The Evolution of Reason: Post-Kantian Transformations of Rationality

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Abstract

This outline of "The Evolution of Reason: Post-Kantian Transformations of Rationality" is based on the idea that there is a profound philosophical history of the idea of reason, which indicates the evolution and dynamics behind this concept. This paper aims to illuminate the transformative impact of Immanuel Kant's critical philosophy on the post-Kantian discourse surrounding the idea of reason. By keeping this in mind, it sheds light on the Kantian conception of reason to draw the lineage between Kantian and post-Kantian thoughts regarding this idea. It is evident that after Kant, many philosophers were immensely influenced by him and shaped their standpoint on rationality (whether by reconstructing or criticising his ideas). That is why, to fulfil the purpose of this paper, I have highlighted the evolution of the concept of reason by following some prominent philosophers of the 19th to the 21st century, viz., Hegel, Foucault, and Habermas. The analysis of the idea of rationality through the lens of these aforementioned philosophers reveals that this evolution of reason marks a significant philosophical transformation, placing rationality at the core of modern thought. However, this also illuminates that the concept of reason or rationality simultaneously faces criticisms, due to its destructive, dominating, and abstract nature. Hence, this paper intends to highlight the lineage, or the legacy of Kantian reason, that implies its evolutionary aspect and also continues to shape contemporary debates on rationality.

Keywords

Reason, Rationality, Evolution, Kant, Post-Kantian, Hegel, Foucault, Habermas.

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Prelude

The concept of reason occupies a central place in both ordinary discourse and philosophical inquiry. Commonly, it is invoked in two distinct senses. In one sense, "reason" is employed to signify the underlying cause of an event—we seek the reason why something occurs, thus treating it as the explanatory ground of an effect. In another, more profound sense, "reason" designates the highest faculty of human cognition, the intellectual power through which thought attains coherence, judgment, and self-reflection. From the standpoint of psychological analysis, human action is mediated by the nervous system, comprising the sensory (receptive) and motor (active) nerves. These systems enable our engagement with the phenomenal world (Sinha, 1984, p. 25).[1] However, their operations are not autonomous; they are directed by the guidance of reason, which serves as the rational principle underlying knowledge and action.

At this juncture, I turn to a philosophical exploration of the concept of reason. In the history of philosophy, reason emerges not as a static notion, but as one shaped and reshaped across epochs of thought. To contemplate the idea of reason is to be drawn toward fundamental inquiries concerning its origin, definition, nature, and scope. Philosophical attempts to define reason have yielded many perspectives, each reflecting diverse metaphysical and epistemological commitments. To my mind, reason may be understood as the distinctive faculty that constitutes the essence of human nature, i.e., an elevating power through which human beings strive toward self-understanding and realising their inner potential. It is the very capacity that enables humanity to transcend mere instinct and engage in reflective, purposive thought. By virtue of their humanity, every individual is endowed with this rational faculty. It is through reason that we orient ourselves in the world, making sense of our experiences and uncovering meaning in both self and other. In its more limited sense, reason can be likened to causal analysis, i.e., the everyday effort to identify connections between events. However, in its fuller philosophical scope, reason is the guiding principle of intelligibility, the capacity for logical discernment that allows human beings to navigate existence in accordance with truth and coherence.

Beyond the previously noted dimensions of the concept of reason, it is imperative to draw attention to its profound and extensive philosophical lineage. Within the tradition of Western thought, reason has not only functioned as a foundational theme but has also remained

a site of enduring contestation and reinterpretation. This sustained engagement reflects the dynamic and evolving character of the concept, shaped by shifting metaphysical, epistemological, and existential concerns over time. In light of this, the present inquiry seeks to undertake a comprehensive examination of the status and transformation of reason within the post-Kantian philosophical context. However, such an analysis cannot proceed without first situating the concept within Kant's transcendental-critical project, wherein reason acquires a pivotal role. Establishing this Kantian framework is essential for grasping both the continuity and the departures that define subsequent philosophical treatments of reason in the wake of Kant's critical turn.

