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Frederic Riu and Kant's *Critique*: Hegel in the Mirror World*

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ὄψις τῶν ἀδήλων τὰ φαινόμενα
ANAXÁGORAS, B 21 a

“Daréte el dulce fruto sazonado del peral en la rama ponderosa.
¿Quieres decir que me darás una pera?
¡Claro!”

ANTONIO MACHADO

abstract

I will introduce and explain in this article the basic features of the philosophy of my friend and colleague at the School of Philosophy at the Universidad Central de Venezuela Frederic (Federico) Riu i Farré (1925–1985). Riu is a thinker of the difference between real experience and rational system, and conceived of philosophy as a kind of sentry of the “Encyclopedia of Unified Sciences”. Hence the critical attention given to the basic ontological positions held by Husserl, Heidegger, Hartmann and Sartre. And hence his return to the examination of the philosophies of Kant and Hegel, in light of the conditions of twentieth century thought..

key words

Frederic Riu, Federico Riu, Catalan philosophy, Venezuelan philosophy, exile, phenomenology.

* The following pages are written in memory of Frederic Riu, a friend who shall never be forgotten. For nearly a quarter of a century, our friendship remained strong, warts and all, until on a summer night in 1984, when, just before the penultimate round of drinks and our farewell hugs, we ventured to make plans together for retirement, naive perhaps of ὕβρις and forgetful, in any case, of how envious the gods can be.

At the end of the 1960's, political and academic preoccupations fuelled the philosophical inquiries of Frederic Riu¹, a professor of metaphysics at the School of Philosophy in the Central University of Venezuela. At that time, Riu's thinking appeared in books such as *Historia y totalidad* and *Ensayos sobre Sartre*². Shortly beforehand, in 1966, however, Riu had already displayed his critical intelligence in the work *Ontología del siglo XX*³. In its pages, Riu's intimate *Einfühlung* and the intensity of his critical engagement with the philosophies of Husserl, Hartmann, Heidegger and Sartre seem to apply the sense of the Hegelian metaphor that truth is revealed only at twilight, when day's work is done. In reality, all of Riu's essays chart this moment of farewell, much as Haydn's Farewell Symphony does. Guided by an interpretative aim that unfolds in two parts, the essays open with a passionately "objective" exposition of a theme or author, and then develop into a kind of critical *Umwälzung*, dismantling the "system" under examination in order to show its logical inconsistencies and/or discontinuities. In each case, Riu's crucial touchstone is the contrast between the principles and categories of the "system" and the original data of experience.

Perhaps this was Riu's valued theme, the real "difference" that resists every attempt at rational mediation, the difference represented by daily events in their immediacy, in the innumerable moments of "here and now" that surround us. Frequently and not without irony, Riu evoked this difference in order to gauge the distance that separates the notion of "system" from common experience. Lines by Antonio Machado –one of Riu's favourite authors– feature in the epigraph⁴ precisely to introduce the philosophical humanity of Frederic Riu: his elegant and mordant sense of humour, his opposition to anything that might be pointlessly sententious, and his long-standing idea of philosophy as metaphysical knowledge grounded through the Socratic method. I think that Riu's view of Machado's duet might perhaps tolerate "*el dulce fruto sazonado del peral*", provided that we could

1 With permission, I refer to Giulio F Pagallo, "Federico Riu y la ontología contemporánea", *Apuntes filosóficos* 11 (1997), p. 39-57.

2 Federico Riu, *Historia y totalidad*, Caracas: Monte Ávila Editores 1968 and *Ensayos sobre Sartre*, Caracas: Monte Ávila Editores 1968. Both essays are collected in *Obras completas I* [Foreword by Fernando Rodríguez], Caracas: Monte Ávila Editores Latinoamericana 1996, p. 83-134 and 135-297, respectively.

3 Federico Riu, *Ontología del siglo XX*, Caracas. Ediciones de la Biblioteca de la Universidad Central de Venezuela 1966; now collected in *Obras completas I*, p. 3-82.

