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Our comparative and critical exposition of the ethical systems of Immanuel Kant and G.W.F. Hegel shows that the 'is-ought' dichotomy is at the centre of their respective philosophical quests. The problem has been examined within the general frame of their respective ontological and epistemological positions. Our comparative-critical study has revealed the fact that Hegelian philosophical developments have been able to overcome the philosophical shortcomings found in Kant in the context of the fact-value distinction.

The 'is-ought' dichotomy is first posed by Hume. According to Hume, we can distinguish one 'is' statement from another 'is' statement. Similarly, we can differentiate an 'ought' statement from another 'ought' statement. But we cannot make a transition from an 'is' proposition to an 'ought' proposition. Hume believes that morality is ultimately rooted in passions, and not in reason. This is confirmed by common experience. Reason is concerned with the discovery of truth or falsehood, which are predicated either of relations of ideas or of matters of fact. Moral statements are not either true or false, because they are neither about relations of ideas nor about matters of fact. Thinking and acting morally are grounded in the sentiments of sympathy, benevolence etc. That is why Hume thinks that there exists a logical gap between fact and value, 'is' and 'ought'.

The 'is-ought' problem can be meaningfully linked to important ideas discussed in Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*. According to Aristotle, morality is rooted in the activity of the moral agent. He says that the highest human value and the goal of a good life is happiness. Happiness can be obtained through the life of appropriate actions. Aristotle brings out the important notion of the 'function of man'. Every human being has a certain role to play in the society. Here morality is within the domain of what men are capable of doing. Here 'what ought to be' the case is already implicit in the realm of 'what is the case'.

While examining the critical philosophy of Kant, we have found that he reconciles the two opposite trends of philosophy, namely, rationalism and empiricism. He
points out that without experience no knowledge is possible, because all knowledge begins from experience. However, knowledge is not strictly limited to experience only. It confines to reason also. Kant here opposes Hume who considers experience to be the only source of knowledge. Kant also criticizes the views of both Leibniz and Locke, for accepting one aspect of knowledge and ignoring another.

Kant's own position about knowledge is that 'All our knowledge starts with the senses, proceeds from thence to understanding, and ends with reason, beyond which there is no higher faculty to be found in us for elaborating the matter of intuition and bringing it under the highest unity of thought.' He however, says that the faculty of sensibility, understanding and reason has limited roles. Sensibility and understanding are applied to the sphere of human cognition only. Sensibility is the faculty of intuition and understanding is the faculty of concepts. Objects are given to us by means of sensibility. They are thought through the understanding. Sensibility furnishes the manifold materials that are absolutely chaotic and unintelligible, while understanding gives them a meaningful order.

According to Kant, a representation is that through which an object is given to us. This is possible when the thing-in-itself acts on our senses and thereby produces the sensible intuitions. He further states that the power of the mind to know these representations is the categories of understanding. He argues that human cognition as synthetic a priori is possible through the transcendental unity of apperception, which provides all things and events in the form of space and time and comprehends them under the categories of understanding. The transcendental unity of apperception provides the highest unity to the sensible intuition through the categories of understanding. The transcendental unity of apperception is the subject of knowledge for Kant and provides the universalizability and necessity to the object of knowledge. It gives us the knowledge of phenomenon.

But synthetic a priori knowledge of Kant has a limit. It is limited to the phenomenal world. He creates two parallel realms of morality and of knowledge. Epistemology is confined to the sphere of phenomenon, and morality operates in the noumenal world. In the phenomenal world, law of necessity prevails, and in morality,
there is freedom. Both the laws of necessity and freedom are antinomous. I would like to
discuss here the antinomies of Pure Reason.

Kant holds that reason can provide only an idea of the unconditioned and it cannot
present the unconditioned in reality. Therefore, there arises a transcendental illusion,
which consists in the belief that the idea of the unconditioned must present the
unconditioned in reality. He wants to expose this illusion. He believes that when reason
demands the absolute totality or the unconditioned, then there arises a conflict between
the idea of the unconditioned and the reality of the conditioned. He regards this conflict
as an antinomy and claims that reason can never resolve this antinomy. There are four
antinomies of pure reason. In each antinomy, there is a thesis, with supporting argument
and an antithesis, with supporting argument. By combining both the thesis and the
antithesis, we get an antinomy.

Here, I shall refer to the third antinomy of the transcendental dialectic in the
Critique of Pure Reason. This antinomy lies at the core of the dichotomy between the
causality and freedom. This antinomy also rests on the dichotomy between ‘is’ and
‘ought’, which is the main aspect of my work. The third antinomy is as follows—

Thesis: Causality in accordance with laws of nature is not the only causality from
which the appearances of the world can one and all be derived. To explain these
appearances it is necessary to assume that there is also another causality, that of
freedom.