The Primacy of Reason in Kantian Philosophy

A close examination of Kant's critical philosophy discloses his deep-seated intention to reorient philosophical inquiry around the nature and scope of human reason. Kant recognised reason not merely as an instrument of thought but as a foundational structure that undergirds human cognition itself. He understood that reason is indispensable to the possibility of knowledge. Indeed, one of Kant's most significant contributions lies in his revelation that human reason is inherently finite, and this realisation was left unexplored by his philosophical predecessors. This insight motivated Kant to inaugurate his critical project with a fundamental epistemological question: What can we know? His answer did not dismiss the empirical world nor elevate pure rationalism above sensory experience; rather, he sought to delineate the conditions under which knowledge is possible, thereby synthesising the insights of both Rationalism and Empiricism. This mediating position challenged the entrenched dichotomy between these traditions, urging a reconsideration of their epistemological commitments.

Kant's analysis identifies three core faculties that constitute human cognition: sensibility, understanding, and reason. Sensibility provides the manifold of intuitions; understanding organises these intuitions through concepts; and reason seeks the unity of knowledge through principles. Within this triadic structure, theoretical reason is tasked with navigating the phenomenal world, i.e., the domain of possible experience. However, Kant emphasises that this form of reason is restricted in scope; it cannot transcend the bounds of experience to access the noumenal, or things-in-themselves. Thus, Kant's critical philosophy marks a turning point: it grounds metaphysics in the conditions of possible experience while

exposing the limitations of speculative reason. For Kant, human knowledge is empowered and constrained by the faculty that seeks to understand it.

It is important to note that, akin to Plato, Kant maintains that what we encounter in empirical experience, i.e., the phenomenal world, are not things as they are in themselves, but merely appearances shaped by the conditions of human cognition. Owing to the particular structure and limits of the human mind, we are unable to grasp the intrinsic essence of things or their reality. However, unlike Plato, Kant does not posit that the ultimate reality, comparable to the Platonic world of forms, exists as a separate transcendent realm accessible through pure reason. Instead, Kant emphasises that the noumenal realm remains fundamentally inaccessible to theoretical reason.

This underscores a key aspect of Kant's epistemology, indicating that our theoretical faculty of reason is confined to structuring and making sense of the phenomenal world, i.e., the realm of space, time, and causality. The noumenal, by contrast, lies beyond the reach of this faculty, as it eludes the conditions under which knowledge becomes possible. Yet, Kant observes a peculiar characteristic of human reason, viz., its inherent drive to transcend its own limits. Human reason is not content to remain within the bounds of experience; it naturally seeks to grasp ideas that lie beyond empirical reality, such as God, the soul, and the ultimate ground of reality. Kant was acutely aware of this metaphysical impulse within reason, and this recognition led him to confront a profound philosophical problem: How, if at all, can we justify such metaphysical beliefs? Given that theoretical reason is incapable of extending beyond the conditions of possible experience, it follows that it cannot provide legitimate knowledge of supersensible realities. This does not mean that the idea of metaphysical entities is without precedent. On the contrary, prior thinkers, particularly rationalists, had long attempted to ground metaphysical claims through speculative reason. Yet, as Kant critically observes, these attempts ultimately failed to produce convincing or rigorous justifications.

Kant reveals that any attempt to establish the existence of supersensible entities, such as God, the soul, or ultimate reality, through the use of theoretical reason inevitably results in what he terms "transcendental illusion." This illusion arises when reason, in overstepping its legitimate bounds, tries to apply the principles of empirical cognition to domains that lie beyond possible experience. Theoretical reason is properly limited to the transcendental domain, i.e., the realm of conditions under which experience and knowledge of the phenomenal world are possible. By its very structure, it cannot provide valid knowledge of the transcendent

things, those realities that exceed the conditions of human experience. This limitation raises a profound philosophical problem: How is it that human reason, aware of its own boundaries, nonetheless exhibits a persistent tendency to reach beyond them in its quest for ultimate truths? Kant recognises this as a central feature of reason's peculiar nature for its inherent drive to seek totality, to unify knowledge, and to comprehend the unconditioned. However, rather than dismissing such pursuits as irrational, Kant interprets them as expressions of a natural disposition, i.e., a structural tendency of human reason to pose questions that cannot be answered within the bounds of theoretical cognition.

