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HEGEL('S) TODAY

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Introduction: Hegel('s) Today

Agon Hamza and Frank Ruda

According to Marx's famous saying, "Hegel remarks somewhere that all great world-historic facts and personages appear, so to speak, twice. He forgot to add: the first time as tragedy, the second time as farce."¹ Displacing this well-known quip, if only a bit, one might ask: Does this also hold for world-historic personages and facts of philosophy? Could one read Hegel's philosophy itself as first, the tragic event? Such a reading would in some respects not be entirely alien to the reception of Hegel's thought in general. Many of his readers have asserted that he can and must be considered an essentially tragic thinker – one may here just in passing refer to the famous "tragedy in ethical life" which is often taken to provide a paradigmatic articulation, not only of the constitution of the Greek, but also of modern political life and ethical communities despite this view being repeatedly contested. However, if – for the sake of following this hypothesis – Hegel represents, and this maybe the tragic event, not only of ethical life, but also of modern philosophy in general, where and how do we locate its repetition in the form of the farce? Where are we to find Hegel's inverted twin?

In many respects, there is a certain farcical dimension to the immediate aftermath of Hegel's thought. Because (some of) his pupils prepared and published an edition of his works that became highly influential to most of his subsequent readers, and which consequently led, to some degree, to profound confusion about the true kernel and thrust of Hegel's philosophical system, and – by adding comments and annotations that were taken to be his very own wording – generated a peculiar struggle about Hegel's ultimate achievements (and failures). Surprisingly this edition – almost until today – was nonetheless able to become the main reference – one manifestation of the "Deckerinnerung" that overshadows what one perceives to be Hegel's philosophy, as Žižek has often claimed with reference to Freud – for generations of his critics and followers.

However, the immediate Hegelian aftermath also already inaugurated, amongst other things, the infamous split between the young and the old Hegelians, which seemed to practically and farcically enact Hegel's own claim that any immediate unity (and thus also that of the Hegelianism and of Hegel himself) will need to undergo processes of alienation and division to at least possibly reinstate the original unity in a reflected form. Does Hegel's ultimate tragedy, in both sense of the term, lie in the fact that immediately after his death his philosophy was not only dissected and rebutted, but there was also a farcical defence of a Hegel which never existed with those words he never wrote against his critics

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¹ Marx 1975, p.15

who got it all wrong? So, did the farce not prove the tragedy to be a real tragedy?

One could also, in both enlarging the historical focus and in locating the ultimate embodiment of the repetition of Hegel's tragedy as farce in the fact that the arguably most influential and important pupil of he who was perceived to have been a Prussian state philosopher has been one of the most influential and famous contenders of revolution and of overthrowing the state, namely Marx. And may not Marx's ultimate Hegelian heritage – again confirming the tragedy-farce sequence – lie in the fact that he himself did not only witness as many rebuttals as Hegel, but he actually put into practice and therein refuted even more harshly, due to what was seen as the brutal and bloody outcomes of his thought when concretely realized. First as tragedy, then as farce that becomes again, a tragedy of its own, and then repeats as a (bloody) farce...

Whatever historical frame one likes to posit, today neither Marx nor Hegel are, surprisingly, thinkers that are generally and overall considered to be indefensible any more. Both have become widely accepted (rather than merely tolerated) thinkers within the universities and the wider outskirts of academia. There are journals dedicated to both, conferences held around the world on an annual basis that deepen and perpetuate the already existing immense scholarship, numerous books are published on their work regularly and editions of their writings that depict high philological quality have been prepared during recent years. Both have become proper objects of academic study. At first sight, it might seem surprising that this holds for both Hegel and Marx, for it might seem – given the political history linked to their names – especially astounding that this also happened to Marx.

For one might be tempted to assume that Marx was after all too farcical (in all the brutal aspects of the farce) to be integrated into and assimilated within academic discourse, even if simply because it is mainly the discourse of state institutions (one of the reasons why Lacan called it “university discourse”). And was Marx not the anti-statist thinker *par excellence* and Hegel the ultimate thinker of the (Prussian) state? Yet, one must acknowledge that already in the last century there have been more institutions devoted to the study of Marx (and Engels) and historical and dialectical materialism than there have ever been for (the arch idealist) Hegel. Surprising as it may be to some, it has proven more difficult to assimilate and integrate Hegel into academia, even though he was deemed a state philosopher in all senses of the term (and Marx did not manage to find a proper job in any institution), than the paradigmatic the thinker of revolution. There seemed (and maybe still seems) to be something in Hegel's thought that was nonetheless a too bitter pill, too

hard to swallow, too much to assimilate for, at least, academia.

A symptom of this may be, as everyone knows, that Hegel was for a long time – and especially in the last century – considered to be the incarnation of the worst kind of philosophy possible. This was, at least partially, because he was one of the very few thinkers that one could find within the history of philosophy (and who did not announce and inaugurate) a renewal or a new period of philosophical thought, although it was paradoxically declared to bring about its end; and more so, with it the end of art, politics, religion, history and thus all human practices. Hegel was the worst philosophy could get, because he ended (and as he said himself: completed) it. He sublated, however precisely this term is understood, everything into a final form of knowledge that – worse comes to worst – he called absolute knowing. Thereby he was for a long time taken to be one who forestalled any kind of future of philosophy or of history, because he systematically suspended historicity proper; a criticism that was famously articulated repeatedly by many, mostly by Marxist critics of Hegel. Hegel was considered, after Plato maybe (and the slightly naïve Frenchman who inaugurated modern philosophy), philosophy's ultimate *bête noir*. He was the one that just seemed to have overdone it: Hegel, at once the tragedy and the farce of philosophy.

That Hegel pathologically, and to a certain degree comically, exaggerated the very business of philosophy was already diagnosed by a famous pupil of Sigmund Freud, namely by Carl Gustav Jung. He stated that Hegel's language is so megalomaniac that it is reminiscent of the language of schizophrenics. If one takes Jung's diagnosis more seriously than one should then it seems apparent that Jung pretty much did not know anything about and of Hegel. However, this might provide a starting point for understanding why today there is a peculiar, maybe even schizophrenic kind of resuscitation of Hegel's thought. Hegel is today no longer represented as philosophy's ultimate lowland but as its pragmatist summit, he is no longer taken to be the thinker who pushed rationalism and systematicity so far that it went over its rationalist edge, he is rather taken to be the first to establish a proper and moderate account of the rational components of collective human practice, with all its rational weaknesses and strengths; he is no longer the philosopher of the end of all practices and of ultimate sublation, but rather as philosopher of intersubjectively mediated normativity that as such has – at least for human beings – neither end nor beginning, because it is the ultimate form of human practice.

Yet, do these shifts of emphasis often not come at a price? How does one also integrate and not simply discard everything that Hegel seems to disturb and spoil this rather peaceful and tamed picture?

Can this even be the goal of a contemporary rendering of Hegel? Is it a problem that all too often one gets rid of the very conception of history that is inscribed into his thought (as this is where the end necessarily comes in) or one shies away from absolute knowing as the highpoint of a metaphysical regression. The name “Hegel” seems to have become one that is precisely that toolbox with which Michel Foucault once stated that one needs to describe, understand and change the world and also which one takes out of it what one needs. But this might be ultimately a good thing, or maybe the best one can do with him.

Yet, this raises at least two questions: Firstly, what does it mean that one is witnessing today not only a Hegel-revival but also, maybe for the first time in over a century, a full appraisal, which seeks to at the same time risks to get rid of crucial elements that made the ‘substance’ of Hegelian thought once appear too dangerous, crazy, or just badly metaphysical? What is a Hegel without its ‘metaphysical’, ‘megalomaniac’ kernel, wherever precisely this may lie? Is he something akin to the infamous beer without alcohol? Second, what would Hegel – and not the name, ‘Hegel’ – have said to this new wave of reception of his thought? What are we in the eyes of Hegel (and not the other way around)?

Hegel always insisted that philosophy only has to think what is (and not what should be). And this is why philosophy is a difficult task, as it is one of the most difficult tasks to grasp one’s own time in thought (as Hegel’s famous definition of philosophy goes). But what does one do with a philosophy that asserts that the task of philosophy is to think its own time, after it exhausted and exceeded this very time? How does one think the present time with Hegel (after Hegel – and even within the present of new Hegelianism)?

Resulting from this, the question the present issue of *Crisis and Critique* seeks to address is thus: What does it mean to conceive of our time, “the today”, as a Hegelian?

Once, in the preface of his *Phenomenology of Spirit*, Hegel writes

...it is not difficult to see that ours is a birth-time and a period of transition to a new era. Spirit has broken with the world it has hitherto inhabited and imagined, and is of a mind to submerge it in the past, and in the labour of its own transformation. Spirit is indeed never at rest but always engaged in moving forward. But just as the first breath drawn by a child after its long, quiet nourishment breaks the gradualness of merely quantitative growth—there is a qualitative leap, and the child is born—so likewise the Spirit in its formation matures slowly and quietly into its new shape, dissolving bit by bit the structure

of its previous world, whose tottering state is only hinted at by isolated symptoms. The frivolity and boredom which unsettle the established order, the vague foreboding of something unknown, these are the heralds of approaching change. The gradual crumbling that left unaltered the face of the whole is cut short by a sunburst which, in one flash, illuminates the features of the new world.²

Hegel’s *sunburst* was the French Revolution, whose ardent supporter he was. In our predicament, the sunburst is the world in which we are entering, and we are still unable to fully grasp and comprehend. We throw catchwords, veiled as concepts, through which we try to understand the epoch in which we are entering globally. This grandiose rhetoric only comes to hide the lack of conceptual and philosophical (or, theoretical) apparatus, capable of truly understanding our own era. Its dawn appears to be, doubtlessly, a violent one, which thereby produces unsettling effects to the established theories and destroying the already existing structures.

It is our (editors) view that the present epoch, can be best and fully grasped through the Hegelian system: “the whole mass of ideas and concepts” which are being proposed either as an anti-thesis of Hegel, or as a ‘subtle’ replacement, are collapsing in front of the reality they try to understand and explain.

In 1922 Lenin proposed the creation of the *Society of the Materialist Friends of Hegelian Dialectics*.³ The present issue of *Crisis and Critique* attempts to repeat this proposal, not only by being (yet another) exercise in affirming the unique dimension of Hegel’s philosophical system, but also by emphasizing the necessity of drawing lines within this very society, creating instructive liaisons and debating (between friends) what paths remain still open to be explored and which are the ones that are leading us astray. Our hope that the practice of such a Hegel-friendly society would not only prove to be farcical or tragic, but may bring to light a properly comic dimension of Hegel – a dimension which has been often neglected or at least downplayed in Hegel scholarship thus far. What is a Hegelian account of a present that has ultimately become Hegelian (in philosophy)?

The present issue of the journal sought to gather some of the most far reaching resuscitations of Hegel today that may help to create a Hegelian perspective onto our present, as well as to grasp it in the form

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2 Hegel 1977, p.6

3 Lenin 1973, p.234

of thoughts and concepts. We are well aware that this issue does not at all exhaust its self-set task, yet we assume that the concrete contributions gathered here can nonetheless stand – in very Hegelian fashion, namely as a concrete universality – for the universality of contemporary readings of Hegel. And if this generates further, even critical and harsh discussions among the friends of Hegel, the present issue would have served this end even more successfully. We have brought together here philosophers and theorists from different Hegelian traditions and backgrounds, whose goal it is neither to simply assert the relevance of Hegel’s thought, nor to only explore the ways in which one can and maybe should be a Hegelian today, but also to depict why it is precisely Hegel who provides a major point of orientation and conceptual tools for understanding the present world as it is.

Prishtina/Berlin, February 2017

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Hegel Political Theologian?

Stefania Achella

Abstract: Moving from the judgement of Carl Schmitt that Hegelian philosophy was a political Christology, this paper intends to investigate whether Hegel's political philosophy can be understood as a political theology. This analysis will be divided into two parts: the first part will analyse the theologico-political aspect in Schmitt's sense that characterizes the Hegelian philosophy. The second part, focusing in particular on Hegel's early writings, and also using a reading of Judith Butler, will investigate whether it is possible to use these reflections against the established image of the Hegelian system as an exclusionary-inclusion system. This double movement will be accomplished by first getting close to Hegel, describing the process of secularization of the theological categories that he carries out in his system, and then seeking, in the second part, a chance to move away from his monolithic theologico-political system. The question will be: must all that criticizes the theologico-political be anti-Hegelian?

Keywords: Political Theology, Hegel, Christology, Love, Christianity.

In the inaugural lecture at the Collège de France in 1970, entitled *The Order of Discourse*, Foucault opened his tribute to Jean Hyppolite, recognizing in the old master the ability to have been able to keep the right distance from, but also the necessary proximity to, Hegel:

I know well that his work is placed, in the eyes of many, under the reign of Hegel, and that our whole epoch, either through logic or with epistemology, either with Marx or with Nietzsche, tries to escape Hegel [...]. But to make a real escape from Hegel presupposes an exact appreciation of what it costs to detach ourselves from him. It presupposes a knowledge of how close Hegel has come to us, perhaps insidiously. It presupposes a knowledge of what is still Hegelian in that which allows us to think against Hegel; and an ability to gauge how much our resources against him are perhaps still a ruse which he is using against us, and at the end of which he is waiting for us, immobile and elsewhere.¹

Following Foucault's lesson, returning to Hegel is therefore not a mere exercise in style, but a necessary movement of thought, if the

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¹ Foucault 1970/1981, 74.

goal is to escape the wiles of his system. And if Foucault recognized in Hyppolite the merit of having

tirelessly explored, for us and ahead of us, this path by which one gets away from Hegel, establishes a distance, and by which one ends up being drawn back to him, but otherwise, and then constrained to leave him once again²

what I shall try to do, with respect to the theme of this essay, will be to follow a reverse path: getting close to Hegel, describing the process of secularization of the theological categories that he carries out through his system, and then seeking, in the second part, a chance to move away from his monolithic theologico-political system. To Foucault's question whether that which is unphilosophical is necessarily anti-Hegelian, I shall therefore substitute the question: must all that which criticizes the theologico-political be anti-Hegelian?³

1. First movement. Hegel political theologian

In *Political Theology II*, at the end of the 'Guideline for the Reader', Schmitt writes:

The thematic development of my political theology from 1922 takes a general direction which departs from the *ius reformandi* [right of reformation] of the sixteenth century, culminates in Hegel and is evident everywhere today, from political theology to political Christology [*von der Politischen Theologie zur Politischen Christologie*].⁴

Following the reconstructive scheme so effectively summarized by Schmitt, Hegelian philosophy, as the highest peak of a movement of autonomization of the world by the sacred, or rather the demystification and immanentizing of divinity,⁵ would mark the transition from a politico-

2 Foucault 1970/1981, 74.

3 In recent decades, particularly in Italy, the debate within political theology has reached very high levels of discussion. Examples are Carlo Galli's reflections on Schmitt, the works of Roberto Esposito, Massimo Cacciari, Giorgio Agamben, Elettra Stimilli, to mention only a few of the protagonists of this discussion. For a reconstruction of the debate, see, among the numerous publications, the monographic issues of *Filosofia politica*, 3, 2013; "Il pensiero", 2, 2011, but also *La teologia politica in discussione* 2012; Scattola 2007.

4 Schmitt 2008, p. 11; Schmitt 2010, p. 32–33.

5 For a shrewd and precise reconstruction of the relationship between Hegel e Schmitt, see the interesting work of Pirozzo 2013, p. 57 ff.

theological system to a Christological one. Hegel would arise, that is, as an expression of that dialectical rationalism which, following the spirit of the Reform, would made the sovereignty of power descend into the community, attributing centrality to the figure of Christ as man and emptying the transcendence of his sacredness.⁶ As stated in the famous § 552 of the *Encyclopaedia*:

The precept of religion, 'Give to Caesar what is Caesar's and to God what is God's', is not enough: the question is to settle what is Caesar's [*was des Kaisers ist*], what belongs to the secular authority [...]. The divine spirit must interpenetrate the entire secular life [*das Weltliche immanent durchdringen*]: whereby wisdom is concrete within it, and it carries the terms of its own justification. But that concrete indwelling is only the aforesaid ethical organisations. It is the morality of marriage as against the sanctity of a celibate order; – the morality of economic and industrial action against the sanctity of poverty and indolence; the morality of an obedience dedicated to the law of the state [...].⁷

As we have said, an obvious movement of Hegelian thought is rendered in Schmitt's judgement – a movement that merits further articulation, however, and that is what I shall do in this first part.

Right from his early writings, Hegel addressed explicitly the link between religion and politics. It was a very different relationship from that which he established between theology and politics.⁸ Whereas the relationship between religion and politics could contribute to the

6 Catholicism misses the mark by locating God outside man and state: "[...] in [Catholicism] this spirit of all truth is in actuality set in rigid opposition to the self-conscious spirit. First of all, in the host God is presented to religious worship as an *external thing*. [...] From that first and supreme relationship of externality flow all the other external, hence unfree, unspiritual, and superstitious relationships; especially a *laity*, which receives *knowledge* of divine truth, as well as the direction of *will* and *conscience*, from outside and from another class [...]", Hegel 1830/1971, § 552, pp. 284–285.

7 Hegel 1830/1971, pp. 286–287.

8 Paradoxically, the interpretative error that induced the first editor of Hegel's early writings, Hermann Nohl, to define them as theological – a definition rectified in subsequent drafts – adequately describes the nature of these reflections if they are placed within a theologico-political framework. Religion, for Hegel, inspired the political structuring models, and at the same time, through its representative dimension, permeated the sense of community. The relationships at the centre of his analysis are those between the Jewish, Greek and Roman models. In these religions the more or less democratic structure of the religion determines a similar structuring of the political community. The fear and trembling of the Jewish state, the typical distance of the Roman religion, the participation at the basis of Greek religiosity/mythology: as is well known, these are models that would find further clarification in the analysis of certain religions that Hegel introduced into his courses in Berlin on the philosophy of religion. Yet, as mentioned, in these early fragments Hegel also emphasized the functionalization that politics makes of religion.

construction of a good political community, the role that theology tended to assume with respect to public life was instead stigmatized. Owing to theology's supposed lack of any freedom – a substantial element of politics –, the interference of theology in the community could not but introduce elements of positivization and rigidity. Regarding this aspect, the exchange of letters between Hegel and Schelling at the beginning of 1795 is interesting. The two philosophers had recently come out of the Tübinger Stift. Having refused to follow an ecclesiastical career, Hegel was reluctantly forced to accept the role of tutor in a Bernese family. The dialogue with Schelling therefore represented a way, albeit indirect, for the young tutor to keep himself at the centre of the philosophical scene. The subject of the correspondence was the union of theology and Kantianism that had emerged at the Stift. Hegel wrote to Schelling:

What you tell me about the theological-Kantian – if it should please the gods [*si diis placet*] – course taken by philosophy in Tübingen is not surprising. Orthodoxy is not to be shaken as long as the profession of it is bound up with worldly advantage and interwoven with the totality of a state. [...] I believe it would be interesting, however, to disturb as much as possible the theologians who in their antlike zeal procure critical building materials for the strengthening of their Gothic temple, to make everything more difficult for them, to block their every escape until they no longer find any way out and have no choice but to fully display their nakedness in the light of day. [...] Reason and Freedom remain our password, and the Invisible Church our rallying point.⁹

Here there is an obvious criticism of the visible church and of the attempt of theology to establish a temporal power using the new watchwords of Kantian philosophy. The two young friends, who had grown up in the wake of the French Revolution, claimed, instead, the affirmation of the Enlightenment diptych of reason and freedom. Politics should, that is, emancipate itself from religious orthodoxy and think of realizing freedom.

This was the tone that dominated in Hegel's numerous early fragments, composed before his move to Jena in 1801. Beginning with the elaboration of the religious system, religion would in fact assume

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9 Hegel to Schelling, end of January 1795, in Hegel 1984, pp. 31–32.

another role, so much more at peace, and perhaps for that reason also more traditional. In these fragments, instead, Hegel's thought, which had not yet assumed a definitive form, was seeking a systematic structure, wandering between different ways and possibilities, as attested, moreover, by the writing of the texts, which did not always shine out for beauty and stylistic elegance. For these texts we may observe that, if it is true, as Schmitt says, that religion undergoes a radical demystification process, and that the God of distances is replaced by Jesus as mediator in the community relationship, it must be added, however, with regard to Schmitt's analysis, that it is not at all clear that we are always faced with a politicization of the theological or, vice versa, a theologization of the political. The scheme present in Hegel's early writings, presumably because of the proximity to the Greek tradition and the sharing of a certain Kantian approach, seem, indeed, to make them lean towards a political vision of theological.¹⁰

To give a univocal judgement on the role of religion in these fragments is therefore impossible, not only, as mentioned, owing to the influence of Kant and the Greeks, but also because of the role that theological training, Lutheranism and interest in English political philosophy play in the development of these Hegelian pages, full of often contradictory inspirations but linked by a constant element: the rejection of a dogmatic and transcendent religion. Aside from this common element, which would always mark the Hegelian reflection – the criticism of all forms of transcendence, the search for categories and concepts that express the immanent dimension of thought –, the influences to which the young Hegel was subjected make these fragments so complex that it would be overly simplistic to trace them to a precise order – from the celebration of the vitality of Greek religion, marked by presence and life, to the criticism of the representation of death in Christianity, from the criticism of positivity, to the equivalence between Jesus and Socrates as companions of destiny, marked by a practical knowledge, to the deliberate omission, in the narrative of Jesus' life, of reference to any miracles. Private religion, public religion, religion of the people: these writings are traversed by the lay intuitions of Reimarus, by the anti-supernaturalistic interpretations of Flatt, listened to at the *Stift*, by the criticism of some aspects of pietism, yet at the same time opposition to anti-pietism, to the point of adhering to a normative horizon, Kantian in nature, in which anti-historically the commandments become a

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10 As is known, in sharp contrast to Schmitt's position, Jan Assmann maintains that all the pregnant concepts of theology are theologized political concepts; cf. Assmann 2006, p. 32 ff.

religious revival of the Categorical Imperative.¹¹ So, whereas Kant wrote, in *Opus Postumum*, “God is not a being outside me, but merely a thought in me. God is the morally practical self-legislative reason”,¹² in one of the Bernese fragments Hegel wrote: “Over against the positivity of the Jews, Jesus set man; over against the laws and their obligatoriness he set the virtues”.¹³

The relationship between religious and political levels was therefore deeply interwoven, yet constant was Hegel’s attempt to identify an autonomous way of founding his thought. And this effort was connected, as is evident in some fragments, to the main question that ran through the young Hegel’s reflection: how can the unity of the community be recovered? For Hegel it was not a case of answering the metaphysical question about the existence of God; he did not set out from a metaphysical instance, but rather from the need to restore to man an intact community.

The principle of rationality at work in the Christian religion, which Hegel would later translate into his philosophical system, certainly originated from these reflections on religion, but it was also the consequence of an originally political interest. To be clear: if it is true that from these early years the Christian religion was presented as the position capable of expressing a principle of universalization which, secularized, would soon give birth to the ploy of a secular reason, it is equally true that Hegel showed us how the search for a unifying political principle finds in religion one of its forms of embodiment. In Hegel these two paths intersected. If religion represented one model of thought, Hegel nevertheless did not stop trying to think of an autonomous and creative formulation of reason with which to respond to the issues left open by modernity,¹⁴ in the direction of a self-legitimization of reason which claimed a radical independence from religious theories.

Hegel’s originality lay precisely in the interweaving of these two instances. If, on the one hand, his reflection on religion appeared closely linked to the political, and offered to politics, as to philosophy,

11 For a detailed reconstruction of these influences and these different orientations present in Hegel’s writings, see my Achella 2008.

12 Kant 1993, AA XXI 145.

13 Hegel 1989, p. 249; Hegel 1948, p. 224.

14 “Legitimization is not to be sought, therefore, in the past, in the continuity of an origin, but coincides perfectly with the fact of formulating, by autonomous and creative means, new sensible responses to unresolved questions of the past in the aftermath of a rupture of the historical process”, Perone 2011, pp. 444–445.

some fundamental categories, on the other hand, in the definition of the genealogy of religion, Hegel emphasized on several occasions its initial derivation from political instances, its originally myth-making function of maintaining order in and between communities.¹⁵

Moreover, it is no mere coincidence that in the early writings he attributed the responsibility for the tearing apart of the modern political community to the Christian religion, which had rejected its political function. Religion, in the form consecrated by Augustine, with the distinction between human cities and cities of God, would, from the point of view of Hegel in those early years, have led to a corruption of public sentiments¹⁶ – hence the need for a *new religion* whose purpose would be to bring the level of transcendence, and of the city of God, back to earth. This new religion, which was presented with the characteristics of an immanent religion – what Hegel called *Volksreligion*, but which in reality expressed a political, if not aesthetic, religion – had to return to the centre of public life a respect for civil virtues and a feeling of belonging to the earthly community.

But what religion was it? What was Hegel thinking of when he spoke of a new religion? This new phase began with a short fragment, written between 1796 and 1797, to which Rosenzweig, who published it for the first time in 1917, gave the title *Das älteste Systemprogramm des deutschen Idealismus*.¹⁷ It provided a different view of religion, treating it from the point of view of art, bringing it closer to mythology. The editors of the fragment identified a new religion which, when freed from the prejudices imposed by the church and by the priests, was able to save the language and forms of a national story: a story which, like the Bible, showed itself able to speak to anyone. As we read in this *Systematic Program*,

15 In a very early fragment of 1787, *On the religion of the Greeks and Romans*, we read: “By means of the oracles priests acquired influence on all important matters. In Greece they were also one of the ties that bound together and tied to a common interest cities so jealous and so discordant”, Hegel 1989, p. 44.

16 This Christianity would have induced men to retreat into the private sphere, educating them as “citizens of heaven whose gaze is ever directed thither so that human feelings become alien to them”, in which the worship and public festivities have assumed the heavy tones of mourning and extraneousness, such that “at the festival, which ought to be the feast of universal brotherhood, many a man is afraid he will catch from the common cup the venereal infection of the one who drank before him”, Hegel 1989, pp. 110–111.

17 *Mythologie der Vernunft* 1984. In this volume is published a critical edition of the text, but some of the main contributions on this issue have also been republished, including essays by Rosenzweig, Pöggeler and Henrich. This fragment is in many ways obscure. The dating and attribution are not certain. It may have been written by Hegel, Hölderlin or Schelling. The manuscript appears to have been drafted by Hegel, but it is not known whether this was under dictation.

We must have a new mythology, but this mythology must be in service of the ideas; it must become a mythology of *reason*.

Until we make ideas aesthetic, i.e., mythological, they will have no interest for the people. Conversely, before mythology is rational, the philosopher must be ashamed of it. [...] A higher spirit sent from heaven must establish this new religion among us. It will be the last and greatest work of humanity.¹⁸

Although the program of secularization is all exposed, here seems to prevail the need, not to translate religion into secular form, but to create a new religion – laical – at the service of politics:¹⁹ a religion that has the function of a foundational narrative.

In the early fragments, religion therefore had a statute that was not at all metaphysical, but marked, rather, by its primarily political objectives, presenting itself, as we have seen, as the location of a narrative capable of allowing the construction of a common memory of the sense of belonging to a people. This need was the reflection in Hegel of the necessity of overcoming the political fragmentation of Germany at the end of the 1700s, the legacy of the *Zerrissenheit*, of the laceration determined by the Peace of Westphalia (1648).

Beginning at the end of Hegel's stay in Frankfurt, this subordination of the theological to the political – this movement of politicization of the theological – radically changed: here political theology showed itself in the guise of theologization of the political. With respect to the still ambivalent developments of the early years, a new turning point was now determined, particularly with regard to Hegel's reconsideration of Christianity. In such a repositioning, that which discriminated was the theoretical weight that Reformed Christianity assumed for Hegel: Christianity had completely changed the interpretative scheme of history, introducing subjectivity, the centrality of the individual. Simultaneously in his writings the values of primitive Christianity were grafted onto a Lutheran structure, placing a spiritualization of the world alongside the gradual de-naturalization of the sacred: the theological

18 *The Oldest Systematic Program of German Idealism (Das älteste Systemprogramm)*, 1797, translated by Diana I. Behler. See more at: <http://www.bloomsbury.com/uk/philosophy-of-german-idealism-fichte-jacobi-and-schelling-9780826403070/#sthash.1jsTqu78.dpuf>.

19 This new religion, no longer connoted by Kantian characteristics but closer to an aesthetic ideal, reflects Hegel's distance from Kantian ethico-theology, unable to transform itself into an authentic popular religion. It does, however, maintain the Kantian-Fichtean vocation of being the motive of ethics – hence the appeal to a mythology of reason which, even without renouncing the rational component, is able to speak to human sensibility.

loses its externality and transcendent authority, incarnated in the Son, “loses its mysterious nature, to reveal itself as self-aware spirit and immanent bond between men – the spirit intended as collective knowing and agent reason”.²⁰ The scheme is that of Christian political theology – as Kervégan rightly pointed out²¹ – and of the recognition of the role of Christianity as the full realization of the religious.

The outcome we know. It is the famous verdict of *Faith and Knowledge*: God is dead: *Gott ist tot*. Here the God of distance is dead. To the Kantian God, still understood as “a God who becomes only marginally the object of reflection, a postulate of practical reason not further definable”,²² Hegel opposes a God of history, the present, facing the world: a living and dying God. The *kenotic* act of self-emptying of the Divine Logos in the historical world therefore marks the birth of a political community that resorts to religion to consolidate its institutions. It is not built according to a vertical pattern and the criterion of obedience. The cancellation of every principle, every unshakable foundation, refers in fact to a community that works and takes possession of reality, giving it shape and rational structure through language, memory and knowledge.²³ For Hegel, with the death of God dies theology itself, which passes, identical in its demythologized content and stripped of its transcendent otherness, into philosophy. And this end of transcendence implies also the rejection of any eschatological dimension, the *eschata* are brought back to the level of the historical community, as shown by the dynamics of Hegel's dialectic, whose driving force is never the end, but rather the appropriation of his own historical time.²⁴

20 Pirozzo 2013, p. 88.

21 Cf. Kervégan 2011, pp. 63–78. In the reconstruction of the transition from the early writings to those of maturity, Kervégan shows the controversial relationship that the systematic Hegel establishes between the State and religion. Although Hegel, unlike Rousseau, does not consider a pure civil faith possible in the context of the modern world, his reflection on the relationship between Churches and State shows how central for him the political dimension of religion is.

22 Küng 1972, p. 115.

23 Cf. Pirozzo 2013, p. 94 ff.

24 For Hegel, theology therefore cannot, as Metz thinks, count as an *eschatological reserve* that would have a critical and dialectical relationship rather than a negative one towards the historical present. In this case, Metz is certainly not thinking of promises in a vacuum of religious expectations. They are not merely a regulatory idea, but a critical and liberating imperative for the present: a goad and task to make these promises operational and thus to “realize them” in the historical present conditions; their truth, indeed, must be “made”. Cf. J.B. Metz, *Sulla teologia del mondo*, Queriniana, Brescia 1969, pp. 113–114.

If Christianity is thus, in Hegel's early writings, accused of having destroyed the proper ethical unity of ancient Greece, in the Jena years, the principle of the North, the Lutheran religion, is seen as the religion which has historically begun the desecralization of the cosmos and of creation, setting man free from the fear of a transcendent *terrible and vengeful* power. With the *Menschwerdung Gottes*, the Incarnation, Christianity has rendered finiteness, and with it the human community, the seat of the infinite and the divine, thus entrusting the fate of the entire cosmos to the hands of humanity. In the Lutheran declination of Christianity, intended, therefore, as the death of absolute transcendence and of separation between God and the world, Hegel sees the beginning of the process of liberation of humanity from every theological claim and every transcendent authority.

Christianity can establish itself as a religion of freedom because it is the only religion in which God, guarantor of the sense of the natural and human world, dies, allowing mankind to discover himself divine in his radical freedom, without any guarantee or transcendent authority to which submit himself.²⁵

Schmitt defines political Christology as Promethean self-deification of modern humanity, which is placed at the centre of the project of emancipation of humanity itself. This political Christology is constructed, as we have seen, on the radical rejection of eschatology, on the peculiar anthropologization of Christology, on biblical hermeneutics based on the demystification process.²⁶

2. Second movement. Protrusions

Thus far we have seen the Hegel of political theology in all his complexity. In this second part I shall try to understand whether there are protrusions in this monolithic system of the Hegelian dialectic. I shall try, then, to understand whether we can make this Christological system play in reverse – whether, that is, it is conceivable to bend Hegelian Christology in an anti-theologico-political direction. It is not necessary here to take a position with regard to the need to get away

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25 Pirozzo 2013, p. 94.

26 The double process present in Hegel is, according to the interpretation given by Vitiello of political theology, a duality inscribed right within the statute of political theology that consists “in the difference between the Platonic version, which moves, so to speak from below, from intersubjective utility (*synphéron*) to reach its condition of possibility (of the *idéa toû agathou*), and that of Paul, which follows the opposite path, proceeding directly from the Truth of God”, Vitiello 2011, p. 84.

from political theology. Here we shall try to understand whether one of the characteristics identified to describe political theology – to be, that is, an exclusionary inclusion mechanism (and here Hegel, with his dialectic, would certainly represent one of the most radical models) – could find a possible internal criticism in Hegel's writing itself. To express it in a slogan: with Hegel, against Hegel, in any event, beyond Hegel.

To this end, therefore, I shall return precisely to those early fragments of which I have shown the ambiguity, the complexity, and in some places also the distance from the finished and closed form of the mature system.

The Hegelian pitfall – as recalled by Foucault, always on guard on our behalf – is the game of wits that Hegel ascribes to his reason and which well describes the process of his system. It can be said, in fact, as Roberto Esposito also maintained in *Due*, that the Hegelian dialectic narrative penetrating “in all its contradictions, the theologico-political mechanism”, at some point becomes an integral part of it, “concealing the very dynamic that it uncovers”²⁷ – namely, that the game of disenchantment staged by Hegel has a double bottom, in which is hidden, in turn, a further masking, more difficult to uncover because it is inside the dialectical movement.

The Hegelian trap consists, therefore, in its being based on contradiction, which is also continuous inversion, making it almost impossible to get out of his scheme once having entered it.²⁸

The possibility, then, of using Hegel *contra* Hegel, exactly according to the scheme announced earlier, means appealing to the Hegel who is not yet completely within the dialectical mechanism and to the “pacified” acknowledgement of the fundamental function of religion with respect to the political categories.²⁹

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27 Esposito 2013, p. 31.

28 If we want to attempt a constructive approach towards a current analysis of the problem, we can consult two sources: on the one hand, the *Logic*, and on the other, once again the early writings. A careful reading of the *Logic*, and in particular the logic of essence, wherein Hegel deals with the problem of otherness, can help us to demonstrate how otherness is an integrating and constitutive part, indeed the very premise, of identity itself, reproducing within the unity that conflict which in part seems to recall the theme of God against God discussed by Schmitt in his *Politische Theologie II*.

29 If we then dwell only briefly on the sense of the Eucharist, the re-reading of the theme of the cult returned by Hegel in these years is interesting. “I no longer call you disciples or students: they follow the will of their master often without knowing why they should do so; you have grown up in the autonomy of man to the liberty of our own will [...] When you are persecuted and maltreated, remember my example, remember that no better fate has touched me and thousands of others”, Hegel 2014, Text 31. In the re-narration of the Last Supper in *The Life of Jesus*, when the transcendent

We return, then, to that series of fragments written in the years of his stay in Frankfurt, which are dedicated to the themes of love, destiny and life. In particular, we shall focus on the theme of love, from where it is possible to seize upon a crack in the relational model to be consecrated by the subsequent dialectic. Through love, Hegel seems to stage a “deactivating decision”, to resume a Agambenian suggestion, although he does not take it to its conclusion, abandoning this route for that of the system. Let us try to understand what it is.

Love is the crucial point, next to that of the law, on which is played the relationship between the Old Testament and the New Testament, between Judaism and Christianity: Paul *in* Paul, we might say. This theme clearly shows Hegel's transition from theology to Christology. The heteronomous power of the law loses its potential as external law insofar as it passes for love and is endorsed. This mechanism which is present in the idea of love as the *pleroma* of the law, in the idea of *agape* as the overcoming of fragmented communities, later passes into the dialectical logic. But in a short succession of fragments Hegel introduces two different ideas of love. The first, within Christian theology, is the love of the Gospels; the second is an idea of love that finds its reference in *Romeo and Juliet* or the story of Antigone: a love, in short, that deals with sensuality, ownership, death. This second idea of love has, I believe one could say, a potential of rupture that allows a different orientation within the dialectical thought that Hegel is structuring in these years. What is interesting here is that the experiment pursued in these years, to use love as a scheme for communal relationships, is considered by Hegel to be a failure. This love therefore does not have the force – yet, in a way, nor does it have the limits – of the logic that will guide the dialectical thinking. This allows us to look at it as a critical potential with respect to the dialectic composition, like an antibody within the system; and perhaps for that very reason Hegel considered it as a route to abandon. Before returning

dimension of the spirit becomes an immanent element, the shared experience of a historical community, there prevails, becoming even stronger in subsequent fragments, the conception that the community is based on *imitation Christi* – namely, “the ethics of unconditional love and of forgiveness and abandonment of the particularist and ethnicist logic of the election and of the violence of identity and self-defence between human communities” (Pirozzo 2013, pp. 62–63). Here the criticism of Kant becomes strong: also the founder of the criticism would ultimately reproduce the same transcendence that inspired the ancient Jewish religion. Whether it be the higher law of the God of Abraham or that which we internalize, it reflects for Hegel, in any case, a split between a being and a having to be, restarting that mechanism of separation and hence of transcendence, with respect to which man is required only to be obedient. If God is conceived “as a power that is beyond the consciousness”, then that also involves a conditional provision of the thinking subject with regard to the absolute object. The result is “a relationship of the individual towards this object as a bond based on authority, heteronomy”. Cf. Cortella 2011, pp. 517–532.

to this “failure”, I shall set out the discussion of “Christian” love and try to construct a way out from the dialectic system that would instead follow it.

Let us begin, then, with those fragments that, in the last critical editing of the early writings, are numbered 52, 53 and 54. To understand the semantic horizon in which Hegel moves, we must remember that whereas the starting point is the interpretation of the Gospels, the point around which the Hegelian reflection revolves is that of life, with respect to which the law represents the moment of fracture, and love the moment of re-composition.

Law and love, then: here returns the recently resumed question in the re-reading of Paul's *Letter to the Romans*³⁰ – namely: is Pauline love inside the law or it is a love that goes beyond the law? Is it the opposite of the law? Or, following the reading of Agamben, is it neither cancellation nor denial of the law, but its fulfilment, in the sense precisely of the Hegelian overcoming? And, going still further, can one think of love as a suspension of the law, as a moment subordinate to the achievement of a higher unity (*à la* Schmitt as a state of exception, and thus as its own founding act)?³¹

The law and punishment offend life, writes Hegel. Compared to the integrity wounded by the extraneousness of the law, by its abstractness which is also a lack of life, love represents, for Hegel, the force that reacts to the offence, not through another law, a punishment, but as a power that allows one to “live and return to live”.³² The idea of violence as power is rejected on the basis of life. In violating the other I violate myself, because “life as life is no different from life” and the violated life “goes against me as destiny”.³³ Life reacts to the “terrible majesty”³⁴ of the law which dominates the particular and holds man in his obedience, and which, for that very reason, cannot undo the guilt, because, as

³⁰ Cf. Agamben 2000.

³¹ On a different position, Žižek cites the Lacanian interpretation: “Lacan's extensive discussion of love in *Encore* is thus to be read in the Pauline sense, as opposed to the dialectic of the Law and its transgression: this second dialectic is clearly ‘masculine’/phallic, it involves the tension between the All (the universal Law) and its constitutive exception, while love is ‘feminine,’ it involves the paradoxes of the non-All”, Žižek 2003, p. 116.

³² Hegel 2014, Fragment 52, p. 511. Here the reference is to the passage on the prodigal son in Luke 15, 32.

³³ Hegel 2014, p. 505.

³⁴ Hegel 2014, p. 505.

extraneous law, it has no power to act before the action. And here it is no accident that Hegel introduces the concept of *destiny* in opposition to that of *the law*. If criminal law is presented as being opposed to life, destiny remains internal to it. Destiny, therefore, is not an eschatological slip, but a reaction within the offended life. It is generated when life is wounded, lacerated. If the guilt linked to the transgression of the law appears as a fragment, that which comes from life is a whole, inasmuch as the element that opposes it is also life.³⁵ The immanent law replaces the transcendent law. The community must seek to reconstruct the laceration without recourse to external laws or punishments.

To the activity of reflection, which every time it arises actually opposes, is therefore substituted the life that has capacity to contain in itself, simultaneously, the union and non-union, the conflict between self and other, between self and self. In this way, Hegel “expunges from the theological horizon of the apostles (and, ultimately, in his reading of the Gospels, also from the message of Christ himself) any reference to eschatology and divine transcendence, focusing attention, indeed, on the death of the separation between man and the divine, between individual and community, between life and law.

But we now take a step back to analyse the other meaning of love that appears in these Hegelian writings. It occurs in fragment 49, which Nohl in fact gave the title *Love* when publishing it. The horizon is that of the Old Testament, and Hegel analyses the *Zerrissenheit*, the condition of laceration in which Abraham lived, fought between himself and his people. Here Hegel explains it clearly: to cling to one's own particularity, to one's own things, determines slavery:

the wider this whole [i.e., either the Jewish people or Christendom] extends, the more an equality of rights is transposed into an equality of dependence (as happens when the believer in cosmopolitanism comprises in his whole the entire human race), the less is dominion over objects granted to any one individual, and the less of the ruling Being's favor does he enjoy. Hence each individual loses more and more of his worth, his pretensions, and his independence.³⁶

.....
35 The position in which Hegel's reflection is placed, as we said, is life, and life is recomposed through love and through fate, while the law and punishment represent the principle of tearing. That is why fate is more ruthless than the law. Because it passes through and permeates life, it is life. There is no possibility of escaping fate. This force makes it more daunting than the law. If the fear of the law's punishment is seen as fear of something alien, in the case of fate the fear is directed inwards.

36 Hegel 2014, Text 49; Hegel 1948, p. 303.

The more the individual frees himself from things, the more he loses that value which the “dominant” device exercised over him giving him a place. Love is instead what frees one from this submission. It provides a relationship “between living beings who are alike in power and thus in one another's eyes living beings from every point of view”.³⁷ Here the acknowledged function of love has a different speculative force from that found in later fragments. In defining the qualities of love, Hegel first resorts to speculative categories: singularity, multiplicity, the finite, the infinite. And the capacity to love is to overcome these distinctions posed by reflective reason. Hegel writes: “love completely destroys objectivity and thereby annuls and transcends reflection, deprives man's opposite of all foreign character, and discovers life itself without any further defect”.³⁸ In love, as Judith Butler evocatively points out, “one feels that which is living in the other”, or, as Hegel writes, love is when “the living feels the living”.³⁹ In this passage, Hegel seems to foreshadow a form of relationship which, in recognition of the difference between individuals, represented by their bodies, by the matter which as such does not allow being crossed over, appeals, not to the material or intellectual qualities in the constitution of the bond, but to being alive. Here Hegel is thinking about the realization of love in the form of spiritual fusion, otherwise the problem would not arise; what he is trying to find here is a form of relationship with one's own body and the body of the other, which, without denying it, it is not a relationship of ownership.⁴⁰

In love the difference as opposition is cancelled. There is no immunization or exclusion. “This wealth of life love acquires in the exchange of every thought, every variety of inner experience, for it

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37 Hegel 2014, Text 49; Hegel 1948, p. 304.

38 *Ibid.* Agamben writes: “Love is never directed toward this or that property of the loved one (being blond, being small, being tender, being lame), but neither does it neglect the properties in favor of an insipid generality (universal love): The lover wants the loved one *with all its predicates*, its being such as it is. The lover desires the as only insofar as it is *such* – this is the lover's particular fetishism. Thus, whatever singularity (the Lovable) is never the intelligence of some thing, of this or that quality or essence, but only the intelligence of an intelligibility. The movement Plato describes as erotic anamnesis is the movement that transports the object not toward another thing or another place, but toward its own taking-place – toward the Idea” (p. 9).

39 Hegel 2014, Text 49; Hegel 1948, p. 304.

40 Agamben writes: “Love is never directed toward this or that property of the loved one (being blond, being small, being tender, being lame), but neither does it neglect the properties in favour of an insipid generality (universal love): The lover wants the loved one *with all its predicates*, its being such as it is. The lover desires the as only insofar as it is *such* – this is the lover's particular fetishism. Thus, whatever singularity (the Lovable) is never the intelligence of some thing, of this or that quality or essence, but only the intelligence of an intelligibility. The movement Plato describes as erotic anamnesis is the movement that transports the object not toward another thing or another place, but toward its own taking-place – toward the Idea”, Agamben 2000, p. 9.

seeks out differences and devises unifications ad infinitum; it turns to the whole manifold of nature in order to drink love out of every life.”⁴¹ In love the difference is removed through the loss of consciousness that is the principle of the distinction. Love has, therefore, a deactivating power, producing a “displacement” of the subjective point of view, towards a prospect that could be called impersonal. The subject is in fact life. Love, the passion of love, is the only way we have to go out of ourselves, from our ego, to really meet the other. This does not happen in ethics, nor religion, Hegel seems to want to tell us in these pages. Love is therefore the life force that recovers its unity, producing “a sort of dispossession of the Self”.⁴² If it is true that the full realization, the conciliation, of the couple is the son, it is also true that in the relationship between the couple there is not conciliation but an on-going reversal of forces, the outcome of which is uncertain. There exists, that is, a *logic of love* that goes against the *logic of reason*, because it never reaches a definitive form, but is unlimited openness. This outline of the relationship opens up a distance from the dialectical mechanism which, if read in its reconciled guise, does not seem to give right to the singularity, to the difference as such.⁴³ In this scheme Hegel seems to prefigure a relationship in which love precedes/exceeds subjectivities, expropriating them of their obstinacy, of their original closure, but also removing their submission to the indistinct community.

Moreover, in *Phenomenology* love finds its exemplary representation in the figure of Antigone, who expresses the alternative to the rule of law. Or rather, Antigone responds to a request that the unconscious mind makes to the law, thus marking the limits of the generality or generalization of the law. Antigone’s law is an anti-normative, anti-nomothetic one. It expresses the force of life and recognizes a deep bond of union, in which exactly that which is outside the law, which is opposed to the established laws, is welcomed, loved, respected in its otherness, without the desire to normalize it.

Surprising in these lines is the vehemence with which Hegel inveighs against property and religion. Religion “makes the individual dead to himself or plunges him into the practices of self-hatred that could only be escaped through his own nullification as a living being,

41 Hegel 2014, Text 49; 1948, p. 307.

42 Butler 2012, p. 9.

43 In a different direction go the interpretations that have instead recently tried to retrieve the vital dimension of the dialectic. For a reconstruction of the discussion, see also: Sell 2013.

a condition that proves to be unbearable”.⁴⁴ But love, instead, means “not being dead for the other, and the other not being dead for the one”.⁴⁵ In love there is always a process of mortification in place, linked to the establishment of a relationship of ownership, which is why it seeks the renunciation of property, beginning with its own body, the conserving of which cancels out the very possibility of a radical love. This is the Hegelian worry: the lover warns that the beloved “has willed this possession”⁴⁶ and cannot take it away because this would create an opposition against the power of the other. Hegel is thus forced to acknowledge defeat:

He cannot himself annul the exclusive dominion of the other, for this once again would be an opposition to the other’s power, since no relation to an object is possible except mastery over it [...]. But if the possessor gives the other the same right of possession as he has himself, community of goods is still only the right of one or other of the two to the thing.⁴⁷

That is: “internal to the singular and living feeling of love is an operation of life that exceeds and disorients the perspectives of the individual”,⁴⁸ which, however, always tends to establish again a relationship of dependency.

Looking for a communal relationship in which the other is integrated into one’s life, yet without negating the particularity, love seems to represent that never-pacified bond that is based, not on the intellectual or physical reduction of the other to himself, but on the continuous effort in the search for a relationship – a relationship that has the specific quality of opposing the law.

Here there is a deviation from the bond of love that in the later

44 Butler 2012, p. 10. As Butler points out, “In those few decades before Marx’s analysis of the commodity is the wish to separate what is animated and animating from the World of property. He does not oppose the world of objects, but wants only to keep that world animated – forever. When objects become property, and property law comes to prevail, the effect is to break down those relations among humans and objects that we might call loving. And this seems to be a different modality from any religious effort to lift the finite into the infinite and have it vanquished there.” Butler 2012, p. 18.

45 Butler 2012, p. 9.

46 Hegel 1948, 308.

47 Hegel 2014, Text 49; Hegel 1948, p. 308.

48 Butler 2012, p. 10.

fragments, as we have seen, can be more clearly traced to a form of religious relationship. This love is continuous unresolved tension between the parties. Here Hegel is not thinking of *agape*, but of the love of the couple, the love between lovers, hence the importance and the theming of the resistance of the bodies and of the *aporia* linked to them.

And indeed it is the resistance of the bodies that is connected to anger and shame. The first, anger, is a force that kills; it is the reaction to the resistance of the body of the beloved. The second, shame, is a force that immunizes; it is a response to the desire to retain ownership of oneself or to possess the other, so as to render oneself or the other something dead.

At this point Hegel disarmingly comments: “then we would have to say that shame is most of all characteristic of tyrants, or of girls who will not yield their charms except for money, or of vain women who want to fascinate. None of these love.”⁴⁹ Here the shame recalls the reaction to the gaze of the other, or, as Butler again emphasizes,

for Hegel shame is what is associated with such institutions in which bodies are instrumentalized for the will of another, perhaps as well that when love takes on the form of inequality and subordination, shame follows [...] This seems to apply equally to the use of the sexual body for purposes of making money, and the use of others’ bodies as personal property or slave labor. The shame seems to be part of the practice, but it also seems to follow an aggressive, subordinating, and/or instrumentalizing dimension of love itself.⁵⁰

If, then, the relationship of property is mortiferous, and love tirelessly and consciously fights against this tragic incapacity, does there exist a form to create a relationship in which this separation is suspended? Hegel is certainly not thinking of Platonic love, but is suggesting, rather, that the only way to overcome this separation and become equal and stay alive is to suspend the ownership – beginning with that of one’s own body. This attempt to keep the love relationship alive as “neither conceptual nor spectatorial”⁵¹ refers to the place where there is no death: life. Love, that is, cannot and must not arrive at a static

49 Hegel 2014, Text 49; Hegel 1948, p. 306.

50 Butler 2012, pp. 14–15.

51 Butler 2012, p. 16.

relationship. Indeed, any attempt to reflect on this love and on life is the introduction of death into it. “Infinite life cannot become ‘object’ for thought without becoming finite and thus losing its very character.”⁵²

In this fragment, Hegel makes clear that truth remains beyond reason, because philosophy crystallizing life introduces something dead into it. It is perhaps here that matures his idea of philosophy as a bat, a philosophy that can and must limit itself to speaking of that which is dead, because to speak of that which is alive would amount to normalizing it, making it prescriptive, mortifying it.⁵³

In this direction, I believe there is a Hegel who acts against the Hegel that much of the tradition has given us – a Hegel who faces the notion of the living, singular body, irreducible to the classic dichotomies of metaphysics and politics and the division of the device of the person; a Hegel who opposes the consolidation of orthodoxies and conceptualizations; a Hegel who seeks not to prescribe life, but only to describe it.

And if, then, thought fails to remove of bodies from the mortiferous process of ownership, what may be another way? Perhaps it could be art, dance, songs, which have the ability to render the law alive, to animate the form. There is an element which acts with force in this fragment, and which sometimes reappears in later works: the Bacchic inebriation of the *Phenomenology*, the beating pulse of *The Science of Logic*. In this form, “animated and animating is not one that overcomes negativity. It only works against the ‘deadening’ effects of possession”.⁵⁴ Here it is certainly not possible to find a form of relationship entirely outside the theologico-political, but perhaps a crack may be opened in the monolithic dialectical system, from which to weaken the force of a seemingly impregnable mechanism.

52 Butler 2012, p. 17.

53 Indeed, many of the difficulties encountered in imagining alternatives to the existing politics probably reside in the attempt to think about politics without falling into a normative position, which simply determines the succession from one form of political theology to the other, thus justifying new forms of exclusion. Once again Hegel demonstrates a desire here to think outside the theologico-political scheme, denying to philosophy a regulatory power, and seeking, rather, a thought that does not tell us how we should act, or what is the legitimate political actor of social transformations, but is always a step behind political events.

54 Butler 2012, p. 19.

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Hegel's Master and Slave

Alain Badiou

Abstract: This article returns to and examines again Hegel's dialectic of master and slave. But it does so from a specific point of view, namely the view of actual existing slavery. The question being raised is: what does Hegel's account of the very constitution of the master-slave relation tell us about the constitution and practice of actual existing slavery, and what is it unable to conceptualize?

Keywords: Hegel, master, symmetry, dissymmetry, slave

Major texts dedicated to slavery are quite rare. This is especially because from the outset everything is in some sense, divided. One does not find simple strong, decided judgments, which one can anticipate. If one returns back to the Greek origins, one finds great societies that were contemporaries of slavery, which even developed it, and here one can make two elementary remarks. To start with Aristotle who ultimately legitimates slavery. He defines the slave as an “animated tool”: the slave is a matter of which only the master is the form, it exists only potentially as its act is in the master. This is to say that the thesis arises according to which the slave is only virtually, not actually or really, human. This will have a long history in different forms. The case of Plato is more complicated, because Plato defines humanity through thought and grants in a certain sense this humanity to the slave, since he shows in a famous scene of the *Menon* that the slave is able to start comprehending a complex mathematical problem and that, consequently, his thought, just as that of the great philosopher, is constituted by the reminiscence of the ideas. Contrary to Aristotle, Plato recognizes the full humanity of the slave. But similarly to Aristotle, Plato never does contest slavery as social and economic system.

In the modern world, it is certain that the most famous text in which (in French) the word “slave (*esclave*)” appears is found in Hegel, namely in *Phenomenology of Spirit*, a book of which I remind you that has been absolutely significant for the whole of French philosophy, specifically between 1930 and 1970. One can thus have the feeling that we have here in the history of occidental philosophy a major text on the objective and subjective figure of the slave.

This text on slavery can be found in a strategic point of Hegel's book. The first half of this book is dedicated to a sort of history of consciousness, such that Hegel interprets it, passing through the constitutive figures of this history, and it is organized in the book into three stages: first consciousness, then self-consciousness and, thirdly, reason. We witness an ascension from animality, that is to say from

immediate life, the life on the level of needs, which Hegel calls the world of sense-certainty, to the summit of reason, which is in fact, ethical consciousness, the consciousness of the law.

In the beginning Hegel tells us that “consciousness is ‘I’, nothing more, a pure ‘This’.”¹ We thus start from an absolutely elementary given: an ‘I’ which knows a ‘This’. An ‘I’ which knows this in an immediate way, by means of its sensory organs as an undifferentiated thing of the world. Then, starting from this utterly elementary relation, Hegel constructs a general image of the whole of civilization. And in the end, after four hundred pages² of enormous difficulty, one finds the typical sentence which reads like this: “[T]he ethical substance has developed... into actual [l’essence de] self-consciousness....”³

A magnificent path, which goes from the humble link between an ‘I’ and a ‘This’ to the ethical substance, which is truly interiorized by self-consciousness as being its will and duty.

This is an immense path which entails numerous stages that one traditionally calls “shapes of consciousness”⁴, stages which stake out this progressive ascension. And in the midst of this immense path, truly in its midst, we have a section of ten pages called: “Lordship and Bondage (*Domination et servitude*)”. In this section here we encounter the shape of the relation of “master and slave” which in a certain way shifts the universe of consciousness from one region to another one. This is why this is an absolutely fundamental text.

Why? Because it deals with the appearance of the figure of the Other. This is the moment in which consciousness removes itself from the pure relation to itself, from its solitude, its solipsism, and realizes that it is partially dominated by the existence of other consciousnesses.

This point seems to be of great banality but it really is not. One can effectively say that we owe to Hegel the explicit introduction of the other into the construction of subjectivity. Consciousness is not reducible to the *Cogito* of Descartes, it is not identical with self-consciousness. It must traverse the recognition by the other and in this recognition one encounters the figure of the mastery and of servitude.

It is interesting to locate exactly the moment where the figures of the master and the slave emerge. For the section dedicated to the apparition of the Other entails three movements whose titles are:

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1 Hegel 1979, 59.

2Translator’s remark: This only holds for the French edition.

3 Hegel 1979, 266.

4 Ibid., 21.

“Redoubled Self-Consciousness”, “The Struggle of Opposing Self-consciousnesses” and “Master and Slave”, the third moment.⁵

Hegel’s text is particularly difficult to understand and even more so to be made comprehensible, but the major difficulty is that I am not persuaded that it really deals with slavery, despite the titles and sub-titles.

Let’s begin with a very simple thing: consider what an individual is. One can very simply consider it in three ways: Firstly, as a simple object in the world, a thing of the world which must be absolutely analysed as any other thing. It is a body, a package of organs, a set of cells, finally a package of atoms, and ultimately a senseless movement of a billion of particles. This is what Hegel calls *the in-itself*. Secondly, one can regard the individual as knowing itself, not simply as a known thing, but as having the reflective capacity to know itself and consequently as being what Hegel calls a “self-consciousness.” The individual exists in-itself but also *for-itself*, that is to say in an effective relation to itself. And then, thirdly, one can consider that this individual exists as an individual that can be recognized as the individual that it is by an other, particularly by an other individual. This is the figure of the other, that Sartre will call the *for-other*. On an elementary descriptive level one very nicely finds again the Hegelian triplicity of in-itself, for itself and for the other. This will give us the key to Hegel’s dialectical development.

Starting from here the first sentence of the section about which we are speaking clarifies a famous sentence in which one hears, if I may call it so, the Hegelian clatter, the sonority of the concepts: “Self-consciousness exists in and for itself when, and by the fact that, it so exists for another.”⁶ This sentence means that consciousness hangs, in its very being, on the recognition by the other.

This is a very strong thesis. There is not the individual and then another individual. Rather, there is an individual which, in its very individuality, integrates the judgment of the other. Thus the whole problem will be that consciousness as self-consciousness does only exist insofar as it is recognized as such by another self-consciousness. It absolutely needs this recognition to be constituted in the universe which is both its own and is always a collective and cultural universe. Self-consciousness is only born insofar as it is recognized. This is both fundamental and a new and profound idea: there is not what now

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5Translator’s remark: These titles are additions by Jean Hyppolite, the translator, to the French edition of Hegel’s text.

6 Hegel 1979, 111. Translator’s remark: The French rendition of this sentence makes the sonority Badiou is referring to more apparent: “La conscience de soi est en soi et pour soi quand et parce qu’elle est en-soi et pour-soi pour une autre conscience de soi.”

exists and then afterwards, the other, no, the other is present in the very constitution of self-consciousness.

We can thus anticipate the problem of the master and the slave, starting from the fact that there are three terms: a self-consciousness, another self-consciousness which recognizes the first, and between the two that which is not consciousness, that which simply put is: the thing in itself. Between the master and the slave there will always be this third term, the thing. And what Hegel will try to deduce is that the master and the slave differ *in relation to the thing*. Everyone has the consciousness that the other is also a consciousness, but what produces their difference is the thing. And why? Because the master wants to enjoy the thing while the slave has to work on the thing so that the master enjoys it. This fundamental dissymmetry that is constitutive of this relation will therefore emerge that the master is tilting to the side of enjoyment, whereas the slave is tilting to the side of labour. However, both labour and enjoyment suppose the thing in their midst on which the slave works so that the master enjoys it.

What Hegel in fact desires, his most fundamental project, is to arrive by philosophical, conceptual means from the simple existence of the other – from the simple fact that every self-consciousness proves that there is another consciousness and ultimately another self-consciousness – at a dialectic, which is the dialectic of enjoyment and of labour. Hegel's gamble is that starting from this simple encounter – one self-consciousness encounters another self-consciousness – one can accomplish the deduction of culture as the cement of collectivity.

Let's try to make our way with Hegel. The simple occurrence of the other self-consciousness presents itself at the beginning as coming from the outside: I am a self-consciousness and I see another self-consciousness; it is outside. In this sense, it is an other, absolutely, since it comes from the outside. The paradox is that in the very moment when I see that it is absolutely other than me, I also see at the same time, that it is absolutely the same as me, since it is another self-consciousness.

We have here an extremely tight dialectic of the other and the same, which will organize the whole procedure. Since the other is also a self-consciousness it is in a certain sense identical to me. In addition, this relation is a relation of pure reciprocity. We have in fact a structure that makes each consciousness conscious of the fact that the other is also a consciousness, a consciousness that also has a consciousness of the fact that the other is a consciousness. All this creates a sort of absolutely primitive reciprocity which is the pure encounter of two self-consciousnesses such that they both immediately identify one with the other.

To put this in more anthropological language: You encounter someone and even before you know anything about him, there is one thing that you know: that he belongs to humanity like you do. Thus, he is other, another human, but at the same time he is just human. And the relationship with the other represents a paradoxical synthesis between absolute difference and absolute identity.

Oddly, here is the point located which brings us to the historical and anthropological consideration about slavery. The great problem is in fact that we are dealing with a pure symmetry: in this analysis, the two terms are indistinguishable; each term is defined as a self-consciousness which encounter another self-consciousness, as other and same. This is what Hegel calls redoubled self-consciousness. We are thus in a logic of the double, a logic which has had many consequences, particularly aesthetic ones (the use of the twin; the fascinating theme of the doubling, of the double). But the double is a symmetry, a symmetrical identity. If I stay with the double, nothing is produced: it is a closed and static structure, since we have a primitive reciprocity where everyone recognizes the other as it is recognized by the other. We are apparently in an impasse of the dialectical process which seems to have stagnated in this primitive reciprocity.

The whole problem is that humanity as we know it can constitute itself beyond this primitive recognition only if there is a dissymmetry. This is the most delicate point, and as we will see Hegel does not fully appreciate this. He certainly knows perfectly well that if one wants to move beyond the mirror effects of reciprocity and of the stagnation it causes, one must introduce dissymmetry. He himself says that the process "at first,... will exhibit the side of the inequality of the two [self-consciousnesses, F.R.], or the splitting-up [...]."⁷ In the moment when one obtains an absolute symmetry, the process must present us with the inequality of the two consciousnesses, which will then present this rupture. But where does this rupture, this inequality come from? At the point where we are, the other is also at the same time, the same.

I think that Hegel produces what I would call a forcing: he will in fact describe the dissymmetry but without having the means to legitimate it. He will also assume and decide that there is a dissymmetry; he will tell us what it consists of, but he will not be able to deduce it, to construct it by starting from what precedes it.

This forcing is, as always with Hegel, quite magnificent and one must understand its nature well. What he tells us is that everyone will engage the other, who is also the same, in a struggle in which the stakes

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⁷ Hegel 1979, 112f.

for each is to be recognized by the other, without being obliged to recognize the other. "I" will get the other into a struggle, into a life and death conflict as such that the other is forced to recognize my humanity in the form of an identity that is not only different from his, but in fact, superior to his. This is to say that the other will be forced to recognize me as more other than he is other: recognize me as an other of a nature other than the inaugurally given symmetrical alterity.

However, one cannot see, how this should result from the procedure itself. The struggle for recognition introduces from the outside a dissymmetry into the relation between the other and the same. The struggle, in fact, unfolds as such that the other recognizes that he is not really the same as me: that is to say, that I am superior to him. One sees here on the one side how we orient ourselves towards slavery, and on the other, that we have a principle of rupture which does not probably draw its legitimacy from the dialectic which precedes it, that of the symmetrical encounter of two self-consciousnesses.

If one introduces a dissymmetry this amounts to saying that in it there is one more human than the other. Here, there is no alternative. And this is exactly what Hegel says in a different language. Here we have the necessarily abstract genesis of racism in its most general sense, of racism whose thesis is that there exist individuals that are certainly human, but of a lesser degree than others. From where the terms of master and slave are derived that name this presumption of inferiority.

How does this struggle for recognition unfold if one admits to the stroke of force that institutes it? To understand this one must recall that behind the self-consciousness of the individual there is animal life, organic life. Before being self-consciousness consciousness must exist, live, as natural body, in sensuous immediacy. The dissymmetry will therefore be constructed in the following manner: in the struggle for recognition one of the self-consciousnesses will accept the risk of death and the other will shrink away in face of the risk of death. In reality, the self-consciousness through fighting in the deadly struggle for recognition is led to accept that the risk of death will fundamentally place the recognition of self-consciousness above animal and organic life. It will declare in the name of the pure recognition of its being human as self-consciousness that it is ready to risk its life, its animal life, since what it defends is pure self-consciousness. In turn, the other will in the fight shrink back in the face of risk of death and will thus not affirm self-consciousness but rather the power of life. One of the combatants will accept that one deals with self-consciousness all the way, accepting to put its organic existence in the struggle for recognition in danger,

whereas the other will remember that organic life is the condition of consciousness and will thus protect it from the risk of death brought about by the struggle of the consciousnesses.

Hegel puts this as follows: "[O]ne is the independent consciousness whose essential nature is to be for itself, the other is the dependent consciousness whose essential nature is simply to live or to be for another. The former is the lord, the other is the bondsman [in the French rendering: the slave, F.R.]."⁸ One of the consciousnesses affirms that a consciousness is ultimately independent from life and must be recognized precisely in this independence; and for consciousness as superiority over life to be recognized all the way it will have to take up the risk of death. And this will be the independence of self-consciousness, self-consciousness as essence. The other consciousness will assume that ultimately the real of self-consciousness is life after all, since without life there is no consciousness and thus it will protect life, but will at the same time accept its inferiority in relation to self-consciousness.

There is a point that I want to underline here because it is often forgotten. One must understand that for Hegel this all has two reasons. One here does not deal with a conflict where one could state that the master is right and the slave wrong because it is correct that self-consciousness is superior to life as well as it is correct that life is the condition of self-consciousness. The master will recognize self-consciousness at the expense of life, accepting the risk of death, but this is an abstraction, because this detaches self-consciousness from life itself. And the slave will abandon the principle of self-recognition in the name of life, however this is also an abstraction, for he renounces the singular progress that is represented by self-consciousness in relation to simple organic life.

As one can see, the genesis of the categories of master and slave in Hegel represent a passionate attempt to deduce the fact of domination from the simple encounter with the other. To be honest, I think that this does not work for the following reason: from the pure encounter one can eventually deduce a symmetrical structure. But the dissymmetry must be introduced from the outside, because fundamentally one does not know why there is one who shrinks away in the face of death while the other accepts it. There is an obscure contingency. One could very easily imagine that in the name of the pure for-oneself, that in a general manner, everyone accepts the risk of death. Or conversely, that everyone refuses it. The dissymmetry is simply the dissymmetry of two possibilities, but the deduction of the fact that these

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8 Ibid., 115.

two possibilities really constitute the fundamental relation of civilization from its beginnings, that of the master and the slave, is not really established.

This means that it is true that the deadly struggle for recognition makes us, in its consequences, pass from one process to the other. In terms of the first process, the master is in the position of domination over the slave. But what will be the content, the exercise of this domination? We find here again the fundamental role of the third term, of the thing. The master, being he who affirms the pure self-consciousness, must live independently from the thing. Since it is he who took the risk of death and has thus affirmed the purity of self-consciousness, detached from the needs of life, he cannot be dependent on the thing anymore. The master is thus he who must be able to enjoy that thing without being preoccupied with it. This is his position. Consequently, he will command the slave, for he has chosen the side of material life, to occupy himself with material life to the master's advantage. He will ask him to produce the things that he desires, without engaging himself in the vital quagmire, if one can say so. The task to occupy oneself with the vital quagmire is returned to the slave to furnish the master with the things that he needs. In this sense, the master is immediate enjoyment, whereas the slave cannot enjoy the thing, because it is destined for the master. The slave must work and form the thing for the enjoyment of the master. While he took sides with life in the fight for recognition, he is thus the one who paradoxically finds himself in the impossibility of satisfying his immediate vital needs, and is thus forced to defer his enjoyment, since he works for the master.

We have here an utterly extraordinary shape insofar as it initiates a reversal. Compelled to defer his immediate satisfaction, to work, to form and cultivate the object independently from his own desire, for the desire of the other, the slave will in the end be the inventor of culture because he is the inventor of a desire that is dispatched from the formation of the thing, in the adornment of the thing, in the aesthetic of the thing. One must here appeal to the language of Freud that is so close to all this and state that the slave is the man of sublimation, the man of repressed pleasure, for the benefit of working on the thing. Ergo, he is the one who creates the human civilization.

One witnesses here, as Hegel will tell us, a complete reversal. The master who had affirmed self-consciousness at the expense of life has become the one who is content with immediate enjoyment, whereas the slave is led to defer the satisfaction of his immediate desire for the sake of culture, of the invention of more and more beautiful, more and more extraordinary and creative objects. It is thus the slave who will become

the creator of sublimated culture, whereas the master will ultimately remain an enjoyer without any creativity.

So, we have in the second section a spectacular reversal that in the end makes it clear that human history is the history of the slaves and not that of the masters, who are nothing but the history of successive enjoyment, and never the history of creative and productive culture. This dialectical reversal allows us to understand in which sense certain depths of Hegel have oriented Marxism: in the bosom of History the fundamental creativity is on the side of the dominated and not on that of the dominating. Hegel tries to give an explicit account of this in a passage that I quote before commenting on it:

"But just as lordship showed that its essential nature is the reverse of what it wants to be, so too servitude in its consummation will really turn into the opposite of what it immediately is; as a consciousness forced back into itself, it will withdraw into itself and be transformed into a truly independent consciousness."⁹

Let us recapitulate. Faced with the risk of death the master renounces the immediacy of life but only to fall into the immediacy of enjoyment that is enchained to a thing whose true master is the slave. In this sense the master becomes the slave of the slave. On his side, the slave has on the contrary accepted, out of fear of death, the primacy of immediate survival. But forced to work and accept the mediation of labor, he has created culture, becoming in this way a future master of the master. In the incapacity to live otherwise than in the present, the master becomes the slave of the slave, in turn, the slave devoted to the future becomes the master of the master.

Now, can we draw any clarification from all of this concerning historical slavery? To a certain degree, yes: it is from the perspective of the last thesis according to which the most important historical work is accomplished as production, as creation by those who are in the position of servitude and not by those who are in the position of mastery. But I nonetheless think that three objections subsist. And this is even apart from a more formal and non-negotiable objection, namely that the German word "Knecht" – translated into French as "esclave / slave" – means "servant" or "knave", and that one thus deals with more universal dialectic than those which clarify the anthropological phenomenon of slavery.

First objection: The dissymmetry remains unexplainable, it is not really deduced and consequently the historical phenomenon of slavery

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9 Ibid., 117.

is missed, precisely because it requires a contingent dissymmetry, that between human groups that are on the levels of – technical, scientific or military – development presenting an objective, historical dissymmetry. The material possibility to organize something as vast and as terrifying as the great transatlantic slave Treaty cannot be explained without mentioning the material instruments and the wills of domination that one camp, that of the powerful imperialists, disposed of. There is an acquired superiority that cannot be explained as a consequence of this pure encounter: in the moment of this encounter a major dissymmetry is already effectively constituted. This is a point that Hegel does not let enter into the account of the dialectical configuration of master and slave, simply because he remains faithful to his program which consists in deducing the dialectic from the encounter.

From here arises a second objection. One can say that real, historical slavery could be rather described as a point of impasse of the Hegelian dialectic. An impasse that one can very clearly situate in the moment of the second time: the thing mediates the relation between enjoyment and labour. Its principle is very simple: by means of his labour, the slave furnishes the master with what his enjoyment obtains. Yet, historical slavery is not limited to this mediating position of the slave, between the thing and the master. The historical slave is nonetheless partially *the attempt to subjectively identify the slave with a thing*. The real slave is not simply he who can work the thing to offer it to the master; he is himself thing-ified, treated like, sold as, bought as a thing. Even if one knows very well that there is always a zone of impossibility of this radical treatment, it is nonetheless true that slavery in the strictest sense is different from the servitude that Hegel describes. From this point of view one could say that real slavery is the moment where the second moment of the Hegelian dialectic finds itself in some sort of blockage, paralyzed by the fact that one does not really recognize in this figure of slavery the distinction between thing and labour. Certainly, what one awaits from the slave is labour, but this labour is itself like an emanation from the thing, since the slave himself is a thing. And thus the triple of enjoyment, the thing and labour, that certainly exists in the real, since for example the slave will fabricate the sugar for the markets of the masters, this dialectic is not the subjective dialectic of real slavery. In real slavery, the slave is lowered to the thing he handles, he is a thing amongst things. One thus must recognize that in this precise point historical slavery does not enter the Hegelian schema.

Finally, the third objection: In the Hegelian frame it becomes impossible to access the proper political subjectivity of the slave with regards to slavery. What I mean by this is that while at the same time the

emancipation attempts of the slaves is contained by themselves, it is also in the revolt of the slaves under the lead of Spartacus in the Roman Empire or in the revolt of the slaves at St. Domingo under the lead of Toussaint-Louverture. This does not enter into the schema because the slave sees himself as confined by Hegel to the register of the cultural production of the thing, and thus nothing allows for him to be able to invent a particular political subjectivity. The figure of the political revolt from the slave origin is a figure that is absent, not simply out of contempt or ignorance but due to the very structure of the Hegelian development.

For my part I think – and I conclude with this point – that Hegel refers with his complete dialectical unfolding to the aristocratic world. The world of enjoyment of the master remains nonetheless, for him, a world of nobility and the world of the slave, of the inferior classes, does in the end, include the bourgeoisie. The inferior classes comprise also of the intellectual class, that is to say the class that is formative of culture, certainly in the state of servitude in relation to monarchic nobility, in the state of abatement and servitude, but this nonetheless is in the end the true motor of History. Even though, in exaggerating a bit, one could say that the slave is Hegel himself, considered in the last resort as small professor, who is insignificant with regard to the politico-monarchical establishment of Prussia at that time. It is Hegel, who attributes to himself or endows himself, in the heart of the consciousness of relative servitude that is those of the small public servant in the ending 18th century with real historical greatness. This otherwise can be resumed in saying: “All this is nice, but one will remember me, Hegel, I will exist eternally, while one will not remember the Count So-and-So, who certainly has enjoyed in his life more than I did, but who in view of universal history is nothing at all.” To my mind, Hegel is much closer to this than to the producers of cans of sugar on the Caribbean Islands.