4 Manuel and Antonio Machado, "Amplificación superflua", in *Obras completas*, Madrid: Editorial Plenitud 1962, p. 1131.

quickly turn back to the real pear eaten with pleasure, a ripe pear and not too expensive. *Res non verba!*

If we turn back to *Ontología del siglo XX* and the philosophies of Husserl, Hartmann, Heidegger and Sartre, the idea that ties the different analyses to a single purpose is this: the crisis befalling the positivist vision of reality and knowledge led to the disappearance of the notion of philosophy as a straightforward *ancilla scientiarum* or, in its ultimate representation, as a sentinel of the “encyclopedia of the unified sciences”. As a consequence, the period covering the end of the nineteenth century and the early decades of the twentieth century saw a call for the return to metaphysics in order to revalidate the principle by which philosophy was simply, first and foremost, *episteme* and first science. The renewed claims of metaphysics gave rise to two programmes of ontology. The first adopted a realist perspective and emphasized the return to “things themselves”. It characterized the Being of a thing in terms of its autonomy and thereby prevented its reduction to a mere phenomenon of subjective consciousness. By contrast, the second programme viewed the transcendental self as a horizon of critical thinking and, therefore, reduced the object and the thing-in-itself to a phenomenon of the self’s consciousness. Of these two programmes, the latter is the one that held sway. Riu noted that the philosophies of our century not only pay heed to the theses of Husserl but are actually tied to his idea of “constitution”, which entails “an ontological approach that interrogates the conditions of possibility [...] of the appearance of the thing as thing”. In this sense, contemporary ontology “is linked to the modern idealist tradition that culminates in Kant, for whom” –Riu reminds us, and not without a certain tone of irony– “the proud name of ontology must give way to a more humble analytic of pure knowledge”⁵.

In one of his last and most committed exercises in philosophical historiography, Riu surveyed the panorama of contemporary ontology and concluded that we needed to look at Kant again. Going back to Kant, according to Riu, involves not only asking what the authentic principle of contemporary philosophy is, but also seeing that the *Critique* has left us a legacy that it is in all likelihood the thorniest, most tangled version of the “difference” between formal rationalism and empiricism. The *Aufhebung* of this difference passes through the German idealism of Schelling and Hegel to the Frankfurt School to Sartre’s critique of dialectical reasoning. It should come as no surprise, then, that Riu proposes a metaphysical reading of Kant that differs sharply from the interpretations of the Neo-Kantians and the idealism of Croce

5 *Ontología del siglo XX*, p. 33–34.

and Gentile. In essence, Riu's lecture on *Crítica y metafísica en Kant*⁶ in 1981 represents his own intellectual autobiography and, at the same time, the end point of his studies of Sartre, Lukács and Marxism, as well as a new opening –only sketchily outlined– toward a discussion of the problem of technique in Heidegger and Ortega y Gasset, which features in his last essays, published posthumously⁷.

Going back to Kant, Riu introduces his analysis by recalling that the author of the *Critique* wished to “resolve the problem of metaphysical knowledge”, i.e. of a “rational knowledge that would provide the universal predicates (categories) of the object in general or of the object as object”. For metaphysics to take the form of rational knowledge, it must “be carried out by means of a defined set of *a priori* concepts” that “do not derive and cannot be derived from experience”, even though the concepts aim to “constitute the absolutely universal and necessary predicates with which we think of the objects of experience”. Only because the Kantian concepts “contain a synthesis that cannot be empirical, because of their apodictic character” does our experience assume universally valid forms without which metaphysics, as a science, would be impossible⁸.

In relation to the tradition of modern rationalism, the Kantian project radically modifies the meaning of *a priori* concepts and the meaning of the object. The “Copernican revolution” manifest in the *Critique* proposes the principle “that objects are governed by *a priori* concepts” and, therefore, that “*a priori* concepts refer to objects [...] with absolute necessity and universality”. Metaphysics is put back on the right path “down the sure road of science”. As a consequence of this Copernican revolution, the notions of object and *a priori* concept acquire a meaning that differs greatly from their meaning in traditional

6 Federico Riu, “El mundo del espejo. Crítica y metafísica en Kant.” Text of the lecture given on 21 October 1981, in tribute to Kant on the occasion of the bicentenary of the *Critique of Pure Reason*, organized by the *Instituto de Filosofía de la Universidad Central de Venezuela*, *Episteme* NS II, 1-3, p. 85-117; now in *Obras completas II*, Caracas: Monte Ávila 2005, p. 391-421. Cf. Ezra Heymann, “El Kant de Federico Riu y el problema de la consistencia de la 2ª edición de la Crítica de la razón pura”, *Episteme* NS 8, 1 (1988), p. 13-25; and José Herrera, “El mundo del espejo. Historia y reflexión en Federico Riu”, in ID., *Tres fundamentaciones de la Filosofía Marxista en Venezuela*, Caracas: Ediciones de la Biblioteca de la Universidad Central de Venezuela 2011, p. 41-71.

