

The Secret of Hegel's System: The Concrete Universal in Perspective

Hegel'in Sisteminin Sırrı: Somut Tümelin Perspektifi

S. Shehzad Noor

Lecturer, University of Peshawar/Department of Philosophy, shehzadnoor83@gmail.com,
ORCID: 0009-0002-5085-5747

Samina Afridi

Dr., University of Peshawar/Department of Philosophy,
ORCID: 0009-0004-0156-1667

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Abstract

Questions concerning the philosophical study of universals include: Is a universal a thing or not? Does it exist separately from our minds and the world of daily experience? Is it abstract or concrete? And is knowledge of the universal even possible? Understanding universals enable human thought and language grasp the world they live in. For this reason, philosophers such as Plato, Aristotle and Kant, to name a few, have explored the existence, nature and function of universals. Considered indispensable, their knowledge is the very key to figuring out each philosopher's system. For example, Plato's separate world of universals, Aristotle's participating universals within the apparent world as well as Kant's universals, the mental categories of human knowledge and the unknown world of the thing-in-itself. This article aims to situate Hegel's own view in dialogue with these earlier thinkers, in order to arrive at the analysis of the *concrete universal*. By doing so, it reveals the central key to Hegel's philosophical system—one in which the universal is not static or abstract, but a singular, living and immanent reality that comes to know itself through the particulars it composes and contains.

Keywords: Universal, Abstract, Concrete, Plato, Aristotle, Kant, Hegel

Öz

Tümellerin felsefi analizine ilişkin başlıca sorular şöyledir: Bir tümel şey midir, yoksa değil midir? Zihnimizden ve gündelik deneyim dünyasından bağımsız olarak var mıdır? Soyut mudur, yoksa somut mu? Ve tümele ilişkin bilgi mümkün müdür? Tümelleri anlamak, insan düşüncesinin ve dilinin yaşadığı dünyayı kavrayabilmesini sağlar. Bu nedenle, yalnızca birkaçını anmak gerekirse, Platon, Aristoteles ve Kant gibi filozoflar, tümellerin varlığını, doğasını ve işlevini incelemişlerdir. Vazgeçilmez kabul edilen tümellere ilişkin bilgi, her bir filozofun sistemini çözümlemenin anahtarıdır. Örneğin Platon'un ayrı bir dünyada yer alan tümelleri, Aristoteles'in görünür dünya içinde paylaşılan tümellerin ve Kant'ın insan bilgisinin zihinsel kategorileri ile kendinde-şeyin bilinemez dünyasındaki tümelleri için durum böyledir. Bu makale, somut tümelin çözümlemesine ulaşmak amacıyla, Hegel'in kendi görüşünü kendinden önceki düşünürlerle diyalog içinde konumlandırmayı hedeflemektedir. Bu, Hegel'in felsefi sisteminin merkezi anahtarını açığa çıkarır: Bu sistemde tümel, durağan ya da soyut değil; kendisini oluşturan ve içerdği tikeller aracılığıyla kendini bilen, tekil, canlı ve içkin bir gerçekliktir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Tümel, Soyut, Somut, Platon, Aristoteles, Kant, Hegel

1. Introduction

Revealing straightforwardly the idea of the *concrete universal* diminishes its importance for understanding Hegel's philosophical system. First, it helps to get clear on terms like universal, particular, individual, 'abstract, and concrete. That's because today, people often mix them up—thinking that universals are always abstract and particulars, concrete. Such clarity overcomes the conceptual difficulty in describing what a *concrete universal* is. Secondly, to compare how the above concepts are understood in the philosophical systems of Plato, Aristotle, and Kant—especially in contrast to Hegel—makes it hard to define what a concrete universal really is. Unlike the conceptual difficulty, this one shows how each philosopher's unique understanding of these concepts shapes their entire system of thought. Therefore, description of *concrete universal* requires (a) familiarization with concepts mentioned above (b) familiarization of those concepts within (selected few) acclaimed philosophical systems of Plato, Aristotle and Kant.

Beginning with our first requirement, universal, particular and individual are described for the purpose of classification as follows: an attribute is universal to the class of things that have it; the same attribute is particular in relation to any one thing of the class which has it; finally, an individual is a specific, not any one, but a specific *this or that* member of a class which is the unique instance of the universal. Furthermore, abstract and concrete are described the following way: concrete things include our experience of actual individual entities, while our mental focus on certain attributes of concrete things are abstractions—a particular attribute is abstracted from one individual and a universal one is abstracted from many (Milne 1962, 16-17). Our modern worldview is based on *abstract universals* (linking the universal with the abstract) exemplified through scientific laws or laws of nature that are universally certain and correct. We arrive at them by abstracting general truths from observations of concrete events and/or circumstances. Thus, scientific laws are a universal relation, abstracted by us as facts from a class of concrete events and/or circumstances (Milne 1962, 20-21).

Moving to our second requirement, we first seek the ancient world's assistance, especially that of Greek Philosophers, Plato and Aristotle.

Socrates, unconcerned with the world of nature, sought universals in ethics to arrive at a fixed definition about the human subject. Plato, unlike his teacher was not restricted to the ethics of man but had a view towards the to-

tality of things, sought to define universals in-themselves, since particulars could not be defined as they were always in a state of continuous change (Aristotle, *Metaphysics*. I 6, 987b); (Lawson-Tancred 1998, 23).

Description of Plato's philosophy is as follows: Sense is appearance/particular and reason, reality/ universal. Appearance (copies) and reality (universals) both have their own separate existences. Universals exist, genuinely as reality, and as copies of reality is appearance. Universal's genuine existence is obviously separate from the copy, because, if their existence was not separate, why would there be a genuine and a copy in the first place. Within the genuine-copy relation, the genuine is free and influences the copy that is dependent.

Aristotle disagreed with Plato regarding the separate existence of universals that gives us a genuine-copy relation between universals and particulars.

Aristotle's philosophy was similar: Sense is appearance/particular and reason, reality/ universal. There is only one existence due to participation of reality within appearance. Reality (universal) is a one common feature present in many appearances and appearances are many having (at least) one common reality (universal).

Thing-activity identity relation is complete existence. From one perspective, the common universal is the activity of the particular thing (appearance), for example, something shines, shining is the activity of that thing, and exists identical to it. From another perspective, the particular thing possesses an activity (a common universal), for example, something has shiny activity, and exists identical to it.

Activity is the reason (why) a thing (the what) exists. Entelechy is an activity, the one common universal that all appearances have i.e. potentiality to actuality movement. Why all appearances comes to light and are visible (explicit) is due to the reality commonly hidden within (implicit) i.e. entelechy as activity. All potentials that actualize (due to entelechy as activity within appearances) are dependent on a purely actual activity i.e. thought thinking thought or contemplation as activity, which is free. Doesn't this mean that appearances have two universals (activities), entelechy and contemplation? Yes, but it is contemplation (pure actuality) that influences entelechy (potential to actual movement) which is common to all appearances.

Ancient Greek philosophy contributes a significant advance in human knowledge: Plato's genuine-copy relation between the separate world of universals and particulars along with Aristotle's contemplation-entelechy activity as the universals which participate within the world of particular things. Transitioning from Ancient to Modern philosophy, the philosopher was tasked to set

limits to the human mind's capacity for knowledge; accordingly, universals obtain an epistemic nature too. Thus, Kant's philosophy reflects on two kinds of universals: one which constructs human mind's knowledge and the other, unknowable yet existing in its own right.