I would thus say that the dialectic of master and slave in Hegel is an interesting, passionate figure, even from the point of view of the theory of the other and its introduction into philosophy. It is interesting to the degree in which it brings with it the theory of enjoyment and of labour, as much as the function of sublimation and repressed desire in this affair; it is also interesting from the point of view of the manner in which the dominated classes can represent themselves in the moment of ending Aristocratism, in the hinges of the 18th and 19th centuries. But it certainly does not really touch the real of slavery. For this to be the case, one would have needed without any doubt a different entry, because, once again, this theory presupposes the quasi eventual givenness of a first dissymmetry, a factor that Hegel has not integrated

in his development because his development must obey to the laws of dialectical genesis. Consequently, and this is my last word, I would say that the dialectic of master and slave, and I believe I have somehow elucidated it, is a magnificent philosophical anticipation whose relation to real History remains however indirect and metaphorical.

Translation: Frank Ruda

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The Future of Hegelian Metaphysics

John W. Burbidge

Abstract: With the recent suspicion of metaphysics it is easy to be embarrassed by Hegel's suggestion that his *Logic* is also a metaphysics. In this paper I want to argue that his conception of metaphysics is still highly relevant, and suggest some ways it could be developed further. I start by suggesting how Hegel justifies his claim, and why that justification still retains a measure of plausibility. Then I turn to a discussion of what we mean by cause, and how Hegel's analyses of necessity, cause and reciprocity transform this concept in ways which are relevant to current developments in science.

Keywords: Logic, Metaphysics, Cause, Necessity, Reciprocity

I
In his *Encyclopaedia Logic* Hegel observes that his “Logic coincides with metaphysics, with the science of things grasped in thought that used to be taken to express the essentialities of things.”¹ For all that the logic is the system of pure thought, these thoughts are not the empty categories of Kant's transcendental philosophy, but the *Logic* “contains *thought in so far as this thought is equally the fact* (or object [Miller]) *as it is in itself; or the fact* (or object) *in itself* insofar as this *is equally pure thought*.”² The term translated by di Giovanni as “fact” and by Miller as “object” is the notorious *Sache selbst*. Whatever else might be involved by his use of this term, Hegel is evidently saying that the thoughts analyzed in the *Science of Logic* are not simply thoughts but capture what is essential about what Kant calls things in themselves.

What is not often noticed is that this claim of the identity of thought and *Sache* comes just after two paragraphs in which Hegel has stressed that the *Logic* presupposes the *Phenomenology of Spirit*. Hegel says that the concept of a philosophical science emerges from his earlier work, and sets the context within which the logic develops. For it is in the *Phenomenology* that “the first immediate opposition” of consciousness and its object is gradually transcended as we “traverse all the forms of the relationship of consciousness to the object.”³

It is worth considering how that opposition of consciousness and object, which is represented in both Kant's appeal to transcendental analysis and Nietzsche's scepticism about what humans call truth, has been overcome. Hegel sets the stage in the Introduction to the *Phenomenology*. Rather than starting out from a preconceived idea

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¹Hegel 1991, §24, p. 56.

²Hegel 2010, p. 29; Hegel 1969, p. 49. Italics in the original.

³Hegel 2010, p. 28.

of what knowledge is, he suggests, it is better to allow consciousness to formulate its own claims. Any such claim to knowledge will involve both a certainty, and a claim to truth. In other words, it spells out in some detail what kinds of effects that might conceivably have practical bearings would result from putting it into practice. The belief in this claim is then advanced with the calm certainty that truth will emerge as expected. When those conceptual expectations prove to be wrong through an experienced encounter with reality, that certainty is shattered. In the aftermath a revised self-certain belief has to be formulated that incorporates what still survives from the previous claim together with what has been learned from its failure. Here we have a process of confident belief, an encounter with reality that shows the belief lacks truth, and a new, more comprehensive belief. By continually reworking the conceptual expectations articulated in its beliefs, consciousness learns from experience.

I have formulated that dynamic in terms of belief and conceivable effects in order to evoke an echo of C.S. Peirce. In his essay, "The fixation of belief" Peirce points out that the only reliable way of fixing belief involves assuming that there is an independent Reality that will frustrate and disprove inadequate beliefs; and in its sequel "How to get our ideas clear" he defines a clear idea as one in which we work out what kinds of "effects that might conceivably have practical bearings, we conceive the object of our conception to have."⁴ What Hegel is outlining in his introduction is essentially a version of Peirce's pragmatism -- a process whereby consciousness formulates a claim to knowledge that works out its conceivable practical implications, discovers that in fact key expectations are flawed, and retreats to develop the next step in its quest for knowledge. It is not surprising that the first title for the *Phenomenology* was "Science of the Experience of Consciousness."⁵

This work, then, traces the way conceptual formulations are constantly corrected by the given facts of experience in a long and on-going process, becoming ever more effective in predicting what will in fact occur when we put a confident knowledge claim into practice. When we come to its final chapter on "Absolute Knowing" we find that what it describes is little more than the general structure of that process. From the beautiful soul consciousness has learned that when one acts on the

⁴ C.S. Peirce, "The Fixation of Belief" and "How to Get our Ideas Clear" 1931-35, 1958, vol. 5, §§ 384 and 402. There is no evidence that Peirce ever read the *Phenomenology*. The Harvard Libraries, however, hold a copy of the second edition of the *Encyclopaedia of the Philosophical Sciences* of 1827 with Peirce's book plate. This edition preceded the posthumous edition of the *Werke* which included material from Hegel's lectures as additions.

⁵ Robert Stern develops this reading in Stern 2009, pp. 218ff. Other readings of the *Phenomenology* that incorporate pragmatic themes can be found in Flay 1984, Collins 2013, and Westphal 2015.

distilled essence of what one knows one discovers that the results are not always what one expects, and one then incorporates that discovery into one's accumulated knowledge; and from revealed religion it has heard that this is the ultimate rhythm of the universe, where the divine essence acts to create a world, discovers the result is not what it expected, and then initiates a pattern in which original design is integrated with the way the world actually is, and where the believer has discovered in the dark night of the soul that there is no truth out there, but that truth lies in the dynamic flux of existence where concepts are always subject to revision. The concept of pure science which is presupposed by the *Science of Logic* is, then, nothing other than this process of learning from experience. Thought has moved from a number of confident affirmations of fixed belief, to a dynamic process that continually incorporates what it learns from its practical failures. Not only has thought been modified by what it has learned from experience, but the act of conceiving has incorporated the open dynamic by which the wisdom achieved from cumulative experience is constantly revised by thought's interaction with the world of reality. Because the logic emerges from and continues to implement this experiential process, it can be confident that its concepts are no longer pure a priori categories of transcendental thought, but metaphysical principles that are implicit in the universe.

In taking this approach, Hegel has abandoned Kant's rigorous distinction between appearances and things in themselves, but at the same time he has incorporated Kant's insight that knowledge involves integrating intuitions and concepts. On the one hand, as Robert Pippin has pointed out, for Hegel there are no pure intuitions, where the intellect is radically passive, but all intuitions are moulded by thought.⁶ On the other hand, useful concepts are not purely a priori, but have been formulated to take account of the way earlier conceptual formulations have failed when applied to the world of experience. It is because he has provided a more dynamic understanding of the way concepts and intuitions interact that Hegel can then proceed to implement Kant's project of a "future metaphysics".⁷

If this analysis is correct, there are implications about the strategy one should adopt if one wants to do metaphysics in a Hegelian way. The concepts he is analyzing are not peculiar to him, but are the result of the cumulative experience of western culture, epitomized by the variety of claims explored in the *Phenomenology*. The analysis itself simply

⁶ Pippin 1989, Chapter 2.

⁷ Consider the title for his *Prolegomena to any Future Metaphysics*. For a more detailed justification of this interpretation of Hegel's metaphysical project, see Burbidge 2014a.

attempts to lay out in detail what is implicitly embedded within those thoughts. So a Hegelian metaphysics would take some of the fundamental concepts with which, as the result of our cumulative experience, we organize our understanding of the world and examine what they entail: to what extent does our actual experience fit and to what extent does it disconfirm what they articulate. And it would then proceed to reconstruct its conceptual framework in light of any disconfirming evidence that experience has provided.

This is not simply a form of the practice of the empirical sciences, in which a proposed theory is tested by developing critical experiments. For the concepts in question are those presupposed when formulating those very theories: concepts like “individual”, “cause”, “law”, “actual”, and “possible”. And the testing is much more tentative, since these fundamental concepts determine what we take seriously as evidence, what we dismiss as irrelevant, and how we formulate our theories. So the process involves reformulating the way we understand the world. It is a genuinely reflective, philosophical enterprise. At the same time, it needs to be sensitive to what the empirical sciences have actually discovered about the way the world operates. Proposals for revision should not legislate what is reliable data, but rather expose what is implicit in the processes and relations discovered.

The expansion of our knowledge about the natural world breaks apart the neat pattern that Hegel's system adopts. It is not simply that physics has split the atom – what was supposed to be the ultimate indivisible unit of reality -- into a myriad of components, and that geology and biology have given nature a history. Thought itself has drawn more refined distinctions and discovered more intricate interrelationships. Hegel's logic appears to trace a single sequential story. For all that he varies that sequence quite considerably as he moves through the various editions of the *Science of Logic* and the *Encyclopaedia*, each version traces a single path, suggesting that there is but one story to tell. But when one enters into the logic and thinks through the various concepts, one can see connections that could easily move in other directions.

What I propose to do in the rest of this paper is suggest what a contemporary Hegelian metaphysics might look like. I shall do so by drawing heavily on analyses that Hegel himself develops, but I shall not be following his particular pathway. I start from the concept of cause as it is understood in the contemporary world, and then suggest how a reflective discipline that takes account of experience might produce a slightly different, but more effective conceptual framework.

The contemporary concept of cause reflects the influence of David Hume and Immanuel Kant. For all that Hume traces our belief in causal necessity to customary habits of the mind derived from the repetition of similar events, he does not question the reliability of that belief. Necessary connection between cause and effect is a cornerstone of his whole philosophy, based as it is on an attempt to transfer a Newtonian approach to science to the world of human affairs. And it finds expression in his confident assertion that: “It is universally allowed, that matter, in all its operations, is actuated by a necessary force, and that every natural effect is so precisely determined by the energy of its cause, that no other effect, in such particular circumstances, could possibly have resulted from it.”⁸

Kant, bothered by the discrepancy between Hume's deterministic claims and the weakness of his justification for our belief in them, traces our belief in cause to the structure of the conditional judgment, *if A then B*, which asserts a necessary connection between antecedent and consequent. Kant claims that it is this conceptual model that determines the way we organize our understanding of phenomena according to causal patterns. We distinguish between a casual temporal sequence and a necessary causal one by the fact that the latter happens according to a rule justified by sufficient reasons.

For both philosophers what characterizes a cause is the necessary connection between cause and effect, so that there is a forward-moving inevitability in the way the world emerges out of the past and moves on toward the future.

This conception of causal necessity has provided the implicit standard for our contemporary conception of cause. To be sure, we are ready to admit that we use the word “cause” for influences that could have been otherwise, or where a condition does not inevitably lead to its regular consequence. While the smallpox virus causes smallpox, we can frustrate the supposed necessity by vaccinating with cowpox viruses. We are reminded by Hume's caveat “in such particular circumstances” that a causal link can always be affected by attendant conditions and circumstances. But, convinced that a forward-moving necessity is implied, we then attribute such a necessity to the accumulation of the appropriate attendant circumstances – not only to the fact that they all have been assembled at the same time, but also to the fact that they have occurred in the proper temporal order and spatial relationships to trigger

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⁸Hume 1993, p. 54.

the resulting effect.

The belief in a forward-moving causal necessity, then, is a metaphysical assumption of our world, an assumption that has seldom been subjected to critical examination. Once we acknowledge its structural role, functioning as a preordained Kantian category, we can begin to examine its justification to see whether that belief is in fact inescapable. Approaching Hegel from this perspective, we find that, in his *Science of Logic*, he provides a number of critical comments that place that belief into question. He does so in his analysis of necessity, in his analysis of cause, and in his analysis of reciprocity.

First, his analysis of necessity. Hegel distinguishes three forms of necessity. *Formal* necessity starts from the fact that a particular event could have happened otherwise, and is thus contingent. Once it has happened, however, it cannot be otherwise and so is necessary. *Real* necessity emerges from a discussion of real possibility, in which enough contributing conditions come together to make some effect necessary. Once that set of conditions becomes sufficient, they cease to be conditions, however, for the effect has already become actual. The move from conditions to result is *really* necessary. At the same time, however, it remains a contingent matter whether enough appropriate conditions emerge to produce the necessary result. So even real necessity is bedevilled with contingency.

One turns to his discussion of *absolute* necessity expecting that Hegel will articulate a thorough-going forward-moving necessity. But that does not seem to be the implications of the dense and difficult final section of his chapter on Actuality. We can identify three steps in his argument. In the first place, real necessity has a determinate structure in which contingent conditions coalesce to produce a necessary result. While, as determinate, it is something actual, it is also inherently necessary. So Hegel calls its actuality *absolute actuality* because it cannot be otherwise. In the second place, this actuality is absolute simply because it is nothing more than its own inherent necessity that makes it possible; so it is radically contingent, and so a bare possibility.⁹ But because the only other possibility would be nothing at all, it can be called *absolute possibility*. So the relation of real necessity when considered as an integrated unity is itself contingent, even as it incorporates into its meaning the contingency that affects the way its conditions come together.

Third, Hegel explores the complex picture that has emerged.

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⁹Consider Leibniz's question: Why is there something rather than nothing?

The absolute actuality that emerges from real necessity is radically contingent, which means it lacks any grounding or justification. At the same time it is formed by an internal dynamic in which conditions coalesce to generate real necessities even though those conditions are themselves contingent on the circumstances through which they became actual. In other words, this internal dynamic is the ground which generates comprehensive or absolute actuality. We have an actuality that at the same time lacks a ground and yet is grounded -- an actuality which simply is (a being), yet its being results from the complicated relation between conditions and their necessary consequences which constitutes its essence. Looking at the total picture we see a complex reciprocal activity in which actuality shifts into possibility and contingency shifts into necessity, just as possibility and necessity shift back to actuality and contingency. These double transitions collapse (or sublate themselves) into a new immediate concept that includes all the details of the interaction. That immediate thought Hegel calls *absolute necessity*.

So absolute necessity does not involve a strict forward-moving inevitability, but a constant shifting back and forth from real necessity to contingency, from pure possibility to pure actuality. It is absolutely necessary that contingencies result in relative necessity, and that necessities produce and presuppose contingencies. If this analysis holds, then the claim of causal determinism that causes generate a strict forward-moving necessity is misguided.

We now turn to Hegel's discussion of cause. It develops in three stages. In the first place, when we consider causes simply on their own, abstracted from any context, we think of them as moving directly into their effect. Once an effect happens, the cause ceases being causal, and the effect ceases being a result. In effect, the causal dynamic and the resultant effect are simply the same thing from two different perspectives. This, says Hegel, is what we usually mean when we talk about causal necessity.

Secondly, once we apply this formal pattern to some content the relationship becomes more complicated. For whatever acts as cause and whatever experiences the effect also have other characteristics that continue even as the change occurs. At the same time the dynamic that constitutes the causal process is transferred from one to the other, while retaining its identity. A specific causal sequence can thus continue to exercise its causal efficacy so that the effect becomes a cause in its turn, and so on in an infinite progress. Similarly the cause was itself activated by some prior cause in a sequence that repeats itself into an infinite regress.

Third, when we look closely at the relation between cause and effect we find a more intricate relation. The cause is active, driving towards the production of an effect; whatever receives that impetus is passive, lying inert until the cause introduces its novelties. But were that passive recipient not there, the cause itself would be impotent and passive, waiting for some opportunity to act. So one could regard the introduction of the supposedly passive recipient as an active initiative that turns the potential cause into an actual cause. What we have is a form of reciprocity -- an action and reaction where each entity acts on the other, and each responds to what the other introduces. From this perspective the causal chain is not a linear sequence, but a series of consecutive circles in which what emerges is a network of mutual implications. One can then consider those situations where the chain does not simply move on to other entities, but develops a complex *modus vivendi* between the two interacting agents. The action of one stimulates a reaction from the other which in turn triggers a new response in the first. They develop a reciprocal pattern in which each transfers its activity over to the other and each receives and adapts that activity in terms of its own distinctive character. We have once again a form of double transition, of passing over from one to another and back again.¹⁰

Hegel has thus set the stage for the move to a consideration of reciprocity. While Kant had recognized reciprocal interaction among the organs of an organism, he nonetheless maintained that, ultimately, everything would be explainable in terms of mechanical causation, with its linear movement through time.¹¹ In contrast, by developing the concept of reciprocity out of the interaction between the initiating and the ostensibly passive conditions, Hegel claims that linear mechanical causation is only an abstraction, and it is reciprocity that captures the essential concept of causality. "In *reciprocity* the mechanism [of finite causality] is sublated."¹²

In addition, reciprocity articulates the structure of real necessity, for the determinate conditions of that necessity now turn out to be substantial agents ("*free actualities*" he adds with emphasis) that act on each other. That interactive dynamic, in which substantial conditions

¹⁰It is worth noting that, by the time Hegel revised both the *Science of Logic* and the *Encyclopaedia*, he introduced in the text of their second editions comments that stressed the critical importance of such double transitions. Indeed, I have suggested elsewhere that, once a double transition becomes stabilized it collapses into a new kind of integrated unity, and that it is this transition that Hegel dignifies with the name "sublation". (Burbidge, forthcoming)

¹¹See Kant 1951, §65, p. 218-222.

¹²Hegel 2010, p. 407 of *Gesammelte Werke* pagination.

determine the nature of real necessity is a process of self-determination. So reciprocity not only captures the essential character of causality, but it also incorporates the absolute necessity that integrates real necessity with contingency and freedom.

When one has a full reciprocity, then, one has a complex that incorporates all of its components into a single comprehensive pattern, something that could be called a *universal*. It has the *particular* characteristics of the specific dynamic involved, and the total complex collapses into an integrated *singular*. This enables Hegel to make the transition to the next Book of the *Logic* on concepts. For *universal*, *particular*, and *singular* are the basic components of concepts and conceiving. In other words, the concept of reciprocity articulates explicitly the critical process of conceptual thought that has emerged time and again throughout the earlier discussions in the *Science of Logic*. The reciprocity or double transition of coming to be and passing away collapses into the immediacy of *Dasein* (or determinate being); the double transition of finite and infinite beyond collapses into being for self; the double transitions of condition and conditioned, of ground and grounded collapse into existence. Since double transitions have spelled out those critical transitions that result in new stages within the logic of objectivity, the concept of reciprocity, by making them the focus of attention, enables the transition to thinking about thought itself or the "concept".

When we look closely at Hegel's analysis of the concept of cause, then, we find interesting implications. The structure of reciprocal causality develops a pattern that continually reconstitutes itself even as each component transfers its energy to the other. This continuing dynamic develops a life of its own, which can become in its turn an agent in other causal processes. The activity of this complex agent, however, is no longer a simple matter of forward-moving causal necessity, for it is made possible only through the action of the initial interacting components, and only through the specific pattern of reciprocal transition that they develop. For all that these constituent elements have been collapsed into a new integrated unity they nonetheless mediate and enable its higher-level functioning.

III

Since Hegel's post-Kantian metaphysics requires that concepts formulated by the intellect be integrated with intuitions emerging from experience, we cannot move directly from an Hegelian analysis of concepts to making metaphysical claims. We need to take into account

empirical evidence that makes it plausible to reconstitute our explanatory concepts along Hegelian lines. With this in mind, I shall outline two relatively recent developments in science.

The first concerns weather forecasting. Scientists have developed a complex structure for gathering data which not only covers the surface of the earth but obtains measurements from atmospheric heights and oceanic depths. That data is then subjected to complex mathematical analysis. The mathematics used is called chaos theory. That discipline emerged from the attempt to establish what happens when more than two objects act on each other. And it produced a sequence of consequences in which no regular pattern emerges, even though everything follows necessarily from the given premises. When Edward Lorenz used the mathematics of chaos theory to develop models for predicting weather patterns he discovered that varying, by even a miniscule decimal point, the initial conditions he put into the calculation he obtained widely diverse results. For all that the use of the mathematics of chaos produced better predictions of what would happen with the weather over the immediate future than the previous reliance on the experiential knowledge of meteorologists, it was nonetheless dependent on the contingency of the data put into the equations. Over time the imprecision of the data collected and the interference of contingent conditions cause the accuracy of the forecasts to gradually disintegrate.¹³

What we have is a structure of necessity, articulated in the mathematics of chaos used in the calculations, that is radically affected by the contingency of the initial conditions and of interfering circumstances. This sounds very much like the pattern of real necessity Hegel has analyzed.

The second development concerns reciprocal interactions that are central to the functioning of the natural world. For some time biologists have known of a dynamic, called symbiosis, in which two organisms interact with mutual benefit, and then develop a relatively permanent association that has a distinctive life of its own. Lichens, for example, are not simple organisms, but are the combination of an alga and a fungus each of which benefits from, and contributes to, the functioning of the other.¹⁴

Equally interesting examples come from what is now called the Standard Model of particle physics. Not only is the atom, which started out as the ultimate indivisible particle of matter, a system of

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¹³This discussion is based on Lorenz 1993 and Edwards 2010.

¹⁴Recently evidence has emerged that there is a third, bacterial, agent involved in the interaction.

reciprocal interaction between electrons and nucleus; but the protons and neutrons that make up that nucleus are themselves highly complex. Protons and neutrons are made up of particles of mass, called quarks, each of which has several characteristics: the direction of spin (which can generate an electrical charge) can be either up or down; and each quark has one of three alternative properties, designated by the terms “red”, “green” and “blue”. (Both “spin” and “colour” are metaphors, not accurate descriptions.) The quarks are organized in such a way that the neutrons have no electrical charge, while the protons have a positive charge; and both neutrons and protons are “white”, that is, each has red, green and blue quarks. That is not all; for the force that holds the quarks together is the strongest force in nature, called the strong nuclear force (which, unlike gravity and the electromagnetic force, increases as the distance between the particles increases). This binding force is made up of particles of energy (which have no mass) called gluons. There are eight kinds of gluons reflecting the properties of the quarks that are to be bound together: +red/-blue; +red/-green; +blue/-red; +blue/-green; +green/-red; +green/-blue; as well as two which bind together quarks of the same colour but with different spins. In other words, this small part of the Standard Model reveals a very complex picture where quarks within a proton or neutron reciprocally interact in quite determinate ways, depending on their distinctive characteristics. The result is larger, more complex particles which make up the nucleus of an atom. A very complicated interplay of reciprocal interactions would seem to characterize the causal processes of matter at this basic level.¹⁵

In other words, contemporary science offers evidence that fits within Hegel’s metaphysical scheme.

IV

We are now at the point where we can draw some implications for our contemporary concept of cause – implications that are essentially metaphysical, since they affect the conceptual framework within which we interpret the way the world functions.

The first implication we can draw is that causes, while initiating and influencing what happens, do not entail any universal forward moving necessity. What Hegel calls real necessity recognizes that, once enough conditions are present, a result will inevitably have to happen; but that does not entail that the assembling of all those conditions in precisely the right order is itself rigorously necessary. It is affected by contingency.

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¹⁵This discussion is based on Susskind 2008 and Baggott 2012.

And while we might entertain the thought of some kind of absolute necessity, that necessity turns out not to be a governing inevitability that structures the universe, but rather the fact that contingencies both emerge and contribute to necessary sequences.

This means, in the second place, that in any causal sequence effects are adulterated and affected by other factors – complicating circumstances and other causal sequences so that a causal move does not get transmitted directly from one to another, but becomes simply one conditioning factor among many in determining what ensues. What has been called “mechanical cause”, taking as its model what happens when balls interact on a billiard table, does not do justice to the way causes actually function in the real world. Rather conditions act on, and react to, each other in the course of producing an effect. This transforms our understanding of rigorous causal necessity, and complicates the belief in causal regularity.

This leads, however, to the third important implication from Hegel's analysis. For it suggests the way regularity can emerge, even within this chaotic maelstrom. If it is possible for causal agents to interact reciprocally, they may develop a tendency to reinforce those features that are mutually beneficial and reduce the influence of those that complicate the picture. Reciprocal interaction, then, encourages a form of regularity and thrives on it, opening up an arena for habitual processes and actions that exert their influence when circumstances are appropriate. From this perspective, the regularity that is enshrined in our language of natural law is not basic to the functioning of the universe, but emerges from the dynamic of reciprocal interaction.

There is, in addition, a fourth implication. For this analysis of cause can explain how properties emerge as entities become more complex; and shows that such emergent properties cannot simply be reduced to the basic functioning of the elementary parts. For all that the indivisibility of atoms has been abandoned, we are still prone to adopt its other reductionist assumption, that everything can be explained simply by drilling down to the most basic constituents, whether they be electrons, quarks or strings. But more complex organisms are not simply the aggregate sum of the actions of their components. They are determined just as much by the distinctive way those components interact; and that interaction introduces forms of shared action that neither component can do on its own. For each is affected and altered by the activity of the others; and that interactive dynamic, while establishing some kind of continuing *modus vivendi*, adapts to new contingent conditions that surface in the environment. The result of the interaction is a new integrated entity that freely determines itself as an agent, interacting

with other entities at a more sophisticated level of complexity. Functions that emerge from reciprocal causality, then, cannot be reproduced by simply activating the elementary components in isolation. The unified dynamic develops a distinctive character that manifests novel properties.

This analysis rehabilitates in a strange way the philosophy of Aristotle. It has become conventional wisdom that the discovery of the importance of mechanical causes in the seventeenth century put paid to the Aristotelian analysis of cause. But what we have just described is a structure of complex cause in which the initial components that enter a reciprocal interaction with their innate modes of operation serve as the material condition, the distinctive pattern that develops within that interaction becomes the formal condition; and the resulting entity that can now independently function on its own is an agent or initiating cause. While we have not identified anything that could be called a final cause or purpose, were it possible to identify complex integrated objects that have the ability to respond to causal interference from their environment by either appropriating what is presented into their own operation or reconstituting themselves in response to damaging incursions, we would have agents that are exercising what looks like the purpose of self reproduction and enhancement.¹⁶

What I have been attempting to do in this paper is to suggest how, by exploring in detail arguments Hegel puts forward in his *Science of Logic*, we can develop resources that enable a critical examination of some metaphysical assumptions of our modern world. Not only that, but it can suggest alternative models that could well do more justice to the way the world actually functions.

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¹⁶I have explored the metaphysical implications of this conceptual model in Burbidge 2014b.

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Hegel's Big Event

Andrew Cole

Abstract: Across his works Hegel has much to say about history and the philosophy of history. But he also has a good deal to teach us about the theory of the “event,” or Begebenheit, and the way in which this term puts before us the problem of philosophy—which philosophy you care to use in the face of events of every magnitude. Badiou’s “event” is examined briefly in this Hegelian context, as well as the distinction between theory and philosophy as such.

Keywords: Hegel, Begebenheit, event, French Revolution, Badiou, dialectics.

On January 23, 1807, Hegel wrote to his former student, Christian Zellman, and among other things pronounced on the importance of philosophical science during the fraught times of the French Revolution:

Science alone is the (true) theodicy [Die Wissenschaft ist allein die Theodizee], and she will just as much keep us from marveling speechless at events like brutes [sie wird ebensowenig davor bewahren, vor den Begebenheiten tierisch zu staunen]—or, with a greater show of cleverness, from attributing them to the accidents of the moment or talents of an individual, thus making the fate of empires depend on the occupation or nonoccupation of a hill—as from complaining over the victory of injustice or defeat of justice.¹

Let’s dwell for a moment on “brutes” and “events,” because Hegel is saying something very precise to his former (read: always current) student. Events (Begebenheiten) can leave us mesmerized and speechless. Yet Wissenschaft gives us something to say about them. Only a philosophical science can supply the appropriate frame within which to understand them. Failing to embrace such philosophy, we cleverly construe events to be something else entirely—“accidents of the moment” (sie Zufälligkeiten des Augenblicks) bearing no relation to necessity; or we fixate on this or that particular happening. In short, events require philosophy in the same way that only philosophy can handle the truth of events.

What can we make of this term for “events,” Begebenheiten? What can it tell us about philosophy or for that matter the French Revolution? Let’s read another letter to find out. Working as a journalist for a newspaper in Bamberg, Hegel penned the following epistle to Karl von Knebel on August 30, 1807:

¹ Hegel 1984, p. 123; Hegel 1952, 1.137.

your region is not very fertile in great political events [großem politischen Begebenheiten]—with the exception of that all-too-great event which was the Battle of Jena, the sort of event which happens only once every hundred or thousand years [zu große der Schlacht bei Jena ausgenommen, dergleichen in 100 oder 1000 Jahren nur einmal vorkommt]. Meanwhile great political events and news for the press [große politische Begebenheiten und Zeitungsnachrichten] are not exactly the same thing, and the latter is not lacking. The comings and goings of a marshal, or of (French) Ambassador Reinhard, the departure of the Ducal family, and especially the new Principality of Jena make for articles well worth the effort.²

It's important to tell oneself things. Having already distinguished “great political events” from mere “news” about the mundane activities of politicians and aristocrats—that is, having differentiated between “große politische Begebenheiten” and “Zeitungsnachrichten”—Hegel freely admits that writing news articles is “well worth the effort,” but it's not exactly philosophy, now is it?: “I know full well that the composition of newspaper articles is like eating hay in comparison with the feast of turning out well-chiseled Lucretian hexameters rich in deep philosophy [tiefsinniger Philosophie].”³ Hegel senses here (again) that to speak of “große politische Begebenheiten” is at once to do philosophy—whereas to faff around with mere “Zeitungsnachrichten” is to do journalism. It looks like the “comings and goings of a marshal” are uneventful in the way “the occupation or nonoccupation of a hill” is. And news-writing makes Hegel not only a dull boy but a hay-eating brute.

We're starting to get the picture about the philosophical gravity of Begebenheiten—how there can be no talk of events without including philosophy in the discussion. One more letter should do it. On April 29, 1814, Hegel wrote to his trusty correspondent, Friedrich Niethammer, to report, in part, that “Great events [große Dinge] have transpired about us. It is a frightful spectacle to see a great genius destroy himself.”⁴ These “große Dinge”—and Hegel here uses the very archaic form of “Ding” as “event”—is the fall of Napoleon, about which he gloats he foresaw: “I may pride myself, moreover, on having predicted this entire upheaval... in my book, which I completed the night before the battle of Jena.” Citing material from the *Phenomenology of Spirit* on the limits of what he calls

2 Hegel 1984, p. 143; Hegel 1952, 1.187.

3 Hegel 1984, p. 143. Knebel was embarking on a translation of Lucretius' *On the Nature of Things*, so Hegel's reference is apt.

4 Hegel 1984, p. 307; Hegel 1952, 2.28.

“abstract formal freedom”—yes, we're still reading a letter here!—Hegel supplies the appropriate philosophical frame within which to qualify, nay translate these “große Dinge” as “großen Begebenheiten,”⁵ and to speak of them in that characteristically cheeky way that lures us to his letters in the first place: “From the streams of blessings necessarily flowing from these great events, just as showers must follow lightning, that brown rivulet of coffee already flows from the pot for the likes of us, and indeed does so with more taste and perk than ever. For we have now been liberated from substitute drink....[W]e can now procure real Java coffee.”⁶ With or without caffeine (read: devastation in the colonies), philosophy can turn any old “Ding” into an “event,” Begebenheit, but when this happens, you face a choice with philosophical and political consequences.

I cite these three examples from Hegel's letters as an attempt to unthink what we think Hegel himself thought about the relation between philosophy and the French Revolution. Each passage from these letters works differently from the other, but all three are circling around a very specific problem for Hegel, which is the problem of philosophy in the face of the revolutionary event. Each passage is trying to express something particular about the character of the word/concept, Begebenheit, as opposed to the many synonyms Hegel could choose to refer to an event, like Ereignis (which he does use, but not in the same way). When you utter the term Begebenheit, you are already speaking a philosophical language, but the term itself isn't self-explanatory, doesn't point to “happenings” in any clear way, nor does it declare its philosophical affiliation in the way jargon does. Good philosophy, after all, isn't reducible to single buzzwords and the like—even though today, ironically enough, the word “event,” risks precisely this reduction in the name of Alain Badiou, to whom I'll turn at the end of this essay. Begebenheit is unintelligible without philosophy—which is to say that you have to use the *right philosophy* to understand the term, and to use the wrong philosophy will only confuse your perspective on historical processes.

In other words, Begebenheit isn't just any old term.⁷ After Goethe, and in view of the emerging historical sciences after Chladenius, it took on a range of meanings in academic discourse.⁸ But to Hegel's mind, the term spelled “Kant,” and with good reason. Kant uses the word

5 Hegel 1984, p. 307; Hegel 1952, 2.29.

6 Hegel 1984, p. 307-08.

7 See Lyotard 2009, pp. 63-66.

8 See Cassin, Apter, Lezra, Wood 2014, pp. 289-90; Smith 2010, p. 118; Beiser 2011, pp. 44-45.

copiously in such works as the *Conflict of the Faculties* [*Der Streit der Fakultäten*], where one finds some of his more memorable remarks about the French Revolution. But his most technical discussion of event qua event appears in the *Critique of Pure Reason*, where the term is applied to jejune circumstances: Begebenheit is an external, mechanical, natural, even agentless occurrence (we're not yet in the third critique where at the end the curtain is raised on the "purposiveness" of nature, revealing the handiwork of an intelligent designer). Furthermore, an event is "something, or some state which did not previously exist, [that] comes to be" and "cannot be perceived unless it is preceded by an appearance which does not contain in itself this state." It's also a "perception that follows upon another perception." It is "an appearance which contains a happening." As well, it's the "order in which the perceptions succeed one another in apprehension."⁹ An event, Begebenheit, is many things even for Kant, then. But from these quotations excerpted from a brief passage from Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*, you can see that this term calls attention to some basic problems—chiefly, the split between subject and object, perception and occurrence. It demands that we think about the coherence of the orders of reality and perception, how reducible experience is to reality, down to and up from the quanta, and so forth. It is, in short, a term that begs for philosophy and ultimately (and arguably) for a philosophical position that is dialectical, precisely because these two orders of reality—like the proverbial parallel lines in non-Euclidian geometry—do ultimately meet. Which is to say: had Kant thought in a consistently dialectical way, his exposition of Begebenheit would have been more ordered, better organized, perhaps more capable of taking on the task of interpreting history.

But Hegel was consistently dialectical, and that is why we are here today talking about "events." We are here concerned with Begebenheiten thanks to that well-known passage from the lectures on the philosophy of history in which Hegel famously says that philosophy inspired the French Revolution—"the *French Revolution* resulted from Philosophy."¹⁰ Hegel's meaning here is not so straightforward, and is not simply a reference to Enlightenment philosophy in some generalized sense; more likely, Hegel here refers to the so-called "philosopher of the revolution," Kant. Even with such specificity, however, he does not intend to say that the relationship between philosophy and revolution is unidirectional or for that matter untroubled. Instead, for Hegel, as we will see, the ways in

.....
9 Kant 1929, p. 221; all references in this paragraph are on the page cited.

10 Hegel 1952, p. 446. See Comay 2011 for an important and richly reflective account of how German Idealists (Kant and Hegel, above all) responded to the French Revolution.

which revolutionary events, as Begebenheiten, *result* from philosophy involve some very specific problems concerning *which philosophy* you care to adopt, and which philosophy you decide to bracket. The choice is a political one, as Hegel teaches us. And, once more, the lesson is a dialectical one.

The Dialectic of the Event

Let's ease into the critique of Kant, however, by first visiting Hegel's most technical discussion of Begebenheit, which appears in the *Philosophy of Right*, at a moment when Hegel just happens to be mention the French Revolution:

An event [Eine Begebenheit], or a situation [Zustand] which has arisen, is a concrete external actuality which accordingly has an indeterminable number of attendant circumstances. Every individual moment [Moment] which is shown to have been a condition, ground, or cause [Bedingung, Grund, Ursache] of some such circumstance and has thereby contributed its share to it may be regarded as being wholly, or at least partly, responsible for it. In the case of a complex event (such as the French Revolution) [einer reichen Begebenheit (z. B. der Französischen Revolution)], the formal understanding [formelle Verstand] can therefore choose which of a countless number of circumstances [einer unzähligen Menge von Umständen] it wishes to make responsible for the event.¹¹

You can tell by his tone that the work of the "formal understanding" is not what Hegel wishes to do, because it is not the work of philosophy, whose task isn't limited to seeking out causes as a way to assign responsibility for this or that event. Because, in other words, an event has "an indeterminable number of attendant circumstances," it would be absurd (my word) for the "formal understanding" to attempt to "choose which of a countless number of circumstances" actually caused the event. Hegel is content to let multiplicity be.

We can confirm this reading—the reading being that the "formal understanding" shan't be applied to the interpretation of the event—by noting that Hegel offers a great statement on the limits of such rigid "understanding," which in his lectures on aesthetics he imputes to the "prosaic mind":

the prosaic mind treats the vast field of actuality in accordance with the restricted thinking of the *Understanding* and its categories, such as cause and effect, means and end, i.e., in

.....
11 Hegel 1991, p. 195/§115; Hegel 1927-40, 7.215.

general with relations in the field of externality and finitude. In this way of thinking, every particular either appears falsely as independent or is brought into a mere relation with another and therefore is apprehended only as relative and dependent; the result is that there is not established that free unity which still remains a total and free whole in itself within all its ramifications and separate particulars.¹²

To adopt a point of view in which “every particular...appears falsely as independent” is to focus on, as we saw in one of Hegel’s letters above, the “accidents of the moment or talents of an individual, thus making the fate of empires depend on the occupation or nonoccupation of a hill.” It’s to dally in false causes. It’s to focus on a single thing when there are multiple causes and numerous determinations. It’s to eat hay.

Kant is not mentioned here, but Kantian problems abound, as we will soon see. For Hegel understands the particular demands of the term *Begebenheit*, enabling him to stake out a difference from Kant—not only a philosophical difference but a political and historical difference about what it means to think about events as big as a revolution. It also demanded him to repurpose this philosophical term, vitiating its Kantianism and applying it to a proper dialectical conception of history and event. What for Kant is the fundamental problem of events—how noumenal succession underlies and informs the ordering of appearances in perception—is for Hegel in the passage from the *Philosophy of Right* a question of “indeterminable multiplicity,” the problem of “an endless number of factors” that will be “responsible” for the complex event (to which subjective ordering—i.e., historical analysis—is applied). Which is to say, Hegel knows that *Begebenheit* is Kantian in the strangely thematic it mirrors Kantian epistemology: history already gives us plenty enough ruptures, politics plenty enough rips in the social fabric, that it doesn’t help to adopt an epistemology (the so-called Transcendental Analytic) that places a chasm of unknowability at the very center of history, politics, and events.

At the encounter between philosophy and the revolutionary event, then, you can find not only the term *Begebenheit*, but you can feel the charge zapping between the opposite poles; you can sense the tension. Let’s give this tension its proper name: the dialectic. But sometimes this dialectic between philosophy and revolutionary event falls into one-sidedness when each fails to pass through the other in the process of historical understanding. Hegel understood the perils of non-dialectical

.....
12 Hegel 1975, 2.974-75.

thinking when he spoke of the failure of philosophy in the face of big events like the French Revolution. Look no farther than his very pointed remarks in his inaugural lecture on the history of philosophy at Heidelberg, 28 October 1816:

But the distress of our time [Not der Zeit], already mentioned, and the interest of great events in the world [Interesse der großen Weltbegebenheiten], has repressed, even among ourselves, a profound and serious preoccupation with philosophy [eine gründliche und ernste Beschäftigung mit der Philosophie] and frightened away more general attention to it. Thus what has happened is that, since sterling characters have turned to practical matters, superficiality and shallowness have managed to hold the floor in philosophy and make themselves at home there. We may well say that ever since philosophy began to raise its head in Germany, the outlook for this science has never been so poor as at just this present time [zu jetziger Zeit]; never have Vacuity and Conceit so endowed it with superficiality, never have they thought and acted in philosophy with such arrogance as if they ruled the roost there. To work against this superficiality, to work together in German seriousness [deutschen Ernst] and honesty, and to rescue philosophy from the cul-de-sac into which it is sliding [or better: “from the solitude to which it has fled,” reading “aus der Einsamkeit, in welche sie sich geflüchtet”]—this is our task, firmly believing that we are called to it by the deeper spirit of the age. Let us together greet the dawn of a finer age [die Morgenröte einer schöneren Zeit begrüßen] wherein the spirit, hitherto dragged outwards, can turn back within, come to itself, and win for its own proper kingdom space and ground where minds rise above the interests of the hour [über die Interessen des Tages] and are receptive of the true, the eternal, and the Divine, receptive of power to consider and grasp what is supreme.¹³

We must take this passage in turns. The “distress of our time” has to be the French Revolution; the closing reference to a “dawn of a finer age” is an allusion to that great event, as well as an allusion to Hegel’s other allusions such as we see in his lectures on the philosophy of history, where the Revolution is (translated as) a “glorious mental dawn.”¹⁴ Within that historical, eventful frame, Hegel tells us that there is only mere “interest” in *Weltbegebenheiten*, with the result that “a

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13 Hegel 1985, p. 2; Hegel, 1927-40, 18.12-13.

14 Hegel 1956, p. 447; rendering, “ein herrlicher Sonnenaufgang” (Hegel 1927-40, 12.529).

profound and serious preoccupation with philosophy” is squelched. When “interest” abounds, there is no serious philosophy. To be sure, there is still philosophy—just not the profound kind: “superficiality and shallowness have managed to hold the floor in philosophy.” We are back with the brutes. So, how did this sorry condition of philosophy arise? It’s because “sterling characters have turned to practical matters.” Good philosophy suffers while bad philosophy holds sway, which is what happens when the best philosophers—those sterling characters—turn to “practical matters.”

Who else could this “sterling” character be but Kant? I suggest that in these ceremonious, and still decorous, remarks Hegel is pointing to Kant and Kantianism as what’s wrong with philosophy and what’s responsible for the bad assessment of world events; later, I will show that this is inarguably the case. Hear Hegel out. He speaks of “interest”—*Interesse der großen Weltbegebenheiten; Interessen des Tages*—as if to put Kant in mind, and specifically to speak of those aspects of Kantianism that Hegel will later overtly critique as having an improper place in the interpretation of the Revolution: i.e., the “pure will” as a form of “absolute freedom.” Those well-versed in Kant, in other words, know that “interest,” when uttered in the same breath as “practical matters,” refers to the problem of the will in such works as the *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*: “the will is nothing other than practical reason”; “The dependence of a contingently determinable will on principles of reason is called an *interest*. This, accordingly, is present only in the case of a dependent will, which is not of itself always in conformity with reason.”¹⁵ Likewise, those well-studied in the clichés about Hegelianism—and we can be clear that this includes most readers, beginning with Hegel himself—can see that the man is referring to his own philosophical, dialectical method in the image of procession and return, complete with the sublative rise: “the spirit, hitherto dragged outwards, can turn back within, come to itself, and win for its own proper kingdom space and ground where minds rise above the interests of the hour [*über die Interessen des Tages*] and are receptive of the true.” Dialectics instead Kantian interest, please.

Hegel can only sustain this allusion and decorum for so long. Take his lectures on the philosophy of history. When he speaks of the subject of the French Revolution—the subject of the “absolute Will”¹⁶—he fails to hide the fact that he’s already projecting Kantian problems into his exposition of circumstances having actually little to do with Kant or the

15 Kant 1997, pp. 24; 25n.

16 Hegel 1956, p. 442.

introduction of Kant into France by way of Charles de Villers. For example, he speaks variously of the “absolute will,” the “pure Will,” the “*formal* Will,” the “abstract Will” as the “basis of all Right and Obligation—consequently of all determinations of Right, categorical imperatives, and enjoined obligations.”¹⁷ It’s only after he projects Kant into the scene of revolution that he then doubles back to say that “the same principle obtained speculative recognition in Germany, in the *Kantian* Philosophy.” There’s a trick here, to be sure: he makes it seem as if France was Kantian first. “Among the Germans,” he goes on to say, “this view assumed no other form than that of tranquil theory; but the French wished to give it practical effect.”¹⁸ The difference between France and Germany, then, isn’t only the difference in enlightenments, or religious reformations (Protestantism was never a state religion in France), nor for that matter economic development. No, as he bombastically writes the story, the difference between France and the Germany is the difference between Hegel and Kant, the difference between dialectics and systematic transcendental philosophy, indeed the difference between theory and philosophy—whereby in Hegel theory appears as philosophy that becomes self-conscious, philosophy that is, in other words, conscious of its own grounds, its own forms of exposition, its own contingency, its own impulses, its own strategies, its own tactics.

These times, those times, demand more—which is why Hegel, in one of the final passages in his lectures on the philosophy of history, says that “We have now to consider the French Revolution in its organic connection with the *History of the World*; for in its substantial import that event is World-Historical [denn dem Gehalt nach ist diese Begebenheit welthistorisch], and that contest of Formalism which we discussed in the last paragraph must be properly distinguished from its wider bearings [und der Kampf des Formalismus muß davon wohl unterschieden werden].”¹⁹ Here, finally, Hegel gives us our term, Begebenheit. How are we to understand his remarks here? This turn from “formalism” to the “wider bearings” is a turn from Kantianism to Hegelianism, and in this turn we are finally urged to consider the French Revolution apart from the French Revolution qua Revolution-as-event, and outside of the Kantian frame. Having said his peace about Kant, Hegel can let go and move on to World History proper in a discussion of other nations (Italy, Spain,

17 Hegel 1956, pp. 442–43.

18 Hegel 1956, pp. 443.

19 Hegel 1956, p. 452; the translation by Sibree is a tad off: “Wir haben jetzt die Französische Revolution als welthistorische zu betrachten, denn dem Gehalt nach ist diese Begebenheit welthistorisch, und der Kampf des Formalismus muß davon wohl unterschieden werden” (Hegel 1927–40, 12.535).

Austria), in particular, England, ending with—of course—Germany.²⁰ The “wider bearings” refigure the “event” (otherwise a “formal,” Kantian *Begebenheit*) into a happening that is “world historical” (though, of course, only European). No wonder Hegel never uses the special term *Begebenheit* in this final section of his lectures called “Die Aufklärung und Revolution” until this very last point—until, that is, the moment the event itself is superseded because Kantian formalism itself must be dialectically surpassed.

We can return, then, to that well-known passage in the lectures on the philosophy of history, mentioned at the outset, where Hegel seems to say that philosophy caused the Revolution:

It has been said, that the *French Revolution* resulted from Philosophy, and it is not without reason that Philosophy has been called “Weltweisheit” (World Wisdom;) for it is not only Truth in and for itself, as the pure essence of things, but also Truth in its living form as exhibited in the affairs of the world. We should not, therefore, contradict the assertion that the Revolution received its first impulse from Philosophy. But this philosophy is in the first instance only abstract Thought, not the concrete comprehension of absolute Truth—intellectual positions between which there is an immeasurable chasm.²¹

Dialectics abhors a chasm. And Hegel loathes “abstract Thought.” He is suggesting here that the Lutheran reformation forestalled a revolutionary event in the German states—that the reformation was, in short, a revolution in thought. If only France had a reformation, so the idea goes, the revolution of 1789 might never have been. But we have to see Hegel’s fuller point, that the reformation, while supplying an intellectual revolution, didn’t provide *enough of a revolution in thought*—in particular, in philosophy. Why? Because there is too much abstraction in Kantianism, which is to say that there is too much formalism in Kantianism, which is to say that the subject of Kant is the subject of “abstract thought” and “absolute freedom.” By these Hegelian lights, Kantianism is no revolution in thought; this “Copernican revolution” can’t lay claim to any conception or initiative borne out by the Revolution itself, and the only prize it can claim is one of failure, as Hegel says he predicted long ago in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*.

Speaking of which: In the *Phenomenology of Spirit*—in particular, that section on “Absolute Freedom and Terror”—Hegel here oscillates

²⁰ Hegel 1956, p. 455.

²¹ Hegel 1956, p. 446.

between allusion and direct reference to the prosaic text of history, but one thing is clear, especially in light of everything he says everywhere else about the French Revolution in relation not only to philosophy but to Kantian philosophy in particular: the problem of that revolution is the problem of a formalism that is Kantian in character. It’s not only Hegel’s references to philosophical purity—“pure metaphysic, pure Notion, or a pure knowing [reine Metaphysik, reiner Begriff oder Wissen]”²²—that point to a critique of the Kantian transcendental subject, which for Hegel is inherently “devoid of self” and is “in truth a passive self” trading in a “pure *insight* [reinen Ansichseins]” whose “distinctions are in the pure form of Notions [Unterschiede in der reinen Form der Begriffe sind].”²³ Rather, Hegel is exposing the problems that result when this famous Kantian subject of cognition, whose conceptual structure are the so-called “forms of possible experience,” are extended into the subject of the will, action, and actuality: the result, in other words, is the subject of “*absolute freedom* [absolute Freiheit]” who is “conscious of its pure personality [reinen Persönlichkeit]”²⁴ and who recognizes himself or herself in the “essence of all the spiritual ‘masses’ [Wesen aller geistigen Massen]”—as if (indeed “as if”!) to universalize his or her own maxim as the “real general will [eell allgemeiner Wille].”²⁵ The Hegelian critique of the “critique of pure reason,” then, is a negation of a (Kantian) negation that revisits, and thus exposes, the universalizing logic of pure reason operating not out there in the cosmos where problems about the infinity of God are treated in the mind games of the antinomies, but rather down here, right now, in an actuality where finitude earns its name precisely in the positing and breaking of limits: “the individual consciousness...has put aside its limitation [seine Schranke aufgehoben]; its purpose is the general purpose, its language the universal law, its work the universal work.”²⁶

Hegel’s Event, Badiou’s *Begebenheit*

I have chosen to focus on the term event or *Begebenheit* in order to estrange the whole question of revolution. The referent to which the word “revolution” itself points could be called something else as a useful

²² Hegel 1977, p. 356/§583; Hegel 1927-40, 3.431.

²³ Hegel 1977, p. 356/§583; Hegel 1927-40, 3.432.

²⁴ Hegel 1977, p. 356/§584; Hegel 1927-40, 3.432.

²⁵ Hegel 1977, p. 357/§584; Hegel 1927-40, 3.432. Of course here Hegel refers to Rousseau’s *volonté générale*.

²⁶ Hegel 1977, p. 357/§585; Hegel 1927-40, 3.433.

exercise in estrangement to see what we have. That's the first step in dialectics: the naming and the un-naming of processes and propositions that will never be static or still—this, the attempt to refresh and reposition your point of view. That's what Hegel was doing in the forgoing passages.

But there is another first step Hegel is taking here. I would call this an event, too, in the name of Hegel and dialectics themselves. The event—or, if you will forgive me, the event of the event—is the transition from Kant to Hegel, and the move from philosophy to theory, from anti-dialectics to dialectics. It is, quite straightforwardly, the birth of theory in Hegel, and the specific ways in which he breaks with Kant. In Hegel, out goes the transcendental subject. Out go the concepts that do not change like those synthesizing “forms of possible experience” in the table of categories. Out goes the resistance to a philosophy of language (notwithstanding Kant's flirtations with this in the third critique), and out goes the disavowal that philosophy is *formed* in language. With Hegel, in comes the idea that, as he says, “it is in language that we are conceptually productive.”²⁷ In comes a subject that is not preconstituted, or transcendental, and thus not the subject of, or subject to, philosophy as traditionally conceived. In comes a rigorous thinking about the historicity and contingency of concepts, as well as the regard for the conceptuality of figures and forms—in other words, in comes a robust and fully articulated aesthetics. And last but not least, in comes the dialectic, which we can remember Hegel adopted as the central mechanism of his thinking at a time when Kant had derided dialectic as dogma and outmoded scholasticism (the figure that undoes the antinomies and is then itself undone and forgotten). At the time, that was a really stupid move on Hegel's part—to speak of dialectics as if to out-Christian-Wolff that old scholastic Christian Wolff. But Hegel acquitted himself just fine. So in Hegel, we have a philosopher who brings down the house of philosophy built by Kant, a philosopher who shows how philosophy works against itself to produce the richly embroidered phenomenology, the bewildering number of perspectives and perspectives on perspectives, we encounter in the *Phenomenology of Spirit* and which continue on in works like his *Logics*, whose systematicity is only windowdressing over the good bones of phenomenology.²⁸

Why say all of this? It's because this transition from philosophy to theory is crucial here, as we behold the concept of the “event” and ask whether it's best setting is within philosophy or, dare I say, philosophy as

27 Hegel 1990, p. 97.

28 I discuss the distinction between theory and philosophy in Cole 2014 and Cole 2015.

such, or indeed whether theory, as described above, is the better frame for thinking this concept. I had mentioned Badiou at the outset. I've never seen more variation, let alone confusion, over a term in critical theory and philosophy as there is with Badiou's notion of “event.” It's like nothing you see with other concepts within philosophy and theory. Why is this?

We already have the answer: it's because there's something about Badiou's idea of the “event” that is perilously philosophical, expressed (as it is) in a monology that is fairly transparent to its own exposition and uninterested in the tensions wrought by its very exemplification, be it the example of the “event” that is the French Revolution in *Being and Event*—and the matheme derived therefrom, “ $e_x = \{x \in X, e_x\}$ ”—or the analysis of the non-event that is the Oka crisis in *Logics of Worlds*, about which parties may differ.²⁹ The examples feel run over, but that is the condition of philosophy, its state and its grounds. My apologies to my many philosopher friends, but when we're not cutting people's brains in half and setting them within different bodies to wonder what a person really is, as moral philosophers love to do and to which the auditor asks “do you not hear yourself talking?,” we're approaching examples as if they are non-resisting subjects, fixed entities, prisoners in Plato's cave with their attention fixed as firmly as the chains that bind them. There is no give, no giving over to what makes an example thinkable, scriptable, or legible—how its inertia manifests in philosophical prose in the way a shoal disturbs the water's surface. I don't want to be unfair, and indeed one can be precisely fair when Hegel and Badiou coincide on the problem of the event. For instance, Badiou states that the “historian ends up including in the event ‘the French Revolution’ everything delivered by the epoch as traces and facts. This approach, however—which is the inventory of all the elements of the site—may well lead to the one of the event being undone to the point of being no more than the forever infinite numbering of gestures.”³⁰ Hegel, in the *Philosophy of Right* in the passage cited above, would agree; he would call that historicism a species of the formelle Verstand, the formal understanding, which deprives events of their eventfulness and dissolves them into the countless causes and one-sided particulars.

It funny, though, because the opposition between philosophy and theory I have in mind—and which presents to us not only the problem of the event but the difficulty of the example—is partly expressed in Slavoj Žižek's encomium of Badiou you often find on the back of the latter's books: “A figure like Plato or Hegel walks here among us!” Forget the

29 Badiou 2005, pp. 180-83; Badiou 2009, pp. 310-17.

30 Badiou 2005, p. 180.

“like”: what’s with the “or”? Žižek doesn’t mean it this way, but when you invoke Plato—bearing in mind the centrality of mathematics to Plato’s conceptual scheme in the *Republic* (mathematics being much to Badiou’s liking), on top of the fact that Badiou himself offers a so-called “hyper-translation” of this very work³¹—you know that the man in question is being called a philosopher, on the one hand. You know, in other words, that he is named a philosopher with all the implications of identifying him as a “philosopher as such.” I bet Žižek intends this suggestion. On the other hand, there is Hegel, so named. Here I am not so sure about the “or.” While Badiou may be a Hegel in stature today—time will tell about tomorrow—he’s not a Hegel with respect to theory, or at least not consistently across his works, which range from high philosophy to opinion piece in popular publications, and of course creative writing. I doubt Badiou would contest any of what I say, and the point is that his work will always be captivating and challenging for the ways in which it splits the difference between philosophy and theory.

Still, the theory of the event suffers in such a philosophical setting, and this is something I think Badiou might also realize. That is, it’s telling that recently he restates his idea of the “event” vis-à-vis “situation” in an essay that tarries with theory, and that freely gives itself over to dialectics, about which he’s never claimed to reject, but which he adopts quite pithily: I am talking about his essay called “The Affirmative Dialectics,” in which he de-abstracts his abstraction and declares the fundamentals of his theory of the event, with such directness as never before seen: “What is an event? An event is simply...” Simply? It is “simply that which interrupts the law, the rules, the structure of the situation, and creates a new possibility. So an event is not initially the creation of a new situation. It is the creation of a new possibility, which is not the same thing. In fact, the event takes place in a situation that remains the same, but this same situation is inside the new possibility.”³² Now, do you really miss the matheme in this construction? Likely not, though welcomed is an exposition that is plainly bold for the way in which Badiou does a dialectical reversal on the dialectic itself: “I think the problem today is to find a way of reversing the classical dialectical logic inside itself, so that the affirmation, or the positive proposition, comes before the negation instead of after it.”³³

For his part, Hegel, in thinking about the French Revolution, indeed in theorizing the event, isn’t doing dialectics in his usual way either, and

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31 Badiou 2012.

32 Badiou 2016, p. 129.

33 Badiou 2016, p. 129.

certainly isn’t fetishizing the term “revolution” in the way that would, well, constitute the French Revolution as an “event,” as Badiou understands the process of its formation.³⁴ Of course, Hegel talks of world spirit and the like in the lectures on the philosophy of history, but his consistent truck with Kantianism in the context of the French Revolution, means that the question of the dialectic is posed a bit differently: namely, the French Revolution was a bundle of antinomies, a collection of non-dialectical problems. We can think of history in terms of big events and world history, but we also might think of what’s missing from the scene of events when “revolution” isn’t our word, and—as far as Hegel is concerned—what’s missing is a dialectical concept of the will, a dialectical concept of state, a dialectical concept of modernity, and a dialectical concept of praxis. All of these are revolutions in a different sense, and perhaps more lasting. Otherwise, it’s either all negation in the destruction of the ancien regime or it’s all affirmation in the purity of the boundless Will whose very materialization is itself a violence. This isn’t the dialectic so much as Manichean opposition, or the kind of Skeptic dialectic or absolute difference that goes by the name of Kant.

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34 Badiou 2005, p. 180.

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Being and MacGuffin¹

Mladen Dolar

Abstract The title of this paper takes its cue from Blumenberg's quip from which *being* can be taken as the MacGuffin of western philosophy. The connection between the meaningless empty word and the dramatic consequences following from it (that is, the characteristics of MacGuffin) is nowhere more obvious than in the famous opening paragraphs of Hegel's *Logic*. This paper considers the paradoxical structure of the first proposition, 'Being, pure being' – which, incidentally, is not a proper proposition at all – as insisting on the repetition that sneaks into the sentence and introduces a gap into *being*, one that conditions all further differences and dialectical moves. This is similar for the analysis of 'Nothing, pure nothing'. This paper maintains that this first move is not to be read according to the usual paradigm of Hegelian dialectics as it hinges on what Hegel calls 'relationless negation' (as opposed to the 'determinate negation') and remains unanalyzable, underlying all subsequent progress of dialectics.

Keywords: being, nothing, difference, repetition, Hegel's Logic

The best comment regarding the question of *being* has been perhaps asked by Hans Blumenberg off-handedly when he said: "Sein – ein MacGuffin?" [Being – a MacGuffin?] This question served as the title of Blumenberg's review of Heidegger in *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* in May 1987, the aphorism of irresistible humor in its very brevity. MacGuffin is the word made popular by Alfred Hitchcock as meaning 'nothing at all' which has stood as the core of many of his plots;² it is a nothing that everybody is after although it is empty in itself and one never comes to learn its content. Rather, it only means that it means and it means so much to so many people – it is placed in the eye of the storm as its empty center, yet we never learn what it might mean, and yet, for the plot it's ultimately irrelevant. So *being* was/is such a MacGuffin of the history of western philosophy, the most spectacular MacGuffin ever, the mover of

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1The paper is based on the lecture given at Duke University on 6 November 2015, dedicated to Hegel's *Logic*. The other speakers were Fredric Jameson, Rebecca Comay and Frank Ruda. It is in the hope of retaining a bit of the spirit of that most remarkable day, that I keep the form of this paper closer to a lecture.

2This comes from a story about two men on a train in Scotland. One man says, 'What's that package up there in the baggage rack?' The other answers, 'Oh, that's a MacGuffin'. The first one then asks, 'What's a MacGuffin?' 'Well,' the other man replies, 'it's an apparatus for trapping lions in the Scottish Highlands.' The first man then says, 'But there are no lions in the Scottish Highlands,' and the other one answers, 'Well then, that's no MacGuffin!' So from this story it is apparent that a MacGuffin is actually nothing at all. (Truffaut 1985, p. 193) Another version of this joke has an even better final rejoinder: 'See, it works', implying that it's nothing at all that produces effects.

a plot with infinite ramifications, endless new intrigues and episodes, with cliffhangers and all. It is Hegel who boldly states that perhaps it is 'a nothing at all', empty in itself, that its mystery pertains not to some hidden enigmatic deep meaning that would need to be unearthed and spelled out, but rather to its absolute emptiness and meaninglessness, which is far more difficult to come to terms with than any deep hidden sense. One of the hardest things to understand is that there is nothing to understand. Nevertheless this insight holds many consequences. Yet the remark, as funny as it is, perhaps doesn't quite do justice to Hegel's use of *being*, for the remark turns *being* into a mana-like signifier, empty in itself but one that enables meaning, ironically meaning potentially everything and an opening up of meaning. However, Hegel wanted to strip *being* even of these qualities. Its meaninglessness is perhaps cut of another stuff and thus gets stuck in the throat of meaning as opposed to making meaning proliferate.

The first part of *Logic* was published in 1812, at Easter, just as the *Phenomenology* five years earlier in 1807 (Easter being the proper time for the rise of spirit, its resurrection, perhaps?). Anecdotically, Hegel got married in September 1811, seven months earlier, so in a letter to his friend Niethammer, announcing the publication, he wrote: "It's not a small thing if in the first semester of one's marriage one writes a thick book of 30 Bogen (450 pages) and of abstruse content. But *iniuria temporum!* [the injustice of times]. I am not an academic; to reach a proper form I would need another year, but I need money for living." (5 February 1812). His remark is, well, remarkable: Hegel, as if embodying the caricature of an arch-Professor, the vintage professor if there ever was one, measures his marriage by semesters, then as if embodying the caricature of the arch-academic saying 'I am not an academic' (at the time he was indeed the director of a gymnasium) while complaining about money. When he was writing the *Phenomenology* he had an affair with the wife of his landlord (resulting in the birth of his illegitimate son, Ludwig Fischer), so it could be said that the *Phenomenology* was the child of a love affair, adultery, indeed the 'child of love', as the saying goes, while the *Logic* was very much the legitimate child, born in proper wedlock. Marriages tend to appear so much less exciting than love affairs, although this is a very non-Hegelian view (and maybe this is what secretly subtends the frequent view that tends to see the *Phenomenology* as an exciting love-affair and the *Logic* as a dull marriage, or as dull as a marriage).³ Actually the *Logic*

3 In a historic counterpoint to this, *Phenomenology* was written against the backdrop of Napoleon's victory in the battle of Jena, in the midst of the canon-fire. *Logic* on the other hand was written against the backdrop of his defeat (1812-1816). No Napoleon on the white horse in the *Logic* aroused Kojève's imagination.

was the child of a protracted honey-moon, and while one is a bit hard-put to see the connection between the abstruse and abstract content of *Logic* and the romantic infatuation of a honey-moon, Hegel was writing *Logic* while engaged in honeymoon activities. There is something in this immediate juxtaposition and equation of two incommensurates that evokes the infinite judgment, 'spirit is a bone': 'love is logic' (or 'marriage is logic'? Perhaps the infinite judgment behind this is 'love is marriage' – could this serve as a clue to figuring out the relation of *Phenomenology* to *Logic*?).⁴ Furthermore, there is the complaint by Hegel about the lack of time (again, very academic, the impossibility to meet deadlines, as if Hegel was accumulating all the clichés in a couple of sentences).⁵ There is the haste, the time-pressure, *Zeitnot*, indicating in an oblique way the strange connection between logic and time, a precipitation of something that Lacan would formulate as the problem of logical time and the assertion of anticipated certainty. Logic might appear as the domain of the timeless, but this is not the case for Hegel's logic because the time loop is essential, it is the time of precipitation and retroaction, and Hegel having to precipitate himself into publication is perhaps but reminded of the external circumstances crudely mirroring the internal temporality. And there is the relation between time-pressure and repetition: he would have to rewrite the *Logic* seventy-seven times, as opposed to Plato who supposedly rewrote the *Republic* only seven times,⁶ there is a compulsion to repeat inscribed already in its framework. There is another most remarkable repetition, namely Hegel publishing the second edition of the first part of *Logic* on the brink of his death, the "Preface" being the last text he wrote before dying, his dying words, *Logic* had to be repeated twice, marking the rite of passage of marriage and death. Between the first occurrence and its repetition, the first edition and the second, between 1812 and 1831, most of the text was largely rewritten, revised and amply expanded, except for one bit: the notorious beginning with *being*, *nothing and becoming*. There was nothing to change there, nothing to add or subtract, it was not rewritten seventy-seven times, just stated twice. The beginning which hinges so much on internal repetition – 'being, pure being' – had to be also externally repeated and restated.⁷

There is something mind-boggling in the beginning of *Logic*. It is

4 Should one, in a wild shot, bring together Hegel's *Logic* and Lacan's formulas of sexuation, which embody quite literally the relation of logic to sexuality?

5 I am not an academic, there is the lack of funding, and all these deadlines to meet. Sounds familiar.

6 Hegel 2010, p. 21. All the page references in the text without other qualification refer to this edition.

7 The three editions of the 'Encyclopedia logic', 1817, 1827 and 1830, were perhaps but a rehearsal for this ultimate repetition.

supposed to be a pure plunge into the indeterminate immediacy which doesn't need or bear any preliminaries, but in order to arrive there, there is the most spectacular roundabout, the long and winding road leading up to it. For someone who harshly criticized Kant for eternal procrastination, Hegel really took his time. *Phenomenology* is supposed to be but the introductory way to logic, leading through all the possible figures of experience, individual and historical, only to undo them and cast them away – there is so much to unlearn, as Rebecca Comay aptly put it, this is an anti-Bildungsroman⁸ and not about the accumulation of experience to arrive at wisdom (the absolute knowledge), rather about getting rid of it. Already the *Phenomenology* was excruciating with its beginning which has the structure of deferral, with the “Introduction” (written chronologically is first) and the “Preface”, written at the end but placed at the beginning as the opening. The point of both is that philosophy bears no introduction, one has to start with the thing itself, one is always already immersed in the thing itself even if one pretends not to be, there is no ante-chamber of philosophy, any beginning with external circumstances and conditions is merely an excuse. One cannot learn to swim without jumping into the water, as the pop version would have it. *Logic* again starts with a deferral, with the first “Preface”, written after its completion (with proofs in March 1812), then the second “Preface” (written in 1831 on the brink of Hegel's death), followed by the “Introduction” (which is chronologically first) Then, just to add insult to injury, a piece with no proper status called “With what must the beginning of science be made?” is followed. This is the beginning before the beginning if there ever was one where one must justify the beginning, but which at the same time supposed to be a beginning without any presuppositions, in no need of justification, a pure immersion into the indeterminate immediacy, which is for Hegel another name for *being*. We have four pieces of text before we get to the first page of *Logic*, that is, to get to the immediacy without further ado, to say nothing about the 600 pages of *Phenomenology*, reputedly his most difficult and tortuous book in the history of philosophy – leading up to what? The answer is: To the simplest possible things there are. His endless procrastination lingers before we can eventually really begin on p. 59, or do we?

All the preliminaries testify materially to the difficulty, the paradox, the impossibility of beginning, for Hegel, against all his proclamations, nevertheless keeps justifying his beginning, trying to justify something that bears no justification, for if one justifies it beforehand, then this is not the beginning, it has to be ‘unjustifiable’, nothing must precede it –

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8 Cf. Comay 2015.

no assumptions, no defined field or object, as it is usual with all other sciences. This was the argument of his “Introduction”: thought produces its object, it has no object given beforehand; and also no method to precede it, insofar as the method must be invented and further justified as we go along. We cannot presuppose the long tradition of *Logic*, and in particular not the Aristotelian laws of thought, not non-contradiction nor the excluded middle, nothing *that Logic* has produced over the more than 2000 thousand years of its development. Something that was for Kant so perfected that it was unsurpassable was for Hegel something to be cast away. When Hegel was defending his doctoral thesis in August 1801, he had to propose some theses for disputation (in Latin), and in the first thesis he proposed the following: “*Contradictio ist regula veri, non-contradictio falsi*,”⁹ ‘Contradiction is the rule of the true, non-contradiction of the false,’ thus standing up virtually singlehandedly, as a young man, against the grain of all logical tradition.

This insight is itself so simple that this beginning is as beginning in no need of any preparation or further introduction, and the only possible purpose of this preliminary disquisition regarding it was not to lead up to it but to dispense rather with all preliminaries. (p. 55)

There is a pragmatic paradox (in the technical sense) to what Hegel is saying: if what he is saying is true, he shouldn't be saying it at all. If there can be no introduction, no beginning before the beginning, if one is always already ‘in’, why bother to write all these introductions and deliberation before p. 59? Why dispense with the preliminaries if preliminaries are impossible anyway? Why prohibit the impossible and dwell on it? Every *pre-liminary* has always already crossed the limen, the threshold, if unwittingly. But at the same time, can one ever be ‘in’, even if plunging into the indeterminate immediacy without further ado? One seems to be either before the threshold (*Phenomenology*, introductions and so on.) or after the threshold of p. 59. But maybe this is also an illusion, another illusion to be rid of, namely that there is an ‘in’ without the false start of deceptively external introductions, so that doing away with the preliminaries in a preliminary way is both an impossible self-contradictory enterprise and an absolutely necessary false start which is the only way to make it possible to properly begin. There is no start without a false start. But this doesn't quite entail the idea that we have always already started – there is a start and a break. No preliminary is necessary, yet we have spent many hundreds of pages with his preliminaries – and some of it the most brilliant pages in the whole history of philosophy which, if we took Hegel's word at its face

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9 Hegel 1986a, p. 533.

value, shouldn't have been written at all. Here, the absolutely necessary and the absolutely superfluous coincide. There is no way to be outside of the absolute, but there is no way to be in it either, for the beginning, if this is indeed the proper beginning, is but an empty spot that should lead up to the absolute, which cannot be but a result, the result which is again nothing without the way leading up to it.

One could say that the absolute knowledge is a crossroad, a partition. There are two ways that follow from it: having reached this point, having climbed to the top of this ladder, one can only revert to the experience, which was there all along – the way to truth is truth itself, the absolute knowledge is nothing but the realization that the truth was produced on the way, unwittingly, and that there is nothing more to learn there, no wisdom to possess (this is, by the way, why Kojève's talk about 'the Hegelian sage' is nonsense), except for what has been learned on the way. The absolute knowledge thus rejoins the sense certainty, the most naïve beginning of the *Phenomenology*, experience is caught in a circle, one is thrown back on one's own experience, on its beginning – yet with a cut, after the break produced by the absolute knowledge. Is there life after the absolute knowledge? The parallel has been already suggested a number of times: it is like continuing to live one's life after analysis, after the break produced by analysis, and the absolute knowledge is in structural analogy with the end of analysis. Lacan's version of the absolute knowledge is *la passe*, the end, the cut of something that once seemed interminable ("Analysis terminable and interminable", as Freud put it). And one always does this, one remains consciousness, one is always stuck with experience, and having produced a cut in it is perhaps not such a small thing. Experience of consciousness becomes the repetition of the experience of consciousness, but with a break.

At the same time, and this is the other way opened up by the absolute knowledge, the way is already paved for *Logic*, to the pure development of concepts in their own terrain, in and for themselves – from a point of view which is no longer that of consciousness and its experience, but that of a subject. What Hegel means by subject – 'substance is subject' etc. – doesn't at all coincide with consciousness, and the trajectory of the *Phenomenology* could be described as 'from consciousness to subject'. It is the very principle of disparity inhabiting both *being* and *concept*, the cut that subtended all experience of consciousness, but which, at the point of the absolute knowledge, emerges as a pure cut. *Logic* is the consequence of this cut. It starts its elaboration from there. It is in this cut that a shift occurs that Hegel names 'the pure decision to think' – and ultimately nothing else is needed as a prerequisite of the beginning of *Logic*, a long and winding way which

was necessary to lead up to it is as if erased and made superfluous by it. This is what makes the big difference of tenor between the two books: there was no decision to think in the *Phenomenology*, the consciousness was rather forced to think against its will and took all possible evasions to counteract this demand. As Rebecca Comay brilliantly put it:

What [Phenomenology] depicts is a thicket of evasions that seem designed to halt any such progress: every stopping point is on the verge of becoming permanent, every "station" ... a place of interminable stasis and stagnation, every stage a stumbling block to further progress. ... the incessant stalling and backsliding, the meandering and repetition, the stubborn obliviousness, the self-censorship, and the constant blackouts. Consciousness proves to be a virtuoso at forgetting what it learns – disparaging its significance, disarming its impact, or drawing inferences that can be counter-intuitive and even perverse.¹⁰

So against this backdrop the pure decision to think inaugurates another path, another dimension, another trajectory, another life within this life, which is the life of the concept. Significantly, at the point of his death Hegel succeeded in the repetition of *Logic*, having prepared the second revised edition (of the first part at least) just before he died, but he failed to produce a repetition of *Phenomenology* – he was actually, at the point of dying, preparing a revision for the new edition, he got through some 30 pages, but then rather died than to repeat this utterly brilliant but superfluous work.