7 Federico Riu, “Sobre la técnica”, in ID., *Obras completas III*, p. 519-613; also independently in: ID., *Ensayos sobre la técnica en Ortega, Heidegger, García Bacca, Mayz*, Rubí: Anthropos Editorial 2010.

8 *Op. cit.*, p. 391-392.

9 *Op. cit.*, p. 392.

metaphysics. First, “the object is not the thing that exists in and of itself, but the transcendental unity of a diversity of sensible representations given in the intuition, in the phenomenon. Second, the *a priori* concept is not a representation of any property of the thing as thing, but a transcendental representation, a pure form, introduced in the function of judgement, which confers unity to the sensible diversity of intuition”¹⁰. Starting from these preliminary considerations, how should we understand the relation between some object of knowledge and some other real object, to which the former appears to refer?

For Riu, there are two ways of interpreting the question above: “Either the object is something beyond representations and denotes the thing-in-itself; or the object is something that does not cross the threshold of representations, but rather denotes a specific unified consciousness of the representations”. Riu states that, despite the intricate hermeneutics of the “transcendental object” in the first edition of the *Critique*, “We know that Kant’s doctrine aims at the second possibility”¹¹. That is, the thing-in-itself cannot cross the horizon of transcendental consciousness to become an autonomous and independent thing. However, the “change of method” formulated by Kant “involves the application of a given interpretation of scientific knowledge to metaphysical knowledge”¹². Further still, the reduction of everything we know to “a diversity of sensible representations synthetically unified” leads to the idea that “metaphysical knowledge is intrinsically constitutive of experience” and that “anything that is apparently as remote from such knowledge as physics is, nonetheless contains it as an internal condition of its possibility”¹³.

If we examine the essential aspects of Riu’s analysis on this point, we observe first that “everything revolves around the concept of phenomenon”. His fundamental understanding is that “the theoretical fixing of this concept must necessarily occur in contraposition to the notion of the thing-in-itself”. This is because “it is not only that the concept of phenomenon cannot be defined without the notion of the thing-in-itself, but that, right from the start, this *caput mortuum*, as Hegel calls it, dislocates the coherence and solidity that many grant Kant’s doctrine”¹⁴. In the text of the *Critique*, we see at B, 69 that “in the phenomenon, objects and even the properties we assign to objects are also

10 *Op. cit.*, p. 394.

11 *Op. cit.*, p. 397.

12 *Op. cit.*, p. 392.

13 *Op. cit.*, p. 396.

14 *Op. cit.*, p. 409.

considered as something really given”, so that it seems to establish “a distinction between the object as a phenomenon and the same object as a thing-in-itself”¹⁵. The interpreter will object that this distinction is highly problematic, because the relation of the given object with the subject “is fulfilled between a representation put in space and a subject and, in this sense, no distinction can be drawn ‘in the object itself’ as a phenomenon and as a thing-in-itself”. Effectively: “Where is the object? If it exists in space, as the *Aesthetics* indicates, then it must be said to exist in a mental, ideal, imaginary realm and the subject-object relation is equally an ideal, intentional relation of consciousness”¹⁶.

At the crucial juncture of his interpretation, Riu’s response draws on the literary imagination that bolstered his critical acuity: “The form in which we must understand the relation of the phenomenon and the thing-in-itself, according to the assumptions of the *Critique*, is totally different [...]. To employ a simile, the world of phenomena is like the world of the mirror. [...] The world of the mirror is an ideal world. In it, space, depth and relations exist only to the extent that we perceive them.” Metaphorically, the world of phenomena “is like the realm of an immense mirror without borders, without a frame. At the same time, we are the mirror and we behold it. Presumably, the mirror reflects what is unknown to us, but this original thing is not “in” the mirror or “behind” it or before it. Rather it is nowhere. What the mirror reflects is the subject itself separated from what produces and beholds it and what is believed illusorily to move within it. [...] The world of phenomena is not the *same* world as the thing-in-itself insofar as it appears to a subject, but it is another world, unreal and imaginary, with a relation to the world of the thing-in-itself that, if it does exist, we do not know. It is not only *formaliter*, but also *materialiter* different”¹⁷. Once we affirm “the transcendental ideality of space” as Kant does, it becomes impossible to hold that any distinction can be established “in the object itself” between phenomenon and thing-in-itself. In effect, “there can be only representations”¹⁸ in a space limited to *ens imaginarium*, or mental space. Riu adds, however, that “I can think” that each of these representations “given or put in space corresponds nowhere to a thing-

15 *Op. cit.*, p. 412.

