two presuppositions: (1) that there indeed is an initial awareness situation in which a subject is conscious of a propositionally unstructured content (Kant's given manifold of sensibility) and (2) that the subject has the ability to transform unstructured content by judging into propositionally structured content or, in other words, that the subject is in the possession of the propositional activity of judging. The story then to be told can be quite short and straightforward if one restricts propositional activity to judging: Whenever a subject is embedded in an environment it is aware (conscious) of it can transform parts of this environment into propositional structures of which it is possible to maintain that they are the case or not the case. This is done by the act of judging. As soon as a subject judges it establishes both a propositionally structured content that functions as the content of the judgment and a self-conscious I that plays the role of the unifying center (Kant's logical subject) of that judgment. Thus the occurrence of a conscious propositional state which is about something or which has objective significance can only be accounted for by paying attention to the twofold performance of the propositional activity at work in judgmental acts.⁴

This rather sketchy version of Kant's story of what is necessary if one wants to account for propositional states can be expanded in different directions though only one of these directions is pursued by Kant himself. This has to do with his being mainly interested not in the occurrence of propositional states as such but (at least in his first *Critique*) in criticizing traditional metaphysics from an epistemological point of view. For him his theory of judgment is the means to show that knowledge of the alleged objects of traditional metaphysics is not possible because, according to this theory, these objects do not meet the conditions necessary for a judgment, an assessment which amounts to the claim that they are no (cognizable) objects at all. However, it is not this critical claim which is the most remarkable outcome of his conception of judging. What is much more important is the picture that emerges as to how to conceive of the possibility of an epistemically accessible world, i.e. a world of which we can think as an object of knowledge. This picture makes it understandable why and in which sense Kant thought of himself as an idealist both with respect to the world as an object of knowledge and (what is quite often disregarded) with respect to the self-conscious I. According to this picture it is the employment of the propositional activity in the act of judging which transforms whatever can be taken to be 'given' to a conscious subject into a structured unity of which it is possible to have empirical

4) This conviction is the reason for Kant's claims in the well known footnote in the preface to the *Metaphysical Foundations of Natural Science* that "from the precisely determined definition of a judgment in general (an action through which given representations first become cognitions of an object" (AA 4, 475 f.) almost alone one can infer how experience is possible. Cf. also *Prolegomena*, § 39: judging is "the act of the understanding that contains all the rest...". AA IV, 323.

knowledge, i.e. experience. Because this structure is supposed to be rooted in and governed by valid forms of judgment and because these forms are the result of operations of the 'mind' the world as an object of knowledge turns out to be mind-dependent consisting of 'ideal' constructions which constitute what is objectively real for us. And because the act of judging cannot take place without bringing into being a self-conscious I as its focal point which provides the unity necessary for the representation of an object this I also has the status of an 'ideal' entity, a thoroughly mental product intimately connected with this propositional activity.

