

The Idea of the True

Annotations by Andy Blunden, December 2024

Hegel's theory of natural and social science, which he applied to writing of the outlines of the various sciences of his time in his *Encyclopaedia of the Philosophical Sciences*, is contained in the penultimate chapter of *The Science of Logic* entitled the "Idea of Cognition." In determining an action, a subject needs to know what is both true of the object and which action promotes the Good. Accordingly, the chapter is structured as a "syllogism," the two premises of which are The Idea of the True and the Idea of the Good.

The following annotations on the Idea of the True. are intended to make it accessible for the purpose of applying it to present-day scientific practice.

The Idea of the True is a syllogism the first premise of which is Analytical Cognition and the second premise is Synthetic Cognition. That is, a science must represent a true concrete concept of the Object by an analysis of the object into parts and a synthesis of those parts according to a concept of the phenomenon. This implies repeated application of analysis and synthesis to data as it becomes available.

The citations below refer to a bilingual version of the text of A.V. Miller's translation of the *Science of Logic*:

<https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/hegel/works/hl/idea-true-bilingual.pdf> including paragraph numbers inserted into the HTML code.

In what follows, "the Notion" (*der Begriff*) refers to a true concrete concept of the world, of which the subject matter is a determination. The Notion is implicit in the world and the ultimate aim of Science is to reproduce it in the form of thought; its determinations are the various entities which exist, so

the activity of the subjective Notion must be regarded from one side merely as the *explication of what is already in the object* (§1710).

"The Subjective Notion" refers to the finite mind of a subject, such as an individual, driven by an urge or will (*Trieb*) to determine the true and the good, so as to be able to realise themselves in the objective world. The Subjective notion is made up of Universals and Particulars, with the Individual moment of the notion being what is immediately before the mind and is the immediate subject matter of thinking.

Any science must begin with analysis of its subject matter. What is paramount in this phase is that the subject must make itself passive and allow the object to show itself, avoiding so far as possible the imposition of any preconception on to reality.

the posited determination ranks just as much as a presupposition that has been merely *found*, as an *apprehension of a datum*; in fact the activity of the Notion here consists merely in being negative towards itself, restraining itself and making itself passive towards what confronts it, in order that the latter may be able to *show*

itself, not as determined by the subject, but as it is in its own self.(§1704)

For a science to be valid it must begin from something immediately known and not some theoretical product of the science itself.

cognition, once it has begun, *always* proceeds from the known to the unknown. The distinguishing feature of analytic cognition is already defined in the fact that as the first premise of the whole syllogism, analytic cognition does not as yet contain mediation;(§1707-8)

Hegel specifies the datum which is to be the starting point of the science, consistent with what he has already said:

analytic cognition ... starts from a *presupposed*, and therefore individual, *concrete* subject matter; this may be an object already *complete in itself* for ordinary thought, or it may be a *problem*, that is to say, given only in its circumstances and conditions, but not yet disengaged from them and presented on its own account in simple self-subsistence. ...(§1709)

“Complete in itself” means that it is not seen as a part or result of some larger phenomenon but is immediately given to everyday consciousness. The other possible starting point is a problem which requires explanation, and in this case the subject matter cannot be abstracted from the circumstances which make it a problem, and must be taken together with them.

It is taken as given that the given individual datum is a determination of the science which is to be reconstructed:

Since analysis is based on the Notion, its products are essentially Notion-determinations, and that too as determinations *immediately contained* in the subject matter.(§1709 cont'd)

Consequently, when the science is complete it will reinstate this determination as a moment of the concrete revealed created by cognition.

Each new datum discovered by analysis is not to be characterised in terms of some *other* criterion, according to criteria which do not belong to the subject matter itself, but as characteristic of the subject matter itself.

... analytic cognition ... does not pass through any further *middle term*; the determination is in so far *immediate* and has just this meaning, to be peculiar to the object and in itself to belong to it, and therefore to be apprehended from it without any subjective mediation.(§1711)

Analysis continues, sorting data according to criteria which are arbitrary at this stage, because so long as the concrete diversity of the subject matter is preserved in analysis, the determination of the relevant variety in the subject matter can be revisited at a later stage in the phase of synthesis.