Human knowledge is limited to the world of appearance. Epistemically, intellectual universals, i.e. the categories of understanding, rather than sensory universals (redness, hardness and so on) frame the world of appearance. These categories (universals) are a mental framework within all human subjectivity that impose themselves on the world as it appears to us in experience. Apart from these categories, another universal exists i.e. the thing-in-itself, which stands for what is beyond the epistemic limit of the human mind.

Finally, upon fulfilling both requirements, we are now able to draw out from Hegel's Philosophical system, the idea of *concrete universal*:

Universal(s) must exist, they exist as categories. The categories (universals) are not in the human mind but in the mind of the Absolute Spirit.

Only the world of appearance exists. The world of appearance is the natural manifestation of the totality of all categories present in the mind of the Absolute Spirit.

Activity of the Absolute Spirit is self-contemplation during which it creates the whole world of appearance which constitutes its own self. Absolute Spirit and the world of appearance are identical, having a hierarchal structure of moments or stages. The movement from the lower to higher moments or stages in that structure is based on entelechy i.e. potentiality to actuality movement. Pure actuality or the moment of the completion of self-contemplation arrives when it knows what it has made is what it is made out of.

A Hegelian philosopher achieves Absolute Knowledge when he/she *finds out* the identity of the Absolute Spirit - world of appearance as well as its constitution as an organism and its rational activity as an act of self-composition. Absolute Knowledge of the Hegelian Philosopher, the world of appearance and the Absolute Spirit's activity taken altogether describe what a *concrete universal* is. Therefore, concrete universal is defined as: The world of appearance is both intellectually known (because it is universal) and sensuously known (because it is concrete) by the Hegelian philosopher as a special moment within it and by the Absolute Spirit as its own self.

Strictly following the outline presented in the introduction, this article shall be divided into three sections. The first section shall elaborate the concepts necessary to understand a philosophical system. These concepts include universal, particular, individual, abstract, concrete, in-itself and for-itself. The se-

cond section shall describe, with special emphasis on universals, the philosophical systems of (a select few philosophers) Plato, Aristotle and Kant. Consequently, the description aids in the comparison of Hegel's position, based on his acceptance or rejection of their views, regarding universals. Finally, the third section focuses on Hegel's philosophical system which includes the relation between Being - Absolute Idea - Absolute Spirit, the Principles (a) identity of concept and existence (b) identity in difference, and the Hegelian judgment, the real is rational, in order to draw out from it what a *concrete universal* is. Remarkably, the way the article is prepared and the sections specified exemplify a *concrete universal* as well.

2. Conceptual Groundwork

This section shall elaborate concepts such as universal, particular, individual, abstract, concrete, in-itself and for-itself that are necessary to understand all philosophical systems.

What is a universal? A universal exists within all the constituents of a collection of things—they are the qualities or characteristics that apply to multiple instances like the property of being a human being, an animal or a tree. Apart from that universals also include ideas like justice, beauty, goodness and the rest (Bunnin and Yu 2004, 715); (Taliaferro and Marty 2010, 234-235).

What is a particular? A particular refers to things that are not whole in themselves; instead they are parts or a partial portion of a whole. A particular has qualities or characteristics (universals), for example French revolution in history, John in human beings, apples in fruits. All of these examples are distinct, one of a kind illustration of particulars (Bunnin and Yu 2004, 505).

We can only imagine what language and thought would be like if our world was made up of only particular things and each particular was unique, one of its kind in all its attributes. Right now, as our situation is, it is impossible to speak and think without marking things together based on similarities and dividing them into types (Wardman and Creed 1963, 37).

What is an individual? An individual is contrasted against both universal and particular, in order to be passed on its own. On the one hand, it means something indivisible, a whole cannot be divided into its parts without losing the nature of the whole, in this sense, it is similar to universals, and on the other hand, it means something that can neither be predicated nor instantiated of anything else, in this sense, it is similar to particulars. However, on its own, an individual is something uniquely distinct in regards to its space-time occurrence and is pointed at with the prefix of *this-ness* or *that-ness* (Magee 2010,

340-341). Therefore, contrasted against both universal and particular, the individual is taken as a non-predicated, non-instantiated, indivisible 'One' and in the sense being passed on its own, 'One' this or that individual is pointed towards as it occurs at a distinct space and time.

Differentiate between abstract and concrete? Abstract, in Latin, means "to remove something from something else" and concrete means "to grow together" (Bunnin and Yu 2004, 3). Something concrete is considered to be detailed, colorful and independent; the abstract lacks the qualities of concrete objects and is considered vague, lifeless and dependent. Something is abstract, if it is the result of the process of abstraction, where a common feature is drawn out from various concrete objects, for example an abstract bachelor has the property common to all bachelors, moreover, that common feature is labeled as a universal (Bunnin and Yu 2004, 3-4). For that reason, ordinary people consider objects to be concrete and concepts to be abstract.

What is in-itself and for-itself? Distinguishing in-itself from for-itself is the same as distinguishing between potential and actual or something inherent or intrinsic against something external or extrinsic but for its own sake. For example, a seed potentially has a tree-that-bears-fruit in-itself, instead of for-itself, unless it's fruit-bearing state is actualized. In-and-for-itself is a unified condition where a thing is at-home-with-itself. It is the synthesis of the state of being in-itself and for-itself. In ordinary language, these concepts would be used in the following manner: some human beings are in-itself hearty (energetic) whose heart, sometimes, wills or wants something, anything for-itself, therefore, being at-home-with-himself, a hearty person sets his heart upon something (Bunnin and Yu 2004, 354-355). A second iteration, one ought to study philosophy for-itself and should always remember that Hegel's philosophy is difficult in-itself, therefore, given its difficulty, Hegelian philosophers still pursue it in-and-for itself.

3. Plato, Aristotle, and Kant on Universals

This section shall describe, with special emphasis on universals, the philosophical systems of select few philosophers.

What are Plato's views on universals? Plato introduced the existence of universal into philosophy. While sorting things out, the things which are the same in respect to certain properties are grouped together. If a number of things have the same color which groups all of them together, then that color is, therefore, a universal (Kim, Sosa and Rosenkrantz 2009, 611-613).

First and foremost, Plato divides philosophy into the intelligible and perceptible worlds—this distinction is drawn from Parmenides and Heraclitus, respectively. The former is the eternal world of unchanging ideas while the latter is the empirical world of change. Plato considers the intelligible world, where forms (universals) exist objectively, superior to the perceptible one (Kenny 2004, 205). The separation of the universal is necessary, for the Platonic view, since knowledge is only possible of entities with permanence, free of change. In his work *Republic*, the analogy of the sun is used to show the separation between the universal and the particular (Prior 1985, 34, 36).

After making separation perceptible, Plato uses the metaphor of copying or resemblance to show that the universals are transcendent. In his work, *Phaedo*, Plato puts across the relation between the universal, “equality”, against its copy, the particular things which are equal. The universal “equal” is not identical to the particular things that seem equal, but it is the observation of particular equals that you and I have got the idea of “equality”. Particulars desire or endeavor to be like the universal but always “fall short” and are “inferior” to them (because they are just a defective copy) (Prior 1985, 38-39); (Plato, *Phaedo*. 74a10-75b5); (Gallop 2002, 21-23).