Consequently, these metaphysical inquiries (though not objects of knowledge) are not without significance. They belong not to the theoretical use of reason, but to its practical function. In the domain of practical reason (which governs moral deliberation and action), reason is not confined by the limits of empirical knowledge. Instead, it posits ideas such as freedom, God, and immortality, not as objects to be known, but as necessary postulates for the moral life. In this way, Kant shifts the ground of metaphysical inquiry: What cannot be justified as knowledge may nonetheless have legitimacy as a practical necessity. Thus, Kant invites us to reconsider the role of reason in addressing the transcendent, not as a faculty of speculative proof, but as a source of practical orientation. The longings of reason for the ultimate, though unsatisfiable by theoretical means, find their proper expression and fulfilment within the moral dimension of human life. Thus, a careful examination of Kant's transcendental-critical philosophy reveals the pivotal role that the idea of reason occupies in shaping his conception of both morality and religion. In its practical employment, it becomes evident that reason serves not merely as a cognitive faculty but as a foundational source for articulating moral principles and the rational grounding of religious ideas.

There is little room for doubt regarding the profound intellectual legacy of Immanuel Kant and the enduring influence that his philosophical system has exerted on the trajectory of Western thought. Significantly, the impact of Kantian philosophy in the post-Kantian era can be seen as twofold, both affirmative and critical. On one hand, numerous thinkers embraced and extended Kant's insights, integrating them positively into their own philosophical frameworks. On the other hand, many responded by critiquing and challenging Kant's positions. Yet even in opposition, these critiques testify to Kant's pervasive influence; whether by adoption or rejection, post-Kantian philosophers remained in dialogue with his thought. This dynamic engagement, whether constructive or critical, underscores Kant's centrality in

shaping the intellectual developments that followed. Thus, Kant's philosophy not only inaugurated a critical turn in metaphysics and epistemology but also left a lasting imprint on subsequent theories of reason, morality, and subjectivity.

In light of this, the present inquiry seeks to examine the evolution of the idea of reason in the post-Kantian philosophical landscape. It aims to investigate how philosophers after Kant grappled with this pivotal concept, whether by deepening, transforming, or resisting his account, and to explore the broader implications of Kant's influence on their respective systems. In doing so, this study endeavours to illuminate the enduring philosophical significance of the idea of reason as it emerges in the wake of Kant's critical project.

The Evolutionary Status of Reason in the Post-Kantian Philosophy

In the post-Kantian period, spanning from the 19th to the 21st century, the intellectual legacy of Immanuel Kant has exerted a profound and multifaceted influence on the development of Western philosophy. His critical philosophy shaped the contours of thought in such a way that numerous major thinkers of the ensuing centuries found themselves compelled to engage with his ideas, whether through affirmation, transformation, or critique.

The primary aim of this section is to explore the evolving status of the idea of reason in the post-Kantian philosophical tradition by examining the contributions of key figures such as Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (1770-1831), Michel Foucault (1926-1984), and Jürgen Habermas (1929-). It is important to underscore that each of these thinkers, in their own way, responded to Kant's philosophical framework, some by further developing and extending his notions, others by radically reinterpreting or opposing them. Yet, whether in agreement or dissent, their thought remains within a discourse profoundly shaped by Kant. For the purposes of focused inquiry, this section will limit itself to an examination of these selected philosophers and their respective conceptions of reason. Additionally, it will attempt to clarify the extent and nature of Kant's influence on their philosophical positions, thereby shedding light on the continued relevance of his thought in shaping subsequent understandings of the conception of reason.