But further, cognition is supposed also to be a *progress*, an *explication of differences*. But because, in accordance with the determination it has here, it is Notion-less and undialectical, it possesses only a *given difference*, and its progress takes place solely in the determinations of the *material*. It seems to have an *immanent* progress only in so far as the derived thought determinations can be analysed afresh, in so far as they are a concrete; (§1711 cont'd)

The analysis proceeds according to immanent criteria given by the subject matter itself, retaining the immediate concreteness of the data. However, it is inevitable that analysis proceeds without a true concept of the subject matter, because this concept is the object of cognition and it yet to be determined.

The subject matter as a whole is defined as an abstract universal in terms of some shared attribute based on appearances and existing conceptions, and analysis continues down to the lowest common denominator covering the full variety of the material.

... the highest and ultimate point of this process of analysis is the abstract highest essence, or abstract subjective identity — and over against it, diversity. (§1711 cont'd)

This analysis continues in the same way across the whole field which is given as the subject matter. The “abstract form of the Notion” refers to the subject matter as first apprehended as a phenomenon, not yet as a concrete concept.

This progress is, however, nothing but the mere repetition of the one original act of analysis, namely, the fresh determination as a *concrete*, of what has already been taken up into the abstract form of the Notion; this is followed by the analysis of it, then by the determination afresh as a concrete of the abstract that emerges from it, and so forth. it is apprehended as something *found already there*, or, as it has also been described, as a *fact* of consciousness that with the determination *whole* is linked the determination *part*. (§1712)

What is distinctive in a given science, which distinguishes the science from arithmetic is what is the qualitatively distinctive in the subject matter.

It is a familiar fact that *arithmetic* and the more general *sciences of discrete magnitude* especially, are called *analytical science* and *analysis*. As a matter of fact, their method of cognition is immanently analytical in the highest degree ... (§1713)

The distinctive, qualitative content of the datum is what gives the whole science its distinctive nature, distinct from logic and mathematics as sciences which are merely formal.

All *other* analytic cognition starts from a concrete material that in itself possesses a contingent manifoldness; on this

material depends all distinction of content and progress to a further content. (§1713)

Up to this point, analysis uses the concepts elaborated in the Logic of Being. Analysis deals with merely external connection between its elements; its principle is that of “the One” – the end point of pure analysis and the starting point of synthesis. No new content can be produced by further analysis, so if this unit lacks any content, then only mathematical analysis can result.

the principle of discrete magnitude, the One. This relationless atom can be increased to a plurality, and externally determined and unified into a sum; this process of increasing and delimiting is an empty progression and determining that never gets beyond the same principle of the abstract one. (§1714)

At this point, Hegel presents a discourse on “pure analysis,” that is to say, mathematical subject matter.

the principle of the abstract one. ... is the determinateness that has become an *indifferent* determinateness, so that the subject matter has no determinateness that might be immanent in it and therefore a *datum* for cognition. (§1714)

When analysis has exhausted itself with determination of the One, it must make the transition to synthesis, making connections between the different units identified by analysis. Analysis completed by merely sorting the data according to an unfolding of the qualitative contents of the One and the distinctive varieties found in the object.

analysis becomes synthetic when it comes to deal with *determinations* that are no longer *posited* by the problems themselves. But the general transition from analytic to synthetic cognition lies in the necessary transition from the form of immediacy to mediation, from abstract identity to difference. Analytic cognition in its activity does not in general go beyond determinations that are self-related; but by virtue of their determinateness they are also essentially of such a nature that they relate themselves to an other. (§1719)

Here “determinations that are self-related” refers to analysis of the qualitative content of the unit determined by analysis which may reveal internal contradictions, independent of its relation to other determinations. From analysis of such internal contradictions, new relations can be discovered that are not immediately given in the subject matter.