However, Kant's ingenious and daring attempt to explain the propositional activity in terms of judging has its price. This has not that much to do with his initial idea to make judging the source both of the objective world and the self-conscious I but with the way Kant executes this conception within his broader epistemological framework. Two of the most challenging obstacles should be mentioned. (1) The first is connected with Kant's implementation of his conception of judging in terms of judgmental forms. Following Kant not every combination of concepts (even if grammatically correct) yields a judgment. In order to meet the criteria for being a judgment an arrangement of concepts must fulfill certain formal requirements. These formal requirements are codified in the list of what Kant regards as the legitimate forms of judgment. Because these forms are based on unifying acts (Funktionen, functions) of the propositional activity (of the understanding) which result in judgments and because these acts are considered to establish the concept of an object what counts as an object is at least indirectly determined by these forms. From early on quite a number of complaints have been raised against Kant's list of these forms. They range from the charge of arbitrariness (starting with Reinhold) to the suspicion of incompleteness (going back to Hegel). And though it is still under discussion whether these complaints are indeed justified (Reich, Wolf, Longuenesse, Guyer, Allison etc.) they are serious enough to cast doubt on the viability of Kant's conception of judging. However, the most disturbing effect of his list of judgmental forms lies in the following: this list seems to commit Kant to the claim that the realm of objects which can count as objectively real and thus as genuine elements of our epistemic environment is restricted to the domain of physical objects. This commitment becomes most obvious as soon as one looks at Kant's treatment of causality. According to his view causality is an object-constituting rule based on the unifying function of the understanding in hypothetical judgments. This rule makes it obligatory that everything which qualifies for the status of an objective epistemic item has to have a causal history. In order to meet this requirement something has to fit into the general causal chain specified by the causal laws of nature which in turn are restricted to physical objects. This restriction, so the objection goes, seems to be not only intuitively questionable, but even from a Kantian point of view it is not without problems as documented e.g. by Kant's moral philosophy. This is so because the restriction to physical objects seems to reduce the world of which experience (empirical knowledge) is possible in a much too radical way and to diminish in a most questionable manner the domain of what can count as real in a full-blooded sense. After all, this restriction excludes from our epistemically accessible world quite a lot of objects we are inclined to believe we are in an objective mode familiar with and of which we trust to have some sort of empirical knowledge. Examples could be social (family), economic (money) or cultural (movies) objects, not to mention aesthetic (works of art) or political (the state) objects. According to Kant, it seems, it is just their physical manifestations we are entitled to think of as 'real' objects, whereas with respect to their non-physical characteristics they have

the status of subjective fictions.⁵ (2) Another considerable problem could be seen in Kant's rather frugal model of the radically subjective self-conscious I, a model apparently designed with the sole purpose to match the equally frugal characterization of an object as a unified collection of spatio-temporal elements. Kant seems to have been content with thinking that what he calls the necessary correlate of a judgment, i.e. a self-conscious I, is sufficiently determined by his very elementary formal concept of an object as a spatio-temporal unity established in the act of judging. Because judging is irresolvably connected with the occurrence of a self-conscious I as a focal point and because both the ideas of spatial (togetherness) and temporal (identity) unity presuppose a self-conscious I as their provider it seems to be sufficient to characterize the self-conscious I by means of its unity providing function and by nothing else. However, if it turns out that Kant's formal concept of an object as a physical unity is not sufficient to cover all sorts of objects established in acts of judging then his characterization of the self-conscious I as restricted to the role of unity provider could be considered to be too poor to do justice to its object constituting role in performing propositional acts (of judging).⁶

Problems like these have already been raised by some of Kant's contemporaries. They can indeed provide a motive not to follow Kant's 'judgmental' interpretation of the propositional activity as constitutive of a self-conscious I and an epistemically accessible world. However, not to agree with Kant's interpretation does not mean automatically to be prepared to present a viable alternative. Rather, a superficial survey over the last 200 years of philosophy can lead to the impression that there were no alternatives seriously explored at all or at least no very radical ones.⁷ The only distinguished exception in my eyes is Hegel's one-time experiment to explain the constitutive achievements of the propositional activity thought to be fundamental to the possibility of an epistemic environment not (like Kant) by judging but by what could be named rather awkwardly 'conceptualizing (begrifflich bestimmen) under the guidance of experience'. In order to avoid this awkward phrase I will stick in what follows to the term 'conceptualizing' when discussing Hegel's account of the workings of the propositional activity. His interpretation is to be called a one-time experiment because his theory of conceptualizing is documented just once in his writings, i.e. in his *Phenomenology of Spirit*, and even there it is not that easily to identify because it is mixed up with

5) Kant is well aware of these limitations with respect to the domain of epistemically accessible objects. His way of dealing with natural ends, i.e. organisms, and aesthetic phenomena in the third *Critique* indicates how he wants to overcome the problems connected with these limitations. Cf. R. P. Horstmann: *Kant and the Problem of Purposiveness, or how to deal with Organisms (and Empirical Laws and Beauty) in an Idealistic Framework*. (Unpublished Ms.).