16 *Ibidem*.

17 *Op. cit.*, p. 412-413.

18 *Op. cit.*, p. 413.

in-itself, but this thought is a conjecture, an opinion, a belief, that the *Critique* does not demonstrate”¹⁹.

This is the critical passage: “Having reached this point, we need to address the discussion raised by Kant himself as to whether the phenomenon is an appearance or an apparition”²⁰. The issue appears in these terms: “What is in me *seems* to be outside me”. This brings into the play the distinction between the “ingenuous realist consciousness” for which “bodies are outside me and I perceive them as things-in-themselves” and the “transcendental critic”, who has access to the knowledge that “some bodies are only representations that are in me” so that, in short, it is only “within the mind that bodies *seem* to be outside”²¹. Therefore, “it must be said that the phenomenon is the apparition of an appearance and the appearance of an apparition”²².

With this proposition, Riu turns to the text in which “Kant specifies the meaning of his transcendental idealism as opposed to transcendental realism and empirical realism”²³. From the viewpoint of transcendental idealism, “all phenomena are seen as mere representations and not as things-in-themselves”. By contrast, transcendental realism “views external phenomena as things-in-themselves, existing independently of ourselves and our sensibility”, while lastly empirical idealism thinks that “all our representations are unable to ensure the reality of these same objects”²⁴. Between the transcendental idealist and the empirical idealist, Kant poses the following difference: the latter, having only the “certainty of the existence of *his* representations” cannot be certain that there exist “objects external and independent of himself”. By contrast, the transcendental idealist is certain of the existence of these objects because “*existing outside of me* does not mean independently of me, but rather in space”, which “is me, is a representation, but causes what it represents in space to appear as outside me”²⁵.



19 *Ibidem*.

20 *Op. cit.*, p. 414.

21 *Ibidem*.

22 *Op. cit.*, p. 418.

23 *Op. cit.*, p. 416.

24 *Op. cit.*, p. 416–417.

25 *Op. cit.*, p. 417.

In the preceding characterization, the concepts of “appearance” and “apparition” have a highly specialized meaning, at least with respect to the crucial role they play in the critique of the Kantian theory of knowledge. The insistence with which Riu underscores their extremely problematic character suggests a possible connection with a similar aspect of themes raised by Hegel in several of his works, starting with his first attempts to tackle Kant’s *Critique*. Riu warns that the Kantian notion of “subjectivity” makes the concept of the “thing-in-itself” inconsistent, if not contradictory, and this brings to mind the Hegelian definition of the “thing-in-itself” as an incoherent and useless *caput mortuum* in Kant’s philosophy. In addition, the categories of “appearance” and “apparition”, justifiably used to foreground obscure points and amphibologisms in the *Critique*, evoke, to some extent, the dialectical nature of “apparent knowledge” in the sensible consciousness, the experience of which is consummated –in Riu’s reading of Kant– in the endless *Aufhebung* of the “certainty of truth” by the “truth of certainty”.

Another critical consideration that recalls the inspiration behind an important extract from Hegel’s *Phenomenology* is Riu’s observation on the improper character of Kantian assertions on the existence of external objects. The transcendental idealist, Riu says, cannot have an awareness “that external things exist, but only that things that *seem* external to the immediate and ingenuous consciousness are in reality ‘internal things’, images”²⁶. Riu points to the logical and semantic distortion that Kant commits here: “Once this reflection has been made, an immediate consciousness or perception is superseded in the sense of being preserved” –here again, this is the exact sense of the Hegelian notion of *Aufhebung*– “but decoded and integrated in a higher truth. Returning to the plane of immediate consciousness as though nothing had occurred, therefore, is an error. Immediacy is not suppressed, but mediated, and this mediation transforms it”: “the world of phenomena, which for the immediate ingenuous consciousness is revealed” –Hegel would say, *is experienced*– “as a world of things-in-themselves, outside of me, is, for the consciousness that has performed transcendental reflection, a world of apparent things, of mental objects, of subjective representations”²⁷. In his introduction to the *Phenomenology*, Hegel used this analogy: “Consciousness, however, is its own *concept* and, therefore, it is immediately the act of going beyond what is limited and, as what is limited belongs to it, it is the act of going beyond itself. [...] Consequently, the consciousness causes itself to suffer the violence brought about by limited satisfaction.

