

Alper Türken, Istanbul

The Infinite Drive: Hegel on Selfhood as Overcoming Otherness

1. Things vs. Selves

At the root of the many anxieties that haunt modern philosophy's relation with the concept of self lies a narrow notion of selfhood that identifies it with consciousness. This notion is at the heart of Descartes's *res cogitans* and is further radicalized by Kant's understanding of the unity of self as based on the original and synthetic unity of apperception, i.e. self-consciousness. According to the Kantian line of thought, if we cannot attribute apperceptive self-consciousness to an entity, we do not seem to have a principled way to differentiate it from merely a thing. If we accept with Kant that, self-consciousness and consciousness are primarily conceptual affairs and conceptual activity is the prerogative of human beings, we end up with a highly restrictive understanding of selfhood.

This notion is also linked with the impoverishment of rationality by seeing it merely as a product of consciousness and failing to recognize the immanent rational continuity between nature, unconscious mental processes, consciousness and sociality leading to a divorce between human sentience and sapience. This is an important aspect of the familiar divorce between nature on one side and consciousness and reason on the other. The outcome is a perpetual tug-of-war between dualistic and reductionist physicalist accounts of the mental in their many flavors. The Cartesian-Kantian identification of selfhood to consciousness and self-consciousness is at the heart of this impasse. Hegel made a plausible attempt towards overcoming it in his metaphysics of self.

To put it in Hegelian jargon, for Hegel the metaphysical structure of the self is the true infinite form. Hegel's primary objective with this move is to reconcile natural, mental and social aspects of selfhood without committing neither to dualist supernaturalism nor to materialist reductionism nor to panpsychism. According to Hegel, a self involves an essential dynamic tension between its own finite real existence (*Dasein*) and inherent true infinity. This inherent tension between selves finitude and true infinity, and the drive to overcome it, is the common ontological ground of natural dimensions of