Antithesis: There is no freedom; everything in the world takes place solely in
accordance with laws of nature.

Kant regards that both the thesis and the antithesis are equally valid, and hence he
does not reject anyone of them. The thesis is that which applies to things-in-themselves
and the antithesis applies to the appearances. Kant states that no knowledge is possible
without a thing given in appearances and no appearances are possible without the things­
in themselves. Hence, both the appearances and the things-in themselves are true.

Therefore, in the third antinomy, Kant uses causality in two different senses. The
former supports the thesis and the latter supports the antithesis. The former is regarded
as the intelligible world and the latter as the sensible world.
In the thesis, it is argued that in the field of appearances, every event is caused by a preceding event and so on. But we must posit a first cause in order to regard a beginning of the events. Kant maintains this to be free causality, which is not caused by anything else, while everything else is caused by it. This free causality is also known as the concept of freedom.

But in the antithesis, Kant holds that everything in nature is determined by the laws of cause-effect relationship. In the phenomenal world, every effect is possible only in conformity to its cause. There is an endless chain of cause and effect relationship, and we cannot conceive of free causality in the world of appearance. He, therefore, tries to show that there is no freedom in the sensible world.

Thus, there arises the antinomy between causality and freedom. Kant’s conception of the freedom of will in the sphere of noumenon creates an unbridgeable gulf with the natural causal series in the phenomenal world.

The transcendental illusion of the antinomies in Kant motivates the idea of dialectic in Hegel. Dialectic is a method of deducing our categories such that the contradictory moments of the categories are sublated in the higher ones. Two terms are fundamental to his dialectical method, namely, (1) contradiction and (2) sublation, are interdependent and in circumstances, interpenetrating.

When Hegel says that everything is contradictory, he thereby means that every concept of logic has its application and involvement in the corresponding contradictory concepts. Contradiction is internal to all terms. Every concept is identical with itself and is thereby different from all other concepts. Therefore, according to Hegel, identity and difference are inseparable but distinguishable features of opposition. With the application of the method of dialectic, the contradictory or negative moments are synthesized into the higher ones. He regards this process of synthesizing all the contradictory aspects the moment of sublation (Aufheben). In sublation, the negative aspect of a category is not rejected but preserved in its higher form. The process by
which a category 'passes beyond itself' and posits another category to which it is intimately related, is at the same time a logical process.

Hegel applies his dialectical method through his deduction of the categories. In the *Science of Logic*, he formulates categories both subjectively and objectively. Epistemologically speaking, categories are the subjective concepts through which we do our thinking. Ontologically speaking, categories are the objective concepts designating the Absolute Truth. Thus, there is a unity between the laws of thought and the laws operating in the objective reality. One can easily say that his logic presents us with a new way of thinking and describing reality. Hegel’s division of logic into objective and subjective has three interrelated parts. They are: (1) The Logic of Being, (2) The Logic of Essence and (3) The Logic of Notion. He says that the Logic of Being and the Logic of Essence constitute the mutually interrelated aspects of the Objective Logic. At the same time, the Logic of Notion represents the aspect of Subjective Logic, where these two aspects of Objective Logic are sublated.

Hegel realizes the drawbacks of Kantian employment of the categories, where Kant gives only a subjective meaning to them, cut off from their application in the objective world. He argues that as long as the thing-in-itself exists beyond the grasp of cognition, epistemology will remain a mere subjective principle without command over the objective world. Hegel proposes a different solution for this problem. He asserts that reason has an active role to play. At the level of understanding, the world is conceived as consisting of finite entities and is governed by the principle of ‘identity’ and ‘opposition’. The role of reason is to unite and sublate them.

Reason holds negation and separation within one unity. In reason, the individual looks at himself as united with the universal. We have gone beyond the opposition between the individual’s goals and the reality over them. The individual is now united in his action with the external reality, which therefore reflects reason. This unity really comes when the *Geist* is reflected in the life of the people. The individual is a manifestation of the *Geist*.
Hegel has overcome the Kantian dichotomy between man and nature vis-à-vis reason and inclination. Kantian reason could not resolve the gap between man and nature. It tells us merely ‘what ought to be the case’. It does not speak about ‘what is the case’. In Kant’s philosophy, the function of reason becomes the ultimate source of the moral law, which is derived neither from sensibility nor from inclination, but only from practical reason, so that it can be regarded as an unconditional command to all rational beings. The command, which is binding all human beings, is known as the categorical imperative.

The moral worth of an action does not depend upon the consequence it produces. It rather lies in obeying the moral law for its own sake. Kant regards it as ‘duty for the sake of duty’. An action is morally good if it is performed out of the motive of duty. And if duty is performed for the sake of duty and not for the purpose of some particular motives or intentions, then it becomes an abstract principle, which has identity without content.