Hegel reflects on the contrast between analytic and synthetic cognition:

Analytic cognition is the first premise of the whole syllogism – the *immediate* relation of the Notion to the object; *identity*, therefore, is the determination which it recognises as its own, and analytic cognition is merely the *apprehension* of what is. (§1720)

Analytic cognition apprehends what is but does not give any comprehension of the subject matter. Synthetic cognition seeks to determine what is necessary in the relation of diverse parts of the subject matter.

(b) Synthetic Cognition

Synthetic cognition aims at the *comprehension* of what is, that is, at grasping the multiplicity of determinations in their unity, ultimately as determinations of the same concept. It is therefore the second premise of the syllogism in which the *diverse* as such is related. Hence its aim is in general *necessity*. (§1720)

Synthetic cognition aims at grasping the subject matter as a whole, that is, so that all the determinations revealed by analysis are found to be determinations of that whole grasped as a concrete concept.

Synthetic cognition takes up the material provided by analysis and uses the concepts elaborated in the Logic of Essence, proceeding on the basis of existing knowledge.

... Now synthetic cognition passes over, in the first instance, *from abstract identity to relation*, or from *being to reflection*, and so far it is not the absolute reflection of the Notion that the Notion cognises in its subject matter. The reality it gives itself is the next stage, namely, the stated identity of the different terms as such, an identity therefore that is at the same time still *inner* and only necessity, not the subjective identity that is *for itself*; hence not yet the Notion as such. (§1720 cont'd)

Synthetic cognition at this stage is critical of existing knowledge, discovering relations hitherto not recognised or in conflict with existing knowledge. The concept elaborated in the Essence Logic are utilized here, since the Concept uniting all the products of analysis as its determination is not yet available.

Synthetic cognition, therefore, has indeed the Notion determinations for its content, and the object is posited in them; but they only stand in *relation* to one another, or are in *immediate* unity, and just for that reason, not in the unity by which the Notion exists as subject. (§1720 cont'd)

Which datum is to make the starting point of synthetic cognition is not given. The subject must select an individual datum.

the Notion's own pervasion of the object still lacks *individuality*; what corresponds to the Notion in the object is indeed no longer the abstract but the *determinate form* and therefore the *particularity* of the Notion, but the *individual* element in the object is still a *given* content. ... (§1721)

Cognition can now derive from the given data phenomena that are already known, but now demonstrating their necessity from the subject matter as analysed. But the phenomena is still not grasped as a whole in a concept.

Similarly, it finds propositions and laws, and proves their *necessity*, but not as a necessity of the subject matter in and for itself, that is, not from the Notion, but as a necessity of the cognition that works on given determinations, on the differences of the phenomenal aspect of the subject matter, and cognises *for itself* the proposition as a unity and relationship, or cognises the ground of phenomena from the *phenomena* themselves.

We have now to consider the detailed moments of synthetic cognition. (§1721 cont'd)

1. Division

To begin with the data is arranged into genre and species and the individual datum which is the subject of analysis taken as the individual moment of the concept.

First, the still given objectivity is transformed into the simple and first form, hence into the form of the *Notion*. Accordingly the moments of this apprehension are none other than the moments of the Notion, *universality, particularity and individuality*. *The individual* is the object itself as an *immediate representation*, that which is to be defined. (§1722)

Thus, the aim of synthetic cognition is a reconstruction based on a Concept of the subject matter, and utilizes the concepts elaborated in the Concept Logic. Each Division of the subject matter must be made on the basis of a concept. The problem is to determine *which* individual moment is to make the starting point for formation of the division.

The relations of the individual subject matter to its related types is specified, especially its distinction from the proximate divisions.

The universality of the object of definition we have found in the determination of the objective judgment or judgment of necessity to be the *genus*, and indeed the *proximate genus*; ... the *specific difference*, which makes it the determinate species it is and is the basis of its disjunction from the remaining species. (§1722 cont'd)

Although cognition is necessarily subjective, the subject determines the individual as belonging to the given genus and particular species.