Among all the preliminary texts, I will make just a brief comment on 'With what must the beginning of science be made?' 'Womit muss der Anfang der Wissenschaft gemacht werden?', a short interpolated text of ten pages, after the prefaces and introductions and before the beginning proper. The text itself has an uncertain status, it is like an intruder, an interloper. The curious thing is that the title of the piece possesses the form of a question. This departs from Hegel's general strategy, which one could formulate like this: ask no questions, but start with the answers. Philosophy is a matter of construction, not of posing questions and then looking for answers. If I venture a very makeshift division, for a bit for fun, there are philosophies of questions – most notably Socrates, Descartes, Kant, and endlessly Heidegger;¹¹ and there are philosophies of answers – most notably Spinoza and Hegel.¹² Hegel always starts with assertions,

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10 Comay 2015, p. 262-3.

11 Cf. lucid comments by Derrida, in Derrida 1991.

12 There is much to be gained from reading the book by Aron Bodenheimer *Why? On the Obscurity of Questioning* (Bodenheimer 1984, new edition 2011). It thoroughly addresses the question of the question, undermining the quasi-radicality of questioning.

statements, this is already inscribed in his criticism of Kant: if we start by asking ‘under what conditions is knowledge possible?’, then we will never get there, we will endlessly ruminate over the conditions of possibility without realizing that the cognition of the means and the conditions of cognition are already cognition. Hence, question is questionable, the radical stance of questioning everything, without any bias and without mercy, actually itself presupposes something, it cannot quite account for the position from which the question is posed. Questioning obfuscates its own enunciation, it barricades itself into a seemingly unassailable place. It questions everything except itself, even if it takes the seemingly radical form of self-questioning. This process is analogous to Hegel’s critique of skepticism as the seemingly radical doubt about everything, except about its own position of enunciation. But here Hegel makes a strange exception, he asks a question, or he takes up, or quotes, a question that one might suppose might be naturally asked. He asks a question in order to dispose of it, to dispose of the form of the question as such. Here, one could say: *being* is not an answer to a question, and specifically it is not an answer to the question ‘with what must the beginning of science be made?’

In what follows I will not attempt to give a proper reading of Hegel’s beginning, an impossible task for a short intervention. I will concentrate just on certain peculiarities of this Hegelian beginning, peculiarities pertaining to its grammar, its syntax, as it were, which cannot be held apart from its logic and, ‘ontological implication’.

First of all, *being*, as the protagonist of the beginning, is an anti-hero. “This simple determination which has no further meaning besides, this empty something, is as such, therefore, the beginning of philosophy.” (p. 55) It is “an empty word”. Nothing is more disappointing and unpromising than the beginning of Hegel’s *Logic*. It is not the wealth of origin, some deep insight from which everything follows, or some incontrovertible axiom on which to build, but the poorest and the emptiest entity possible. As it has no meaning and no determination, therefore nothing can be said about it. Strictly speaking any determination, any predicate is already too much. Once we arrive at page 58, after yet another interpolated piece on the general division of logic, once we arrive at the heading “Section 1. Determinateness (Quality)”, and further, once we would finally expect the proper beginning, Hegel makes yet another false start by stating “Being is the indeterminate immediate.” This looks like a definition of *being*: *being* is the subject to which two predicates are ascribed. He starts with a proposition, with the two negative qualifications that will keep recurring through the next pages. Indeterminate and immediate, they are both negative words and given

that we don’t possess a positive word for the most immediately given, we have to recur to removing mediation and determination. One could say that the *Phenomenology* was but a long way of doing this. We start with a positive entity, *being* is only via negation and removal, and however positive the beginning is, it is always already premised on a subtraction. It is an ‘experience of thought’ which requires subtraction of all experience. Of course Hegel is perfectly aware that negative determination is still a determination, and that absence of mediation is itself mediated, a negative mode of mediation. But this is a most curious dismissal of dialectics, or suspending its power and sway for a moment, the moment of being – one has to think non-dialectically if one is to start thinking. Hegel will, for example, say, in the second sentence of section ‘being’: “In its indeterminate immediacy it is equal only to itself and also not unequal with respect to another” (p. 59), thus cutting the dialectical tie of equal-unequal – how can it be equal only to itself without being unequal to another? It is an act of severance and an act of willful isolation of terms.

The two negative words are nevertheless telling. They don’t form some double negation, quite the contrary, indeterminacy is rather there to counteract the negation implied in immediacy. This is directed against Kant, for whom the immediacy of *Anschauung*, intuition, was precisely the most determinate, the wholly and entirely determinate, before we come to distill its features into concept, sieve and select them, that is, before we submit it to understanding (this is at least the *vulgata*). Immediacy ‘spontaneously’ implies something most determinate by being immediately given and fully there in its thereness and singularity before selecting some of its traits as more relevant than others. So indeterminacy suspends the spontaneous hang of immediacy. One can only get there by removing its mediation by negation of mediation and undermining its immediacy by another negation which makes it lose its footing. Yet, there is a sort of recourse to a Kantian move, to what Kant names infinite judgment: the (positive) ascription of a negative predicate. Indeterminate and immediate, *unbestimmt* and *unmittelbar*, are perhaps to be read on the model of the ‘undead’. It is a third realm between an affirmative judgment (*being* is determinate) and a negative judgment (*being* is not determinate), opening a strange mode of negativity in the very positivity of affirmation.

So if this is another false start, not by its inaccuracy, but by its form, which is the form of a proposition, one has to remove this form as well. Thus we finally arrive to the notorious *Sein, reines Sein* – note that there is no definite article. Hegel, who very consciously doesn’t start with a proposition, nevertheless makes a move, a further move. He doesn’t rest his case by merely stating ‘Being’, but makes a further qualification,

which is a repetition. 'Being, pure being.' (If we disregard the continuation of the sentence: '– without any further determination', *ohne alle weitere Bestimmung*. There is a hyphen, the sentence gets curiously split and qualified by stating the absence of qualification, but there is no verb. Taking just the first part of the sentence as a sentence on its own, Hegel introduces a cut, he repeats 'being' twice in this first sentence, one cannot say merely 'being', but the minimal utterance would thus have to be 'being, being'. It is as if repetition comes into the place of predication, instead of ascribing a predicate to being one merely repeats the subject. Hegel interpolates 'pure' to insist that there is no determination, we are supposed to have something pure in this first step, the first step of the dialectics which is nothing but the 'logic of impurity', as it were, everything passing into something else, everything being tainted by its otherness, unwittingly, against one's better intentions. There is no pure entity in dialectics, this is what dialectics means, everything is mediated by its other, everything carries the ineradicable mark of otherness in its bosom. Yet, at this first step, we are trying to hold on to precisely the purity of being in its immediate indeterminacy. Still, we don't quite manage, there is like the surreptitious move of repetition, something pushing to repeat, a *Wiederholungszwang*, compulsion to repeat *being*, to turn the first sentence into the insistence of being rather than the assertion of being. But one cannot step into the same being twice. Is the second being the same as the first one? Does the non-sentence make more than it caters for? Is the assertion of purity in the second being something that purifies the first being, as its minimal qualification, or rather renders it 'impure'? The second being is like both an addition and a subtraction from the first *being*, subtraction by qualifying it as pure, against the possible representations that one might have by stating merely 'being'. It restricts the first *being* by adding something to it, it wants to reduce it to its purity – 'being and nothing more' – but saying 'nothing more' is actually saying something more. One could say: in the beginning there is *being* posited twice, or in the beginning there is a gap in *being*, a gap between the first and the second *being*, splitting the *being* from itself, by the sheer cunningness of its grammatical structure. Does Hegel surreptitiously introduce something that he didn't want to introduce at all, by the mere use of a rhetorical device? But where does rhetoric start, in particular with this most sensitive point of the beginning, where everything would have to be measured, all rhetoric kept in check? The minimal rhetorical device is precisely repetition, introducing redundancy, the surplus of rhetoric over 'information'. Saying something twice is redundant, it doesn't bring new information, it's like an ornamental addition to adorn the poverty and the nakedness of a single

occurrence. But the rhetoric at this point has immediate ontological value, it is the rhetoric of *being* itself, which makes that *being* insist before ever properly 'existing', it insists as a repetition and a cut. The minimal, for being pure, is a redoubled minimal.

There is no other of *being*. There is no other against which *being* would be determined in opposition with or differentially, the only otherness is introduced by repetition which separates *being* from itself. *Being* is an assertion, but the assertion of an emptiness, the assertion of the void of any determination or distinction. When in the next step we get to nothing, it is essential that nothing is not the other of *being*. This is not a determination by opposition, even more, strictly speaking, not by negation. Nothing is actually not a negation of being, strange as it may seem, nor is it the truth of *being*, let alone its suppression or sublation. It is rather that *being*, because of its emptiness and indeterminate nature, cannot even be being that it purports to be.¹³

There was an English TV series '*allo 'allo*', very popular in the nineties, which featured a woman who appears at some point in every episode and gives exactly the same line: 'Listen very carefully, I shall say this only once!', a line which has inevitably turned into proverb. Of course the line is funnier since its repetition, which occurs with clockwork precision, immediately contradicts its content, namely the affirmation that it will not be repeated but told only once. We know of course that the thing will happen in the next episode, we know, when the woman appears, exactly what she will say, and she says it – yet we cannot be but surprised, we are always caught unawares. For Hegel one could coin the adage: 'Listen very carefully, I shall say this only twice.' Indeed he states being twice, on top of that he writes the comma twice – 'being, pure being, –'. The fact that there is only one dash can refer us to a larger thrust of repetition, namely that the dash in the first proper sentence of *Logic* repeats the dash in the last sentence of the *Phenomenology*, thus linking the two together by the sheer cunning of punctuation. The dialectical punctuation device cuts and disconnects while at the same time, in the same place, establishing a connection.¹⁴ The same goes for the repetition of nothing, "Nothing, pure nothing", and nothing in its turn has to acquire

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13 Stephen Houlgate puts it well: "Being vanishes into nothing, according to Hegel, because it is so indeterminate in itself that logically it is not even the pure being that it is and so is in fact the absence of being. Pure being vanishes, in other words, not because it fails to meet our standard of intelligibility or because it is experienced by us as nothing but because its own utter indeterminacy prevents it logically from even being pure and simple being." (2006, pp. 277-8) The sheer indeterminacy of pure being entails its vanishing, it is too indeterminate to even be *being*. *Being* is not pure being because precisely insofar as it is pure and simple *being* it undermines itself.

14 I can only refer to the brilliant work accomplished by Frank Ruda and Rebecca Comay in their 'dash' project.

the qualification of purity. This follows in the same vein for the repetitious structure of *being* and nothing which are both repeated when introduced, with the repetition of an entity repeated twice. There is a repetition not merely within the first two statements about *being* and nothing, but also within the repetition of statements themselves, which mirror each other. The same move has to be repeated twice, once for *being* and once for nothing. This turns into a curious machine of repetition, the inner and the outer repetition. *Being* and nothing are repeated, and nothing repeats *being*. As I already mentioned, the verbatim repetition of the beginning in the first and the second edition of *Logic* is twenty years apart. However, it's a repetition which stops at two, not quite a repetition, but a redoubling, a replication, there is no third term to relieve the tension introduced by two. Two is enough for a minimal difference, a difference of the same, a pure split which is the object of this repetition.

In the first edition of *Logic*, in 1812, Hegel in a remark he omitted in the second edition, makes a thought experiment of possible alternatives to the first statement by way of other attempts that might do the job and maintain *being* in its purity. The remark would require an attentive reflection, but all I can venture here is a brief remark on the remark itself. The first candidate is 'being is the absolute'.¹⁵ Obviously, a predicate is ascribed to *being* that says far more than it is vouched for by its indeterminacy. Here one makes in the very first step an unwarranted assumption about what is the absolute, something that can only be produced by a long process. So the second attempt tries with mere tautology, 'being is being'. But even this is too much, for tautology, modest as it seems by its very form, implies a movement only to then arrest it by not moving anywhere. It seems to say something, but it doesn't say anything: "it says nothing". It's not that it ascribes some content foreign to the indeterminacy of *being*, what is foreign is the very form of ascription of predicates. The third attempt is 'being is', which also fails, for it contains a difference between *being* itself, as a category, and its *being* implied by 'is'. It's not the same being that figures as the subject and the *being* of 'is', in what is called 'judgment of existence' – existence is too much for *being*. Hence pure *being* can only be without a predicate. So the fourth possibility that Hegel considers is 'Being!', that is, an exclamation, but which by its form can only pertain to the subjective stance, to opinion and affection. The outcome of this experiment is the final form, which is not a proposition and which doesn't content itself with a mere exclamation – of being stated twice, 'being, being', and twice only. *Being* is the pure two, the figure of twoness, which is just

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¹⁵ For this and the following Hegel 1999, p. 57 f.

enough to circumscribe the cut, the break between the two, which is not the differentiation of being, but its pure stuckness. *Being* is there just to display the break and instigate pure difference, while being meaningless in itself, a pure *flatus vocis*.

I have already said that 'nothing' repeats the repetition of *being*, however it is curiously endowed with the definite article: "*Nichts, das reine Nichts*". *Being* didn't need a definite article (*reines Sein*), but *nothing* seems to 'spontaneously' require it.¹⁶ Linguistically, 'nothing' is determined by the definite article, as opposed to indefinite being. Here, a slight move has been made, surreptitiously, by the inclusion of an article, but can this be possibly seen already as an incipient move towards determination – What has been introduced by this 'rhetoric' of repetition is a difference, although not a difference of content – *being* has the same content as *nothing*. This difference doesn't concern intuiting or thinking, they are both empty in both cases, and there is no difference between the two. Yet by making this move, the move of 'renaming' as it were, using a different word for the same content (for the same absence of content – but maybe the crucial question is: can absence be the same?), it seems apparent that something has moved, changed, a distinction has been made. 'It makes a difference', although it's hard to see on what this difference is based. One could extend Hegel's two propositions by a third one, 'Difference, pure difference', stated twice, pure difference between *being and being*, between *nothing and nothing*, and between *being and nothing*. One hasn't moved, as far as the object of thought is concerned, yet one has moved by restating the same emptiness twice with two opposite qualifications, although their difference is null. It would be too much to say that the content is the same but the form has changed – too much, for there should be no difference between form and content at this level because the form (and content) is the mere redoubling. Content and form are reflexive determinations, pertaining to the logic of essence, so while this language is inappropriate it is inevitably used. Hence many critics of Hegel were pointing their fingers at the illegitimate use of reflexive determinations when there should be none, not quite appreciating that Hegel is up to an impossible task.

'Nothing' is the same determination, the same absence of determination as *being*, the same yet not quite the same. A difference has been introduced in this pure indeterminacy, and then immediately erased, for this is no real difference at all, yet the split has emerged a differing in the bosom of *being*, a pulsation of *being* (a rhythm of *being*?).

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¹⁶ Is there a language requirement? Can one say *reines Nichts* just as easily as *reines Sein* without forcing some propensity of language? My German friends more or less agree that it would be equally or even more natural to use *reines Nichts*.

One shouldn't venture into some cosmic poetry or fantasy because what this amounts to is that the split, the break, the cut, is what sustains *being*, the empty space between *being* and *being* in the midst of the very indeterminacy. The first difference is the difference of 'nothing at all', insubstantial and unsubstantiated. It is a difference to precede all differences, a non-dialectical difference (Hegel will later say that much) that conditions all the dialectical differences.

"Pure being and pure nothing are therefore the same." Here we have the first proper proposition that takes the form of $S=P$ – if we only consider the opening assertions. Pure *being* and pure *nothing* are the same – but punctuated by 'therefore', *also*. What legitimizes this 'therefore'? This looks like the conclusion of a syllogism. 1. Being, pure being. 2. Nothing, pure nothing. 3. Therefore, pure being and pure nothing are the same. This doesn't look like a kosher Aristotelian syllogism, for both premises are not propositions, and nothing can be deduced from statements without predicates. The fact that they are without predicates is essential, it is not that we could supplement and spell out the implicit predicates. The premise is inherently non-propositions, but predicateless assertions. In the first proper proposition, which is the conclusion, we get a predicate that can finally be ascribed, not to the one or the other, but to both at the same time, both occupying the place of the subject, and the predicate is sameness, the radical equation of the two entities of the first two paragraphs. But equation doesn't take the form of 'Being is nothing', but rather that 'Being and nothing are the same' – the essential point is that nothing is not the predicate of *being* (nor its other). One should be attentive to the German wording, for the translation is inaccurate by being helpful and correct: *Das reine Sein und das reine Nichts ist also dasselbe*.¹⁷ Hegel uses the singular, the sentence is grammatically not correct, the pure *being* and pure nothing *is* the same. He conflates the two subjects into one, he merges them grammatically and more so, he refuses to use plural. He takes them as one entity and disregards the rules, he makes them into a unit. Do the two thus merge into one? Is this what he means? Not at all. The split is indistinguishable, yet asserted. Two grammatical subjects get a verb in singular but their distinction is stated and erased in the same move.

The truth of this strange syllogism is neither in *being* nor in *nothing*, the truth of no syllogism rests solely with the premises, there is something implied in the premises that the conclusion spells out. The conclusion posits the equality of what was repeated, of what is insisted through repetitions. However, this equality is not an equation, it's a

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17 Hegel 1986b, p. 83.

passage, the truth is in passing, it's a 'passing truth'. *Nicht übergeht, sondern übergegangen ist* (ibid.) – *being* has passed over into nothing and nothing has passed over into *being*. Again the grammar is essential, it's all in the telling and the particular grammatical forms. The tense is precisely the present perfect (the same in German). There is an 'always already', it's a passage that we cannot catch while it happens, the moment we posit it, it has already happened; the result, *being or nothing*, is always already the result of the passage on which it is premised. The present perfect – the present is already based on a passage which has been 'perfected', that is, accomplished (from Latin *perficio*), the present of being (cf. metaphysics premised on conceiving 'being as presence', metaphysics of presence etc.) is always passed (passed and not past) not the passing presence, which is commonsense, but the passed presence. (Might this be present passed, instead of present perfect?)

But the truth is just as much that they are not without distinction; it is rather that *they are not the same*, that they are absolutely distinct yet equally unseparated and inseparable, and that *each* immediately *vanishes in its opposite*.

In this passage asserting their sameness, there is the essential rub of distinction, which is put in a very precise way – they are 'not without distinction', *nicht ihre Ununterschiedenheit*, with the crucial form of double negation which is not at all to be conflated with the negation of negation. Hegel will say this much himself. They are not said to be different, but 'not non-different', *nicht ununterschieden*, and 'not non-different' is not the same as different. There is like a sub-difference, a distinction not based on difference that one can base anything on. They are the same, but they are 'absolutely distinct' (*absolut unterschieden*, Hegel uses the same word, different not distinct, although 'distinction' is perhaps in place here, this is 'gained in translation'), they are unseparated and inseparable in their very distinction, immediately vanishing into each other, with the same immediacy that qualified *being* (and nothing) from the outset. We start with the immediate, but the immediate vanished into its 'opposite', which is not at all its opposite but the same, so finally the immediate is this passage itself, but which, by producing a distinction, becomes mediated. It becomes movement, it becomes 'becoming', the immediacy is its own becoming, 'becoming immediate'. There is only 'becoming immediate', not immediacy, as a state that one can relish or immerse oneself in. The movement of thought that one has accomplished by considering being-nothing, is the movement of being itself, for one can distinguish *being-nothing* only in the bosom of non-distinction between *being* and thought. One doesn't think *being*, one constructs it, for nothing is given in this beginning to be thought about

or reflected upon, except for the indeterminate and immediate givenness of thought and being in one. The distinction that one has made, between *being* and nothing (premised on the distinction between *being* and *being* and nothing and nothing), is a non-distinction, it just as immediately dissolves itself, or rather 'has dissolved itself', *aufgelöst hat*, always already.

Hegel makes a number of remarks to explain this first move, although he insists at the same time that there is nothing to be explained. One only makes things worse by explaining, one adds too much and rather thereby obfuscates the simplicity of what is at stake.¹⁸ Nevertheless – *but nevertheless, I know very well but nevertheless* – what he says is interesting and useful, although he needn't (and shouldn't) have said it. (This raises the intricate question: when does Hegel speak, properly speak? Is it in the prefaces and the introductions, in all the preliminary texts, in his remarks? Is the proper statement only 'being, pure being' etc.? Is everything to be taken on the same level? If we distinguish layers, where do we draw the line?) First there is the question of opposing nothing to something, and to be clear, this is not at all what is at stake here, for we are not dealing with any determinate existence of a something. The moment we have a determinate something we also have a determinate nothing, and this is what he meant by *bestimmte Negation*, the determinate negation, the very motor of dialectics. Negation, to be worthy of its task, cannot be just a negation (abstract negation), but a determinate negation of a particular something, and hence it contains a positive content. Here we don't have something to negate, just indeterminate *being* and therefore indeterminate *nothing*. Second, he considers the notion of non-being as equivalent to *nothing*. However, saying non-being instead of nothing is again saying too much. One uses the negation and the opposition, but this is not any usual negation or opposition, it is abstract and immediate, just the passage of one into the other. There is precisely a non-opposition between the two, that is, they are indiscernible from each other. They are 'non-identical indiscernibles', as one commentator usefully put it.

But the issue first of all is not the form of opposition, which is at the same time the form of *reference* [*Beziehung*], but the abstract, immediate negation, the nothing purely for itself, negation devoid of reference [*beziehungslose Verneinung*] – and this can also be expressed, if one so wishes, simply by saying '*nothing*' [*das blosse Nicht*]." (p. 60)

The translation misleadingly uses the word 'reference' where Hegel

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18 Somewhere in the correspondence with his wife Hegel, when he would need to apologize for something and explain, states: 'When one comes to the point of having to explain, it is already too late'.

says *Beziehung* as referring to relation. Opposition is a relation and here we are after something that is without a relation. *Being and nothing* are not *in* relation. What we need to establish is not 'negation devoid of reference', but rather '*die beziehungslose Verneinung*', the negation without relation, a relationless negation, a negation that doesn't establish a relation, but merely a (non)distinction. There is no relation, maybe this is the minimal Hegelian theorem, ('not unlike' Lacan's, to extend the double negation). However, if this is a relationless negation, then all the negations which follow will precisely establish a relation in this non-relation.¹⁹ Because this is a relationless negation, using 'nothing', *Nichts*, is better than using non-being, for it avoids the etymological relation, in both senses of the word; the dependence of the negative 'non-being' on *being*, which could mislead to the supposition of non-being *being* derivative and secondary, a negative addition to being. Because they are the same and the etymological non-relation *Sein-Nichts*, having 'nothing' in common, is better for the purpose. They are co-originary, there is no derivation of nothing from *being*, they are just immediately the same in their split.

Because it has this strange structure of a relationless negation on which negation is based, the beginning ultimately cannot be superseded:

Thus the beginning of philosophy is the ever present and self-preserving foundation of all subsequent developments, remaining everywhere immanent in its further determinations. (p. 49) Consequently, that which constitutes the beginning, the beginning itself, is to be taken as something unanalyzable, taken in its simple, unfilled immediacy; and therefore *as being*, as complete emptiness. (p. 52)

The beginning doesn't vanish in what follows, it is the underlying ground for its development, and one could say that the one thing that all the progression has at its core without being able to be rid of it is the beginning. It is never quite sublated and remains in a way, inscrutable. Beginning must be abandoned if there is to be a progression, but it remains inherent in whatever follows. It is the kernel one can never be rid of, not a remainder of anything, but rather something produced by the first step, something imperceptibly small, indistinguishable, yet insuppressible, *unaufhebbar*. It is perhaps the object of philosophy reduced to its minimum. It is the blind spot of all further dialectical steps, as if pushing them forward, yet being recalcitrant to the conceptual grasp it instigates and conditions at every point. *Unanalysierbar* is a strong word and there is something at the core of dialectics that conditions the dialectical movement, all its differences, contradictions, oppositions,

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19 One can remark that Hegel rarely uses the Freudian word *Verneinung*, as he does here, he usually sticks to the Latin *Negation*.

turns. It stands at its core as a non-dialectical kernel. It cannot be grasped separately in itself, the only way to point to it is by this minimal ‘statement’, ‘being, pure being’, the stammering of *being*, something that is not a difference nor negation nor passage into the other.

On a famous spot at the end of the “Introduction” Hegel says that logic is “an unconscious power” (p. 37) because it deals with the unconscious of thought itself, and this tension between the reflexivity and the unconscious, as something that cannot be quite reflexively appropriated, this conceptual blind spot is the driving force of logic. The blind spot is the non-dialectical condition of dialectics. Everything is dissolvable into concept, this is the vulgate of Hegel, with the exception of this one element, the beginning, that has been brought forth by the decision to think. The paradox is this: the decision to think circumscribes the unconscious of thought, something that subtends thought, and the further development of logic is the deployment of thought that it rests on and carries with it the persistence of this blind spot.

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Hegel Amerindian: For a non-Identitarian Concept of Identification in Psychoanalysis

Christian Ingo Lenz
Dunker

Abstract: In this paper we compare the Hegelian theory of contingency with the concept of cannibal metaphysics as described by Eduardo Viveiros de Castro, a Brazilian anthropologist, in order to show how these bring us resources for a non identitarian theory of identification in psychoanalysis; an identification which we need to solve some clinical problems, as well as to give a narrative reference to the sexuation formulas of Lacan.

Key Words: Hegel, Lacan, identification, Anthropology, Psychoanalysis

1. Introduction

Hegel's thought has been both embraced and found renewal in the field of psychoanalysis. Authors such as Žižek, Laclau and Mouffe have demonstrated the strength of combining critical reflections of German idealism with the psychoanalysis of Jacques Lacan towards an analysis of culture and critical social theory. Authors such as Arantes and Olgivie have demonstrated the impact of reading Hegel had on Lacan during later moments of his work. In my previous work, I have argued that we can encounter three modes of appropriation of Hegel via Lacan. The first concerns the importation of method: to read the course of the psychoanalytical treatment as a dialectical experience: taking the inversions and returns of the consciousness to itself as logical passages of the psychoanalytic treatment which is understood, as a whole, as a dialectical experience. The second mode consists of absorbing a theory of recognition, from within which the notion of subject can be properly introduced in psychoanalysis, supplementing the Freudian theory of narcissism around the figures of the Master and the Slave, most present in Chapter IV of the *Phenomenology of Spirit*. During this second moment the theory of recognition is deepened, initially gestated under the influence of anthropogenesis, brought about by Kojève into Hegel's text in the 1930s, and through with which the importance of the crucial logic of negativity becomes gradually highlighted. This is especially so under the influence of Hyppolite's reading in the 1950s. An important difference, for our purposes, is that an identitarian concept of recognition arises between these two Lacanian references of Hegel.

In Kojève's work, this takes place at the cost of an anthropology that supposes that, although we are divided between Slaves (*Herr*) and Masters (*Knecht*), we are all nevertheless united in our human and non-animal identity:

'The attitude of the master is that of an existential impasse: the master does not obtain the recognition he desires, since he is

recognized by a unfree consciousness. He realizes this: impasse. The bondsman, on the other hand, recognizes the lord's freedom. It is only left for him to make himself recognized by the master in order to arrive at true recognition, that is, mutual recognition. The existence of the master is 'justified' when he transforms - through strife - conscious animals into slaves who will one day become free men."¹

In Hyppolite's work this is resolved through the universalist progress of identity which departs from the Master as immediate consciousness (I = I) and where the Slave is represented as the mediation of essence; that is, through a system of negations that does not need passages between the animal and the human, the barbarian and the civilized, the child and the adult:

"What the master brings upon the bondsman, the bondsman brings upon himself, that is, recognizes him as a bondsman; thus, his operation is that of the lord, it has no meaning of its own, it depends on the essential operation of the master. However, what the bondsman does upon himself he does not do upon the lord, and what the lord does upon the bondsman he does not do upon himself. The true of the master's consciousness is the inessential consciousness of the bondsman."²

One notes here the origin of the Lacanian theme of the subjective division between knowing and truth, as an infinite dialectic, without solution or agreement, nor the cure for a terminal experience of recognition. This variation is important because it shows how, through perspectives distinctive from the theory of recognition, that subsequently its concept of identification remains depended on the presumed identity, although contradictory, between the subject and the world.

Many commentators and interpreters of Lacan's teaching argue that the importance of Hegel to Lacan culminates and disappears after the 1960s, notably with the introduction of the concept of the *objet a*. Here we follow Safatle in his thesis that it is, on the contrary, from this third moment onwards that Lacan radicalizes his appropriation of Hegel. However, it is from here that there is a consistent support from the *Science of Logic* as well as a more rigorous use of the notion of the Real. The persistent criticisms of Hegel in terms of synthesis and intersubjectivity, as insistentes críticas ao Hegel da síntese e da intersubjetividade, in the Lacanian texts of the 1960s, neglect that the

1 Kojève 2002, p. 53.

2 Hyppolite 2003, p. 188.

genesis of his logic of the not-all and his theory of the four discourses are a development and radicalization, at the same time, ontological and logicist, of the Hegelian theory of negativity.

Today we lose sight that this was more or less a common approach to Hegelian studies in the 1970s. It is enough think of, for example, the Brazilian logicist Newton da Costa, who so many times cited the examples of those formalizations compatible with the late Lacan:

But this is the fundamental problem: is it convenient, in scientific contexts, to continue to ignore the fringe of vagueness and its meaning for logic, restraining ourselves to classical logic, or would it be better to explicitate the existence of this fringe and to investigate it, making use of new (para)consistent logics? (...) Before anything else, however, one must note if a dialectical logic (a paraconsistent one), incorporating formulations I and II of the principle of the unity of oppositions, exists and is functional within rational, and specially scientific, contexts"³

The idea that there are alternative and rival logical systems, derived particularly from the idea of negation⁴ and the critique of the idealized character of pure semantic, which bring logical systems and real logical structures into equivalency⁵, form two fundamental aspects of the Hegelian logic: its emphasis on negativity and its relation to the concept of the world. Lacan's criticism of metalanguage (purely logical systems in a formal sense), his refusal of a non-narrative and non-exhaustive concept of truth (truth in a structure of fiction) and his critique of the theory of possible worlds (that there is no universal discourse), are all indications of the proximity I want to introduce.

Our hypothesis is that when Lacan deals with sexuation there emerges a non-identitarian theory of recognition, better yet, a theory of the failure of recognition and the limit point that he does not want to reach. This point is named precisely as the Real. Here, he is able to preserve Hegel's universalism, getting rid of its identitarianism.

To do so, he has to settle accounts with the anthropology inherited from Kojève and the theory of negativity taken from Hyppolite.

2. *Totem and Taboo as an indentitarian myth:*

After being killed and successively buried in the 1960s, we are surprised by the flashing reappearance of the opening pages of *Seminar 17 The Other Side of Psychoanalysis*, in which we realize that this first discourse, the discourse of the unconscious, the discourse from which

3 Costa 1979, p. 218.

4 Ibid., p. 250.

5 Ibid., p. 255.

others will be deduced, by progression or regression, is nothing more than the logical form of the Hegelian discourse of the Master:

“But what must be understood in this schema, as it was already indicated when we placed the S2, of the master's discourse, in the place of the slave, and then placed it in the discourse of the modernized master (...) in the place that Hegel, the most sublime of hysterics, designates in the discourse of the lord, as being that of truth, (...) which I call hysteria (...) this historic machine, never reaches absolute knowledge (...) to mark the annulment, the failure, the vanishing of the only thing which motivates the function of knowledge: its dialectics with enjoyment”⁶

But if this discourse of the Master without sex, of the universal consciousness of the subject, opens itself up with reference to Hegel, it takes on a no less unusual memory of Lévi-Strauss. Here, Lacanian intuition seems to be that the two founding myths of psychoanalysis, the historical myth of Oedipus and the anthropological myth of *Totem and Taboo* are not complementary, but rather, contradictory.

“No one ever seems to have been flabbergasted by this curious thing, the extent to which *Totem and Taboo* has nothing to do with the current use of the Sophoclean reference .”⁷

Truth can only be semi-dictated because its two halves do not come together. The dead father of *Totem and Taboo*, the origin of civilization and the symbol of the prohibition of incest, does not fit the royal father, an agent of imaginary castration in the equine nightmares of little Hans. This occurs because while one dialectic is concerned with the recognition of (symbolic) consciousness, the other requires the discernment that this process of recognition involves the recognition of the reality within which it is developed. They are two crossed logics, one of knowledge and the other of truth, the real one being between them. The distinction between the *Wircklichkeit* (relational reality) and this *Realität* (negative reality) will be expressed years later in the thesis on the side of the man:

Formulation 1: “The inscription in the phallic function (castration) is valid for all.”

Formulation 2: “There is at least one who is an exception to this rule: the Father of the Primordial Horde (Urvater) .”

The Oedipal existential-particular discovery relates to its totemistic universalization from a speculative or paraconsistent identity

.....
6 Lacan 2007, p.35.

7 Ibid. P.115. “... the analytic relationship is based on a love of truth- that is, on a recognition of realities” (p.166)

between these two formulations. As it happens, the tensions between Anthropology and History are deeper than we may think, and few have observed that this restriction clause matters to Lacan in his theory of discourse:

“In the so called primitive societies, insofar as I inscribe them as not being dominated by the master's discourse - I say this for whoever wants to dig a little deeper - it is quite likely that the master signifier would be demarcated through a more complex economy”⁸

Just as there is a distinction between the old Master (from ancient Greece) and the discourse of the modern (capitalist) Master, there is also a structural difference between the discourse of the Master himself as a prevailing social link (modern and ancient), of the social bond in so-called “primitive societies.” It is a difference based on the differential economy of the Master signifier.

Now we come to a certain affinity between the “man” side of the formulas of sexuation and totemism expressed in two figures of the Lacanian consciousness: Oedipus and the Father of the Primitive Horde. Let us here note now that the Freudian precedent of these two figures goes back to his theory of identification. The fulcrum of his theory of identification is the anthropophagic experience. Here we are no longer only in the order of myth, but also within the order of concrete ritual practices involving war-waging, imprisoning, captivity, killing, and the ingesting of the other. It turns out that based on the totemism that prevailed in his anthropological references, like Atkinson, Robertson Smith, and others also moved towards the structuralism of Lévi-Strauss, the doctrine of sacrifice always remained subordinated to the mythical one of the Totem. With this we inherit an incorporative and possessivist conception of the anthropophagic incorporation. Within this we also find difficulties similar to those we present between Hyppolite and Kojève. We assume that to join these is to know who the Masters are (us) and who the potential Slaves are (them). Slaves are potential enemies, but while included in the category of the Other, they are also potential friends, with whom it is possible to exchange words and women through formations of alliance. Therefore, the universal theme of parricide must be divided into two: the murder of the friend or of the enemy. Regardless of this indeterminacy, it is ascertained that whenever I ingest parts of the Other, I assimilate something that was not originally mine, and in addition I come to possess a trace, by which I increase my range of identifications.

.....
8 Ibid., p.93.

That is why of all three forms of identification described by Freud, the first being the primary identification, (*Uridentificazione*) is performed with the father. However, if the real Father is the agent of castration, he must be a father before he is real; and therefore dead and thus, symbolic.

We can read the Freudian theory of identification in its narrow approximation with Hegel as understood as a logical-ontological theory of identity, based on three ideas:⁹:

(1) The temporal production of the identification between knowing and being takes place through acts of identification. The work of returning to mnemonic traits of perception, repetition as a fundamental expression of the death drive, the unitary trace as an inscription of the turns of the demand on itself, which remains a negative element.

(2) Identifications are procedural mediations between being and having, between desire and demand, between the subject and the Other, between the signifier and the subject, and so on. In these mediations, the transformations carried out at the level of knowledge have an ontological effect, such as “*the transformation that occurs in the subject when he assumes an image*”.

(3) The identification departs from its presuppositions (history of previous identifications) and is presented through negations (activity-passivity, return to self, negation, sublimation), retroacts upon the subject and transforms it into what it already was, without knowing it.

There is a premise hidden in this series of theses around identification: *I always know who we are and who they are*. Along with totemism, psychoanalysis imported an identitarian conception of identification, which Lacan tried to mitigate first with the concept of the unitary trait and later with his theory of the letter.

This is not only a metapsychological problem, but also a point of convergence between many small clinical difficulties, to which I have been dedicating myself and which I summarize below in more detail:

(a) The situation of an infinite elaboration of mourning, where all the conditions for the elaboration of a loss are met and yet the mourning does not end: This process is sometimes called melancholy, and without knowing exactly how this possibility, occurs in cases of non-psychosis¹⁰.

(b) The situation in which the transference is organized in the co-presence of intransitive and anguished demands of personal love, simultaneously attacks any sign of response: The coexistence of narcissistic intolerances with schizoid anguishes has been called, by non-Lacanian psychoanalytic traditions, border states or *borderline*

9 Bourgeois 2001, p.306.

10 Dunker 2018

personality.

(c) The situation in which there is a kind of failure in the constitution of the relation of transfer: The narrative of suffering seems to be completely subsumed in the discursive ties of the Master (or the University). There is no fissure in the knowledge regarding the symptom and the identification towards the Master signifier comprises on the one side of a “weak jouissance” and on the other a “petrification” of alienation¹¹.

3. Animist Perspectivism

Totemism in general, and particularly its consequences for psychoanalysis, seems to have found an important alternative in the findings of Eduardo Viveiros de Castro’s ethnographic research along with the upper Xingu populations such as the Araweté and Kaiapós. Such groups obviously have systems of kinship governed by the prohibitions and nominations described by Lévi-Strauss, but there is also a significant part of their social bond that is organized by another principle that is neither symmetrical nor complementary to that of totemism. The former student of the author of *Pensée Sauvage*, called this other form of organization Amerindian perspectivism. This anti-narcissistic cosmology takes indigenous theories in strict continuity with their intellectual pragmatics¹², reversing the relationship, consolidated since modernity, whereby there is a single, fixed and definite ontology around which different epistemologies are presented, or more precisely, a point of view with their devices of recognition, classification, predication and judgment. Regarding perspectivism, it is on the contrary that there is a single epistemology and the worlds produced move, adjusted or referred to this epistemology. However, at the heart of this epistemology the pre-definition of “we” is indeterminate: it includes animals, spirits, gods, the dead, enemies made allies, but also allies reversed into enemies. It is not a question of revising the relationship between people and things, us and them, humans and nonhumans, but rather of *unrealizing* and *blurring* their borders, according to the institute of *affinity*, which is so present in these South American communities.

What we have here is a review of the classic thesis brought by Lacan from Lévi-Strass: that the taboo of incest is the law that separates culture and nature, since that, from then on, there are several natures forming a kind of multi-naturalism¹³. This intuition unfolds the experience

11 Ibid.

12 de Castro 2015, p. 24.

13 Ibid., p.33.

of recognition into two strains: one of the Same, and the other of the Other. If the negation of the Same is given by the work of language and expressed in Lacan by the notion of Subject, the other of the Other is given via the metamorphosis of the body and expressed, by Lacan, in the problem of the possible and conjectural: “Another jouissance.”

“The European praxis consists in “making souls” (and differentiating cultures) starting from a given material-corporeal background (nature)’the indigenous praxis, on the other hand, “makes bodies” (and differentiates species) from a socio-spiritual continuum given “since forever” “¹⁴

In this world the Real is defined as a “semiotic defect”, not as an ontological unity. This double twist makes of perspectivism an attitude that is both materialistic and speculative¹⁵ and at the same time is neither a relativism nor universalism of wholes, but a kind of fractured, transitive and provisional universalism. This establishes culture and the subject as the form of the universal, and nature as the form of the particular:

“ [...] animals and other non humans who have souls see themselves as people and, therefore, under certain conditions and contexts, “are” people, that is, complex entities with a double-faced ontological structure (a visible and an invisible one), existing under pronomial modes of the reflexive and the reciprocal and the relational modes of the intentional and the collective”¹⁶

The way humans see animals, spirits and other cosmic beings differs from how these beings see themselves and how they see humans, since the original condition common to humans and animals is not animality, but humanity¹⁷. When someone in a trance, illness or alteration of consciousness sees one of these invisible beings, it does not mean that someone is abnormal, but that the situation or that perspective is abnormal. The notion of a person does not apply or overlap with the anthropomorphic notion of the individual; it is closer to what Lacan calls the subject position, deduced from the relationship with at least two signifiers; this is why to know is basically to know the “who of things”¹⁸, as Guimarães Rosa, a well know Brazilian “Joycean” writer, said.

There is a specific kind of being, the shamans or spirits, who have the intrinsic ability to be something else, and who are characters

.....
14 Ibid., p.38.

15 Ibid., p. 41.

16 Ibid., p.44.

17 Ibid p.60.

18 Ibid., p.50.

infinitely different from themselves. They are able to reconstruct the complex relationships of recognition, occurring when there is a common background of difference regarding oneself between humans and non-humans¹⁹.

“If humans see themselves as humans and are seen as non humans - animals or spirits - by non humans, then animals should necessarily see themselves as humans”²⁰

All beings “represent” the world in the same way. What changes is the world that they see, so the most precise concept is that of *perspective* and not of *representation*. How can we here not rediscover the Hegelian critique of Kantian idealism and its separation between the consciousness in itself (*an-sich*) and the consciousness for itself (*für-sich*), endowed with a single meaning and multiple references? The perspectivist multinaturalism is a kind of animism, not totemism. It involves a double twist transformation: the inversion between term and function²¹, as Levi-Strauss initially described as a structure of myths²² which then formalizes with the notion of Klein’s bottle²³. For this, it is necessary to understand perspectivism as a new concept resultant from the original concept²⁴. Taking into account the four forms of ontology, or the four “modes of identification” described by Descola in Klein’s group structure, we shall see that *animism* is for *totemism* just as *analogism* is for *naturalism*. With this we can deduce a regime of analogical identification, which does not overlap with the identitarian registry of totemism. If totemism effects translations, perspectivism presents itself as a “*doctrine of misunderstandings*,”²⁵ not because it is concerned with sanctioning the defects of interpretation, but because it supports the excess of interpretation as its starting point.

“The equivocation determines the premises, more than is determined by them. Consequentially, it does not belong to the world of dialectical contradiction, for its synthesis is disjunctive and infinite”²⁶

From what has been presented so far, it is clear that perspectivism

.....
19 Ibid., p.61.

20 Ibid., p.61.

21 Ibid., p.69

22 Lévi-Strauss 1953.

23 Lévi-Strauss 2008.

24 Ibid., p 73.

25 Ibid., p.86.

26 Ibid., p. 93.

is actually the non-identitarian theory of recognition which we were looking for. Without ceasing to be anthropology, it undoes the boundaries between the human and inhuman, the basis of Kojève's reading, as well as it works with a double register of inverted negations capable of overcoming the "symmetry" of Hyppolite's approach. Perhaps, might it be the ethnological model, assumed by Lacan, as capable of explaining the more complex economy of the Master signifier in primitive societies?

4. Cannibal metaphysics:

The Araweté cosmology bears a non-totemistic form of posthumous cannibalism. When a warrior shaman imprisons, kills and devours one of his enemies, he does not enrich himself metaphorically with his magical properties. The soul of the dead reaches the heavens and is devoured by the spirits. However, the ground status of the dead begins as an indeterminate one. This occurs because years may pass between the initial captivity and the devouring. During this time the prisoner can "integrate" himself with the local community, including being able to marry one of his women. They can be called a *tovajar*, that is, both "brother-in-law" and "enemy". Here the contradiction is blatant since the brother-in-law is precisely a borrowed friend, the ally, the relative; therefore, conceptually, the opposite of the enemy. The Tupinambá funeral rite imposes that the killer undergoes a radical transformation: he gains a new name, can speak in public and begins mourning after his act of killing. But there is another condition not predicted by the myth of *Totem and Taboo*. All members of the tribe can eat a piece of the slaughtered, with the exception of the killer. Killing and devouring are acts separated by a symbolic ban. In the Araweté funeral rite, the community of devourers, represented by the spirits (*Maais*) devour the soul of the devoured one once it arrives in the heavens. The devoured one, in turn is represented by the other dead Arawetés. And the living Arawetés sometimes make of the group an enemy. The Araweté rite is a perspective translation of the Tupinambá rite, involving a substitution of terms and functions, means and ends, the self and others.²⁷

The crucial question for the work of Freudian mourning is to discover what has been lost in the lost object, and, from this, to produce a symbolic introjection, analogous to the devouring, which is mythically practiced in relation to the totemic parent. That is, a well-done mourning is the reduction of the object to its elementary traits, a destruction with conservation, an *Aufhebung*.

However, from the Araweté animistic perspectivism it is not

.....
27 Ibid., p.159.

a question of incorporating the trace of the enemy, but of eating the "*relationship of the enemy to his eater*", a movement of reciprocal self-reflection from the point of view of the enemy²⁸. If for Freudian theory to end the mourning is to conclude a metaphor, for perspectivism the sacrificial mourning is the beginning of a metonymy.

The Amazonian figures of ritual cannibalism and transverse shamanism embody the permanent question of perspectivism: for whom is the position of the human? They bring together the duplicity of the officiant and the sacrificed. They are polyglots, androgynous, *triksters*; the anticipated dead, perceived as food in preparation by the soul-devouring *Maais*. As practical intermediaries between two worlds, or diplomats between conflicting ontologies, they experiment both the eschatology of *de-individualization* and the mythology of *pre-specification*²⁹; that is, they do not become one, nor do they actually live the duality that could give rise to the class or group. They are *borderline* beings between man and animal, inhabitants of boundary states between the living and the dead.

Perspectivism is not a theory of closed relations among the terms it embodies, but a theory of terms open to relations. The name of this opening is becoming, and it represents a third kind of relationship, another concept of recognition, beyond the totemist law and the sacrificial metonymy³⁰. If production is the model for the fabrication of man's identity with nature, in this becoming it consists of an identity in reverse. The totemist becoming articulates affiliation and alliance, the perspectivist becoming involves a second type of alliance, called a *consensual alliance*. In it we find a non-judicialist and non-contractualist relationship of the law, which would carry out the disjunctive synthesis of the three primary social laws, described by Macel Mauss: to give, to receive and to reciprocate. The impulse of perspectivism, if not production, can be described as predation. It is the pursuit of acquiring words, souls, names and everything that is from another to suture the permanent crisis of identity that has structural value, but in this case is not exactly narcissistic. This consensual alliance occurs in the context of the translation or the transformation of myths. The *Maais* need new souls because their hunger for terms is infinite. What would happen then if we imagine a social bond so stable that the discursive economy remained perfectly stable, with no trace of indeterminacy and no form of perspectivism? This would not be the case for our patients who, despite speaking, do not transfer, since they do not intend to translate

.....
28 Ibid., p. 160.

29 Ibid., p. 177.

30 Ibid., p.197.

their narratives of suffering, but only to maintain their own identity. They do not suffer from the narcissism of small differences, but rather with a narcissism of great similarities. That is, if we think that identity is a relation that presumes reciprocity, symmetry, and reflexivity, we see here how perspectivism offers us in each of these cases a specific negation. Amerindian mourning denies reciprocity between devouring and being devoured. The Amerindian shaman denies the symmetry between me and another. Finally, the denial of becoming helps us to understand the suspension of reflexivity and the activity of translation, present in cases of narrative deficit.

5. Hegel and Perspectivism

It is not a question of showing here how Amerindian perspectivism is essentially a kind of savage Hegelianism, nor it is of interpreting this way of life as a predicted case in Hegel's system. Our argument is more simple. The theory of sexuation in Lacan, as well as the clinical problems associated with it as dependent on the concept of identification, demand an anthropology, a conception of language and a notion of non-identitarian recognition. Here we follow Taylor's assessment³¹ that the teleological system of history, along with its ontology based on reconciliation and recognition of consciousness in the structures that embody the Idea, and ultimately the State, have failed. Nature will no longer be seen as the emanation of the spirit³². Its failure as a program is an important part of understanding its historical recovery in three areas: politics, language and anthropology. In all three cases, the recovery of the expressive power of the subject serves to understand how the negative power of consciousness allow us to engender the effects of transformation of reality that condition the production of this same consciousness.

The attempt to show how the modes of subjectivization in the Lacanian clinic are fundamentally structures of recognition. They are based in an ontological negation which manifest itself in a privileged way in the confrontation between subject and object. But this confrontation can offer many distinct operations, like the recuperation of love beyond narcissism, the redefinition of aesthetic rationality, and the clinical reorientation through modes of implementation of the Real. So the experience of recognition is not a symbolic and imaginary operation. Recognition as a transformative experience is a Real, Symbolic and Imaginary knot. This seem excessively dependent on an 'ontological

.....
31 Taylor 2014.

32 Ibid., p.185.

turn' in the comprehension of metapsychology.³³

It is important to highlight that given this program, the proposal of Viveiros de Castro, namely that perspectivism is aligned with a philosophy of becoming, like that of Deleuze, and that its consequence is an anthropology of the Anti-Narcissus, which accompanies the Anti-Oedipus. Much of Deleuze's criticism of psychoanalysis is based on the criticism of his totemism as a principle of law-making, as the aim of unification of the drives and as a celebration of a logic of identitarian recognition:

The only subject is desire itself on the body without organs, inasmuch as it machines partial objects and flows, selecting and cutting the one with the other. When we pass from one body to another, following connections and appropriations we are doing a R.S.I knot.

Each time of this knot destroy the factitious unity of a possessive or proprietary ego (anoedipal sexuality).³⁴

Through reading Hegel as the philosopher of identity generated by the work of the negative and by realizing how Lacan employs this to support his theory of desire, the first idea that perspectivism is the point-to-point denial of the Lacan-Hegel program is important to note. There are disjunctive synthesis between heterogeneous and non-dialectical horizontal or vertical, topological continuity of forces and non-discontinuity of forms, ontological discontinuity between sign and referent, multiplicity of becomings (as anti-memory) and non-reconciliation of the multiple in the universal (as memory of memory), reciprocal implication (thus ethical) and not determined double negation³⁵. Just as structuralism is anti-humanism, perspectivism is anti-romanticism: instead of society as an organism, the organism as a society³⁶. There is nothing more Hegelian than Lacan's capacity to incorporate what is presented as his "exact opposite." If we know that we are in the accuracy of the contrary, it will not be long before identity begins to lurk. This is exactly what we find in the Hegelian reversal represented in the reading of Žižek: What if the wager of his dialectic is not to adopt the "point of view of finality" towards the present, viewing it as if it were already past, but, precisely, to reintroduce the openness of the future into the past, to grasp that-which-was in its process of becoming, to see the contingent process which generated existing necessity?³⁷

.....
33 Safatle, 2001, p. 319.

34 Deleuze & Guattari 1983 p.72

35 de Castro 2015, pp. 110- 11.

36 Ibid., p.123.

37 Žižek 2012, p. 464.

But, in spite of everything, as Viveiros de Castro observes, “*Anti-Oedipus*” is a book “*necessarily, even more dialectically Oedipal*”³⁸ and the most pungent example of this is the allocation of the Dogon totemist myth which questions the universality of *Totem and Taboo*³⁹. It is not really necessary to destroy the categories of *alliance and affiliation* to destroy the Oedipal anthropology, rather, it would suffice to realize how the concept of “equiss” can lead us to an idea of a non-all-Oedipal social bond, that is to say, a non-identitary and mutated concept of relation.

This is exactly what Lacan proposes in his theory of sexualization. A schism, or a non-relation, between two perspectives: “man” and “woman”, which rest on another internal schizophrenic between “woman” and “woman.” This is what Hegel called the *Entzweiung*, or division of being.

“Each sex constitutes itself by escaping the universal through which, nonetheless, it defines itself, either - and this characterizes the masculine - through the contradiction brought to a function which stands for all elements of the set, either - and this is the feminine - through the inscription of an alterity which goes around this universal function without logically contradicting it”⁴⁰

Of course, if we associate Hegel’s thought with the contradiction, it will be reduced to the perspective that constitutes the masculine, and it results in a masculine conception of the subject. But this is the Kantian Hegel of the first Lacan: more precisely it is the Hegel that led Lacan to think of the Real as impossible. It is the Hegel of progress of reason by assimilation (anthropophagic?) of his figures and alienated forms.

Yet there is still what Jean-Marie Lardic⁴¹ calls the dialectic of contingency, where it is not so much the deduction of the real as it is the production of the Real. In it, it is a matter of questioning the relation to itself as to its Other through mediation, but now this Other is perceived as the necessity of contingency, just as we find in concept and perspectivism. It is not so much the combinatorial of finitude, but of the types of infinity.

“The category of the relation between necessity and contingency is that through which all the relations between finitude and infinity are condensed and inverted.”⁴²

38 de Castro 2015, p. 138.

39 Ibid., p. 143.

40 David-Ménard 2014, p. 47.

41 Lardic 1989.

42 Hegel 1968, p. 434.

There is for Hegelian thought a real *need for contingency*, since what is necessary in its ipseity would be precisely “*without reason of being, and therefore contingent*.”⁴³ Contingency is not a production of the subject, as mediation, but lies in the Real, as creative negativity, so:

“Hegel makes us leave the traditional pure logical formalism and gives us ontological content, or a logic of effective content.”⁴⁴

Would not this passage, the insertion of contingency, be the necessary element to think of Araweté mourning, with its indeterminacy of the statute of the enemy, with its reverse ritual, and with its celestial battle to know the statute of the slayer in relation to his victim? Is Amerindian becoming an anthropological case of Hegelian productive indeterminacy, or rather, is it the opposite?

Jameson reminds us that in the preliminary versions of the struggle of the Master and the Slave⁴⁵ the dialectic was presented in sexual terms, as an opposition of genders, which later was reallocated to the chapters on “Pleasure and necessity” and “The law of the heart” in the 1807 of the *Phenomenology of the Spirit*⁴⁶. Here the figures of the Master and the Slave are marked by the opposition between inessentiality, or anonymity and real recognition. Jameson observes that along with the historical interpretation which he attempts to allegorize - that is, the birth of citizenship in post-revolutionary European states - this is about a myth⁴⁷. It is a myth of grasping and deliverance. It is a myth that is also the inductive myth of our relations of primary appropriation of our identity; that is, it is a version of the narcissus myth and its connection with work, desire and language. Therefore, Deleuze’s critique of the Hegel-Lacan marriage is consistent on this point.

However, what if the Hegel of *Science of Logic*, dealing with an emphasis on contingency expressed a late realization about his project of thinking up a theory of sexual recognition? The dialectic of the mistress and the Slave or the dialectic of the Master and the Slave? If this were so, we could re-enlighten the hitherto stressed approaches between Amerindian perspectivism and Hegelian philosophy, such as the relation between, on the one hand, a system of contradictory myths about Phallic law (*Totem and Taboo* and *Oedipus*, Narcissism and Master-Slave) and, on the other hand, a non-system or non-set of becomings that does not

43 Lardic 1989, p. 97.

44 Idem: 107

45 Hegel 1979

46 Hegel 1988.

47 Jameson 2010, p. 67.

oppose the Phallic law, nor question it, nor dialectize it, but travel in another register of concept, in another modality of time, called by Lacan of not-all. That is, there is no dialectic between the all (masculine) and the not-all (feminine), but an explosion of the categorical, representational and predicative unity, which we call identity, and which must be counted not as a relation between individuals, but as a perspective. As we have seen, perspectivism is the production of worlds for the practical puzzles that the prospects demand. It is, in its own way, a performative critique of representational identity as the general rule of relations of recognition. Here we could re-encounter the Hegelian critique of truth:

“The possibility that the representation conforms itself to the object to which it is related only appears as an enigma because one has let explode the effective unity in which the expression (made subjective determination) the sense (made a separate universal) and the thing (made a pre-given content) converged”⁴⁸

This explosion of the unity of the Other is fundamental if we are to think of a non-identitarian theory of identification. Žižek perceived the importance of the notion of contingency in Hegel for both his difficulty in thinking certain aspects of the psychoanalytic record of contingency (unconscious, overdetermination, objet a and sexual difference) and his thesis of identity as absolute negation. However, the idea that nature represents the contingency of necessity and the involuntary joke that “if the facts do not fit the theory, change the facts “ seems to be surprisingly rehabilitated by multinaturalist perspectivism.

“The standard reproach to Hegel is that he tries to abolish the absolute heterogeneity of the Other, its thoroughly contingent character. But there is in Hegel a name for such irreducible contingent Otherness: nature”⁴⁹

Nature is not only the other of the idea, but the Other with respect to itself, precisely as in:

“Why do animals (or others) see themselves as humans, after all? Precisely, I think because in humans, we see them as animals, seeing ourselves as humans”⁵⁰

The progress of the “outer” contingent appearance, the semblance or dress of all beings (humans, spirits, animals, dead, etc.) through classically named processes concerning theories of recognition, self-reflection, hermeneutics of the self (Honneth), self-consciousness

.....
48 Lebrun 2000, p. 379

49 Žižek 2012, p.461

50 de Castro 2015, p. 61.

(Hegel), symbolization (Freud), and subjectivation (Lacan) need not be read as progress toward a pre-existing inner essence, but as a “”performative” process of constructing (forming) that which is “discovered:”⁵¹. We thus come to the paradoxical conclusion that although Hegel’s philosophy of nature is a poor model for thinking nature in the sense of modern science, it is a great resource for thinking of a non-identitarian theory of recognition in which epistemology is fixed and ontology is variable. It is the difference between thinking with the contradiction, the canonical Hegel, whereby “*the thing becomes what it has always been*” (the process of self-identity) and the Amerindian Hegel, in which the thing is not given in advance, but is *formed in an open and contingent process*: that of becoming.

Translation: Sabrina Fernandes

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51 Žižek 2012, p.467.

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On Threat

Andrew Haas

Abstract: A threat is a strange thing—for it is neither simply a deed done, nor undone. But if we think the threat in terms of the presence or absence of an actual or potential threat—as the history of philosophy (from the Greeks, through Hegel, to us) has done, then we miss what is threatening. For the threat—whether to life and limb, freedom or identity, or to an individual or group, family and friends, civil society or a state or the world as a whole—is the suspension of action. Then the threat is prior to possibility and impossibility, necessity and contingency, presence and absence. But this too, is a threat—and one that implicates us—at least insofar as the implied threat implies the threat of implication.

Keywords: aspect, being, implication, problematic, suspension, threat, time, unity.

And take the present horror from the time,
Which now suits with it. Whiles I threat, he lives:
Words to the heat of deeds too cold breath gives.¹

Horror and time, words and deeds—these are the themes that surround the question of the threat. And perhaps more today, in the present age, it seems to be on the basis of an actual or possible threat—whether of punishment or violence, exposure or death, terrorism or war, the other or difference, truth or joy—that action is taken, words spoken and deeds done. But if this is the guiding question of (ethico-political) philosophy from the Greeks to us, then it is Hegel who (as Heidegger reminds us) provides ‘the clearest and greatest example of the unity’ of the history of threat.² And it is to this history that we must turn in order to even begin responding to the threat.

So, *what* is a threat? Or what does it mean to threaten? And *how* does the threat threaten? And is the threat not itself somehow threatened by that which cannot be an actual threat, or even a possible one—and then, if ‘the present horror’ cannot be taken ‘from the time’, what are the implications for words and deeds, the ethics and politics of speaking and acting and thinking?

¹ Shakespeare 2005, *Macbeth*, II.1.

² Heidegger 1977, *GA65*, p. 76.

The Threat to the World

In fact, at first, the threat appears *in abstracto*. I am a person with individual personality, alive and free (not merely a subject, nor a featherless biped or rational animal, nor just a thinking thing or transcendental apperception). For I have the possibility or power (δύναμις, *potentia*, *Möglichkeit*) of self-determination. Being the law for myself, I am autonomous (αὐτό-νομος). On the one hand, I have a right to my body as my material-concrete possession, as my *finitude*. On the other hand, my thinking and imagining, desiring and willing, is unlimited, *infinite*, universal. And I am not only conscious as this person, present to myself, I am also self-conscious of being the one who is conscious, and conscious of this self-presence—which is how I am different from others, and the same as them (insofar as other persons are alive and free). In other words, I am a contradiction: finite and infinite, a finite infinity or infinite finitude. And tolerating my contradictory being—this is the ‘supreme-achievement of the person.’³

But my freedom can be taken from me: slavery threatens. Another can treat me as if I was a thing, unfree, impersonal, without rights. Or I can appropriate another, steal their body or body parts (or that which they possess, objects they created, work or works into which they put themselves, or the value thereof); take their substance as something to be used or abused, possessed and exploited, consumed and enjoyed, as well as thrown away and destroyed. I can treat the other, not as an end in itself, or a being in and for itself, so not as an essentially free personality (with inalienable rights)—but rather, as a being for me, as ‘a beast of burden’, a mere *Naturwesen*.⁴ However contrary to right, I can determine myself as master and the other as slave.⁵

And my life can be taken from me: death threatens. Not only can

3 Hegel 1986, VII, §35n. Hegel’s concept of contradiction is neither a category (neither Aristotelian nor Kantian, which both seek to resolve contradiction) nor an abstract idea (like some Platonic other-worldly εἶδος)—for it is just as real and concrete; it both resolves and maintains itself by grasping the truth of contradiction contradictorily, by ‘sublating’ (that is, tolerating) contradiction. And Hegel uses this word, sublation, *Aufhebung*, because it has the advantage of ‘not just different meanings, but opposite ones’ (Hegel 1832, p. xvii); it translates a Latin two-fold original: *tollo*, *tollere*, *sustuli*, *sublatus* comes from *tolero*, *tolerare*, *toleravi*, *toleratus* (bear, endure, tolerate) and *fero*, *ferre*, *tulis*, *latus* (bring, bear; tell speak of; consider; carry off, win, receive, produce; get). Thus, one word, *aufheben* (like *aufgeben*) is two, essentially ambiguous, double, Janus-headed (and so perfectly suited to both phenomenology and logic, that is, to phenomenologic)—for it means both destroying or dissolving, *elevare*, and preserving or keeping, *conservare* (Hegel 1986, p. 574). And as I have argued (Haas 2000, pp. 58-62), if the history of Western philosophy (as metaphysics) is biased towards a thinking of truth as essentially unambiguous, Hegel’s sublating concept is perhaps the first to grasp truth as contradictory, ambiguous, *doppelsinnig* and *zweischneidig*—and the ambiguity of truth, that which Heidegger (1977, GA24, §18) thinks as ἀ-λήθεια, revealing and concealing, uncovering and covering, unveiling and veiling.

4 Hegel 1986, VII, §48n, §57n.

5 Hegel 1986, III, pp. 145ff [§178ff].

I commit suicide (even if it is wrong, because I am free), but I will die (because I am a finite being, an organic body, both one with nature and separated therefrom). And I can kill and be killed, *von fremder Hand*, at the hand of another⁶—as the lord and servant each seek, not only mutual recognition, but threaten the death of each other. So the threat of violence is essentially a mutual death threat.

But the threat is not just mine, or yours, my own or the other’s, and not only to me or you; it is ours—and the counter-threat threatens. For when personal interest and particular desire is raised above the universal—so that *my* right is taken to be *the* right—we are both threatened by error, lying, deception, coercion. Our relationship (agreement, contract, promise, honesty, trust, etc.) is under threat of individual vanity. Recognition and respect of each other is threatened by the will of one, and the power to force or coerce. In this way, intentionally or not, the relative threatens the absolute. And the individual’s willingness to place their subjective interest over and above mine (and everyone else’s), a willingness to claim that the universal (as the transcendental ground or condition of the possibility of any relation whatsoever) is particular (in its very being and essence)—this is the threat of wrong-doing and criminality (hence the role of punishment, not as revenge; but as righting of the wrong, sublation of injury, restoration of right, which is a kind of ‘justice’, *Gerechtigkeit*).⁷

And yet, the threat does not stop there—for even within myself, in my relation of myself to myself, the silent soliloquy of inner monologue (or dialogue), my loneliest of lonelies: discord, disharmony, difference threatens. Indeed, insofar as I relate to myself, I am not merely identical with myself, so that my will (my thoughts and dreams, words and deeds) belongs to me; I am also different from myself, in opposition to myself, insofar as I am another, ‘*je est un autre*’.⁸ For although my freedom is mine, although I am free, it is always possible that my will does not correspond to my concept, that my acts do not correlate with me, but to the other. In other words, my purpose and intention, my consciousness (conscience or judgment, as well as beliefs and feelings) of good and evil—which I take to be purely mine, subjective—these are threatened by others, by those whose identity is identical with mine (whereby what

6 Hegel 1986, VII, §70n.

7 Hegel 1986, VII, §99n. Against Feuerbach 1801, pp. 13-18 (and Hobbes 1909, Part II, Chapt. 31), Hegel thinks punishment—neither as revenge, nor as coercion or social control—as a way of honoring and respecting the criminal as a rational human being, as a person who freely places their individual will over and above the victim. Perpetrators know and recognize what is right, but determine that their subjective interest and desire is better served by doing wrong.

8 Rimbaud 1972, ‘*La lettre du voyant*’ to Paul Demeny, 15 May 1871, p. 250. Hegel 1986, VII, §109.

I take to be mine might be another's) and different from mine (whereby mine might just be determined in opposition to theirs, and so not mine, but simply not theirs).

Then first, difference threatens responsibility. For if I am not myself, if I am different from myself, I cannot claim to be the cause and ground of my (praise-worthy or blame-worthy) actions, and so responsible therefore (innocent or guilty). In this way, difference in the will poses a threat to autonomy, and to the entire economy of accountability. If I am not myself, or not simply myself—in anyway whatsoever—if there is a trace of otherness, self-difference, that contaminates my will; then my freedom is threatened as well. Oedipus, for example, is not just ignorant of the fact that the man he kills is his father; rather, in addition, his act is his fate, the will of the gods (if not determined by some other difference, such as instinct, God or the devil, the struggle for survival of the species, will to power, the means of production, the unconscious, etc.), and so not his, which threatens his ownership of the parricide. Autonomy shows itself to be far more heteronomy, and responsibility lies just as much with the other.⁹

But second, difference threatens intention (and intent), perhaps even the intentional act. For if I am divided from myself, if my thoughts and concepts, judgments and determinations (even my welfare and happiness and good will), are not my own; then I am not the one who intends the action, whether I know it or not. And if guilt or innocence are ascribed on the basis of knowledge (and knowledge of knowledge, or self-knowledge)—so that the murderer must have known, or hoped, that the act would kill—then any difference between knowledge and ignorance, or between what is now the case and what is to come in the future (conditionally), threatens my very ability to intend, the act's motive (as well as responsibility). This is why, normally, anyone who is not themselves, not self-identical, not self-present, so incapable of self-determination, that is, freedom, autonomy—but who are self-absent in anyway whatsoever (such as 'children, imbeciles, lunatics, etc.' whose actions are either totally absent or diminished)—are not held responsible.¹⁰

Then third, difference threatens the good (throughout the history of philosophy as metaphysics from the ἐπέκεινα τῆς οὐσίας to the *gute Wille*). For if the good remains an idea or ideal, an infinite goal towards which we strive or that which directs action, and so 'without-content', unrealized and perhaps unrealizable, a form (or form of forms) and

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9 Hegel 1986, VII, §117.

10 Hegel 1986, VII, §120n.

merely formal, abstract and lacking particular articulation—then its essential difference from reality means it is no good at all.¹¹ The truth of difference threatens to reveal the distance between that which is potentially good and actually good; just as the really good threatens to unmask the ideally good for what it is, merely ideal, a good idea, but just an idea. And then all the good laws and principles, all the good intentions and good wills—and all the good of rights and duties, good habits and values, good words and deeds, as well as all the good governance (of democracy or a democracy to come, or some other form of government)—all this (along with its opposite) threatens to evaporate. Indeed, the idea of freedom does not make us free, although it can be used to enslave. And the difference between *is* and *ought* is not just unbreachable—it threatens an inverted world in which the universal is relative, the objective subjective, in which the 'rule of law' is the 'rule of men', philosophy is sophistry, and the very idea of the good is evil.

But the threat does not stop there—for what was previously merely abstract, becomes concrete. And what seemed simply ideal is real. Thus, the potential threat becomes actual: a threat to me and my family, friends and colleagues, fellow citizens, to one country and another, and finally to the world as a whole.

First, the family is threatened by civil society. As a circle of love, *Kreis der Liebe*—based on love, not just physical lust or biology (survival of the species, genetics), nor merely the mutual satisfaction of needs, nor a contract for the acquisition of money and power¹²—the family

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11 Hegel 1986, VII, §135.

12 With regards to men and women, sex and gender, love and learning, the *Philosophy of Right* seems (at first glance) deeply traditional: 'Women may well be educated, but they are not made for the higher sciences, for philosophy and certain artistic productions which require a universal element. Women may have insights, taste, and delicacy, but they do not possess the ideal. The difference between man and woman is the difference between animal and plant; the animal is closer in character to man, the plant to woman, for the latter is a more peaceful [process of] unfolding whose principle is the more indeterminate unity of feeling. When women are in charge of government, the state is in danger, for their actions are based not on the demands of universality but on contingent inclination and opinion. The education of women takes place imperceptibly, as if through the atmosphere of representational thought, more through living than through the acquisition of knowledge, whereas man attains his position only through the attainment of thought and numerous technical exertions' (§166n). Indeed, traditionally (in a sexist patriarchal context) men are powerful and active; women passive and subjective—or, the difference between the sexes is like that between animal and plant. And yet, this (prejudicial) understanding of male and female belongs not to Hegel, but to his students—the quote is from Hotho and Griesheim. Hegel however, is quite clear: gender relations are merely external, *nach außen*, the traditional ways in which—at this point in world-history (as the history of world-spirit)—sexual difference is expressed. But *nach innen*, internally (spiritually) things are otherwise; there is another truth, and this historical moment, dominated by traditional roles, is to be sublated, along with the ways in which men and women present themselves to one another, and to themselves (§166). In other words, although the family needs to direct itself both inwards and outwards, there is nothing that says such roles must *a priori* be filled by one sex or the other. Nevertheless, Hegel still does seem burdened by the historical prejudice that the gender known as outward-directed, as powerful and active, is masculine (regardless of sex difference), while the gender of the partner that is inward-directed is known as feminine. Today,

is supposed to be the original unit of which the person is a part. Like everyone, I am born into a family; and my family is the ground of my essence, and condition of the possibility of my being. And family is not a (two-fold) relation between adults, which is marriage; rather, it is between adults and children—for there is no child without parent, and no parent without child, just as there is no marriage without two.¹³ But the family unit is not a self-sufficient totality; rather, it is grounded on (in relation to, mediated by) the larger unit, the family of families, of which it is a part. Each family is an end-in-itself, but cannot accomplish its task, cannot provide for the welfare of its individual parts (needs and desires, security and opportunity, education and work)—it is thereby, threatened by others (outside the family, other persons and families) who can do so. For individual freedom can only be exercised and enjoyed, right can only be actually possible, justice can only be concrete and real (not just an idea and ideal), if it is embodied in the ‘law of the land’—not just the ‘law of the father’—if it is actualized and preserved by legal institutions (police and inspectors, courts and juries, legislative bodies and procedures). In this way, groups—such as the farmers of food and the manufacturers of clothing, builders of shelter and creators of art, as well as the thinkers of thought, philosophers—threaten the unity of the family unit, insofar as they demonstrate that it is not the ground of its own unity. And as a greater unity, a more whole whole, a more fundamental fundament, or more universal universal, civil society is not just responsible for the unity of the (nuclear) family; but this ‘second family’ also threatens the ‘first family’ with disunity.¹⁴

Second, civil society is threatened by the state. For the original ground, that which allows society to exist, is the constant presence of the state, the substance of its being; it is already there, *schon vor*, embodied in constitutional (constituted-constitutive) law, even before me. Each citizen is free thanks to the state; I can exercise my freedom because the state gives (or has always already given, albeit in a concealed way, *eingehüllt*) me the right to do so.¹⁵ And it was ‘from the state that freedom of thought and science first emerged (whereas it was a

at least in some parts of the world, the cunning of reason in history appears to have begun to call this determination into question.

13 Again, there is nothing in Hegel to preclude the possibility of same-sex marriage, although he does seem to maintain that both gender-roles (one directed towards itself, inward to the family, for its own sake; the other directed towards the other, outward to friends and civil society, for the sake of the relation to others) must be fulfilled (although not necessarily by the same person at the same time, nor all the time).