6) Actually, Hegel is of the opinion that ultimately such a restricted conception of the self-conscious I cannot make sense even of physical objects. Cf. Dina Emundts: *Hegel's Criticism of Kant's Concept of Physical Laws*. Forthcoming.

7) This does not mean that there are no interesting suggestions examined in the last 200 years. In contemporary philosophy the most ambitious and thoughtful example of an attempt to tackle the question of the constitution of an epistemically accessible world I know of is the attempt of Barry Stroud to introduce what he calls 'propositional perception' as the basic epistemic activity. (For a recent programmatic statement of his view s. his exchange with Cassam in *EJP* 17, 2009, 559 ff., esp. 595 f.). But he too seems to be committed to a broadly Kantian framework in that his propositional perception is intimately linked to Kant's conception of judgment.

considerations which are due to other concerns Hegel is occupied with in the *Phenomenology*. It might even be doubted that conceptualizing is understood by Hegel primarily as an epistemological notion. Though I think that this is the case, it is of no importance here. For the present purpose it is enough if it is conceded that Hegel's concept of conceptualizing can have an epistemological function. As far as I know there are no serious doubts about that.⁸

Presumably Hegel's approach to questions concerning self-consciousness and objectivity and his presentation of conceptualizing as an alternative interpretation of the achievements and the function of the propositional activity is encouraged and motivated by the awareness of what he thought to be shortcomings of Kant's position. However, he is by no means a radical critic of Kant's basic epistemological assumptions. On the contrary, he shares quite a number of them. He agrees with Kant that we have to think of the epistemically accessible world as a product of an activity that transforms non-propositional into propositional content. He also agrees with Kant that this activity is constitutive both of the epistemic object, i.e. the object the proposition is about, and of the self-conscious I that functions as the epistemic subject of a propositional state. And, most importantly, he even agrees with Kant that there is a relation of mutual dependence between the epistemic object and the self-conscious I: no object without an I and vice versa. He disagrees with Kant on what could be called the plasticity or creativity of the propositional activity with respect both to the constitution of epistemic objects and of the self-conscious I. As far as epistemic objects are concerned Hegel complains that in Kant's theory of knowledge the rules governing the propositional activity responsible for our having epistemic objects at all are restricted in a very unconvincing way in that they allow only physical entities which are causally connected to be objective parts of an epistemically accessible world. And as far as the I is concerned Hegel challenges the austere conception Kant presents because he is convinced that the I is much richer than Kant wants it to be. Reasons for such a disagreement with Kant with regard to objects and the I are not that difficult to find. Even from an everyday point of view one might feel uncomfortable with a position which claims (1) that from an epistemic perspective the world in which we live is 'objectively' nothing but a bunch of physical objects (and events) and (2) that the self-conscious I is nothing but an empty provider of unity. This feeling might get even stronger if one has to acknowledge that the main reason for these claims is that only these objects and such an I can be accounted for by the mechanisms of our propositional activity.

Hegel's disagreement with Kant on these topics seems to be based on the conviction that one has to think of the epistemically accessible world and the features of the self-conscious I in a much more sophisticated way. Puzzled by Kant's restriction of objectivity to the world of (Kantian, i.e. causally-mechanically explainable) physical objects and events he wishes to proceed on the assumption that the world looked at as the totality of epistemic objects, i.e. of objects of which we can have knowledge, contains a lot more 'objectively real' items than those Kant tolerates. He wants e.g. organisms and persons (self-conscious beings) as well as social institutions (corporation, society, state) and cultural phenomena (works of art, religion) to be objective elements of the world not just in virtue of their being physical objects but because of their intrinsic constitution. And he wants a conception of the self-conscious I that can deal with those objects in such a way that their claim to objectivity is

8) An in-depth analysis of Hegel's phenomenological theory of experience under an epistemological perspective is provided by a comprehensive study by Dina Emundts: *Erfahren und Erkennen. Eine Studie zu Hegels Phänomenologie des Geistes*. Forthcoming. The following remarks owe much to her investigation.

justified. In short, what Hegel is after is what could be called, in G. E. Moore's spirit, a defense of common-sense.