The difference between the two philosophers is that, whereas morality is an abstract, contentless principle in Kant, for Hegel it is contentful. Hegelian morality develops through the concrete ethical institutions: Abstract Right, Morality and the Ethical Life. It is through these institutions that Hegel’s doctrine of freedom is developed as well. He uses freedom in two mutually related spheres: outward and inward. Outward objectification of freedom is Abstract right. Here freedom is used by us in dealing with things in order to achieve some desired goal. Morality is the inward side of freedom. Inward objectification of freedom is manifested in the questions of motive, intention etc.

The difference between abstract right and morality is that the former is the embodiment of morality in the external world, whereas the latter is an affair of individual’s inner consciousness. Hegel applies morality for the inner state of the will, and therefore it is subjective. Morality is the return of the will upon itself. Its retirement from the objective world makes the will purely subjective. The will is here an ‘ought to be’. It is infinite and self-determined. Hegel states that freedom actualizes itself in a subjective will. But he also argues that morality has also an objective side. The subjective will has connection with the external world and therefore it is objective.
From morality, Hegel moves on to the Ethical Life. The ethical life is regarded as the unity of the abstract right and morality. Ethical life develops through the following three stages: family, civil society and the state. Hegel says that freedom of the individual is manifested in the form of rights. Kant also speaks about rights. But these rights are not actualized in the form of these institutions. Hegel develops these rights into the social institutions like family, civil society and State. He thinks that freedom first grows in the family, and then it develops in the society and finally culminates in the State. There is a dialectical unity between these institutions.

Hegel further argues that true freedom consists in my obligation towards the laws and institutions of the state. The German term *Sittlichkeit* refers to the moral obligation, which I have to an ongoing community. It is not just an ‘ought’ (*Sollen*), something that should be the case. Rather, the norms that we follow are there in the institutions that exist in our society and my allegiance or obligations towards those laws of the institutions. Hegel argues that the spirit living in a people shows us laws, which are at the same time *Sein*, real existence. Thus, there is no dichotomy between the fact (*Sein*) and the value (*Sollen*) or between the ‘is’ and ‘ought’ in Hegel.

Hegel’s solution to the ‘is-ought’ dichotomy is similar to the views of Aristotle. According to Aristotle, morality is rooted in the activity of the moral agent. The highest human value and the goal of a good life is happiness, which can be obtained through our actions. Aristotle brings out the important notion of the ‘function of man’, i.e. that every human being has a certain role to play in the society. It is through our respective functions in the society that we attain the life of fulfillment, that is, happiness. Morality is within the domain of what men are capable of doing. What ‘ought to be’ is within the realm of ‘what is the case’.

The doctrine that puts *Sittlichkeit* at the apex of the moral life—the good life—requires the notion of society regarded as a larger community life, in which man participates as a member. Now this notion displaces the centre of gravity from the individual to the community, which is seen as the locus of a life or subjectivity of which the individuals are phases. The community is an embodiment of the *Geist*.
There are certain norms and principles that are built into the structure of society, and the members of the society abide by them through their activities. While practicing the norms and principles of the community, the individual is actually participating in the larger communal life (Volksgeist). The state expresses the idea of a moral-social order in its embodiment of the ontological structure of things. Man recovers his essential relation to this ontological structure, and to the other beings in the modes of consciousness, which Hegel refers to as the absolute spirit. Thus, the state, which is fully rational, is one that expresses through its institutions and practices the most important ideas and norms which its citizens recognize, and by which they define their identity.

The distinction between the individual and the surrounding nature disappears in Hegel’s philosophy. Both individual and collective life are in interaction with the natural surroundings, and together they all express a larger rational plan. The individual no longer looks upon himself as something opposed to a non-human nature, but rather thinks that nature itself is an integral part of the rational plan to realize the absolute.

Hegel’s solution to the Kantian problem of the antinomy between morality and nature can also be found in his earlier work, On Christianity: Early Theological Writings. In this work, he also discusses the ‘is-ought’ problem. Speaking about the ‘is-ought’ problem in an essay entitled ‘The Spirit of Christianity and its Fate’, Hegel gives us a historical account of the moral and religious life of the Jews that begins with Abraham, continues through Moses and culminates in the moral teachings of the Jesus.

According to Hegel, people had no individual freedom in the ancient Jewish life. People were subordinated to the external authority or God for gaining material help. The actions of the external authority or God were regulated by the commandments. These commandments had to be obeyed by the Jewish people. People could not question those commandments. Hegel points to the fact that Abraham breaks the original unity between spirit and nature. Nature could not be united with the spirit, because nature is dominated by the spirit or God.

Hegel thinks that just as there is total opposition between the spirit and the people in the Jewish life, with no option for the people but to obey the commandments of the spirit, so there is a dichotomy between morality and inclinations in Kantian philosophy. In Kantian philosophy, the moral law is derived neither from sensibility, nor from
inclination, but only from reason, so that it can be regarded as an unconditional obedience to the moral law.