14 Hegel 1986, VII, §252.

15 Hegel 1986, VII, §260n.

church which burned *Giordano Bruno* and forced *Galileo* to recant on his knees for *presenting* the *Copernican* theory of the solar-system, etc.)’.¹⁶ In this way, the power of society to serve as the condition of the possibility of the family is threatened by the state’s power to produce and preserve society—and the state itself. Indeed, each circle of circles, each universal of universals or whole of wholes (however self-differentiated), law of laws and ground of grounds, foundation of foundations and cause of causes—each one threatens the very existence, the being and essence, of those it encircles, universalizes, totalizes, legitimizes, grounds, founds, causes. And if the state ‘*permeates all relations within it*’, all laws and customs, it is because—in the name of peace and internal security—the sovereignty of the state threatens the sovereignty of all therein.¹⁷

But third, the state (and everything therein) does not only threaten—it is threatened. For each state, and its relation to all others, other-to-other, is under threat from the outside. And the threat to the being and essence, existence and freedom, of the state—this is ‘the ethical *moment of war*’.¹⁸ Then the self-defense of the state is (supposedly) justified, perhaps even to the point of neutralizing the attacker (military conquest, slavery or death), if sovereignty is threatened. But if there is no state of states, no meta-state or supra-national sovereign that has power over independent, mutually-recognizing states—although states are free to make peace, fulfill

16 Hegel 1986, VII, §270.

17 Hegel 1986, VII, §274.

18 Hegel 1986, VII, §324. In fact, for Hegel, war is not just unnecessary and evil and destructive—it can just as well be cathartic and purifying and productive (and not only for those in the military estate, or those exhibiting valour, or valuing *θράσος* over justice, like Thrasymachus): ‘War is that condition in which the vanity of temporal things and temporal goods—which tends at other times to be merely a pious phrase—takes on a serious significance, and it is accordingly the moment in which the ideality of the particular attains its right and becomes actuality. The higher significance of war is that, through its agency (as I have put it on another occasion), “the ethical health of nations is preserved in their indifference towards the permanence of finite determinacies, just as the movement of the winds preserves the sea from that stagnation which a lasting calm would produce—a stagnation which a lasting, not to say perpetual, peace would also produce among nations”’ (1986, VII, §324; II, p. 481). For Hegel’s student Gans, war is both necessary and beneficial: ‘But the state is an individual, and negation is an essential component of individuality. Thus, even if a number of states join together as a family, this league, in its individuality, must generate opposition and create an enemy. Not only do peoples emerge from wars with added strength, but nations troubled by civil dissension gain internal peace as a result of wars with their external enemies. Admittedly, war makes property insecure, but this real insecurity is no more than a necessary movement. We hear numerous sermons on the insecurity, vanity, and instability of temporal things, but all who hear them, however moved they may be, believe that they will none the less retain what is theirs. But if this insecurity should then actually become a serious proposition in the shape of hussars with sabres drawn, the edifying sentiments which predicted all this turn into imprecations against the conquerors. But wars will nevertheless occur whenever they lie in the nature of the thing; the seeds germinate once more, and talk falls silent in the face of the solemn recurrences of history’ (1986, VII, §324n). Nietzsche’s view of war is similar (1967, *Fünf Vorreden zu fünf ungeschriebenen Büchern*, §3).

their obligation to honor international laws and norms, universal rights—the threat to the state’s life and liberty remains. In this way, conflicts between states can (supposedly) ‘only be decided by war’.¹⁹ And not merely actual threats, but potential ones—for a state cannot wait to respond where-and-when an injury happens; it must estimate the probability of a greater or lesser danger, make conjectures as to the intentions of other states (friend or foe), which can itself be a cause of conflict or *controversia*, dispute or *discordia*, disunity or difference, πόλεμος, breaches or breaks in the twists or *Zwisten* of the fabric of international relations.²⁰

And finally, neither simply individuals or families, or families of families, nor merely societies or states—the world is under threat. And this is the true subject and substance of (ethico-political) philosophy (from Plato’s *Republic*, which begins with a threat, ‘But you see how many we are?’, to Hegel’s *Philosophy of Right*, which does not end with the state, but with the world), indeed, any philosophy whatsoever.²¹ For the threat to freedom (as ideal as it is real, and so actualized as right) *in* the world—or more precisely, the freedom *of* the world—is a threat to the whole world, the history of the world, the universal reason or spirit of the world, and so to everyone and everything within and without. And not just the freedom of the world, but the truth of this freedom, the knowledge or self-knowledge that freedom is the ‘being and principle’ of the world, and so the act of actually becoming ‘what it is’,

19 Hegel 1986, VII, §334. Furthermore, insofar as the state’s freedom is its being, how it is and is one, an unfree state would be no state at all—thus war is the way in which the state presents itself when its existence is threatened, when it is threatened with non-existence, with absence. This is why war is essentially contradictory: absolutely hostile to the aggressive individuals of other states, but simultaneously benevolent towards them as individuals in themselves; it is the state’s utmost presence of spirit, *Gegenwart des Geistes*, and at the same time, its utmost absence, *Abwesenheit*—for war is a temporal determination of freedom, the way in which the state is (and states are) one in wartime, whether (aspectually) completely or not (Hegel 1986, VII, §328).

20 Hegel 1986, VII, §335; Hölderlin, 1944ff, Vol. II, p. 17; Nietzsche 1967, *Jenseits von Gut und Böse*, §208. Heraclitus: Πόλεμος πάντων μὲν πατήρ ἐστι, πάντων δὲ βασιλεύς (Kirk and Raven 1957, Fr. 53; Heidegger 1977, *GA39*, pp. 124–25). As Heidegger insists: ‘Ambiguity threatens and mere *Zwist*’ (1977, *GA9*, p. 363).

21 More precisely, the *Republic* begins with an implied threat. Returning from the festivals, Polemarchus stops and ‘arrests’ Socrates and Glaucon, and says: ‘But you see how many we are? [ὅρῳς οὖν ἡμᾶς, ἔφη, ὅσοι ἐσμέν] (Plato 1903, *Republic* 327c). And this is no question—or at least it is a question that is also not a question—for it is command, and implies a necessary demand: prove yourselves better, stronger than Polemarchus and his mates, or submit to the greater force and come peacefully. Fight or be kidnapped—and *tertium non datur*: either/or, either warrior or prisoner-of-war. And Socrates’ proposed alternative, a third that is neither/nor (namely, argument, possibly persuading Polemarchus to let them go) is excluded—for Polemarchus refuses to listen, so there is nothing to be done: εἰ δοκεῖ, ᾗν δ’ ἐγώ, οὕτω χρὴ ποιεῖν (Plato 1903, *Republic* 328b). Goethe thinks this in literary terms: ‘National literature is no longer of importance: it is the time for world literature, and all must aid in bringing it about’ (Eckerman 1981, 31 January 1827, Chapt. 80).

free *qua* world—this too is under threat.²² On the one hand, the world is threatened by individuals and individual nation-states, each with its own particular subjectivity and subjective interests, desires and wills, its own sphere of influence and activity, its own (relative) claim to (imperfect) justice, each unable or unwilling to see the whole of world history (and the universality of right) as their own.²³ On the other hand, the world is threatened by nature, by natural objects and objectivity, ‘geographical and anthropological’ forces (e.g., global warming and the environment, famine and population, poverty and abundance, disease and epidemics, the life of the Sun and the movements of the stars), and their (evidently unequal) distribution among states.²⁴ And it is this double-threat to the world as a whole, the barbarism veiling the true threat and truth of the threat—as subjective as it is objective—that Hegel thinks as ‘still *unthought*’.²⁵ Or, to paraphrase Heidegger: the greatest threat to the world in our most threatened (and perhaps threatening) time is that ‘we are still not thinking’—neither what the threat is, nor how so.²⁶

The Horror of the Threat

So what is the threat, or threatening in all these threats? What is the essence or concept of the threat? Is it the abstractness of the abstract, or is it concrete, even the concreteness of the concrete? Is it something particular (slavery or death, subjective or objective, me or another, and so the difference between us) or is it the non-particularity of the threat that threatens? Is the mere idea of a potential or possible threat threatening, or is it only threatening insofar as it is real, an actual threat to me and my family, our friends and colleagues, our society and state, or the world as a whole? In other words, how does the threat threaten?

As Macbeth says: ‘I threat’. I do it. The threat is threatened. It is an act that refers to another. So that the threat is always the ‘threat of’ some word or deed, kindness or cruelty. Threatening is an activity, which is why it is spoken as a verb, an action word—although this is perhaps an indication of how we are ‘still far from considering the essence of acting decisively enough’.²⁷

22 Hegel 1986, VII, §343.

23 Hegel 1986, VII, §345.

24 Hegel 1986, VII, §346.

25 Hegel 1986, VII, §359.

26 Heidegger 1977, *GA8*, p. 7; Haas 2007, p. 122.

27 Heidegger 1977, *GA9*, p. 313; Haas 2007, Chapt. 4.

The act of threatening, however, is two-fold. On the one hand, as a verb, tense indicates time, when it is done, past or present or future: I threatened or threaten or will threaten—so that the threat is now (present) or then (whether past or future). On the other hand, the verb has aspect, how it is done, at any time whatsoever: either I threaten (complete aspect) or I am threatening (incomplete), either I threatened or I was threatening, either I will threaten or I will be threatening (simply, continuously, repeatedly). And the two ways of threatening cannot be conflated (even if the history of philosophy, from the Greeks to us, seeks to reduce aspect to tense, and aspectuality to temporality). Rather the threat is threatening—if it is one—insofar as it is both temporal and aspectual.²⁸

But even further—not only time and aspect—for if the threat ‘is’ and ‘is one’, then it has some kind of being and unity (which is what an onto-henology of the threat might seek to illuminate, at least to the extent possible). So, a threat threatens, insofar as being and unity are the same, and are one thing, and ‘are implied by one another...[and] there must be exactly as many species of being as of unity’.²⁹ Thus, threats are and are one, temporally and aspectually—which is how they can be accidental, true, potential and actual, and categorical.

First, the threat may be accidental: even if I do not intend to threaten, merely being there, my presence or absence can be a threat. But being does not necessarily imply threatening; it just happens to be the case, *quid facti*. There is no necessary connection between the abstract act of showing myself to another, of presenting my presence to the other, and threatening.³⁰ Nor is there any threat necessarily implied by words like ‘five plus seven’—so that if they are threats, it is not because of the ‘twelve’ to which they *must* refer; but rather because of that to which they *may* refer (months in a year, Schönberg’s music, Kant’s first *Critique*, days until an execution, etc.). For the ‘pure’ coming face-to-face with the other—not just their words and deeds, but their being here or there, in and for themselves or for me, or for another—is prior to the threat. And the relation of self-to-other, or self-consciousness to self-consciousness (like that of self-to-self, or other-to-other), could just as well be devoid of threat, whether it is a relation of friends or lovers, citizens or Earthlings. So too, a state *may* threaten another with invasion and be rich in oil and totalitarian—but it is not thereby a threat simply because of oil, nor merely because it is

28 Haas 2015a; Haas 2017. On linguistic aspect, see Comrie 1976.

29 Aristotle 1957, 1003b22-34; Brentano 1862, p. 6; Owens 1951, pp. 118-123, 259-275.

30 Hegel 1807, pp. 118-119, §187.

totalitarian, at least insofar as they are separable from each other and not necessarily implied by one another.

Second, the threat can be true, a true threat: not merely my subjective judgment or assertion (objectively valid and logically consistent, or not), nor simply corresponding to my concept of what is threatening, nor just correlating to my beliefs (legitimate or paranoid, real or fake, as in my fear of needles or ghosts); nor merely an object with which I can threaten or be threatened (a knife or gun, a word or deed, a thought or idea, a god or evil demon). Rather the threat can be truly threatening, if my fear and that of which I am fearful, if my experience of fear and my experience of what I fear—if these are one (so, a lived-threat); which is how they can be separated from each other, and then joined or rejoined (adequately or not).

In other words, what is truly threatening may be found in the *intentum*, in what I take to be threatening, *adaequatio rei et intellectus*, that is, in what I identify to be identical to a threat, to a state of affairs as continuously or repeatedly threatening, a self-same or real threat, a true threat *as such*. Or, the true threat may be found in the *intentio*, that is, not what is threatened, but in taking an act to be threatening, so that the threat only threatens insofar as I (or we as a group, now or at some other time) know and identify, assert and judge, that an action is truly threatening, whether it is done or not. But prior to both, prior to an object that truly threatens and the judgment that it is a true threat, the truth is that the threat is an action (whether of speaking or doing, imagining or thinking, moving or not—in fact, any act whatsoever).³¹ Indeed, before a threat is real or fake (unreal, or merely ideal) it is (the act of) threatening. And this action is the threat’s truth, which is how it can come to presence as *intentum* and *intentio*. So, even before a determination of a threat’s essence (real or fake) and existence (that it is there, present, or not, absent), it is an act (which can be true or false, a threat or not). And this threat, the double-possibility of a threat’s *essentia* and *existentia*, that which opens our eyes to potential threats, and asks both what the threat is (true or not) and whether there is a threat at all—this is the truth of the action (that comes to presence as a threat, that presents the threat, and itself as threatening, or not). So before Macbeth is a true or false threat, he is Macbeth, potentially both; before his threat is real and true, before his threat is or is not a threat, he is present as what can be both—so Macbeth’s threat is only true on the basis of being Macbeth, on the ground his presence, the givenness of his act of being there as one of those things (people) that can threaten

31 As I have argued elsewhere, the origin of an action (such as a threat) is improvisation—understood not as free-play, but as self-schematization (Haas 2015b).

or not; and the threat is only truly threatening, if it is an action that may not be a threat at all.³²

Threatening then, is made possible by acting—but what does this mean for the threat? In fact, ironically or not, it means that the truth of the act of threatening lies precisely in not acting—for if the act were carried out, it would no longer be a threat. Or more precisely: the truth of the threat neither acts nor does not act. For the threat, if it is threatening, suspends action (like the bloody dagger before Macbeth's eyes); it does not bring the threatened act to presence, although neither does it simply leave it in absence. Rather, the threat truly threatens only if it is a third thing, *tertium datur*. So that suspension is the truth of the threat, which is presumably why it is so suspenseful. And whiles Macbeth threatens death, Duncan (and Banquo) lives—for the truth of the threat lies not in the act of threatening, but in the continually-not-yet-murdering (present time, incomplete aspect). So not death, but the threat of death; not the event in which 'each seeks the death of the other', but that which is (always and still) to come—and the threat is not a threat if it is carried out, which is how it is possible (in an 'economy' or 'ethics' or 'politics' of the threat) for Macbeth to 'make good' on his threat.³³ Thus, the true threat threatens to act, and the truth of the threat lies not in the act of threatening, but in the suspension of the threatened act.

Third, the threat is potential or actual—possible or necessary, or (by privation or negation) impossible and unnecessary—and apparently, once again, *tertium non datur*, there is no third. So a potential threat is one that has not come to presence or disclosed itself—or more precisely, one that comes to presence as not yet present, not yet threatening. Then on the one hand (with respect to the object), Macbeth's dagger (which may be illusory, not necessarily an instrument for killing, rather than cooking or carving) is not yet a threat, but must rather first be a possibility, and disclosed as a dagger (or some other tool which would be necessary for doing the deed), if it is to threaten murder—especially insofar as death is separable from the dagger, or their unity is only potential. And on the other hand (with regards to the

32 As Heidegger insists: 'being is understood in the same sense as in the ancients, namely, as *continual presence*'—which is the meaning of *οὐσία* (Heidegger 2001; see Allison 2005, pp. 89-99). On givenness, see Heidegger 1977, GA2, p. 37. And Kant is not only the first and only one, *der Erste und Einzige*, to have grasped the relation between being and time—he is also a thinker of givenness: 'In whatever way and by whatever means knowledge may relate to objects, *intuition* is that through which it is in immediate relation to them, and to which all thought as a means is directed. But this only happens insofar as the object is *given* [*gegeben*] to us...' (Kant 1900, IV A19/III B33, my emphasis; Heidegger 1977, GA2, p. 23).

33 Hegel 1807, pp. 118-119, §187. As Heidegger writes (of the hint, which has a similar economy to that of the threat): 'Hints only remain hints when thinking does not twist them into definitive statements and thereby come to a standstill. Hints are only hints as long as thinking follows their implications while meditating on them' (1977, GA10, p. 188).

subject), Macbeth-the-man is not actually a threat—for the end, τέλος (threatening, in this case, murder), is not yet present, but is rather absent in, ἐν, his presence.³⁴

But an actual threat is one in which the end is inseparable from the object or subject, so that the deed is done in the doing, ἐντελέχεια. Then, on the one hand, the deed is necessarily implied, when it is continuously present in the object: Macbeth's dagger is already a threat insofar as it has the form and matter, μορφή and ὕλη, of what is actually capable of doing the deed, of being the origin and cause, ἀρχή and αἰτία, of murder, and coming to presence, ἐν-έργεια, in the work of killing. And on the other hand, in threatening, Macbeth has threatened—which is an event, if it is one, that comes to presence in the same time, but with a difference in aspect.

The question then, becomes neither just whether the actual threat is prior to the potential one or the potential is prior to the actual, nor merely whether the necessity of an actual threat is greater—and so in need of more caution, fear, action—or less, lower or higher, than a potential or possible threat; rather, it is a question of the origin of both.³⁵ For how can a threat be both potential and actual? How can it come to presence as one of those things that possibly threatens or necessarily does so? Or cannot do so—and thus, remains unthreatening, or an impossible threat?

Kant provides a clue: 'we first judge something problematically, then take its truth assertorically, and finally claim it as inseparably united with understanding, that is, as necessary and apodictic'.³⁶ In other words, before a threat is possible or necessary, it is problematic. Or, prior to the potential or actual threat lies the problem of the threat. Then being a threat, one of those things that threatens, that presents itself as threatening, whether continuously or not—all this is suspended by the problematic threat (which is always also the threat of the problem). And if Macbeth's threat is a problem, it is because we cannot yet determine that it *must* be one, necessarily an actual threat (or unnecessarily), nor even that it *may* be one, possibly a potential threat (or privatively, that it cannot be one, or that it is impossible for it to threaten)—we can only say that it *might* be one, which is problematic. Thus, the way in which the horror follows, ἀκολουθεῖν, from the threat, 'which now suits with it', problematizes what is neither apodiction nor assertion, or what cannot yet be apodicted or asserted.

34 Aristotle 1957, 1048b18-36.

35 Aristotle 1957, 1049b4-10; Heidegger 1977, GA2, p. 38.

36 Kant 1900, IV:A76/III:B101; Haas 2015c.

Fourth, the threat is categorical. In other words, if there is a threat, it is particular, not just a general or generalizable one. And if it is determined to be really threatening, it is only insofar as it submits (or has always already submitted) to real categories—not just imaginary or ideal forms of thought. Macbeth's threat, if it is one of those things that threatens (and so has being and unity, time and aspect), has its specific quality and quantity, etc.—as well as its way of being problematic, how it (intentionally or not) suspends any determination of its truth or falsity, reality or unreality—which is presumably why it is so suspenseful.

But this is the problem—or more precisely, the problem is that which suspends the categories of the threat; just as the suspension problematizes any attempt to determine it categorically (*a priori* or not), to identify it as a threat, differentiate it from other actions, delimit its quality and quantity, define its essence, demarcate its place, even describe the experience of such an event. For it would be difficult to categorize something (like a threat) that does not come to presence, that—if it is truly threatening—resists presenting itself as being one. In other words, if the categorization of the threat depends on the presentation of the threat—or alternatively, if the threat only comes to presence, if it submits to the category of the threatening, if it may be determined as constituting a threat—and if the threat is only threatening if it refuses to come to presence *qua* threat (while refusing to simply remain absent, the absence of the threat or a non-threat), then the task of categorizing the threat might have to be suspended as well. And so the problem might be how to categorize that which is neither an actual threat, nor a potential one, neither necessarily threatening, nor open to a determination of that and how, *da und wie*, it could possibly threaten—or how to think a threat that cannot even be one. Or, if threat must come to presence as subject to categorization, that is, have a quality and quantity, essence and place, etc.—the problem of the threat is precisely that it resists the present. And so, it suspends itself before us as not yet necessarily threatening, nor even possibly—which means it cannot be categorized. Or, if it submits to categorical presentation, it is no longer threatening; just as, if it presents itself as a potentially or actually, possibly or necessarily, solvable problem (or one that cannot be solved, an impossible or insoluble one), then its threat is no longer a problem; just as, if it breaks the suspense, no longer takes 'the present horror from the time'—from the non-present, not now, but then, a future (or past) to come—then it is no longer a threat.

So the time of the threat comes to presence in relation to absence, and in terms of past, present and future. On the one hand, the threat comes from the future, from somewhere, anywhere, that is not here,

some event or end that has not yet come to be; and so remaining in non-being is not, not present, absent—but being absent is a way of being, just as $\mu\eta\ \delta\upsilon\nu$ is a mode of $\tau\omicron\ \delta\upsilon\nu$, or 'non-being *is* non-being', just as what *is not yet* present *is* not yet present, or what is not here is *qua* not here, or just as what is absent is present as absent; or being what threatens to come is threatening, and *not threatening* to come also *threatens* not to come.³⁷ For

[the] being present of something[—]absence is constitutive for this presence, absence in the sense of deficiency, lack. This being-there in the sense of lack is completely its own and positive. If I say of someone: "I miss him very much, [he has not yet come]", I precisely do not mean to say that he is not there, but express a *quite particular way that he is there for me*.³⁸

On the other hand, the threat comes from the past, from what has happened, insofar as it can come again, repeat itself (whether a sudden event like 9/11 or Hiroshima, or an extended one like an ice age or war or the rise of Fascism). Thus the time of the threat, insofar as it remains not-now, comes to presence as not present, which is how it can come to be, and take the present horror from the time, which now suits with it, whiles I threat (whether in the same way or not).

But the threat does not only have time—like any act, any deed or word, thought or thing, anything that is and is one, in anyway whatsoever—it also has aspect, that is, the way the threat threatens, whether completely or incompletely, simply or repeatedly or continuously (which precisely cannot be reduced to a matter of time). Then if Macbeth's threat continues to takes the horror from the time, it is because he gives it to aspect, to the heat of deeds. And the time of the threat illuminates itself in language and discourse: 'to threaten', like any verb, *Zeitwort*, even the verb 'to be' and 'to be one' (from whence the substantive is derived, being or unity), is tensed. But threatening has tenses, *Zeitstufen*, and aspects, *Aktionsarten*.³⁹ And aspect is the other How of the threat, the other way in which it is and is one; it is neither a view, nor perspective on the threat, neither our position relative to a threat, nor the side or face it shows us—on the contrary,

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³⁷ Aristotle 1957, 1003b10; 1019b6.

³⁸ Heidegger 1977, *GA18*, p. 311; *GA14*, pp. 17-18.

³⁹ Heidegger 1977, *GA2*, §68; Herbig 1896, 164-9; Comrie 1976, pp. 1-10. Additionally, not only is aspect irreducible to time, it cannot be confused with voice (active, passive, middle) or mood (indicative, subjunctive, optative): mood or 'modality differs from tense and aspect in that it does not refer directly to any characteristic of the event, but simply to the status of the proposition' (Palmer 2001, p. 1).

the aspect of threat is its way of being, whether at this time or that, now or then, always or never. So irreducible to tense, at one and the same time, I threaten (or threat) and I am threatening; I threatened and I was threatening, I shall threaten and I shall have threatened. And the difference between these ways of threatening (or being a threat, one of those things that threatens or is threatened) is not just temporal—it is an aspectual difference.

If the threat then, takes its horror from time (past-present-future, or present/non-present, or some combination or permutation thereof), it also takes it from aspect (simple-repeated-continuous, or complete/incomplete). So the horror of the threat shows itself to be not just temporal, but also aspectual, at least if it is one, that is, has its being and unity. Thus, the horror of the threat is a metaphysical horror (perhaps even somehow illuminating the horror of metaphysics itself), one which takes its horror from the time and aspect, from the being and unity, of the threat.

And yet, if the threat is not just accidental, but true, and if its truth lies in the very suspension of the act of threatening, which problematizes the possibility of actual and potential threats, as much as the necessity of determine the presence of a threat—what is so horrifying?

The Threat of Implication

In fact, the horror of the threat is that there is no threat, and so no horror. Or more precisely, insofar as the threat is not present, it horrifies (not just us, but the history of thought, the history of philosophy as metaphysics from the Greeks to us). The horror of the threat is the horror of metaphysics, which is the horror of what resists coming to presence, which is not to say that it merely remains in absence—rather, the horror is a horror of what is neither present nor absent, but (*tertium datur*) has always only been implied, an implication, ἀκολουθεῖν.⁴⁰

And what is that—implication? It is how the threat is and is one. For the threat neither comes to presence as threatening, nor remains in absence. In this way, the threat is neither here nor there; it is not present anywhere, which is not simply to say that it is absent—rather, it is implied.

Just one example (from Heraclitus): ἥθος ἀνθρώπων δαίμων.⁴¹ That is: ‘a person’s character *is* his divinity’.⁴² Or ‘the (familiar) abode for humans

40 Plato 1903, *Republic*, 332d, 398d, 400c, 400e, 451d, 455a, 474c, 490c, 533a, etc.

41 Diels 1960, B119; see, Kahn 2003, p. XII n11.

42 McKirahn 1996, p. 40; my emphasis. Kahn 1979, p. 81.

is the opening for the presencing of the (un-familiar) god’.⁴³ But the word ‘is’ is not in the original—being is not present, or absent; it is implied, an implication, that which neither comes to presence, nor simply remains in absence. And what is implied can be neither determined as appearing in accordance with the categories, nor asserted to be what does not appear; it is neither an action nor inaction, neither event nor a non-event, neither something nor nothing, neither here nor there, now nor then, never nor always; it is neither a threat nor a non-threat—at least insofar as it is implied. For implication suspends presence and absence, which is why Heraclitus simply states the problem: ‘human character divine’. And if ‘to be’ does not mean ‘to be present,’ but ‘to be implied’—insofar as being is implying, an implication—it is perhaps no wonder that ‘to threaten’ does not mean ‘to come to presence as a possible or necessary threat’ or ‘to present the threat’ (nor to keep the threat hidden, secret, absent, and so ‘to present the absence of a threat’ or ‘to assert the impossibility of presenting the threat’); rather, it means ‘to be an implied threat’ or ‘to imply that the threat suspends the very problem of the threat’.⁴⁴

And that is the horror. Suspension of presence and absence. Suspension of action, and of the act of threatening. A problem prior to possibility and impossibility, necessity and contingency. One that implies being and unity, time and aspect, in the threat; and one that implicates them in the horror. So that the implied threat implies the threat of implication—and that is what is truly horrifying.

But then, the horror is not just a metaphysical one—for implication threatens me and my family, friends and colleagues, fellow citizens and states, even the world. It threatens my claim to self-presence, my power to be present to myself, and so suspends my right to be my own law, to my body and mind, my mastery over thoughts and things. But implication not only threatens the possibility or necessity of being free; it also problematizes my relation to others. For even if I do not present myself as the enslaver of slaves, the appropriator of their words and works, the thief of their bodies and minds, the doer of the deed (whether good or bad, the slaughterer of the slaughtered or lover of the beloved), I cannot simply claim that I was absent, at least insofar as I am implicated thereby.

And so death too, is threatened—for it might no longer be possible to reduce the dead to what is gone, or to what remains present,

43 Heidegger 1977, *GA9*, p. 356; my emphasis.

44 It is easy enough to multiply the examples (Haas 2017): “‘Beauty is truth, truth [?] beauty’” (Keats 1814-1891, 3.2). Or, Я человек больной... Я злой человек (Dostoyevski 1864, p. 1); that is, ‘I sick man...I wicked man’.

constantly or not, like a spirit or ghostly presence. It rather seems that the dead (perhaps like the living) are merely implied, which is how they can be implicated in our lives, even how they survive historically. Then like life, death is a way of being one, temporally and aspectually—neither just present or absent, here or there—but implied. And death would not simply be implicated in how we are and are one, in our deaths and dying (as well as lives and living, births and birthings), but just as much in our killing and being killed.

But if the very subjectivity of the subject, the presence and absence of the self to the self, is threatened—this would also seem to threaten the threat, our ability to make threats and counter-threats. The problem then, might be not only in our desire and need to assign praise and blame, to determine innocence or guilt, responsibility and irresponsibility; but just as much in how universal right and reason is assumed to be present in particular interest and will, in my actions and inactions, intentionally or not. In other words, if the presence of universal right cannot be assumed (for example, honesty)—not because it is not right, but because it is not present. But then the age-old problem of universality in general, as well as the threat of subjectivism and relativism (and the correspondence or correlation of universal and particular, transcendental and empirical), would seem to be suspended by the way in which they implied one another, and so are implicated in how each is one, which may far more be what we mean by justice.

And so, the relation of self and other, both the selfness of the self and the otherness of the other—this too might be under threat. For not only am I not present to myself, or absent from myself, I am not myself or another; nor are others other, or present to themselves, or to me, or some combination or permutation thereof. Rather, implicated by one another, we imply each other, which is perhaps what is so suspenseful about others, and ourselves.

But then, responsibility would be threatened as well—for implication suspends the presence and absence of the ground of autonomy and heteronomy, accountability and unaccountability. And even if we take responsibility for what we take to be our actions, or assign responsibility to those who do (or do not do) deeds, or determine co-responsibility (for a response or non-response), we may not be able to exclude (or simply include) those who are implicated thereby. Then the threat to suspend responsibility might be horrifying, but it could also be the beginning of thinking it as a problem.

And so, also intention, intent, even intentionality as a whole—this too would be threatened by implication, by the suspension of presence (and absence) of self from itself, and so of knowledge and

self-knowledge as well. Or rather, if consciousness is consciousness of something, an intended object; then we are not conscious of what is present in consciousness, but only of what (and how) it is implied therein. In this way, knowing and doing, speaking and acting, whether threatening or not—these are problematic, insofar as action itself (intentional or not) presupposes the presence or absence of an actor, or some combination thereof. And the problem lies not only in how I am implicated in my act, and it in me, but in the way I cannot be simply present therefore. Then knowledge is not given or present in me, so I cannot give or present it to another, and take responsibility for the success or failure of my actions—although this is not to say that I remain (more or less) ignorant or irresponsible.

And not just responsibility and intention—the good itself becomes a problem, when it can no longer simply be found present in good acts, when it no longer merely comes to presence in a good will. For then the possibility of the good itself, any good (and bad or evil)—much less any necessary good—would seem problematic. And the suspension of goodness might threaten the very idea of good laws and principles, rights and duties, habits and values, words and deeds, governing and being governed. But suspending the necessity of the *is*, and the possibility of the *ought*—this does not threaten to end of any good beyond being; rather, it marks the beginning of a good that is irreducible to presence and absence, to this real good here and that ideal one there. For it is the beginning of thinking of how the idea of the good is implicated in good acts, how the particular good deed implies the problem of the universality of the good.

But not only for me—that is, the good, intentionality, responsibility, subjectivity and otherness, death and horror—all this threatens the potentiality and actuality of those nearest to me, my family and friends, colleagues and fellow citizens. And the problem lies in how friends are implicated in the family, or the family in friends, or colleagues and fellow citizens in both, and vice versa. For the family is supposed to be present to (possibly or necessarily) provide for the child's welfare, but its power is compromised by the presence of another—which not only threatens the family's identity, but implicates others in its actions, as well as in the (necessary or possible) unification of the unit. In other words, if the family is one, if friends are friends, and enemies enemies, if fellow citizens are fellows, and colleagues in league (being civil in civil society); then not only are being and unity, time and aspect, implicated thereby—but so too, those who are not family or friends or enemies or fellow citizens. Then the family unit becomes—not simply disunified—but a problem, and friendship and citizenship become problematic,

perhaps as much as the need or desire to determine the identity of the enemy, or detect the presence of the foreign.

And if all this—individuals and families, friends and citizens—is supposed to be possible thanks to the state, and the relations of state-to-state, war and peace, nature and culture, which is itself made possible by the world, then this too is under threat. For the world is not just present in us, in our families and friends and enemies, citizens and states—nor merely absent therefrom—rather, it is implied (as is the being of its unity and unity of its being, its historical time and its aspect of survival). In this way, the world is implicated in the suspension of the possibility or necessity of thinking the problem of how so, and the horror thereof. And it is the implications of this world, of this world of implications, that threatens to remain ‘still *unthought*’.⁴⁵

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45 Hegel 1986, VII, §359.

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Hegel and Picture-Thinking, or, an Episode in the History of Allegory

Fredric Jameson

Abstract: In this paper, I want to pay tribute to Gerard Lebrun's great book, *La Patience du concept*, published in 1972. Regrettably, there is as yet no English translation of this fundamental work of modern philosophy by drawing on rich materials which turn precisely on representation and "picture-thinking." In a certain sense, picture-thinking has suffered the same fate in philosophy, where the term metaphoric has become a bad word; and in painting, where the doorkeepers of Worringer's abstraction have long since rendered "the figural" homeless among the fashionable galleries. It is thus interesting to rediscover this now dogmatic antagonism at work in the deeper levels of the Hegelian scientific laboratories. In doing so, I aim to add a chapter to the historical narrative of this concept.

Keywords: Lebrun, picture-thinking, reason, understanding, Hegel

But perhaps the matter of picture-thinking is too interesting to be trivialized into a footnote in that now distant historical struggle between allegories and symbols: the latter now superannuated by Jungian archetypes and Joseph-Campbell-style myths (from which only the exotic structural complexities of Lévi-Strauss' Brazilian and North-Coast-Indian exhibits seems capable of rescuing it); the former threatening to clatter out of the closet like so many skeletons eager to take their places. The symbol was thought to be somehow transcendent, organic, and on the side of life: Worringer's notorious opposition between the deathly geometries of abstraction and the warmer sympathies of *Einfühlung* playing its part here, along with that ideology of Nature and the natural which played so powerful a role in the supercession of late-feudal artificiality by a more bourgeois Enlightenment. Durkheim's peculiar reversal in his classification of societies, in which it is the mechanical which represents standardization, democratization and Identity, while the organic stands for difference and hierarchy, only reminds us that we tend to leave the organism itself out of our conventional prejudices against homogeneity and the organic, and to forget that it is composed of a host of heterogeneously functioning organs, a multiplicity Joyce underscored in the allegorically themed chapter divisions in *Ulysses*. Still, a turn-of-the-century vitalism swept all before it for a time, reinvigorating the symbol and its sibling the sublime, and not even blinking when a Bergsonian Deleuze managed to endow his machines and mechanical apparatuses with joy and vitality, and a not-so-Freudian Lacan transformed the master's death wish into the very apotheosis

of desire in his concept of *jouissance*. But his choice of the term Symbolique for his linguistic order did not succeed in reviving the value of the older “symbol”, whose obsolescence drew even the omnipresent Metaphor - replaced by an appropriately heterogeneous multiplicity of lesser tropes - down into the trashcan of the history of ideas along with it. The discovery that there is no literal language, however, failed to revive the mortal remains of the great antagonist Allegory, the latter now a mere period mode, like the deliberate archaism of a moment of 18th-century counterpoint in Beethoven or Brahms, or the personification of minor characters and their names in this or that modern novel.

In a certain sense, picture-thinking has suffered the same fate in philosophy, where the term metaphoric has become a bad word; and in painting, where the doorkeepers of Worringer’s abstraction have long since rendered “the figural” homeless among the fashionable galleries. It is thus interesting to rediscover this now dogmatic antagonism at work in the deeper levels of the Hegelian scientific laboratories (today rebuilt after long decades of disuse). In what follows, I want to pay tribute to Gerard Lebrun’s great book, *La Patience du concept* (1972)¹, by drawing on rich materials which turn precisely on representation and “picture-thinking”, in order to add a chapter to the historical narrative I have just sketched in.

It is well-known that two powerful allegorical figures, *Verstand* and *Vernunft*, are locked in titanic struggle at the very opening of the Hegelian philosophical edifice. *Verstand*, the omnipresent 18th century term of “understanding”, characterizes a kind of common-sense empirical thinking of the spatial type we use in navigating our everyday world: a thinking in terms of qualities and quantities, of objects and their measurements, of substances and their predicates - a thinking that has no truck with those categories and relationships which are unconsciously flexed in their normal conceptual operations, only occasionally calling attention to themselves in those paradoxes and antinomies which are something like the stretched muscles, cramps or sudden twinges of empiricism as such.

Such paradoxes and antinomies are indeed the domain of *Vernunft* or Reason; or at least of those operations Hegel called “the determinations of reflexion”, the dialectical structures only visible to a philosophical self-consciousness, which do not yet constitute that third term of the Speculative or of Absolute Spirit which Hegel sometimes, like

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1 Page references in the text are to the PUF edition. Regrettably there is as yet no English translation of this fundamental work of modern philosophy (Lebrun’s long association with São Paulo accounts for the existence of a Portuguese version).

Kant, also included under the heading of Reason (and sometimes not).

So it is a question, in Hegelian “objective idealism”, of abstracting from *Verstand* or better still, of subjecting it to an x-ray, in order to purify it of those reifications (“fixed determinations”, Hegel called them) into which an inveterate habit of substantification, a habit developed in Western philosophy since Aristotle, tended to perpetuate, under the empiricist delusion that thoughts are things (or words) and that the spatial categories of the material world in which *Verstand* lived and moved were applicable *tel quel* to the mind itself.

Those categories, to which *Verstand* is as inseparably conjoined as the mind to the body, are what Hegel will call *Vorstellungen*; and the German word is here the strategic nub of the argument. For what the translator often loosely calls “idea” is in reality a kind of “picture-thought” in which something is placed or positioned before us, before our mind’s eye, like an object. No doubt, an idea is often contemplated in that way, particularly when it bears a name. But a *Vorstellung* is also a theatrical performance or “spectacle”; it is a kind of image or imagining (“*stell Dir vor*” - “just imagine”); and we will here, following Lebrun, also want to insist on this viscosity, as when we - to be sure, partially and misleadingly, in the service of our polemic bias here - associate *Verstand* in general with picture-thinking.

This rekindles, to be sure, a rather different philosophical quarrel which turns on Hegel’s professed idealism. It will come as no surprise to anyone with an interest in post-war philosophy that with the exception of the spiritualisms (and traditional religion) there are virtually no respectable idealists left and your standard philosopher takes materialism in one form or another for granted, even when not driven by an irrepressible drive to root out idealism as such in all its forms. But without an idealist opposite number, something vaguely identifiable as materialism tends to lose its identity as well, along with its status as a respectable philosophical and academic problem.²

The Marxist tradition was however, one of those in which the polemic against Idealism was tenaciously kept alive, despite Lenin’s warning: “Intelligent idealisms are closer to intelligent materialisms

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2 Matter is, as Deleuze might say, a bad concept. Indeed, Bishop Berkeley himself sounds like Deleuze when he denounces the obliterating effect of this pseudo-idea on sensory vividness. This is at any rate why the greatest materialist philosophers practice what Frank Ruda in a marvelous phrase has called a “materialism without matter”. Still, in order to construct such a materialism, it is necessarily to invent an idealism to negate. Thus for Deleuze himself, Hegel, but above all Plato. For Althusser’s very different materialism - that of ancient Greek atomism - a rather different Hegel, the one first attacked by Marx, is deployed. And what kind of materialism does idealism require for its equally constructed negation? The body itself is at least one candidate for such idealist repression/sublimation.

than unintelligent materialisms.” And it must be said that much standard Marxian polemic has to be judged to be among the unintelligent materialisms, neglecting the fundamental distinction made by Marx himself between historical and mechanical or 18th century materialisms, or in other words between history and nature, between properly Marxist analyses (“historical materialism”) and quasi-philosophical or metaphysical systems, such as “dialectical materialism”. This distinction in fact throws another kind of monkey-wrench into the idealism/materialism debate, namely a distinction between the collective and the individual. Historical materialism proposed the analysis of social and collective movements and ideologies; 18th century or mechanical materialism (of the type resurrected by Engels in “dialectical materialism”) focused on the problem of the individual body and its consciousness, the latter’s determination (or “determinism”) by the material body (and nowadays of course by the material operation of the brain and of genetic structures).

If one looks at the problem from this angle, Hegel’s idealism takes on a wholly different meaning: not some quasi-religious horror of the body, but rather the attempt to move away from the immediacy of individual consciousness towards that more universal and collective dimension Hegel called the *Begriff* or notion, the so-called “concept”, a realm or *Geist* (variously translated as mind or spirit) which might better be rendered for the contemporary intellectual public in terms of a Lacanian Symbolic Order, or language as such as the collective and social dimension of reality within us, the Other of a collectivity from which we are inseparable as human biological individuals. But this is not the place to pursue this argument, only to defuse or problematize initial objections to Hegel’s theory of representation from a stereotypical materialist position.

Nonetheless, as Lebrun so masterfully demonstrates, we do in this theory confront a systematic attempt to withdraw from the visible to the abstract, or in other words, from the immediacy of our sensory experience of the world towards its various meanings - meanings which are not only collective (this is how one should translate *Geist*), but also abstract in the sense in which their rendering in the picture-language of *Vorstellung* or representation is inadequate, misleading and “defective” (another good Hegelian term). But here we must be careful with our language, that is to say, we must raise the dilemmas of representation from the outset: for if terms like picture-language are more or less satisfactory ways of describing our immediacies, our spatial and visual relationship to the physical world around us as individuals, the word “abstract” is utterly unsatisfactory as a characterization of what must replace them in

the movement Hegel’s system prescribes. They are abstract only insofar as they are no longer a form of thinking in pictures or in physical (for Lebrun essentially visual and even aesthetically contemplative) terms, however deeply such terms are buried in actual linguistic usage. It is Enlightenment rationalism that is abstract in the ordinary sense of the word, the object of so much anti-Enlightenment and sometimes anti-rational) critique: abstraction in the sense of science and law, repression of the affective dimension, promotion of what for Hegel himself would have been a confusion of *Verstand* - in this bad sense a truly abstract mixture of thinking and measurement, a kind of dialectical mixture of the abstract and picture-thinking - with *Vernunft*, or in other words Hegel’s own far more capacious version of Reason as such and as an embodiment of *Geist* or spirit that greatly transcends the narrow kind of Enlightenment or rationalistic though in question here.

So while we know more or less what figurative or picture-thinking looks like, its opposite number, the kind of consciousness to emerge in its place and after it has been transcended, is less clearly identifiable (except no doubt as the Hegelian Absolute Idea itself, about which no one has ever been able to propose an explanation on which historians of philosophy can reach consensus).

But with that proviso, we may then begin an exposition of Hegel’s positions on representation and or figuration which Lebrun traces back to the young philosopher’s first positions on religion, and in particular on the difference between Greek subjectivity and Christianity as a new mode of “belief”. Hegel’s contemporaries, indeed, grew up in the neo-classical revival of which, and not only in Germany, Winckelmann was somehow the apotheosis and the founder. This newly discovered ancient Greece (via Roman copies) seemed to offer the solutions to all the problems of modernity, from poetry to politics, from individuality to daily life: let Hölderlin stand as the very paradigm of this Greek “solution” (in which, in a rather different form to be sure, Heidegger will later on follow him). For most of the other contemporary or Romantic thinkers and poets as well, the return to Greece, the “temptation” of Greece as E.M. Butler will put it, remains alive as a dream if not a practical solution, with Byron’s life as its tragic epitome.

Only Hegel broke early with this nostalgia which he too shared as a student (he was, to be sure, Hölderlin’s roommate); and it is this break which not only determines his attempt to theorize the historical “superiority” of Christianity over Greek religion, but also, and even more significantly, his characterization of the Greek moment as one of an essentially “aesthetic” religion. With the problem of representation, and of the representation of gods and the godhead in particular, we are then

at the very center of Hegel's confrontation with the problem of figuration that concerns us here.

The anthropomorphism of the Greek gods is then the issue, and in particular its distinction from the incarnation of Christ in Christianity: in as much as for both, and unlike what passes for the numenal in the other religions - light, the fetish, animals, lightning, mountains, natural elements or monstrous statuary of various kinds - presuppose that the human figure, the human body, is an adequate vehicle for the revelation of the divine.

In the case of the Greeks, however, Hegel wishes to see such "incarnations" - perfectly acceptable in the various myths or literary narratives in which they figure this or that force in the universe - as discontinuous and uniquely ephemeral events; the "descent" of a god into human form, as in Zeus' multiple conquests, is not the acquisition of a durable human individuality or subjectivity (as is the incarnation of Christ in Jesus), but rather, if anything, reinforces their radical difference from the world of human beings (and this is why, Hegel tells us, Socrates' claim to visitation by a daimon was blasphemous for his contemporaries). "The human presence [of the Greek gods]", Lebrun declares, "ironically recalled their fundamental inhumanity" (25). "The human in God" Hegel explains, "marks only his finitude, and this religion therefore [that of the Greeks] still in that fundamental sense belongs to the religions of finitude" (quoted, 30). This sentence must be understood in the light of Hegel's association of modern subjectivity with "infinity"; and given the preponderance of the imagery of the inside and the outside in his philosophical terminology, might well be rewritten in terms of exteriority; with the Greek gods and their anthropomorphic appearances, we have to do with a purely external contact with the divine, and one which (as Lebrun underscores) is accessible only through visibility (and as it were mocked by the now blinded eyes of Greek statuary).

The more human individuality of Jesus is then radically distinct from this purely external (and thereby purely contemplative or aesthetic) divinity: for it becomes interiorized through his life and teachings. But it is here that Hegel's account suddenly shifts its codes and adopts a radically different set of philosophical coordinates (indeed, we may see in this shifting of gears an instructive lesson in the dialectic as such, and its capacity for mediation between incommensurable systems or levels). For now the fundamental absence that marked the representation or picture-thinking of the Olympians - that they are occasional and that the attempt to give them true body in statuary can only convey their blindness to our attempts to approach them in space and in visual contemplation - is displaced onto history as such; the meaning of "event" thereby changes

radically. For Hegel the crucial feature in the Christian narrative is not the resurrection but rather the crucifixion as such, the death of Jesus, his disappearance from the visible and phenomenal world. Suddenly the life of Jesus, marked by this unique new type of event, has become what the Olympians could never be, namely *historical*. A new kind of temporality has entered the picture along with interiority as such: the place of the external/visible/aesthetic has been taken not only by inner feeling and love but above all by the temporality of history as such, which dictates a new relationship to the divine, namely historical memory or *Erinnerung* (the German word, with which the *Phenomenology* concludes, retains the sense of interiorization within itself).

Yet we have so far failed sufficiently to underscore this movement from the Olympians to Christianity as a process not merely of thinking, - for if the picture-thinking has been modified here, it has not altogether disappeared - but also and above all as a disembodiment, a movement away from the finitude and externality of the individual body towards something else, for which the term spiritual is as inadequate as we have shown the word abstract to be.

But it is also important to distinguish this other, non-pictorial realm of subjectivity (what Hegel will eventually call speculative thought or simply, to distinguish it from religion as such, philosophy) from that third religious system which in fact explicitly forbids picture-thinking. That is of course Judaism, with its ban on graven images; and this is the moment to say that Hegel will radically distinguish this absence of pictoriality from that philosophical conceptuality he has in mind as some ultimate position among these alternatives.

The central problem of a sublimation of the figural has in recent discussions however been obscured by a more scholarly debate about the relative position of Islam in Hegel's "philosophy of religion"; and in fact there would indeed seem to have been a hesitation as to where the order of the two religions of the book are to be positioned in the dialectic of figuration we have been concerned with here.³ How to evaluate the negativities of these two anti-figural subjective formations - Judaism and Islam - and the relative significance of the seemingly empty Absolutes they propose? It is a problem which also involves the universality of Islam and the exclusivity of Judaism, and is unsurprisingly tainted by the "current situation" in the Middle East (and by rather hysterical efforts to decide whether Hegel was anti-semitic or not).

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³ Of the now enormous literature generated recently on this topic I will limit myself to mentioning Yovel 1998.

For us here, what needs to be stressed is the interest of Hegel in religion in the first place. Far more than any selective history of the various periods in the development of artistic production, the various religions offer a set of structural variations on the relationship between letter and spirit - a kind of combinatoire or permutation scheme in which all possible alternatives are formally worked out. This means that his treatment of religion must necessarily be comparatist; and that it makes little more than anecdotal sense to ask ourselves what Hegel thought about Christianity, for example, or whether his thinking was not essentially Christian in the first place, on the basis of the trinity and of triads in the bulk of the early writings; any more than the positioning of his discussions of Judaism and Islam is suitable evidence for resolving the question of some unlikely personal anti-semitism.

The positions offered by the structural permutation scheme of the religions (comparable today to a similar operation by the Lacanian school, which to be sure is enriched by all manner of familial content of no little psychoanalytic interest)⁴, is in fact a useful testing ground for the varieties of structural and signifying possibilities raised by the opposition between allegory and symbol. In particular the gap necessarily implied by the various versions of the religious problem - what we have called the opposition between letter and spirit, but which might also take the form of an opposition between body and mind, figuration and abstraction, immediacy and the mediated, and so forth - this essential distance within the phenomenon, a well-nigh Lacanian split or gap - focusses our attention on the structural problem at the heart of the allegorical phenomenon itself rather than the surface effects of the various possible structures (as when we tax allegory with its boring didactic intentions or grow fatigued with the complacency of the various symbols). But it is this same structural or intrinsic gap or distance which also makes possible what we may call the contagion of allegory, its capacity to parasitize texts and thoughts not first primarily allegorical in their construction, to endow simpler forms with a variety of allegorical overtones and undertones they did not initially vehiculate.

Returning to the phenomenon of religion as such, it would seem that, as Lebrun sees it, Hegel has isolated three fundamental forms of picture thinking. The first would be the occasionalization of meaning, as when an Olympian temporarily assumes the guise of a mortal being. This would seem to reduce Greek religion to the level of what Hegel calls

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4 Such pioneering work is to be provisionally associated with the names of Slavoj Žižek, Eric Sandtner, Kenneth Reinhard, Fethi Benslama, Lorenzo Chiesa, Gabriel Tupinambá, and Moustafa Safouan.

the natural religions or religions of nature, in which the divine takes the form of a natural elements, such as light. Yet the relationship to light, as a crucial instance in Hegel's typology, is highly valued, insofar as light seems to be pure of determinate properties and to have so much in common formally with pure subjectivity. Meanwhile, what is distinctive about this form is that light is not multiple and that its sacred value is relatively permanent (no doubt owing to the fact that its transparency only rarely allows its unique presence to be felt as a distinct yet non-figural phenomenon).

After that, the various fetishisms, which seem to be as far from specific religious languages as possible, owing to their "deficient" form as a block of wood or stone which is incapable of articulating any more complex inner relationships. Here then the specifically religious power of such forms will be essentially quantitative: as in the pyramids or other overwhelming presences of sheer matter; and it is always worth noting the distinction with Kant in this instance, for Hegel explicitly borrows Kant's term of the sublime to characterize such religions, thereby utterly inverting the evaluation Kant meant to establish. We do not need to impute Hegel's low estimations of so-called "picture-thinking" to Kant to note that the latter assuredly shares the former's valorization of philosophy as the ultimate form of self-consciousness. Indeed, this was the spirit in which for Kant the "sublime" has a more elevated function than the merely beautiful (the merely aesthetic): for the challenge to the mind's limits of the sublime is akin to what the author of *The Critique of Pure Reason* sought to achieve philosophically.

For Hegel, however, the sublime means little more than the imprisonment of spirit in matter, in sheer quantity, and is the lowest form of religious consciousness. As we have noted, however, he seems to distinguish between two varieties of such "natural religion": light, as the One, is sharply distinguished from the multiplicity we find embodied in his entertaining descriptions of the Eastern polytheisms and pantheisms, which, under the obligation of finding and combining the divinities available in the immense varieties of forms to the natural world, can only give figuration to their multiplicities by way of monstrosity.⁵ They nonetheless bear witness to the attempt, in all religion, to strain towards unification, and to conceive of the One as such, something the religion of light was able effortlessly to accomplish. There is a sense then, in which Greek religion is simply a more respectable solution to this dilemma, for

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5 I have myself proposed something like a structural analysis of the rather delirious account of Egyptian religion in the *Philosophy of History* (1956, p. 209), which seems to me a more promising mode of analysis than standard denunciations of Hegel's eurocentrism or Orientalism.

it acknowledges an immense variety of divinities and divine forces, but on the one hand allows for temporality and the ephemeral appearance of this or that god, in order to ward off the enormities of Eastern simultaneity; while on the other, for the most part, it privileges one unique form of the natural over all the others, namely the human body.

As we have seen, both these features – temporality and the human body - will return in Christianity, but to a wholly different effect, which we have already, following Lebrun, characterized: for here a single human body is individualized (the One thereby recovered from the multiplicity of mythological human characters, but then obliging the theologians in its turn to reinsert it in a different kind of multiplicity, namely the Trinity); while temporality is dramatized as an absence rather than an appearance, and the death of Christ becomes almost more significant than his historical incarnation (which is to be sure itself, as a date in history, a new kind of temporal absence in its own right).

Judaism becomes then no doubt not only the void from which this new kind of religious figuration can emerge, the negation and cancellation of a polytheism which must now make place for a different kind of image (despite its resurgence later on in the form of a kind of pantheon of saints and angels - the addition of Mariolatry posing a rather different problem). But it is also the refusal of figuration as such, and thereby proves incapable of absorbing the old content into some new system. Hegel's absolute spirit, however, will prove to be the opposite of this abstract negativity, being a repudiation of picture-thinking by way of a genuine *Aufhebung*. It should of course be clear that this is not merely a refusal of Judaism as a religion, but that insofar as all religions consist necessarily in picture-thinking, it amounts to a repudiation of all of them, but in distinct or determinate negations which respect their unique structures and ratios of the subject-object relationship.

We have thus in effect several axes to coordinate here. There is the representational one just discussed: can the divine be represented or not, is picture-thinking possible or must it be absolutely negated? We know the answer to that as it can be inferred from Hegel's refusal to admit absolute error: picture-thinking cannot be wholly condemned or negated, it necessarily includes its moment of truth, or better still, constitutes a necessary stage on the road to whatever lies beyond picture-thinking in some realm of what cannot any longer simply be called abstraction. Picture-thinking can therefore no longer simply be dismissed as idolatry, as Judaism will do, without losing its implicit conceptual or philosophical content.

But picture-thinking would seem to come in the two distinct forms of fetishism and Greek religion, in which forces are conveyed either

through inanimate objects (or animals) or the human body: here in either case, however, their representational privilege is provisional, or if you prefer the other formulation, non-temporal (insofar as an apparition in the present, a fleeting identification, is presumably neither a temporal nor an eternal event). We have here, as it were, yet a third species of time: neither the past-present-future of chronology, nor the absolute present of consciousness but rather the blink of the apparition, which, like the proverbial leprechaun, is neither present nor absent. To these three temporalities suddenly a new form of religious representation adds a fourth: for on Hegel's view the uniqueness of Christianity lies not in its assumption of a human incarnation (as with the Greeks) but in its mortality and historicity, which seals its essence as a pure past, as what once existed but does so no more. (That there is a kinship here between this absolute pastness of the Christian religious structure and the philosopher's commitment to what is past - to the interiorization of what is past (*Erinnerung*), to the absolute turn away from the future, as in Hegel's position on the coming history of the New World⁶ - this kinship is undeniable. But it does not mark Hegel as a Christian philosopher of some sort; rather it secures Christianity an indispensable place in the pre-history of Hegelianism, as a necessary stage in the approach to "objective idealism", the speculative, etc.)

It is, however, this historicity of the religions of the book which is the crucial development in the evolution of picture thinking - the natural religions, the Greeks - towards philosophy and absolute thought or abstraction. To be sure, as we conceive abstraction it remains an allegorical process, inasmuch as the very word implies something, some object or objectivity, from which the abstraction is itself drawn and of which it is somehow visually or conceptually purified and yet sublimated. This second element remains within it, albeit cancelled: abstraction in this sense is a kind of negative allegory, which carries its object within itself like a shadow. The translation of *Geist* as spirit is not much better, since it is dogged by the phantom opposites of body or letter, themselves profoundly allegorical insofar as allegory would seem fatally to entail some such opposition. The speculative, the concept or *Begriff* - these are among the impoverished terms which alone carry the freight of what transcends picture-thinking and what even the term Reason or *Vernunft* fails to convey (it being itself ensnared in the opposition to *Verstand*). The speculative, if we could grasp its full meaning and implications, is the

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6 As he puts it in a famous passage about the Americas: "as a Land of the Future, it has no interest for us here, for, as regards *History*, our concern must be with that which has been and that which is." (Hegel 1956, p. 87).

very climax of Hegelian philosophizing - the Absolute Idea, the Notion in traditional, quaint English-Hegelian language, which we can think of in some vague external and non-Hegelian way as a kind of identification, and at the same time supercession, of the opposition between the subject and object - the transcendental and the empirical, or Spinoza's two modes of extension and intellection. For our purposes it is enough to grasp this ultimate thought mode as the supercession of all picture-thinking and its subsumption, without a trace, into the logos, which we must try to think not as logical abstraction (always a kind of abstraction from something else) but as pure meaning.

Still, the very organization of the *Logic* seems in some peculiar and original way to perpetuate the dual level we have been claiming as a fundamental vice in picture-thinking as such, namely the gap or distance between a signifier (image) and a signified or meaning. It does so, however, in a non-pictorial way, since the deeper level of philosophical (and presumably other) discourse lies in a series of what may be called categories; purely formal conceptual shapes without content (and without even that picturality the word "shape" would seem to convey), pure oppositions, such as that very distinction between form and content itself, or inside and outside, or essence and appearance. Such categories are the unconscious or preconscious forms which organize our surface thinking and language without our being aware of them or thematizing them in whatever we call self-consciousness. These forms – life and syllogism - which presumably exist at one and the same time in the object-world and in the mind (as we used to call this duality) are then the logos itself, the "logic" of the world. In a moment we will return to this level of non-pictorial meaning - what has been called Hegel's idealism; it is not necessary to defend its premises philosophically, but only to point out that, visual and pictorial or not - it still retains that gap between surface level and deeper organizational entities which was Hegel's fundamental reproach to picture-thinking, but which secured the latter's structural identity as an essentially allegorical one.

Let's recapitulate the stages: allegory necessarily combines two terms, much like metaphor: not all binary oppositions are allegorical, nor are all metaphors - yet metaphor itself suggests the fundamental temptation whereby the allegory slips into the false appearance of the elusive symbol, a promise of the concrete universal, some ultimate reconciliation between letter and spirit or tenor and vehicle.

Religion then disproves the possibility of the symbol: it aspires to the symbol as its fulfillment, but the symbol turns out merely to be the dream of realization of picture-thinking; only Christianity, among those various laboratory-experiments in which the world religions consist,

claiming some permanent symbolic reconciliation and realization in the incarnation as such. But it is at this moment that the symbol betrays everything illusory about itself in an unexpected way - by the insertion of temporality, and historical temporality at that, into the dilemma. The ultimate symbol, the reconciliation of letter and spirit, the incarnation of Christ, is possible only on condition that Christ - inserted into human history - die and as an event move at once into the past, lose that "immense privilege of the present" which, as symbol, it claimed.

It would be a mistake to think that the problem of picture-thinking (let alone allegory) is irrelevant for present-day philosophical concerns; but the mistake is certainly encouraged by an image culture so omnipresent as to cause the problem itself to fade into the background. What else is the notion of the "simulacrum" than a confused memory of this problem and the mirage of its solution at one and the same time? The well-nigh universal reception of some Deleuzian notion of immanence is meanwhile the expression of relief that a formula has been found which, without the embarrassment of Hegelian Absolutes, can testify to the magical dissolution of the gap between reality and meaning, to their seamless reunification. But immanence may well simply be the constitutive illusion of the human age, the obliteration of nature by human production (with doctrines of the simulacrum as its bad conscience).

Hegel's solution was far more prudent and cautious than this: for the doctrine of *Erinnerung* thrusts everything into the past and is content to transform the Absolute into History. Only twilight allows us to "understand", that is, to turn what happened into necessity. "Temporal difference holds absolutely no interest for thought", Lebrun quotes Hegel as asserting (356); and perhaps this is the one point at which his philosophy bears some resemblance to the Christian view of history, about which it is unclear whether what is historical is the positive fact of the existence of Jesus or the negative fact of his disappearance and an empty grave.⁷

Philosophy has no use for the future, he asserted (perhaps in both senses of the phrase); and as for that present in which he entertained mild constitutional fantasies in the midst of the most fanatical reaction, we may take his views as so many wish-fulfillments, tempered by the longing to be a new realist, a new Machiavelli (Machiavelli being for political people perhaps the only strong embodiment of Immanence as such).

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⁷ See the classic essay of Marin 1994.

As for capitalism - I was tempted to write, for capitalism and for us! - like Faust, it revels in its power to forget, to acknowledge no past and exercise no memory, to claim an existence beyond History, in the pure present.⁸

So at that point, then, picture-thinking gets assigned to the pathological, to the return of the repressed. We may as well conclude with a commemoration of the unhappy Silberer, whose experiments were noted by the master of modern research into picture-thinking, Sigmund Freud himself. Silberer had been able to observe, in these experiments, that in moments of extreme fatigue and of the lowering of mental *niveau*, the most abstract concepts became degraded into purely physical images.⁹ Immanence lapsing into some bad material transcendence? I prefer to see these interesting examples as nudging us, from the philosophical problem of representation, in the direction of what Freud himself rather termed representability (*Darstellbarkeit*).

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⁸ Althusser's characterization of Hegel's "expressive causality" as expressing a "present" which "constitutes the absolute horizon of all knowing" , Althusser 2009, p. 105), however illuminating, seems to me misleading and ultimately unproductive.

⁹ Silberer 1909. Silberer was one of the brightest of Freud's younger followers (but on the way to Jungianism). He committed suicide at the age of 41.

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Holding Lenin Together: Hegelianism and Dialectical Materialism— A Historical Excursus

Adrian Johnston

Abstract: Current reactivations of dialectical materialism often involve interpretations of Hegel and/or Marx guiding by benefits of hindsight provided by contemporary Continental metaphysics. However, between Hegel's and Marx's nineteenth century, on the one side, and the early twenty-first century of present materialisms, on the other side, there lie the Russian/Soviet dialectical materialisms indebted to Engels as well as Hegel and Marx. Especially for any reactivation of dialectical materialism that takes seriously the interlinked *Naturphilosophie*, dialectics of nature, and philosophy of science crucial to the Soviets, revisiting this neglected history promises to be of philosophical as well as historical interest. Herein, I advance several connected theses: Starting with Plekhanov, Russian/Soviet Marxists are right to recognize in Hegel's "absolute idealism" numerous components crucial for a quasi-naturalist materialism; Lenin's break with Plekhanov is more political than philosophical, with the former never ceasing to be influenced by the dialectical materialism of the latter; Relatedly, Lenin is consistently both a dialectician and a materialist, with there being no pronounced break separating the Engelsian-Plekhanovite materialism of 1908's *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism* from the Hegelian dialectics of 1914's *Philosophical Notebooks*; Apropos Bukharin, by contrast, there indeed is a pronounced break between the mechanistic *Historical Materialism* of 1921 and the dialectical *Philosophical Arabesques* of 1937; Finally, the theoretical dimensions of Stalin's Thermidor can be seen with clarity and precision against the preceding historical background. I conclude by drawing from the Plekhanov-Lenin-Bukharin-Stalin sequence lessons for today's Hegelian dialectical materialists.

Keywords: Hegel, Plekhanov, Lenin, Bukharin, dialectics, materialism, naturalism

Between Friedrich Engels himself, on the one hand, and recent reactivations of the tradition of dialectical materialism, on the other hand, there lies a now almost entirely neglected and forgotten tradition of (post-)Engelsian *Naturdialektik*: the Russian-then-Soviet furtherances of dialectical materialist philosophies of nature and the natural sciences, starting in the late nineteenth century with some of Georgi Plekhanov's contributions (I deal with dialectical materialism à la Mao Tse-Tung, the other major non-Western strand of this orientation, in the first volume of my *Prolegomena to Any Future Materialism*¹). For theoretical as well as

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¹ Johnston 2013, pp. 23-28

historical reasons, assessing the contemporary significance of a Hegel-inspired materialist dialectics requires doing intellectual justice to the dialectical materialism of non-Western Marxism. On my reading, V.I. Lenin's philosophical interventions with respect to both materialism and dialectics represent the most decisive developments for a dialectics of nature within the Russian/Soviet context—and this both because of these interventions' inherent philosophical qualities as well as because of the effective canonization of Lenin, including of such works as *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism*, in the Soviet Union. However, in addition to Plekhanov and Lenin, I will discuss a range of other relevant figures, including, most notably, Nicolai Bukharin and J.V. Stalin.

My critical examination of Plekhanov will focus on a relatively early text in conjunction with a later one: 1891's "For the Sixtieth Anniversary of Hegel's Death" and 1908's *Fundamental Problems of Marxism* (the latter being Plekhanov's last major theoretical work). The extended essay of 1891, a piece commemorating the life and thought of the towering giant of post-Kantian German idealism (as its title clearly announces), enables me to situate Plekhanov's perspectives on historical and dialectical materialism in relation to Hegelian, Marxian, and Engelsian ground. His 1908 summation of the philosophical foundations of Marxism permits an enhanced appreciation of these perspectives from the vantage point of the end of his career.

Neither Plekhanov's political radicalism nor his qualified Hegelianism emerge *ex nihilo* within nineteenth-century Russia. As Guy Planty-Bonjour nicely and carefully documents in his 1974 study *Hegel et la pensée philosophique en Russie, 1830-1917*, such forerunners as Vissarion Grigor'ev, Belinskij, Aleksandr Ivanovich Herzen, Nikolaj Vladimirovi Stankevi, Timofey Nikolayevich Granovsky, and Mikhail Alexandrovich Bakunin pave the way for much of what is involved in Plekhanov's Marxist syntheses of Hegelianism with materialism. In addition to these domestic predecessors as well as the profound foreign influence of Karl Marx, Plekhanov is deeply indebted to Engels, including the author of *Dialectics of Nature*, *Anti-Dühring*, and *Ludwig Feuerbach and the Outcome of Classical German Philosophy* (i.e., precisely the Engels defending a *Naturdialektik*). In fact, Plekhanov's quite Engelsian rendition of dialectical materialism is the key link bridging between Engels's and Lenin's connected philosophical positions—and this despite the political rift that opened between Plekhanov and Lenin in the early 1900s as well as Lenin's complaints about Plekhanov's allegedly inadequate appreciation of G.W.F. Hegel and Hegelian dialectics. One finds in the philosophical writings of Plekhanov a quasi-Hegelian materialism anticipating what later arises in and through the combination of Lenin's *Materialism and*

Empirio-Criticism with his *Philosophical Notebooks*.

Near the beginning of "For the Sixtieth Anniversary of Hegel's Death," Plekhanov remarks that, "the most consistent materialist will not refuse to admit that each particular philosophical system is no more than the intellectual expression of its time."² Of course, this is an obvious endorsement of the Hegel who, in the deservedly renowned preface to 1821's *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, asserts that, "each individual is... a *child of his time*."³ Plekhanov considers this to be a proto-Marxian historical materialist thesis, given historical materialism's emphases on superstructural phenomena, up to and including philosophy itself, as arising from and remaining grounded by their time-and-place-specific infrastructural bases. However, he proceeds, later in "For the Sixtieth Anniversary of Hegel's Death," to play off historical materialism against a feature of Hegel's 1821 preface closely related to this "*child of his time*," namely, the (in)famous Owl of Minerva. Following Engels especially, Plekhanov protests that post-Hegelian historical materialism, unlike Hegelian philosophy and contrary to Hegel's assertions embodied by the Owl of Minerva, enjoys a foresight with predictive power as regards the future.⁴

Not only does Plekhanov (as does Lenin too) take over from Engels the narrative about the history of philosophy being organized around the battle lines between the "two great camps" of idealism and materialism—he likewise knowingly inherits Engels's ambivalence about Hegel, an ambivalence manifest in placements of Hegel's philosophy as straddling the contested border between idealist and materialist territories. As does Engels, so too does Plekhanov repeatedly deploy variations on Marx's distinction between "the rational kernel" and "the mystical shell" within Hegelianism.⁵ Echoing *Ludwig Feuerbach and the Outcome of Classical German Philosophy* in particular,⁶ he asserts that, "As long as Hegel remains true to the dialectical method, he is a highly progressive thinker"⁷ and that, "The dialectical method is the most powerful scientific weapon bequeathed by German idealism to its successor, modern

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2 Plekhanov 1974, p. 457

3 Hegel 1991, p. 21

4 Plekhanov 1974, pp. 475, 478-479; Johnston 2017 [forthcoming]

5 Wetter 1958, p. 397

6 Engels 1941, pp. 11-13, 24)

7 Plekhanov 1974, p. 477

materialism.”⁸ Once “freed from its mystic wrappings,”⁹ the Hegelian dialectic, in and through historical and dialectical materialism, can and does realize its revolutionary potential (with both Engels and Plekhanov equating, as regards Hegel’s philosophy, dialectics with this philosophy’s rational kernel and its purported idealism with its mystical shell).

Plekhanov, while paying Hegel the backhanded compliment of being the most systematic of idealists, nonetheless contends that, despite Hegel’s impressive systematicity, his idealism still remains plagued by inconsistencies.¹⁰ In Plekhanov’s view, these inconsistencies are symptomatic of that fact that, “*materialism is the truth of idealism.*”¹¹ However, this leads him to an immanent critique of Hegel according to which Hegel’s alleged idealist inconsistencies are such as to lead into this idealism’s auto-dialectical, self-sublating transformation into Marxian materialism.¹²

A few other features of Plekhanov’s materialist evaluations of Hegel in “For the Sixtieth Anniversary of Hegel’s Death” warrant notice here. First of all, Plekhanov displays an acute awareness of the significant difference, often overlooked by Hegel’s critics, between subjective and objective/absolute idealisms (so too does the Lenin of the *Philosophical Notebooks*, as will be observed below shortly). He stresses that the idealism of Hegel is not, by contrast with that of Immanuel Kant, subjectivist.¹³ Likewise, and in relation to the infamous “*Doppelsatz*” from the preface to 1821’s *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*—this is the notorious thesis according to which “What is rational is actual; and what is actual is rational” (*Was vernünftig ist, das ist wirklich; und was wirklich ist, das ist vernünftig*)¹⁴—Plekhanov praises Hegel for rendering *die Vernunft* immanent to *die Wirklichkeit*, with this realism of reason proposing that human history as well as material nature are knowable thanks to being objectively structured in rational ways in and of themselves.¹⁵

Additionally, this Plekhanov of 1891 endorses certain features of

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8 Ibid., p. 477)

9 Ibid., p. 478)

10 Ibid., p. 463)

11 Ibid., p. 468)

12 Ibid., p. 468

13 Ibid., p. 473

14 Hegel 1970, p. 24; Hegel 1991, p. 20

15 Plekhanov 1974, p. 482

the historical and economic dimensions of Hegel’s *Geistesphilosophie*. He approvingly highlights the recognition by Hegel of the problems and challenges posed by the “rabble” (*Pöbel*).¹⁶ Moreover, he maintains that Hegel’s recourse to economics (i.e., “political economy”) help open up paths towards historical materialism proper (Plekhanov here foreshadows the Georg Lukács of 1938’s *The Young Hegel*).

Two points in “For the Sixtieth Anniversary of Hegel’s Death” recur in *Fundamental Problems of Marxism*. First, both texts credit Hegel—“For the Sixtieth Anniversary of Hegel’s Death” also credits Schelling with this too—with forging a compatibilist resolution of the freedom-determinism antinomy as subsequently taken up by Engels in particular¹⁷ (I have dealt with Engels’s supposedly Hegelian compatibilism elsewhere¹⁸). Second, Plekhanov, in both 1891 and 1908, contrasts Hegelian models of historical development with the (pseudo-) evolutionist gradualisms associated, within turn-of-the-century Marxism, with the Second International and Menshevism. Basing himself on the Hegelian logical dialectics of quality and quantity (as does Engels before him and Lenin after him), he reasonably argues that, for Hegel, there is revolution *qua* sudden and abrupt leaps as well as evolution *qua* slow and steady progress¹⁹ (incidentally, this argument of Plekhanov’s indicates he is not quite so guilty of the total neglect of Hegel’s logical dialectics with which Lenin sometimes charges him²⁰). In the notes on *Fundamental Problems of Marxism* taken by Lenin, he places a “NB” (*nota bene*) next to Plekhanov’s stressing of the revolutionary in addition to the evolutionary.²¹ Planty-Bonjour, speaking of Plekhanov and Lenin,²² suggests that, “The opposition between the two men is more political than philosophical.”²³

Fundamental Problems of Marxism also maintains that the combination of Hegel with Ludwig Feuerbach is the key to understanding Marx and Engels.²⁴ For Plekhanov, Feuerbach’s prioritization of being

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16 Ibid., p. 471-472; Hegel 2002, p. 99; Hegel 1979, pp. 170-171; Hegel 1991, §244-246 pp. 266-268], §248 pp. 269;
Hegel 1999, pp. 255-256; Johnston 2017.

17 Plekhanov 1974, pp. 476-477; Plekhanov 1969, pp. 90-92, 143-144, 146

18 Johnston 2017.

19 Plekhanov 1974, p. 480; Plekhanov 1969, p. 45

20 Lenin 1976, pp. 357, 360

21 Ibid., p. 404

22 Planty-Bonjour 1974, pp. 272-273

23 Ibid., p. 273

24 Plekhanov 1969, p. 25

over thinking in his critique of Hegel's allegedly idealist privileging of thought is a crucial precondition for Marxist post-Hegelian materialism²⁵ (likewise, in his notes on Engels's *Ludwig Feuerbach and the Outcome of Classical German Philosophy*, he appeals to the histories of pre-human and pre-organic nature so as to argue, long before Quentin Meillassoux, that, "Idealism says: *without a subject there is no object*. The history of the earth shows that *the object existed long before the subject appeared*, i.e., long before any organism appeared which had any perceptible degree of consciousness"²⁶). On Plekhanov's assessment, not only is this specific Feuerbachian criticism fully justified—he adds a reiteration of the old charge of teleology according to which Hegelian "Universal Spirit" dictates that reality conform to a (quasi-)secular theodicy. Plekhanov contrasts this to a non-teleological "modern dialectical materialism."²⁷

However, both implicitly and explicitly, this same Plekhanov of 1908 continues to praise Hegel despite objections raised to his absolute idealism. Hegelian dialectics permits a proper appreciation and grasp of the complex reciprocal interactions and immanent antagonistic negativities within societies between their infrastructures and superstructures²⁸ (Plekhanov is here anything but a crude mechanical economic reductionist). Additionally, Hegel's dialectical philosophy facilitates navigating between the opposed one-sided extremes of theories of history emphasizing the agency of either "great men" or anonymous structures.²⁹ Furthermore, Plekhanov characterizes Kantianisms as "the principal bulwark in the struggle against materialism."³⁰ Hence, Hegel's devastating critiques of Kant can and should be enlisted in the service of the struggle for materialism.³¹ Finally, *Fundamental Problems of Marxism* voices historical materialist approval of Hegel's acknowledgment (at the end of the introduction to his lectures on the Philosophy of World History³²) of the importance of geographical forces and factors at the contingent, factual basis of the trajectories of

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25 Feuerbach 2012, p. 168; Plekhanov 1969, pp. 28, 30-31, 45, 83

26 Plekhanov 1974, p. 519

27 Plekhanov 1969, p. 110

28 Ibid., pp. 52, 64, 71; Plekhanov 1974, pp. 488-489

29 Plekhanov 1969, p. 149; Plekhanov 1974, p. 525

30 Plekhanov 1969, p. 90, 97

31 Plekhanov 1974, pp. 512-514

32 Hegel 1956, pp. 79-102

human history.³³

Consistent with Planty-Bonjour's above-quoted assertion of philosophical proximity, despite political distance, between Plekhanov and Lenin, I would contend that the former's Engelsian synthesis of Hegelian absolute idealism with Marxian historical materialism is the direct Russian forerunner of Leninist dialectical materialism.³⁴ Standard Soviet wisdom came to have it that Lenin's materialism is to be found in 1908's *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism* and his dialectics in the *Philosophical Notebooks* of 1914.³⁵ Indeed, and as I will show in what follows, texts by Lenin directly addressing philosophical concerns from 1913 onward reveal that the Soviet construal of his dialectical materialism is not inaccurate.