To meaningfully investigate the status of the idea of reason in post-Kantian philosophy, it is first necessary to revisit the historical trajectory of classical Western thought. Throughout its development, philosophy has been characterised by a sustained effort to uncover the nature

of reality, i.e., the essence of the world that human beings encounter. Across different epochs, philosophers have proposed diverse accounts of what constitutes ultimate reality. However, a pivotal transformation occurred when the focus of philosophical inquiry shifted from an investigation of the world in itself to an investigation of the human subject. In other words, the quest for truth evolved from a nature-centred perspective to a human-centred one. This anthropocentric turn in philosophy brought with it a profound curiosity about the nature of human beings and gave rise to a host of foundational questions: What is the essence of the human being? What are the limits and capacities of human knowledge? Is the external world as we perceive it truly real, or merely a realm of appearances? What should human beings be and do, and what is their relationship to the world around them? These inquiries necessitated the development of philosophical methods capable of addressing epistemological, ontological, metaphysical, and ethical concerns.

At the root of this shift lies the enduring question: What is a human being? In response, classical philosophers frequently defined the human as a rational animal, emphasising rationality as the distinguishing feature of human existence. While human beings exhibit various traits, the capacity for reason has long been regarded as the one that fundamentally sets them apart from other forms of life. Rationality enables human beings to interpret sensory data, construct meaning, regulate desires, form judgments, and direct their actions. Thus, reason is not merely a faculty among others but is central to the constitution of human subjectivity. As philosophical inquiry progressed, the aim was not only to define the human being in terms of rationality but also to interrogate the nature, scope, and limits of this rational capacity. This concern reaches a critical point in the thought of Immanuel Kant, who places reason at the centre of his critical project and articulates its foundational role in human cognition, ethics, and the structure of experience. Given that this section aims to explore how the concept of reason is treated in the post-Kantian context, I begin by examining Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel's conception of reason. This inquiry will seek to clarify the extent to which Hegel was influenced by Kant and how his understanding of reason aligns with or diverges from Kant's. In doing so, the analysis aims to shed light on the continuity and transformation of the idea of reason in the philosophical discourse that follows Kant.

A close reading of Hegel's major works, *The Phenomenology of Spirit* (1807/2018)[2] and the *Encyclopedia of the Philosophical Sciences in Outline* (1817/1990),[3] makes it evident that, much like Kant, Hegel does not conceive of reason merely as a psychological faculty

located in the human mind, and governs individual judgments, behaviors, or actions. Instead, Hegel articulates a far more expansive and ontological conception of reason. For Hegel, reason (*Vernunft*) is not simply a tool of cognition but the very principle through which the finite and the infinite are unified. It is, in his terms, "the Idea" or a dynamic process of self-conscious thought that seeks to realise itself in, and through, the world. Hegel presents reason as an instinctive striving of thought to discover itself within external reality, thereby revealing reason as a principle that does not merely reflect the world but is constitutive of it (Ferrarin, 2016, p. 6).[4] In this view, reason is not abstract or isolated; it is the movement of consciousness toward self-realisation. When Hegel speaks of reason as a form of consciousness, he refers to the finite subject, i.e., the "I", which initially experiences itself in opposition to the external world. However, this duality is ultimately overcome when the finite consciousness recognises itself as spirit (*Geist*), the formative and self-articulating principle of reality itself.