26 *Op. cit.*, p. 418.

27 *Op. cit.*, p. 418-419.

Feeling this violence, anxiety can certainly shrink from the truth and aspire to conserve the very thing whose loss threatens it”²⁸.

However, the possible consonances between the starting points of these critical considerations in opposition to the Kantian theory of phenomenological knowledge and the “thing-in-itself” do not in any way imply an identity of systematic intentions or aims. For Riu, the critique of Kant and his work provides a more solid foundation for metaphysical realism.



Let us return to the main threads of Riu’s argument. The first observation to highlight in the context of the transcendental analytic is the contradictory nature of the postulate of the “thing-in-itself”, which takes us directly to the Hegelian formula of the *caput mortuum*. In Hegel’s case, this *mot d’esprit* may be fitting, but it is not simple. Rather, it is the synthetic expression of the very essence of Kantianism. It represents the reflective sublimation of the sensible consciousness, which maintains the opposition between subject and object as essential to itself. “In every dualist system, but especially in Kantianism, the fundamental defect can be seen in the incoherence into which the system relapses in its desire to unify”, i.e., when it seeks to unify moments of Being and thought that are seen as separate and independent. “This way of doing philosophy lacks the simple awareness that, with such toing and froing” –that is, from the Being *per se* of the “thing” to the science of phenomena– “each of these singular determinations is declared as insufficient, and the defect consists in the impotence of putting two thoughts together (given that the form only allows for two)”²⁹.

Long before the *Encyclopedia*, in the first lines of the “Vorerinnerung” of his *Differenz des Fichteschen und Schellingschen Systems der Philosophie* (1801), Hegel criticizes the improper and insufficient development of the original speculative principle in Kant’s three critiques. The meaning of the “identity of subject and object”, Hegel argues, is turned upside down by Kant under the light of understanding and his analytic procedure. As a result, the absolute identity of the foundation is transformed into an equally absolute opposition, much as

28 G. W. F. Hegel, *Fenomenologia de l’esperit*, trad. into Catalan by Joan Leita, Barcelona: Editorial Laia, 1985, vol. 1, p. 114.

29 G. W. F. Hegel, *Enciclopedia de las ciencias filosóficas*, Mexico City: Juan Pablos Editor 1974, p. 57.

in the old dualist metaphysics. Only, Hegel adds, “with greater arrogance under the name of critical philosophy”³⁰.

En *Glauben und Wissen* (1802), Hegel undertakes a thorough examination of the *Reflexionsphilosophie* of Kant, Jacobi and Fichte and frames the inquiry in its essential terms: for the formalism of critical idealism –Kant’s philosophy– “the subject and things, or the non-I, each exist in themselves –the I of ‘I think’ and the thing-in-itself”. Interrelated, each is identical to the other. However, this is a simple formal identity “that appears as a causal connection so that the thing-in-itself becomes object by receiving from the active subject a certain determination –which, therefore, is one and identical in both; but both are also something completely different, identical as the sun and the rock can be identical in relation to heat, when the sun warms the rock”. Therefore, “the absolute identity of subject and object has gone beyond a formal identity as such and the transcendental idealism in this formal, or rather psychological, idealism”³¹. Consequently, this is a philosophy that is, in a certain sense, “the development of the philosophy of Locke”, but it interprets “perception itself as immanent form, and this signifies an enormous advantage, because the emptiness of perception or *a priori* spontaneity is absolutely full of content” and “at the same time, *a priori* understanding becomes, at least in general, *a posteriori* [...] and this results in a formal concept of reason (*Vernunft*) that is both *a priori* and *a posteriori*, both identical and non-identical, in an absolute unity, the idea of which (*Idee*) continues to be understanding (*Verstand*), and only its product is known as an *a priori* judgment (*Urteil*)”³². It is precisely this space in which the *caput mortuum* of abstract objectivity takes refuge. Using this formula, Hegel adds: “The richness of thought always unfolds in Kant, therefore, only in an exclusively subjective form; all fullness, all content, fall within the act of representing, of thinking, of postulating. What is objective, according to Kant, is only this in-itselfness, without knowing what things-in-themselves are. However, this in-itselfness is only the *caput mortuum*, the dead abstraction of what is other, the indeterminate empty Beyond”³³.