However, a number of non-Soviet Marxists/leftists have challenged the official Soviet equation according to which Lenin's dialectical materialist philosophy equals *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism* plus the *Philosophical Notebooks*. One of Western Marxism's trademark tactics is to play off a good Marx against a bad Engels (with these maneuvers often resembling the psychoanalytic defense mechanism of "splitting" à la Kleinian object-relations theory). In line with this tactical template, many Western Marxists likewise separate a bad *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism* (guilty of the crudeness of Engelsian-Plekhanovite materialism and naturalism) from a good *Philosophical Notebooks* (perceived as closer to the [quasi- or pseudo-]Hegelianisms of non-Marxist theoretical currents on the European Continent of the twentieth century). Regarding the Lenin of *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism*, Helena Sheehan remarks, "Not surprisingly, most of the authors hostile to Engels are equally hostile to Lenin and speak of him in the very same terms."³⁶

Planty-Bonjour detects tensions between Lenin's key philosophical texts of 1908 and 1914.³⁷ Other non/anti-Soviet authors go further. The Maurice Merleau-Ponty of *Adventures of the Dialectic* issues an early-Lukács-inspired condemnation of *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism*³⁸ (the later Lukács, in 1947's *Existentialisme or marxisme?*, already objects to the narrative according to which Lenin's emphases on materialism

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33 Plekhanov 1969, p. 49

34 Jordan 1967, p. 208

35 Bukharin 2005, pp. 307, 328, 337, 372; Planty-Bonjour 1967, pp. 29, 79, 91, 98

36 Sheehan 1993, p. 141

37 Planty-Bonjour 1974, p. 317

38 Merleau-Ponty 1973, pp. 59-65, 67

eclipse dialectics in his thinking³⁹—and this in addition to his public damning of Merleau-Ponty following the publication, in 1955, of *Adventures of the Dialectic*⁴⁰). Henri Lefebvre advocates abandoning *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism* in favor of the *Philosophical Notebooks* alone.⁴¹ Michael Löwy tries to stress philosophical as well as political differences between Plekhanov and a later Lenin said to have left behind the allegedly “stupid materialism” of 1908 under the beneficial influence of “intelligent” dialectical idealism⁴² (with, more recently, Stathis Kouvelakis echoing some of Löwy’s assertions along these lines⁴³). And, Raya Dunayevskaya and her student Kevin Anderson devote gallons of ink to driving a wedge repeatedly between a supposedly deplorable, vulgar *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism* and a laudable, sophisticated *Philosophical Notebooks*.⁴⁴ An author less invested in these disputes, historian David Joravsky, speaks of “a greater emphasis on dialectics” in Lenin’s notes on Hegel’s *Science of Logic* “than one can find in *Materialism and Empirio-criticism*.”⁴⁵ Gustav Wetter similarly judges that, “Lenin’s *Philosophical Notebooks*... represent an advance, philosophically speaking, on his *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism* and show how thoroughly he had grasped the nature of dialectic.”⁴⁶

Lefebvre, Löwy, Kouvelakis, Dunayevskaya, Anderson *et al*, in playing off the *Philosophical Notebooks* against *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism*, presuppose that the absolute idealism of Hegelian dialectical-speculative philosophy is anti-realist and anti-naturalist. They also posit that 1914 marks a sharp break in Lenin’s philosophical itinerary (akin to the thesis of the alleged 1845 break in Marx’s development associated with classical, mid-1960s Althusserianism⁴⁷). Treatments by me of Hegel elsewhere⁴⁸ already go a long way towards fundamentally undermining the picture of Hegelian thought presupposed by Lefebvre and company

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39 Lukács 1961, pp. 251-252

40 Lukács 1956, pp. 158-159

41 Lefebvre 1971, p. 229

42 Löwy 1973, pp. 132-133, 139-140, 142; Löwy 1973, pp. 151, 153-154

43 Kouvelakis 2007, pp. 173-175, 187-189

44 Dunayevskaya 1973, pp. 95-120, 204; Dunayevskaya 2002, pp. 50, 69, 105, 167, 214-215, 217, 251; Anderson, 1995, pp. 4, 14, 23, 40, 42, 58-60, 64-65, 78-81, 95, 102-103, 174-175; Anderson 2007, pp. 125-127

45 Joravsky 1961, p. 20

46 Wetter 1958, pp. 130-131

47 Johnston , 2018

48 Johnston 2017; Johnston 2018

(as well as many, many others). Apropos the positing of the *Philosophical Notebooks* as a sharp, abrupt rupture with Lenin’s pre-1914 philosophical positions, I can begin by referring to Dominique Lecourt, one of Louis Althusser’s students. After glossing Lecourt’s work on this topic, I then will add further criticisms of attempts to quarantine *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism* in relation to the *Philosophical Notebooks* and associated later texts by Lenin.

Lecourt, in his 1973 study *Une crise et son enjeu: Essai sur la position de Lénine en philosophie* (published in Althusser’s *Theorie* series at François Maspero), adamantly opposes the by-then commonplace splitting of Lenin into crude materialist (1908) and subtle dialectician (1914).⁴⁹ On Lecourt’s reading of Lenin’s philosophical writings, the primacy/priority of being over thinking, a thesis central to *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism*,⁵⁰ remains the ultimate load-bearing tenet of Lenin’s materialist philosophy throughout the entire rest of his career.⁵¹ According to Lecourt, a key aspect of Hegel valued by the later, 1914-and-after Lenin (as well as valued by Engels⁵²) is the sustained, multi-pronged assault on the anti-realist subjectivism of Kant’s transcendental idealism.⁵³ That is to say, Lenin, in the *Philosophical Notebooks* and elsewhere, is interested in a specifically materialist harnessing of the Hegelian problematization of Kantian subjectivist anti-realism.⁵⁴ By Lecourt’s lights, scientific “crises” of the sort motivating Lenin’s 1908 philosophical intervention—as is well known, *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism* is a response to the overthrow of Newtonian physics and idealist attempts to capitalize philosophically on this scientific upheaval—are the underlying root catalysts for Lenin’s recourse to Hegelian dialectics.⁵⁵ Relatedly, Lecourt maintains that dialectics always and invariably remains subordinated to materialism—this is a materialism, moreover, indebted to and informed by the empirical, experimental sciences of knowable natural objectivities—in Leninist dialectical materialism.⁵⁶

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49 Lecourt 1973, pp. 14-15

50 Lenin 1972, pp. 38-39, 50-51, 78-79, 86, 106, 167-168, 220, 270-272

51 Lecourt 1973, pp. 31-33; Pannekoek 2003, pp. 109-110; Graham 1972, p. 402

52 Engels 1975, p. 14

53 Lecourt 1973, p. 51, 55, 57-58, 61-62, 65-67

54 Wetter 1968, p. 121

55 Lecourt 1973, p. 98-102, 107

56 Ibid., p. 48

Incidentally, a younger, more traditionally Marxist Lefebvre (1957) even goes so far as to defend Lenin’s “reflection theory,” one of the elements of *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism* most despised by those pitting the *Philosophical Notebooks* against this 1908 treatise. On Lefebvre’s interpretation, the thesis that thinking “reflects” being is an essential axiom for materialism as involving anti-dualist immanentism, an immanentism according to which thinking is internal to and a moment of being.⁵⁷ Lefebvre’s then-comrade, French Communist Party (PCF) philosopher Roger Garaudy, contemporaneously (1956) offers the same defense of Leninist reflection⁵⁸ (with a similar point already being alluded to, also in the French Marxist context, by Trần Duc Thao [1951] apropos dialectical materialism generally⁵⁹). This 1957 Lefebvre also anticipates certain of Lecourt’s points, especially those pertaining to the anti-subjectivist objectivity of the dialectics of Hegel’s absolute idealism as a foreshadowing of full-fledged materialism.⁶⁰

Lecourt’s arguments against those who divide Lenin’s philosophical works by setting the *Philosophical Notebooks* against *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism* so as to dismiss the latter can and should be supplemented by additional assertions. To begin with, whereas the post-1914 Lenin has *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism* widely distributed in official published form, he never sees fit to publish the *Philosophical Notebooks*. This is not at all to say that what the later Lenin indeed does publish disavows or shows no ties to the content of his 1914 commentary on Hegel’s *Science of Logic*.

Instead, and as I will demonstrate below shortly, Lenin’s published philosophy-related writings both contemporaneous with and subsequent to the *Philosophical Notebooks* fuse the Engelsian-Plekhanovite, science-shaped materialism of *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism* with Hegelian dialectics. This runs contrary to the claims of Löwy, Dunayevskaya, and associates, who, as noted above, contend that a break occurs resulting in 1908’s materialism being jettisoned altogether in favor of 1914’s dialectics. I think the textual evidence suggests otherwise. As Lenin himself indicates, the position he defends is called “dialectical *materialism*” with good reason.⁶¹

Lenin, like Marx, Engels, and Plekhanov before him, knowingly takes

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57 Lefebvre 1957, p. 130

58 Garaudy 1956, pp. 50, 60

59Trần Duc Thao 1986, p. 172

60 Lefebvre 1957, p. 181, 183-185

61 Lenin 1972, p. 284

over and absorbs elements of pre-Marxian materialism.⁶² For all four of these militant materialists, although philosophical materialisms from the ancient Greek atomists through Feuerbach problematically are lacking in historical and dialectical sensibilities, these materialisms nonetheless are crucial precursors making possible what eventually arises in the mid-to-late nineteenth century as historical/dialectical materialism proper. Moreover—this again contests the thesis of a 1914 rupture with the materialism of 1908—the later Lenin encourages his comrades to immerse themselves in close study of Plekhanov’s philosophical writings.⁶³

I turn now to some of Lenin’s texts themselves. My focus in what follows will be on facets of what could be called a “dialectical naturalism” operative within Lenin’s materialist philosophy. I already deal with *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism* along similar lines in the first volume of my *Prolegomena to Any Future Materialism*.⁶⁴ Here, I will offer selective interpretations of four particular texts by Lenin: “The Three Sources and Three Component Parts of Marxism” (1913), “Conspectus of Hegel’s *The Science of Logic*” (1914), “On the Question of Dialectics” (1915), and “On the Significance of Militant Materialism” (1922).

As is well known, the triad referred to in the title “The Three Sources and Three Component Parts of Marxism” is none other than “German philosophy, English political economy and French socialism.”⁶⁵ This essay, roughly contemporaneous with the *Philosophical Notebooks*, promptly goes on to insist that the philosophical core of Marxism is a materialism indebted to its historical predecessors (including the mechanical materialists of eighteenth-century France).⁶⁶ For this Lenin, Marx’s main philosophical accomplishment is the synthesis of pre-Marxian materialism with Hegel-inspired dialectics.⁶⁷ What is more, this 1913 essay continues to invoke the motif of the two opposed, struggling camps of idealism and materialism as per Engels, Plekhanov, and *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism*.⁶⁸ Herein, Lenin associates idealism

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62 Pannekoek 2003, p. 129

63 Lenin 1971, p. 27; Lenin 1975, p. 658; Lenin 1971, p. 660; Lenin 1922

64 Johnston 2013, pp. 13-38

65 Lenin 1975, p. 641

66 Ibid., pp. 641-642

67 Ibid., p. 641

68 Sheehan 1993, pp. 126-129

with religion and materialism with science.⁶⁹ Hence, a mere year before the *Philosophical Notebooks*, Lenin continues to insist that Marxist philosophy is, first and foremost, a natural-science-informed materialism.

But, what about the *Philosophical Notebooks* of 1914? As I already indicated, my gloss upon these incredibly rich set of reflections on and responses to Hegel by Lenin will be highly selective. Given my precise purposes in the current context, I am interested particularly in the place of naturalism in Lenin's serious materialist engagement with the speculative dialectics of the *Science of Logic*.

However, before turning to the naturalist dimensions of the dialectical materialism characterizing the *Philosophical Notebooks*, I once again feel compelled to highlight some additional details further problematizing the thesis of Dunayevskaya *et al* positing a 1914 break by Lenin with his pre-1914 philosophical positions (as espoused primarily in *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism*). Those maintaining the existence of this purported rupture consider Lenin *circa* 1908 as too wedded to ostensibly “bad” *qua* crude/vulgar Engelsian and Plekhanovite ideas. As I noted a short while ago, partisans of this supposed break rely upon contentious assumptions about discontinuities between Hegel, on the one hand, and both Engels and Plekhanov, on the other hand.

But, what is more, Dunayevskaya and her ilk, in holding up Lenin's *Philosophical Notebooks* as amounting to a purported split with his prior Engelsian and Plekhanovite commitments, tend to ignore the obvious continuities and overlaps between how Engels, Plekhanov, and Lenin all critically yet sympathetically read Hegel. That is to say, Lenin's appreciations of Hegelian dialectics in 1914 partly echo those already articulated by these two Marxist predecessors of his. Examples along these lines in the *Philosophical Notebooks* include: approval of Hegel's emphasis on immanent self-development⁷⁰; endorsement of absolute idealism's critique of Kant's anti-realist subjectivism specifically and subjective idealisms generally⁷¹; praise of the Hegelian dialectic for its multidimensional fluidity and nimble dynamism⁷²; agreement with Hegel's criticism according to which Kant, in his excessive “tenderness for things,”⁷³ refuses to recognize the ontological objectivity of

69 Lenin 1975, p. 641

70 Lenin 1976, p. 89

71 Ibid., pp. 91-93, 130, 168, 175, 183, 194, 196-197, 207

72 Ibid., pp.100, 110, 141, 224)

73 Hegel 1969, p. 237; Hegel 1991, §48 p. 92; Hegel 1955, p. 451

kinetic contradictions within real beings *an sich*⁷⁴; reiteration that comprehending Marx requires comprehending Hegel⁷⁵; and, crediting Hegel with anticipating and making possible historical materialism.⁷⁶ Insofar as the Hegel of the *Philosophical Notebooks* bears multiple resemblances to the Hegel of Engels and Plekhanov, this Lenin does anything but cleanly and completely separate himself here from the Engelsian and Plekhanovite influences shaping his thinking prior to 1914.

Immediately before turning to Hegel's treatment of the category of appearance in “The Doctrine of Essence” (i.e., the second of the three major divisions of Hegelian *Logik*), Lenin declares, “Continuation of the work of Hegel and Marx must consist in the *dialectical* elaboration of the history of human thought, science and technique.”⁷⁷ As in 1908, so too in 1914: Science remains a crucial component of Leninist materialism, which seeks, following in Engels's footsteps, to dialecticize (the study of) nature as well as the domains of humanity's ideas and activities (similarly, this Lenin of 1914 audibly echoes the Engels of *Dialectics of Nature*, for better or worse, when he writes of “not things, but the laws of their movement, materialistically”⁷⁸). Soon after this just-quoted declaration, Lenin's naturalism begins to emerge even more explicitly in the *Philosophical Notebooks* with his exclamation, “Down with Gott, there remains *Natur*.”⁷⁹ What is left after sweeping away narratives about transcendent, top-down divine creation *ex nihilo*—a little earlier in the *Philosophical Notebooks*, Lenin insists that all emergences are out of something instead of nothing⁸⁰—is immanent, bottom-up genesis starting from the brute givenness of mere, sheer natural being(s) ultimately prior to all sentience and sapience.⁸¹

Lenin's agreement with Engels's and Plekhanov's praise for the robust realism of Hegelian absolute idealism already involves Lenin repeatedly recognizing that, for Hegel, logical categories are as much a matter of objective-natural being as of subjective-human thinking.⁸² What

74 Lenin 1976, pp. 135-136, 228

75 Ibid., pp. 180, 211, 213

76 Ibid., pp. 189-191

77 Ibid p. 147

78 Ibid p. 94

79 Ibid, p. 155

80 Ibid., p. 133

81 Ibid., p. 171

82 Ibid pp. 91-93, 130, 175, 183, 196-199, 201, 222

is more, the *Philosophical Notebooks*, despite the focus on the *Science of Logic*, make a number of references to Hegel's *Naturphilosophie* as represented in the second volume of the *Encyclopedia*, the portion of the System immediately succeeding Logic. On a single page, Lenin emphasizes the “*Closeness to materialism*” of both this Philosophy of Nature as well as the general Hegelian conception of substance as per the movement from substantiality to subjectivity.⁸³ And, despite Lenin's reservations regarding what he sees as the anti-materialist aspects of the Hegelian narrative of the passing over from *Logik* to *Naturphilosophie*—Lenin even derides (“Ha-ha!”) what he takes to be Hegel's account of the transition from the logical Idea to real-philosophical Nature⁸⁴—Hegel's Logic-concluding identification of the Idea with Nature strikes Lenin as a gesture that “brings one within a hand's grasp of materialism.”⁸⁵

Additionally, the *Philosophical Notebooks* express an appreciation for the opposition of a speculative dialectics “full of content and concrete”⁸⁶ to empty “formalism.”⁸⁷ Admittedly, this perhaps represents an implicit criticism of an Engels who sometimes lapses into formalizing generalizations about purportedly universal “laws of dialectics.” Nonetheless, this Lenin of 1914 does not, for all that, abandon the science-informed naturalism of Engelsian dialectical materialism (and, behind that, Hegelian *Naturphilosophie*). Although he turns Hegel's anti-Schellingian denouncements of pseudo-mathematical formalisms in the Philosophy of Nature against him,⁸⁸ Lenin, like Hegel, denounces only abstractly formalized *Naturphilosophie*, not *Naturphilosophie tout court*.

Materialism and Empirio-Criticism recurrently insists, in a good naturalist-materialist manner, that the human central nervous system is the highly organized matter forming the necessary natural basis for consciousness, mindedness, etc.⁸⁹ This 1908 insistence subsequently is echoed in 1914 by a proposed inversion of what Lenin takes Hegel's views to be—“Should be inverted: concepts are the highest product of the brain, the highest product of matter.”⁹⁰ I will put aside questions

.....
83 Ibid p. 158

84 Ibid p. 174, 186

85 Ibid p. 233

86 Ibid. p. 232

87 Ibid p. 229

88 Ibid p. 183

89 Lenin 1972, p. 38-39, 43, 50-51, 61, 95, 238, 269-270

90 Lenin 1976, p. 167

regarding the accuracy of Lenin's construal of Hegel here. That said, Lenin, in both 1908 and 1914, avoids lapsing into crudely reductive materialism by adding to his neurobiological naturalism (as per his emphasis on the centrality of the central nervous system) what amounts to a greater emphasis on the dialectics of real abstractions. How so?

At one point, the *Philosophical Notebooks* sharply contrast Kantian and Hegelian abstractions in favor of the latter.⁹¹ Soon after, Lenin remarks in relation to Hegel's introductory framing of the *Science of Logic*:

Is not the thought here that semblance also is objective, for it contains *one of the aspects* of the *objective* world? Not only Wesen, but Schein, too, is objective. There is a difference between the subjective and the objective, BUT IT, TOO, HAS ITS LIMITS.⁹²

A subsequent passage from the *Philosophical Notebooks* reinforces this:

The thought of the ideal passing into the real is *profound*: very important for history. But also in the personal life of man it is clear that this contains much truth. Against vulgar materialism. NB. The difference of the ideal from the material is also not unconditional, not überschwenglich.⁹³

Through implicit recourse to the Hegelian-Schellingian dialectical-speculative motif of the identity of identity and difference,⁹⁴ Lenin identifies nature as precisely the substantial identity between the different dimensions of, on the one hand, ideal subjectivity (*als Schein*) as “abstract,” “phenomenon,” and “moment,” and, on the other hand, real objectivity (*als Wesen*) as “concrete,” “essence,” and “relation.”⁹⁵ Very much in line with Hegel's interrelated substance-also-as-subject thesis and his *Naturphilosophie*, the *Philosophical Notebooks* posits a substantial natural being that sunders itself into itself as objective nature and its intimate other as subjective more-than-nature. Further—this would be Lenin's dialectics of real abstractions to which I referred a moment ago—Lenin hypothesizes that substance-generated subjects can and do really react back upon their generative substance. As per

.....
91 Ibid., pg. 92

92 Ibid., pg. 98

93 Ibid., pg. 114

94 Ibid, p. 184

95 Ibid., p. 208

“vulgar materialism,” appearances are mere appearances, with a one-way trajectory of causality running from a material real to an epiphenomenal ideal. As per dialectical materialism, by contrast, appearances are themselves actual beings too, with a two-way dynamic of reciprocal influences flowing back-and-forth between objective realities and subjective idealities. For instance, brain-mind relations, by the lights of Lenin’s dialectical materialism, are such that, although the mind (as ideal subject) has as a necessary condition for its very existence the being of the brain (as real object), the former can and does affect and shape the latter.

Thanks to 1914’s immersion in the work of Hegel, dialectical themes and notions obviously are quite prominent in Lenin’s notes on the *Science of Logic*.⁹⁶ However, these themes and notions hardly are new. Prior to the *Philosophical Notebooks*, *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism*: One, opposes “vulgar materialism” in the name of properly dialectical materialism⁹⁷; Two, insists on the irreducible, full-fledged ontological status of the ideal as well as the real⁹⁸; And, three, advocates dialecticizing the natural sciences, rather than trusting them to their own non-dialectical devices.⁹⁹ Lenin’s materialism in 1908 already is dialectical (as is Engels’s in, for example, *Ludwig Feuerbach and the Outcome of Classical German Philosophy*,¹⁰⁰ from which Lenin draws so much inspiration). Lenin’s dialectic in 1914 still is materialist. Although materialism is to the fore in *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism* and dialectic to the fore in the *Philosophical Notebooks*, this amounts to a difference of emphasis rather than a shift of position. Before, during, and after both 1908 and 1914, Lenin remains an Engels-inspired dialectical materialist.

No fundamental rupture, including a sharp break with Engelsian *Naturdialektik*, is inaugurated by the *Philosophical Notebooks*. The thesis of a 1914 *volte face*, popular amongst Western Marxists, does not hold water. If the contrasting Eastern/Soviet thesis, according to which Lenin’s dialectical materialism equals *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism* plus the *Philosophical Notebooks*, needs correcting, its flaw is that it risks misleadingly suggesting that there is no dialectics in the first work and no materialism in the second work. Of course, this (perhaps inadvertent)

96 Graham 1972, pp. 48-49

97 Lenin 1972, pp. 40-41, 285-286, 288-289, 291, 277-278

98 Ibid, pp. 238, 290, 292-293, 393-394

99 Ibid., p. 372

100 Engels 1941 pp. 25-27, 48-50; Wetter 1958, p. 300; Jordan 1967, p. 160

suggestion sets the stage for and plays into the hands of Dunayevskaya and company, whose disparagement of Lenin’s 1908 materialism and celebration of Lenin’s 1914 dialectics leads to a “dialectical materialism” materialist in name only, being really devoid of any traces of materialism (as itself involving both naturalism and realism).

At this juncture, I succinctly can address as a pair two of Lenin’s post-1914 texts, namely, 1915’s “On the Question of Dialectics” and 1922’s “On the Significance of Militant Materialism.” The first of these essays contains audible echoes of the *Philosophical Notebooks*, coming only a year after the latter. In 1915, Lenin continues both: one, to stress the ubiquity of dialectics (*qua* struggles between opposites¹⁰¹) in an inherently, objectively dialectical nature-in-itself as well as in and between human beings¹⁰²; and, two, to advance a dialectics giving pride of place to “leaps” (*à la* Hegel’s dialectics of quantity and quality¹⁰³) and discord over gradualness and harmony.¹⁰⁴

Along related lines, “On the Question of Dialectics” attributes the materialist universalization of Hegelian dialectics to Marx himself, claiming that, “with Marx the dialectics of bourgeois society is only a particular case of dialectics.”¹⁰⁵ Of course, this is tantamount, in line with Plekhanov, to crediting Marx, apart from Engels, with forging a dialectical materialism (implicitly including a potential *Naturdialektik*) as the general theory of which historical materialism, as deployed in the capitalist-era critique of political economy, is a special instance or application¹⁰⁶ (in “On the Significance of Militant Materialism” Lenin hints again at this same crediting¹⁰⁷). Lastly, Lenin, in this 1915 piece, declares that, “Philosophical idealism is *only* nonsense from the standpoint of crude, simple, metaphysical materialism.”¹⁰⁸ Essentially, this amounts to a reminder of the central thrust of the first of Marx’s eleven “Theses on Feuerbach,” with Thesis One’s distinction between contemplative (as ahistorical, crude, eliminative, mechanical, metaphysical, reductive, simple, vulgar, etc.) and non-contemplative (i.e., historical and/or

101 Lenin 1976, p. 222; Wetter 158, p. 120; Graham 1972, p. 58-59

102 Lenin 1976, p. 357-358, 360

103 Lenin 1976, p. 123

104 Ibid., pp. 358, 360

105 Ibid., p. 359

106 Jordan 1967, pp. 359, 370

107 Lenin 1971, p. 665

108 Lenin 1976, p. 361

dialectical) materialisms.¹⁰⁹ Both Marx and Lenin lambast contemplative materialisms without, for all that, ultimately endorsing those idealisms contesting such flawed, limited materialisms. Although these idealisms' basic resistance is correct, these idealisms themselves are not. Put in Lenin's own phrasing, when it comes to idealism or contemplative materialism, "Both are worse!"

1922's "On the Significance of Militant Materialism," one of Lenin's final pronouncement on matters philosophical, seems further to vindicate my preceding assertions about a consistent dialectical materialist stance running from *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism* through the *Philosophical Notebooks* and beyond (indeed, up through the last years of Lenin's life). As in both *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism* and 1913's "The Three Sources and Three Component Parts of Marxism," the Lenin of 1922 once again invokes the conflict between science and religion, with the Engelsian-Plekhanovite motif of the perennial war between the "two camps" of materialism and idealism palpable in the background. For this Lenin still, staunch materialism necessarily entails "militant atheism."¹¹⁰

Moreover, "On the Significance of Militant Materialism" manifestly returns to the main topic of central concern to the Lenin of *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism* specifically: the rapport between the natural sciences and philosophy, especially cases in which scientific crises and upheavals are exploitatively capitalized on by idealisms in their perpetual campaigns against materialisms. As in 1908, so too in 1922: Lenin warns that rapid advances in and radical transformations of the natural sciences threaten to inspire idealist philosophical efforts to undermine materialist views, including the spontaneous materialism of practicing natural scientists themselves.¹¹¹ On the later Lenin's evaluation, both science and materialism need philosophical support in order to stand up to and fend off reactionary idealist/spiritualist misappropriations of scientific revolutions.¹¹² Lenin associates the militant materialism providing this vital support "under the banner of Marxism" (as per the title of the journal, *Pod Znamenem Marksizma*, whose intellectual and ideological mission is being addressed in "On the Significance of Militant Materialism") with a "Society of Materialist Friends of Hegelian Dialectics."¹¹³ But, again, instead of 1908's materialism or 1914's

109 Johnston 2018

110 Lenin 1971, pp. 661-662; Joravsky 1961, p. 36

111 Lenin 1971, p. 664-666; Wetter 1958, p. 256; Sheehan 1993, pp. 120-122, 132-135, 137

112 Lenin 1971, pp. 664-666

113 Lenin 1971, pp. 660-662, 665

dialectics, Leninism, in 1908, 1914, and 1922, sticks to dialectics and/with materialism, no more, no less.

I come now to the tragic figure of Bukharin. In particular, my concern will be with him at the very height of his tragedy, namely, with his *Philosophical Arabesques*, a 1937 text written in a prison cell by an already-condemned man awaiting execution. Bukharin, writing to his wife Anna Larina, says about *Philosophical Arabesques* that, "The most important thing is that the philosophical work not be lost. I worked on it for a long time and put a great deal into it; it is a very mature work in comparison to my earlier writings, and, in contrast to them, dialectical from beginning to end."¹¹⁴

The self-assessment contained in Bukharin's just-quoted remarks about *Philosophical Arabesques* arguably is quite accurate. Specifically, his prior theoretical *magnum opus*, 1921's *Historical Materialism*, indeed is far from thoroughly dialectical. In fact, this earlier work presents a rather non-dialectical codification of historical materialism bringing the Bukharin of this period into association with a "mechanist" faction of Soviet philosophy opposed to Abram Moiseyevich Deborin and his followers (the Deborinites championing their version of Hegel as the key to all the philosophical issues of concern in the Soviet context of the 1920s).¹¹⁵ In relation to the mechanist-Deborinite split—varying accounts of this split can be found in, for instance, Wetter's *Dialectical Materialism*, Joravsky's *Soviet Marxism and Natural Science*, Jordan's *The Evolution of Dialectical Materialism*, and Sheehan's *Marxism and the Philosophy of Science*—Bukharin's *Historical Materialism* indeed puts forward a mechanistic rendition of Marxist materialism as a thoroughgoing determinism of iron laws of causality completely governing non-human nature and human social history alike.¹¹⁶

The Bukarin of 1937's *Philosophical Arabesques* clearly is a thinker of significantly greater dialectical finesse than the 1920s fellow traveller of the anti-Deborinite mechanists. Although I reject dividing the earlier (*circa* 1908) from the later (*circa* 1914) Lenin, I affirm just such a division between the earlier (*circa* 1921) and the later (*circa* 1937) Bukharin. My treatment of *Philosophical Arabesques* first will highlight the continuities between Lenin's dialectical materialism and Bukharin's final theoretical positions. I then will underscore the conceptual innovations introduced by Bukharin on the eve of his execution.

To begin with the topic of realist materialism (i.e., the top priority

114 Bukharin 2005, p. 17

115 Wetter 1958, pp. 142, 175

116 Bukharin 1969, pp. 19-52, 229

of Lenin in 1908), *Philosophical Arabesques* emphasizes multiple times that life, sentience, and sapience are all later emergent phenomena preceded by an already-long-existent Real of inorganic, non-conscious *Natur an sich*.¹¹⁷ Similarly, the naturalist dimension of Leninist dialectical materialism shines through in Bukharin's prison treatise. Lenin's anti-idealist, neurobiological emphasis on the brain as the material seat of subjectivity (albeit subjectivity as dependent on but different from the highly organized matter of the central nervous system) is echoed by *Philosophical Arabesques*.¹¹⁸

Moreover, Bukharin observes, apropos the difference between subjectivity and objectivity, that, "This opposition to *réalité* arose historically when nature created and singled out from itself a new quality, the human being, the subject, the historico-social subject."¹¹⁹ In other words, natural history immanently generates out of itself, in a dialectical dynamic involving the Hegelian logic of quantity and quality, the distinction between objective nature and subjective history/society¹²⁰ (one of Bukharin's descriptions of this process even audibly anticipates contemporary talk about the "anthropocene," with Burkarin speaking of "the 'anthropozoic period' of the planet earth"¹²¹). Bukharin's natural substance, like that of Hegel, Marx, and Engels, is self-sundering as partially auto-denaturalizing. I say "partially" here because Bukharin, in line with Engelsian-Leninist (qualified) naturalism, is careful to stipulate that socio-historical mediations, although profoundly transforming human nature and humanity's relations with non-human nature, never bring about total denaturalization *qua* exhaustive liquidation of anything and everything natural.¹²²

In a chapter of *Philosophical Arabesques* devoted to the topic of "Teleology," Bukharin provides additional clarifications in connection with what I just underlined. He states therein:

In humanity, nature undergoes a bifurcation; the subject, which has arisen historically, stands counterposed to the object. The object is transformed into matter, into the object of knowledge and of practical mastering. A human being, however, represents a contradiction, a dialectical contradiction; he or she is at one

117 Bukharin 2005, pp. 48, 60, 135, 241-243, 245

118 Ibid., pp. 140, 143

119 Ibid., p. 59

120 Ibid., p. 143

121 Ibid., p. 244

122 Ibid., p. 101

and the same time both an 'anti-member'... that is, a subject counterposed to nature, and a part of this nature, incapable of being torn out of this universal,
all-natural, dialectical relationship. When Hegel introduced his trinomial division into mechanism, 'chemism,' and teleology, he in essence used idealist language to formulate (that is, if we read him materialistically, as Lenin advised) the historical stages of development, of real development.¹²³

Bukharin ends in this passage with a qualified endorsement of the fundamental categories (i.e., "mechanism, 'chemism,' and teleology") of Hegel's strong-emergentist *Naturphilosophie* construed as stages of natural history, of a nature exhibiting a historical series of categorial emergences.¹²⁴ Putting aside for the moment Bukharin's relations with Hegel and Lenin's (quasi-)Hegelianism—I will address these shortly—the rest of the above quotation essentially suggests a dialectical convergence of identities and differences between the natural and the human. On the next page of the same chapter of *Philosophical Arabesques*, Bukharin adds:

Dialectical materialism does not treat human beings as machines; it does not deny special qualities, does not deny goals, just as it does not deny reason. But dialectical materialism views these special qualities as a link in the chain of natural necessity; it views human beings in their contradictory duality as antagonists of nature and as part of nature, as both subject and object, while viewing the specific teleological principle as an aspect of the principle of necessity.¹²⁵

As evidence elsewhere in this 1937 manuscript corroborates,¹²⁶ Bukharin's invocations of "necessity" here are of a piece with an endorsement of Engels's purportedly Hegelian compatibilism¹²⁷ according to which, as Bukharin himself puts it (in connection with an appeal to

123 Ibid., p. 184

124 Thao 1986, p. 138

125 Bukharin 2005, p. 185

126 Ibid., p. 116-117

127 Engels 1959, pp. 157, 390-393

Francis Bacon's *New Organon*¹²⁸), "Freedom is cognized necessity."¹²⁹ Plekhanov too, before Bukharin, already reaffirms this same Engelsian compatibilism¹³⁰ (I have critiqued this Engels on properly Hegelian grounds elsewhere¹³¹). Additionally, Bukharin's "principle of necessity" arguably resonates specifically with the theme of causal lawfulness so central to his earlier, 1920s version of Marxist materialism.

In addition to repeating Engels's pseudo-Hegelian compatibilism, Bukharin also repeats a somewhat serious mistake made by Engels. The latter at one point regrettably equates materialism with nominalism¹³² (thereby regressing to a Hobbesian ontology—a couple pages later in the same text, Engels refers to the British empiricists Bacon, Thomas Hobbes, and John Locke as inspirations for the eighteenth-century French materialism itself in turn inspiring Marx and himself too¹³³). *Philosophical Arabesques* likewise mentions a connection between Marxism and nominalism.¹³⁴

However, Bukharin, fortunately but inconsistently, also upholds the anti-nominalist doctrine of real abstractions advanced by both Marx and Lenin. Two echoes of Lenin's version of this doctrine can be heard in his 1937 text: one, "theory is also a force when it seizes hold of the masses"¹³⁵; and, two, "the subjective cannot be treated as merely subjective."¹³⁶ These two statements can be rephrased respectively as follows: One, the ideality of conceptual abstractions are non-epiphenomenal *qua* causally efficacious in reality; Two, the realm of the ideal is not simply unreal. For a nominalist ontology, the only true existents are the perceptible immediacies of concrete spatio-temporal particulars as irreducibly unique "x"s, as absolutely individuated singularities; any categorial and conceptual generalities over and above such "x"s are dismissed as mere names, as inefficacious, sterile linguistic constructs and conventions lacking any real ontological status or weight. For dialectical materialism (as well as transcendental

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128 Bukharin 2005, p. 117

129 Ibid., p. 116

130 (Plekhanov 1974, pp. 476-477; Plekhanov 1969, pp. 90-92; Plekhanov 1969, pp. 143-144, 146

131 Johnston 2017

132 Engels 1975, p. 10

133 Ibid., p. 12

134 Bukharin 2005, p. 87

135 Bukharin 2005, p. 37

136 Ibid., p. 74

materialism¹³⁷), categorial and conceptual generalities are far from epiphenomenal, instead being endowed with actual causal efficacy *vis-à-vis* nominalism's particulars.

Picking back up the thread of the continuities between Lenin's dialectical materialism and the late Bukharin, several more links between these two Bolsheviks surface in *Philosophical Arabesques*. In line with the Engelsian-Plekhanovite-Leninist motif of the recurrent struggles between religious idealism and atheistic materialism, Bukharin speaks of sweeping away religion and its "dualist fetters."¹³⁸ He also endorses Lenin's account according to which: First, dialectical materialism is the general theory behind Marx's historical materialism as an application of this theory to social formations¹³⁹; and, second, Marx's dialectical materialism is itself a synthesis of mechanistic materialism (from the Greek atomists, through the French materialists, and up to Feuerbach) with dialectical idealism (as embodied by Hegelian philosophy)¹⁴⁰ (with the Lukács of 1954's *The Destruction of Reason* echoing this rendition of Marx's dialectical materialism¹⁴¹).

I turn now to observing briefly the overlaps between Lenin and Bukharin specifically apropos Hegel. An appreciation of Lenin's *Philosophical Notebooks* is largely responsible for Bukharin's belated conversion from a more mechanistic to a more dialectical materialism.¹⁴² Accordingly, endorsements and reiterations of this Lenin (and, implicitly behind him, Plekhanov) abound throughout *Philosophical Arabesques*: The realist-objective (i.e., anti-subjectivist) side of Hegelian absolute idealism places it in close proximity to materialism¹⁴³; The speculative dialectics of absolute idealism must be taken as ontological and not merely epistemological¹⁴⁴; Various aspects of Hegel's corpus distinguish him as a proto-historical-materialist¹⁴⁵; And, in line with a long-standing tradition amongst Russian Hegelians and Marxists, there is celebration of the dialectical dynamics of quantities and qualities, with their "leaps," as

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137 Johnston 2014a, pp. 57-61, 65-66, 73-78, 85, 96-97, 100-102, 123-124

138 Bukharin 2005, pp. 220-221

139 Ibid., p. 337

140 Ibid., p. 328

141 Lukács 1981, p. 196

142 Bukharin 2005, pp. 325, 372

143 Ibid., pp. 57, 261, 304

144 Ibid., pp. 308-309

145 Ibid., pp. 114-116

crystallizing “the algebra of revolution” (Herzen).¹⁴⁶

But, what, if any, are the novel contributions made to the tradition of dialectical materialism by *Philosophical Arabesques*? I discern several in this text. To begin with, Bukharin tempers the apparent ahistoricism of Engels’s laws of *Naturdialektik* by stipulating that these laws are historical, albeit on the longer time-scale of natural history.¹⁴⁷ Hence, these laws seem ahistorical only relative to the comparatively shorter time-scales of human history.

Bukharin also addresses Hegel’s *Naturphilosophie* directly. He faults Hegel for allegedly having regressed back behind Kant into a pre-modern vision of nature as ahistorical (i.e., eternal, unchanging, static, etc.).¹⁴⁸ Bukharin charges that, in Hegel’s Philosophy of Nature, idealism (as conservative and reactionary) sadly wins out over dialectics (as progressive and revolutionary).¹⁴⁹ Although I fundamentally disagree with Bukharin’s characterization of Hegelian *Naturphilosophie*,¹⁵⁰ Bukharin admittedly is right to suggest that ongoing scientific developments from Hegel’s time onward demand revising and reworking multiple components of Hegel’s original Philosophy of Nature. Indeed, I agree that transforming *Naturphilosophie* in response to the sciences is an important process of recurrent theoretical labor for dialectical materialism. But, Bukharin is wrong to suggest that Hegel himself would be unready, unwilling, and/or unable to carry out such transformations were he to be confronted with these scientific developments.

Apropos the natural sciences, *Philosophical Arabesques* makes a couple of points worth noting. First of all, Bukharin denounces as “stupid, obtuse, and narrow-minded” the gesture of reducing the sciences to being social constructions through and through.¹⁵¹ Of course, there are plenty of non-Marxist permutations of this maneuver. However, he understandably is concerned with its Marxist variants, according to which, on the basis of an economistic assumption about one-way determination of superstructure by infrastructure, the sciences are superstructural outgrowths of the economic base. Therefore, they are peculiar to given social formations and, moreover, likely entangled with the ideologies permeating superstructural phenomena. Precisely as

.....
146 Ibid., p. 348

147 Ibid., p. 60

148 Ibid., pp. 134-135

149 Ibid., pp. 134-135

150 Johnston 2014b, pp. 204-237; Johnston 2018.

151 Bukharin 2005, pp. 217-218

a materialist, Bukharin cannot stomach the anti-naturalism and anti-realism of such a pseudo-Marxist philosophy of science.

Also apropos the empirical, experimental sciences of nature, *Philosophical Arabesques* ventures a tentative prediction about further development to come. Bukharin muses:

...in the future a whole series of solid conquests of science will be taken in different connections, considered from different points of view, once these points of view have been developed; it is absurd to think that in millions of years thought will be the same as it is now. But a great deal of today’s science will remain alive, as solid, eternal, and absolute acquisitions.¹⁵²

The crucial upshot of Bukharin’s reflections here is that one can acknowledge the shifting claims and findings of the sciences without, for all that, succumbing to an anti-realist skepticism about the entirety of their contents past and present. That is to say, just because the sciences have changed and will change does not mean that each and every determinate result put forward by them is doomed to total nullification sooner or later in the future. For Bukharin, dialectical materialism proper must shun such anti-naturalist epistemological pessimism as speciously justifying deliberate neglect of the sciences.

Finally, *Philosophical Arabesques* contains an important warning about the abuses of dialectics, a warning with which Hegel would agree¹⁵³ (even if Bukharin is unaware of this agreement). Bukharin cautions that dialectics cannot and should not carelessly be generalized into an unqualified “theory of everything,” namely, a circumscribed set of universal laws equally applicable to even the smallest, most commonplace things under the sun (he gives as examples of the latter buttons, knives, forks, and steel ingots, ridiculing the notion of a “dialectic of buttons,” for instance).¹⁵⁴ Bukharin’s essential point is that dialectics, accurately understood, does not dialecticize everything without reserve or remainder. In other words, dialectics itself recognizes differences between the dialectical and the non-dialectical, admitting the existence of the latter (for Hegel, such non-dialectical dimensions as *Verstand* and mechanical physics indeed are realities to be recognized as such¹⁵⁵). The Bukharin of 1937 ought to be recognized as perspicuously

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152 Ibid., p. 281

153 Johnston 2017.

154 Bukharin 2005, p. 337

155 Johnston 2017

discerning the need for a (meta-)dialectical balancing between the dialectical and the non-dialectical.

Immediately on the heels of *Philosophical Arabesques*, Stalin publishes in 1938, just months after having executed Bukharin, his codification of Marxist philosophy. Stalin's *Dialectical and Historical Materialism*, articulating his *diamat*, promptly is imposed as official doctrine within the Soviet spheres of Really Existing Socialism. Just as Stalin's liquidation of Bukharin is one of the incarnations of a terrifying political Thermidor, so too is the succession of *Philosophical Arabesques* by *Dialectical and Historical Materialism* a manifestation of a philosophical Thermidor.

As is well known, Stalin eliminates Engels's dialectical law of the negation of the negation. Of course, this specific elimination is a theoretical symptom of the practical fact of the entrenchment of the Stalinist bureaucratic state apparatus (with this dictatorship, as a [post-] revolutionary "negation" of the tsarist state, refusing to contemplate the possibility of itself being "negated" in turn by further revolutionary developments).¹⁵⁶ Stalin, in his last major philosophical statement (on the topic of language and linguistics) from the start of the 1950s, similarly adds caveats to the Hegelian-Engelsian dialectics of quantity and quality. Implicitly at odds with Lenin's (and Bukharin's) emphatic Bolshevik celebrations of the "leaps" of Hegel's speculative-logical "algebra of revolution," Stalin argues against cumulative quantitative changes always sooner or later catalyzing leap-like "explosions." More specifically, he suggests that, in terms of social transformations in classless societies (with the Soviet Union *circa* 1950 largely having achieved, according to Stalinist propaganda, the dissolution of classes), the continuity of evolutions rather than the discontinuity of revolutions will be the rule.¹⁵⁷ Once again, the message is clear: There will be no future explosive revolutionary negations of the *status quo* in the U.S.S.R.; Stalinism is here to stay.

However, as per the cliché "even a broken clock is right at least twice a day," Stalin's rendition of Marxist materialism is not entirely without its (admittedly unoriginal) merits *qua* select concurrences with the prior philosophical efforts of Engels, Plekhanov, and Lenin. To begin with, Stalin's 1924 lectures on *The Foundations of Leninism* stress the importance of theory (against anti-intellectualism, spontaneism, and the like) and, in connection with this, indicate that theoretical concepts can and do function as real abstractions by galvanizing and guiding mass-

156 Wetter 1958, p. 311

157 Stalin 1972, p. 27

scale socio-political projects (as practices, movements, revolutions, etc.).¹⁵⁸ 1938's *Dialectical and Historical Materialism* likewise implicitly relies at points on the notion of real abstractions.¹⁵⁹ Other features of *diamat* also echo the dialectical materialism of Stalin's predecessors as discussed by me in the preceding: Both natural and human histories indeed are punctuated by sudden revolutions in addition to gradual evolutions¹⁶⁰; The matter of *Natur* exists prior to and independently of the *Geist* of humanity¹⁶¹; Marxism, with its materialism (especially as carried forward by Engels and the Lenin of *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism*), involves a Hegel-inspired scientific realism¹⁶²; And, against mechanistic economism and related deviations, superstructures react back upon infrastructures¹⁶³ (an anti-deterministic thesis central to Western Marxists from Lukács and Antonio Gramsci onward). Evidently, Stalin even resisted Trofim Denisovich Lysenko's attempted tethering of sciences to classes, rebutting that mathematics and Darwinism, in their scientific universality, are independent of class bases¹⁶⁴ (a point likewise central to Stalin's later rebuking of linguist Nicolai Marr's thesis that languages are components of specific social superstructures¹⁶⁵).

Yet, even these philosophical virtues borrowed by Stalin from his Marxist predecessors manage to be perverted by him into political vices. In particular, the theories of real abstractions and the downward causation of superstructure *vis-à-vis* infrastructure are pressed into the service of rationalizing a voluntarism, one in tension with core aspects of historical materialism, of top-down governance by the enlightened consciousnesses of the Party and its Leader.¹⁶⁶ In general, Stalinist *diamat* somehow manages the lamentable feat of a non-dialectical, contradictory sandwiching together of a teleological determinism (as per the combined laws of nature and history inexorably progressing toward specific ends) with a spiritualistic voluntarism (as per exceptional individuals, "great men," playing guiding roles in various processes). I

158 Stalin, *The Foundations of Leninism*, Peking: Foreign Languages Press, 1975, pg. 19-23

159. Stalin 1940, pp. 22-23, 43-44

160 Ibid., pp. 8-9, 11-13

161 Ibid., pp. 15-16, 20

162 Stalin 1975, pp. 20-21; Stalin 1940, p. 17

163 Stalin 1940, pp. 22-23, 43-44

164 Pollock 2006, pp. 56-57, 59, 134

165 Stalin 1972, pp. 5-9, 25; Stalin 1972, pp. 33-35; Pollock 2006, pp. 104-135

166 Wetter 1958, pp. 216-217, 219-220

neither pretend nor would be inclined to try to sort out the muddle of conflicting theoretical elements forced together under the ferocious pressure of Stalin's unprincipled political opportunism.

As I noted a short while ago, the deletion of the negation of the negation and the limitation of the dialectics of quantity and quality are two hallmark philosophical features of the Stalinist Thermidor. Two other such features, the first of which I refer to immediately above, surface in *Dialectical and Historical Materialism*: one, the necessary, inevitable progress of natural and social developments over the course of historical time in an inexorable "onward and upward movement"¹⁶⁷; two, the association of dialectics with a perspective according to which, starting with nature-in-itself, material realities are envisioned as continuously evolving organic wholes of thoroughly interconnected parts.¹⁶⁸ The Stalinist (per)version of dialectical materialism promotes the necessities of strong Nature and strong History as, taken together, a teleological big Other or One-All (to resort to a hybrid of Lacanian and Badiouian phrasings). By sharp contrast, transcendental materialism puts forward the contingencies of weak nature and weak history as, taken together, an aleatory barred Other or not-One/non-All. This difference comes down to that between totalizing organicist (w)holism and its negation.

I want at this juncture to leave Stalin behind and circumnavigate back to Marx and Lenin so as to bring the present intervention to a fitting close. Apropos Marx and Lenin, Planty-Bonjour acknowledges that both are committed to an ultimately naturalist basis for historical and/or dialectical materialism.¹⁶⁹ However, he expresses some worries and reservations about this naturalism. In his book *The Categories of Dialectical Materialism*, Planty-Bonjour remarks:

...although human activity explains the dialectical bond between man and nature, it says nothing about the origins of nature. It is too easy to say that Marx did not take the question up. Do we not find in Marx the famous text on the rejection of the idea of creation? And it is precisely there that he takes an openly naturalist position to defend and justify the ontological primacy of material being, in order to invalidate a recourse to God the creator.¹⁷⁰

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167 Stalin 1940, pp. 8-9, 11-13

168 Ibid. pp. 7-8

169 Planty-Bonjour 1967, p. 96; Planty-Bonjour 1974, p. 288

170 Planty-Bonjour 1967, p. 96

Several things ought to be said in response to these comments. To begin with, insofar as Marxist materialism insists upon the chronological as well as ontological priority of being over thinking, it would not and could not have any intention of trying to account for the origin of nature via human *praxis*. For Marx, as both a materialist and an admirer of Charles Darwin, any attempt along these lines would be an idealist inversion of reality, since, in fact, humanity emerges from nature and not vice versa. The human and humanizing dialectics of laboring arises out of a physical, chemical, and organic nature as a relatively recent development in evolutionary history.

Furthermore, not only is there a close link between materialism and naturalism, including for Marxist materialism(s)—naturalist materialism also is intimately associated with atheism too. To state the obvious, as a materialist, one must exclude the possibility of an immaterial, transcendent cause for real existence (such as a monotheistic God). And, as a naturalist materialist, one also must exclude the possibility of humans creating nature (insisting instead upon the opposite). Hence, Marx (and those following him, such as Engels, Plekhanov, Lenin, and Bukharin) is compelled to deny that either divine or anthropomorphic agency constitutes "the origins of nature," as Planty-Bonjour puts it in the above quotation.

Planty-Bonjour's observation that Marx "says nothing" about these origins, regardless of his intentions, should not be counted as a critical point. My argument here is that Marx, aware of Engels's efforts apropos *Naturdialektik*,¹⁷¹ assumes, like Engels, that the problem of "the origins of nature" is best left to empirical, experimental science. To usurp such *aposteriori* science through an *apriori* armchair adjudication of this problem, even if such armchair adjudication is performed by someone identified and/or self-identifying as a materialist, would be tantamount to a methodological relapse into an idealism pretending to be able to reconstruct all of reality, nature included, from within the concepts of a thinking detached from the percepts of being(s). Marx, Engels, Lenin, and their dialectical materialist fellow travelers, given their appreciation of the natural sciences and the histories of these disciplines, are well aware of the incomplete, in-progress status of scientific investigations into, among other matters, the initial, primordial genesis of *Natur überhaupt* (with this issue continuing to be far from fully resolved by today's sciences). However, dialectical materialists would rather gamble on having faith in the potential of scientific explanations for this and other puzzles than impatiently and preemptively explain things away through

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171 Johnston 2018

hasty recourse to the illusory dogmatic certainties of religious and other non-naturalist notions. Marx and his dialectical materialist comrades deliberately leave open the question of the origins of nature precisely because, as materialists, they understand it as primarily the jurisdiction of sciences, sciences for which the genesis of the physical universe (or universes) indeed remains an open question.¹⁷²

Planty-Bonjour's study of Russian Hegelianism up to and including Lenin's readings of Hegel similarly voices misgivings about the naturalism of Leninist dialectical materialism. Planty-Bonjour recognizes that, "For Lenin, the first foundation is the becoming of nature."¹⁷³ Not long after this acknowledgement, he characterizes Lenin's Hegel-inspired positing of an anthropogenetic gradual "detachment from nature" as "audacious" for a materialist, insinuating that this audacity might represent a backsliding into outright idealism.¹⁷⁴ Planty-Bonjour's reaction can be rephrased as a question: How, if at all, can one formulate a thoroughly materialist account of the immanent natural emergence of (self-)denaturalizing human beings out of pre/non-human nature? Of course, this is a key, defining question for transcendental materialism with its dialectical naturalism.

Planty-Bonjour evidently assumes that Hegel's manner of asking and answering this query is thoroughly idealist *qua* anti-realist and anti-materialist (an assumption I attempt to demolish elsewhere¹⁷⁵). Additionally, Planty-Bonjour's perplexed response to Lenin's invocation of a real-dialectical liberation from nature—more precisely, this would be the self-liberation of (a part of) nature, namely, nature's auto-denaturalization in and through the activities of minded and like-minded organisms of a peculiar type—is quite strange given the former's knowledge of the history of dialectical materialism. One of the red threads of Hegelian origins running through the materialist musings of Marx, Engels, Lenin, Bukharin, and various others is the conception according to which *praxis*, as human laboring broadly construed, indeed involves a nature-catalyzed and nature-immanent "detachment from nature."

But, perhaps Planty-Bonjour's critical point is that traditional dialectical materialism fails to elaborate a satisfactorily detailed account of pre/non-human nature at the level of a sort of *Naturphilosophie*

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172 Johnston 2014b, pp. 222-224

173 Planty-Bonjour 1974, p. 288

174 Ibid., p. 310

175 Johnston 2017 & 2018

providing a required but missing theoretical foundation for both dialectical and historical materialism. If this in fact is his claim, I am partially sympathetic to it. Less sympathetically, I try to show on another occasion that various Marxist figures, especially when appropriately situated *vis-à-vis* a certain Hegel, already furnish much of what is requisite for such a general theory of nature.¹⁷⁶ More sympathetically, I admittedly have to engage, on this other occasion, in a great deal of exegetically charitable reconstruction work in order to extract and (re) assemble a cohesive model of *Natur an sich* from the texts of Marx and friends.¹⁷⁷ I also might be in agreement with Planty-Bonjour in judging that Marxist materialists (such as Engels and Lenin at certain moments and Stalin unwaveringly) sometimes have recourse to an image of nature as a "strong" totality *qua* deterministic and lawful organic whole—an image of nature in relation to which, as per Planty-Bonjour's criticism, it truly is difficult to conceive of any actual real "detachment" in monistic-materialist (rather than dualistic-idealist) terms.

Transcendental materialism's main philosophical contribution to the tradition of dialectical materialism is nothing other than its idea of "weak nature" at stake across the entire arc of the second volume of my *Prolegomena to Any Future Materialism*. This idea, I maintain, uniquely enables the formulation of what Planty-Bonjour worries Lenin wants but cannot have: a nature-based materialism allowing and accounting for "detachment from nature." In this respect, I leave it open whether transcendental materialism, with its dialectical naturalism, amounts to positing the presuppositions of dialectical materialism or represents a movement of surpassing it. Maybe, considering Hegel's *Aufhebung*, this is a false dilemma.

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176 Johnston 2018

177 Ibid.

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Normative Rationality: Hegelian Drive

Jean-François
Kervégan

Abstract: This article examines the resources which Hegel's thought could offer to the current theory of the normative rationality, in particular by means of the concept of ethicicity (*Sittlichkeit*). The examination concerns at first Hegel's theory of the "abstract law", which develops an original vision of the relationship of law and right(s). Relationships between legal and moral normativity are then studied, about which Hegel's arguments converge to a certain extent with those of legal positivism. Finally, the article analyzes Hegel's institutional theory of the ethical "dispositions", which tries to overtake the opposition between subjectivist and objectivist visions of the society.

Keywords: law, philosophy, normativity, right, Hegel, Kant

The hypothesis I wish to explore here is that Hegel's philosophy, and in particular his doctrine of objective spirit, provides an appropriate basis for current philosophy of normativity; that is to say, for philosophy of law, moral philosophy, social and political philosophy, as well as for the philosophy of action. The main argument is that with the broad concept of ethicicity (*Sittlichkeit*) Hegel came up with a way of reducing the various modes of practical rationality to a fundamental and unitary structure, without erasing the specific bonds they establish between norms and actions. If a separation of law and morality is a characteristic feature of the contemporary understanding of normativity – this is the position commonly attributed to legal positivism – then the way in which Hegel conceives practical rationality, as a complex assemblage of subjective normative expectations and objective networks of institutionalized norms, might well open up a productive perspective for overcoming such a separation. Yet the Hegelian perspective does not entail denying the differentiation of normative systems, a key characteristic of modernity. The Hegelian theory of objective spirit recognizes the specificity of moral and legal normativity whilst grasping them as "abstract" and non-autonomous components of a fundamental "ethical" structure.

Of ("abstract") law and rights

At first sight it may seem odd to look for Hegel's contemporary relevance in the domain of law, since he does not seem to prize law and its "abstraction". Nevertheless there are two reasons for this choice. First of all, Hegel's attitude towards what he called abstract law (that is, civil law) is far more nuanced than is often believed: despite the fact

that the word “abstract” generally has negative connotations in his work, the “abstraction” of legal determinations plays a positive role in the construction of the doctrine of objective spirit. Law’s “formalism” is powerful because it guarantees a real universality for legal norms and principles.¹ This can be verified with the example of juridical personhood, which constitutes in Hegel’s eyes the first fundamental objectification of freedom, freedom being the foundational determination of spirit in so far as it is opposed to nature.²

Subsequently, and this is my second reason, abstract/civil law plays an important role in the structuring of *Sittlichkeit* because in a certain manner it makes up the infrastructure of what Hegel, giving an old term a new meaning, calls civil or *bourgeois* society (*bürgerliche Gesellschaft*). Despite being “the system of ethiccity, lost in its extremes”³ due to the tensions that run through it, civil society can be described in ethical terms. Such a “ethicization” is possible thanks to the “unconscious necessity” of the market, to the political regulation of social tensions (which Hegel, in obsolete terminology, terms the “police”), and last but not least to the legal framing of social action. Note that such ethicization of civil society would require a hard battle against the incivility and conflict concealed within it, since it contains “the remnants of the state of nature”.⁴ Hegel notes that within what he calls the system of needs, that is, the system of production and exchange regulated by the market, “law becomes externally necessary as a protection for particular interests”, as a safety net given the abuses of economic competition. In this manner, “even if its source is the concept, law comes into existence only because it is useful in relation to needs.”⁵ This apparently “materialist” approach to law leads to the following conclusion with regard to the relationship between law and the market:

Only after human beings have invented numerous needs for themselves, and the acquisition of these needs has become entwined with their satisfaction, is it possible for laws to be made.⁶

1 See on this point. Kervégan 2008, p. 59-66.

2 *PM*, § 502, p.248. Hegel, *Enzyklopädie der philosophischen Wissenschaften*, 1986, p. 311: “The real fact is that the whole law and its every article are based on free personality alone — on self-determination or autonomy, which is the very contrary of determination by nature.”

3 *EPR*, § 184, p.221 (*RPh*, p. 184).

4 *EPR*, §200, p.234 (*RPh*, p. 354).

5 *EPR*, §209 Addition, p.240, modified (*RPh*, p. 361).

6 *Ibid.*, (*ibid.*).

Civil/abstract law’s capacity to be something “universally recognized, known and willed”⁷ is thus certainly insufficient but it is a necessary condition of modern ethiccity. It constitutes the objective basis of human rights, understood as the rights of the social individual (which Hegel names, in line with Rousseau and Kant, the ‘bourgeois’). The Hegelian theory of legally “constituted”⁸ civil society can be described as a critical or dialectical theory of what will be later termed the *state of law* (*Rechtsstaat*) The following hypothesis can thus be advanced: for Hegel, “the state of law” is not yet a State in the full (political) sense of the term, but rather a legal constituted civil society. For Hegel, as for Marx later, human rights are the rights of the *bourgeois* rather than those of the *citizen*, as indicated in the Remark after §190 of the *Elements*.⁹ What is lacking from civil society – a merely “external” State¹⁰ – in order to be a genuine State is the strictly political dimension of “*union* as such”,¹¹ of living together, which thanks to a combination of subjective and objective elements makes the (political) State “the actuality of the ethical idea”.¹² As such the Hegelian conception of the political clearly has no relation to the contemporary notion of a bureaucratic apparatus that overlooks (or overburdens) society. Nor does it have anything to do with community understood in legal terms alone: the Hegelian state would not exist if it were not sustained by its citizens’ subjective *ethos*, by what Hegel calls their “political disposition”.¹³ On the one hand we need to recognize the role played by the law in the constitution of ethiccity; and on the other hand we need to recognize the impossibility of a solely legal definition of the political bond.

It is the case that Hegel’s contribution to the understanding of “abstract” law and its social realization has not received much attention. In contrast to Kant, who no doubt correctly is placed alongside Locke as the precursor of the theme of the state of law, and whose efforts at distinguishing legal normativity from moral normativity (in Kant’s

7 *EPR*, §209, p.240 (*RPh*, p. 360).

8 See *EPR*, § 157, P. 198 (*RPh*, p. 306), where it is a question of the “legal constitution” (*Rechtsverfassung*) of civil society.

9 See *EPR*, § 190, p. 228, modified (*RPh*, p. 348): “In law the object is the *person*; at the level of morality, it is the *subject*, in the family, the *family-member*, and in civil society in general, the *citizen* (in the sense of *bourgeois*).”

10 *PM* §523, p. 257 (*Enzyklopädie*, § 523, p. 321).

11 *EPR*, § 258, p.276 (*RPh*, p. 399).

12 *EPR*, § 257, p.275 (*RPh*, p. 398).

13 See *EPR*, § 268, p.288 (*RPh*, p. 413-14).

terminology, law and ethics) still arouse much interest today,¹⁴ Hegel has always been suspected of being a defender of power-State (*Machtstaat*), and as an adversary of the rule of law. Whether this suspicion is justified or not makes no difference. Apart from a few exceptions, amongst whom Jeremy Waldron should be mentioned, Hegel is rarely cited never mind discussed in current research in the philosophy of law.¹⁵ If we take the most influential works in this field in the twentieth century, Kelsen's *Pure Theory of Law*, and Herbert Hart's *Concept of Law*, Hegel is named only once in the first and not at all in the second. In the *Oxford Handbook of Jurisprudence and Philosophy of Law*, Hegel is named six times, much less than Ronald Dworkin or Herbert Hart, and far less than other classic authors such as Aristotle, Bentham, Hobbes, Hume, Kant and Plato. We can go some way to explaining this phenomenon: for the most part contemporary philosophy of law is of English-speaking provenance, and the philosophical tradition to which it belongs is generally that of empiricism and utilitarianism rather than German idealism. In such a tradition Hegel is viewed with suspicion if not completely ignored. However I am convinced that the philosophy of law could benefit considerably from the Hegelian approach. Evidently it is not a question of repeating word for word Hegel's concepts and solutions: for one, certain presuppositions of Hegel's logic and metaphysics have become incomprehensible in the era of "post-metaphysical thought".¹⁶ Nor is it my intention to defend the richness of 'post-metaphysical' readings of Hegel: I have tried to do that elsewhere.¹⁷ But I do consider that the philosophy of law, and more generally normative philosophy, would make significant gains if Hegelian analyses were properly taken into account. This is the case, for example, when it comes to the question of rights.

If I had had to translate *Grundlinien der Philosophie des Rechts* into English rather than French, I would have probably translated *Philosophie des Rechts* by "philosophy of law", and not by "philosophy of right", as in the existing English translations (that of Knox, revised by Houlgate, and that of Nisbet-Wood). Hegel repeatedly attempts to dismiss a 'subjective' understanding of law that could give rise to a moral if not moralizing interpretation of the law; much like Kant and Fichte Hegel wishes to forearm himself against such an interpretation. In paragraph §29 of *Elements*, law is defined as follows:

14 See Höffe 1999; Kersting 2004; Korsgaard 1996; O'Neill 1989 & 2013; Timmons (Ed.) 2004.

15 See Waldron 1988. In his discussion of the concept of private property, Waldron takes Hegelian arguments for and against into consideration, and at length.

16 See Habermas 1994 & 2012.

17 See Kervégan 2008, p. 7-15; Kervégan 2012, p. 283-309.

Right [law?] is any existence [*Dasein*] in general which is the *existence* of the *free will*. Right [law?] is therefore in general freedom, as Idea.¹⁸

At first sight this definition seems to run along the lines of a 'subjective' interpretation since it makes a reference to 'free will'. However, the rest of this paragraph disqualifies such an interpretation by indicating that the will that constitutes the "substantial basis" of law is not the "will of the single person" but "rational will which has being in itself and for itself".¹⁹ Thus the concept of will which is the basis for the objective system of law is not that of subjective will, but that of a "free substantial will", or that of an "objective will".²⁰ This concept of law as objective will leads to the thesis of the inseparability of subjective rights and objective law: the actualization of each person's legal capacity, that is their legal freedom, takes place according to universally obligatory legal norms.

The result of this examination of the two significations of the word 'law', the subjective (right) and the objective (law), is that the relation between rights and the duties instituted by the legal norms should not be understood as one of *reciprocity* but rather as *identity*: "*duty* and *right* coincide".²¹ However, this identity of right and obligation cannot be directly established in the domain of abstract/civil law, but only on the basis of a supra-legal standpoint, that of ethiccity (*Sittlichkeit*). It then becomes evident that human beings "[have] rights in so far as [they] have duties, and duties in so far as [they have] rights".²² In civil law there is a primacy of duties, thus of objective norms, over rights. At first sight, this thesis seems paradoxical with regard to the common theory that assigns an original and foundational character to rights. But Hegel considers that the very structure of abstract/civil law implies a logical priority of *duty*, and not of *right*. This can be explained in the following way: from the point of view of a *description* of the manner in which legal relationships appear to those at concern, "the law" signifies first of all a series of duties and restrictions to which the rights of persons are subordinate; hence the representation according to which rights and duties would be placed somehow opposite each other:

In the phenomenal range right and duty are *correlata*, at least in the

18 *EPR*, § 29, p.58 (*RPh*, p. 80).

19 *EPR*, § 29, p.58 (*RPh*, p. 80-81).

20 *PM*, § 486, p.242 (*Enzyklopädie*, p. 304).

21 *EPR*, §155, p.197 (*RPh*, p. 304).

22 *Ibid.*, (*ibid.*).

sense that to a right on my part corresponds a duty in someone else.²³

In other words, the civil law relationship, in its basic configuration, corresponds to what has been described since Hohfeld by the term claim-right.²⁴ However, for Hegel, this is *only* valid from the perspective of a phenomenology of legal consciousness. Besides, we should note that the eviction (or at least relativization) of the model of reciprocity is confirmed in contemporary systems theory. Niklas Luhmann, for example, explains that the modern promotion of rights corresponds to a replacement of the traditional symmetrical model of reciprocity, which came from Roman law, with an asymmetrical model of complementarity.²⁵ However we should also note that Hegel does not speak of complementarity as Luhmann does, but of *identity*; and this is because he does not deal with the problem of rights and duties from the standpoint of legal (“abstract”) rationality alone, but from the standpoint of the “supra-legal” rationality of ethicicity.

If adopt the latter standpoint, we have to account – following Hegel’s suggestion – for the fact that *one and the same* legal situation must be simultaneously described in terms of duties and rights: it is no longer a case of reciprocity or complementarity, but of a genuine *identity* of right and duty. The same thing that appears to me as a duty is, objectively speaking, my ‘right’, at least if one understands by this word not only that for which I am qualified, or that which I can claim from another, but in a general manner that which is owing to me, “my due”, including responsibilities, even a punishment. For example, when I am the owner of something, not only do I have a right of *usus* and *abusus* over it, but I also have a duty to confirm that formal legal property by my effective usage of the thing. Furthermore, this expanded conception of a right as a legal situation which is owed to a person – a conception in agreement with the Roman concept of *jus* – that even the sentence imposed on a criminal is “*his* right”.²⁶ The punishment is what is due to the criminal; that is, it is the latter’s “right” in so far as it confirms the autonomy of the subject of law, its responsibility with regard to its acts, and even reestablishes its dignity by “reconciling” it with its own free personality as well as with the objective legal order. It is well known that Hegel draws a controversial conclusion from this argument – a justification of capital punishment. Besides this, what we should retain from this original approach to right

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²³ PM, § 486, p.242 (*Enzyklopädie*, p. 304).

²⁴ See Hohfeld 1964, p. 36-38.

²⁵ See Luhmann 1981, p. 364-365. Also see Luhmann 1991, p. 483, and Luhmann 2004. And especially Luhmann 1993.

²⁶ EPR, § 100, p.126 (*RPh*, p. 190).

is that the latter is not only a freedom from *x* or a freedom to *y*, but an assemblage of positive and negative determinations, of rights and duties.

However under close examination the correspondence between right and duty turns out not to have the same meaning in the different spheres of objective spirit. In the first two spheres, especially that of abstract/civil law, there reigns “an appearance of diversity” of rights and duties.²⁷ Hegel thus shares the common opinion that given my right to own something there is a corresponding duty on the part of others to respect its inviolability. But for Hegel this correspondence holds solely at a descriptive level and within the limits of civil law and its kind of normativity. Indeed, “according to the concept”, “my right” contains a duty *for myself*: in legal exchanges with others I must fulfill the conditions which are those of personality in general – at base, this is a very Lockean thesis. Then, within the sphere of morality, there can be a discord between the right claimed by subjectivity (its “purpose” or “intention” in Hegel’s terms) and the Good as objective norm to which action in general must be submitted. On the other hand, within the ethical sphere “these two parts have reached their truth, their absolute unity”, despite a continuing “appearance of diversity” between the two.²⁸ This is why ethical subjects (the “citizens”, *Bürger*, who are also “bourgeois”) have indissociable rights and duties: by fulfilling the duties that correspond to their legal and social position, they endow their claims with objective validity, thus turning them into *rights*.

However, Hegel’s main thesis, the “absolute identity of duty and of right”,²⁹ does not entail that the rights and duties inherent in a particular legal situation are identical in their content, although their functional correlation does proceed from one and the same legal relationship. Let’s take an example: within the family children have duties (to obey their parents) and rights (to receive an education); these duties and rights do not have the same content but they correspond. The same occurs with the citizen: the duty of paying taxes corresponds to the right to receive certain services. In fact, it is especially in “the realms of civil law and morality” that egalitarian formalism reigns.³⁰ Formally any legal person, any moral subject, has rights and duties which correspond to duties and rights on the part of other persons. But ethical kind of relationships bring about their institutional differentiation. The rights and duties of

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²⁷ PM, §486, p.243(*Enzyklopädie*, p. 304).

²⁸ Ibid., p.242-3 (*Enzyklopädie*, p. 304).

²⁹ EPR, § 261, p.284 (*RPh*, p. 408).

³⁰ Ibid., (ibid.).

the member of the family, of the “bourgeois” and of the citizen are not identical; but in each of these cases their institutional position defines the pertinent right and duties. Moreover it is important, and Hegel emphasizes this point, that every legal situation, including that of the citizen, not only implies duties but also rights:

In the process of fulfilling his duty, the individual must somehow attain his own interest and satisfaction or settle his own account, and from his situation within the state, a right must accrue to him whereby the universal cause becomes *his own particular* cause. Particular interests should certainly not be set aside, let alone suppressed; on the contrary, they should be harmonized with the universal, so that they both themselves and the universal are preserved.³¹

It would thus be quite correct to see in Hegel a precursor of the doctrine of “subjective public rights” as developed at the end of the 19th century by the jurist Georg Jellinek.

To summarize: the phenomenological *reciprocity* of rights and duties (to A’s duty corresponds B’s right) masks a conceptual *correlation* (A’s subjective rights are bound to A’s duties), which can itself be interpreted as a fundamental *identity*. This identity of right and duty is only fully manifest when the formalism of legal and moral relations is surmounted by the normatively guided relations of social subjects and socio-political institutions. However, this correlation itself presupposes the liberty of the modern legal person, without which there can be neither duties nor rights: “there is a single principle for both duty and right, namely the personal freedom of human beings”.³² Hence the modern conviction, which Hegel adopts: “he who has no rights has no duties and vice versa”.³³ But Hegel provides a non-trivial basis for this conviction: only an ethical and institutional approach can conceive the correlation of rights and duties as a consequence of one and the same relation. A natural law approach to the law, including “subjective rights”, is not capable of such a conception. In my view this approach could make a productive contribution to the contemporary theory of rights, which generally depends on a model of simple reciprocity.

Legal and moral normativity: from Kant to Hegel and beyond

The question of the relation between legal and ethical norms is under debate today just as it was in the time of Hegel. And here again it seems to me that the Hegelian position is worthy of attention.

31 *EPR*, § 261, p.284-5 (*RPh*, p. 409).

32 *Ibid.*, p.284.

33 *PM*, §486, p.243 (*Enzyklopädie*, p. 304).

In contemporary philosophy responses to this question come in two opposite orientations. On the one hand, it is claimed that legal norms require a (direct or indirect) moral justification, since the ultimate principles to which these norms are subordinated are moral. I shall term this the “subordination thesis”, a thesis whose representatives include Lon Fuller, Joel Feinberg, Ronald Dworkin and Jürgen Habermas (at least in the 1986 Tanner lectures).³⁴ On the other hand, we have philosophers who defend the “separation thesis”, which is often based on a variant of legal positivism. The latter argue that legal normativity should be conceived independently of moral norms presumed to be universal; such a presumption is quite risky in an era characterized by a “polytheism of values” (Max Weber). Law must be held apart from moral controversies and possess its own principles. However there are two variations of this separation thesis. The ‘hard positivism’ professed by Kelsen or Joseph Raz (contemporary scholarship also speaks of ‘exclusive positivism’, ‘incorporationism’, etc.) pleads for a strict separation of the legal and moral spheres, whereas Hart’s or Jules Coleman’s ‘soft positivism’ (also called ‘inclusive’ or ‘normative positivism’) allows for the existence of a certain overlap between the two spheres.³⁵ In Hart this leads to the theory that a certain number of “moral truisms” are inevitably presumed by any positive legal system; and within the framework of a soft and non-dogmatic positivism this leads him to allow the existence of a “minimal content of natural law”.³⁶

Such questions were equally present in classical German philosophy. In the post-revolutionary period, and in part in reaction to the overt moralism of the French Jacobins’ politics, Kant and Fichte for example insisted on the necessity of maintaining a strict distinction between ethical and legal normativity: “the philosophical doctrine of law”, writes Fichte in 1796, is not “a chapter of morality”, but “a distinct and autonomous science”.³⁷ For his part, in the first Appendix to “Perpetual Peace” Kant asserts that “true politics can therefore not take a step without having already paid homage to morals”, but in the second Appendix he qualifies this statement adding that it is a matter of morals “as doctrine of law”, that is, morals considered as a common genre of

34 See Fuller 1964; Feinberg 1978; Habermas 1992 and 1998.

35 All of these labels are used in various contributions to the volume edited by Coleman 2001. See in particular Raz, Coleman, Leiter, Perry and Waldron’s articles. See also A. Marmor (“Exclusive legal positivism”) and K. E. Himma’s articles (“Inclusive legal positivism”) in J. Coleman & S. Shapiro (eds) 2002, p. 104f. et 125f.