Hegel argues that to follow the moral law does not simply mean that we should respect the duties alone and ignore the inclinations. Rather, acting in the spirit of the law implies both reverential respect for duty and a humane concern for our inclinations. The Kantian sovereignty of reason over action in sheer disregard of the life of inclination is, for Hegel, a distortion of the way to true human fulfillment.

According to Hegel, Jesus does not remove the Jewish laws, but the inconsistencies in them by introducing inclinations into their fold. The inclination of the heart, that is love, fulfills the laws and transforms its character. Through this union of the moral law with inclinations, the moral law loses its abstract form.

It is through the introduction of love that, according to Hegel, Jesus reconciles the opposition between morality and nature. Morality and the inclinations are thus intermingled in the realization of the good life. According to Hegel, the primary mistake of the Kantian categorical imperative is its one-sidedness. It only represents the rational dimension of human nature, leaving out the vital dimension of inclination as an impediment to the realization of the good life. But Love is the spirit which restores the unity of man within himself with other men and with nature. Hegel argues that Kantian morality, in separating the concept of the right from the morality of our inclinations, expresses simply an ‘ought’ (Sollen). But the religion of Jesus which unites the two is founded on an ‘is’ (Sein), a ‘modification of life’.

Hegel’s views can be comparable with Hume’s in giving importance to the inclinations or passions of man. For Hume, morality is a matter of our passions, emotions and inclinations. That it is so is confirmed by common experience. Reason is not the seat of morality, nor does it have any control over them. According to Hume, reason is the slave of the passions. But Hegel differs from Hume in giving supreme importance to the role of reason. According to Hegel, reason is bound up with the ontological structure of things. In reason, the individual views himself as united with the universal. This unity is inherent in the objective spirit, that is Geist reflected in the life of a people, which Hegel calls ‘ethical substance’.

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Hegel thinks that philosophy, confronted with the problem of ultimate reconciliation, must let religion take the lead. But religion, as his historical studies have demonstrated, does not offer the final solution. The original unity of all things is not for him the object of a mystical or poetical intuition, but a truth discovered by logic. In his later writings, that is, in the *Phenomenology of Spirit* and in the *Science of Logic*, He argues that the method of logic can help us to overcome the dichotomies between thought and life. According to him, logic is a systematic triumph over the fundamental contradictions of metaphysical speculation. It is therefore a science of the basic principles not only of knowledge and thought but also of Being and Existence.

Hegel’s logic undertakes to bridge the gap between thought and life. It is the logic of life, the logic he has been seeking ever since he recognizes life as the medium in which opposites both arise and dissolve. It is also the logic of reason, for reason differs from the intellect or the understanding in being speculative. At the level of understanding, the categories ‘being’ and ‘nothing’ exclude each other. But at the level of ‘reason’, ‘being’ and ‘nothingness’ supplement each other as much as they exclude each other. Their mutual exclusion is not permanent. What is permanent is their mutual growth.

We can now summarize the discussion. By driving an ontological wedge between phenomena and noumena and limiting human knowledge to the phenomenal world of causality, Kant creates an inescapable philosophical duality between the epistemological and the ethical. The phenomenal world of facts governed by causal laws is the object of scientific knowledge all right, but it is a world that leaves no room for the possibility of a normative life. For the ethical life of norms require the human individual to act with freedom, and freedom is incompatible with causality.

Thus, Kant has to talk about switching ourselves from the phenomenal mode of existence (the abode of scientific knowledge) to the noumenal one, where the self is out of the sphere of causality. The noumenal self is governed by reason alone, and has the freedom of the will both to postulate and to be legislated by the moral law. Thus, there involves the mysterious shift from the causally determined world of ‘what is the case’ to that of ‘what ought to be the case’. The shift allows the possibility of meaningfully talking about categorical imperatives, maxims of morality, freedom of will, autonomy,
good will and holy will. But the unbridgeable gulf between the 'is' and the 'ought' looms large.

Hegel takes the revolutionary dialectical step of reorganizing the Kantian epistemological, ontological and ethical frameworks in a manner that neatly overcomes the gulf. He proposes a dialectical synthesis between epistemology, ontology and morality. He argues that ought-statements come out of the contradictions in the sphere of 'what is', 'what has been' or 'what will be'. The maxim 'one ought to act....' is meaningful and significant only if it leads to a concrete visualization of situations where it can possibly be obeyed. 'Ought' and 'is', therefore, for Hegel, go together, enrich each other by dialectically supplementing one another. In this process, however, 'ought' does not lose its identity. It is not reduced to the sphere of 'what is'. Both 'what ought to be' and 'what is' maintain their self-identity, and it is by virtue of their self-identity that they dialectically interact with each other.