30 G.W.F.Hegel, *Werke in zwanzig Bänden, 2, Jenaer Schriften (1801-1807)*, Frankfurt a. M. 1970, p. 9, 10.

31 *Op. cit.*, p. 310.

32 *Op. cit.*, p. 314.

33 G.F.W. Hegel, *Lecciones sobre la historia de la filosofía III*, trad. into Spanish by W. Rocés; ed. prepared by Elsa Cecilia Frost, Mexico City – Buenos Aires: Fondo de Cultura Económica 1955, p. 455.

Following this line of thought, Riu focuses on the inherent contradiction for Kant in the relation of the subject and the “thing-in-itself”. His view appears to take the Hegelian approach with respect to their ultimate consequences. For example, Kant states that “what is not found in the object-in-itself is always found, contrary to that, in its relations with the subject”, so that “it is justifiable to assign the predicates of space and time to objects of the senses as such, without any appearance existing in this case”. To this, Riu’s response is blunt: “Kant, in this text, refers to the relation of the predicates of the perceived object and the perceived object, a tautology, while we refer not to the predicates but to the object as such, to the phenomenon considered as a whole. To the extent that I cannot attribute the phenomenon to the object-in-itself, what supposedly appears is an appearance”. In conclusion, Riu writes, “We must say, therefore, that the phenomenon is the apparition of an appearance and the appearance of an apparition”. He goes further: if “Kant fixes the concept of apparition in the context of the subject-object relation in itself, and if this is not as it appears, I am saying that the apparition is an appearance”³⁴.

In the end, the most difficult conceptual knot in Kant arises from an erroneous notion of phenomenon, because a phenomenon must have value not only as appearance but also as “apparition”, that is, the manifestation of the “object-in-itself” to the consciousness. Riu’s insistence on singling out the aporetic character of Kant’s concept of phenomenon invites us to turn back to the interpretative registers used by Hegel, in order to highlight the dialectical character of the “experience” of consciousness and of the *Erscheinung* of knowledge. With this aim, two instances of the Hegelian critique are relevant: first, the criticism levelled at the formalism of Kantian philosophy, which becomes “empty idealism” in need of empirical integration. Effectively, this approach focuses on the barely *a priori* classification of categories. And second, the contradictory structure of the “object”, as it is given in the sensible certainty and successive figures of the consciousness of phenomena.

With respect to the first issue, abstract reasoning “has forgotten” the path that it must follow to constitute itself. Therefore, “its first act of declaration is only this abstract, empty word that says that everything is *its*. [...] The first reasoning known in the object is expressed in empty idealism which [...] by pointing to the pure *myness* of consciousness in all Being and expressing things as sensations or representations, imagines that it has pointed to this pure *myness* as an accomplished reality”. However, this idealism is “at the same time, an absolute empiricism, for by the *act of filling* the empty *myness*, i.e. by the act of having the difference, and all development and all configuration of this very dif-

34 Federico Riu, *El mundo del espejo* cit., p. 414-415.

ference, the reasoning of this idealism lacks an outside impulse in which there is only the *varied multiplicity* of perceiving and representing”. In this way, it cannot reconcile “its contradictory thoughts, the thought of the pure consciousness as a whole reality and also the thought of the outside impulse or the sensible act of perceiving and representing as an identical reality, but rather it fluctuates constantly between one and the other”³⁵.

This first observation of Hegel appears to be reflected in Riu’s remark on the direct *suppositio* that the phenomena, the simple data of consciousness, move toward the “thing-in-itself” in the *Critique*, and that this move entails a highly contradictory shift toward the “thing-in-itself” of empirical traits, such as time and space, that cannot be predicated of the numinous object, whichever way you look at it, because it escapes any form of sensible intuition on its own. “In short,” notes Riu, “Kant founds transcendental idealism in order to provide a foundation for empirical realism”, which is equivalent to incorporating “the very figure of immediate consciousness”, i.e. the separation of representations and actually existing things. However, this operation leads to one of two results: “to a philosophy of ‘as if’ or to scepticism (we take phenomena as if they were objects-in-themselves, knowing that they are not)”. By contrast, if “the transcendental foundation remains faithful to itself, it is obliged to go –according to the understanding of Post-Kantian idealists– beyond empirical realism”. This signifies that “it must stop being critical. Otherwise, it is unsustainable”³⁶.