Whereas, cognition on the contrary is subjective and has an external starting point, or it is subjective by reason of its external starting point in the individual. ... (§1724)

At this point there is still no principle available as to which individual moment is to be taken as key to the formation of a concrete concept of the subject matter.

there is no principle available for determining which sides of the subject matter are to be regarded as belonging to its Notion-determination and which merely to the external reality. (§1725)

- At this point Hegel talks about external objects and their shape.

Having completed the organisation of the data, a beginning must be made from the nature of the universal, the totality of the subject matter and the distinctive nature of the particular. Cognition proceeds in this way from an individual embodying the universal to individuals embodying the particular, and the basis for the progression must lie in the universal itself.

The universal must *particularise* itself; so far, the necessity for division lies in the universal. But since definition itself already begins with the particular, its necessity for passing over into division lies in the particular ... the individual content of cognition ascends through particularity to the extreme of universality; but now the latter must be regarded as the objective basis, and with this as the starting point, division presents itself as disjunction of the universal as the *prius*. (§1732)

Many definitions of the universal and its particular kinds are possible, but a “synthetic science” is possible only if the starting point for synthesis is selected which embodies the nature of the universal. The result is then a systematic cognition of the subject matter.

a plurality of definitions goes with the plurality of objects. The progress, proper to the Notion, from universal to particular, is the basis and the possibility of a *synthetic science*, of a *system* and of *systematic cognition*. (§1733)

This brings us to the crucial paragraph.

Synthetic cognition must begin from an individual product of analysis, that is, something simple and self-related (i.e., not a species of something else or dependent on something else for its existence), given to ordinary (i.e., rather than scientific) consciousness consciousness, provided the subject has immediate access to the object, abstracted from the concrete circumstances of its appearance, selected because it captures what is universal.

The first requisite for this is, as we have shown, that the beginning be made with the subject matter in the form of a *universal*. In the sphere of actuality, whether of nature or spirit, it is the concrete individuality that is given to subjective, natural cognition as the *prius* (*das Erste*); but in cognition that is a *comprehension* (*Begreifen*), at least to the extent that it has the form of the Notion for basis, the *prius* must be on the contrary something *simple*, something *abstracted* (*Ausgeschiedene*) from the concrete, because in this form alone has the subject-matter the form of the self-related universal or of an immediate based on the Notion. (§1734)

“Prius” means the first. “Comprehension” (*Begreifen*) means grasped as a concept, as opposed to “mere understanding” (*bloß Verstand*) or apprehension. Abstracted (*Ausgeschiedene*) means separated. “Self-related” means that the individual datum has meaning in itself, not dependent on something else.

That is synthetic cognition must begin from a simple, concrete product of analysis that is given without mediation to natural consciousness but which is, that is, can stand for, the universal, exhibiting all the essential properties of the universal, this “elementary universal” must be separated from its immediate circumstances.

- Hegel discusses that one cannot remain on the level of intuition.

Hegel again emphasizes that the simple individual datum chosen is presupposed to ordinary thought and is not to be ‘derived’.

For the cognition here considered there is no immanent limit, since it starts from the *given*, and the form of abstract universality is characteristic of its *prius*. Therefore any subject matter whatever that seems to possess an elementary universality is made the subject matter of a specific science, and is an absolute beginning to the extent that *ordinary thought is presupposed* to be acquainted with it and it is taken on its own account as requiring no derivation. (§1738)

This unit, the “elementary universal” defines the specific science which follows. Since it is known to ordinary consciousness, that is, conscious which does not have any scientific or other metaphysical theory of the unit but is acquainted with it nonetheless from everyday life in the relevant community.

Cognition now proceeds from the Universal to the Particular by dividing up the subject matter according to principles derived from analysis of the Universal as already determined by selection of the starting point. No external criteria for division into particular can be introduced.

The next step forward from this starting point is *division*. For this progress, only an immanent principle would be required, that is, a beginning from the universal and the Notion; but the cognition here considered lacks such a principle, for it only pursues the form determination of the Notion without its reflection-into-self, and therefore takes the determinateness of the content from what is given. (§1739)

There are no criteria given in advance for how division into particulars must proceed, but the subject seeks divisions which reflect the character of the elementary universal. The grounds of division are immanent in the object itself. There is no formula for how to specify the particular types to be recognised in the science.