But – and here things start to become a bit complicated – this defense is meant to be carried out within a broadly Kantian approach to objectivity and self-consciousness. What is required for such a task? Perhaps the easiest way to answer this question is to start with an outlook on what I take to be Hegel's basic view with regard to our epistemic situation if it is to be described in allusion to something like a Kantian framework. Here a rather sketchy version of such a description: In the act of transforming non-propositional into propositional content the conscious subject constitutes both an I and an epistemic object the proposition is about. The sum total of what a subject can transform in a rule governed fashion into epistemic objects delineates the epistemically accessible world of that subject. The rules which govern this transformation define the fundamental nature of the propositional activity. Because there is no propositional content and thus no epistemic object for a subject without an I and because the only role an I can play in epistemic contexts is to function as the subjective correlate to an epistemic object (or, as Kant would say, to accompany it) one can expect that the possibility of having epistemic access to an object depends on the ability of the I to fulfill its correlating function or, what amounts to the same, that only those objects are epistemically accessible which are such that they meet the correlation conditions (if there are more than one). If this dependence holds then, according to Hegel, what can count as an object in an epistemically accessible world is demarkated by what one can attribute to the I as its defining properties. This is so because these properties determine not just the I but also the features an object must have if it is to be correlated to an I. If it is the defining characteristic of the I to be in charge of providing unity and spatio-temporal distance to a propositional content in order to think of it as an epistemic object, and if unity and spatio-temporal distance can be assigned by the I to a propositional content in an object-constituting way just in case the content meets a set of categorical, that is rule governed requirements, then these categorical rules establish what can satisfy the conditions under which an I can correlate to an epistemic object.

Up to this point everything appears to be pretty much in line with Kant's way of thinking. Differences start to show up when it comes to the question as to what can function as a categorical, i.e. an object-constituting rule. According to Hegel it is not just the logico-linguistic practice of judging which codifies these rules exhaustively but there are (other) social practices too which indicate another realm of object-constituting rules. It is because of these rules that we can integrate next to physical objects and events entities like other persons, political institutions like governments and things like movies into our epistemic environment as 'objectively real' (to use again a Kantian term). This move on Hegel's part seems at first sight nothing but the expression of a by now unfounded conviction that there is more to encounter in the epistemically accessible world which can count as a real object than just the physical. And indeed this move could be dismissed as a case of wishful thinking if there were no compelling reasons in its favor. For Hegel these reasons are to be found in his general metaphysical theory concerning the constitution of reality. Fortunately there is no need to go into the details of his controversial metaphysics here because what is at stake right now are his suggestions as to how the object-constituting rules come about and how they give rise to epistemic objects that can be correlated to (or grasped by) an I. These suggestions are largely independent of his metaphysics.

Now, what can be said about object-constituting rules according to Hegel? First of all, they must be such that they can integrate what is present as non-propositional content in an exhaustive way. This integration cannot be achieved if these rules are confined to Kantian