In this process, reason manifests in two essential modes. First, as a subjective spirit, it is the inner movement of self-consciousness striving toward self-knowledge. Second, as objective spirit, it externalises and actualises itself in institutions, ethical life, and culture, wherein the individual consciousness comes to recognise its unity with the rational structure of the world. Thus, for Hegel, reality is not a pre-given domain upon which the mind imposes form. Rather, the reality is the product which is very own to reason (Ferrarin, 2016, p. 7). This distinction marks a fundamental divergence between the Kantian and Hegelian conceptions of reason. Kant treats reason as a faculty of the human mind that provides a priori principles, which in turn structure the manifold of experience. In this framework, reason operates within the limits of the finite subject and remains confined to the phenomenal domain. In contrast, Hegel reconfigures reason as a self-developing idea or spirit that transcends subjective limits, mediates between the finite and the infinite, and actualises itself in both thought and reality. For Hegel, reason is not bounded by the epistemological constraints of the individual; it is the very movement of the universal realising itself through the particular. Hegel seeks to propel reason beyond its merely subjective confines to reconcile with the objective world. A world that, in Hegel's view, is itself inherently rational. Thus, reason or spirit is conceived as the mediating force that strives for the unity of subjective and objective spirit. This philosophical stance reflects a decisive break from Kant's doctrine of things-in-themselves, according to which the essence of objects remains fundamentally inaccessible to human cognition. For Kant, knowledge is mediated by the innate structures and categories of the human mind, which shape how phenomena appear to us, while leaving their intrinsic nature unknowable.

Hegel firmly rejects this epistemological limitation. He argues that, since reality itself is rational, whether in the form of individual beings or the natural world, reason possesses the capacity to comprehend it in its totality. To achieve this, it is necessary for consciousness to transcend its initial, finite subjectivity and enter into a dialectical engagement with objective spirit, that is, the rational structures embedded in the world itself. Through this dialectical process, reason does not impose form onto an alien reality but recognises itself within that reality. In Hegel's system, reason is thus the unifying principle that overcomes the dualism of subject and object, of the thinking "I" and the external rational order. Importantly, when Hegel asserts that nature or reality is constituted by reason or consciousness, he is not referring to the consciousness of an individual subject. Rather, he invokes absolute spirit, i.e., an all-encompassing, self-developing rational totality that governs and integrates both subjective and objective dimensions of reason.

In this way, Hegel does not merely repudiate Kant but also carries forward and transforms his project. He inherits Kant's central concern with the role of reason in shaping experience, but expands it into a more comprehensive ontological and metaphysical framework. By situating reason as the substance of reality and as the dynamic principle of its unfolding, Hegel reinterprets Kantian reason in a broader, more integrated sense, i.e., one that dissolves the boundaries between knowing subject and known object through the unfolding of absolute spirit.

Let me now turn to Michel Foucault, a thinker whose philosophical contributions, particularly in his seminal work *History of Madness* (1961/2006),[5] profoundly unsettled the foundations of conventional and modern philosophical thought. A close reading of Foucault's intellectual trajectory reveals a dynamic and evolving engagement with the concept of reason. In the earlier phase of his career, Foucault was sharply critical of the Enlightenment project, particularly its dominant epistemological and political assumptions. Foucault became actively engaged with one of the central philosophical questions of eighteenth-century modernity: What is Enlightenment? This question was originally posed in the *Berlinische Monatschrift* (Biester & Gedike, 1783). This inquiry provoked responses from many Enlightenment thinkers, among whom Immanuel Kant offered one of the most influential reflections in his 1784 essay, "An Answer to the Question: What is Enlightenment?" (1784/1996).[6] In this essay, Kant famously defined Enlightenment as humanity's emergence from self-imposed immaturity, guided by the autonomous use of reason.

While Kant's answer was hailed in its time as groundbreaking, Foucault remained deeply unsatisfied with it. In his 1984 lecture What is Enlightenment? (1984/2020),[7] Foucault problematises Kant's optimism about rational autonomy. He argues that if Enlightenment entails the universal rationalisation of human life, where everything is subjected to critical scrutiny and systematic order, then such rationalisation paradoxically gives rise to new forms of domination. Far from guaranteeing liberation, it fosters mechanisms of modern power that can become profoundly oppressive. This critique leads Foucault to interrogate the dangerous convergence of reason and power in the modern age. He contends that modern power, particularly as exercised by the modern state, extends its reach into scientific, technological, and institutional spheres, shaping subjectivity and controlling the production of knowledge. This form of power, which masquerades as rational governance, instrumentalises both human and natural sciences to impose contingent regimes of truth. It thereby forecloses alternative epistemological possibilities and restricts the autonomy of subjects, institutions, and knowledge systems alike.