The analogy of the sun and the metaphor of copying, demonstrate that the (Parmenides-Heraclitus) being-becoming distinction exists as the separate worlds of universals and particulars (Prior 1985, 44). To drill this point home, Plato's work, *Cratylus*, describes that there must be a difference between an original universal and its copy (the particular), they both cannot be identical or else the copy cannot be deemed defective. Plato contrasts the creation of a painter with that of a God, if a painter makes a portrait of a person and a god creates a biological clone of the same person, would there be two persons or a person and a portrait of a person? In the case of God's creation there would be two persons, but in the painter's case, there would be a real person and a representation of the person, a defective copy. God's creation would share all the qualities of the said person but the painter's representation, having the correct color and shape, would lack certain qualities like warmth and wisdom (Prior 1985, 36); (Plato, *Cratylus*. 432b-c); (Reeve 1998, 148).

What are Aristotle's views on universals? Aristotle describes Plato's concept of universals in book Alpha 6 of *Metaphysics*. He describes that Plato was well aware of the thoughts of Cratylus and Heraclitus regarding sensible things, which are in a state of continuous change and this makes it impossible to have knowledge of those sensible things (Aristotle, *Metaphysics*. I 6, 987a); (Lawson-Tancred 1998, 23). For Plato, the universals exist in a supersensible world of their own; a table in that world does not decay or change, but in the world of particulars not only can we make this or that table but we can also destroy it or

it may wear-down over time with use. Thus, many particulars were all dependent upon independently existing forms (universal) for their existence and characteristics. Aristotle finds the idea that particulars are copies of independent universals problematic: if the particulars are copies of the universals, then an extra universal is required to explain the relation between the group of particulars and the first universal and this requirement of an extra universal continues on till infinity. Aristotle calls this the third man argument (Wardman and Creed 1963, 37).

Aristotle's forms (universals) are not separate; any universal is an attribute of an actual individual. Health and goodness are universals, but actual health is always someone's health i.e. this healthy man, and actual goodness is the goodness of something, i.e. this good cat (Kenny 2004, 217). Even if universals were separable from particular individuals, it was only so in thought, they are inseparable in fact (Wardman and Creed 1963, 30). In the statement "Socrates is a human", what is the signification of the word human? In the Platonic view, it stands for "Humanity", a universal that is separate and independent of Socrates. For Aristotle, the word "human" does not signify something distinct from Socrates himself, "to be Socrates is to be human" and if Socrates is no longer human, then he no longer exists. Human beings do not receive the universal attribute of "human" from an Ideal, but rather from their parents (Kenny 2004, 220-221). For Aristotle, no universal can exist apart from its particular instance, this means, universal do not exist by themselves, there is no such thing as a universal man; man begets man universally, your particular father gave birth to you and Peleus to Achilles (Aristotle, *Metaphysics*. XI 5, 1071a); (Lawson-Tancred 1998, 366).

Distinguishing logically, a universal is predicated¹ of various things, while a particular is not, man is an example of a universal that is predicated of both John or James, that is, John is a man or James is a man, while each person is a particular individual which cannot be predicated of anything, that is, warm is a John and loud is a James (Aristotle, *De Interpretatione*. Ch.7, 17a38); (Ackrill 2002, 47). Additionally, a universal is the attribute that belongs to and/or is predicated of all particular instances of a thing, for example "point" and "straight" are universals that belong to and/or is predicated of every (particular) line that exists (Wardman and Creed 1963, 166). Particular individual things exist independently, to know something about them is to know the universal that applies not only to that particular thing but to others of the same kind (Wardman and Creed 1963, 136). Conversely, if a person possesses the

¹ Predicate means the information that tells us something about the subject, for example, John is white. White is the predicate in this example. This color white can be predicated of other items as well such as roses, snow, etc.

knowledge of universals, he would know something about the particulars (that have it as an attribute/predicate) also (Wardman and Creed 1963, 136,166,195). The interesting point to note about the above distinguishing account is that human perception is unable to grasp the universal in a particular by looking at one instance of it. Only after multiple instances of particular things or events have been observed, the observer will be able to look for the universal, as it is at all times and in all places the case (Wardman and Creed 1963, 199-200). Applying this late realization of the logical universal that is implicitly prior but is recognized by human perception at last on the entire world of particulars, we come to see that the universal present in the entire world of particulars is an activity called *entelechy* i.e. movement of potential to actual. This active attribute or universal, *entelechy*, makes all particulars move from a potential state (of a germ) to an actual state (of an organism). Not only is the actual what the potential *grows into*, but also the actual *grows out* of the potential. This means, the actual state of the particular is the *purpose* of the potential and always logically *present prior* to our perception of the movement from potential to actual. But now the question arises, what gives *entelechy* as an active universal its characteristic? What is it itself under the influence of? The answer is contemplation i.e. Aristotle's God. Contemplation means "thought thinking thought". It is an activity, having no trace of potential in it, a state of pure actuality. Contemplation is the active (purely actual) universal that influences *entelechy* as an active universal present in all particular things of the world making them move from a potential inert state to an actualized one.

What is Kant's view on universals? Kant argued that the human mind is a-priori structured in and fixed by categories (universals) that it impresses upon the objects of sense experience, limiting our human knowledge only to the world of appearances. But this is one side of the picture. Similar to Plato, he also believed in the existence of another world, a world of reality behind and/or beyond the world of appearance. Categories of the human mind do not impose themselves upon the objects that exist there; instead, "the thing-in-itself" (another kind of universal) fills the world of reality that exists beyond human knowledge.

If we look at an apple, we know the apple as it appears to us (due to the categories as universals) but do not know it in reality (the apple as a thing-in-itself). Thus, the following two statements became common expressions regarding Kantian epistemology: Statement 1 - "We can never experience anything except the appearance of a thing". If the categories of the human mind are imposed upon objects that we experience through our senses, then knowledge is possible but limited to the world of appearance. These categories are 12 in total, 4 groups of three: Quantity: unity, plurality, totality (what is one, many and/or all); Quality: reality, negation, limitation (what is real, not real or in part real);

Relation: substance-accident, cause-effect, agent-patient (what is/has, cause or connects); Modality: possibility-impossibility, existence-non-existence, necessity-contingency (what is possible, actual or necessary).

Statement 2 - “The thing-in-itself exists, however, its knowledge is unknown to us”. As the unknown thing-in-itself that exists but cannot be experienced by the senses and is beyond the reach of the categories of the human mind, so knowledge about reality is not possible (Stumpf 1971, 329). In conclusion, for Kant, universals both set the limit of human knowledge and also exist as an unknown thing-in-itself.

Describe the relation of the universal in Plato, Aristotle and Kant with its effects on Hegel’s philosophy? A universal and its examples (particulars) exist in two different senses. Plato, as we have already mentioned, thought universals existed in their own a realm, the universal “man” exists in a separate world of reality from the world of senses where Jake, John and James exist. Aristotle thought universals existed in the examples (particulars) as their qualities and attributes which determine their characteristics and personalities. The universal “man” exists in Jake, John and James giving them the personality and characteristics of manhood, distinguishing them from other things (Audi 1999, 368-369); (Bunnin and Yu 2004, 129). Kant’s universals are the subjective categories of the human mind, an epistemological principle of knowledge, instead of objectively existing in a metaphysical world or characteristically existing in the natural world.² These categories are non-sensuous relations that are a-priori (they exist before experience) and all human experience depends on them (Stace 1924, 60-61).

Hegel’s philosophy takes the nature of universals from Plato, Aristotle and Kant as follows: He accepts the platonic position that universals have an objective existence but rejects the platonic separation of universal and particulars. Similarly, he accepts the Aristotelian position that a universal like whiteness is meaningless without its particular instance, a white shirt or a white page but rejects viewing them from the perspective of the laws of thought of formal logic: universals are static attributes, particulars are mere carriers and their relationship is one-way—universals explain particulars, but don’t develop through them. (Kamal 1989, 13). Additionally, where Kantian universals, the categories (of understanding), are characteristics of subjective human understanding and have an epistemological nature, Hegel’s universals (categories) have an ontological nature and exist, independent of the human mind, within the mind of the Absolute Spirit. For that reason, these categories which compose

² Unlike Plato, Kant distinguishes between sensuous and non-sensuous universals.

the natural world in a dialectical way are discoverable rather than being invented (Kamal 1989, 18).