forms of judgment because (as Kant's own theory proves convincingly!) this restricts objective propositional content to physical objects and events. Why is it that this restriction is misleading and unwarranted? Because in the process of transforming non-propositional into epistemically accessible, i.e. propositional content we have to realize that we run into a lot of features which turn out to be non-propositionally present and which cannot be accounted for by rules based on Kantian forms of judgment.⁹ We experience that there is a difference between what we are non-propositionally conscious of and what we take to be the propositional understanding of this non-propositional content by being confronted with what could be called 'epistemic resistance' or 'epistemic unruliness' of the content that constitutes the epistemic object. This fact, according to Hegel, already is an indication that the activity in charge of transforming non-propositional into epistemically accessible, i.e. propositional content is not just Kantian judging but has a lot to do with the way we experience things and situations. Thus the process of propositional-content-formation is underdetermined if nothing but Kant's categories are available as object-constituting rules. If this is the case then, according to Hegel, one has to accept two consequences: (1) there must be more object-constituting rules around which are characteristic of the propositional activity than those based on Kant's table of judgments, and (2) the propositional activity cannot be identified with judging (in the Kantian sense). The first consequence gives rise to his conviction that in order to find the object-constituting rules which are the defining characteristics of the propositional activity one has to do justice to the experience of fundamental differences between types of objects we encounter in our epistemically accessible world. The second consequence leads Hegel to the suggestion to think of the propositional activity in terms of conceptualizing under the guidance of experience.

Following Hegel it is a fact of experience that we distinguish between (at least) three different kinds of objects in the process of propositional-content-formation. These are (a) physical bodies, (b) living organisms, and (c) self-conscious beings. This differentiation is due to the experience that we cannot account for each of them adequately in terms of the characteristics of the others. Thus a self-conscious being cannot be characterized adequately either as a physical body or a living organism – experience tells us that in each of these characterizations there is something missing. This makes experience a negative criterion for an adequate characterization. If a characterization succeeds in integrating what is essential for a specific object in order to explain its peculiar behavior without violating the way it is experienced then this would count as a positive criterion for an adequate description of an object. Now, if one agrees with Hegel that there are indeed different types of objects which belong into our epistemic universe and if one accepts the general idea of the *modus operandi* of the propositional activity then this activity of transforming non-propositional into propositional content has to be guided by rules which codify the categories necessary for adequate descriptions of different types of objects. These categories have to be fundamental concepts which capture what is essential for each type of object. For Hegel, these categories are the rule of causality, or more accurate: the rule of reciprocity (*Wechselwirkung*) with respect to physical objects, inner purposiveness (*innere Zweckmäßigkeit*) with respect to living organisms, and freedom resp. end in itself (*Zweck an sich selbst*) with respect to self-conscious beings.

9) This move on Hegel's part is based on and justified by his (very un-Kantian) conviction that already the non-propositionally given is somehow structured, maybe not necessarily propositionally or conceptually structured but just qualitatively.

For the purpose at hand it plays no role why Hegel was convinced of the fundamental distinctness of the three types of objects mentioned. It even plays no role whether this tripartite ‘list of objects’ (physical objects, living organisms, self-conscious beings) does fully justice to Hegel’s view as to what can count as a fundamental type of object. (Some might like to include as a fourth type social-cultural entities.) It also is of no importance here to find out why Hegel thought of the categories mentioned (reciprocity, inner purposiveness, freedom) as appropriate tools of categorizing (though it is easy to notice and interesting in its own right that all three of these categories can be related directly to a central concept in each of Kant’s three *Critiques*). In the present context the main objective of these sketchy allusions to his *Phenomenology* has been to bring to our attention Hegel’s attempt to show (a) that and why we need more conceptual resources than available from Kant’s table of judgments in order to transform non-propositional into propositional content with the aim to determine an object in such a way that it can be considered an element of the epistemically accessible world and (b) that these resources are based on conceptual activities of the conscious subject (hence his preference for the term ‘conceptualizing = begrifflich bestimmen’ instead of Kant’s ‘judging’). These conceptual resources, according to Hegel, are necessary in order to arrive at propositional content which can capture sufficiently what we experience.