36 Hart 1994, p.193.

37 Fichte 1991, p.10.

which law and ethics are the two species.³⁸ One should note that in Kant as in Fichte's work the strict distinction of moral and legal normativity is founded on a "strong" and unitary theory of practical reason. Apart from rare exceptions (such as J. Raz, who is however a representative of 'hard positivism'), such a strong justification is missing in the work of most of the contemporary representatives of legal positivism. This is precisely what makes the position of 'exclusive legal positivism' weaker than that of Fichte or Kant since the statement "legal validity is exhausted by reference to the conventional sources of law"³⁹ is only valid if one has also advanced at least the hypothesis that law as a social convention possesses a minimum of rationality. Of course, Kant explained that even a population of devils would need laws; though of course this supposes that they are rational devils.... Yet such a hypothesis would no doubt presuppose an entire theory of institutional rationality and perhaps (here I come back to Hegel) a theory of objective spirit.

In Hegel, the problem of the relation between legal and moral normativity is framed in a different manner than in Kant and Fichte. He too considers that a strict distinction should be established between morality and law. But the justification he gives for this position is quite original. In Kant the difference between law and ethics (in Hegel's terms: morals) lies in legal norms defining external duties whilst ethical/moral norms define "ends that are also duties".⁴⁰ Consequently the distinction between law and ethics does not concern the content of norms but rather the "kind of obligation".⁴¹ But then a problem arises: how can one simultaneously affirm the unity of practical reason and the strict distinction between legal and ethical normativity without making law and ethics into domains that are materially differentiated (i.e. at the level of the content of the norms they each contain). Kant is quite aware that a material differentiation of law and ethics is unsatisfactory; moreover there are many cases in which the two types of norms overlap. He also abandons the ancient but weak distinction between *forum externum* et *forum internum*. He then meets with difficulties that are summed up in the following phrase:

Ethical lawgiving...is that which *cannot* be external; legal legislation is that which can *also* be external.⁴²

.....
38 Kant 1991, p.125, p.127 (*Zum ewigen Frieden*, p. 347, 350).

39 Marmor 2002, p.104.

40 Kant 1991, p. 514 (*Metaphysik der Sitten*, p. 511).

41 Ibid, p. 385 (*Metaphysik der Sitten*, p. 326)

42 Ibid, p. 384 (*Metaphysik der Sitten*, p. 326).

In a similar way the idea that law prescribes rules for actions whilst ethics prescribes the maxims (the subjective projects) of actions is unsatisfactory, just as the distinction between the more or less "wide" or "narrow" nature of the two kinds of obligation.⁴³ In the end Kant's recourse to *lex permissiva* to pinpoint the specificity of legal with regard to ethical lawgiving is not very clear.⁴⁴ It even awakens lawgiving suspicion that the entire Kantian reconstruction of the law (at least of civil law) has as its sole and unique goal the justification of the existing *de facto* distribution of what is mine and thine, as clearly suggested by the well-known formula of his *Doctrine of Law*: "Happy is he who is in possession (*Beati possidentes*)!"⁴⁵

In my opinion these difficulties are due to the fact that Kant should have revised the theory of rational normativity presented in the *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals* and the *Critique of Practical Reason* in order to justify the recognition of the equal dignity of law and ethics that occurs in the later texts, especially in *The Metaphysics of Morals*.⁴⁶ The conception of practical reason laid out in the first two works is of course harmonious with the presentation of *ethical* normativity (or in Hegel's terms, of morality) but not with that of *legal* normativity, such as the latter is presented in the *Doctrine of Law*. Kant should have explicitly reworked this conception so as to justify the elevation of "simple legality" to the same level as morality in the *Metaphysics of Morals*. Moreover it can be shown that in this last work the distinction between legality and morality acquires a different signification to the one it has in the *Critique of Practical Reason*: from that point onwards legality is no longer said to be an inferior, extra-moral, kind of normativity. In other words, the recognition that there is also a legal categorical imperative should have entailed an explicit revision of the theory of moral normativity presented in the *Critique of Practical Reason*. Such a revision would have led to an expanded theory of normativity which would have founded in a unified manner morality (ethics) and the doctrine of law without neglecting the specificities of either.

Hegel constructs precisely such an expanded theory when he conceives of the articulation of law and morality on the basis of a broad theory of *ethical* rationality. (Here I open a terminological parenthesis: from this point onwards, 'ethics' and 'ethical' must be understood in

.....
43 Ibid, p. 521 (*Metaphysik der Sitten*, p. 520)

44 Ibid., p. 406 (*Metaphysik der Sitten*, p. 354)

45 Ibid., p. 410 (*Metaphysik der Sitten*, p. 367).

46 This argument is developed in Chapters 2 and 3 of Kervégan 2015.

a strictly Hegelian and non-Kantian sense. In Kant's work, the word 'ethnicity' (*Sittlichkeit*) has roughly the same meaning as the term *Moralität* in Hegel. In the latter's work, the terms morality and ethnicity are strictly distinguished and placed in a hierarchy. Ethnicity in Hegel's sense does not have any equivalent, in his eyes, in Kant's philosophy. Hegel declares that the practical principles of Kantian philosophy "render the point of view of *ethics* impossible and in fact expressly [infringe] and [destroy] it".⁴⁷ However one could argue that the Hegelian theory of *Sittlichkeit* plays a role analogous to that of the Kantian metaphysics of morals as a "system of principles" of practical reason,⁴⁸ given that it covers the entire range of normativity, including the domains of those legal and moral norms which are "actualized" within it. End of parenthesis.)

What is the basis in Hegel for both the kinship *and* the difference of legal and moral normativity? The difference is based on the fact that moral norms (the "Good") defining and limiting the *subject's* sphere of liberty,⁴⁹ whilst legal norms *stricto sensu* (abstract/civil law) organize the *person's* sphere of liberty and his/her actions,⁵⁰ without restricting that liberty – in contrast to Kant.⁵¹ This is not a purely verbal distinction. The law is the normative framework for trade between persons, and their liberty is incarnated and sometimes reified in external goods and things, as shown in the example of property. Legal normativity has thus nothing to do with "subjectivity" and its maxims and attitudes; it only concerns the materiality of acts that can be legally determined. For their part, moral norms (which are summed up in the idea of the Good) define the subject's legitimate field of action; and for this reason the subject is "*the series of its actions*".⁵² In contrast to the law here it is clearly impossible to dismiss the pertinence of subjectivity: on the contrary, in the moral sphere subjectivity is "ground... [of] freedom", and as such the "moral point of view" expresses "the right of the subjective will" to "self-determination" (to autonomy).⁵³

Despite this difference (between the legal person and the moral subject), there is a certain parallel to be found in the *development* of law and morality within Hegel's reconstruction. In Hegel's description

.....
47 EPR, , § 33, p.63 (RPh, p. 88).

48 Kant 1999, p. 370 (*Metaphysik der Sitten*, p. 319).

49 EPD, § 105, p.135 (RPh, p. 203).

50 EPD, § 35, p.67-8 (RPh, p. 93).

51 See EPD, § 29, p. 58 (RPh, p. 80-1).

52 EPD, § 124, p. 151 (RPh, p. 233).

53 EPD, § 106-107, p. 135-6 (RPh, p. 204-205).

the development of civil law leads to the introduction of subjectivity within the legal sphere, a sphere which is initially understood in a purely objective manner. This occurs through the figure of the subjectivity of the criminal, who in one manner or another must be reconciled with itself through the punishment that s/he incurs. Hegel writes, "the *action* of the criminal involves...the *individual's volition*. In so far as the punishment which this entails is seen as embodying *the criminal's own right*, the criminal is *honoured* as a rational being."⁵⁴ Let's leave aside what, from a contemporary standpoint, is morally shocking about this justification of punishment, and focus on the structural signification. Punishment leads the criminal to reappropriate his or her subjectivity, whilst his or her act, as a material refusal of the law, annihilates that subjectivity or condemns it to alienation. The logic of abstract law thus leads to the emergence of *subjectivity* within objective spirit. Reciprocally, morality is the terrain of a process of *objectification* whereby the subject is required to recognize the "objectivity that is in and for itself" of moral norms and submits to them. The intersection of these two processes – the subjectification of abstract law and the objectification of abstract morality – is none other than *Sittlichkeit*, which thus turns out to be the keystone of the Hegelian theory of normativity.

Consequently, between legal and ethical normativity there is no subordination but parity. Given that both one and the other are "stages of the development of the concept of freedom", each possesses "its distinctive right", and "the realm of actualized freedom", that is to say, *Sittlichkeit*, needs these two incomplete modalities of the normative structuring of social action so as not to remain an empty requirement.⁵⁵ What is common to both law and morality is the *abstraction* of the kind of actualization of freedom that they respectively guarantee, at least inasmuch as they are understood as separate, if not potentially opposed, forms of normativity. In the end, their abstraction is due to the fact that moral and legal norms not containing their principle of efficacy within themselves. According to Hegel the actualization of the law is not a legal but a social question: it is solely inside a living civil society and thanks to social exchange that law receives "the power of actuality" and is in this manner liberated from its intrinsic abstraction; an abstraction reflected in the separation of the person and its "external sphere of freedom" (i.e. its property).⁵⁶ For their part, the errors (to be perpetually feared) and contradictions of "the right of the subjective will", which in itself is fully

.....
54 EPD, § 100, p. 126 (RPh, p. 191).

55 EPR, §30, §4, p.59, p. 35 (RPh, W 7, p. 83, p.46).

56 EPR, § 210, §41, p.240, p. 73 (RPh, p. 361, p.102).

justified, lead to the replacement of “formal [moral] conscience” by the “true [moral] conscience” of the ethical individual, who is both *bourgeois* and citizen.⁵⁷ In short, law and morality have the common property of being abstract normative expressions of that freedom which only becomes effective, concrete freedom as *ethical* freedom (that is to say, according to the structures of the doctrine of ethiccity, as familial, social and political freedom).

Ethicity as the basis of a dynamic normativity

The richness of the Hegelian concept of ethiccity is often underlined, in particular by Axel Honneth in his recent contribution to a theory of ‘democratic ethiccity’.⁵⁸ According to Honneth the value of Hegel’s contribution lies, amongst other things, in the fact that he does not provide an abstractly normative theory of justice, such as that of Rawls for example; rather his theory is one that constantly concerned with the conditions of efficacy of legal, moral, social and political norms. Honneth considers (and quite rightly, in my opinion) that after Hegel the question formulated by Rousseau and Kant of rational self-determination and of the “autonomous” normative moral order that it generates can only satisfyingly be posed within the framework of institutionalized ethico-political configurations. As such ethiccity becomes the condition of normativity and not the reverse. For my part I wish to underline two aspects of the Hegelian theory of *Sittlichkeit* that could enrich the contemporary theory of normativity, and in particular the philosophy of law.

Ethicity, such as Hegel conceives it, is a complex of objective structures (institutions) and subjective attitudes (dispositions, *ethos*), of social being and of individual and collective conscience. (In the context of this article I can only briefly mention the rich discussion provoked by the idea of collective intentionality or the existence of We-Intentions, from Hegel, Durkheim to Margaret Gilbert, Raimo Tuomela, Philip Pettit and Ronald Searle).⁵⁹ Hegelian ethiccity is thus a social reality that is both subjective and objective:

Ethicity is the *Idea of freedom* as the living good which has its knowledge and volition in self-consciousness, and its actuality

57 *EPR*, § 132, §137, p.158, 164 (*RPh*, p.245, p.256).

58 See Honneth 2014.

59 Apart from Hegel, who lies at the source of this kind of enquiry, and Durkheim, who pursued it (Durkheim 2010, chap. V ; Durkheim 2013a, I. III, chap. II; Durkheim 2014, chap. I; Durkheim 2013b), see especially in the contemporary literature: Gilbert 1989, 1996, 2014. Pettit 1996, 2004; Pettit & List 2011; Schmid 2009, 2012; Searle 1995, 2010; Tuomela & Miller 1988; Tuomela 2005, 2007.

through self-conscious action. Similarly, it is in ethical being that self-consciousness has its motivating end and a foundation which has being in and for itself. Ethicity is accordingly the *concept of freedom which has become the existing [vorhandenen] world and the nature of self-consciousness*.⁶⁰

Just like the Good in the sphere of morality, *Sittlichkeit* brings together classes of norms to which individual action is submitted. But here in contrast to what happens in the sphere of morality, there is no distortion between the objectivity of the norm and the subjectivity of the agent. The Good (here the ethical norm) is now “the living Good” because, in a manner of speaking, it configures or in-forms subjectivity, such that individual action is in a kind of pre-established harmony with that norm.⁶¹ Reciprocally, the ethical “self-consciousness” of the “citizen-bourgeois” is the touchstone for the efficacy of ethico-socio-political norms, which are only valid when they can be consciously approved of and applied by the individuals and groups in question. Hegelian *Sittlichkeit* is thus quite different to any “process without a subject”: it only gains objectivity, it only participates in the construction of objective spirit, if its norms are consciously put to work in individual and collective action. One could consider Bourdieu’s concept of *habitus* as a kind of actualization of Hegelian *Sittlichkeit*. Indeed, Bourdieu attempts to combat both the “subjectivist” and the “objectivist” visions of the social world with his use of this concept. Like Hegel, Bourdieu conceives of social practice as a “system of structured and structuring attitudes which are constituted within and by practice and which are always orientated towards practice”.⁶² Moreover Bourdieu’s definition of *habitus* could be quite easily used to characterize what Hegel names in general “the ethical disposition”, and then in a more precise manner “the political disposition”.⁶³ Habitus, Bourdieu writes, are

Systems of lasting and transposable dispositions, structured structures that are predisposed to function as structuring structures; that is to say, as principles that generate and organize practices and representations which can be objectively adapted to their goal without necessarily supposing a conscious vision of objectives nor a purposeful

60 *EPR*, § 142, p.189 (*RPh*, p. 292).

61 Ibid., *ibid*.

62 Bourdieu 1980, p. 87.

63 See various occurrences of these expressions: *EPR*, §137, §141, §207, §268, p. 165, 186, 238, 288-9 (*RPh*, p. 256, p.287 , p.359, p.413-414)

mastery of the operations necessary to attain such ends.⁶⁴

Just like “practice” in Bourdieu’s work, Hegelian *Sittlichkeit* throws into question the division of the subjective and the objective that organizes our spontaneous perception of the social world.

Now for the second aspect of the Hegelian concept of ethnicity, its *institutional* character. Institutional thinking has a bad reputation, in particular amongst those who lay claim to the “critical” dimension of theoretical work. It is all the more suspect in that some of its chief adherents, from Carl Schmitt to Arnold Gehlen, became mired in muddy waters... I believe, however, that there is a productive usage to be made of the institutionalist problematic: Hegel offers a good example. It is often wrongly believed that institutions stifle the creativity and spontaneity of individuals and groups. Hegel helps us to combat this prejudice. First of all it is an illusion to believe that an individual on his or her own, coming up with his or her own rules for action, would be “freer” than an individual whose action is framed by an adequate institution. On the contrary, the former is more likely to be prey to “blind necessity”, such as that of the system of needs (the market economy), whose logic, if not framed by institutions, prohibits individuals from “rising above” such necessity towards an authentic social and political liberty.⁶⁵ It is only thanks to social and political institutions (which, moreover, must be constantly transformed) that individuals and social groups are capable of escaping the “blind necessity” of social reproduction. It should also be noted that the usual understanding of institutions is too narrow. By institution what is often understood is what Maurice Hauriou, the great French representative of institutionalism, called “institution-persons”, those that can be personified in one manner or another; that is, social or political institutions that Hauriou groups under the term corporative institutions.⁶⁶ But apart from these personified institutions (which are precisely “moral persons”), there are also what Hauriou names “institution-things”, and these play a major role in the structuring of social action, inasmuch as the latter takes place in a universe of “institutional facts”, as John Searle puts it.⁶⁷ I think one can argue that Hauriou’s institution-things or Searle’s institutional facts coincide with what Hegel, after Aristotle, named the “second nature” of socialized individuals; it is the “all-

.....
64 Bourdieu 1980, p. 88.

65 PM, § 532, p.262 (*Enzyklopädie*, p. 328).

66 See Hauriou 1925, pp. 96-97.

67 See Searle 2010.

pervading soul, significance and actuality of individual existence.”⁶⁸ Such “small” institutions, acting on our practices and our representations without our awareness (think of language, but also of the mass of social habits that we inherit), not only make social interaction possible, but they also contribute in a decisive manner to social *change* because they help individuals and groups distinguish between stable and unstable social intuitions and collective beliefs. Of course, Hegel did not explicitly make such a claim, and it is quite probable that he had a conservative perspective on the ethical work of institutions. However the conceptual construction that establishes his doctrine of objective spirit proposes productive orientations to any philosophy paying attention to the movement of society.

Translation: Oliver Feltham

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68 *EPR*, § 151, p.195 (*RPh*, p. 301).

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Substance Subjectivized

Zdravko Kobe

Abstract: The paper provides a methodological reading of Hegel's programmatic declaration on substance and subject according to which the statement should be understood as a call to develop a new conceptual regime that would enable us to think what the inherited conceptual made unthinkable. The paper first tries to decipher the passage in question by putting it in perspective of the philosophical debate of the time, using Bardili, Reinhold, Jacobi, and earlier Hegel's writings; in the second part, Hegel's declaration is presented as the final answer to Spinozism, this time understood against Schelling and as a defence of consequent thinking; at the end, some general implications are briefly considered.

Keywords: Substance, Subjectivity, Hegel, Spinoza, Metaphysics, Understanding, Reason

In the Preface to the *Phenomenology of Spirit* Hegel makes the famous programmatic declaration:

In my view, which must be justified only by the exposition of the system itself, everything depends on comprehending and expressing the true not [merely] as *substance*, but also equally as *subject*.¹

The declaration – shorthanded into the slogan: Substance is subject – has acquired a special status in the scholarly tradition. Hegel was extremely cautious in using first person singular and rarely spoke of what *his* philosophical intentions were. Moreover, the statement was made in a unique historical conjunction, at the moment as Hegel, under utterly insecure personal conditions and in the middle of deep theoretical hesitations, just completed the composition of the *Phenomenology* and realised for the first time that he was in possession of a system of his own. It is a place of strategic importance marking, as it were, the endpoint of Hegel's development. And since the Preface was intended not for the *Phenomenology* specifically, but for the entire *System of Science* which was supposed to follow, it strangely serves as an opening to a work that has never been written. It may well be the sole point offering a fresh, self-confident view over Hegel's philosophical system as a whole.

Hegel's declaration is of course so general that it lends itself to a variety of interpretations. Indeed, its openness seems to be deliberate,

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¹ Hegel 1977c, p. 9–10. – Hegel translations are occasionally modified without particular indication.

for in the very same Preface Hegel himself provides several readings, all of them equally convincing, including the one that refers to the standard S–P sentence form. As if Hegel – the supreme joker, who reputedly stressed that philosophical insights cannot be reduced to general formulas and yet proved to be extremely skilful precisely in inventing formulas for general use, as if Hegel wanted to illustrate his other thesis how it is only through the effort of concept that a thought acquires a definite content. Or, as is if he wanted to show once more that every real event in philosophy comes about as a combined result of many simultaneous strands of thoughts. In this sense, while many lines of interpretation can be considered correct at the same time, none of them is by itself sufficient to provide a complete explanation.

However, there is one line of interpretation that clearly stands apart: the one that reads Hegel's declaration with reference to Spinoza. It was Spinoza after all who was renown as the philosopher of substance.² It is therefore only natural to read Hegel's statement with reference to his treatment of substance in the *Science of Logic*, or to rely on his presentation of Spinoza in the *Lectures on the History of Philosophy* – especially since both references appear to comply almost perfectly with it. In the *Science of Logic*, for instance, the *substance* stands for the last and the highest thought-determination before Objective logic passes into *Subjective* logic. And in retrospect Hegel offers a description that strictly corresponds to our programmatic declaration:

The only possible refutation of Spinozism can only consist, therefore, in first acknowledging its standpoint as essential and necessary and then raising it to a higher standpoint on the strength of *its own resources*. ... The exposition in the preceding Book of substance as leading to the *concept* is, therefore, the one and only true refutation of Spinozism.³

In a very similar vein, Hegel presents the situation in his *History of Philosophy*:

The general point to notice here is that thinking, or the spirit, has to place itself at the standpoint of Spinozism. This idea of Spinoza's has to be acknowledged to be true and well-grounded.

2 Cf. Hegel 2010a, p. 511: "The philosophy that assumes its position at the standpoint of *substance* and stops there is the *system of Spinoza*."

3 Hegel 2010a, p. 512.

There is an absolute substance, and it is what is true. But it is not yet the whole truth, for the substance must be thought of inwardly active and alive.⁴

Note that in both instances, the standpoint of substance is acknowledged to be true and necessary, it is deficient merely to the extent that it lacks activity or subjectivity. Therefore, so Hegel's argument would go, when one begins to philosophise one has to start by being Spinozist; yet it is of even greater importance that in philosophising one does not stop at this standpoint of mere substance: instead, one has to produce a true refutation of Spinozism and, by doing so, to conceive the true as subject as well.

As we can see, this line of interpretation fits nicely into Hegel's project and is textually well-supported. Indeed, it has been able to produce numerous valuable insights, for instance by Sandkaulen and, in a somehow different respect, Bowman, to mention just the two.⁵ Yet without any intention of discarding their relevance in what follows we are going to propose a somehow different reading. Hegel's confrontation with Spinoza is often presented at the level of doctrinal content where the main thrust of his critique is supposed to be directed against the non-existence of independent personality in Spinoza's system, or against the presumed indeterminateness of his one substance.⁶ Instead, we are going to claim that in his programmatic declaration in the Preface Hegel has a different image of Spinoza in mind – an image that was basically shaped by the so called *Pantheism Controversy*, portraying him as the iconic proponent of a certain way of thinking, of a specific *finite* conceptual regime which Hegel interchangeably called representation [*Vorstellung*], understanding, or reflection. Read in this way Hegel's programmatic declaration would basically boil down to a demand that we should – in agreement with what was vigorously advocated by Horstmann⁷ – start to "think differently",

4 Hegel 1990, p. 154.

5 Cf. Sandkaulen 2008; Bowman 2012.

6 It may be added that any presentation of Hegel's refutation of Spinoza is considerably complicated by Hegel's habit of conflating the doctrine actually defended by Spinoza with the views taken by his "friends", in particular Jacobi and Schelling. For instance, when Hegel comments on the absolute "abyss" that all determinate being is thrown into, he is first and foremost referring to Philosophy of Identity defended by Schelling. And while it may well be true that Spinoza's substance necessarily leads to Schelling's Absolute, so that they prove to be inseparable after all, it is still reasonable to distinguish them.

7 Cf. Horstmann 2006, p. 73: "Whatever one makes of the details of Hegel's philosophy, we should always remember that it is principally concerned with inaugurating a new conception of rationality, with grounding and elaborating a new kind of philosophical thinking." Cf. Horstmann 1999, p. 278, and Horstmann 1991.

change our “paradigm of rationality”.

In the paper, we will first try to decipher the passage in question by putting it in perspective of the philosophical debate of the time, including Hegel's earlier writings; in the second part, Hegel's declaration is presented as the ultimate answer to Spinozism, this time understood against Schelling and as a defence of consequent thinking; at the end, some general implications are briefly considered.

I

Let us now take a closer look at Hegel's declaration:

In my view, which must be justified only by the exposition of the system itself, everything depends on comprehending and expressing the true not [merely] as *substance*, but also equally as *subject*. At the same time, it is to be observed that substantiality comprises within itself the universal, or the *immediacy of knowledge*, as well as that [immediacy] which is *being* or immediacy *for* knowledge. – If the conception of God as the one substance shocked the age in which it was proclaimed, the reason for this was on the one hand an instinctive awareness that in such a view self-consciousness merely perishes and is not preserved. However, on the other hand, the opposite view, which clings to thought as thought, to *universality*, is the very same simplicity, is undifferentiated, unmoved substantiality. And if, thirdly, thought does unite itself with the being of substance as such, and grasps immediacy or intuition as thinking, it still depends on that whether this intellectual intuition does not again fall back into inert simplicity, and does not present actuality itself in a non-actual manner.⁸

The main lines of Hegel's picture seem rather obvious. After making the programmatic declaration, he draws a portrait of recent history of philosophy, starting with Spinoza, the philosopher of the one substance who shocked the opinions of his time to such an extent that he draw upon himself un excommunication from the Jewish community; and ending most probably with Schelling who indeed acknowledged the virtues of intellectual intuition, yet nevertheless fell back into the same inert simplicity where according to Hegel all cows are black. But why does Hegel feel a special need to stress that there are two different modes of immediacy in Spinoza, in correspondence to the two attributes

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⁸ Hegel 1977c, p. 9–10.

of extension and thought? In what sense does the introduction of intellectual intuition represent a breakthrough? In relation to what? And to whom does the middle term in this three-stage story refer to?

If we start by answering the last question, the first name that comes to mind is of course Fichte, the philosopher of subjectivity⁹ – in particular since he explicitly defended his doctrine of science as the only possible alternative to Spinozist dogmatism.¹⁰ And as we will see, in a sense, it is Fichte. We have to remind ourselves, however, that Fichte himself never clung to “thought as thought” (or perhaps “thinking as thinking”) used here as a paradigmatic description for the so called opposite position. In fact, the collocation “Denken as Denken” was the trademark of *rational realism* presented by Gottfried Christoff Bardili in his *Outline of the First Logic* in 1800. Why Bardili, then?

The details of Bardili's *Logic* can be left aside, for it is not certain if Hegel even read the book.¹¹ But he was familiar with Reinhold, who after yet another conversion enthusiastically defended Bardili's views in his many volumes of the *Contributions to an Easier Overview of the State of Philosophy at he Beginning of 19th Century*. In the preface to the first volume Reinhold sketches out the development of philosophy after Kant, claiming that through recent contributions to Transcendental Idealism its “*cycle [Kreislau] is fully completed*” (mark the words!).¹² With Fichte and Schelling it has gone full circle only to find itself trapped in the bounds of subjectivity: so a new move is needed now, not a step forward, but “an essential step *backwards*”, namely towards the analysis of “thinking itself” where the main obstacle of philosophy is supposed to come from. And it is there that, according to Reinhold, Bardili achieved something of considerable philosophical value.

Two points of importance to our present purpose should be noted here. First, in the third *Contribution* Reinhold deplores the “deep-seated habit”, familiar in particular “among philosopher of our time”, to conceive

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⁹ Cf., for instance, Yovel & Hegel 2005, p. 97.

¹⁰ Cf. Fichte 1982, p. 6ff.

¹¹ It may be noted – out of respect, and due to obvious solidarity with Hegel's own project of founding philosophy by developing a new logic – that in his Preface Bardili too explicitly refers to Kant who, in his public declaration against Fichte in 1799, mocked the Doctrine of Science as a vain effort, that had accordingly never been tested, to “extract the real object out of *pure logic*”. But if it has never been tested, asks Bardili, how can we know it is a vain effort? In fact, Bardili defended the ability of thinking to produce something real, for if there is anything universal and strictly necessary, it can be grounded in thinking only. Consequently he proposed a new start for philosophy based on a fundamental analysis of “thinking as thinking”, prior to and independent of its aplication to any object. Cf. Bardili 1800, pp. XI–XVI.

¹² Reinhold 1801, p. VI.

of thinking as “*merely subjective activity*”. For that reason, even logic itself is often treated as a “science of merely *subjective forms* – that in themselves have *no real truth*”.¹³ If we consider the state logic is in, there may be even some truth in this judgment; but if so, Reinhold adds, then

the *reformation of philosophy* would necessarily have to start *with the correction* of the previous *science of thinking*, ... – *by introducing* a completely *new* investigation of thinking, as thinking.¹⁴

Second, in rational realism the essence of thinking as thinking was inherently linked to *calculation* and to the *mathematical method* in general. “He who calculates, thinks,” declares Bardili at the very beginning of his investigation.¹⁵ Similarly, since it is only in mathematics that thinking was able to resist all the attacks of “*sceptics* and *dogmatists*”, philosophy too should, according to Reinhold, look first “at the application of thinking *in mathematics*”.¹⁶ In this way Reinhold was led to the following definition:

In calculation and by calculation *thinking as thinking* describes itself under the *character of infinite repeatability of one and the same as one and the same in the one and the same and by one and the same*, or as *pure identity* – and it is exactly this infinite repeatability, or pure identity, that the essence, or *inner character of thinking*, as *thinking* consists in.¹⁷

At the end, Reinhold’s commitment to rational realism can be summarized as the project to undertake a renovation of philosophy by developing a fundamentally new science of real logic wherein thinking is modelled along the guiding lines of mathematics.

Indeed, such a project bears obvious resemblance to Hegel’s mature science of logic, with a small, if important difference, that Hegel developed his program *against* the mathematical method. So, before

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13 Reinhold 1801, pp. 96–97. – Cf. Reinhold 1801, p. 95: »If, and to what extent, the application of thinking as thinking is *subjective*, *objective* or *both at once* – that should be determined only by the investigation in question.”

14 Reinhold 1801, p. 98.

15 Bardili 1800, p. 1.

16 Reinhold 1801, p. 102.

17 Reinhold 1801, p. 106. – Cf. Bardili 1800, p. 3.

we return back to Hegel we have to introduce another player into our plot: Friedrich Heinrich Jacobi. In 1799, in the heat of the Atheism Controversy, Jacobi composed an open letter to Fichte accusing the latter’s philosophy as nihilism. Once more, the details of this writing can be left aside. For our present purpose it is only relevant that at the begging of the letter Jacobi made a strange observation suggesting that materialism and idealism – ultimately Spinozism and the system of Fichte – in the final analysis boil down to the same. True, they begin from opposite starting points, one from self-determining matter and the other from self-determining intelligence; however, they both proceed in exactly the same manner, so that in the end, that is “for a *power of thought* that *will think to the end*”,¹⁸ they produce the same result, incidentally both ending in nihilism.¹⁹

In order to understand Jacobi’s equalization it has to be taken into account that, for Jacobi, it is the formal structure that determines the character of a philosophical system. In his view, for instance, the whole system of Spinoza is in a way contained already in the consequent use of the *mos geometricus*. In the second edition of the *Concerning the Doctrine of Spinoza*, he writes:

Under “mechanism” I include every concatenation of purely efficient causes. Such concatenation is *eo ipso* a *necessary* one, just as a necessary concatenation, *qua* necessary, is by that fact a *mechanistic* one.²⁰

But since the usual method of logical reasoning proceeds according to equally necessary relations, the same mechanistic logic reigns in the realm of thought as well. Nowhere is this more evident than precisely in Spinoza according to whom “the order and connection of ideas is the same as the order and connection of things”. If ideas essentially behave in the same way as the paradigmatic billiard balls, we have to acknowledge the existence of something like a “mechanism of ideas”. Or alternatively, granted that mechanism and materialism may be considered interchangeable, we could speak of “materialism without

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18 Jacobi 1994, p. 502. – Again, mark the words!

19 In fact, Jacobi reaches this conclusion in a three-step argument. First, materialism and idealism have the same dogmatic formal structure. Second, this formal structure prevents us to reach to anything real outside the realm of thought. Third, since this equally applies to the realm of thought as well, we are left with nothing real. Materialism is idealism which is nihilism: dogmatism as such is nihilism.

20 Jacobi 1994, p. 366.

matter”.²¹ Spinoza's and Fichte's philosophy are to that extent just two different sides of the same dogmatic, mechanistic system. In any case, it was through such representation of “an *inverted* Spinozism”, adds Jacobi, that he first found entry into Fichte's *Doctrine of Science*.²²

After considering Jacobi's reduction of Fichte, we are now in a position to return to Hegel. But instead of going directly to the programmatic declaration in the Preface to the *Phenomenology*, we are going first to examine an analogous statement Hegel made just a few years earlier. The reasons for this final detour will, I hope, soon be evident. In 1802, working in close collaboration with Schelling, Hegel published the article *Faith and Knowledge, or Reflective Philosophy of Subjectivity in the complete range of its forms as Kantian, Jacobian, and Fichtean Philosophy* that was likewise devoted to the latest developments in philosophy. Here too, we are not going to dwell upon the details, especially since we can here safely assume that the reader is sufficiently familiar both with Schelling's new Philosophy of Identity as well as with the main line of Hegel's argument. Let us just observe that in spite of the differences that may exist among the tree philosophers, namely Kant, Fichte and Jacobi, Hegel in essence claims that they all share the same “fundamental principle” of “absolutisation of the finite”: instead of acknowledging the contradictory nature of everything finite, they all treat the finite as true in itself, limit reason to the finite forms, and make it thus incapable of grasping the true, infinite absolute.²³ Concluding his examination, Hegel wrote:

In their totality, the philosophies we have considered have in this way recast the dogmatism of being into dogmatism of thinking, the metaphysics of objectivity into the metaphysics of subjectivity. Thus, through this whole philosophical revolution the old dogmatism and the metaphysics of reflection have in the

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21 Jacobi 1994, p. 502. – Jacobi proposed to describe Spinoza's substance as a cube with being (the objective) at the upper and thought (the subjective) at the bottom side, where all the points of both sides are exactly bound together with invisible threads. The point is that by turning this cube upside down, that is by transfiguring materialism into idealism, everything would have looked exactly the same as before. “Strange,” adds Jacobi, “that the thought has never occurred to Spinoza of inverting his philosophical cube.”

22 Here, we cannot discuss the question whether Jacobi's characterization of Fichte's Doctrine of Science was justified. To our judgment, it was completely unwarranted, since if there was anyone that before Hegel strived to develop a different conceptual model appropriate to think freedom, it was Fichte. But this is not the point here.

23 Cf. Hegel 1977b, p. 62: “The fundamental principle common to the philosophies of Kant, Jacobi and Fichte is, then, the absoluteness of finitude and, resulting from it, the absolute antithesis of finitude and infinity, reality and ideality, the sensuous and the supersensuous, and beyondness of what is truly real and absolute.”

first place merely taken on the hue of inwardness, of the new and fashionable culture. ... This metaphysics of subjectivity has run through the complete cycle of its forms in the philosophies of Kant, Jacobi, and Fichte ... Therewith the external possibility directly arises that the true philosophy should emerge out of this formation, nullify the absoluteness of the finitudes and present itself all at once as perfected appearance, with all its riches subjected to the totality. ... this completeness has now been achieved.²⁴

The sequence above runs in such a striking parallel to our statement in the Preface to the *Phenomenology* that, we believe, it can be considered its tacit original. As such it makes clear for whom the middle term stands for and what his precise deficiency was: between Spinoza and Schelling there is Fichte, to be sure – yet not Fichte alone, but the whole bunch of contemporary philosophers, including Kant, Jacobi and everyone else. Why such a harsh verdict? Because for Hegel the transcendental revolution was no real revolution after all! The philosophies of Kant and Fichte remained equally dogmatic and equally metaphysical as the former varieties of Spinozism, since they continued to rely exclusively on the conceptual tools inherited from the philosophical tradition. The change they initiated was at best superficial, a matter of colour only, or a question of fashion. They simply turned the metaphysics of objectivity into metaphysics of subjectivity – while, and this is crucial, retaining the same *dogmatic, mechanistic method of thinking*.

Hegel in essence subscribed to the diagnosis given by Jacobi: Transcendental Idealism is nothing but inverted Spinozism that left the essential structure of the philosophical cube intact. However, at the same time he extended it to include Jacobi himself. In spite of all the criticism addressed against the paradigmatic philosophical figures, Hegel argues, Jacobi too accepted their fundamental presuppositions regarding the validity of finite conceptual forms; and by doing so, he in fact consolidated the exclusive right of the traditional dogmatic mode of thinking. In any case, nothing of philosophical importance can be achieved by simply fleeing from being to thinking and from one immediacy to another, for thinking – at least *such* thinking – is still but one of the attributes of the same substance. So Hegel claims that these “philosophies of subjectivity” in the final analysis remained at the standpoint substance: they include “the very same simplicity”, the

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24 Hegel 1977b, p. 190.

“unmoved substantiality”.

But there is a positive result to this sequence as well. With the philosophies of Kant, Fichte and Jacobi, the subjective “cycle is fully completed” and its incapacity to grasp the true finally manifest. The outward conditions are thereby established to undertake the true renovation of philosophy, and we may assume that, this time, it is bound to involve a thorough investigation of the thinking itself. In order to succeed, however, the true science of reason must dispel its fascination with the mathematical method, since according to Hegel, and contrary to what was suggested by Bardili or Reinhold, it was precisely by trying to reduce thinking to calculating that philosophy remained trapped in the closure of substance. So, relying on the assessment implicitly provided by Jacobi, Hegel wanted to carry out Bardili’s project of a new foundation of thinking against Bardili’s initial intentions.

In *Faith in Knowledge* Hegel clearly expected this decisive revolution to come from Schelling’s direction. The brief indication given here in guise of a conclusion, together with Hegel’s earlier self-confident descriptions contained in the *Difference Essay*, strongly suggest that for him “true philosophy” included a kind of objective scepticism²⁵ denying that the finite truly exist, and leading to something like “self-annihilation of reflection”,²⁶ whereby the limitation of the finite thought-determinations would finally be left behind opening the way to a positive cognition of the absolute. The hopes for an imminent revolution ended shortly, however. In the Preface to the *Phenomenology*, which marked the public break between the two philosophical friends, Hegel continued to acknowledge that the steps taken by Schelling were steps in the right direction. However, if we can rely on the hint implicit in the construction of the sentence, Schelling did not go far enough in that direction and as a consequence fell back into the same inert simplicity he had started from.

According to Hegel’s account, Schelling overcame the strict division that was separating being and thought in the dogmatic metaphysics (Kant, Fichte, and Jacobi included). This is by itself sufficient to annihilate the traditional representational model where idea and thing, subject and object inhabit two parallel worlds without any interaction between them. Yet the very mention of intellectual intuition which is supposed to “apprehend intuition as thinking” suggests that Hegel

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25 For a presentation of Hegel’s relation to scepticism in Jena period, see for instance Vieweg 1999.

26 Cf. Hegel 1977a, p. 96: “So far as reflection makes itself its won object, its supreme law, given to it by reason and moving it to become reason, is tot nullify itself. Like everything else, reflection has standing only in the absolute; but as reflection it stands in opposition to it. In order to gain standing, therefore, reflection must give itself the law of self-destruction.”

has something more specific in his mind. We are inclined to believe that, here, Hegel is referring to the subject theme raised in the Remark of the §§ 76 and 77 of the *Critique of Judgment* where Kant, discussing the inevitable limitations of discursive understanding to explain the phenomenon of life, invoked the idea of an “intellectual intuition” and “intuitive understanding”. Schelling’s admiration for the Remark is well known. Starting from his earliest writings, he was full of praise in its regard, claiming for instance that nowhere on so few pages so many deep thoughts were brought together; his philosophy of nature can be viewed as a prolonged effort to develop an appropriate, that is, non-mechanistic or speculative conceptual model for explaining natural phenomena.

At first Hegel supported Schelling’s endeavour. But soon he felt obliged to distance himself from what the Philosophy of Identity actually turned into. On the one hand, Hegel grew positively bored of the speculative excursions into philosophy of nature conducted by Schelling and his pupils. Such constructions struck him as arbitrary formalism: they came about “through the shapeless repetition of one and the same, only externally applied to diverse materials”.²⁷ Note how exactly this allegation rephrases Bardili’s definition of thinking! On the other hand, Hegel considered Schelling’s absolute method, that started with the finite, exposed its inner contradiction, only to end in “this single insight that in the absolute everything is the same”,²⁸ simply void and in vain. No *determined knowledge* is gained by such “dissolving of what is distinct and determinate” and throwing everything without difference into the same “abyss of vacuity”. There is no movement, no life, nothing determined therein. And if this is to be the idea of the absolute, it is definitely presented here in a “non-actual form”.

Schelling’s basic orientation was according to Hegel correct. He set out to overcome the limitation of finite determinations, to unite intuition with thinking, to apprehend “the being of substance as subject”, to grasp it as a “living substance” which is “in truth subject, or what is the same, which is in truth actual”.²⁹ However, this is not enough. Everything depends on comprehending the substance as subject, true; still, Hegel adds – *es kommt noch darauf an*, “whether this intellectual intuition does not again fall back into inert simplicity, and does not present actuality itself in a non-actual manner”. And this is where Schelling failed!

Perhaps this failure was inevitable, for “in its begging” every new

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27 Hegel 1977c, p. 8.

28 Hegel 1977c, p. 9.

29 Hegel 1977c, p. 9.

science is in a position of weakness compared to the material richness and the detailed formal structure of the old one; it can therefore easily happen that “the formalism which recent philosophy denounces” only “reappears in its midst”. But then, the time has *now really* come to elaborate an actual presentation of actuality! This is the Gordian knot Hegel set out to cut.

II

In the proposed interpretation Hegel’s programmatic declaration was read as an injunction to develop a new philosophy, after the so called metaphysics has completed its full cycle, and after the first attempt made by Schelling relapsed in the same formalistic dogmatism. In part, his renovation call demanded a much closer attention to be paid to the actual study of nature. Instead of shapelessly repeating one and the same, as Schelling and his epigones presumably did, the “expansion” has to come about “trough one and the same having spontaneously assumed different shapes”, that is to say, through an immanent self-differentiation analogous to the one that can be observed in self-transformation of a concrete living organism.³⁰ But what is even more important, indeed decisive, is the need to invent a new mode of thinking, an altogether new regime of rationality that would be able to think what from the standpoint of the traditional regime of thought proved to be unthinkable. Against the mechanistic logic of necessity that used to rely on the mathematical method, a new organicistic logic of freedom is needed. In this sense Hegel’s declaration may be understood as an ultimate response to the challenge set by the Spinozism Controversy.³¹ Let us explain.

In *Concerning the Doctrine of Spinoza*, which created a huge intellectual turmoil at the time of its original publication in 1785, Jacobi reported of his conversation with Lessing that allegedly included the following exchange:

Lessing: There is no other philosophy than the philosophy of Spinoza.
Jacobi: That might be true. For the determinist, if he wants to be

30 According to the remarkable, well argued and finally convincing proposal made by Förster, Hegel’s distancing from Schelling may have been influenced by his interest taken in Jena biological garden set up by Goethe, cf. Förster 2007. In addition, Förster drew attention to Goethe’s *Metamorphosis of Plants*. Goethe in retrospect commented, for instance, “that his thought does not separate itself from the objects, that the elements of the objects, that the intuitions go into them and are intimately permeated by them, that his intuiting itself thinking, his thinking intuiting is” (cf. Förster 2007, p. 120).

31 For an excellent presentation of the debate and its implications, see Beiser 1987, pp. 44–126.

consistent, must become a fatalist: the rest than follows by itself.³²

Philosophy was here used as general name for the project to provide an explanation according to the criterion of sufficient reason for everything. In that respect it was tantamount to the standpoint of rational knowledge. But since this knowledge proceeds by giving reasons with necessary validity, the standpoint of philosophy unavoidably results in a fatalistic world where there is no place left for freedom – together with everything that is usually associated to subjectivity, including such phenomena as beauty, love, or life.

Hegel basically subscribed to the relevance of Jacobi’s diagnosis.³³ However, as we have seen, he attributed the fatalistic consequence not to the project of rational justification as such, but rather to its inherited habit to rely exclusively on the “mode of cognition distinctive of understanding”.³⁴ The imminent task for philosophy was thus to introduce a different mode of cognition that would not be limited to the finite. From the standpoint of understanding philosophy had to rise to the standpoint of reason.³⁵ Yet as we have seen, Hegel could not be satisfied with Schelling’s absolute method consisting in the mere self-annihilation of the finite. True, in the realm of the infinite, the reflective mode of cognition is bound to produce an explicit contradiction. On the other hand, if the reflection is simply abandoned, as happened in Schelling, the absolute reached in this way not only becomes completely undetermined, the philosophy as a project of rational explanation itself is given up. What Schelling proposed as an attempt to save philosophy was in fact indistinguishable from Jacobi’s outright rejection of it.³⁶ Their respective positions differed only in that Schelling’s two-stage path took longer, for he first assumed the standpoint of philosophy and only later

32 Jacobi 1994, p. 187.

33 Cf. Hegel 2009, p. 7: “Jacobi ... recognized with Spinoza that this view is the ultimate and true result of all thinking, and that every consistent system of philosophy must in the end led to Spinozism.”

34 Cf. Hegel 1970, 20, p. 163: “One may concede that demonstration leads to Spinozism, if under this expression we understand the mode of cognition distinctive of understanding [die Weise des verständigen Erkennens].” Cf. Hegel 1990, p. 156: “To render his philosophy mathematically conclusive and consistent, Spinoza presented it according to a geometrical method, but one that is only appropriate for the finite sciences of the understanding.”

35 Cf. Bowman 2013, p. 31: “[Hegel] therefore accepts the diagnosis of Kant and Jacobi, while rejecting their cure. ... Being *is* intelligibility, but intelligibility is not what we thought it was – nor, for that matter, is being.”

36 In the *Jacobi Review* Hegel compares Jacobi’s sensuous intuition of immediate knowledge to Schelling’s intellectual intuition, declaring both to be “equally abstract”, cf. Hegel 2009, p. 7.

threw it away.³⁷ However, this actually speaks in favour of Jacobi. Instead of indulging in futile process of reducing the determined finite to the undetermined infinite, it would be in fact more reasonable to surrender philosophy right away and directly embrace faith, as Jacobi did.

Considering the final outcome of Schelling's proposal Hegel was thus led to conclude that philosophy couldn't abandon Spinoza without abandoning itself at the same time. That gave a new meaning to the verdict regarding Spinozism, namely, that to be a philosopher is simply to be consequent, or as Jacobi put it, "to think to the end".³⁸ And the task of philosophy grew thereby even harder, since now philosophy had not only to start from the standpoint of Spinoza, but in a sense it had to remain within it, while still be able to produce the dimension of subjectivity.

In any case, Hegel now came to understand his philosophical programme in opposition to Schelling, as a defence of finite determinations against an undetermined infinite. At a certain point in the later Jena period Hegel affirmed that the true itself is structured as reflection:

Reason is, therefore, misunderstood when reflection is excluded from the true, and is not grasped as a positive moment of the absolute.³⁹

This strategic decision⁴⁰ clearly commanded a series of other positions to be taken, ranging from affirmation of the negativity internal to the absolute itself,⁴¹ over positive treatment of contradiction,

37 In the *Jacobi Review* Hegel implies that in fact Schelling (since he probably refers to Schelling) already produced this determinate result, only to discard it after the fact, cf. Hegel 2009, p. 9: "Thus the difference between determining the absolute as substance and determining it as spirit boils down to the question whether thinking, having annihilated its finitudes and mediations, negated its negations, and thus comprehended the one absolute, is conscious of what it has actually achieved in its cognition of absolute substance, or whether it lacks such consciousness."

38 The expression used by Jacobi is "die *Denkkraft*, die *ausdenkt*"; it literally means something like "the power of thinking that thinks to the end, thinks it through, endures in thinking".

39 Hegel 1997c, p. 11–12.

40 Reflection is a extremely complex notion whose vicissitudes by itself embody the complexity of Hegel's position. In general, it stands for the mode of thinking of understanding, with a special emphasis given to the question of determinacy (the formula *omnis determinatio negatio* was often named Principle of Reflection). However, we must not forget that in Kant the reflective judgment was designed to capture the specificity of alternative, nondeterministic mode of predication, and that under this heading reflection, even the so called external reflection found its way into the structure of Hegel's essence.

41 Cf. Hegel 2009, p. 8: "Everything depends here on a correct understanding of the status and significance of negativity."

to dynamisation of the fixed thought-determinations. All of them, however, can be summed up in the injunction that the result of the self-destruction of the reflection has itself to be grasped within the mode of reflection, as a *concept*. The point where Schelling abandoned reflection is precisely the point where we must stick to determinate thinking – with which philosophy stands or falls. The most explicit formulation of this fundamental program is perhaps to be found in the opening paragraphs of the later *Encyclopaedia Logic*. Speaking of the activity of thinking and of the aspiration of philosophy to find its satisfactions, Hegel notes:

But while going about its business it so happens that thinking becomes entangled in contradictions. It loses itself in the fixed non-identity of its thoughts and in the process does not attain itself but instead remains caught up in its opposite. The higher aspiration goes against this result of this thinking distinctive of mere understanding, and is grounded therein that thinking does not let go of itself, that even in the this conscious loss of its being at home with itself, it remains true to itself, 'so *that it may overcome*', and in the very thinking brings about the resolution of its own contradiction.⁴²

Since every thought-determination is essentially affected with negativity, any consequent use of understanding is bound to bring it out in the form of explicit contradiction.⁴³ This is the major lesson given by Kant in his Dialectic, acknowledged by Jacobi in his critique of philosophy, and made use of by Schelling for his absolute method. However, while the manifest contradiction led all off them to a certain devaluation of thinking, declaring that its concepts are incapable of grasping what is true – be it under the guise of restricting their validity to mere subjectivity (Kant), rejecting them altogether in favour of an immediate knowledge (Jacobi), or trading them for the equally abstract absolute identity of $A = A$ – Hegel in contrast followed the suit of Bardili and vehemently rejected this kind of logical despair. "Thinking did not need to fall into the *misology*".⁴⁴ On the contrary, this is precisely the point where the thinking has to remain true to itself, without reservation, the point where we have

42 Hegel 2010b, p. 39. – For a similar emphasis given to the passage, cf. Kreines 2015, pp. 197, 245.

43 Hegel often said that understanding was not only led, but actually misled into contradiction by reason: *misled* or *seduced* since the contradiction violates the basic principle of understanding and works therefore against it; and *by reason*, since reason is supposed to be already at work within understanding. Cf. Hegel 1977a, p. 95.

44 Hegel 2010b, p. 39.

to think on, withstand the contradiction, and by thinking it through bring about its resolution.

Here we cannot go into any details of this decisive injunction. Three short remarks will have to suffice. First, a close reading of Hegel's early Jena writings suggest that, contrary to the prevailing opinion, he already at that time considered a similar standpoint of fidelity to thinking. In the concluding remarks to *Faith and Knowledge*, for instance, Hegel called for a "speculative Good Friday" where "the pure concept would give philosophical existence" to what used to be just a moral precept or feeling.⁴⁵ Since the historic Good Friday is a story of annihilation, of the willing death of God himself, and of his subsequent resurrection in glory, the speculative Good Friday seems to command a reading that involves a kind of persistence of thinking in what is equivalent to its death – that is, a resurrection of the concept transformed out of its contradiction.⁴⁶

Second, if we look for a brief illustration of what is involved in such transformation, we can find one directly in the Preface to the *Phenomenology* where Hegel discusses the transitions from representation to thought and from thought to concept.⁴⁷ It is interesting that Hegel starts his sketch from an apparently naïve situation in which representations are immersed in everyday life and serve not so much as notions representing things of the world, but principally as tools that help us find our way around. Within this picture, which bears a strange resemblance to Wittgenstein's description of language games, representations make us familiar with the things, yet strictly speaking they do not convey into us any cognition of them since at this level the necessary distinction between the two realms is simply non-existent.

Such separation happens only with the entrance of understanding that cuts the living structure of the world, tears the representation out of its initial place and breaks it up into its elements. Such analysis transforms representations into thoughts, which are according to Hegel "themselves familiar, fixed, and inert determinations".⁴⁸ At this point one would expect Hegel to lament over the deficiencies of understanding. Instead, he holds a laudation praising understanding as "the most

45 Hegel 1977b, pp. 190–191.

46 For a closer elaboration cf. Kobe 2005.

47 The illustration is paradigmatic since the sequence in question stands for the operation of philosophy us such, cf. EPS 1, 52; 8, 73–74: "The distinction between representations and thoughts has a special significance, because it can generally be said that philosophy does nothing but transform representations into thoughts – and, indeed, beyond that, the mere thought into the concept."

48 Hegel 1977c, p. 18.

astonishing and mightiest of powers, or rather of the absolute power"! This should make us pause. What makes it so absolute? It is not merely the fact that understanding transforms a given content into a possession of the self, or that it exemplifies "the power of the negative", for this it has in common with reason. Its particular absoluteness has rather to do with "the separated and the non-actual as such", with the "making-itself-non-actual" where understanding precisely differs from reason. It should be read therefore as the ontological priority of understanding over reason, which echoes in Hegel's repeated affirmations that understanding can be something without reason, while reason is nothing without understanding. And this is why the true *has to be* necessarily grasped as substance first.⁴⁹

Thoughts are then finally transformed into concepts. This operation is described as "far harder"⁵⁰ since it has to work against the fixity of the determinations that were previously posited by understanding itself. But on the other hand, no new capacity really enters the stage, what is required is only that understanding, this tremendous power of the negative "looks the negative in the face", "tarries with it", that "it endures" in what otherwise would mean its death, that is to say – in contradiction, and "maintains itself in it". In fact, one may say that in facing the contradiction understanding faces only itself. After all it was understanding that posited the mortifying determinations; and it is the very necessity of thinking, which is to say of understanding again that has brought it in contradiction. In a sense understanding is forced to choose – between the necessity of its particular positions and the necessity of its universal laws.⁵¹ In order to "maintain itself" the power of thinking is therefore forced to think on, assume the contradiction, and by tarrying with the negative convert it into being.

This power is identical with what we earlier called the subject.⁵²

At this point understanding may be said to become reason.

49 Similar point are on many occasions made by Bowman, cf. for instance Bowman 2103, pp. 7, 80, or 189: "Finite cognition is a constitutive moment of the (infinte) cognition of the Idea." – The same applies to Kreines, cf. for instance Kreines 2015, p. 248: "Hegel agrees that the very project of reasoning or theoretical inquiry must begin with a substantial commitment, whose violation would mean giving up inquiry. The beginning is *epistemically necessary*, in this respect."

50 Cf. Hegel 1977c, p. 18.

51 Cf. Hegel 2010b, p. 57.

52 Hegel 1977c, p. 19.

However, this is only a figure of speech, since what is called reason has always already been operative in the guise of understanding. It is therefore more proper to say that substance becomes subject to the extent that thinking simply thinks the true as substance, yet thinks it all the way down, and endures in thinking even in the face of contradiction.

And third, in the description above there was a point when the moment of decision was invoked. In fact, in a situation of inner contradiction, especially when the contradiction is not arbitrary, and even if the sides seem to be of unequal importance, such as above, it is impossible to find a resolution by the means of an internal logical necessity alone. The resolution can be brought about by something excessive only, and that can be supplied to thinking only by including the instance of subject, through a gesture of subjectivation. Hegel was explicit enough about that. In his official discussion on method, in the chapter on the absolute idea at the end of *Science of Logic*, he described the stages of the immanent progress of the concept, paying particular attention to the varieties of negativity. At the stage of absolute negativity, corresponding to the point of undecidability mentioned above, Hegel comments:

Now the negativity just considered constitutes the turning point of the movement of the concept. It is the simple point of the negative self-reference...⁵³

This is the *turning point*, for at this point thinking has to turn its scope away from the objective content of thought-determination and to the subjective form of thinking itself. It is the point where the subject of thought is forced to assume the task of thinking in the first person and force a resolution.⁵⁴ This is the point where substance subjectivizes.⁵⁵

.....
53 Hegel 2010a, p. 745.

54 Regarding the place of decision in Hegel's logic of concept, cf. Bourgeois 1992, p. 91: "Contrary to the usual interpretations ... Hegelian dialectic not only tolerates, but by its very meaning requires, in its essential *necessity*, its anchoring in the *contingency of the sensuous this* and in the *liberty of the decision*."

55 Initially it was intended that, at this place, a close comparison with Spinoza's *political* philosophy would follow. We would have tried to show that there is a close similarity not only between Hegel's and Spinoza's theory of the political state; but that there is even a more extraordinary overlapping to be found between Hegel's treatment of the logic of understanding and the logic of reason on the one hand, and Spinoza's presentation of the inner logic of the aristocratic and monarchic regime on the other. Hegel's new logic of the concept would thus prove to be eminently political indeed, developed as an extension of Spinoza's theory of the political. And if true, this would imply that Hegel actually fought Spinoza with the help of Spinoza himself. Here, we can therefore only agree with Campos that "with regard to political philosophy's method, Hegel seems to be much more indebted to Spinoza

III

In our description of the transition from substance to subject it was claimed that at the turning point of the method a gesture of subjectivization was needed, and the necessity to choose was invoked. Such manner of speaking can easily induce one to believe that Hegel's concept basically refers to the thinking of a subject. This would be wrong.

True, since an empirical subject, be it individual or collective, instantiates the essentially subjective structure of reason, every comprehensive interpretation of Hegel has to allow for such phenomena of subject's thought-formations. Also true, since Hegel himself declared that "the *originally synthetic* unity of *apperception*, the unity of the '*I think*', or self-consciousness" constituted "the *essence of the concept*",⁵⁶ his philosophical project is bound to entertain an intimate relation with Kant's philosophy. However, Hegel alerts, if we try to describe the concept by turning to the nature of the I, "it is necessary to this end that we have grasped the *concept* of the '*I*'".⁵⁷ In that way the reference to Kant turns almost into a tautology.

Again, it is worth stressing with Horstmann that "Hegel's concept of logical subjectivity is emphatically anti-subjectivistic and anti-psychological".⁵⁸ Hegel explicitly says that "the concept is also not to be considered as the act of self-conscious understanding, not as *subjective understanding*, but as the concept in and for itself which constitutes a *stage of nature* as well as of *spirit*".⁵⁹ And if in Hegel's system the former metaphysics was replaced by logic, this is consequently not to say that for him philosophy has to give up the traditional metaphysical questions concerning the structure of being and humbly limit itself to clarify our conceptual schemes. Quite the contrary, Hegel did not need a special discipline of metaphysics precisely because, for him, the concept was something real in itself, existing at least to the same – and usually to a much higher – degree as the so called objective phenomena of nature. For him, the science of logic simply is the science of what there truly is in the world, and the concept of a thing is at the same time what the

than he is prepared to acknowledge" (Campos 2012, p. 78).

56 Hegel 2010a, p. 515.

57 Hegel 2010a, p. 516.

58 Horstmann 2004, p. 200. In Hegel's use, adds Horstmann, "'subjectivity' precisely cannot be grasped in opposition to 'objectivity', it has rather the function to describe an essential property of a highly developed whole that includes both objectivity and subjective concept." – For a similar point cf. Illetterati 2005.

59 Hegel 2010a, p. 517.

thing in question actually is in itself. This is the meaning of the “objective thought” which, according to Hegel, is itself equivalent to the phrase that “there is understanding, reason in the world”.⁶⁰

The true has consequently still to be comprehended as substance – not in the sense of fullness of being presumably provided by substance, but as an expression of its “non-actuality”, its failures and gaps. We need Spinoza, we need him precisely in his untruth, we need him for his “gappy ontology”. And not only in the sense that the things of nature are not thoroughly determined, which indeed they are not, but in order that in their gaps and indifferences they still may, somehow, be.

.....
60 Hegel 2010b, p. 58. – *Reason in the world* is the title of recent book of James Kreines where he vigorously defends a metaphysical reading of Hegel with a peculiar suspended, self-sustaining, top-down ontology of the real concept that lets the nature go free in its indifferent indeterminacy, cf. Kreines 2015. Our point is, however, that there has to be understanding in the world as well. For a similar metaphysic reading of Hegel where more emphasis is given to the necessity of appearing, that is to say of *being* untrue, cf. Bowman 2013.

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Hegel and the Present¹

Pierre Macherey

Abstract: Hegel has assigned the task to philosophy of reconciling the logic (thought) and of history (time). In order to accomplish it, he conceived of a new concept of “present” (*Gegenwart*), distinct from that of a given actuality (*Jetzt*), namely the concept of “effectivity” (*Wirklichkeit*), which manifests the eternal activity of Spirit, its presence to itself that is impossible to be identified at any finite observable moment, here and now. This comprised that the concept of “the end of history” will guarantee a proper timeless significance: it coincides with a special event located somewhere in the course of time and as such likely to be announced or prophesized; but it represents the impulse that leads the entire cycle through which the Spirit becomes real; accordingly it finds itself constantly in this cycle, the eternal present of a history that, having always already begun, must never be completed.

Keywords: Present, Hegel, History, Logic, Lebrun

“One of the most difficult tasks of Hegelianism is to elaborate a concept of ‘presence’ which is free of any reference to a ‘presentation’.”²

Gérard Lebrun

Let us begin from a well known expression, which enigmatically summarizes - it is an introductory formula - the meaning and the issue of the Hegelian project: “to recognize reason as the rose in the cross of the present” (*im Kreuze der Gegenwart*); the existence of a separation is posited in this way, as is the need to overcome it. The sentence which precedes it immediately explains its meaning: “What lies between reason as self-conscious spirit and reason as present actuality, what separates the former from the latter and prevents it from finding satisfaction in it, is the fetter of some abstraction or other which has not been liberated into [the form of] the concept.”³ The difference is between: on the one hand, the rose of reason, that is to say, the conscious mind of the self in the absolute and timeless perfection of

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¹ This paper was first published in *Cahiers philosophiques* n°13, décembre 1982, p. 7-19

² Lebrun 1972, p.50

³ Hegel 2003, p.72

its system (it is the sphere of the *Offenbarung*). On the other hand, the cross of the present, that is to say, the present reality through which the Spirit “appears”, through the tearing of finitude (this is the sphere of the *I'Erscheinung*). To philosophise is to reconcile these two terms, that is to say to pull them from their mutual isolation, from the abstraction in which they are initially locked, to concretely think their unity: therefore, it is to resolve the contradiction of the infinite and the finite, which is also that of thought and of time, or even that of logic and of history.

What does this mean: to think concretely the unity of logic and of history? This means to think this unity, not as a formal or given unity, but as the work of the Spirit who, at one and the same time, thinks and produces itself as *present*. In this sense, we can say that the notion of the present gives the key to the entire Hegelian project, in as much as it is the point where the contradiction of thought and time is resolved. Which means that the present, is another name for the effective: *wirklich*, that is to say of the real as it is for the Spirit which assimilates it, understands it, and produces it.

In what sense is the present, for Hegel, the other name, the proper name we might say, of the concept? What does this mean: thinking the present, thinking in the present?

This may initially be understood negatively, by elimination: philosophy thinks the present insofar as, according to Hegel, it deals neither with the past nor with the future. Firstly, philosophy does not deal with the past as such. Thus, when it considers universal history in order to express its rational meaning, it considers its sense as present, and not as past: “the point of view of philosophical history is not abstractly universal, but concretely and eminently present (*gegenwärtig*) because it is the Spirit which is eternally with itself and for whom there is no past.” Here, Hegel adopts an antiquated position which, on the contrary, seeks to retain and assimilate the past as it is: “When we go through the most remote past, we are always dealing with something present (*gegenwärtig*) because our object is the idea of the Spirit and we consider all history as its appearance (*Erscheinung*). Philosophy always has to do with the present, the real (*die Philosophie hat es mit dem Gegenwärtigen, Wirklichen zu tun*). The moments that the Spirit appears to have left behind, continue to be grasped by him in his actual depth. Just as he had passed through these moments in history, he must traverse them in the present (in der *Gegenwart*) - in its proper concept.”⁴ Rational thought, therefore, is only interested in the past to the extent where it can turn it into something present, i.e. integrating it to the life of the concept: from this

4 Hegel 1963, p.30, 215

perspective, it maintains only a negative relation with the past as such.

Hegel extends this remark in relation to all the other forms of life of the Spirit. For example, in the lessons on aesthetics, at the end of the first part which is dedicated to “the Idea of beauty,” concerning whether the artist can borrow from the past the contents of its representation Hegel writes: “no matter how well and how precisely we know it; but our interest in what is over and done with does not arise from the pure and simple reason that it did once exist as present. History is only ours when it belongs to the nation to which we belong, or when we can look on the present in general as a consequence of a chain of events in which the characters or deeds represented form an essential link.”⁵ Thus, here we find that the same idea exists, strictly speaking, has value only to that which is present, and it is the present which determines the point of view from which all that is historic can be recuperated.

It's also the same argument that applies to the history of philosophy: “We are not dealing with the past, but with thinking, with our own proper spirit. Thus, it is not in reality a history, or better, it is a history which at the same time is not a history. For the thoughts, the principles, the ideas which are offered to us are of the present. They are determinations of our own proper spirit. What is historical, that is, of the past, is no longer, is dead. The abstract historical tendency that deals with inanimate objects spread heavily in recent times. It is a defunct heart which finds its satisfaction in occupying itself with what is dead, with corpses. The living spirit says: “let the dead bury the dead.”⁶ The past only makes sense insofar as it leads to the present. The privilege of the present - according to the famous formula: “*die Gegenwart ist das Höchste*” (the present is the highest)⁷ – is the consequence of the evolutionary perspective, and so recurrent, adopted by Hegel on everything that is historic: it is one of the expressions of rational teleology.

Moreover, philosophy does not concern itself with the future either, insofar as it forbids itself from prophesying over what “ought to be”. Thus Hegel remarks about the “New World”: “As a Land of the Future, it has no interest for us here, for, as regards History, our concern must be with that which has been and that which is. In regard to Philosophy, on the other hand, we have to do with that which (strictly speaking) is neither past nor future, but with that which is, which has an eternal

5 Hegel 1988, p.272

6 Hegel 1979a, p.156

7 Ibid. p.686

existence — with Reason; and this is quite sufficient to occupy us.”⁸ Through philosophy, we have a relation “with that which has been and that which is”: that is, to what has been in so far as it is, as we have already shown. This remark, which concerns America, “land of the future”, applies also to the Slavic peoples, of whom Hegel says, at the end of the Lessons on the Philosophy of History, that they have not yet exhausted all the potential that they carry in them: “These people did, indeed, found kingdoms and sustain spirited conflicts with the various nations that came across their path. Sometimes, as an advanced guard — an intermediate nationality — they took part in the struggle between Christian Europe and unchristian Asia. The Poles even liberated beleaguered Vienna from the Turks; and the Slaves have to some extent been drawn within the sphere of Occidental Reason. Yet this entire body of peoples remains excluded from our consideration, because hitherto it has not appeared as an independent element in the series of phases that Reason has assumed in the World. Whether it will do so hereafter, is a question that does not concern us here; for in History we have to do with the Past.”⁹ We are dealing with “the past”, in so far as it can be thought of an “appearance” of the Spirit, therefore in the present.

This exclusion of the future from the field of philosophical reflection must be replaced in the context of the condemnation of the ideal, abstractly opposed to the reality of what is: this theme is fully developed in the preface to the *Elements of the Philosophy of Rights*. From this point of view, if philosophy always comes “after”, as the well-known metaphor of the owl of Minerva shows, it is because it cannot come “before”: because it refuses any anticipation, any speculation on what has not yet happened: this position is, moreover, the correlate of the recurrent approach which envisages all reality from the point of view of a teleology.

This philosophical reflection, not taking into consideration what belongs to the past and to the future envisaged as such, seems to explain the exclusive privilege that it grants to the present by elimination: the present is what remains when we have done away with the past and the future, what comes before or after. But is this negative consideration of the present, obtained by subtraction, is it authentically rational? Is it adequate to the contents of what the present is, in the sense of a positive affirmation, according to which is present to that which is presented? And what exactly is the nature of this content?

8 Hegel 2001, p.104

9 Ibid. p.367

To conceive of the present negatively is also to consider it as a moment of time, alongside those other elements that are the past and the future. But yet, time, in its unfolding, is precisely that negativity which makes it come after [*succéder*] distinct moments: “Time contains the determination of the negative. For us, this is something positive, a positive fact; but, it can also mean the opposite. This relationship with nothing is time and this relation is such that we cannot only think it, but we can also grasp it by sensible intuition.”¹⁰ The present is something negative insofar that it results from the passage of what was to come into something that is actual, which itself must be transformed into something past. In this sense, we can identify the abstract paradoxes of which time is the occasion, or rather the pretext: the past of a thing is to have been to come; and its future, is to become past. So, insofar as the present is of time, that is to say, is inscribed in its course, it seems that it cannot be conceived positively, that is to say concretely: what then justifies its rational privilege?

To try to answer this question, we can refer to a passage from the Encyclopedia: “The present, future, and past, the dimensions of time, constitute the becoming of externality as such, and its dissolution into the differences of being as passing over into nothing, and of nothing as passing over into being. The immediate disappearance of these differences into individuality is the present as now, which, as it excludes individuality and is at the same time simply continuous in the other moments, is itself merely this disappearance of its being into nothing, and of nothing into its being.”¹¹ The abstract present, which, as such, is reduced to an external form, is the present reduced to the limits of a finite actuality: it is the present considered as an exclusive present, this present, which as such is condemned to disappear and remains necessarily external, in the same way as the future from which it originates and the past in which it goes, to the eternity of the concept. The concept itself is timeless in the sense that it does not pass.

In so far as it is reduced to such a “now” (*Jetzt*), the present (*Gegenwart*) has no right to any rational privilege. As stated in the remark which follows paragraph 259 of the *Encyclopaedia*: “The finite present is the now fixed as being, and as the concrete unity, distinguished from the negative, the abstract moments of the past and the future, it is therefore the affirmative factor; yet in itself this being is merely abstract, and disappears into nothing”. The present, brought back to the finite existence of what actually exists, that is to say, returned to the objective

10 Hegel 1993, p.181

11 Hegel 1970, p.233

representation of a given – or even: a *Gegenwart* returned to the objective “presence” of a *Gegenstand* - is precisely the present of the abstract representation which illusorily fixes one “moment” of time and tries to grasp it as positive by arbitrarily eliminating the negativity which haunts and decomposes it, annihilates it: finally, it is the temporal “presence” reduced to a spatial determination, it is the Spirit bogged down in the exteriority of what is purely natural. It is not, therefore, in this actual presence of what is simply present that we must seek a rational content: the latter is necessarily absent.

The difficulty that we encounter here is of the relation between thought and time. Thought seeks to grasp the Spirit, as such, in its eternal presence to itself (*Anwesenheit*): this is why it must, in a certain way, be freed from time, from finitude, which is the external form of its unfolding: what “appears” in time is exposed to the negativity of time, and is therefore condemned to disappear like all that is limited.

But for thought to be freed from time, it must resort to the intermediary of time itself, through which it is necessary for thought to “pass” in order to reach that spiritual world where it is at home, beside it (*bei sich*). It is not possible to, one might say, “jump over time”, because time is the form by which thought reaches eternity. In this sense, the activity of thought is necessarily temporal. It is at this level that the typically Hegelian problem arises: thought must reflect on time, or rather reflect time, not only as something external, but insofar as it is bound to it by a relation of belonging. Thought belongs to the order of time, thought is “time,” which means that every thought, that is, each of the realizations of the Spirit, comes “in its own time”: It corresponds to a moment of time which can be rationally determined, according to its own necessity.

As a result, the relation of thought to time is double, it is also, therefore contradictory. On the one hand thought, in so far as it is its own proper “act”, appears as the outcome of time: it gradually forms over the course of this temporal future, where the limited figures follow, that emerge one after another, in the context of an oriented development, the “becoming the self of truth” [*devenir soi du vrai*]. Furthermore, thought, throughout this progression, pursues a single goal which is to “get out of time”, and thus to detach itself. From the point of view of this end, the negativity of time appears as absolute negation, the negation of negation, which returns to itself to eradicate itself: if time has a speculative function – it is the place of the appearance of thought - it is precisely because of this power that it holds to eliminate itself in its own process. In this sense the end of time - in this very precise sense: the goal pursued by time in its unfolding - is

eternity, which is the specific element of the self-consciousness of the Spirit.

The difficulty, which has torn Hegel's interpreters, is whether this end of time is the end [*fin*] also in the other direction of this term: a completion, a culmination, that is to say, a limit. Is the end of time a moment of time, the one through which time is done away with, which disappears to give way to the eternity of the Spirit which has been completely and definitively reconciled with itself? The end of time, is it to reach this eternal present that no longer passes, now (*Jetzt*) forever fixed in its unalterable actuality, in the positivity of that which is wholly and definitely fulfilled, of what can not be surpassed, surmounted, after which nothing more can be thought? The aporias that we encounter here are those which also cross, and tear, the traditional conception of the end of history.

To escape from these aporias, let us return to the question we asked earlier: in what way is the present specifically rational? To answer this question, let us start from the interpretation of Hegelianism proposed by R. Kroner¹² (R. Kroner – *Von Kant bis Hegel* (Tübingen 1924) t. II p. 505 – *System und Geschichte bei Hegel* (Logos t. XX 1981 p. 243)). The latter remarks first of all that Hegelian thought to all appearances re-emerges with the eschatological speculation, as it developed in the beginnings of Christianity: temporal existence has meaning only insofar as it is lived in expectation of a promised end, of the next and inevitable parousia. But this expectation, which is constantly delayed and disappointed, seems to be given an effective term by - in a Hegelian sense - the speculative system: in absolute knowledge, does not history fully accomplish its rational destination? Could we not also say, then, that it comes to an end? But what does this mean: to reflect on this end as present and effective? Does this mean that it is identified at a given moment, and therefore limited by time, to a singular historical and philosophical actuality, which could be the time of Hegel himself?

The absurdity of such a position has been repeatedly denounced. By Nietzsche, for example: “History understood in the Hegelian manner has been mockingly called the action of God on earth, God being himself only a creation of history. But this God, inside the skulls of Hegelians, has become transparent and intelligible to himself, and dialectically climbed all the degrees of its becoming until this revelation of itself so that for Hegel the summit and the terminus of the universal process (*der Höhepunkt und der Endpunkt des Weltprozesses*) eventually coincide with his own Berlinian existence. He would even have said that anything

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¹² Kroner 1931, p.505; Kroner 1981, p.243

that comes after him would have no more value than the coda of the universal rondo or, more precisely, would be superfluous. He did not say it; on the other hand, he implanted in the generation impregnated of his thought this admiration for the “dust of history” which is transformed at every moment into an admiration for success and leads to the idolatry of reality, this idolatry in which we have generally sought to repeat the mythological formula: “to do justice to the facts”. When one learns to bend the back and lower one’s head before the “power of history” one ends by appreciating with the head, like a Chinese figurine [*magot chinois*], no matter what power.”¹³ This, Hegel himself “did not say,” Nietzsche rightly observes, who blames this illusion for the weakness of the “Hegelian skulls.”