In his *Encyclopedia*, for example, Hegel cleanly argues a variation of what Riu points out about the impossibility that what is “apparent” to the consciousness at the same time signifies the “apparition” of the “thing-in-itself”. At §41, Hegel observes that the Kantian investigation of the forms of knowledge preserves “the opposition of subjectivity and objectivity” and expands it to such an extent “that he brings together in subjectivity” both of the two moments of experience, i.e. the particular sensible matter and the *a priori* forms “and it leaves only the thing-in-itself in their place”³⁷. However, even the categories by which “mere perception is raised to objectivity, to experience”, to the extent that they are interpreted “as a unity only of the subjective consciousness [...] are equally a purely subjective element”³⁸. In effect, the “thing-in-itself” is reduced to object as “pure abstraction, the specific absolute emptiness only as a Beyond; the

35 G.F.W. Hegel, *Fenomenologia de l’esperit* cit., p. 147-148.

36 Riu, *Obras completas* cit., p. 419.

37 Hegel, *Enciclopedia* cit., p. 43-44.

38 *Op. cit.*, § 43, p. 45.

negative element of representation, of sensibility, of the given thought, etc.” In addition, “it is also clear that this *caput mortuum* is only the product of thought, of thought continued into pure abstraction; the empty self makes this empty identity into its own object”³⁹. With clarity, Hegel shows the subjectivity both of phenomena and of the “thing-in-itself”. There is no doubt that “if we take this unqualified as the absolute and true object of reason”, the knowledge of experience becomes “what is not true, such as appearance”⁴⁰. However, in the contrary direction, it also becomes the thing-in-itself, the “truth” of which – as Riu repeatedly indicates– must be only the product of thought, according to Hegel. Therefore, “if Kantian philosophy is only a subjective idealism” that has assumed subjectivity “as the ultimate absolutely affirmative determination”, then the “thing-in-itself” also becomes no more than “appearance”⁴¹. The fact that experience integrates the two parts –the *a priori* categories and the sensible intuitions– “constitutes a correct analysis without any doubt whatever”, even though, as Hegel remarks, it leads to a “singular contradiction”: “because the first part of experience is subjective *per se*”, and “the objective part, which should be in opposition to the subjective, is also subjective” to the extent that “it is enclosed within the circle of my own consciousness”. In effect, “the categories are only determinations of our thinking and understanding”⁴².

According to Hegel, the negative reflection that affects phenomena and the thing-in-itself depends on the nature of the “object” of sensible consciousness. In reality, “the object must have an essential property that constitutes its Being as simple in itself”; at the same time, “however, it must also contain diversity”. In other words, it must refer to what exists in itself, independently of consciousness⁴³. Here it is possible to find the paralogism into which Kant again falls in his attempt to mediate between phenomenon–appearance and phenomenon–apparition. As Riu notes, this attempt is doomed to failure. The certainty of the sensible consciousness, says Hegel, implies that the object be called “*phenomenon* [*Erscheinung*]”, and not simple appearance [*Schein*], because it is “*Being* that is immediately in itself a *non-being*”. The phenomenon in itself is “the *complete set* of appearance [...] the object that *is in itself*”, “true to its consciousness”. However, at the same time, the

39 *Op. cit.*, § 44, p. 45.

40 *Op. cit.*, § 45, p. 46.

41 *Op. cit.*, § 46, p. 46.

42 Hegel, *Lecciones sobre la historia de la filosofía* cit., p. 430–431.

43 Hegel, *Fenomenologia de l'esperit*, cit., p. 146–147.

consciousness “is not yet conscious of this basis”, and for the consciousness, the object of its certainty “is not yet the *objective* phenomenon that disappears”⁴⁴.