If one is prepared to give some credit to what is put forward as Hegel’s reasoning so far the next question to ask is: why is it that in (Hegelian) conceptualizing we are committed to use the categories he suggests as object-constituting concepts? How do we arrive at these categories? What is their justification? For Hegel, there are two procedures to justify our object-constituting concepts. The first is the one paradigmatically presented in his *Phenomenology*. Here the justifying function is attributed to what he calls ‘experience’.¹⁰ The second consists in what he likes to characterize as the ‘logical development of concepts’ and is elaborated in his *Science of Logic*. Whereas ultimately the so-called ‘logical’ justification is in Hegel’s eyes the superior one it is at the same time so deeply connected with his general methodological and metaphysical views that it is almost impossible to give a short account of its peculiarities. Thus, I won’t even try here.¹¹ Another reason not to embark on an account of Hegel’s logical justification of categories is that the model of justification based on experience is more directly related to the epistemological task of object-constituting via categorical rules.

According to this model it sometimes happens that when transforming non-propositional into propositional content we experience something like resistance on the part of what is non-propositionally given to conform to the conceptual means used as rules of transformation. We experience that certain concepts we take to be object-constituting are not fitting in order to capture what we take to be the content of what is immediately at hand to us. Thus – to use one of Hegel’s examples – in a situation where living organisms play a role as elements of the non-propositional content that is present in the mode of immediacy the attempt to give such content propositional shape by making use of the object-constituting rule or category of causal reciprocity gives rise to the experience of dissatisfaction or of disappointment because of the obstinacy of the content immediately present to obey the

10) It is worth mentioning that the original title of what then becomes the *Phenomenology of Spirit* has been *Science of the Experience of Consciousness*.

11) For an exposition of some of the leading ideas underlying Hegel’s ‘logical’ treatment of concepts cf. my: *Substance, Subject and Infinity: a Case Study of the Role of Logic in Hegel’s System*. In: Katerina Deligiorgi (Ed.): *Hegel. New Directions*. Chesham (Acumen) 2006. 65 – 84.

demands of that rule which shows that causal reciprocity cannot do (fully) justice to the living element that is somehow contained in the immediately present content. In the case of living organisms this (partial) disobedience to the rule of causal reciprocity is documented by their behavior in that they exhibit attitudes like e.g. self-movement or self-regeneration which we cannot get hold of by relying on causal reciprocity alone. This experience of disappointment in the face of unruly behavior has to be overcome by introducing other categories which can accommodate the specific character of immediate content. Concerning organisms it is – as already mentioned – the concept of inner purposiveness which is supposed to be necessary as an object-constituting category. According to Hegel, this practice of conceptualizing under the guidance of experience is not restricted to natural phenomena. Social and cultural objects enter our epistemic universe in pretty much the same way: Here too it is the experience of some discrepancy between what is non-propositionally or immediately present and the means we have at our disposal to synthesize it adequately into conceptual elements which leads to new object-constituting concepts. These concepts might include inter-subjective relations (like recognition), social practices (like getting married), moral facts (like freedom) and legal conditions (like contract) as well as political circumstances (like government) or cultural affairs (like religious attitudes).¹² All these concepts find their justification as object-constituting categories in what we experience, and what we experience is dependent on what is immediately present to us. Thus the process of conceptualizing under the guidance of experience turns out to be the ultimate basis for determining what can be epistemically real for us.¹³

These remarks have to be sufficient to give an idea of how to conceive of the object-constituting performance of the propositional activity within a Hegelian framework. What remains to be done is to look at the subject-constituting operation of this activity in Hegel's phenomenological setting. Here Hegel's central objective might be described most conveniently again in terms of Kant's model of self-consciousness. As was pointed out before the Kantian conception of the self-conscious I as a necessary element in the process of the constitution of epistemic objects represents self-consciousness as an objective unity of apperception whose sole function consists in providing unity (and thereby the possibility of spatio-temporal determination) to what is immediately given. According to Hegel this view is fundamentally right but has to be modified and expanded in such a way that it can explain the possibility of a relation of the self-conscious I to more items than just physical objects. This modification and expansion is required if one is to hold fast to Kant's basic intuition shared by Hegel that the idea of a self-conscious I is irresolvably connected with the propositional activity in that it is taken to be a necessary correlate to propositional content and thus also to

12) For a more detailed discussion of Hegel's phenomenological views concerning objects and their constitution cf. my: *The Phenomenology of Spirit as a "Transcendentalistic" Argument for a Monistic Ontology*. In: Dean Moyar, Michael Quante (Eds.): *Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit. A Critical Guide*. Cambridge (CUP) 2008. 43 – 62.