Hegel denies the existence of the ideal world of universals and the unknowable thing-in-itself, so there is no separate world of reality, the world of appearance is the only one in existence. This world of appearance is the creation of the a-priori categories of the mind, but for Hegel, we cannot point towards our human mind as the creative power, instead the inner secret of the whole universe and human history is the creative manifestation and labor of the rationality of an Absolute Spirit which acts like an Aristotelian universal present within each and every particular of it. For Kant, the categories of the human mind are the mental process that make knowledge of appearance possible, for Hegel, the categories exist independently of any human mind in an Absolute Mind which manifests itself as the world of nature, which all individual humans observe daily but only Hegel has detected its hidden presence by means of his philosophy (Stumpf 1971, 330-331). Therefore, Hegel puts forward the idea that reality has a discoverable dialectical structure that can be known, rather than believing that we have a mental structure that logically frames and knows only the appearance of reality, like Kant. In Hegel's philosophy, there is no appearance/reality distinction like the one Kant had, appearance is reality and vice versa. Since there is only one reality in front of us, it must be intelligible but hidden. As Hegelians our task is to see the internal relations between universals that are presently working in the given human and natural world of particulars and discover the nature of Absolute Mind (Spirit) in it (Ewing 1961, 61).

4. Hegel's "Concrete Universals"

This section focuses on Hegel's philosophical system which includes the relation between Being-Absolute Idea-Absolute Spirit, the Principles (a) identity of concept and existence (b) identity in difference, and the Hegelian judgment, "the real is rational", in order to draw out from it what a *concrete universal* is.

What is Hegel's philosophical system? Hegel's philosophical system taken as a whole is the Absolute Spirit, which is similar to Aristotle's God i.e. Contemplation or self-thinking thought of God. Such a being is not unknowable because its existence is the world of appearance only and its nature as well as activity can be experienced in full. Stating its existence, nature and activity altogether, the Absolute Spirit is a consciousness that is aware of itself as an object of thought, thus it is self-conscious. This self becomes conscious of the many universals (categories) that compose it and experiences itself as an all-inclusive individual of the human and natural world of particulars that it comprises (Findlay 1958, 224).

A simplified outline of Hegel's whole system Being-Absolute Idea-Absolute Spirit is as follows: Hegel's philosophical system starts with the *Science of Logic* consisting of categories only, from the emptiest of categories that is "Being" (something is what it is) it moves towards the concretely rich category of the "Absolute Idea". Absolute Idea is the 'divine governance' of the world but not in the sense of a human observing, creating and controlling something, standing apart from it. It merely exists as a category, a logical being, having a logical relation to the world, instead of a temporal one³ (Stace 1924, 29). It is a reason working *in* the world, so it journeys forward to manifest itself into the world of nature, where it is asleep, then becomes conscious in the subjective spirit of man, socially-conscious in the creation of a State, finally showing itself as the "Absolute Spirit" in philosophy, its highest conscious manifestation. Absolute Spirit's whole development from its earlier stages in the *Logic* to its final stage in (*Lectures on the History of Philosophy*) possesses only one motivation: "How can 'I' (Absolute Spirit) as an Idea come into existence and know myself?" Hegel's work *Science of Logic* treats it (the Being of the Absolute Spirit) as a category of pure thought—an Absolute Idea which exists purely in thought. By the end of Hegel's system in his work *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*, 'this' Idea (Absolute Spirit) exists as something philosophy can fully grasp—an object of knowledge of/for philosophy (Stace 1924, 516-517). Philosophy, henceforth answers the motivation by showing that the purpose of the world of nature and the social world is the complete realization of the mind of God in actuality—a mind which was potentially present in the category of the Absolute Idea (and before that in "Being"). Philosophy, conceived as such or by conceiving it so, is/becomes the knowledge of the Absolute Spirit which self-consciously exists.

Depicting the development afresh: Being grows into that which it *presupposed*: the Absolute Idea, which exteriorizes itself in the existence of the world of nature. At the stage of nature, Absolute Idea as Spirit was asleep, it became conscious in animals and self-conscious in human beings⁴ and through the human-beings, the Spirit becomes the Absolute Spirit and works itself out in art, religion and philosophy. It is at the stage of philosophy that the Absolute Spirit becomes self-conscious of itself as a self and comes to light as the (First Principle) underlying reason of reality that was *presupposed* all-along, contained by the categories of Being and/or Absolute Idea implicitly. In other words, as we reach philosophy, the Absolute Spirit knows itself self-consciously as the Principle of reality and the reason working within reality.

³ A temporal relation would mean that it exists before the world began and/or it creates the world at a specific moment in time.

⁴ An interesting point to note: human beings are only potentially divine, not actually so. They are distortions of the Absolute Spirit.

In the above depiction, what does it mean for the Absolute Spirit to be the First Principle? To qualify as the First principle, the Absolute Spirit must possess two qualities: It must explain its own existence—be self-explanatory, and the (natural and human) world arising out of it—its cosmic presence. Absolute Spirit as Reason fulfills both requirements, that of being a self-explanatory principle—Reason is the self-contained complete whole—as well as the necessary relation of what arises out of it—Reason is the ground from which the world arises and in it the world remains fully present. (Stace 1924, 58-59).

Reason is composed of the categories, each category works out one from another, and the many categories make up a single organic whole that is self-explanatory in the sense of the closure of a circle (the image of the circle, in this sense, is both an object and an act). Reason will start with the first category (Being) and then end up with the complete category (Absolute Idea). Afterwards, the world's existence is the exteriorization of the complete category. Advancing towards the last stage, both the category of Being [Reason as beginning, pure idea] and the world [Reason as exteriorization, appearance] is at home within the self-conscious absolute knowledge of an Absolute Spirit philosophically (Stace 1924, 83). At this point, on the one hand, Absolute Spirit (as Reason) is both the presupposition (logically prior-ness) and end-goal (completion) of Being, plus on the other hand, Being contains and grows into the final category, the Absolute Spirit. For that reason, Absolute Spirit is present at either end of the development because it is a presupposition—something contained as the beginning (the first)—and the end-goal—that into which something grows at last. Absolute Spirit is a self-explained First Principle⁵ due to its epistemologically circular nature (Stace 1924, 111). This circle can also be imagined to be a ladder, but you will say that the ladder has a linear start from the bottom and ends up at the top. However, here is the trick to see the ladder as a circle: “The same ladder that is a way upwards is a way downwards”. If we reverse the process of the beginning, reason becomes its own reason, a self-enclosed circle comes to view where the end retrospectively justifies the beginning and the beginning anticipates the end—the self-explanation of the First principle in its self-determination is discovered⁶. Neither a-prior reason nor a reason external to itself can be asked of this First Principle, hence, it is self-explanatory (Stace 1924, 112-113). The *Logic* is based on this very standpoint—the end is a purpose or goal that retrospectively grounds the beginning. In the case of the beginning moving towards its rational goal, the concrete category, Absolute Idea,

⁵ Self-explained First Principle means that it is the inner echo of reason becoming aware of itself as ground.