What did Hegel say? “The finite present is distinguished from the eternal present, as it is the mode of the now and its abstract moments, as past and future, distinguish themselves from it as the concrete unity; but eternity, as it is a concept, contains its moments in itself, and its concrete unity is not that of the now/present, since it is the tranquil/quiet/silent identity, concrete as a universal being, and not what disappears into nothingness like/as becoming...”¹⁴ Eternity is this infinite present that cannot be confined within the limits of any finite actuality: one can say that it is essentially “in-actual”. On the contrary, the actuality of what exists now (*das jetzige*) is a particular determination, a moment of time. The present, in so far as it is the concept itself grasped in its effectiveness, possesses a rational dignity because it does not consist in such an abstract moment of time, which carries, within it the conditions of its annihilation. To what extent does this present still have a relation to time? Perhaps we must say that it is time itself, grasped in the totality of its unfolding, as a totality, apprehended in its concept, insofar as it is the concept itself in its concrete identity to itself.

This is why it is not possible to say that eternity is external to time: thus it does not succeed time, by the effect of a momentary interruption of its unfolding: “The Notion of eternity should not however be grasped negatively as the abstraction of time, and as if it existed outside time; nor should it be grasped in the sense of its coming after time, for by placing eternity in the future, one turns it into a moment of time.” (Encyclopedia, par 258, Remark). Eternity, the infinite present, is in time, not after it, insofar as it is time itself, and not one of its moments, time conceived in totality, such as it is from the point of view of speculative

¹³ Quoted from Lefebvre 1970, pp.82-4

¹⁴ Hegel 1963, p.202

thought, which expresses its truth. The task of philosophy, in the Hegelian senses, is to grasp eternity as present, that is to say, as actually real, and not as past (a lost origin) or to come (a project, a hope not yet accomplished); it is also to grasp the present as eternal, from the point of view of its immanent reality: “to recognize reason as the rose in the cross of the present”.

From a speculative point of view, we must therefore reverse the previous formula: if thought belongs to time, in the course of which it appears, it is insofar as time itself, taken in the totality of its concept, belongs to thought, that is, is in itself rational. The concept is therefore this knowledge of time which apprehends its intrinsically rational character, recognizes it as the self-presence of the Spirit and thus masters it, fulfils it. Now this knowledge of time is also a temporal knowledge: but, in so far as it becomes conscious of this determination, and recognizes its necessity, it dominates it, assimilates it, transfigures it; thus it accedes to its own eternity which is in time without being of time, that is to say without depending on that negativity which constitutes time as such.

So, the identity of the present and eternity does not depend on the particular conditions of a specific and limited historical moment: on the contrary, it is from the thought of this identity, which is the concept itself, that all moments of history can be understood in their intrinsic necessity. To reproach Hegel for having pretended to identify himself, insofar as he represents such a moment in history, with a total reason from which he himself would be the culmination, completion, is to reverse the terms in which Hegel himself reflected the relation between thought and time. A text by M. Guérout gives us an example of this misapprehension: “In admitting that Hegel, by his identification of logic and history, validly formulated the mode by which philosophies succeed each other and are linked together, he is right to say that his present is confounded with eternity, for the systems which succeed him could not bring other conceptions of the Spirit, opposed to this mode of its realization, would furnish, with respect to their contents in relation to it, no essential difference; The story would well be stopped... If, on the contrary, we wish to affirm that other presents will destroy the actual philosophical present and bring new contents, we must assume that any theory relating to the reason of these new presents must itself be destroyed by them. Thus the mere possibility of history abolished at once a possible system of history.” (Philosophie de l’histoire de la philosophie (Aubier 1979) p. 265). But, yet, the speculative enterprise, in the perspective opened by Hegel, consists precisely in leaving the framework fixed by such a problematic, to overcome the limitations

posed by this alternative: from the infinite point of view of the concept, the eternity is not what is realized in this or that present, brought back to its exclusive peculiarity, but it is that which is effected in the present as such, that is to say, all the present and in all present: it is the infinite present as absolute power of affirmation that has mastered every kind of negativity.

It follows from this that Hegel in no way excluded the possibility of new speculative developments which would refute the system in the historical form which it had itself given to it. It is what illustrates, for example, the following remark reported in confidence by one of his disciples: "You, revered Master, told me one day that you were fully convinced of the necessity of new progress and new forms of the universal Spirit, even beyond the science completed by you, without being able to give me a more precise account of these new forms. " (Letter from Weisse to Hegel 11 July 1829). And this inability to foresee the future must be understood not as the symptom of impotence, the negative limitation of reason, but as the refusal to prophesy, to anticipate a reality that has not yet occurred, and as such unpredictable.

Through the notion of the present, apprehended in its rational content, Hegel wanted to think concretely the unity of the finite and the infinite, which does not allow itself to be reduced to a formal coincidence: "In the finite, we can neither experiment, nor see that the aim is truly fulfilled. The accomplishing of the infinite purpose consists therefore only in sublating the illusion that it has not yet been accomplished. The Good, the absolute good, fulfils itself eternally in the world, and the result is that it is already fulfilled in and for itself, and does not need to wait upon us for this to happen. This is the illusion in which we live, and at the same time it is this illusion alone that is the activating element upon which our interest in the world rests. It is within its own process that the Idea produces that illusion for itself; it posits an Other confronting itself, and its action consists in sublating that illusion. Only from this error does the truth come forth, and herein lies our reconciliation with error and with finitude. Otherness or error, as sublated is itself a necessary moment of the truth, which can only be in that it makes itself into its own result. " (Encyclopaedia, addition to par. 212). The illusion dissipated by the rational system consists in believing that the infinite can be realized totally, as it is in itself, in a finite form: whereas it is realized in the finite, or if one wants, in history, only on condition that it is grasped in totality, that is to say, from the point of view of the Infinite which acts in him.

However, this illusion is at the same time the bearer of a secret

truth: the expectation it inspires of an ultimate moment when the tendency which pushes us towards the totality would finally be satisfied, in a definitive form, if it is ineffective, since it cannot lead to any realization, and, yet is not without content: in the process through which the Spirit pursues its return to itself, it plays the role of a subjective motivation, a ruse of reason that is fulfilled even in its illusions. The idea of a completion of the process of thought and history, which is deprived of all rational content, has therefore only the value of a speculative passion, and as such it is irreplaceable: it is that which inspires a philosophical interest and confers on it its necessity.

To conclude, let us cite a final text which, in a very Hegelian way, will bring us back to our point of departure. In the lessons on the philosophy of religion, it concerns the discussion of the mythical conception which places the ideal in a lost origin or a desirable future, Paradise past or future, in any case absent: "This theory determines its ideal as past or future. It is necessary that it posits itself and thus expresses truth in and for itself, but the defect is precisely this determination of past or future. It makes it something which is not present and in this way immediately gives it a finite determination. What is in and for itself is the infinite: nevertheless, thus reflected, it is for us in a state of finitude. Reflection rightly separates these two things; it nevertheless has the fault of keeping them in abstraction and it demands, however, that what is in and for itself must also appear in the world of external contingency.

Reason assigns its sphere to chance, to free will, but in knowing that in this world that is extremely confused in appearance the truth is nonetheless found.

The ideal state is a sacred thing, but this state is not realized; if we imagine by its realization the complications of law and politics, the circumstances which present themselves as well as the multiplication of human needs must all be in conformity with the Ideal, there is here a terrain which cannot be adequate to the ideal, but which must however exist, and where the substantial Idea is yet real and present.

What existence has of absurdity and trouble does not alone constitute the present. This present existence is but one side, and does not entail the totality which belongs to the present. What determines the ideal may exist, but we have not yet recognized that the Idea is actually present because we observe it only with finite consciousness. It is difficult to recognize reality through the bark of the substantial, and because it is difficult to find the ideal in reality, it is placed in the past or in the future. It is a possible labor to recognize through this bark the nucleus of reality - to gather the rose in the cross of the present, one

must personally take charge of the cross.¹⁵
(*Glockner t. XV p. 293 trad. Gibelin (Vrin éd.) t. II p. 32*). That is to say,
we must philosophize.

Translated by:
Frederico Lyra de Carvalho
Rodrigo Gonçalves

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15 Hegel 1979b, p.32

Learning to Love the End of History: Freedom Through Logic

Todd McGowan

Abstract: Hegel's *Philosophy of History* is often taken as an introduction to Hegel's thought. This essay argues that the *Philosophy of History* is actually Hegel's least representative work and can only be understood through a reading of the *Science of Logic*. But once we look at the *Philosophy of History* in this way, we are able to see the importance of Hegel's controversial idea that history comes to an end. Hegel's conception of the end of history in the *Philosophy of History* corresponds to the discovery, with Christianity, that even God does not escape contradiction. This discovery has the effect of freeing humanity from divine authority because authority can only function through the image of itself as substantial and non-contradictory. The idea of freedom that Hegel develops in the *Philosophy of History* thus depends on the idea of contradiction that he works out in the *Science of Logic*.

Keywords: Logic, History, Freedom, Christianity, Hegel, Kojève

On Not Privileging History

The most unfortunate development in the dissemination of Hegel's thought after his death was the central role that his lectures on the *Philosophy of History* played in this dissemination. Despite the fact that Hegel himself never published his thoughts on world history, the transcriptions of his own and student notes to his lecture course came to define the popular image of Hegel. This work—usually just the introduction, labeled *Reason in History* (*Vernunft in der Geschichte*)—became the beginning and end of the Hegel canon for non-specialists. The *Philosophy of History* is not at all a representative work by Hegel, as even the key terms reveal. Terms such as “the world historical individual” play a pivotal role in the *Philosophy of History* and exist nowhere else in Hegel's philosophy. And yet, this term, along with other clichés from this work (like Hegel's dismissal of the importance of the individual in history), are often the only references to Hegel that many people have at their disposal.

What's striking about the relative weight that the *Philosophy of History* receives in the analysis of Hegel's thought is the dramatic difference between Hegel's champions and his detractors. Adherents of Hegel's philosophy looking to elucidate it almost never take the *Philosophy of History* as their starting point. It is difficult to think of an exception, especially in the last 50 years. For those looking to poke holes in Hegel's system or to set him up as their philosophical fall guy, however, the *Philosophy of History* is their go-to text. It provides much juicy material (apparent ethnocentrism, justification of violence, indifference

to real historical events, and, most damningly, teleology) to bury the entire system. It is the work that Benedetto Croce has in mind when he says, “Before Hegel seeks the data of facts, he knows what they must be.”¹ Opponents glom onto this text as a representative one, but they are able to glom onto it with such vitriol precisely because it isn’t.

One of the key features of Hegel’s philosophy is that it contains multiple points of entry. One can begin with the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, the *Science of Logic*, the *Encyclopedia*, or even the *History of Philosophy* without suffering any initial missteps. Each of Hegel’s works has a legitimate claim to serving as an introduction to the entire system. In this sense, there is no bad choice when one begins to read Hegel for the first time—except the *Philosophy of History*, which has, not coincidentally, for a long time functioned as the standard shorthand for Hegel’s entire philosophy. Whereas each of Hegel’s other major works rehearses in some way his dialectical system while introducing the subject matter (logic, philosophy, religion, and so on), the *Philosophy of History* does not. It is a work in which dialectics has only a peripheral role relative to the description of various societies and their development of freedom.

In this work, Hegel describes history as the progressive unfolding of freedom, but he does not fully develop the foundation of freedom. His concern is to distinguish his concept of freedom from the liberal or romantic version that associates freedom with an absence of social constraint. For Hegel, there is no natural freedom. Instead, freedom arises through subjectivity’s break from the immediacy of the natural world. He claims that “the human being as spirit is not an immediate being but essentially a being that returns to itself. This movement of mediation is thus the essential element of spiritual nature; in this way human beings become independent and free.”² Mediation is not the interruption of our naturally free inclinations with the restrictiveness of law. Instead, freedom is attained through mediation.

But at no point in the *Philosophy of History* does Hegel offer a precise definition of freedom. He tells us clearly what his vision of freedom is not but not what it is. Nevertheless, this work operates with a tacit definition of freedom based on Hegel’s ontology, which otherwise plays no role in it. In order to understand what Hegel means by freedom in the *Philosophy of History*, one must have recourse to the text that he wrote ten years before giving his first lectures on the subject. It is most likely because the *Philosophy of History* is Hegel’s most accessible

1 Croce 1915, p. 140.

2 Hegel 2011, p. 150.

work that teachers and students seeking a short cut to his philosophical system flock to it. But the accessibility of this work is entirely misleading. The work is not valueless, but accessing its value requires a circuitous route. To get at the conception of history articulated here, one must navigate a perilous path. The only way to the purported ease of the *Philosophy of History* is through the minefield of Hegel’s most difficult work—the *Science of Logic*. It is impossible to understand the stakes of the *Philosophy of History* without grounding it in the *Science of Logic*.

Ironically, this is exactly the claim of Hegel’s enemies. For them, the *Science of Logic* establishes a pattern of thought that the *Philosophy of History* imposes on a recalcitrant history, with the result that his version of history resembles his logic but not history as it really happened. In this picture of Hegel’s philosophy, he is so arrogant—or so naïve—as to assume that real history corresponds to the dialectical unfolding that he discovers in the structures of thought. Obviously, such a position would be indefensible today (or, frankly, even when it was first formulated). But if we understand the *Science of Logic* as the key not to how the course of history logically develops but to the definition of freedom that animates the *Philosophy of History*, its theoretical primacy seems less ridiculous.³

The great insight of the *Science of Logic* is that the contradictions of thought necessarily entail contradictions in being itself. When thought tries to determine the identity of any entity, it discovers a contradiction because every entity involves what it is not and every identity depends on what negates it in order to have identity at all. Nothing simply is what it is. In the final chapter of the book, Hegel distinguishes the revelations of his logic from ordinary formal thinking. He writes, “The firm principle that formal thinking lays down for itself here is that contradiction cannot be thought. But in fact the thought of contradiction is the essential moment of the concept.”⁴ Whereas Kant sees the contradictions that reason discovers as an index of its overreach and its errors, Hegel views the contradictions of reason as a positive assertion of knowledge. Reason’s

3 In “Hegel’s Logic of Freedom,” William Maker argues the converse. He claims that the structure of the *Science of Logic* depends on the idea of freedom as its initial precondition. According to Maker, “Freedom is the form and content of logic. It is not difficult to see why logic as philosophical science must begin in and as pure freedom, in the self-determination of self-determination, if it is going to be absolutely unconditioned. Independently of a modern practical interest in worldly freedom, Hegel shows that philosophy itself requires freedom as its innermost *theoretical* core.” Maker 2005, p. 6. While I agree completely with Maker’s alignment of logic with freedom, his position requires him to insert a presupposition into Hegel’s logic, a logic structured on the avoidance of any presupposition.

4 Hegel, 2010, p. 745. The German reads: “Es macht sich darüber den bestimmten Grundsatz, daß der Widerspruch nicht denkbar ist; in der Tat aber ist das Denken des Widerspruchs das wesentliche Moment des Begriffes.” G. W. F. Hegel, *Wissenschaft der Logik II* (Frankfurt an Main: Suhrkamp, 1971a, 563.

great achievement is its ability to think the contradiction that inhabits all being, to articulate how being necessarily involves its own negation.

If there is no aspect of being that escapes contradiction, if every entity (even God) includes what negates it, then there is no consistent authority in the world. Authority depends on consistent self-identity: we attribute authority where we posit an absence of contradiction. But we do so only insofar as we leave the figure of authority unthought. Its consistency depends on our positing it as unknown, and when we try to know it, as Kant does in the Transcendental Dialectic from the *Critique of Pure Reason*, its contradictory status becomes evident. The subject finds itself enthralled to external authority only as long as it can believe in the consistent status of this authority, and the discovery of its contradiction has the effect of freeing the subject, as the subject recognizes that even the ultimate authority is in the same boat as the subject itself.

According to Hegel, we know that there is no possible higher end for the subject than its own freedom because we have discovered that there is no being without contradiction. Freedom is the result of this discovery. In a discussion of Kant's discovery of the categorical imperative in the *History of Philosophy*, Hegel provides his most thorough and compelling definition of freedom. He claims,

While humanity seeks after this and that end, how should it judge the world and history, what should it make into its final end? For the will there is no other end than the one created out of itself, the end of its freedom. It is a great advance when this principle is established that freedom is the last hinge on which humanity turns, the last summit from which humanity lets nothing impress it and accepts no authority that goes against its freedom.⁵

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5 Hegel 1971b, p. 367. The German reads: "Indem der Mensch sucht nach diesem und jenem Zweck, wie er die Welt, die Geschichte beurteilen soll, was soll er da zum letzten Zweck machen? Aber für den Willen ist kein anderer Zweck als der aus ihm selbst geschöpfte, der Zweck seiner Freiheit. Es ist ein großer Fortschritt, daß dies Prinzip aufgestellt ist, daß die Freiheit die letzte Angel ist auf der der Mensch sich dreht, diese letzte Spitze, die sich durch nichts imponieren läßt, so daß der Mensch nichts, keine Autorität gelten läßt, insofern es gegen seine Freiheit ist." E. S. Haldane and Frances H. Simson translate the passage as follows: "While a man is striving after this aim and that, according as he judges the world or history in one way or the other, what is he to take as his ultimate aim? For the will, however, there is no other aim than that derived from itself, the aim of its freedom. It is a great advance when the principle is established that freedom is the last hinge on which man turns, a highest possible pinnacle, which allows nothing further to be imposed on it; thus man bows to no authority, and acknowledges no obligations, where his freedom is not respected." Hegel 1995, p. 459. The only major difference between this translation and Hegel's text is the word "imposed," which the translators use to make sense of the unusual term *imponieren*. Hegel's point toward the end of this passage is not that the subject that recognizes its freedom refuses to allow anything to be imposed on it (though this is undoubtedly the case) but that it is not *impressed* by anything, which is the significance of *imponieren* in this context.

The key point in Hegel's definition of freedom here is that it coincides with a refusal to be impressed by the Other. Subjects are impressed by substances, by beings that appear beyond any contradiction. But reason reveals that this beyond does not exist and that every being exists through contradiction.

History is the arena in which we discover the contradictions that strip the authority from figures of authority. Each discovery frees the subject from its investment in the authority until there are no more figures of authority left. Even the subject's own natural inclinations suffer from contradiction, which disqualifies them from any authoritative status over the subject. This absence of any authority—either external or internal—bespeaks for Hegel the subject's freedom. The free subject relates to the figure of authority as a fellow being divided by contradiction rather than as a self-identical substance.

When one examines Hegel's conception of freedom as he articulates it here, it becomes clear just how far it is from the liberal conception. For the liberal thinker, freedom is the absence of constraint, but such a thinker misses how constraint most often functions. Direct constraint is the primary concern of liberalism. And yet, direct constraint is the easiest to defy. The most pernicious form that constraint takes occurs when the external authority presents itself as substantial as thus impresses the subject. Impressing the subject is far more threatening to its freedom than imposing on it and is usually propaedeutic to imposing on it. Authentic freedom requires an absence of impressive external substances. Otherwise, the subject finds itself devoted to an external authority while remaining utterly convinced of its own freedom. This is the classic liberal trap.

Hegel famously divides history into three primary epochs: the Asiatic world in which one (the ruler) is free; the Greek and Roman world in which some (those of the ruling class) are free; and the modern world in which all are free. This schematic history actually recounts how the recognition of contradiction has developed. Despotism involves the freedom of only one because it is only the ruler in a despotic regime that can act without reference to a substantial external authority. The despotic ruler, by virtue of the ruling position, recognizes that every Other suffers from self-division, and this is the basis for the ruler's freedom. In the Greek and Roman world, the free men collectively share this position, but it is denied to women, slaves, and men without citizenship. Freedom is the refusal to endow the Other with wholeness or self-consistency. It is the refusal to treat the Other as a substantial being.

The modern world permits every subject to experience this revelation of the inconsistency of authority. Every subject can recognize

that contradiction is coextensive with being itself. This is why modernity is the epoch of revolutions: if there is no undivided Other, no figure of authority that avoids contradiction, then no one has a right to rule.⁶ As a result, rule becomes the object of contestation, and, what's more, subjects must learn to exist without reliance on any consistent external authority whatsoever. At the end of history, they must enact their own duties while wrestling with the self-division of the Other.

The claim that history comes to an end seems odd coming from the philosopher who introduced history into philosophy.⁷ It seems like a retreat from the radicality of Hegel's own recognition of our inescapable historicity. For this reason, critics often see the proclamation of an end to history as a sign of Hegel opting out of political struggle, of him taking a position above the fray. But the proclamation that history ends with the modern world does not function as an escape hatch from politics or freedom. It assures us that we are condemned to freedom, that we cannot turn back to the assurances of a consistent authority. Hegel's assertion of an end to history is not a retreat but a refusal of retreat, and those who would reassert the claims of history today are themselves looking for respite from the traumatic and liberating implications of its end.

The proclamation of an end of history is the most radical step that Hegel takes in the *Philosophy of History*. History ends when freedom becomes accessible for all. As Hegel sees it, freedom can be the only possible end of history because being itself has given it to us. Whatever end that we erect for ourselves beyond freedom will always have its basis in freedom, which derives from the absence of any substantial authorization. The ontology of contradiction assures us that we will never have any assurance and that history will never move beyond freedom. No matter how advanced humanity becomes, no matter how far we go down the road of posthumanity or metahumanity, we will remain within the ontology of contradiction and thus on the terrain of freedom. It is in this extreme sense that freedom marks the end of history.

The Allure of Modesty

It is tempting—and even the greatest Hegelian thinkers sometimes

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⁶ Hegel's commitment to this position and to the revolutionary nature of modernity led him to champion every revolution he encounters. As Domenico Losurdo notes, "every revolution in human history was supported and celebrated by Hegel, despite his reputation as an incorrigible defender of the established order." Losurdo 2004, p. 99.

⁷ Many observers have described Hegel as the inventor of history in philosophy. For instance, Joseph McCarney claims, "For he is, beyond all comparison, the historical philosopher, the one for whom history figures most ambitiously and elaborately as a philosophical category." McCarney 2000, p. 7.

succumb to the temptation—to interpret the end of history in relative terms. One can infer from Hegel's formulation that he is making the modest claim that one cannot but relate the narrative of history from its endpoint. Because the future is radically foreclosed to our thought—Hegel never wavers on this point—we cannot anticipate the direction that history will go or the future truths that it will reveal. As a result, when recounting history, we necessarily find ourselves at the end.

This is how Slavoj Žižek conceives of the end of history. For Žižek, it is our total immersion in history that condemns us to speak about history as if we were at its end. According to this position, Hegel theorizes an end of history in order to acknowledge that there is no exit from history, that we can never view the world *sub specie aeternitatus*.⁸ We cannot subtract ourselves from the historical process that we are recounting, which gives this process the appearance of an end with us. Hegel's point, Žižek claims, is not that all of human history ends with him, but that we cannot but think history from the end, which is always now. This closure is the result of the standpoint from which we speak, the result of the act of speaking history. Our position of enunciation manifests itself within our historical statements in the form of a retrospective account. Žižek puts it like this: "at every given historical moment, we speak from within a finite horizon that we perceive as absolute—every epoch experiences itself as the 'end of history.'"⁹ We are, in other words, condemned to locating ourselves at the end of history.

Žižek's analysis of the end of history is correct as far as it goes. It is accurate to say that we cannot avoid speaking from the perspective of the end when we narrate history. But this interpretation of the end of history has the effect of minimizing Hegel's claim when he announces that history reaches its end with the full development of the concept of freedom. This interpretation reflects a modesty in relation to Hegel that Žižek typically avoids. Hegel's claim here is stronger than an admission that the end of history constantly imposes itself on us as historical subjects. Instead, he believes that we will never move beyond the recognition that all are free, which is the recognition that occurs in modern Europe (as well as in North America and Haiti).

This does not mean that significant historical events will cease or that no new avenues for the articulation of freedom will be discovered—

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⁸ In this sense, Hegel's theorization of the end of history represents a direct riposte to Spinoza, who insists on our ability to abstract ourselves from a historical perspective and take up the perspective of eternity.

⁹ Žižek 2012, p. 218.

like some new form of communism, for instance. But for Hegel, history as a field for the unfolding of new insights into existence reaches its conclusion with the recognition of universal freedom. The assertion of freedom based on the recognition of intractable contradiction is the most important event in the history of subjectivity. It marks the end of history because no subsequent event can ever top it.

Though it has become fashionable to bash Francis Fukuyama's proclamation of liberal capitalist democracy as the end of history in 1989 as a terrible reading of history and of Hegel, his thesis is true to Hegel's thought in one crucial sense.¹⁰ Like Fukuyama, Hegel believes that history can come to an end, that we can reach a decisive recognition that no subsequent event can dislodge. The difference is that for Hegel the end of history is not the end of political struggle because it has its origins in the recognition of a divided substance rather than in the achievement of a particular political regime.

Freedom is the key to history for Hegel because freedom is the correlate in the subject of the recognition of being as contradictory. The freedom of all that Hegel sees manifest in modern Europe has its basis in the absence of any consistent Other that might function as an authority for the subject. The subject is free because it has nothing external to it that it can rely on for guidance. Every external authority that the subject would defer to—God, nature, the monarch, the people, history itself, and so on—suffers from the same contradictory logic that besets the subject itself. The modern subject can fantasize a consistent Other, but this consistency can only be fantasmatic for it. When it posits laws of historical development or harmony in nature, the modern subject attempts to avoid the fundamental insight of modernity—the inconsistency of the Other—and thereby to escape its own freedom. But the problem with these stratagems is that they rely on the freedom that they purport to escape.

The End of Freedom

While one temptation is to relativize Hegel's conception of the end of history, the other is to reject it altogether, which is the majority position. Most interpreters of Hegel refuse the image of Hegel as a philosopher of the end of history.¹¹ Because it seems so evidently wrong,

¹⁰ See Fukuyama 1989. Fukuyama subsequently developed this thesis in a book-length work entitled *The End of History and the Last Man*. See Fukuyama 1991. More recently, Fukuyama has qualified his claims, though he has not retracted them.

¹¹ Others attempt to cut out the dead idea of the end of history from the rest of the Hegelian corpus. This is the position of Steven B. Smith, who, in an otherwise sympathetic interpretation of Hegel's political philosophy, argues, "Hegel's thesis about an end of history could not but become another

because history clearly introduces fundamental substantive changes to existence after Hegel's death, Hegel's champions have found this thesis untenable, which has led them to attribute it to someone other than Hegel himself. That someone is Alexandre Kojève.

For much of the 20th century, Kojève seemed like the most important interpreter of Hegel's philosophy. Though his interpretation cut against the grain and married Hegel with Marx and Heidegger (who were, to say the least, strange bedfellows), it reignited the spark of this philosophy and created an awareness of Hegel as a valuable thinker that otherwise would not have existed. The Hegel of the 20th century is more or less Kojève's Hegel. When Kojève gave his lectures on Hegel in Paris during the 1930s, there was no extant translation of the *Phenomenologie des Geistes* in French.¹² There was one soon afterward, just as there were philosophers like Jean-Paul Sartre, Jacques Lacan, and Georges Bataille seriously engaging with Hegel's thought in a way that would have been unthinkable without Kojève's epochal intervention. Kojève created a contemporary Hegel, but the price of this currency was that Hegel became the thinker of the end of history.

In his lectures, Kojève makes it clear in no uncertain terms that Hegel formulated an end to history. Kojève idiosyncratically bases his reading of Hegel's philosophy of history on the dialectic of the master and slave in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*.¹³ Rather than read the *Philosophy of History* directly on its own, Kojève hits on the idea of a detour through the *Phenomenology*, and this detour produces stunning results. According to Kojève's interpretation of Hegel, humanity begins in the struggle for prestige or recognition. A long series of senseless fights to the death in order to gain prestige dominate prehistorical human existence. The winner of these fights gains prestige but lacked anyone to bestow it because the other was dead. This war of all against all is, according to

stifling orthodoxy that would generate its own antithesis, namely, an end to the end of history." Smith 1989, p. 230-231. Though Smith articulates several justifications for Hegel's claim about history coming to an end, he ultimately believes that one must reject it in order to stay true to the core of Hegel's philosophy.

¹² Jean Hyppolite published the first translation of the *Phenomenologie des Geistes* in 1941 as *Phénoménologie de l'esprit*, two years after the end of Kojève's lectures.

¹³ Kojève translates Hegel's "Herr" and "Knecht" into "maître" and "esclave" in French, which would be "master" and "slave" in English. Most translators and interpreters of Hegel avoid the term "slave" as misleading, though some retain "master." The two translators who rendered the *Phenomenology* into English in the 20th century, J. B. Baillie and A. V. Miller, opt for "bondsmen" rather than "slave," for instance.

Kojève, Hegel's version of the state of nature.¹⁴ History proper begins when the fight to the death for prestige ends not with death but with the acquiescence of one subject to another. At this point, the slave offers to work for the master in order to avoid death, but even more importantly for Kojève, the slave also agrees to recognize the master. The slave's gesture of capitulation, rather than simply indicating cowardice and dishonor, becomes the inaugural gesture of history and the basis for all cultural achievements. Kojève's revaluation of the slave parallels Marx's revaluation of the proletariat. In each case, the apparent historical loser becomes responsible for the creation of value in history.

The contradiction within this relationship is the motor for history. It is the slave that drives history progressively forward while the master ends up cast aside. For Kojève, the master suffers from an untenable position. He claims, "the Master struggled and risked his life for recognition, but he obtained only a recognition without any value for him. This is because he can only be satisfied by the recognition from someone whom he recognized as being worthy of recognition. The attitude of the Master is thus an existential impasse."¹⁵ The master desires recognition from someone worthy of recognition, but at the same time, she or he cannot tolerate the existence of another master who would have this status. There is only the slave to recognize the master, and the slave's recognition is really no recognition at all. As a result, mastery leads to a historical dead end or an existential impasse.

The slave, in contrast, has history on her or his side. Through the dread of death and subsequent work for the master, the slave finds another avenue for recognition that is not open to the master, and when slaves successfully revolt, they establish a society of mutual recognition in which they can achieve satisfaction. This society is the end of history. In his lectures and subsequently, Kojève waffles on just when history does come to an end. He begins by accepting the verdict that he attributes to Hegel—that history ends with the Napoleonic regime after the success of the French Revolution. But later Kojève sees the end in American capitalism and, ultimately, in what he calls Japanese snobbism. In each case, the end of history arrives when subjects attain mutual recognition.

Despite the enormous influence that Kojève had on French thought

14The problem with Kojève's account should become evident with the invocation of a prehistorical state of nature. For Hegel, we have absolutely no insight into the state of humanity prior to history because the emergence of spirit so dramatically distorts what precedes it. When we look at the state of nature, we see only the fantasy of the state of spirit.

15 Kojève 1947, p. 25.

in the 20th century (and, ironically, on American neoconservative thought), most committed readers of Hegel view Kojève not as a commentator on Hegel but as an altogether separate thinker—the thinker who believes in the end of history.¹⁶ Philip Grier gives this position its most compelling formulation. He painstakingly shows how Kojève's thesis of the end of history borrows liberally from Alexandre Koyré's own distortion of Hegel's philosophy of history in order to produce a distinct philosophy.¹⁷ Grier claims straightforwardly that "Kojève's end-of-history thesis has no obvious grounding in Hegel's text."¹⁸ By interpreting the end to history as foreign material inserted into Hegel's philosophy, Grier can simply dismiss this troubling idea and preserve Hegel as the thinker of a continually evolving history. But the price of this corrective is too high. While Kojève's conception of the end of history may have gone astray, we cannot abandon the idea altogether while remaining true to Hegel's project.

Grier simply sidesteps Hegel's own direct statements on the end of history, statements that force us to grant that Kojève is onto something. For Hegel, history has an end in both senses of the term—an aim and a terminus in which this aim has been reached. When spirit "is at home not with another but with itself, with its essence, not with something contingent but rather in absolute freed," Hegel believes that this is "the final end of world history."¹⁹ History achieves this end in modern Europe.²⁰ Here, Hegel gives Kojève enough material to justify his claims about history coming to an end, an end that he identifies with freedom.

The problem with Kojève's interpretation is not, as Grier would have it, that it lacks textual warrant. The fundamental problem is that

16There are commentators on Hegel who take up and develop Kojève's reading of Hegel. See, for instance, Maurer 1965), and Cooper 1984.

17 Kojève did not simply take over Koyré's thesis about the end of history in Hegel's philosophy. He also took over the course on Hegel that Koyré was giving when Koyré sought a replacement.

18 Grier 1996, p. 186. Grier makes clear the fundamental break between Kojève's philosophy and Hegel's, even though Kojève poses his philosophy as merely a commentary. Grier writes, "No serious reader of Hegel could fail to recognize that Kojève is as much creator as interpreter of the system he ascribes to Hegel." Grier 1996, p. 185.

19 Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of World History, Volume I*, 168.

20Toward the end of the introduction to the *Philosophy of History*, Hegel says, "World history goes from east to west; because Europe is the end of world history as such, Asia is the beginning." Hegel 1956, p. 103 (translation modified). The German reads: "Die Weltgeschichte geht von Osten nach Western, denn Europa ist schlechthin das Ende der Weltgeschichte, Asien der Anfang." Hegel 1970, p. 134.

Kojève imagines history coming to an end through the elimination of contradiction. Kojève supplements the *Philosophy of History* with the *Phenomenology of Spirit* (specifically the master/slave dialectic) when he should have supplemented it with the *Science of Logic*. He rightly saw the need for another text to make sense of Hegel's most idiosyncratic work, but he chose injudiciously. Kojève identifies a society developed out of servitude in which mutual recognition overcomes social antagonisms. This is the point at which Kojève's debt to Marx gets the better of his allegiance to Hegel.

History doesn't come to an end when a society emerges that no longer suffers from self-division. Hegel's point is exactly the opposite. History comes to an end when we recognize that we are all free, and we recognize that we are all free when we recognize that nothing can avoid contradiction, that there is no possible consistent authority to provide a ground for our identity. Kojève is on the right track when he identifies the end of history as a crucial pillar of Hegel's edifice. But his attempt to theorize it has the effect of knocking it down. Thinking the end of history requires seeing Kojève as symptomatic of its refusal.

A Christian That Refuses Heresy

When we grasp Hegel's conception of freedom and its relationship to contradiction, the explanation for the privileged role that Christianity plays in his thinking about history becomes clear. It is not that Hegel simply prefers his own religion and that of Europe, which is what it seems on the surface. Christianity offers a philosophical insight that no other religion does. This insight derives from the unprecedented act of divine humiliation that it enacts, and this is what Hegel finds so appealing about it. With the death of Christ on the cross, humanity is able to witness the contradiction at the heart of the divine, the revelation that the divine endures the travails of finitude. It is a moment at which the infinite shows itself as finite, an event that strips all authority from the divine.

The divine humiliation that Christianity enacts follows directly from Christ's message of love. A loving God or a God capable of love cannot be a substance but must be a subject. Only divided subjects can love because only divided subjects turn to the other to look for a corresponding division. The message of love initially draws Hegel to Christianity, but it is the humiliated God that love entails which sustains him as an adherent.

The advent of Christianity marks the end of history for Hegel, even though it takes over 1,500 years for the world to register this end. With Christianity, it becomes possible to recognize that even the highest authority imaginable, even the infinite authority of God, suffers from the

same contradiction that besets the lowest subject. But Hegel does not end his account of history with the death of Christ or with the Edict of Thessalonica in 380 CE that installs Christianity as the religion of Rome.²¹ The decisive blow in the development of Christianity occurs with Martin Luther, who offers subjects a direct relation to God.

As long as the Church functioned as a mediator between the subject and God, the subject could not partake in the freedom that Christianity enacts. The presence of the Church sustains God's obscurity for the subject and leaves God in a position where divine contradiction does not become evident. History ends only when the God of the beyond comes down to earth for all subjects, which is what Protestantism occasions. At this point, everyone can see the divine humiliation that transpires in Christianity.²²

But Christianity is not the only religion in which the divine manifests itself in a finite form. Both Hinduism and Buddhism have their own versions of incarnation, each different from the Christian version. Both fail, according to Hegel, to formulate the severity of the humiliation that God suffers in Christianity. The point is not that Hinduism and Buddhism lack the sophistication or elegance of Christianity but that they lack its extreme humiliation of the divine. For instance, a certain version of Buddhism posits God's reincarnation in another Dalai Lama after the death of one, whereas in Christ, God dies once and for all. The Buddhism of the Dalai Lama preserves God from the depths of finitude to which Christianity subjects the divine. The profound abasement of God in Christianity is the source of the freedom that it provides. This is what leads Hegel to make the impolitic remark that "a human being who has not the truth of the Christian religion has no truth at all; for this is the one and only truth."²³ Here, Hegel not only fails to be a good multiculturalist, but he also theologizes truth, which would appear to make him a bad subject of modernity as well. Two strikes against him in a single sentence. But he doesn't strike out. His claim is neither a failure

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21 Despite Constantine's conversion to Christianity in 312 CE, he did not name Christianity that state religion of the Roman Empire but did end the persecution of Christians.

22 If we compare the iconography of Protestantism with that of Catholicism, it would seem that Hegel makes the wrong choice for the form of Christianity that embraces divine humiliation. Catholicism's crucifix gives us a vision of a devastated God suffering on the cross, while the empty Protestant cross appears to spare us from this confrontation. For Hegel, however, the absence is crucial for the freedom of the subject. As long as God remains on the cross in a particular form, we do not yet have the moment of the Holy Spirit, the moment when individual subjects can come together through God's absence.

23 Hegel 2011, p. 449.

of multiculturalism nor a retreat from modernity. Christianity is “the one and only truth” insofar as it proclaims that the subject must experience divinity through its humiliation, which any modern subject—Hindu, Buddhist, Muslim—can do by recognizing that the divine doesn’t exist beyond contradiction. Otherwise, one condemns oneself to unfreedom.

Protestant Christianity implies freedom for all because it exposes the fundamental contradiction of God itself. The true Christian ceases to be impressed by the glory of God. This glory loses its ability to dominate the subject insofar as it comes down from the beyond and exists in a finite form (and dies). The recognition of contradiction at the heart of the divine announces the end of all slavery. Of course, slavery continued well into the era of Christianity, but for Hegel, this required a betrayal of the foundation on which Christianity is built.

History ends with Protestant Christianity and the freedom that it unleashes, but most often modern subjects take up a heretical attitude to their Christianity. Hegel stands out as a Christian because he absolutely refuses heresy. Unable to confront the humiliation of God, most Christians restore the divine to the position that it has in other religions. Every claim that “no one knows God’s plan” or “I have faith in the man upstairs to guide me” or “we look to God for guidance” indicates a thoroughgoing abandonment of the basic tenet of Christianity: God is no longer a mysterious being existing beyond the contradictions of our existence. The real heretics are those who cling to an unknown God in order to avoid confronting a divided God, a God suffering from the same humiliation that subjects themselves endure.

Hegel recognizes that his version of Christianity is not the garden-variety version. During his theorization of its link to freedom, he admits, “We need to remember that we are not to be thinking of a Christianity of the man in the street, as whatever anyone makes it out to be.”²⁴ The problem with the “Christianity of the man in the street” is that it refuses the full weight of the divine humiliation and clings to the existence of an undivided God. For Hegel, this recalcitrance from the average Christian does not have the power to block Christianity’s philosophical revelation. It is this revelation that brings history to an end, despite the rearguard efforts of average Christians.

The Absence of Idealism

There are two standard readings of the *Philosophy of History*, both of which take Hegel as an idealist in the strict sense. The worst of these, favored especially by Hegel’s opponents, sees history as a

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24 Hegel 2011, p. 449.

teleological narrative directed by a transcendent God who uses particular historical events and actors to accomplish the universal goal of freedom. According to this reading, Hegel’s indifference to the suffering of particulars sacrificed in the slaughterhouse of history is the necessary byproduct of his investment in the endpoint of the historical narrative.

The second reading posits an immanent development of freedom in history: though no transcendent force plans the development of history, it moves in the direction of freedom because of a human longing to be free. The spirit of freedom guides subjects unconsciously toward history’s ultimate endpoint. In the most sophisticated form of this reading, the dialectical logic of historical development doesn’t determine specific events but relies on a series of contingent events to achieve its aim.

The majority of the significant interpreters of Hegel writing today—Slavoj Žižek, Catherine Malabou, Rebecca Comay, Sally Sedgwick, and Susan Buck-Morss, just to name a few—avoid the *Philosophy of History* like the plague. When one sees how much fun Hegel’s opponents have with this work, it’s tough to blame them. Karl Popper’s sarcastic quip—“it was child’s play for his powerful dialectical methods to draw real physical rabbits out of purely metaphysical silk-hats”—hints at the extent of the ridicule heaped on this work.²⁵ Those who do discuss it, such as Robert Pippin, do so in much the same way that Kojève does—through their reading of the *Phenomenology of Spirit* and the project of mutual recognition that they find in that text. The *Philosophy of History* is anathema because it seems impossible to reconcile it with the materialism that these interpreters (along with most contemporary subjects) share.

Hegel’s account of history is unabashedly idealist. Hegel envisions subjects driving the movement of history through their commitment to realizing their ideas. It is not “the mode of production of material life” that triggers historical transformation but the idea of freedom, which is why this work from Hegel, more than any other, leads Marx to want to turn Hegel on his head.²⁶ Of course, Hegel thinks more clearly standing right side up, and when we consider the *Philosophy of History* in light of the *Science of Logic*, its runaway idealism diminishes.

Freedom ceases to exist as an idea separated from any material origin and becomes the ideal correlate of the structure of being. Though subjects pursue freedom as an end, neither God nor some amorphous humanist impulse has given them this end. It is the product of God’s

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25 Popper 1966, p. 27.

26 Marx 1970, p. 20.

failure, a failure shared with all being. The contradiction of being rather than the idea of freedom becomes the engine of history. The self-division of being is the material cause of the development of human history that Hegel recounts. If Hegel himself never articulates this, it nonetheless is apparent from the way that he describes freedom throughout his philosophy.

Why History Doesn't Seem Over

When Hegel lectured on the philosophy of history in the 1820s and early 1830s, he could still feel the aftereffects of the American, French, and Haitian Revolutions. It seemed as if the freedom deriving from the recognition of the contradictory status of all authority would change the world irreversibly, enabling the philosopher to announce the end of history. But the two subsequent centuries did not bear out Hegel's certainty that the recognition of freedom had become ineluctable. What we have witnessed in the time since Hegel's death has been a desperate search to erect a new authority that would avoid God's humiliation.

This turn toward authority is not a rebirth of history but rather a neurotic response to its end. If Hegel did not predict this reaction against contradiction, it was because he was not yet Freud and lacked a theory of neurosis. The neurotic subject confronts the absence of a substantial authority and rather than taking up the freedom that this absence grants, this subject fantasizes an authority not riven by contradiction. Hegel never spends any time in the *Philosophy of History* dealing with those who want little to do with the freedom of contradiction, but this position is far more prevalent today than the one that accepts freedom without asking for assurances from the Other.

The two basic forms that the neurotic reinstitution of authority takes today are naturalism and fundamentalism. The naturalist sees the natural world as bereft of contradiction and thus capable of acting as an authority for the subject. According to this position, the subject's freedom disappears in the face of the dictates of its nature. In its most popular form, naturalism envisions the gene as the noncontradictory figure of authority. The self-identical gene knows what it wants and pursues its aim with a ruthless purpose. Though subsequent scientists have complicated the picture that Richard Dawkins lays out in *The Selfish Gene*, his classic text still provides the most compelling account of the gene as the contemporary authority figure. He writes, "The genes are master programmers, and they are programming for their lives. They are judged according to the success of their programs in coping with all the hazards that life throws at their survival machines, and the judge is

the ruthless judge of the court of survival."²⁷ The position that Dawkins espouses here is a neurotic one because it evinces the belief that genes know what they want, that they have a purposiveness not at odds with itself.

In this sense, genes take up the position once occupied by the pre-Christian God. They are more appealing than the Christian God because they have not yet succumbed to the crucifixion, which enables them to retain the status of an undivided authority. It would be interesting to see a gene die on the cross, which would allow the believer in the self-identical gene to discover the freedom of the Christian. Dawkins does not believe himself to be a believer, but this disavowal of belief permits it to function all the more vehemently.

We can see a similar example of belief in the noncontradiction of the gene in a discussion that took place in a film course that I recently taught. While explaining the concept of the femme fatale in film noir to a group of students, I showed the scene in which Gilda (Rita Hayworth) first appears in the film *Gilda* (Charles Vidor, 1946). In this famous scene, the camera cuts to Gilda with her long hair covering her face, and she flips her hair back in order to reveal her face to both the other characters in the film and to the spectator. This is a classic image of the femme fatale establishing her allure. But rather than seeing this as either a sexist image of the woman or a bold assertion of femininity (or both at the same time), the students labeled it an instance of "peacocking"—someone displaying her reproductive appeal to prospective mates interested in propagating their genetic material. As the students (to a person) proclaimed, we choose our sexual mates on the basis on an unconscious instinct that seeks out the best genes in possible sexual partners. A woman with hair like Rita Hayworth's, they reasoned, undoubtedly possesses excellent genetic material. The students might not know their desire, but at least their genes do. For them (and for Richard Dawkins), the gene is a noncontradictory authority that provides refuge in the modern abyss of freedom.

Naturalism is not, however, the only neurosis at work today, though it is the most widespread. The other neurosis, while exponentially more rare, is much more visible. Fundamentalism of all stripes does not rediscover the substantiality of authority in the obscurity of a gene but prefers a more grandiose form. The embrace of God, nation, or ethnicity as an undivided authority amid the contradictions of modernity enables the fundamentalist to exist in this world without confronting its consequences.

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27 Dawkins 2006, p. 62.

But because the modern world denies the existence of any substantial authority, the fundamentalist must resort to extreme acts to assure herself or himself of the authority's presence. By blowing up a nightclub or shooting an abortion provider or participating in ethnic cleansing, one acts in order to provide proof that the authority is an authorized authority. The fundamental act is an effort to substantialize the authority, but the act inevitably undermines itself. If the authority really were substantial, such acts would be unnecessary.

The fundamentalist attempts to reignite history and deny the crucifixion by sustaining the idea that God still exists in the beyond, where the divine can remain substantial and avoid the pitfalls of contradiction. The fundamentalist's version of God defies revelation, which means that fundamentalist Christians must betray the core tenet of their own religion. But the question for the fundamentalist runs deeper: if God exists beyond all revelation and thus beyond all contradiction, how can the subject receive the divine message? The very fact that the believer hears from God indicates that God too is a subject and not just a substance.

Both the naturalist and the fundamentalist try to work around the end of history and its irreducible contradiction. They seek out an identity that can be what it is. But for the modern subject this position is only ever a neurotic fantasy that collapses when confronted with the exigencies of the modern world. Contradiction and its correlate of freedom continue to bombard the neurotic subject with revelations of non-identity at the heart of their authority's identity. One never escapes contradiction for good through the neurotic fantasy because this fantasy nourishes itself on contradiction. It stages what it avoids.

When we recognize the radical implications of Hegel's *Philosophy of History* and the proclamation there of history's end, we can reconcile ourselves to its outsized position within the popular image of Hegel. Even though the interpretation of this work depends on a reference to the *Science of Logic*, it nonetheless has something important to tell us about our contemporary condition. The *Philosophy of History* is not just a way of avoiding Hegel. It is also a path leading to the most pressing questions of contemporary politics.

The end of history is not the end of politics. In some sense, it marks the beginning of political contestation in its most authentic form. Rather than struggling for freedom, subjects must now struggle for the form of life most adequate to their freedom. The liberal capitalist answer has clearly revealed itself as wanting. Its failure stems directly from its basic misconception of freedom as the absence of overt constraint and its superstitious investment in the market as an authority without

contradiction. Attempts to realize a communist society have betrayed contradiction through adherence to either the laws of history or the apotheosis of the party leader. These two failures leave the field of politics open. We have witnessed how freedom will not manifest itself. It remains to be seen how it will.

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The Germ of Death: Purposive Causality in Hegel

Gregor Moder

Abstract: The purposive nature of dialectical process, its teleological orientation, is one of the most problematic aspects of Hegelian philosophy. This article begins by analyzing Spinoza's criticism of final causes in general as well as Althusser's specific criticism of epistemological expressionism. The author argues that such criticism of Hegel's concept of purpose is well founded inasmuch as it is linked to the organic metaphor of the germ as plant-in-itself. However, Hegel himself limited the usefulness of the organic metaphor in matters of spirit. In order to separate the teleology of nature and the teleology of spirit, Hegel employed the metaphor of the 'germ of death.' In the second part, the author argues that Hegel completely agrees with Spinoza's rejection of what Kant called the *external* teleology – e.g. the understanding of lightning as God's punishment. While Hegel does often explain the process of knowledge with reference to the *internal* teleology of organic nature, the proper Hegelian concept of purpose (telos) rests in understanding the purposive nature of the dialectical process as following the internal logic, but nevertheless producing a result which is external to it. This concept of teleology bears the same fundamental structure that is characteristic of the signature Hegelian claim that the true must be understood both as (determinate) substance, as well as a (free) subjectivity.

Key Words: Hegel, germ, death, teleology, final causes, purpose, freedom

In contemporary philosophical, political and social discussions, many Hegelian concepts seem extremely problematic, if not even counter-productive. These include the idea of truth as a whole; the principle according to which the sequence of events in historical development should be understood as a logical progression; the general notion that contradictory positions somehow belong to a greater unity; and the scientifically abhorrent concept of the absolute knowledge. But perhaps the most dubious notion of them all is the conceptual nest of purpose (*Zweck*) and purposivity (*Zweckmäßigkeit*), clearly referring to the historical metaphysical problematic of purposive causality, or teleology, such as it is known in Thomas Aquinas and other Aristotelian traditions. It comes as no surprise, then, that contemporary usage of Hegel's philosophy limits the discussion about this concept to a very particular topic contained within the philosophy of nature or avoids this potential minefield altogether.

The idea that the outcome of an action or process could be interpreted as its cause was always met with harsh criticism. The modern concept of causality, especially when explicitly related to the processes in nature, works without any reference to purposes that people or cannon balls might (or might not) have in their view. In the addition to the first part of his *Ethics*, Spinoza states quite matter-of-factly that “all final causes are but figments of the human imagination,” adding that this doctrine “turns Nature completely upside down, for it regards as an effect that which is in fact a cause, and vice versa.”¹ Spinoza’s arguments are valuable because they provide us with more than just a refutation of the concept; they offer us an explanation of why this notion of causality persists even today. According to Spinoza, people have the tendency to attribute to God and Nature the same properties that they think they possess themselves; in this case, the pursuit of ends. This is basically the argument against personification of nature, against the anthropomorphic accounts of God. Spinoza argued that the philosophical problem with understanding Nature or God as pursuing ends is that this implies imperfection or lack. If Nature or God must become something else, if they must get somewhere else, or if they must fulfill certain goal, then it seems we have been considering them as deficient to some degree. Spinoza writes, “This doctrine negates God’s perfection; for if God acts with an end in view, he must necessarily be seeking something that he lacks.”²

But Spinoza goes much further. Even when people describe their own actions, human actions, as effects of the ends they have in view, as effects of final causes, they are wrong! In the introduction to part IV of *Ethics*, Spinoza uses Aristotle’s famous example of building a house in order to inhabit it and explains it strictly as a result of urges and efficient causes: “When we say that being a place of habitation was the final cause of this or that house, we surely mean no more than this, that a man, from thinking of the advantages of domestic life, had an urge to build a house. Therefore, the need for a habitation insofar as it is considered as a final cause is nothing but this particular urge, which is in reality an efficient cause, and is considered as the prime cause because men are commonly ignorant of the causes of their own urges.”³ Explanations which make use of final causes are only possible because people are ignorant of the true causes (which are, for Spinoza, always efficient causes) and confuse them with their desires and imagination. However, ignorance

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1 Spinoza 2002, p. 240.

2 *Ibid.*

3 Spinoza 2002, p. 321.

is only one of the reasons for the success of explanation through final causes. There is one further reason, or perhaps simply another version of the same reason: The mistake is in that people consider themselves *to be free* – that is, they consider themselves to be independent from what produced or caused them.

This is the crux of the matter. For Spinoza, human beings are nothing but finite modes of the absolute substance and cannot be considered as free causes; only the substance itself (God or Nature) can be considered as a free cause, as it is determined only by and through itself without the mediation of an external cause. This is why German Idealism in general, while it admired Spinoza’s radical and consequential understanding of human nature, nevertheless sought to overcome what it perceived as Spinoza’s utter determinism. Hegel’s programmatic claim that truth should be considered both as ‘substance *and* subject’ should be considered precisely as an attempt to accept all the consequences of philosophy as Spinozism but defend in it the place for freedom of the subject. According to Dieter Henrich, Hegel integrated the principal claim of Kant with Jacobi’s claim, “the claim that freedom is the highest principle (Kant) with the claim that a rational philosophy, to be coherent, has to be Spinozistic (Jacobi).”⁴

The concept of final causes within the Hegelian framework is, in the ultimate analysis, related to the question of freedom. In Kantian terms, the efficient causality at work in scientific explanations of changes in nature should not be considered as *the only* causality; philosophy must set as its goal a concept of specifically human causality, one that accounts for causality of freedom, one that presupposes freedom as cause. The concept of final cause in Hegel – or, to be more precise, the concept of purposivity – should therefore not be taken simply as a backdoor to old metaphysics, but rather as an explicit attempt to conceptualize the somewhat paradoxical idea that substance is one and absolute and guided by a necessity of the logical order, but that this one substance is also, at the same time, self-transforming and self-producing. The concept of teleology is therefore not a peripheral question in Hegel studies, it is not a philological detail that does not necessarily require our attention, but one of Hegel’s central concepts, perhaps precisely the one that is charged with the most acute task of reconciliation between consequential rationalism and the idea of freedom.

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4 Henrich 2003, p. 80.

The Indictment

“If a reason, one single and therefore fundamental reason must be given, here it is: we made a detour *via* Spinoza in order to improve our understanding of Marx’s philosophy.” (Althusser 1976, p. 134)

Hegel’s insistence on what we could call the teleology of spirit in history and logic profoundly irritated French postwar thought, so much so in fact that its prominent thinkers felt they had to explicitly reject Hegel and distance themselves from his dialectic. Jacques Derrida describes the strong aversion to Hegel in several generations of French scholars, including Sartre, Foucault, Deleuze, Lyotard, Bataille and Lacan, as nothing short of an “active and organized allergy.”⁵ Perhaps this move is nowhere more evident than in the philosophy of Louis Althusser, the infamous structuralist Marxist who claimed that Spinoza’s critique of final causes is the foundational work of any theory of ideology: “Spinoza refused to use the notion of the Goal, but explained it as a necessary and therefore well-founded illusion[.] In the Appendix to Book I of the *Ethics*, and in the *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus*, we find in fact what is undoubtedly the first theory of ideology ever thought out.”⁶ Althusser’s project, at least in the texts of *For Marx*, consisted mainly in reading Marx without Hegel, that is, in understanding Marxism not merely as an inverted Hegelianism, not merely as Hegelian dialectic without Hegelian mystical shell, but rather as a complete refusal of dialectic as such, insofar as it relies on simple logical contradictions instead of studying the complex historical conjuncture of each particular situation.⁷

In the context of epistemology, Althusser criticized the concept of teleology in the process of knowledge as nothing but a variation of the theological concept of the End Judgment (Parousia).⁸ He argued that science functioned as a break or rupture or cut that breaks through ideological idling in circle, and heavily criticized Hegel’s idea of science as a teleological progress of knowledge from simple and abstract beginnings to the absolute. He described Hegelian process of knowledge as simple matter of expression, where the whole (Hegel’s *Ganze*) is

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⁵ Derrida 2005, p. xxvi.

⁶ Althusser 1976, p. 135.

⁷ See especially: Althusser 2005, pp. 103–105.

⁸ Althusser 1970a, p. 16.

present in its beginning as a *germ* which only needs to manifest itself in the process of development, just as the oak tree is a manifestation or expression of what already lies in the acorn.

[T]he history of reason is neither a linear history of continuous development, nor, in its continuity, a history of the progressive manifestation or emergence into consciousness of a Reason which is completely present in germ in its origins and which its history merely reveals to the light of day. [...] The real history of the development of knowledge appears to us today to be subject to laws quite different from this teleological hope for the religious triumph of reason. We are beginning to conceive this history as a history punctuated by radical discontinuities [...] We are thereby obliged to renounce every teleology of reason, and to conceive the historical relation between a result and its conditions of existence as a relation of production, and not of expression[.]⁹

This is the indictment: teleology implies a coincidence of beginning and end, a closed circle, a vicious circle of ideology; and for Hegel, this circle involves the entire history as a development of what was already implied in the germ and is manifested or expressed in its result. Even though these are specific Althusserian formulations, they nevertheless address all the issues that lay at the heart of the criticism of Hegel and of his dialectic.

In what follows, we shall loosely adopt the form of a court trial and take a close look at Hegel’s own usage of the concept throughout the body of his work in order to determine its usefulness in contemporary debates on Hegel. What strikes us even at the outset is the multiplicity of terms and variation of the usage. Firstly, (1) there is rhetorical or idiomatic usage, such as in phrases like ‘... in order to ...’ While it is interesting to note that our languages can scarcely function without the assumption of final causes, we are not primarily interested in such implicit concepts of teleology, but rather in its explicit formulations. Secondly, (2) we can find in almost every major work by Hegel a section devoted to teleology (*Teleologie*), but those sections are limited to a very specific problematic of the philosophy of nature, in fact, precisely to the problematic of biological teleology, such as may be said to be at work in acorns and oak trees. And finally, (3) there are passages where terms like purpose, goal, end or aim are used specifically as concepts that must explain a central theme of Hegel’s philosophy. These passages will be of our primary

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⁹ Althusser 1970a, p. 44–45.

interest, and we will see how they relate to the question of teleology in nature (2). Let us first examine two famous citations from *Phenomenology of Spirit*.

[The True] is the process of its own becoming, the circle that presupposes its end as its goal [Zweck], having its end also as its beginning; and only by being worked out to its end, is it actual.¹⁰

These words sound exactly like the typical metaphysical mix-up of the cause and the effect. The idea of the True as a kind of *circle* which is set in motion by its *end* which is understood as its *purpose* and retroactively moved to its *beginning*: This is exactly what the final cause was always criticized for in Spinoza's century as well as in Althusser's. Now let us take a look at the second quote:

What has just been said can also be expressed by saying that Reason is *purposive activity* [zweckmässige Tun]. The exaltation of a supposed Nature over a misconceived thinking, and especially the rejection of external teleology, has brought the form of purpose in general, into discredit. Still, in the sense in which Aristotle, too, defines Nature as purposive activity, purpose is what is immediate and *at rest*, the unmoved which is also *self-moving*, and as such is Subject. Its power to move, taken abstractly, is *being* for-itself or pure negativity. The result is the same as the beginning, only because the *beginning* is the *purpose*; in other words, the actual is the same as its Notion only because the immediate, as purpose, contains the self or pure actuality within itself. The realized purpose, or the existent actuality, is movement and unfolded becoming [entfaltetes Werden].¹¹

The result is the same as beginning because the beginning is purpose. The beginning is understood in the Aristotelian sense here, as the unmoved mover. Such beginning is called by Hegel telos or purpose of the whole movement because it stands at the beginning of the movement, it is the beginning, while at the same time it can only be realized as the outcome of the movement. It is apparent that Hegel understands both Reason and Nature as purposive activities. The process of Reason is analogous to the process of Nature.

But the formulation that seems to confirm all the suspicions of

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10 Hegel 1977, p. 10.

11 Hegel 1977, p. 12.

Althusser and other critics is the formulation at the end of the segment, the idea of unfolded becoming, *entfaltetes Werden*. In German as well as in English, the term implies an organic development, like unfolding of leaves or blossoms in spring. Hegel's explicit references to Aristotle and to the purposivity in Nature seem to confirm this: Hegel's concept of purpose does not only imply circularity, but also a motion similar to organic blossoming. The crucial argument of the prosecution is this: Hegel explains the teleological process of Reason not only as analogous to organic teleology, but seems to imply that what is in play at the level of organic nature is one and the same process of unfolding and becoming that is characteristic for logic and spirit. Whenever one thinks of Hegel's purpose, one apparently also thinks of the organic metaphors, and among those, of Hegel's favorite metaphor of the germ or seed (*Keim*) as the plant-in-itself.

In *Phenomenology of Spirit*, the metaphor of the germ is only used once, in passing, and the usage is rather untypical – after the famous analysis of Greek antiquity through a reading of the myth of Antigone, the ethical substance is said to have been ruined and that it passed into another state, the legal state, “which simply reveals the contradiction and the germ of destruction inherent in [...] the ethical Spirit itself.”¹² The metaphor of the germ truly blossoms in the *Encyclopedia*; but even there, the usage is quite often similar to the usage in *Phenomenology*. Every proper Spinozist will shiver upon reading the following lines: “The true way to construe the matter, however, is that life as such carries within itself the germ of death and that, generally speaking, the finite contradicts itself in itself and for that reason sublates itself.”¹³ The idea that life carries within itself the germ of death may sound awfully like an assertion of a country priest. And is this idea not precisely that which is the most naïve in the framework of final causes, namely that the natural end of a process – a death of such and such individual – is considered as its fulfillment and perfection, its goal and purpose? However, as I hope to demonstrate, it is precisely this somber formulation of the idea of the germ that will prove to be the most productive one in understanding Hegel's concept of telos.

But let us first take a look at the dominant usage of the metaphor of the germ. Here is a very clear formulation from *Encyclopedia Logic*:

In the same sense the seed can also be regarded as the plant-in-itself. What should be taken from these examples is that

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12 Hegel 1977, p. 289.

13 Hegel 2010, p. 129.

one finds oneself very much in error if one thinks that the in-itself of things or the thing-in-itself in general is something inaccessible for our cognizing. All things are initially in-themselves but they are not thereby left at that, and just as the seed which is the plant in itself is only this, to develop itself, so too the thing in general advances beyond its mere in-itself as the abstract reflection-in-itself, proving itself to be reflection-in-another as well, and thus it has properties.¹⁴

It is evident that Hegel uses the organic metaphor of plants to explain the process of knowledge. And if there was ever any doubt that the concept of telos (*Zweck*) is the very nodal point where all the notorious Hegelian ideas converge – namely, the metaphor of the circle, the development of the concept as a simple expression, and all those flourishing organic metaphors – then the following quote from Encyclopedia's *Philosophy of Nature* could be used as the final piece of evidence against Hegel:

To see purpose as inherent within natural objects is to grasp nature in its simple determinateness, e.g. the seed of a plant, which contains the real potential of everything pertaining to the tree, and which as purposeful activity is therefore orientated solely towards self-preservation.¹⁵

We have here everything thrown together in the same bucket, so to speak: the concept of telos in the realm of nature is nothing but the simple determination of the natural thing. The germ of the plant is the perfect example in nature for Hegel's idea of how concept is developed in the spirit. Even though all of the quoted passages could be painstakingly interpreted to mean something else than what critics of Hegel saw in them, after all this hard work we would still be forced to admit that Hegel, in the final analysis, retained a bit too much of the aspirations of thinkers like Herder.

And yet, things are far more complicated than this for Hegel. There are two indicators of this implied already in the very quotes I selected. Firstly, Hegel is himself very critical of what he calls the 'external teleology', and secondly, there seems to be a very important difference in Hegel between using the metaphor of the germ as a metaphor of the conceptual development and the actual discussion of teleology as a

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14 Hegel 2010, p. 192.

15 Hegel 1970a, p. 196.

process within the realm of nature. I will expand on both of these two counts.

The Defense

First, let us take a closer look at the idea of external teleology. It may sound surprising, but Hegel's critique is just as sharp as Spinoza's. While commenting on Francis Bacon, he claims:

But in this connection an important point is that Bacon has turned against the teleological investigation of nature, against the investigation into final causes [...] the hair is on the head on account of warmth; thunder and lightning are the punishment of God, or else they make fruitful the earth; marmots sleep during the winter because they can find nothing to eat; snails have a shell in order that they may be secure against attacks; the bee is provided with a sting. [...] It was right that Bacon should set himself to oppose this investigation into final causes, because it relates to external expediency, just as Kant was right in distinguishing the inward teleology from the outward.¹⁶

The point is this: Hegel's critique of external teleology – here, attributed to and praised in Bacon and Kant – is almost exactly the same as Spinoza's. The mistake is in that we pick a random effect (such as, for instance, death of a soldier in combat), and explain it as a purposive result of an unrelated action (such as, for instance, the law which allows for gays to serve in the military). The ridiculous idea of lightning as God's punishing for whatever, actually – Hegel doesn't even bother to give an example – is truly the paradigmatic example of this procedure.

But Hegel's critique of final causes goes well beyond the dismissal of this elementary form of sophistry. In *Phenomenology of Spirit*, Hegel writes specifically on human goals, intentions (*Absichten*) and the actions. While one should not consider the terms *Absicht* and *Zweck* as completely synonymous in Hegel, my wager here is that human intentions (*Absichten*) may be considered as the beginning of a purposive activity, and therefore do fall in the general category of *causa finalis*. Hegel writes:

The *actual* crime however, has *its inversion* and *its in-itself* as *possibility*, in *the intention* as such; but not in a good intention; for

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16 Hegel 1896, p. 184–185.

the truth of intention is only the act itself.¹⁷

Hegel's context is very different from that of Althusser and his notorious thesis of the material existence of ideology, but it seems that they completely share the idea that the truth of an intention is only in the act itself. Hegel admits no question about good or bad intentions, there is no contradiction or conflict between good intentions and criminal act, what counts in the end is only the material result, the act itself which is the truth of the intention. Isn't this precisely what Althusser pointed out about Pascal's answer to intelligent and educated atheists, who ask the seemingly obvious question: how can they possibly start believing? Althusser condensed the reply: "Pascal says more or less: 'Kneel down, move your lips in prayer, and you will believe.'"¹⁸ The belief is, in the final instance, a function of actions, and the truth of someone's religion is in the actions they perform, just as Hegel claims. This should give us at least some indication that the question of purposivity is a very serious question for Hegel, and that he was well aware of the details of the criticism of the concept.

Let us now take a closer look at the idea of the *internal* teleology. As was already mentioned, Hegel takes up this idea from Aristotle and understands it, primarily, in the context of biology. Telos is the designation of the essence of the natural being itself. For Hegel, Aristotle's concept of internal teleology, entelecheia, was basically an argument that the natural realm can be explained consistently and consequently with mechanical determinism. The germ determines what can grow from it. In fact, it is only when we understand the biological teleology that we can make the distinction between internal and external teleology. The fact that it is raining or that there is a lightning is accidental – namely, it is accidental or external with regard to the inner determinism of an organism. To explain the growth of a plant by relating to the germ as its inner telos is perfectly legitimate. But to explain the extinction of an individual by referring to a stroke of lightning as a consequence of actions of that individual is to commit the fallacy of the external teleology.

Only once the difference between internal and external teleology is established, we can go deeper into the problematic. And it becomes clear very soon that the problem resides in the fact that Hegel consistently argues that the process of the concept could easily be explained as a development of some internal telos; it would seem that dialectic is driven by internal teleology. The process of reason must only express, or render

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¹⁷ Hegel 1977, p. 98.

¹⁸ Althusser 1971, p. 169.

manifest, what was already present in its germ. This was Althusser's specific criticism: While Hegel is not guilty of the fallacy of external teleology, he nevertheless explains the process of knowledge as following internal teleology. It is therefore quite essential to point out those moments in Hegel where it becomes obvious that the organic metaphor used to explain the process of the concept is only productive up to a certain point.

Let us take a look at one of the examples where Hegel points out a difference between internal teleology of nature and teleology of the concept. In his *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*, he explains the difference by claiming that the fruit of the plant does seek a return to the germ, but that it produces it in another germ, in another seed, which is different from the first. Hegel says that this is very different from what happens in Spirit:

As with the germ in nature, Spirit indeed resolves itself back into unity after constituting itself another. But what is in itself becomes for Spirit and thus arrives at being for itself. The fruit and seed newly contained within it on the other hand, do not become for the original germ, but for us alone; in the case of Spirit both factors not only are implicitly the same in character, but there is a being for the other and at the same time a being for self. That for which the "other" is, is the same as that "other;" and thus alone Spirit is at home with itself in its "other." The development of Spirit lies in the fact that its going forth and separation constitutes its coming to itself.¹⁹

The difference is that in organic Nature, the return of the germ to itself is only a return of another, whereas for Spirit, the returning Spirit is *for that same Spirit* which was in itself at the beginning. Almost the same point, but with an important addition, is raised in *Encyclopedia* in the framework of the discussion about intelligence: The germ returns to itself only in another, in the germ of the fruit, whereas the intelligence "as such is the free *existence* of the *being-in-itself* that recollects itself into itself in its development."²⁰ Teleology in organic nature is therefore not the same thing as teleology in Spirit. Moreover, the metaphor of the organic teleology fails precisely at the point where Hegel wants to introduce the idea of 'free existence;' this is to say, it fails precisely at the point where we have to think the true not only as substance, but also as subject.

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¹⁹ Hegel 1802, p. 22–23. Translation modified.

²⁰ Hegel 2007, p. 187.

But one may object that Hegel's argument here actually brings us into even greater difficulty. In biology, the fact that the germ at the origin is not at all the same as the germ of the produce guarantees that change is possible. Evolution is only possible because there is a factor of chance, coincidence, contingency, which allows for mutations of the genome. Hegel's Spirit, however, seems to be, just as Deleuze argued, an instance of sameness, an instance where all the process of negation is nothing but a detour or a backdoor to affirm the original sameness.

The point for Hegel is, however, that the Spirit that undergoes development is not the same as the Spirit that was at the beginning. The point is rather that not only did the transformation occur, but that it occurred to the spirit itself. What we are dealing with is the idea of the self-transformation of the Spirit. This is where Hegel is profoundly anti-Aristotelian: the substance *itself* is transformed by the accident. And this is what Hegel resents in Spinoza, this is why he insists on the formula that the concept of substance itself is not enough, that truth must be thought of as substance and as subject.

Interestingly enough – and here we come to the very core of the matter – we can detect this even on the level of the metaphor of the germ itself. While the organic unfolding, the Aristotelian inner teleology, is indeed used by Hegel quite often as a metaphor of the self-development of the Spirit, there is another phrase that is at least as prominent in Hegel's writing, a phrase that should warn us immediately that there is something other than organicism at work here; something that excludes the teleology of nature. The phrase is precisely the previously mentioned 'germ of death,' *der Keim des Todes*.

The Verdict: Death

At the very end of Encyclopedia's Philosophy of Nature, there is a section which is charged with one of the most important tasks in Hegel's philosophy, the task of transition from nature to spirit. The final section (encompassing two paragraphs) bears a very interesting title indeed: *The death of the individual of its own accord*, (*Der Tod des Individuums von sich selbst*). This sounds gruesome enough, but what exactly does this mean for Hegel? To be more specific, what exactly does death signify here? Because we know that death can certainly be understood as an organic process – a process of decay, destruction, degradation, decomposition. And it may seem that Hegel is referring precisely to the organic process of decay, to death as a part of life itself: "In fact, however, it is part of the concept of existence to alter itself, and alteration is merely the manifestation of what existence is in itself. Living things die, and they do

so simply because they carry the germ of death in themselves."²¹

But anyone who has ever read anything from Hegel will know that death is not simply an organic process for him. That is the concept of death in Spinoza – simply the decomposition or destruction of individual's specific disposition. Spinoza would argue and in fact did argue that such destruction always comes from outside of the individual, it can never be understood as an internal drive of the individual itself. But in truth, Hegel and Spinoza aren't even in contradiction on this point, because for Hegel, the death of natural things has a completely different meaning.

But then what does the death of the individual of its own accord mean at the threshold from philosophy of nature to philosophy of spirit? Clearly, it is precisely the question of death that separates nature from spirit and what facilitates the transition from nature to spirit. Surprisingly or not, at this crucial point we come back to the question of 'purpose:'

Spirit has therefore issued forth from nature. The purpose [Ziel] of nature is to extinguish itself [sich selbst zu töten, to kill itself], and to break through its rind of immediate and sensuous being, to consume itself like a Phoenix [sich als Phönix zu verbrennen, to burn itself down] in order to emerge from this externality rejuvenated as spirit.²²

Now, the term Hegel uses is not *Zweck* (purpose), but *Ziel* (goal, end); we are still in the framework of the concept of telos, but the term used is not the same. The answer to this is perhaps very simple. It could be argued that Hegel uses this term in order to clearly separate the concept of telos at play here from the biological telos, from the telos of 'inner teleology.' The death of nature by itself and through itself is not anything like an organic decomposition; Hegel has to use a completely new metaphor here, and compares the death of nature to the burning of Phoenix. Telos, here, does not imply an organic unfolding, but a rejuvenation through death.

This is far from being an exceptional instance in Hegel of explaining subject with the reference to something dead. In *Phenomenology of Spirit*, we find the example of the infinite judgment 'Spirit is a bone.' Hegel directly designates the skull-bone of man as *caput mortuum*, as a "dead being."²³ As Jure Simoniti points out in a recent publication, it is precisely the deadness of the skull that constitutes the condition of the self-

²¹ Hegel 2010, p. 148.

²² Hegel 1970b, p. 212.

²³ Hegel 1977, p. 198.

determining Spirit: “The function of the bone is still most necessary and non-trivial. First, Spirit exists nowhere else but in the matter inside the bone. Second, with its inert subsistence, the bone signifies that Spirit is not a given, but an emergent, self-reflexive, ideal entity.”²⁴ Spirit emerges through death.