If we move from the *Phenomenology* to the *Science of Logic* and its second chapter on “Essence”, the analysis of the “appearance (phenomenon)” is presented in its essential dialectical terms. “The world that exists in and for itself” and the “world that appears” are two worlds that “are interrelated such that what is positive in the phenomenal world is negative in the world that exists in and for itself, and vice versa, what is negative in the former is positive in the latter. [...] Indeed, it is precisely in this opposition that both worlds have *disappeared in their difference*, and what should be a world existing in and for itself is itself a phenomenal world, and vice versa, the phenomenal world is itself an essential world”⁴⁵.



“That the *Critique*, on the one hand, contains the thing-in-itself, the entity as entity, as a troublesome residue, a phantom that is present but impossible to capture and that finds no place in the system and, on the other hand, that it sets out the programme of transcendental constitution, are two faces of the same spiritual fact that retain a particular tension in the *Critique*”⁴⁶.

Perhaps it is precisely this tension that enables us to say good-bye to Immanuel Kant, without having left Kantianism behind yet, in the dimension of modern and even post-modern society. In the last part of his essay, Riu proposes a historical interpretation of the *Critique*, according to which Kant’s work transcends the reservations about its theory and takes on another –and perhaps more significant– meaning in how it has gradually planted the roots of reason in history, paving the way for the contemporary triumph of science and technology. “In this way, what we think of the *Critique* today depends to a great extent on what the *Critique* has contributed to the shaping of who we are”⁴⁷. “The seminal idea in Kant’s work”, writes Riu in his final remarks, “that ‘reason only recognises what it itself produces’ has become the key principle of

44 *Op. cit.*, p. 161-162.

45 G.W.F. Hegel, *Ciencia de la lógica*, trad. into Spanish by A. and R. Mondolfo, foreword by R. Mondolfo, Buenos Aires 1968², p. 448.

46 Riu, *Obras completas III*, cit., p. 420-421.

47 *Op. cit.*, p. 409.

life today. For this reason, the ongoing debate about whether the *Critique* shall survive the new geometries or the new physics will always fall short of what the *Critique* has already achieved in historical reality, it will always come up short with respect to what this prodigious work, as Hegel and Heidegger considered it, says to us and demands of us⁴⁸.

The historical progress promoted by Kantian reason has reached the highest level of universality, captured by Francis Bacon in his aphorism *homo tantum potest quantum scit*. This, according to Riu, has increased and continues to increase the radius of human power *ad infinitum*. "To put it as Hegel did, if we take the *Critique* not only as a work expressing the opinions of the subject Kant, but also as the manifestation of a moment in the historical development of humanity, then the *Critique* has been realized and continues to be realized in us on a scale that surpasses all learned discussion"⁴⁹.

Riu invites us to think in a Hegelian manner by considering the actual thinking of Hegel in *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*. Hegel looks beyond the unpolished style and logical inconsistencies and considers that, from a theoretical perspective, Kant has traced "the rhythm of knowledge, of scientific movement, as a general schema" and "in this manner, Kant historically indicates the moments of everything and precisely defines and distinguishes them", providing philosophy with a solid starting point. Nevertheless, what is even more important than the "system" is the fact that the Kantian conception of reason has intervened in the life of human beings and "thought and thinking have, for the time being, become an insuperable necessity that it is not possible for us to abolish". In this way, "thought has spread all over the world, it has adhered to all, it investigates all, it gives its forms to all, it systematize all; such that it is necessary to proceed in accordance with its determinations and not in accordance with a simple feeling, routine or common sense, this immense unconsciousness of so-called practical men".

In the final analysis, "it is necessary to proceed rationally in theology as in governments and their legislation, with respect to the purpose of the state, industry and mechanics, and we begin to hear of the rational operation of a brewery, a tile factory, etc."⁵⁰.

Even in their references to a possible original foundation for contemporary technical rationality, the Kantian readings of Hegel and Riu appear to

48 *Op. cit.*, p. 421.

49 *Op. cit.*, p. 409.

50 Hegel, *Lecciones sobre la historia de la filosofía* cit., p. 459, 460.

agree on the individuation of an identical *arché*. Although the theoretical developments of the *Critique of Pure Reason* fall far short of the speculative idea that underpins them, the principle of its Copernican revolution, for both Hegel and Riu, defines the destiny of the modern world, ensuring a philosophical foundation for the ideology of scientific and technical progress, and the boundless expansion of the *regnum hominis*.

Translated from Catalan by Joe Graham