Foucault's challenge to the Enlightenment is, therefore, not simply a rejection of Kant's historical conception of reason, but a more profound critique of the epistemological and political foundations of Kant's thought. For Kant, human finitude, especially the limits of theoretical reason, meant that knowledge is confined to the phenomenal realm, thus securing a clear boundary between knowable appearances and unknowable noumena. Foucault sees this demarcation as a mechanism of containment where the rationalist framework that ultimately stifles the pursuit of absolute truth and limits transcendental beings in the secure path of knowledge (McIntyre, 2021, pp. 228-229).[8] Thus, while Kant believed his conception of Enlightenment would mark a new era of human autonomy and liberation, Foucault, much like Max Horkheimer (1895-1973), exposes the darker legacy of Enlightenment reason. In their view, reason, when institutionalised in the service of power, no longer functions as a vehicle for emancipation but becomes a tool of domination. The very apparatus meant to liberate humanity instead turns against the freedom it once promised (McIntyre, 2021, p. 229).

Foucault's critique of the concept of reason should not be misinterpreted as a wholesale rejection of rationality. He does not align himself with the tradition of anti-rationalist thought, nor does he dismiss the significance of human reasoning. A careful examination of his philosophical writings makes it clear that Foucault does not repudiate the use of reason; rather, he interrogates its historical deployments and the power relations they entail. For Foucault,

reason is not a fixed, universal faculty, but a contingent and historically situated practice. It is characterised by its aim-oriented nature, operating within specific discursive frameworks to justify, regulate, and structure experience. He identifies multiple modes of reason, such as historical, scientific, public, political, and others, each of which functions within its own regime. These diverse modalities of reason enable humans to formulate norms, address problems, and create intelligible structures within various domains of life (Lawlor & Nale, 2014, pp. 424–425).[9]

Thus, Foucault acknowledges the productive and indispensable functions of rationality. Yet, he remains acutely aware of its ambivalent character. Reason, while a necessary tool for critical reflection and the organisation of knowledge, also bears the potential for domination and control within it. This duality is central to Foucault's thought. He insists that any critical engagement with reason must recognise both its generative capacities and its "intrinsic dangers" (Rabinow, 1984, p. 14).[10] In this way, Foucault promotes a vigilant form of critique, i.e. that neither idealises nor dismisses reason but remains attentive to its historical effects and ethical stakes.

Following the analysis of Foucault's conception of reason, it is essential to turn the attention to the reflections of a contemporary philosopher, Jürgen Habermas, whose work represents a significant development in the post-Kantian discourse on reason. As we have seen in the trajectories of earlier thinkers, many philosophers after Kant distanced themselves from his characterisation of reason as a purely mental faculty residing within the individual subject. Instead, they reconfigured the concept of reason, often situating it within broader ontological, historical, or sociopolitical frameworks. Habermas, too, partakes in this post-Kantian reconfiguration. His philosophical project aims not merely to reject Kantian reason but to reconstruct it in a manner that addresses both its limitations and its enduring relevance. It has often been said that the post-Enlightenment era marked the beginning of reason's decline, i.e., an eclipse brought about by its association with domination, instrumentalization, and technocratic control. However, to my mind, this perceived eclipse does not negate the indispensable role of reason in shaping human life and its engagement with the phenomenal world. This enduring significance of reason motivates Habermas to rescue and rehabilitate its practical potential through what he terms the "communicative turn." Habermas seeks to salvage reason from its historical distortions. Rather than grounding rationality in isolated cognition or abstract universality, he situates it in the intersubjective realm of communication. In this

account, reason is not a solitary faculty but a dialogical process embedded in the lifeworld, i.e., a mode of discourse oriented toward mutual understanding, consensus, and democratic legitimacy. In this way, Habermas offers a critical yet constructive response to the legacy of reason. That means one that acknowledges its historical burdens while rearticulating its emancipatory possibilities through communicative rationality.