⁶ It is not Hegel who describes his explanation; rather it is the outside world of Hegel that has this description as a secret which needs to be found.

is the completion of the abstract category, Being. However, in the case of explaining the beginning, the concrete category, Absolute Idea, is the presupposition of the abstract category, Being. Absolute Idea is the purpose of Being that has true explanatory power of it. The end is what gives sense to how *it* began and explains why the beginning culminates at *that* end. An architecture of the system of categories (Being to Absolute Idea) assembles henceforth, where higher categories surface out from and support lower ones: As a seed grows into a tree, and at the same time, the tree grows out of a seed, so, Being is implicitly Becoming and Becoming is explicitly Being, and in a reverse sense, Becoming is hidden in Being and Being is visible in Becoming (Stace 1924, 108). Without Becoming (that which Being grows into and which it explains), there is no Being (that which Becoming grows out of to explain). Similarly, without Absolute Idea, there is neither Becoming nor Being. Although the complete and final category, i.e. Absolute Idea, comes later, it is present as the logical first which is presupposed by Being and all previous categories (Stace 1924, 110).

Clarifying the above account further necessitates an explanation regarding the essentiality of the system of categories (Being to Absolute Idea) in the *Logic* for the intelligibility of both world and subject: Consciousness has a delayed awareness of universals (categories), it lags behind them and discovers what was logically prior at last. Psychologically speaking, a person is conscious of a particular prior to a universal. Only after we have seen one tree, car or book do we grasp the universal, “oneness”. However, categories as real universals are logically prior to sense-experience of particulars, because what is known to us at last, psychologically, is logically the first, and what is known to us first psychologically is in reality, the last thing. As children learn a fact before knowing the reason for it, so, consciousness of the universal “oneness” comes later yet it was present in all the particulars we saw daily, for example one tree, car or book. The perception of these particulars is impossible without categories as real universals upon which they depend (Stace 1924, 67). Imagine a world with no birds in it; now try to imagine a world about which nothing can be affirmed or denied or without one-and-many relation. Is it not obvious that the first of the two is conceivable and the second one not so? As a result, the categories mentioned in *Logic* are non-sensuous and a-prior universals which exist objectively prior to both the inner and outer human world. Existence of this hidden system of universals (categories) in *Logic* makes us realize that it is possible to imagine a world without sensuous universals like redness, circle-ness, chair-ness. Yet it is impossible to imagine a world with non-sensuous universals like unity, existence, negation, contradiction (Stace 1924, 62-63). To reiterate, the categories as real universals are a precondition for the intelligibility of both the world and the subjective mind that knows it, though the subjective mind comes

to see the logical priority of these categories later (Stace 1924, 68). Can we separate the categories as real universals from the world or the subjective mind? No, these pure universals cannot exist apart from both the external world and the subjective mind; however, they are only conceptually separable (as abstractions) from them as a system because they are logically prior to them. In this sense, we may conceptually separate a seed from a tree but not existentially so. Analogically, the system of categories is the (hidden, logical, and necessary) seed from which the world-tree (visible and sensuous) grows out of.

The next inquiry into Hegel's philosophical system is: why does the human and natural world of particulars exist out of real categories (universals)? Principle of "identity of concept and existence" makes it possible for the human and natural world of particulars to exist out of real categories. The concept side (categories in *Logic*) and the existence side (the human and natural world of particulars) are related to each other in identity. The former represents the conceptual structure while the latter embodies it as its existence which altogether expresses what the Absolute Spirit⁷ is: the concept thinking itself into existence because the concept-in-existence (representation of the human and natural world of particulars as categories in *Logic*) is the existence of the concept (embodiment of the categories in *Logic* as the human and natural world of particulars). Simply, as the particulars are not different from the categories that are the condition of their existence, out of which the particulars are made, and apart from them there is no unknowable thing-in-itself, so by means of the above principle Absolute Spirit may be identified in the following manner: "the concept (Absolute Spirit) is not only in existence but is itself what comes to exist" and/or "the concept that exists is existence (Absolute Spirit) that is conceptually structured". (Stace 1924, 71-73) Absolute Spirit is conceptually 'what' exists (as First principle) and conceptualizes its own existence (as cosmic presence)—categories in *Logic* conceptually compose (make/structure) the existence of the human and natural world of particulars they are constituted by, with no hidden remainder (unknowable thing-in-itself).

What is the nature of the Absolute Spirit in Hegel's philosophy? Principle of "identity-in-difference" permeates itself at this point representing the Absolute Spirit, on the one hand, as an organism (a unity of the parts of a whole), and on the other hand, as an individual achievement of rationality (Milne 1962, 185). Although, the nature of former representation is empirical and the latter,

⁷ As I understand it, Absolute Spirit as self-knowing Reason both makes and is made by the categories plus the natural human world of particulars. That is, the categories (universals) in *Logic* come to exist only through their manifestation in natural and human life, while at the same time these manifestations are themselves intelligible only through the conceptual structure provided by the categories. This reciprocal constitution is what I understand by the identity of concept and existence.

rational, yet it is the same principle which unites in the former case and underlies the latter one.

The Principle of “identity-in-difference”, as the unifying nature of the Absolute Spirit, presents a whole with many internally related parts like that of an organism. Every part depends and determines the nature and activity of the other parts, all connected from within to make a whole that includes them all. This organism is a rational agent, a centre from which rational activities originate. Simply put, it acts by thinking. It is the self-conscious permanent unity of all its activities and each activity is its short-lived moment or limited expression. Its self is continuously being made—it recognizes that it is being realized through its activities. Simply put, it becomes who it is (a rational agent) by what it does (rational activities), and it knows this (self-conscious about agent-activity unity). (Milne 1962, 28-29).

The Principle of “identity-in-difference”—the underlying nature of the Absolute Spirit—exists as the inner logic constructing the outer structure where the practice takes place. As the structural schema only, the inner logic creates change from the lower to a higher level of rationality: Logic → Nature → Spirit → Absolute Spirit. This change appears mechanical and/or naturalistic (if self-consciousness is subtracted from it, which gives it a self-developing characteristic). The structure of rationality, changing from a lower to a higher level, comprises of moments that differ in kind and degree at each level. Each level is a distinguishable moment of rationality having its own particular point of view. Each higher level happens to be a more adequate moment of rationality than the one lower to it (Milne 1962, 38-39). To illustrate this, imagine Absolute Spirit like a seed (organism) underground. Hidden within the seed is the potential to be a tree. The seed grows into a tree having different parts—roots, trunk, branches and leaves. The seed becomes more of itself, and at the same time, the tree doesn’t lose what it is by growing. Here we see that “Identity-in-difference” is actively depicting the change from Logic → Nature. Advancing further and depicting the change from Nature → Spirit, the tree starts to have reflective self-consciousness—the ability to think about oneself as experiencing something, for example “I’m alive, I’m growing, and I understand what I am.” Its trunk is not just trunk—it feels itself. Its branches don’t just move—they know they’re reaching. We see “Identity-in-difference” working as follows: It remains the same tree, yet it starts to reflect on what it is and now it’s aware that it’s not just wood. At last depicting the change from Spirit → Absolute Spirit, the whole tree (organism) realizes that it doesn’t try to stay the same by avoiding change. It identifies with who it truly is by becoming different. Logic → Nature → Spirit were different levels of its individual identity. At the highest level of rationality, Absolute Spirit attains self-knowledge. The tree is aware that the object it knows, starting at the lower levels till this moment, is itself. The tree is not just