13) It might be of interest to note in passing that this Hegelian model of the constitution of epistemic objects which is sketched out by Hegel in terms of a progression from immediacy via resistance to conceptual items was very much appreciated by C. S. Peirce. He not only recognizes the value of Hegel's phenomenological model explicitly he also makes use of and endorses it (up to a certain point) in his own theory of the universal categories of Firstness, Secondness, and Thirdness in that he identifies Firstness with immediacy (presence), Secondness with resistance (struggle), and Thirdness with concept (representation). Cf. *Lectures on Pragmatism*, especially Lectures II to IV.

epistemic objects. That is to say: if the rules of conceptualizing available to the propositional activity include not just Kantian categories but also Hegel's preferred concepts and thus give rise to particular types of objects, and if the I is to be thought of as an integral element of such an activity which can accompany *all* propositional content, then the propositional activity must be conceived as having the resources to supply not only epistemic objects via categories but also to provide an I which is in the position to come to terms with the special characteristics of different types of epistemic objects. This is so because the propositional rules (categories) available for determining an epistemic object determine also with respect to what the self-conscious I can function as the radically subjective center of unification. Thus in a Kantian epistemic world the (Kantian) I can be correlated only to an objective propositional content if this content is fixed in accordance with Kantian propositional rules for otherwise the content would lack objectivity. What is not subject to these rules cannot be conceived as propositional content at all and hence fails to leave room for the self-conscious I as the center for which unification into an object takes place. (This is the reason that for Kant even the I as an epistemic object can only appear to us in the guise of a physical object.) For Hegel all this implies that as soon as there are object-constituting rules in play which bring about other than Kantian (physical) objects one has to make sure that there is an I around which has more resources or which is 'richer' than a Kantian I in order to be able to deal with these differently constituted objects. In other words: if the propositional activity transforms a non-propositional, i.e. immediately given content into an objective item of a specific kind then this activity also has to provide an I which can relate to what is specific about this object or (to use again Kantian terminology) which can bring under its "objective unity" the essential characteristics of this object. (In a certain sense what is happening here is the revitalization of the old philosophical saying going back via Aristotle to Empedocles that the same is cognized only by the same – *hê gnôsis tou homoiou tô homoiô*.) If one shares Hegel's epistemic universe according to which there are (at least) three different types of objects this means that one has to establish a conception of the I which is responsive to those conceptual tools that are decisive in bringing about objects of these types. Thus in the case of living organisms which are taken to be characterized essentially by inner purposiveness the self-conscious I in order to connect to propositional content structured in accordance with the Hegelian category of inner purposiveness has to be able to function as the supplier of "objective unity" to items revealing this essential characteristic. Roughly the same has to be true of the other object types.

This Hegelian model is by no means a paradigm of an immediately convincing contribution to the question as to how the self-conscious I functions in propositional contexts. In part this might be due to obscurities in Hegel's way of expressing his views. But mainly to blame is the crude exposition of his views given by me. Of the many things left open especially one issue seems to pose serious problems for his account (though I believe that Hegel would deny this). This is the issue of the identity of the self-conscious I as the objectifying center, an issue taken to be of crucial importance for every account of self-consciousness. Two of the problems connected with this topic seem to be the following: (1) If the unity of an object is constituted by a specific set of essential characteristics and if the self-conscious I is shaped by the unity of the object then it seems that different sets of characteristics determine different self-conscious I. Thus the impression is hard to avoid that there are as many self-conscious I as there are essential characteristics. How, then, one is to make sense of the identity of the self-conscious I in different propositional acts concerning different object-types? Here things become a bit 'metaphysical' in the controversial sense, and I have no intention to go into the details of Hegel's answer. I just want to hint at his approach