For the particular that makes its appearance in division, there is no ground of its own available, either in regard to what is to constitute the basis of the division, or in regard to the specific relationship that the members of the

disjunction are to have to one another. Consequently in this respect the business of cognition can only consist, partly, in setting in order the particular elements discovered in the empirical material, and partly, in finding the universal determinations of that particularity by comparison. (§1739 cont'd)

Progress of synthesis does not create any new phenomena, but simply puts in order what is already known through analysis. It simply puts what is known in order such that its necessity is manifested.

These determinations are then accepted as grounds of division, and there may be a multiplicity of such grounds, as also a similar multiplicity of divisions based on them. The relationship between the members, the species, of a division, has only this general determination, that they are determined relatively to one another *in accordance with the assumed ground of division*; if their difference rested on a different consideration, they would not be coordinated on the same level with one another. (§1739 cont'd)

Each individual and particular must “exhaust the notion,” that is, demonstrate its participation in the universal by its own nature.

Because a principle of self-determination is lacking, the laws for this business of division can only consist of formal, empty rules that lead to nothing. Thus we see it laid down as a rule that division shall *exhaust* the notion; but as a matter of fact each individual member of the division must exhaust *the notion*. It is, however, really the *determinateness* of the notion that one means should be exhausted;

there exists a crowd of principles to which it has to conform, and therefore in one series of its forms follows one principle, and in other series other principles, as well as producing hybrids. (§1740)

Hegel now:

- discusses taxonomy of natural objects, but lacking a knowledge of evolution of species it lacks any scientific value. (§1741-1742)
- discusses definitions, theorems & axioms in Euclidian geometry (§§1743-1760)
- rejects the geometrical method in philosophy (§§1761-§1763)

Summing up the results of Synthetic cognition:

Here *necessity* has the position of being the *reality* or *subject matter* of the Notion, just as the Notion into which it passes now appears as the Notion's subject matter. But the transition itself is the same. Here too it is only at first

implicit and lies as yet outside cognition in our reflection; that is, it is still the inner necessity of the cognition itself. It is only the result that is for it. (§1764)

The result is the reproduction of the concrete in thought as a necessity.

The Idea, in so far as the Notion is now *explicitly* determined in and for itself, is the practical Idea, or action. (§1764 cont'd)

That completes the Idea of the True, what follows is the Idea of the Good.

The Idea of the Good

The Notion, which is its own subject matter, being determined in and for itself, the subject is determined for itself as an individual. As subjective it again presupposes an implicit otherness; it is the urge to realise itself (§1765)

A subject strives to realize itself in the objective world. And to do so, its action must be based not only on its idea of the Good, but also the Idea of the true.

the Idea of the good can therefore find its integration only in the Idea of the true. (§1772)

what is still lacking in the practical Idea is the moment of consciousness proper itself; namely, that the moment of actuality in the Notion should have attained on its own account the determination of external being. (§1771)

An idea makes its transition into the world by taking an action.

But it makes this transition through itself. In the syllogism of action, one premise is the immediate relation of the good end to actuality which it seizes on, and in the second premise directs it as an external means against the external actuality. (§1773)

In an action the subject uses the actual world as a means to change the actual world.

For the subjective Notion the good is the objective; actuality in its existence confronts is as an insuperable limitation only in so far as it still has the character of immediate existence, not of something objective in the sense of a being that is in and for itself; on the contrary, it is either the evil or the indifferent. (§1774)

The subjective mind sees the existing actuality as either worthless or evil. When the subject acts in pursuit of its own ends and the Idea of the true they succeed in changing the objective actuality.

The Idea of the Notion that is determined in and for itself is posited as being no longer merely in the active subject but as equally an immediate actuality; and conversely, this actuality is posited, as it is in cognition, as an objectivity possessing a true being. (§1779)

With this the individuality of the subject vanishes as it acts as it must.

The individuality of the subject with which the subject was burdened by its presupposition, has vanished along with the presupposition; (§1780)