saying, “I am,” but “I am’ and I know I am” or “I exist,” but, “I exist *through* everything I’ve become, and I *know* that.” It has reached the highest individual achievement of its *own* rationality. So, what is so special about this level? Knowledge now appears as a unity of two distinct but related statements: first, Absolute Spirit is itself the subject of rational self-creation; second, the very inner logic (identity-in-difference) becomes aware of itself. Absolute Spirit is the level when identity-in-difference is not just working but self-knowing; it knows that it doesn’t just propel the change in the schema but is present throughout. It is no longer just a structural principle working behind the scenes; it becomes the self-conscious truth of the whole—a unity-embracing-transformation. That’s why Absolute Spirit is not just the end of the development, but its meaning. What does the “self-conscious truth of the whole” mean? Absolute Spirit is an individual organism that internalizes its own development—from abstract logic to self-knowledge—through the principle of identity-in-difference. The schema—Logic → Nature → Spirit → Absolute Spirit—is the necessary self-realization of rationality from within, achieved through the self-originating activity of Absolute Spirit as an individual subject. If we focus on the “work-side” of rational activity, it is self-maintenance: an activity carried out by the principle of identity-in-difference in order to maintain the structured development of reality itself across the schema. However, the way of life of the Absolute Spirit is something more than mere structural self-maintenance; there must be something worth maintaining one’s self for. Thus, if we focus on the “psyche-side” of rational activity, it is self-conscious knowledge: an activity carried out by the Absolute Spirit of grasping its existence as an all-inclusive organic whole. In this act, the principle of identity-in-difference no longer just works—it knows itself as the very ground and truth of reality (Milne 1962, 40). Altogether, the inner logic that previously constructed the outer structure is now a self-knowing content. Absolute Spirit does not merely achieve the work of identity-in-difference; it comes to love, affirm, and recognize that work as it’s very self. Hegel would call the “work-side” *necessity*, and the “psyche-side” *freedom*. In Logic → Nature, identity-in-difference works as a mechanical necessity: Being must become Absolute Idea and manifest as Nature. In Absolute Spirit, freedom arises when the principle that was working blindly before, now is self-aware. Absolute Spirit knows identity-in-difference is not an external compulsion but an inner comprehension—it is not chained to the principle, it *is* the principle, knowing itself or self-knowing principle. In Nature → Spirit, identity-in-difference works without knowing its purpose. Nature and mankind maintain themselves without knowing why? In Absolute Spirit, freedom arises when it hits upon the point of its own self-maintenance: identity-in-difference is what was working all-along, but unconsciously, which now has come into clear awareness. Simply, Absolute Spirit now knows that it is not just doing rational activity; it is the beginning and end-goal

of the activity. The principle of identity-in-difference no longer works; it is the “explicit content” of self-knowledge. At this juncture, it is now possible to illustrate what the dictum, “The real is rational and the real is rational”, epistemologically means in Hegel’s philosophy: “work-side” and the “psyche-side”, necessity and freedom are one—“Know-thyself side”. To know-thyself, Absolute Spirit *becomes fully real by knowing itself as its own process*. “One” becomes fully what it is, only by knowing that it is. *In another way*, “Know-thyself side” means “work-side” and the “psyche-side” are one. In short, Work is the self that observes it. It demands that the schema—and Absolute Spirit and the Hegelian philosopher thinking it—live out its meaning: Absolute Spirit—an organic whole structured by identity-in-difference—creates the natural world out of itself and maintains it as its very own existence. But Absolute spirit not only self-generates and self-maintains; it is present both in nature and mankind as the purpose of their movement. It is, in this sense, self-ambitious too. The human mind, only in the form of philosophical consciousness, comes to discover and participate in Absolute Spirit’s own act of self-knowing—thus arriving at Absolute Knowledge. The Hegelian philosopher is the moment at which Absolute Spirit achieves the imperative to “Know-thyself”. The Hegelian philosopher does not merely observe the schema of Absolute Spirit, it is what the philosopher lives when he/she achieves Absolute Knowledge via the Absolute Spirit’s “Know-thyself side”. Principle of identity-in-difference is now self-knowledge in and as the activity of philosophical thought, the Absolute Knowledge of the Hegelian philosopher and the “Know-thyself side” of the Absolute Spirit. The dictum, “The real is rational and the real is rational” becomes epistemologically alive: It doesn’t just mean reality follows reason, which would be a minimal reading where Absolute Spirit and the Hegelian philosopher follow the logic of the world. Instead, reason is real because it knows itself as reality. Logic knows itself as the activity through which reality both comes into being and becomes intelligible; and in this very recognition, the Hegelian philosopher and Absolute Spirit discover that this logic is nothing other than their own self-knowing activity. Reason-knower-Reality is one.

We are now in the position to ask: what is the *concrete universal*? Abstract means “whatever is partial, incomplete, or one-sided”. For example, the principle of identity in logic is an abstract identity stated as “Something is only what it is”. Such an identity is isolation only—A is A. It is non-relational to an ‘Other’. A participates in its own existence. Principle of difference is also one-sided and abstract: “Something is not something else”. It introduces a relation of otherness—A is not B. However, the relation of difference is only external, A and B separate in existence only. Contradiction means “Something is what it is not”. There is an internal difference in identity—A is not-A. Identity is having a conflict within itself and creates difference. The relation of otherness is not external.

A is not different from something else; rather, A is differing in-itself. Abstract identity and difference help in understanding something—either there is isolation or an otherness; contradiction helps to have a reason to act because we stop clinging onto one-sided abstracts and start to experience an inner urge to be active—isolation is otherness. The very attempt to purely participate in one's own existence fails and separates that existence from within. Isolation becomes its own opposite, an otherness. Concrete universal is principle of identity-in-difference. "Something is what it is only through what it is not."—A is A only through not-A. Its motto now is "Isolation through otherness". Isolation no longer opposes the otherness within, but is realized through it. Identity at first was an abstract isolation, then it self-negates and enters into conflict with itself, finally it has become concrete through its difference by including it. Difference at first was abstract otherness, then it exists due to identity's self-negation, finally it has become concrete by being included within identity. Abstract Identity excluded difference, and abstract difference excludes identity; contradiction arises as the conflict between them. Identity-in-difference negates the exclusion, so it is inclusive and negates the conflict, so it is unified. Therefore, identity and difference has an internal relation with each other—identity contains internal differentiation, and difference is structured by an internal identity. Abstract identity excludes abstract difference and vice versa; contradiction arises as the conflict between these two moments. Identity-in-difference overcomes this by being inclusive—it negates the exclusion—and unified—it negates the conflict. This mutual mediation is what it means for identity and difference to be internally related: identity now contains internal differentiation, and difference is structured by an internal identity. Identity contains internal differentiation means Absolute Spirit, as an organism, includes moments of the schema—Logic, Nature, Spirit, Absolute Spirit—as its own difference within itself. Difference is structured by an internal identity means that the schema—Logic, Nature, Spirit, Absolute Spirit—is the individual achievement of Absolute Spirit's inner logic: the principle of identity-in-difference. In conclusion, abstract identity is the lifeless isolation of a concept, let's say, A. Abstract difference is external negation of the concept; A is no longer alone, others like B or C and many more stand over against it. Contradiction is the inner negation of the concept, a conflict within A. Concrete universal is the identity-in-difference of the concept. The concrete A, as an identity, now includes both its abstract differences (the external negations B, C, D...) within itself as parts of a whole—its nature as an organism—and contradiction (the inner negation) as conflict within itself—its inner urge to activity and self-realization. Epistemologically speaking, understanding grasps fixed concepts and separates them into distinct identities. Reason, being self-critical introduces contradiction by negating fixed identities and exposing