concerning this question in a rather superficial manner. The basic idea is that the conditions of the identity of the epistemic I in different propositional acts have not to be sought in our conceptually informed ways to transform non-propositional into propositional content but that the identity of the epistemic subject is rooted in the complex propositional structure of reality as a whole which has to be conceived as a single monistic object.¹⁴ Strictly speaking, so Hegel, talk about the identity of the self-conscious I as the radically subjective center of conscious propositional states makes no sense because what is identical is not the self-conscious I but the conscious subject of the propositional activity, i.e. the subject that performs propositional acts. This metaphysical line of thought is hard to figure out and has a number of rather strange consequences which, as is well known, have had damaging results for Hegel's philosophical reputation. (2) Another alleged problem concerning identity of the self-conscious I is this: If it is the case that each Hegelian object-type asks for a particular self-conscious I in order to become a propositional content and if it is the case that one and the same object can belong to different object-types how is it possible to think of the self-conscious I as the same in each of the different relations it has to the same object? The following example might highlight the problem: Even in Hegel's epistemic universe self-conscious beings are at the same time living organisms and physical objects. This means, according to Hegel, that in the case of self-conscious beings a conscious subject can transform the very same non-propositional content in either of three ways. Each of these three ways is determined by a specific set of categories and thus gives rise to three different self-conscious I. Why should one think of these I as identical? Here again Hegel's answer is a bit extravagant: As before he would insinuate that identity has not that much to do with the self-conscious I but starts to be significant when it comes to organization of the conscious subject. And as to the question of how to deal with categorically different descriptions or with an object belonging to different object-types he would argue that the categories needed to conceptualize an object one way or another are interconnected in a hierarchical order which guarantees the identity of the object under different object-type descriptions. All this points to the conclusion that Hegel though committed to important elements of a Kantian conception of the procedure of the propositional activity does not want to give too much credit to a conception of the self-conscious I à la Kant.

What has been said so far about the Kantian and the Hegelian account of how to think of the procedure of our propositional activity in bringing about a (radically subjective) self-conscious I and an epistemic object is not meant to be exhaustive. Even less the foregoing remarks can pretend to give a historically correct and systematically adequate presentation of the epistemological views of Kant and Hegel. At best they might succeed in pointing out some aspects which, in my eyes, have been at work in their respective approaches to questions concerning knowledge and objectivity. These limitations have their source in the main objectives of the paper: The leading intention here has been on the one hand (especially in the first part) to examine from a phenomenological point of view why one should think of the role and the function of self-consciousness, i.e. the radically subjective self-conscious I, in a rather restricted way. On the other hand it has been the aim of the preceding explorations (especially in the second part) to have a closer look at different attempts in the German idealistic tradition to come to terms with the origin and the constitution of an epistemic world, i.e. a world of which we can have knowledge, within a framework that is based on the idea of

14) Concerning Hegel's views on the connection between monism and self-consciousness cf. my *Ontologischer Monismus und Selbstbewußtsein*. - In: D. Henrich (Ed.): *All-Einheit. Wege eines Gedankens in Ost und West*. Stuttgart (Cotta) 1985. 230-246.

a propositional activity as a subject- as well as object-constituting activity. Obviously, the issues addressed here have been under discussion in a lot of different ways in (at least) more than two centuries. Though it is easy to notice that contemporary approaches to these issues especially in the Anglo-American philosophical community have the tendency to start from different assumption than those characteristic of the positions alluded to here it is not that easy to see why this is so. Given the fact that there are no uncontroversial solutions to the problem of self-consciousness around yet it is justified to revisit a tradition which emphasizes the dynamic aspect connected with self-consciousness by thinking of it in terms of acts and activities.