Jürgen Habermas is widely recognised for his concept of "communicative reason," a notion central to his philosophical enterprise. A careful examination of this idea offers crucial insight into his broader understanding of reason. Reflecting on the trajectory of 20th-century philosophy, one observes a decisive shift in focus toward the philosophy of language. Thinkers across various traditions began to explore the structures of meaning and reality through the medium of linguistic analysis. Habermas, too, aligns with this linguistic turn, particularly in his magnum opus *The Theory of Communicative Action* (1981/1984,1987),[11] where he undertakes a systematic effort to reconstruct the notion of reason through what he terms "universal pragmatics." By universal pragmatics, Habermas refers to the conditions that make meaningful and effective communication possible. For him, reason is not merely a faculty of abstract thought or instrumental calculation but is fundamentally realised through the process of intersubjective communication.

In this context, successful communication is achieved through mutual understanding, thereby minimising conflict and promoting cohesion within the lifeworld, i.e., the shared horizon of cultural meanings, values, and practices that structure everyday social interactions. Through the analysis of the implicit rules and normative structures embedded in language, Habermas argues that communicative reason fosters a rational consensus that respects the plurality of perspectives without collapsing into relativism. Thus, his theory of communicative rationality or communicative reason emerges as a dialogical and inclusive model of rationality, which is grounded not in the solitary cognition of subjects but in the intersubjective dynamics of discourse aimed at understanding the true reality of every state of affairs (whether natural or human). This approach not only redefines reason as a socially embedded practice but also revitalises its normative function within democratic societies.

Conclusion

Thus, as a concluding remark, it can be said that this chapter has sought to critically examine the evolving status of reason within the framework of post-Kantian philosophy. The

central aim of this inquiry has been twofold: first, to assess the continuing influence of Immanuel Kant on subsequent philosophical thought; and second, to explore how this foundational theme, i.e., reason, has been interpreted and reconfigured by major thinkers following Kant's critical philosophy. To pursue this objective, the paper has engaged with the thought of three prominent philosophers spanning the 19th to the 21st centuries, viz., Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, Michel Foucault, and Jürgen Habermas—each of whom offers a distinctive contribution to the discourse on this concept. In tracing Kant's intellectual legacy, especially in relation to the idea of reason, it becomes evident that while these thinkers diverge from Kant's characterisation of reason as a cognitive faculty inherent to the individual mind, they nonetheless inherit and adapt his view of reason as a self-determining, self-elevating force.

Hegel, for instance, rearticulates reason beyond the confines of subjectivity by emphasising its ontological and historical dimensions. He conceives of reason not merely as an internal faculty, but as something that manifests objectively in the world, in the form of spirit, or consciousness. His philosophical project can be read as an extension of Kantian rationality into broader and more dynamic realms of reality. Foucault and Habermas, by contrast, approach reason from critical and pragmatic perspectives. While deeply critical of the disciplinary and hegemonic functions of reason in modern institutions, Foucault accepts its utility outright. He acknowledges the instrumental and practical roles of reason in structuring thought and practice, even as he problematises its historical entanglements with power. For his part, Habermas can be seen as offering a constructive continuation of the Kantian project. Through his theory of "communicative reason," he advances a model of rationality grounded in intersubjective discourse and mutual understanding. In doing so, Habermas not only preserves but also reconfigures the practical aspirations of Kantian reason, demonstrating how claims to truth, rightness, and authenticity can be justified through universal rational deliberation in the public sphere.

Thus, the post-Kantian philosophical landscape reveals a complex but enduring engagement with Kant's legacy. While interpretations of reason have significantly evolved and are expanding into objective, historical, communicative, or critical modalities, the foundational impulse toward rational inquiry and the pursuit of meaning remain unmistakably Kantian in spirit.

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