conflicts within them. Speculation, however, preserves both the structural intelligibility of concepts—through understanding, which fixes identity and distinguishes difference—and the internal activity of concepts—through reason, which reveals their inner-conflicts motivating them towards self-realization. Much like an organism that creates what it is composed of, understanding gives it form, reason life (the inner urge to be active), and speculation, the living form of truth—an organism evolving from within, guided by its own inner necessity. Conceptually speaking, Understanding relates the universal and particular abstractly. The universal is a category, for example, animal. Particulars are an example of the universal, for example, this animal drawn here. Understanding is just classification: it is a lifeless container holding things that do not belong to each other by inner necessity. Reason necessitates break down in the relationship, universal and particular contradict each other. Universal fails to grasp the full reality of particular and the particular refuses to submit to the abstract form of the universal. For example, all people should follow reason, but particular individuals act from desire, emotion or faith. These particulars break the universal exposing a contradiction within it. Speculation realizes the universal through the particular. Particulars contain the inner necessity of the universal within it and the universal manifests this necessity through making its particulars. The universal comprises of a number of particulars and this universal governs the particulars composing it. The unity of both is an individual, the universal lives in the particulars and they in it. For example, principle of identity-in-difference as reason is universal logic, as knower is particular Hegelian philosopher, and reality the individual Absolute Spirit. Understanding was the external relation, reason, a contradictory relation, and speculation, an internal relation between universal and particular. (Milne 1962, 51)

Unlike an abstract universal which is a thought pointing towards the common feature in some particulars, concrete universal is a “*self-individualizing universal*”. The former is a formal identity while the latter is an individual act of embodiment and establishment of the universal in and by particulars. Hegel’s philosophy is unable to allow the existence of an individual universal without particulars. Only the concrete universal exists and that’s why a universal particularizes itself and/or self-individualizes. Concrete universal is self-particularizing, it ‘composes’ or ‘makes up’ the particulars as details of its own self. Concrete universal is self-existing, ‘comprising’ or ‘made up of’ all its particulars as its own details. Concrete universal is (immanently) self-present in all its particulars giving them their activity and purpose. A self-present universal achieves its nature in the various particulars and is differently realized in each particular (Findlay 1958, 225-226); (Kamal 1989, 33). Altogether, concrete universal is a self-individualizing universal: it is self-particularizing, self-existing, and self-present in its particulars. This conceptual epistemology is only achievable by

speculation: the three aspects—creating, existing-presence + existing, created-presence + present, existing-creator—are the modes in which the universal creates, exists and lives. Concrete Universal is the creator that is present in what it creates, the created that exists as the presence of the creator, and the presence in which both creator and creation are one.

Concrete universal determines what this or that is, and it unifies different this and that within itself. It self-participates in both senses i.e. determining and unifying. Containing them altogether, it determines them by happening in them, differing each from its other. Various this and/or that present its existence, while its self-determination shines through them all.

Concrete universal creates a unity of different determinations—its unifying nature of containing parts altogether is its universal aspect—and unifies different aspects of its own determination in each of them—its specific rational existence in mutually exclusive parts is its individual aspect. It is a unity of opposites—a whole having different created parts whose existence it determines. Rationally, it is the reason for the differences between the parts of the whole, and each different part differs—because of its present rationale at that moment—from the rest, being a dim illumination of the whole, which contains all these dim lights as its particular instances. Viewed as a container, it gives existence to what is contained in it and by their means exits as itself: the whole is a container of the total appearance of all its possibilities through the parts only in so far as the parts, a short-term possible appearance, belong within the whole. (Findlay 1958, 227). Construed as a self and body, concrete universal is visible as a body made up of its own created purposefully active particulars, and intelligible as a self working out their details within them (Audi 1999, 368-369).

Hegel's philosophical system is structured as follows: categories mentioned in the "*Science of Logic*" as a whole → philosophy of nature → philosophy of Spirit (Anthropology, phenomenology, psychology → Politics → Art, Religion, Philosophy). Categories are the rational potentialities which actualize themselves in the world; both the categories and the world are "at home" in the Absolute Spirit—a monism that unites opposites, the implicit categories and the explicit world. Thus, Absolute Spirit *comprises* the mental categories and rational determinations which *compose* its self-manifestation as the world. Absolute spirit is a self-conscious individual that organically comprises the self-explanatory categories as universals, which work out and exteriorize themselves as the existence of the world of particulars, and in doing so becomes conscious of the explanation of its own existence. In short, a self-conscious individual lives like a creator that shows off its self-explanatory universals in its creation as self-existing particulars. Taken altogether, concrete universal is the Absolute Spirit's individual life working out its universal reason (absolute idea) within particular

existences nature, man and spirit (art, religion and philosophy) (Magee 2010, 61-62); (Milne 1962, 186). At this juncture, it is now possible to illustrate epistemologically a Hegelian philosopher's Absolute Knowledge: Hegel's categories are not a subjective mind's power of a necessary rule for possible experience; they are the Absolute Spirit's power of exteriorizing itself in nature, the precondition to the creation and existence of our human minds—a stage where the activity of the Absolute Spirit during self-creation creates our active human minds which have the activity of the Absolute Spirit in them. In order to have self-conscious knowledge of itself, Absolute Spirit differentiates itself into a subject (the Hegelian philosopher) that thinks and an object of thought (the natural and social world). Spirit dreams or sleeps in nature and wakes up in humans in order to know its own self through a Hegelian philosopher's knowledge of the Absolute. Since the Absolute Spirit immanently resides in the finite human mind, it is no wonder that we are able to see the hidden categories playing their part in the visible natural and social world. Although, it is possible for us to achieve Absolute Knowledge via universal/particular relation, yet it is actually restricted only to the Hegelian philosopher who happens to be within the world of Spirit, having the necessary concern to understand reality as the relation of thought to existence. Being a part, a short-term appearance of the whole, the Hegelian philosopher is the key moment or stage where Hegelian philosophy achieves Absolute Knowledge once it recognizes that the Absolute Spirit's rational activity constitutes an organic structure consisting of the logical, natural and social world. As Hegelian philosophy, the Absolute Spirit makes its own self as its object of thought—the subject recognizes the object as itself. The Absolute Spirit recognizes the emergence of natural and social world out of the unifying and universalizing agency of its own thought and activity, while the Hegelian philosopher—being a key moment and stage of the unity and universality of the Absolute spirit—achieves Absolute Knowledge. (Mure 1940, 100); (Copleston 1969, 130)

As Hegelian philosophers, we are now in a position to trace the evolution of the concept of universals from Plato and Aristotle through Kant to Hegel—thus mirroring the three dialectical moments: Abstract – Contradiction – Concrete.

In the first moment, universals are understood as abstract and fixed identities—either transcendent (Plato) or immanent but static (Aristotle). For Plato, universals exist in a realm beyond the material world, and particulars are mere copies of these universals. The universal is pure, separated, static. In contrast, for Aristotle, universals exist within particulars, as their essential nature or defining attribute, functioning as a classifying identity shared among the many things in the material world. Thus, in this first moment, universals

are understood to exist either beyond the world or within it, but in both cases as static and identical.

The second moment marks the crisis of Enlightenment reason: universals are necessary for human knowledge of the world, yet they also become problematic—they separate us from the reality of the world. Kant reconfigures the previous distinction by introducing two types of universals: on the one hand, subjective-immanent universals—namely, the categories of understanding—which reside within the human mind and actively structure all possible experience; and on the other, an objective-transcendent universal—the thing-in-itself—which exists independently of our cognition and remains fundamentally beyond epistemic access. While the categories actively shape our experience and makes knowledge of the world possible, we can never know things as they are in themselves. Thus, the very universals that make knowledge possible are also the reason for our separation from reality, generating an inner contradiction between the subjective universals that organize appearances (that only we encounter, structured by our own cognitive faculties) and the objective universal that grounds reality but remains unknowable. In this second moment, the contradiction takes the form of appearance versus reality: universals simultaneously enable conceptual knowledge of appearances and signify our separation from reality, revealing the deep split between thought and reality.

Finally, the third moment arrives with Hegel's idea of the Concrete Universal. It is no longer something abstract, separate, or limited—no longer a universal beyond the world (Plato), classifications inside things in the world (Aristotle) or human subjective structure that shapes the appearance of the world while remaining cut off from world-reality (Kant). The universal is now real, not as something standing above or behind reality, but as something that lives within the world, creates it and comes to know itself through its concrete manifestations. It is not outside reality, but immanent within it—and it not merely a thought, but a thought that is realized in and through reality. The universal is concrete because it is not empty idea or abstract category—no longer just a definition or classification. A concrete universal is like a living system: a thought that comes to life, working itself out, expressing itself through the particular things of the world and becoming real in and through them.

To understand what it truly means for the universal to become real and concrete leads us directly to a radical rethinking of logic and thought—beginning with the difference between Aristotle's formal logic and Hegel's dialectical logic, and continuing through the contrast between Kant's categories of understanding and Hegel's categories of thought. Both comparisons reveal how Hegel

redefines immanence—not as a static classification or imposed mental structure, but as the living logic of reality itself, a thought-process through which reality becomes self-conscious.

Hegel rejects transcendence, both as Plato's world of universals and Kant's thing-in-itself, but accepts and radicalizes Aristotle's immanence—universals exist in the particulars. For Aristotle, immanence is based on formal logic and metaphysical existence (form in matter), but Hegel bases immanence on dialectical logic and metaphysical self-consciousness (Spirit in progress). Aristotle's metaphysics is real but not self-conscious. For Hegel, reality is Spirit, which means a metaphysical self-consciousness exists that knows itself through philosophy. For Aristotle, being is; for Hegel, being knows itself and is reflexively self-aware. Formal logic deals with abstract universals that create classification—dead containers in which things are put based on shared attributes. It structures reality based on the law of identity, non-contradiction, and the excluded middle. Dialectical logic holds contradiction to be real and necessary for change. It articulates a concrete universal that passes through contradictions and manifests in particulars. Only through particulars does the universal become itself and is not complete without them.

The distinction between “categories of understanding” and “categories of thought” marks a fundamental difference between Kant and Hegel. Kant's *categories of understanding* form an epistemological structure—*structure* here refers to a fixed framework of concepts in the mind, applied to raw sense data. These categories are the preconditions of knowledge; that is they condition how a human subject must think in order to experience the world at all. By contrast, Hegel's *categories of thought* are ontological-logical determinations. Here, structure is neither pre-given nor imposed by the human subject; rather, these determinations gradually shape a rational structure from within, as if reality were thinking itself—unfolding through its own immanent logic and coming, in this process, to know itself. In Hegel's view, thought is ontological: it is both the inner logic of reality and the actual content of reality as it comes to self-knowledge. Thus, for Kant, categories are subjective in origin but universal and necessary for any rational being in order to access reality. For Hegel, they express the objective activity of reality itself—universal and necessary not for the subject to know the world, but for reality to come to know itself. The rational structure of the world, in Hegel's view, is not something our mind imposes on it as Kant suggests. Rather, the world itself is rational because it is thought-like in its own structure. For Hegel, reason is not external to things, but inherent in them—they are rational by nature, not because we make them so through our thinking. For Kant: *We think reality. For Hegel: Reality thinks itself.*

Conclusion

Either, universals exist out-of-the-world of particulars but then the question arises: *how can they relate to or determine particulars without being part of them?* or, universals exist down-in-the-world of particulars but then the question arises: Is a particular just a pack of universals—a grouping of predicates—or an *embodied universal*, where universality comes into real presence? Similarly, either universals exist (categories of understanding) inside the human mind, aiding the knowledge construction of a limited world, or the unknowable thing-in-itself exists beyond the knowledge limit of the human mind. Philosophy, especially metaphysics, found each view to have its own difficulty, whether universals are thrown out of this world or the human mind or brought down to earth or within the human mind.

Universals do not exist as subjective categories in the finite mind that merely construct a representational framework of the world; rather, they are objective categories—the self-articulations of Absolute Spirit—manifest in the world and knowable by reason, because all objects and persons participate in their universality. For Hegel, universals exist, down in the world of particulars as its immanent structure composed by the activity of the Absolute Spirit which contains these universals as its own non-sensuous, self-determining categories of thought. For the Absolute Spirit, the existence of a thing and its intelligibility are one and the same. Unlike Plato's Ideal-World or Kant's Thing-in-itself, Hegel rejects the existence of a thing beyond Absolute Spirit—what exists, exists only as it is known and created by it.

Abstract, means something isolated, cut off from other beings, separate any quality from an object, for example, whiteness from a ball and you will get an abstraction—whiteness. Only if you take the white, round, heavy and hard ball altogether, will you get a concrete thing that contains all abstractions within itself. If colour-ness excludes whiteness, blueness, redness from its self and each specific colour from the other, then each one is a simple abstraction, but insofar as it includes every specific colour and their differences, it becomes a concrete category. In short, viewing an entity apart from its relations is abstract, for example, cut a tree leaf to observe it in the laboratory, however, the concrete view observes it in its organic relations—knowing the tree leaf's relation to the tree's life.

Absolute Idea, Hegelian Philosopher and Absolute Spirit correspond to different expressions of the Concrete Universal in Hegel's system:

Starting from the emptiest of categories—Being—each subsequent category cannot exist without the other(s), implies them, gives rise to them via inner contradiction and includes them within itself. Being, as an abstract identity,

collapses into Nothing because it fails to remain logically identical or one-sidedly fixed; this tension gives rise to Becoming, the first genuine unity of opposites. Becoming is the first concrete category which will be digested by the other categories that come afterwards till Absolute Idea, the most concrete, is reached which includes all previous categories within itself. Absolute Idea, the category of categories, is the fully actualized logical existence of the “concrete universal”, which doesn’t just stop and say, “That’s the end of the thinking process.” Instead it says, “This thinking is reality”. At this point Logic is no longer just logical—a structure of thinking. It becomes ontological—a study of what exists. Logic crosses over into Nature, and eventually into Spirit. Scheme, surface, and Self/Absolute knowledge correspond well to Logic, Nature, and Spirit, respectively: Logic is the scheme – thought exists as categories, Nature is the surface – categories give appearance to the world and Spirit is Self/Absolute knowledge – philosophy is self-conscious thought existing as nature. Absolute Spirit is the “concrete universal” that creates itself (logic), exists as world (ontology) and knows itself through a Hegelian philosopher (philosophy).

The Hegelian philosopher seeks the hidden secret of reality, while the Absolute Spirit’s own goal—immanent within that very search—is to reach insight into the meaning of “knowing thyself”. Discovering the Absolute Spirit in reality—an all-inclusive organism and all-pervading rationality—serves as the site where the “concrete universal” becomes conscious of itself. It is here that the Hegelian philosopher becomes the highest achievement of the Absolute Spirit’s rational self-development, occupying a position within its organic structure where knowledge becomes Absolute. At this moment of Absolute Knowledge, Absolute Spirit becomes the subject that knows itself as its own object—as if declaring: “I exist here and now because I know this as I am this”.

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