And if we follow *Encyclopedia* and the explanation of the death of individual through itself, we quickly come to the same conclusion. Hegel is not talking about organic death at all! Rather, what he means by death, by death that the individual is born with, by death that is his original disease (his *ursprungliche Krankheit*), is the fact that an individual is a limited being in the first place and that it is therefore “inadequate to universality.”²⁵ In order to overcome this condition, the individual can only attain an abstract universality of habit (*Gewohnheit*). It is precisely the habit that is called by Hegel the death of the individual through itself; the habit is the deathly circulation of life without any transformation; habit is the repetitive, ossified life itself (*verknochert*). It is through habit that individual becomes like a bone, it is through habit that nature kills itself (*sich tötet*): “the *activity* of the individual has *blunted* and *ossified* itself, and life has become a habitude devoid of process, the individual having therefore *put an end to itself of its own accord* [*es sich aus sich selbst tötet*].”²⁶

The difficult task for the concept of purposivity is that it should reconcile between freedom of the subject and determinism of the substance but neither by implying the *external teleology* of divine intervention nor be reduced to the *internal teleology* of urges and drives, of germs and actualizations. Can there even be such reconciliation? The task of the metaphor of Phoenix which replaces the metaphor of the germ is precisely to procure a solution to this knot: the idea of limiting the process only to its internal logic, but nevertheless producing as a result something radically other, something external to the process itself. Spirit as radically alien to nature is therefore not something superimposed on it from the outside but is rather produced as nature's own inner purpose. This idea has immense consequences for Hegelian system and dialectic in their entirety; it is nothing short of a notion of following perfectly logical and consequential steps and ending in surprising results.

The concept of telos in Hegel must therefore be considered as the concept of transformation, of the capability of the substance to radically transform itself. It is of the utmost importance for Hegel because it is one

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24 Simoniti 2016, p. 165.

25 Hegel 1970b, p. 209.

26 Ibid.

of the ways through which he develops the idea of the self-transformative character of Spirit. While it may seem as that which is the worst in Hegel, that which is pre-critical in Hegel, that which is arch-metaphysical in Hegel, it should in fact be understood as precisely that which is worth defending in Hegel.

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Ethical Form in the External State: Bourgeois, Citizens and Capital

Terry Pinkard

Abstract: Geist is self-conscious life. Life itself must be conceptualized in terms of the form of organisms as having their organs serving a purpose, namely, the production and reproduction of the organism. Because of this, things can go well or badly for organisms. Human subjectivity emerges out of the background of life, not in opposition to it nor as something separate from it. Human subjects are life in which “the concept which has come into existence.” As such, the subject brings itself under conceptual demands that have the force of the practical demands of life itself. Those demands constitute what counts as a successful life. On Hegel’s own terms, the citizens (*Bürger*) of the Hegelian state cannot succeed. To do so, they must become, as Hegel argued, citizens (*Citoyen*) of genuine state based on freedom and equality. Hegel’s argument for this fails on his own terms since it fails at curbing the domination of capital, as he himself, surprisingly, argues.

Keywords: Hegel, civil society, teleology, self-consciousness, Sittlichkeit, Bürger, citizen, citoyen

I. Introduction

The dominant older reading of Hegel’s political philosophy as culminating in a kind of idealist version of a totalitarian state has by now been put aside, and it is now fairly commonplace to cite the many passages where Hegel stresses that the universality of the state has to make room for the particularity of its subjects. Although it is obvious that Hegel endorses both the value of individuality and the need to a commitment to the common interest, so do lots of other political theorists. Given that is established, we should instead now ask: what does Hegelian dialectic bring to our understanding of this commitment and if so, how does it do it? Answering this question takes its usual Hegelian three steps: First, there will be some brief remarks on the nature of the logical form that characterizes human subjectivity.¹ Second, we then go over some familiar ground to see how a particular historical shape (in this case, modern market society) is to be conceived in terms of logical form. Third, we then see how the work of external and internal determination functions within the logical forms that emerge.

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¹ In this paper, I will here use the Hegelian term, “subjectivity,” and “subject,” rather than the more common Anglophone term, “agent” and “agency.” Although closely related, “agency” and “subjectivity” are not exactly equivalent, but teasing out the differences between them is not the topic here.

II: Dialectic and Life

A. The concept of Life as involving purposes

One of the major issues confronting any interpretation of Hegel – and especially those who look to see on how it might bear on any of today's concerns – is the longstanding critique of its "idealism" from the camp of those who characterize it from the standpoint of "materialism" (Marx is the most prominent, but not the only, member of those critics). Much of this has to do with Hegel's conception of *Geist*. It is not terribly controversial to say that the central defining project for *Geist*, the central defining term for Hegel, is that of comprehending what it is to be *Geist*. To state the general thesis of this account in a few words: "*Geist*" in Hegel's philosophy is more or less equivalent to "self-conscious life." In fact, the term, "self-conscious life" can be substituted for almost all uses of "Geist" in Hegel's writings without there being any obvious incoherence or garbling of the text.² Or, rather, it should be put: "Geist" is Hegel's term for the species on the planet that is self-conscious. Why this makes a difference has to do with the following.

In the terms of Hegel's *Logic*, the concept of life plays a role in the judgments and inferences which are characteristic of what he calls the "concept," of what, in the misleading but ubiquitous term in Anglophone philosophy, is called "normativity" (Hegel's own term for practical normativity is often simply the German term, "*Recht*"). In the judgments and inferences we make in "Being" (the title of the first part of Hegel's *Logic*), we make judgments about individual things by pointing them out, characterizing them, generalizing about them, and counting them. In the judgments and inferences we make in terms of "Essence" (part two of the *Logic*), we explain things as appearances of something else which is both distinguishable and identical with the appearance (such as the tie that looks green in the dimly lit tie shop but blue in sunlight) and things which are the result of the causal processes that make up the things themselves (such as the spark which caused the fire).

Judgments and inferences about the "concept" (which Hegel identifies with Kant's synthetic unity of apperception³) have to do with

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²The most obvious cases where there might a worry are in phrases such as "self-conscious *Geist*." However, there the term, "self-conscious" is being used in two distinct but related senses. The phrase, "self-conscious *Geist*" means self-conscious life that is now explicit, or more fully aware, of its status as self-conscious life. It is thus, as the phrase would have it, self-consciousness about self-conscious life.

³"Es gehört zu den tiefsten und richtigsten Einsichten, die sich in der Kritik der Vernunft finden, daß die *Einheit*, die das *Wesen des Begriffs* ausmacht, als die *ursprünglich-synthetische* Einheit der *Apperzeption*, als Einheit des „*Ich denke*“ oder des Selbstbewußtseins erkannt wird. - Dieser Satz macht die sogenannte *transzendente* Deduktion der Kategorie[n] aus; sie hat aber von jeher für eines der schwersten Stücke der Kantischen Philosophie gegolten, - wohl aus keinem anderen Grunde, als weil sie fordert, daß über die bloße *Vorstellung* des Verhältnisses, in welchem *Ich und*

proprieties, such as, for example, whether a conclusion follows from a premise, or whether a claim coheres with another claim). In such judgments, we are not just pointing out or counting, nor are we looking for the reality behind the appearance. Rather, we are evaluating something. On Hegel's account, such evaluations go further than merely judging about the goodness or badness of inferences and claims, they also have to do with how good or bad certain types of things are themselves, given their relation to themselves and other things. Now, we can evaluate things either "subjectively," in which case we examine various proprieties of judgment and inference (in our subjective thinking), or we can evaluate things "objectively," in which case we are looking at systems of things and evaluating them in terms of whether they measure up to their concept (or evaluate even whether the concept of "measuring up" is appropriate to that system). Finally, we can examine things that are objective (as systems measuring or failing to measure up to their concept) but which themselves also have a subjective interiority to themselves which means that they have an active self-relation in measuring up or failing to measure up to their concept. "Life" is such an "objective-subjective" concept. How does this work?

Living creatures have an interiority in that they are what they are – or, perhaps better put, they have the powers they have – in terms of the purposes intrinsic to the overall shape of their kinds. For example, the fern is what it is in that it has the power to produce fern-like things (fronds, etc.) and also has no power at all to produce, say, acorns. Of course, it will do this only in certain objective conditions (the correct sunlight, water, nutrients in the soil, and so forth), but this is a phase of its overall purpose, which is to produce and reproduce itself and other ferns. The fern is part of a biological and ecological system, and explaining how it does this involves explaining its biochemistry. But that the fern produces other ferns (in this case, through its spores taking to the winds) is a power it has by virtue of being the species it is. The fern produces neither acorns, roses nor fish. Rather, it produces itself as a fern, and it produces other ferns.⁴ Those are its powers, and they

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der Verstand oder die *Begriffe* zu einem Ding und seinen Eigenschaften oder Akzidenzen stehen, zum *Gedanken* hinausgegangen werden soll." Hegel 1969g, p. 254. ["It is one of the profoundest and truest insights to be found in the Critique of Reason that the *unity* which constitutes the *essence of the concept* is recognized as the *original synthetic* unity of *apperception*, the unity of the "*I think*," or of self-consciousness. – This proposition is all that there is to the so-called *transcendental* deduction of the categories which, from the beginning, has however been regarded as the most difficult piece of Kantian philosophy – no doubt only because it demands that we should transcend the mere *representation* of the relation of the "*I*" and the *understanding*, or of the *concepts*, to a thing and its properties or accidents, and advance to the *thought* of it." Hegel and Di Giovanni 2010, p. 515.

⁴"*Zweitens* ist es der *Lebensprozeß*, seine Voraussetzung aufzuheben, die gegen dasselbe gleichgültige Objektivität als negativ zu setzen und sich als ihre Macht und negative Einheit zu

are biochemical in nature. The interiority of a fern is limited and almost barren, but its parts – fronds, spores, etc. – do what they do by virtue of the kind to which they belong (ferns), and thus its parts exist within its overall kind, which organizes itself around what it is. Moreover, its kind is itself contingent and can vary in terms of a variety of changes (given the mechanisms of Darwinian evolution), and its own determinateness as the kind it is must also be fluid. (Hegel, who was not an evolutionist, shared this view.⁵) Nature, after all, has no way of ordering itself into better or worse, and the forces of evolution put great demands on all natural kinds.

Life is thus a form of self-organizing matter. It defies no natural physical or chemical laws – and thus does not require us to posit a separate natural law, force or underlying non-chemical substrate, such as an *élan vitale*, to explain it – but it is a different concept in terms of how it relates things to each other, namely, as not merely “negative” (not just in terms of this not being that), nor in terms of determination by something other than the matter at issue, but as organizing itself. The parts of a fern organize themselves in terms of the species of fern itself, such as the ability to produce spores. However, life is not fully self-organizing. The living creature can manifest its powers sometimes only by its being triggered by something outside of itself, but in those cases, it is its own nature (as being a fern) that responds to such externalities. The same externality does not trigger the same thing in a turtle as it does in a fern.

This much has to do with the explanation of life, namely, that it is not to be seen as the kind of system (the living individual) that is to be fully explained in terms of the judgments and inferences of “Essence” (as a stage in the *Logic*). On the one hand, life is a series of chemical processes. That these and not those chemical processes take place in ferns is because of the overall system that constitutes the fern. Fern-like processes occur because of the nature of ferns. This is not because the

verwirklichen.” Hegel 1969g, p. 473. [“*Second*, it is the *life-process* of sublating its presupposition, of positing as negative the objectivity indifferent to it, and of actualizing itself as the power and negative unity of this objectivity. By so doing, it makes itself into the universal which is the unity of itself and its other.” Hegel and Di Giovanni 2010, p. 679.

5 “So ein Allgemeines wie „Fisch“ ist eben als Allgemeines an keine besondere Weise seiner äußerlichen Existenz geknüpft. Indem man nun annimmt, daß so ein Gemeinschaftliches in einer einfachen Bestimmtheit, z. B. Flossen, bestimmt dasein müsse, und solches sich nicht findet, so wird es schwer, Einteilungen zu machen. Es wird dabei die Art und Weise der einzelnen Gattungen und Arten zugrunde gelegt, sie als Regel aufgestellt; ihre Mannigfaltigkeit, die Ungebundenheit des Lebens läßt aber nichts Allgemeines zu.” Hegel 1969b, §368, p. 503. [“For example, if we take the general concept ‘fish’ as the common feature of what this name connotes in our concept, and ask, ‘What is the simple determinateness in fish, their one objective property?’, the answer, ‘Swimming in water’, is insufficient, since a number of land animals do this, too. Besides, swimming is not an organ or a structure, and in general, is not any specific part of the shape of any fish, but a mode of their activity. A universal of this kind, like fish, simply as a universal, is not linked to any particular mode of its external existence.” Hegel and Miller 2004, p. 417.

fern is the identity of the individual as an instance of the species, fern, and the chemical processes that on their own are not necessarily fern-like at all (even if there are some that only occur in ferns). (That would be a paradigm of essence-explanation, such as the tie looking green in the shop and being blue in the sunlight). Artifacts and living things have parts which are to be identified as the parts they are because of the function they serve in the whole. The difference is that artifacts require an artificer, whereas life simply requires itself and its own biochemical processes. Living things reproduce themselves out of their own internal systemic makeup.⁶

Out of the concept of the living organism, one thereby develops a logic of internal as opposed to external determination. The individual organism becomes the individual it is by differentiating itself from others instead of being differentiated by some other thing of its type. (The organism thus evidences what Hegel calls a self-relating negativity. It distinguishes itself rather than being distinguished by some external thing.)

Judgments and inferences about living things thus include a purposive element to them, and the category of life includes an evaluation of how things go for the organism in question. With regard to living things, it is therefore not merely our subjective judgments and inferences about going well or badly for them that is at stake. What is at stake is whether things are actually going well or badly for them in terms of the species they are.⁷ Such judgments and inferences are not merely “subjective,” not merely an unavoidable but species-bound feature of our own powers of judging – something like that would be Kant’s view – but also “objective,” part of the systems of the world itself.

Things can be good or bad for organic life in ways that cannot exist for non-organic things.⁸ (For example, for ferns, a dry environment is a

6The distinction between the purely chemical process and the self-replicating organic chemical process might not quite be as sharp as the distinction Hegel wants to make, but it is a distinction he explicitly notes: “Der chemische Prozeß ist so ein Analogon des Lebens; die innere Regsamkeit des Lebens, die man da vor sich sieht, kann in Erstaunen setzen. Könnte er sich *durch sich selbst* fortsetzen, so wäre er das Leben; daher liegt es nahe, das Leben chemisch zu fassen.” Hegel 1969b, §326: [“The chemical process is an analogy to life... If it were to *continue itself on its own*, it would be life; that is what suggests that life is to be grasped chemically.” Hegel and Miller 2004, p. 236.] It was only in 1828 that Friedrich Wöhler accidentally synthesized urea in his laboratory (down the street, as it were, from Hegel’s lectures), thereby inadvertently ushering in the new field of organic chemistry.

7This is why Hegel says, “... und insofern diese Wirklichkeit es nicht ist, so ist es *ihr* Mangel.” Hegel 1969b, §368, p. 503. [“and in so far as this actual existence does not do so, the defect belongs to *it*.” Hegel and Miller 2004, p. 417.]

8 “Noch tritt an den konkreten Dingen neben der Verschiedenheit der Eigenschaften gegeneinander der Unterschied zwischen [dem] *Begriff* und seiner *Verwirklichung* ein. Der Begriff in der Natur und im Geiste hat eine äußerliche Darstellung, worin seine Bestimmtheit sich als Abhängigkeit von Äußerem, Vergänglichkeit und Unangemessenheit zeigt. Etwas Wirkliches zeigt daher wohl an sich,

bad thing, since the fern cannot grow into an adult plant when the spores land in such dry spaces.) Of course, the plants cannot register things as being good or bad for them, whereas at least many animals can. What things are good or bad for organisms depends on the species since the standards for what is going well or badly depends on what the species needs to have things go well for it, and what counts as going well for such creatures has to do with its self-maintenance (its reproduction of itself) and its ability to reproduce more of its kind. This is crucial for Hegel's dialectical conception since it sets the background of his conception of subjectivity (or what he would call "subjectivity"). The normativity that characterizes subjectivity is not something that is completely at odds with natural normativity but is a development from out such primitive, natural normativity. In the case of living organisms, such norms are also facts about the organism. Many reef-building corals grow optimally in water temperatures between 73° and 84° Fahrenheit (23°–29°Celsius), and for most of them, when the water becomes much warmer, they become more stressed and are likely to die. If this is a fact about corals, it is also the norm for the species.

B. The Idea of life

It is worth noting a word or two about Hegelian language (or as it is sometimes put belittlingly, his "jargon"). Hegel puts both life and rational animality under the heading of the "Idea" (*Idee* in the German). Why use such language? Because the "Idea" is, as Hegel uses it, the unity of subjectivity and objectivity, or as we might put it much more

was es sein *soll*, aber es kann auch nach dem negativen Begriffsurteil ebensosehr zeigen, daß seine Wirklichkeit diesem Begriffe nur unvollständig entspricht, daß sie *schlecht* ist. Indem die Definition nun in einer unmittelbaren Eigenschaft die Bestimmtheit des Begriffes angeben soll, so gibt es keine Eigenschaft, gegen welche nicht eine Instanz beigebracht werden könne, in der der ganze Habitus zwar das zu definierende Konkrete erkennen läßt, die Eigenschaft aber, welche für dessen Charakter genommen wird, sich unreif oder verkümmert zeigt. In einer schlechten Pflanze, einer schlechten Tiergattung, einem verächtlichen Menschen, einem schlechten Staate sind Seiten der Existenz mangelhaft oder ganz obliteriert, welche sonst für die Definition als das Unterscheidende und die wesentliche Bestimmtheit in der Existenz eines solchen Konkreten genommen werden konnten. Eine schlechte Pflanze, Tier usf. bleibt aber immer noch eine Pflanze, Tier usf." Hegel 1969g, pp. 517-518. [In the concrete things, together with the diversity of the properties among themselves, there also enters the difference between the *concept* and its *realization*. The concept has an external presentation in nature and spirit wherein its determinateness manifests itself as dependence on the external, as transitoriness and inadequacy. Therefore, although an actual thing will indeed manifest in itself what it *ought* to be, yet, in accordance with the negative judgment of the concept, it may equally also show that its actuality only imperfectly corresponds with this concept, that it is *bad*. Now the definition is supposed to indicate the determinateness of the concept in an immediate property; yet there is no property against which an instance could not be adduced where the whole *habitus* indeed allows the recognition of the concrete thing to be defined, yet the property taken for its character shows itself to be immature and stunted. In a bad plant, a bad animal type, a contemptible human individual, a bad state, there are aspects of their concrete existence that are defective or entirely missing but that might otherwise be picked out for the definition as the distinctive mark and essential determinateness in the existence of any such concrete entity. A bad plant, a bad animal, etc., remains a plant, an animal just the same. Hegel and Di Giovanni 2010, p. 712.]

loosely, the unity of norm and fact.⁹ There is no single English term for such a conception (and none in the other European languages as far as I know), so Hegel (and Kant and Schelling) decided to appropriate an older use and put it to work in a special way. When other people try to state this unity of norm and fact, they too generally have to adapt an old term or coin a new term. For example, Philippa Foot, who argued for a related position vis-à-vis the relation between facts about species and norms, called such conceptions "Aristotelian categoricals."¹⁰ Michael Thompson calls them "natural-historical judgments" (and at one time, called them "life-form-words").¹¹ Hegel uses the term, "Idea," because (like Schelling) he is taking it over from Kant where it is used to indicate a concept that has to do with a totality, a whole that organizes its parts.¹²

The value of Hegel's so-called jargon consists in its moving away from the more empiricist and atomist assumption that if anything like "values" are indeed objective and (as the saying goes,) "in the world," they must therefore be individual things of some sort. On that empiricist view, since goodness is not a thing like a chair or even a number, it cannot be encountered and must therefore not be real or else be something we merely project onto things.¹³ Goodness is, however, not an individual

⁹The argument is, of course, more complicated than this. There is the "subjective" logic of the proprieties of inference and judgment, and there is the "objective" logic of describing systematic concatenations of things in the world such as mechanical, chemical or teleological facts. The solar system, for example, is a fact of nature in the way it relates individual things (planets, the sun, asteroids, etc.) into one mechanical system governed by gravitational laws (among others). The "Idea," on the other hand, is the logic that is both subjective and objective, that is, both fact-stating and norm-stating. Hegel says: "Die Idee hat aber nicht nur den allgemeineren Sinn des *wahrhaften Seins*, der Einheit von *Begriff* und *Realität*, sondern den bestimmteren von *subjektivem Begriffe* und *der Objektivität*... Die Idee hat sich nun gezeigt als der wieder von der Unmittelbarkeit, in die er im Objekte versenkt ist, zu seiner Subjektivität befreite Begriff, welcher sich von seiner Objektivität unterscheidet, die aber ebensosehr von ihm bestimmt [ist] und ihre Substantialität nur in jenem Begriffe hat." Hegel 1969g, p. 466. ["But the idea has not only the general meaning of *true being*, of the unity of *concept* and *reality*, but also the more particular one of the unity of *subjective concept* and *objectivity*... Now the idea has shown itself to be the concept liberated again into its subjectivity from the immediacy into which it has sunk in the object; it is the concept that distinguishes itself from its objectivity – but an objectivity which is no less determined by it and possesses its substantiality only in that concept" Hegel and Di Giovanni 2010, p. 673.] In a remark on his lectures on Aristotle, Hegel simply notes: "Der Begriff sagt: Das Wahre ist die Einheit des Subjektiven und Objektiven und darum weder das eine noch das andere wie sowohl das eine als das andere. In diesen tiefsten spekulativen Formen hat Aristoteles sich herumgearbeitet." Hegel 1969f, p. 163. ["We in our way of speaking designate the absolute, the true, as the unity of subjectivity and objectivity, which is therefore neither the one nor the other, and yet just as much the one as the other; and Aristotle busied itself with these same speculations, the deepest forms of speculation even of the present day, and he has expressed them with the greatest determinateness." Hegel 1963, vol. II, p. 148.]

¹⁰ Foot 2001

¹¹ Thompson 2008; and Thompson 1995

¹² It is worth noting that parts for Hegel only the "absolute Idea," that of thought thinking about its own conditions of intelligibility qualifies as a totality that has all of its conditions within itself.

¹³ This was part of J. L. Mackie's well known objection to objective values, that they were "queer." On

thing (if it were, it would be described in the terms at use in the chapters on “Being” in the *Logic*) but something having to do with the organism as an individual belonging to a species, for which certain things will be significant for its living well and certain things will not. Perhaps “Idea” is not the right term, but that is more of a fact about current linguistic usage and the cultural world it inhabits than it is about the real issue at stake.¹⁴

III. Dialectic and Subjectivity

These considerations about life should hopefully dispel whatever lingering notions there are that the only honest way to interpret Hegel is in terms of a scheme of grand teleological causality producing life out of non-living chemical processes (which either involves another entity, *Geist*, performing the causation or involves chemical processes as the means to a plan that cosmic *Geist* is carrying out).¹⁵ This has similar implications for Hegel’s conception of self-conscious life and the norms – the *Recht* – to which it may or may not be inadequate, since, as Hegel clearly states, although “right’s [normativity’s] source is in the concept... right comes into existence only because it is useful in relation to needs.”¹⁶

Subjectivity itself as self-conscious life can be looked at in two ways. On the first way, one can take the external view of agency (that favored by “the understanding”) and explain agency in terms of distinct types of things interacting in law-like ways. For example, in explaining human action, one would picture action as a compound of some inner

Hegel’s view, they are no more queer than, say, the solar system. Mackie 1977

14 This also has to do with a deeper issue about Hegel’s charge that Kant was an “empiricist” at heart. For Kant, concepts were rules (for the unification of experience), and as rules as such, were empty, requiring therefore empirical content from sensibility to have any real determinateness. A priori concepts (such the categories and the basic principles of geometry and mathematics) were possible only because there were a priori intuitions of space and time to provide such a priori content to the categories. As Robert Pippin has argued, it is perhaps the oldest misreading of Hegel to claim that Hegel accepted Kant’s view of concepts and then proceeded to discard the conditions under which such concepts could have content, thus leading to the charge that Hegel resurrected the kind of pre-critical metaphysics that Kant thought he had so thoroughly undermined. Hegel actually differed from Kant on the very nature of concepts, claiming that they could have content on their own apart from sensibility. That is another, longer story. See Pippin forthcoming

15 That particular reading of Hegel, historically as influential as it is, rests on the mistake of thinking that all explanation must be invoking some deeper substrate that explains the matters at the level of appearance (such as forces explaining the movement of bodies). It makes sense on that view to suppose that *Geist* is the deepest of all the substrates, explaining everything. That simply confuses one of Hegel’s most fundamental points in his *Logic*, that of the difference in form between Essence-explanation and Concept-explanation. On the confusion of substrate and concept explanation, see Kreines 2015

16 Hegel 1969d, §209., vol. 7, p. 361. “Wenn es auch aus dem Begriffe kommt, so tritt es doch nur in die Existenz, weil es nützlich für die Bedürfnisse ist.” [“Even if its source is the concept, right comes into existence only because it is useful in relation to needs.” Hegel 1991, p. 240.]

events (paradigmatically, a psychological state) and outer events (paradigmatically, bodily movement), and the debate becomes over how to state the “inner/outer” relation correctly without leaving that picture behind.¹⁷ The inner would then be conceived as an inner act of willing (or “trying”) or as simply a psychological state causing something like bodily movement. On both these accounts, the inner is fully determinate and identifiable independently of its connection (whatever that might be) with the outer.¹⁸

In the case of understanding subjectivity, as we might put it very loosely, there is the “phenomenal” grasp of subjectivity as that of empirically determinable individuals bringing about certain events in the world of appearance, and there is a “noumenal” grasp of subjectivity, that is, of the subject as a metaphysically significant subject for whom the proprieties of judgment and inference are binding and whose reasons determine its actions. In such “noumenal” terms, we do not conceive of subjects so much in terms of their dispositions (for example, in terms of what inferences they are likely to make or typically do draw) but rather in terms of the proprieties of their inferences (which are the correct ones?). What therefore is the relation between the subject as “phenomenally” conceived and as “noumenally” conceived? For the Hegelian, the simple answer is that the noumenal and the phenomenal subject are identical. In “noumenal” terms, the subject as a center of dispositions, desires and social forces is now to be viewed in terms of proprieties of thought, that is, as having a concept to which it is to measure up. The “noumenal” world – the world as grasped in rational thought – is the same as the phenomenal world but grasped differently. This is because the “noumenal” subject just is the “phenomenal” subject as comprehending him-or herself as doing something in light of the thought of what he or she is doing.¹⁹ The “noumenal” subject has, as we might put it, a point of view, whereas the phenomenal subject can be studied independently of anything like a “point of view.” From the “phenomenal”

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17 This is stated as the “decompositional” approach by Lavin 2016

18 This is the point where Pippin argues that such a picture breaks down, since he defends an interpretation where the inner cannot be fully determinate until it is linked with the outer, so that the determinateness of an “intention” cannot be specified until the action has taken place (resulting in the “deed”), and further that the action (or the deed) itself is not fully determinate until its relevant social context is determined. In turn, the social context is not fully determinate until its own location in the history of such contexts is provided. This continues to see the problem as set in terms of “inner” and “outer” and thus in terms of the judgments and inferences of “Essence.” Christopher Yeomans argues against Pippin but himself also looks to “Essence” and its account of causality to link the inner and the outer. See Pippin 2008 For Yeomans’ account, see Yeomans 2011 See Yeomans’ critical account of Pippin in Yeomans 2009

19 See the discussion of the related themes about the noumenal status of power relations in Forst 2015

standpoint, there is simply some set of events that lead to the action, and the action is something else, more than this earlier set of events (as we would conceive of action if it were just a bodily movement caused by a psychological state).²⁰ The noumenal subject is the phenomenal subject conceived in terms of its logical form, and in Hegelian terms, that means that subjectivity is not just life but self-conscious life. Or, to put it in even more up-front Hegelian terms, self-conscious life (*Geist* itself) is the truth of the phenomenal conception of subjectivity. The “inner” as it is conceived in terms of psychological states and dispositions is not so much denied as it is shifted into another conceptualization that also changes the way in which such states and dispositions are to be conceived. In Hegel's German term, these states and dispositions are *aufgehoben*. The “inner” of a psychological state is transformed into the “inner” of a shape of self-conscious life.²¹ Life becomes self-conscious life, that is, *Geist*, the species of life that is conscious of itself.²²

Self-conscious life is not simply life with self-consciousness added onto it. Self-conscious life is a different species, for which Hegel adopts the term, *Geist*. This is not a claim that *Geist* appeared from nowhere and had no *anthropos* ancestors. It is the claim that with the new type of self-relation, this *anthropos* became something different from its predecessors, namely, a *geistig* being, self-conscious life. Or, rather, by acquiring the capacity to think – to be not merely an animal but a rational

20 See Ford 2016 and Ford's arguments against corporealism, volitionalism, instrumentalism. https://www.academia.edu/29928490/The_Province_of_Human_Agency

21 This also suggests why without Hegel's dialectical approach, we most likely seek to show the unity of the “phenomenal” and the “noumenal” either through some metaphor of sight or some appeal to a standard external to the distinction itself. We just have to “see” how they are a unity or how they fit some independently established standard, (such as, for example, our pre-theoretical intuitions or some independently established metaphysics of causality). On the way in which external standards get brought into discussions of agency, see Ford 2016: “The reason for their lack of interest is fairly obvious: the reason is that everything that happens with everything we use is standardly theorized as an effect of bodily movement, and, as such, it is slated to be covered by a generic account of causation, which is not supplied by the action theorist, but by her favorite metaphysician, whose job it is to explain how causality works in general.” On the other hand, it the metaphors of sight that drive Schelling's insistence on “intellectual intuition” to drive his account and Sellars' conception of “stereoscopic vision” as necessary for combining the manifest and scientific images.

22 As Hegel puts it in, Hegel 1969a, p. 143: „Sie ist die *einfache Gattung*, welche in der Bewegung des Lebens selbst nicht *für sich* als dies *Einfache existiert*; sondern in diesem *Resultate* verweist das Leben auf ein anderes, als es ist, nämlich auf das Bewußtsein, für welches es als diese Einheit, oder als Gattung, ist.... Dies andere Leben aber, für welches die *Gattung* als solche und welches für sich selbst Gattung ist, das Selbstbewußtsein, ist sich zunächst nur als dieses einfache Wesen, und hat sich als *reines Ich* zum Gegenstande“ [“It is the *simple genus*, which in the movement of life itself does not *exist for itself* as this “*simple*.” Rather, in this *result*, life points towards something other than itself, namely, towards consciousness, for which life exists as this unity, or as genus... But this other life for which the *genus* as such exists and which is the genus for itself, namely, *self-consciousness*, initially exists, to itself, only as this simple essence and, to itself, is an object as the *pure I*.” (my translation)]

animal – it became self-conscious life.²³ As the self-consciousness animals we are, we are thereby, in Hegel's terms, “the concept which has come into existence.”²⁴ In being able to make judgments, life becomes self-conscious life in that judging is always – although only occasionally – self-conscious. To be thinking is for a living being to be doing something, and it must know what it is doing for it to count as thinking. To use Matthew Boyle's term, self-conscious life is thus a transformative, not an additive concept.²⁵

23 Hegel 1969g, p. 487: “Das Leben ist die unmittelbare Idee oder die Idee als ihr noch nicht an sich selbst realisierter *Begriff*. In ihrem *Urteil* ist sie das *Erkennen* überhaupt./ Der Begriff ist als Begriff *für sich*, insofern er *frei* als abstrakte Allgemeinheit oder als Gattung existiert. So ist er seine reine Identität mit sich, welche sich so in sich selbst unterscheidet, daß das Unterschiedene nicht eine *Objektivität*, sondern gleichfalls zur Subjektivität oder zur Form der einfachen Gleichheit mit sich befreit, hiermit der Gegenstand des Begriffes, der Begriff selbst ist. Seine *Realität* überhaupt ist die Form seines *Daseins*; auf Bestimmung dieser Form kommt es an; auf ihr beruht der Unterschied dessen, was der Begriff *an sich* oder als *subjektiver* ist, was er ist in die *Objektivität* versenkt, dann in der Idee des Lebens. In der letzteren ist er zwar von seiner äußerlichen Realität unterschieden und *für sich* gesetzt, doch dies sein Fürsichsein hat er nur als die Identität, welche eine Beziehung auf sich als versenkt in seine ihm unterworfenen Objektivität oder auf sich als inwohnende, substantielle Form ist. Die Erhebung des Begriffes über das Leben ist, daß seine Realität die zur Allgemeinheit befreite Begriffsform ist. Durch dieses Urteil ist die Idee verdoppelt - in den subjektiven Begriff, dessen Realität er selbst, und in den objektiven, der als Leben ist. – *Denken, Geist, Selbstbewußtsein* sind Bestimmungen der Idee, insofern sie sich selbst zum Gegenstand hat und ihr *Dasein*, d. i. die Bestimmtheit ihres Seins ihr eigener Unterschied von sich selbst ist.” (Underlining by me.) [“Life is the immediate idea, or the idea as its still internally unrealized *concept*. In its *judgment*, the idea is *cognition* in general. The concept is *for itself* as concept inasmuch as it freely and concretely exists as abstract universality or a genus. As such, it is its pure self-identity that internally differentiates itself in such a way that the differentiated is not an *objectivity* but is rather equally liberated into subjectivity or into the form of simple self-equality; consequently, the object facing the concept is the concept itself. Its *reality* in general is the *form of its existence*; all depends on the determination of this form; on it rests the difference between what the concept is *in itself*, or as *subjective*, and what it is when immersed in objectivity, and then in the idea of life. In this last, the concept is indeed distinguished from its external reality and posited *for itself*; however, this being-for-itself which it now has, it has only as an identity that refers to itself as immersed in the objectivity subjugated to it, or to itself as indwelling, substantial form. The elevation of the concept above life consists in this, that its reality is the concept-form liberated into universality. Through this judgment the idea is doubled, into the subjective concept whose reality is the concept itself, and the objective concept which is as life. – *Thought, spirit, self-consciousness*, are determinations of the idea inasmuch as the latter has itself as the subject matter, and its *existence*, that is, the determinateness of its being, is its own difference from itself.” Hegel and Di Giovanni 2010, p. 689.]

24 “Der Begriff, insofern er zu einer solchen *Existenz* gediehen ist, welche selbst frei ist, ist nichts anderes als *Ich* oder das reine Selbstbewußtsein. Ich *habe* wohl Begriffe, d. h. bestimmte Begriffe; aber Ich ist der reine Begriff selbst, der als Begriff zum *Dasein* gekommen ist.” Hegel 1969g, p. 253. [“The concept, when it has progressed to a concrete existence which is itself free, is none other than the “I” or pure self-consciousness. True, I *have* concepts, that is, determinate concepts; but the “I” is the pure concept itself, the concept that has come into *determinate existence*.” Hegel and Di Giovanni 2010, p. 514]

25 (Boyle 2015).

IV: Dialectic and Ethics

A. The good of the species

The bindingness of practical normativity is therefore that of life itself, just as the necessity for nutrition and the like are practical binding demands on the organism. Just as a particular animal may need various forms of plants for nutrition which place general practical demands on the organism to sustain itself, self-conscious life by its very nature falls under demands placed on itself by its species. However, because it is self-conscious life, it falls under its concept by virtue of bringing itself under its concept, and for it to be adequate to its concept means that it must actively strive to be the kind of being its concept demands. These “concepts” make up what Hegel calls a form of life (*Gestalt des Lebens*), and it is the most crucial part of Hegel’s overall idea that a form of life is most basically composed of certain concepts which for the participants in that form of life are experienced as unavoidable (even if, at a different point in time, some of them may seem not only to be avoidable or even to be irrational). Those unavoidable demands placed on a subject because of his or her “concept” are commitments to be honored, as the phrase goes, as if one’s life depended on it. A *geistig*, minded species falls under different demands of life than do non-minded species. For example, a moose falls under the species “moose,” and there are therefore ways in which it flourishes and ways it does not. *Geistig* beings, on the other hand, fall under a concept having to do with their social life, but they must bring themselves under that concept, unlike other social animals. (Sartre’s famous example of the café waiter striving to be a café waiter is an example of somebody bringing himself under a concept that, although socially given to him, is something to which he struggles to adequate himself.)

Hegel’s point here is largely Aristotelian (something he never disguises²⁶), in that it claims that certain ways of leading a life –

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26 Hegel 1969c §378: “Die Bücher des *Aristoteles* über die Seele mit seinen Abhandlungen über besondere Seiten und Zustände derselben sind deswegen noch immer das vorzüglichste oder einzige Werk von spekulativem Interesse über diesen Gegenstand. Der wesentliche Zweck einer Philosophie des Geistes kann nur der sein, den Begriff in die Erkenntnis des Geistes wieder einzuführen, damit auch den Sinn jener Aristotelischen Bücher wieder aufzuschließen.” [“The books of Aristotle on the Soul, along with his discussions on its special aspects and states, are for this reason still by far the most admirable, perhaps even the sole, work of philosophical value on this topic. The main aim of a philosophy of mind can only be to reintroduce unity of idea and principle into the theory of mind, and so reinterpret the lesson of those Aristotelian books.” Hegel et al. 1971 p. 3.] And: “Das Beste bis auf die neuesten Zeiten, was wir über Psychologie haben, ist das, was wir von Aristoteles haben; ebenso das, was er über den Willen, die Freiheit, über weitere Bestimmungen der Imputation, Intention usf. gedacht hat. Man muß sich nur die Mühe geben, es kennenzulernen und es in unsere Weise der Sprache, des Vorstellens, des Denkens zu übersetzen, was freilich schwer ist.” Hegel 1969f, p. 221. [“The best that we have on psychology, even up until the most recent times, is what we have from Aristotle; the same goes for what he thought about the will, freedom, further determinations about imputation, intention, etc. One must only take the trouble to get to know it and to translate it into our

which, for Aristotle, are those of the virtuous life – are mandatory for a successful life for the kind of being that humans are. Hegel’s departure from Aristotle has to do with his other equally strong commitment to a Kantian-inspired conception of self-consciousness. Because of that, Hegel argued that we had to take self-conscious lives to be historically indexed in ways that Aristotle did not and could not countenance. If a successful life is one that is adequate to its concept and in which the concept itself is adequate to itself (that is, ultimately adequate to reason itself), then a successful life will be one that attends to the form of the species at stake, which, for self-conscious creatures, is always to be specified in terms that have the same logical structure as that of the life of a self-conscious human within a historically shaped form of life (such as warrior, actor, dressmaker, etc.). A successful life is one in which the person can actualize – make real – a set of objective values (or, put more loosely, actually do things that are worthwhile), where the objective values will be those that can be justified given the reasons available to the subject. This end is not that of happiness, which is both too indeterminate for that kind of general use and which when being made more determinate and therefore action-guiding is contingent upon individual eccentricities and thus once again not useful as a general principle.²⁷ When people have achieved something objectively good, they are, as Hegel puts it, satisfied (*befriedigt*). They have done something worthwhile even if they are not made happier by doing so.²⁸

language, ideas and thoughts, which is of course difficult.” (my translation)]

27 This does not imply, as Hegel notes, that happiness is somehow an illegitimate claimant on human loyalties. He notes at Hegel 1969d, §123: “Insofern die Bestimmungen der Glückseligkeit vorgefunden sind, sind sie keine wahren Bestimmungen der Freiheit, welche erst in ihrem Selbstzwecke im Guten *sich* wahrhaft ist. Hier können wir die Frage aufwerfen: hat der Mensch ein Recht, sich solche unfreie Zwecke zu setzen, die allein darauf beruhen, daß das Subjekt ein Lebendiges ist? Daß der Mensch ein Lebendiges ist, ist aber nicht zufällig, sondern vernunftgemäß, und insofern hat er ein Recht, seine Bedürfnisse zu seinem Zweck zu machen. Es ist nichts Herabwürdigendes darin, daß jemand lebt, und ihm steht keine höhere Geistigkeit gegenüber, in der man existieren könnte.” [“In so far as the determinations of happiness are present and given, they are not all determinations of freedom, which is not truly present for itself until it has adopted the good as an end in itself. We may ask at this point whether the human being has a right to set himself ends which are not based on freedom, but solely on the fact that the subject is a living being. The fact that he is a living being is not contingent, however, but in accordance with reason, and to that extent he has a right to make his needs his end. There is nothing degrading about being alive, and we do not have the alternative of existing in a higher spirituality. It is only by raising what is present and given to a self-creating process that the higher sphere of the good is attained (although this distinction does not imply that the two aspects are incompatible).” Hegel 1991, p. 151.]

28 Hegel identifies Aristotle’s eudemonia with happiness (*Glückseligkeit*) and claims that although Aristotle’s conception shares with his own concept of *Befriedigung* (as “satisfaction”) the idea of a more general concept that straddles a whole life and not just a part of it, it is still too indeterminate and bound to individuality to serve as such a measure. Thus, for Hegel, the species aim is not that of flourishing, as it is for Aristotle and the host of naturalist-neo-Aristotelians such as Philippa Foot and Michael Thompson, but is the aim more appropriate to a self-conscious species that conceives of itself as giving itself the law (to put it in Kantian terms). Kant’s conception of being worthy of

There are two sides to this idea, both of which are relatively well known about Hegel's thought. First, in the modern period, Hegel argued that the development of a ground-level commitment to the claim that all are free itself has itself generated an almost equally ground-level commitment to the idea that modern people can legitimately lay claim to certain abstract rights (life, liberty and property), be committed to a universalist morality, and find binding guidance for their individual lives in the spheres of ethical life (*Sittlichkeit*), namely, in the bourgeois family, civil society and the state. These each give more determinateness to what counts as a successful life in modern conditions, and none of them could have had any genuine reality in the condition of, say, early modern Europe (where a deeply hierarchical form of life inherited from the medieval firmly excluded the idea that "all are free"). Moreover, to the extent that a form of life cannot provide these kind of determinate shapes for what counts as a satisfactory human life, it cannot under modern conditions long maintain any normative allegiance to itself on the part of its members.

Second, part of the force of the conditions of modern life is that the general terms by which a successful life is envisaged cannot be legitimate if they are imposed by an alien authority. Under modern conditions, for example, that this and not that counts as a successful marriage and therefore as a legitimate right is legitimate only when it can be comprehended as rational – only when, to put it more loosely, it makes sense to the parties involved – and not as a brute fact of nature or a divine command whose rationality itself cannot be comprehended but must be simply accepted. (Note that this is not the neo-Kantian claim that each individual must autonomously legislate for himself but rather that each individual must be able to exercise some insight into the justifiability of that "species" of life, even if the principles and pictures of it are not generated by him-or-herself autonomously but by tradition, history, cultural conditions and the like).

Third, Hegel's conception of *Sittlichkeit* and his argument for its necessity is not just the weak sociality thesis that we need connections with each other and that much of the content of our moral deliberations come from traditions and so-called "thick" commitments that only have places in special communities, nor is a "communitarian" view that holds that we are bound to the ethos of our community because it is "our own." Hegel's view is a thesis about ethical form, that is, the way in which the "universal" the species has to take its shape in the particular. The species of Robins only take shape in individual robins, but in self-conscious lives,

happiness is, as we might put it, *aufgehoben* into Hegel's conception of satisfaction.

the species takes shape in individuals shaping their lives in terms of standards that are generated by their history and environment. It cannot take shape just as the "human" in general since "man in general... has no existence as such"²⁹ The species of courtier, for example, only takes shape in terms of the expectations and practices of a courtly culture that produces the type, "courtier," who is always instantiated in a particular way.³⁰

B. Modern ethical life

Hegel's view also involves a more radical thesis about modernity itself, namely, that it is false that an inhabitable shape of modern life need only concern itself at its baselines only with abstract rights of life, liberty and property and universalist morality itself, and that it is false that everything other than that is a matter of policy and not part of the ground-level commitment that the general principle that "all are free" demands. Hegel's argument is that the moral life, at least as exemplified in Kantian and immediately post-Kantian thought, is in principle too limited to provide any genuine guidance. The categorical imperative is, as Kant says, only "the supreme limiting condition of the freedom of action of every human being," and does not provide any more guidance than that.³¹ Beyond that people have to do what will make them happy, and the injunction, "do what will make you happy" is itself so indeterminate as to be of little value in guiding action. (Kant's own principle of justice is simply that everybody should be free within the conditions of the same right being real for others.³²)

It is worth underlining the ways in which Hegel's conception of

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29 Hegel and Hoffmeister 1994, p. 85; Hegel 1975, p. 72.

30 In this way, learning one's place in a given social setup requires learning the material inference rules of that setup – that from, "I occupy such and such a position," it follows that "one ought to treat me in these particular ways." These material inferences make up the "social space" for those individuals. This is a point I have argued in Pinkard 1994

31 This is an obviously contentious point, since it rests on Hegel's taking Kant at his word, namely, that the conception of the practical law contains only the thought of universality of the maxim and that, contra Kant, nothing substantive other than the supreme limiting condition is going to follow. Hegel does not contest the interpretation of Kant that would have the much of the further content that Kant himself claims to be synthetic a priori follow from the categorical imperative supplemented by a few non-contentious empirical assumptions. Hegel's skepticism about that strategy is that it only ratifies the particular ideological setup of those drawing the conclusions (i.e., it simply ratified the moral ideas held at a particular time and place without providing any genuine critical distance from them).

32 "No-one can compel me to be happy in accordance with his conception of the welfare of others, for each may seek his happiness in whatever way he sees fit, so long as he does not infringe upon the freedom of others to pursue a similar end which can be reconciled with the freedom of everyone else within a workable general law — i.e., he must accord to others the same right as he enjoys himself.", Kant and Gregor 1996, p. 812.

modern *Sittlichkeit* emphasizes the “modern.” As new forms of commerce spread throughout Europe, a new shape of life was taking form in which the older social life of close, communal ties was giving way to a form of life in which subjects were called to live a more abstract life, that is, a life in general terms that applied to people who had to learn to deal with others who were, both figuratively and literally, at a distance from them.³³ This affected everything in its path – the family, commerce and politics. Whereas standards of action had previously rested on the “thicker” relations of communities and families (which Hegel knew firsthand from his youthful experience in Württemberg with its “hometown” structures³⁴), the life-world taking shape in Europe as a whole was much thinner and, so it seemed to many, also becoming more fragmented. The problem animating Hegel’s thought in the practical sphere was that of whether there really could in any substantive sense be any genuine “ethical life” above and beyond Locke’s triad of “abstract rights” and that of morality interpreted in term of Kant’s “supreme limiting condition on action.” Was there any way in which practical reason, in the shape it had assumed in modern life, was to provide any guidance other than that offered by worldly wisdom and the hodge-podge compendia of common sense advice and the desire to somehow pound all those into a form that looked consistent? Or should practical reason, having established Lockean rights and Kantian morality, simply content itself after that to reasoning about things in terms of utility or some other instrumental goal?

The idea that practical reason’s goodness is by and large restricted entirely to some form of instrumental reasoning is itself rejected in Hegel’s conception in favor of an argument to the effect that its goodness has to do with the goods of the species, and for a self-conscious life, this has to do with the way the “species” particularizes itself into historically indexed “shapes of life.” Hegel’s conception of the “family” as the basic building block of a modern shape of life is illustrative here, since it is one of the places where a good many contemporaries of all kinds of different philosophical persuasions are united in the certainty that he failed. Hegel, as is well known, argues for a modern “bourgeois” family structure centered around distinct spheres for the employed husband and the homemaker wife responsible for child care. To be sure, that offered a model for living a life that had quite a bit of determinacy on both sides. Hegel also thought that demarcating the spheres in this way were not

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 33 My discussion is shaped here not just by Hegel’s own views but also by the wide ranging and deep discussion of the contentious relation between the “bourgeoisie” and “modernity” in the innovative work by Seigel 2012

34 See Pinkard 2000

at odds with the natural temperaments of men and women but fit them almost perfectly. Hegel’s view is decidedly bourgeois and sexist.

Hegel’s model thus finds few defenders nowadays. However, although defending Hegel’s overt sexism and bourgeois tendencies would be impossible, it is nonetheless worth stressing the very “modernity” of Hegel’s conception. First, he defends an idea of companionate marriage, in which as one seventeenth century Englishman put it, was to be that of “two sweet friends.”³⁵ This version of marriage was supplanting the older idea of a strict hierarchy in which husbands dominated their wives and controlled their property, even though the newer companionate form of marriage, as originally conceived in terms of its uplifting “spirituality,” was not understood to be uprooting or putting into question the older hierarchical conception or the gender inequality at work in it at all. Its effect, however, was to put great stress on the inequality it was not intending to put into doubt.

Second, Hegel supports the partially “modern” idea the family’s property is not the husband’s exclusive possession but belongs to the family as a whole, and that women have the right to preserve some portion of their property after entering the marriage. However, like so many of his counterparts, Hegel could not bring himself to see that the idea of a marriage of equals was completely at odds with his own preferred idea of maintaining a high level of gender inequality (even if, especially oddly from the standpoint of the 21st century, he himself saw his views as vigorously defending the equality of women and men).³⁶ Even more oddly, in many ways Hegel’s treatment of marital equality and his defense of gender inequality were almost paradigmatic for what in all other places he treated as a shape of life heading for crisis and breakdown. (But, after all, he never claimed that philosophy was predictive, not even his own.)

What one sees most generally in Hegel’s treatment of the family are two things. First, there is the dialectical relation between internal and external determination. People entering into marriage are determined externally in a variety of obvious ways: Age, gender, status, and the fact that the institution itself sets the norms for the participants. On the other hand, whereas the participant in the older institutions of marriage (most of which Hegel dismisses as what he calls “patriarchal”) took the

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 35 Stone 1977, p. 137. See also Simon Schama’s short discussion of how companionship and its accompanying informality began appearing in Dutch paintings of the seventeenth century – a period which Hegel found immensely appealing both socially and artistically. Schama 1987, pp. 426-27.

36 In his own marginal comments to the *Philosophy of Right*, he notes: “die Frau als *sich gleich achten* und setzen – nicht höher... Gleichheit, Dieselbigkeit der Rechte und der Pflichten – Mann soll nicht mehr gelten als die Frau – nicht niedriger.” Hegel 1969d, p. 321, remarks to §167.

standards to be set by nature or some form of divinity and to be valid independently of whether we mortals can understand them, moderns find that they cannot accept the standards unless they themselves can understand their rationality, or, put more loosely, unless they make sense to them within a more general framework. Second, this conception of the family was itself a response to changing social conditions, in particular to those having to do with the way in which subjects individually and collectively were becoming more dependent on distant rather than closer and more familiar relations. (The emerging market conditions of European life at this time were a major feature of this but not its cause.³⁷) Whereas marriage once came with a very determinate hierarchical structure, modern companionate marriages were increasingly reliant on the parties making up the structure (within the nonetheless determinate hierarchy of the bourgeois family) for themselves as they went along. This form of marriage was more abstract than earlier forms in that its very informality and its marked view on working out and sustaining emotional ties was far less than determinate than the thickly embedded marriages and families of the immediate past.

Hegel's conception of the modern family was thus dialectical. The abstractness of modern familial and marital life meant that it had to take much of its bearings not from an alien natural or traditional structure but from the features of the people involved themselves. Whereas on the one hand, that might appear as arbitrary and as external determination – external in the sense that it had to be in large part the individual emotional temperaments and not the simply structure of the family unit itself that determined the way it worked itself out – the concrete marriage became an internal feature of a relationship shaped in terms of freedom and respect for individual standing and emotional attunement to the others in the family. Modern families were the result of a kind of thinning out, but that thinning out implied a new shape of a free life which included a new resonance within itself. The modern family, as we might say, was dyadic in its ethical structure. More or less undetermined by the rules, its ethos and motion was set by the emotional innovative attunements of its members as it moves forward in time.³⁸

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37 See Seigel 2012

38 Hegel claims Hegel 1969d, §75 that marriage cannot be assimilated to a contract and dismisses Kant's idea that marriage is a contract for the mutual and exclusive use of each other's sexual organs as "disgraceful." That is because Hegel argues that marriage should be seen as embodying an ethical form, which mere legality cannot capture. As far as external legality is concerned, any two people can become married (emotional attunement or lack thereof is not a legal consideration), and one clear ground for dissolution of the marriage would be sexual infidelity. This is a smaller part of Hegel's overall argument that Kantianism can only comprehend the "external state" and not the state – that is, true citizenship – proper.

V: Dialectic and the External State

A. The citizen as *Bürger*

Hegel was not the first, but still among the very earliest to mark a firm distinction between "state" and "civil society."³⁹ Prior to Hegel, civil society was not necessarily conceived as really that distinct from the state, since civil society was taken to be an organization of sorts of individuals and families according to laws, and thus all the issues that surround conceptions of political authority (law, economic regulation, administration of justice, etc.) – all of which were typically paradigmatic "state" matters – were also taken to be intrinsic to civil society. (John Locke, for example, equated "political society" with "civil society."⁴⁰)

It was already clear before Hegel's treatment of civil society that the emerging conception of civil society embodied certain moral ideas, especially Kant's conception of a kingdom of ends.⁴¹ Civil society thus put moral limits to the otherwise unfettered freedom of individuals interacting in it, and from those moral limits some relatively substantive commitments about justice also followed.⁴² Hegel did not take issue with that. For him, the issue was whether civil society also embodied any ethical form, that is, any way of specifying what would be appropriate to the life-form of *geistig* beings in the context of an underlying commitment to the modern concept of "all are free." From the moral point of view, it seemed that in fact it could not take any ethical form since what the individual is to do with his or her freedom does not follow from the forms

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39 As is well known, Hegel used the German term, *bürgerliche Gesellschaft*, which might look as if it literally meant, "bourgeois society." However, since it was the preferred translation of the Latin "societas civilis," it best rendered as "civil society." In fact, rendering it as "bourgeois society" is in a deep sense misleading. The "*Bürger*" of whom Hegel was speaking were not yet the French bourgeoisie. See Seigel 2012.

40 Locke and Macpherson 1980, "Those who are united into one body, and have a common established law and judicature to appeal to, with authority to decide controversies between them, and punish offenders, are in civil society one with another: but those who have no such common appeal, I mean on earth, are still in the state of nature, each being, where there is no other, judge for himself, and executioner; which is, as I have before shewed it, the perfect state of nature."

41 Kant seems to accept at least generally Locke's identification of civil society with political society. See Kant's mature statement in Kant and Guyer 2000: "Die formale Bedingung, unter welcher die Natur diese ihre Endabsicht allein erreichen kann, ist diejenige Verfassung im Verhältnisse der Menschen untereinander, wo dem Abbruche der einander wechselseitig widerstrebenden Freiheit gesetzmäßige Gewalt in einem Ganzen, welches bürgerliche Gesellschaft heißt, entgegengesetzt wird; denn nur in ihr kann die größte Entwicklung der Naturanlagen geschehen." §83. Von dem letzten Zwecke der Natur als eines teleologischen Systems. My underlining. "The formal condition under which alone nature can attain this its final ambition is that constitution in the relations of human beings with one another in which the abuse of reciprocally conflicting freedom is opposed by lawful power in a whole, which is called civil society; for only in this can the greatest development of the natural predispositions occur." Kant and Guyer 2000, pp. 299-300.

42 See also the discussion about the purity of such commitments as following from the moral law in Ripstein 2009 On this point, also see the different although related discussion in Kervégan 2015

of judgment and inference having to do with what it is to be a subject in civil society in general. Beyond that, the individual bearing that form simply had to decide for him-or-herself what to do with their freedom. (Study at night for an exam qualifying oneself to be jeweler or secretary? Make a living repairing carriages? Stay on the farm? Try to become a professor?)⁴³

Hegel's position was that, on the contrary, civil society did have a thin but nonetheless significant ethical form to itself, and it also served thereby to prepare people for a more truly political status, that of citizenship. To see how he got there, though, one has to distinguish, as Hegel did not completely clearly do, the *bourgeois* from the *Bürger* in *bürgerliche Gesellschaft* (civil society).⁴⁴ On Hegel's view, one of course is not born a *Bürger*, one has to become one. In good Rousseauian fashion, he identifies such *Bürger* not simply as seeking to maximize their utility but also just as much seeking self-esteem in the eyes of others. The true *Bürger* acquires a sharp eye for social action, and he (or she) modifies his behavior in terms of the behavior of others, which requires a special type of education in order to learn how to do it and do it well. Each *Bürger* is compelled by others and himself to do things as he sees others do.⁴⁵ For this to be real, the person has to become "educated" in terms of the German *Bildung*. He is not merely to acquire technical skills

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43 It is probably obvious, but one should distinguish those positions in social life that involve ethical form from those that are merely "roles" or even "mere positions" in social life. Thinking of the positions that are particularizations of ethical form as "roles" involves an element of theatricality that is not present in the full cases of ethical life. Such theatricality enters only in a fully alienated life, when the role is merely a role and not a requirement of a successful life itself.

44 The French term, "bourgeoisie," became the default name for a class of people that were property owners and who on the whole opposed more equitable social change. They thus became the foot-dragging conservatives – the "bourgeoisie" – denounced by everyone from Marx to Flaubert to Sartre only really after the so-called "bourgeois monarchy" of Louis-Philippe in 1830. For one explanation for why it was that it was the French term and not, for example, the English term, "the middling classes" nor the German term, "*Bürger*," that filled this role, see Seigel 2012. Thus, "bourgeoisie" came to have an odd place in social discourse since many *Bürger*, who took themselves to be progressives, did not think of themselves as "bourgeois." Wealthy property holders funding opera houses did not think of themselves, for example, as "bourgeois." On this latter point, see Gay 1995

45 "Unter gebildeten Menschen kann man zunächst solche verstehen, das sie alles machen wie andere, und die ihre Partikularität nicht herauskehren, während bei ungebildeten Menschen gerade diese sich zeigt, indem das Benehmen sich nicht nach den allgemeinen Eigenschaften des Gegenstandes richtet." Hegel 1969d, p. 345. Hegel 1991, §187, *Zusatz*: "By educated (*gebildeten*) people, we may understand in the first place those who everything as others do it and who do not flaunt their particularity, whereas it is precisely these characteristics which the uneducated display, since their behavior is not guided by the universal properties of its object... Thus, education (*Bildung*) irons out particularity to make it act in accordance with the nature of the thing," p. 226; This is following Nisbet's correction (which he does according to Hotho's notes) of the standard German text, which has "alles machen können, was andere tun" but which makes no sense. Both Rousseau and, following him, Kant thought that the propensity to seek self-esteem in the eyes of others and thus to make one's own personal choices dependent on how others will view them was itself a natural propensity of humans, even though Rousseau thought this propensity was only unlocked once the rules of property had been established.

(reading, writing, adding, subtracting) or merely general knowledge (such as history) but also to acquire the right emotional responses and proper aesthetic taste. In becoming so "educated" (*gebildet*), he also acquires thereby a mind of his own, even though he is cultured enough not to flaunt it, nor to let it interfere with his social interactions.⁴⁶

The uneducated fail the test of being such a *Bürger* (they fail at the abstract status of *Bürgerlichkeit*, "citizenship" of a special sort). Likewise, the aristocrats of the older order also typically fail at such *Bürgerlichkeit* since they have to think of themselves as more vaunted than others, and therefore as (befitting aristocracy) somebody special who is beyond the laws regulating the relations among the *Bürgertum*. The true *Bürger* thus has in mind his own advancement and place in society (which is heavily dependent on the opinion of others), but he also has, in the most abstract sense, the "society" itself in mind as he acts. The *Bürger* is thus not to be identified straight-out with the neo-classical economic creature whose supposed first-order interest is maximizing its own utility, even though any at least partially canny *Bürger* will be doing exactly that. In fact, given the setup of civil society, one can easily understand how the proper *Bürger* will be tempted and even pushed by the forces of social imitation off of which he lives to become such an individual utility maximizer.

Through *Bildung*, the *Bürger* becomes an exemplary modern character even though there seems to be no real ethical content to his actions. Both Rousseau and Kant in fact deprecated such people as living a not truly free life, since their lives are so completely determined by something external to them, namely, the opinion of others. The *Bürger* thus exhibits in his heart a mild contradiction. The purpose of *Bildung* is to develop a kind of virtuosity so that one can have a mind of one's own – be capable of making, for example, the proper aesthetic judgments – yet the *Bürger's* plan of action always has to do with how it and he will look to others, so that his "own mind" – his internal determination – is in fact set by others – an external determination.

What is attractive about being such a *Bürger*? This kind of creature is best attuned and more likely to develop the virtues necessary for living in an abstract world where the givens of daily life in a more customary, hierarchical and closely knit world have either vanished or are in the process of fading out. These new *Bürger* have to learn to breathe thinner

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46 This emphasis on *Bildung* and acculturated self-development was to become a central feature of classical German liberalism, finding its most well known articulation in Humboldt and Burrow 1969 (The book was apparently written in 1792 but not published until 1851). That aspect of classical German liberalism found its English expression in Mill and Rapaport 1978 in 1859. (The book should actually be credited to John and his wife, Harriet.)

air than their ancestors did.⁴⁷ Thus, unlike the older city-dwellers (the *Stadtbürgertum*) who preceded them, they have to learn to be citizens of a state (*Staatsbürgertum*). If the older version of a *Bürger* was replete with “thick” (and in particular, hierarchical) concepts, the newer version of the *Bürger* was thinner. The older form of *Bürger* played its part in a local economy where the rule of contract was not so fully established, and widely shared (or at least recognized) standards of conduct ruled some things and other things out (as iniquitous). As patterns of communication and trade increased among traditionally more isolated communities and, importantly, as markets began to be less local and more cosmopolitan, increasingly strangers had to interact with each other without having any backdrop of local “thick” standards to which they would have to keep faith. Modern morality (especially in its Kantian form) filled part of that gap but only part of it. The *Bürger* operating in the new and expanded world of commerce and the arts had to be self-reflective and a bit wary while at the same time laying the grounds for a good reputation to accompany him as he learned to deal with and rely on strangers.

These expanding systems of linkage and the new forms of life they were creating undermined the traditional hierarchical systems (however the older hierarchies had been established) which accompanied the way in which the general idea that “all are free” was beginning to flesh itself out institutionally. The thinned-out civil society populated by the abstract people emerging from the new bourgeois family was thus generating and finding itself more and more firmly committed to the twin ideas of freedom and equality.⁴⁸

B. the *Bürger*, freedom and equality

The reason that freedom and equality remain thin (or “abstract”) in civil society is that the equality of the *Bürger* in this thinned out form of life is forever under the pressure that comes from the necessity of securing one’s acquisitions within this kind of setup. Civil society is therefore also, at first incipiently and then later robustly, a market society, where prices are determined by some kind of equilibrium between consumer and producer. The larger “whole” which makes up *Bürgertum* (the social sphere of such *Bürgers*) constitutes a kind of thin and

47 The metaphor is Nietzsche’s: the ascetic person who desires “freedom from compulsion, disturbance, noise, business, duties, worries; clear heads; the dance, bounce and flight of ideas; good, thin, clear, free, dry air, like the air in the mountains, in which all animal existence becomes more spiritual and takes wings.” Nietzsche and Smith 2008, p. 78.

48 “*Freiheit und Gleichheit* sind die einfachen Kategorien, in welche häufig das zusammengefaßt worden ist, was die Grundbestimmung und das letzte Ziel und Resultat der Verfassung ausmachen sollte. So wahr dies ist, so sehr ist das Mangelhafte dieser Bestimmungen zunächst, daß sie ganz abstrakt sind.” Hegel 1969c p. 332.

boundless medium of market exchanges between thinly but discretely identified individuals operating in a social space where each is free and equal. In this new world, the old order where some (the wealthy, the aristocracy) consume and others produce finds itself dissolving. Rather, all are now participants in consumption, spurring what the historian Jan De Vries has called the “industrious revolution,” a change in life forms which produced in people the motivation to produce more so they could buy more, thus spurring on the development of even wider market opportunities, and all of this long before the industrial revolution provided the extra spark for the industrious revolution to speed up.⁴⁹ Prior to this, production and consumption was more or less local. However, the “industrious revolution” spurred on trade among different communities, which meant that such trade was not just in terms of luxury goods that only the very wealthy could afford to consume but was for matters that a wider variety of people could consume.

On Hegel’s view, since each is a discrete individual trying to maximize his own utility, the behavior of these units of consumption and production can be studied empirically and scientifically in terms of the laws they follow as the *Bürger* move around in the very medium which sustains their activity but which they, by being the modern *Bürger* that they are, also create. Within that medium, they are not merely producers and consumers, they are also *Bürger* with a sense of reputation and amour *propre* to sustain them in what has to seem like a monadic existence. The “monads” of the economy – whose monadic appearance to themselves and each other is a feature of the medium that sustains such a form of subjectivity – find their *pathos* in following the rules and learning to master them to their own benefit. The scientific study of this is political economy, and it promises to be able to treat all aspects of the structure and flow of this medium mathematically and the logical form of judgments and inferences befitting such seemingly monadic units leads to its possible systematization.⁵⁰ For civil society, it seems that the fundamental theoretical system would certainly not be theology, and almost as certainly not philosophy, but rather modern economics.

Because of this, civil society has the semblance that it has no ethical form but only a moral form (of mutual respect under conditions of legal equality). Thus, as Hegel says, “the ethical is lost in its extremes,” since there are no inferences to the determinate shape of life of each *Bürger* from the form they take in people becoming those types of subjects in the new far-flung and abstract relations among people. The

49 De Vries 2008.

50 See Hegel 1969d, §189, where Hegel discusses the power of explanation by political economy.

idea of emotional attunement, so central to modern marriage, is thinned even more in civil society.

In the historical German situation of the early nineteenth century, it also did not spring up on its own. Napoleon's invasion of Germany spurred the German lands into developing reforms so that they could generate the kind of wealth which the dominant French state demanded from them or to militarily fight back. The old order was rotting out within itself, as Hegel saw things, and Napoleon simply knocked the dead idol off the shelf. (As Hegel commented sarcastically to his friend Immanuel Niethammer in 1822, the Bavarians do not have themselves to thank for their new political order but only "God and Napoleon."⁵¹) The creation of civil society was itself a creation by the state in the German lands, and in Hegel's eyes, it was up to the reformed states (Prussia first and foremost) to create as it were the conditions for these new abstract people to form themselves. In the German lands, it was a top-down creation.⁵²

C. The *Bürger* and the state

Even if civil society is not constructed by state action, it still rationally has to create a state out of itself, and this is the "external state" based on "*Not*" (distress, danger, need and necessity). These *Bürger*, circulating in their medium under the moral conditions of freedom and equality, require an administrative way of making those moral conditions effective, all of this because of collective action problems, the need for security in market dealings and because of what would otherwise be irresolvable contradictions among the *Bürger*. Such an external state would in effect look much like the political body for which Kant argues in the *Metaphysik der Sitten*. It requires a functioning market with the right and abstract rules for competition firmly in place, a system of justice for adjudicating disputes (articulated in courts, published legal codes, and the like), and official state units to regulate that market where there are market failures. The last is especially important since producers and consumers can have entirely different, even deeply contradictory, interests. Left to its own, the market overreaches, and even though it has within itself a large self-correcting element, it still requires external regulation that fairly balances the differing interests on all sides (and particularly those between producers and consumers, which includes everyone).⁵³ This external state, even in its Kantian form, need not be

51 Hegel and Hoffmeister 1961, II, #390.

52 See the discussion in Seigel 2012.

53 Hegel 1969d, §236: "Die verschiedenen Interessen der Produzenten und Konsumenten können in Kollision miteinander kommen, und wenn sich zwar das richtige Verhältnis *im Ganzen* von

democratic.

These features of the external state are supposed to follow from the purely moral considerations about mutual respect and freedom. Something like Kant's argument for leaving the state of nature is supposed to show how this state could arise out of purely moral demands (even though in Germany it in fact arose out of a response to Napoleonic hegemony). In the state of nature, the moral law would permit people to seize those things that have no rights (all items of nature) to provide for their needs; and it would prohibit anybody from wronging anybody else; and, where there was an issue about possible wrongs, the basic moral principle of justice would prohibit anybody from being a judge in their own case. Thus, when there is dispute in such an imagined state of nature about the possession of something, the two parties must turn to or appoint a third party to settle the dispute, and, so the Kantian argument goes, following out the implications of pure practical reason in this case leads to the idea of a sovereign governing civil society whose role it is to settle the law on such matters and to take on further obligations, such as stating who is to count as legislating the law and so forth. Hegel seems more or less to accept this as an account of the moral justification of the external state. This state thus arises not out of anything like a social contract – Kant's "Idea" of a social contract is not an actual contract – but is generated out of the needs of the *Bürger* who populate the civil society that generate it and from their reciprocal recognition of the moral demands it places on them.

This state is external because it does not follow a law of its own but arises only out of the various collisions and interests that make it necessary. It is the "third" party to adjudicate disputes between two "monadic" *Bürger*. The rules that guide it are the same rules that govern civil society. It has, as it were, no rules of its own. It is more of the actualization of the basic principles that animate the flowing medium of civil society itself. The external state has no special form of ethical life for itself.

The external state, however, remains external. It sets boundaries to individual and collective action, and it establishes some weak duties to promote general welfare, but it has its only motivational roots in (Kantian) morality itself. Since even Kant himself thought that this was too unstable to sustain collective action – since as Kant put it, "man is not thereby expected to renounce his natural aim of attaining happiness as soon as the question of following his duty arises; for like any finite

selbst herstellt, so bedarf die Ausgleichung auf einer über beiden stehenden, mit Bewußtsein vorgenommenen Regulierung."

rational being, he simply cannot do so”⁵⁴ – the reality of clashes between personal motivation (for “happiness”) and duty are bound to be present, and, as Kant himself recognized moral “duty” on its own seems to be too weak to do the job all by itself. For the *Bürger* to be adequate to their concept – to exhibit the more general characteristic of *Bürgerlichkeit* – more is needed.

Since each *Bürger* is expected to look out for himself, it follows that where his own particular interests coalesce with those of others, he needs to establish a bond with them to further their joint interests. Moreover, an uneven system of welfare for those who cannot provide for themselves may also, on moral grounds alone, be established. (An example would be Locke's familiar claim from his *Second Treatise* that in conditions of initial appropriation of un-owned things, we have to “leave enough and as good” for others – as well as his earlier and stronger claim in the *First Treatise* that the needy have a moral right to the surplus of the more well-off.⁵⁵) To become a *Bürger*, one must be willing to deal and compromise, which also means that one must have some things with which to deal.

To make good on those needs, the coalescence of interests would lead to the formation of two distinctive types of groups, which Hegel identifies as the Estates and the Corporations. (Hegel is actually not clear on how distinct the groups are, nor on which of the two are more basic.⁵⁶) Within such estates and corporate bodies, a type of life becomes possible that is associated with each estate. (As we shall see, this is the crucially weak link in Hegel's argument.) Each estate establishes a kind of life that is appropriate to that estate. Thus, the agricultural estate, for example, develops a life where success is not bound up with being related to distant markets but rather with sticking to family and community as protection against ruin (such as natural disasters or prince-induced warfare), and it thus stubbornly resists the pressure to lead a thinner,

54 “I had provisionally designated morals as the introduction to a discipline which would teach us not how to be happy but how we should become worthy of happiness. Nor had I omitted to point out at the same time that man is not thereby expected to renounce his natural aim of attaining happiness as soon as the question of following his duty arises; for like any finite rational being, he simply cannot do so.” Kant, “**Theory and Practice**,” in Kant 1991 p. 64

55 Locke, (*Locke and Macpherson 1980*) Ch. 4, §42; First Treatise: “But we know God hath not led one Man so to the Mercy of another, that he may starve him if he please: God the Lord and Father of all, has given no one of his children such a Property, in his peculiar Portion of the things of this World, but that he has given his needy Brother a Right to the Surplusage of his Goods; so that it cannot justly be denied him, when his pressing Wants call for it.”

56 In the Hegel 1969d, Hegel at one time credits one as basic and at another time the other as more basic. For example, in Hegel 1969d)§201, he claims in addition to the family as a basic “root” of the state, the estates the second such “root”; however, later at §255, he again, after noting the family as one “root” of the state, identifies the *Korporation* as the second. His strategy suggests that he regards them both as two sides of the same coin.

more abstract life. In this way, Hegel claims that civil society, which looks like it has either none or only the most abstract relations to ethical life, turns out to embody a kind of thickness to itself that is appropriate to modern times.⁵⁷ The estates become threefold: Agricultural laborers, those who work in trade and industry (who have to lead lives that are more reflective and thus more abstract than the members of the agricultural estate), and those fully abstracted individuals who do more or less fully symbolic work aimed at civic improvement and public policy. The last is called the “universal estate,” who have the “universal interests of social conditions for their business.”⁵⁸ Each provides a distinct model for a form of life, each gives some rather thin but nonetheless determinate enough purposes around which individuals working within them can stake their lives as if they were born to it. In this way, each estate gives such modern, abstract people a slightly more firm anchor in life. As Hegel puts it, in the formation of these groups, genuine ethical as distinguishable from moral form arises in civil society, and it does so as the very medium of civil society itself and not just within one's own place in it as it becomes an object of reflection and concern.⁵⁹

B. The *Bürger* and the *Citoyen*

Why not then end the *Philosophy of Right* with the external state? First, of all there is the motivational issue: If it is impossible to leave civil society at the level where individual interest (Kant's “happiness”) threatens to pull apart the civil society, organizing the individual interests into groups of interests will not solve that problem. The problem that

57 C. Yeomans tries to make a case for the different estates and corporations as expressing different strategies for individuation as self-appropriation. However, as intuitive as his classifications are, they are far from being necessary expressions of the logical form of the inhabitants of civil society as Yeomans reconstructs them. His argument is more that, given the particular historical conditions under which Hegel wrote, something like these three estates are likely and plausible strategies for individuation. There is, of course, much more to Yeomans' careful sifting of the various Hegelian arguments than this indicates, but there is not nearly enough room here to go into them. Yeomans 2015

58 Hegel 1969d, §205: “Der *allgemeine Stand* hat die *allgemeinen Interessen* des gesellschaftlichen Zustandes zu seinem Geschäft; der direkten Arbeit für die Bedürfnisse muß er daher entweder durch Privatvermögen oder dadurch enthoben sein, daß er vom Staat, der seine Tätigkeit in Anspruch nimmt, schadlos gehalten wird, so daß das Privatinteresse in seiner Arbeit für das Allgemeine seine Befriedigung findet.” [“The universal estate has the universal interests of society as its business. It must therefore be exempted from work for the direct satisfaction of its needs, either by having private resources, or by receiving an indemnity from the state which calls upon its services, so that the private interest is satisfied through working for the universal.” Hegel 1991, p. 237.]

59 Hegel 1969d, §249: “Indem nach der Idee die Besonderheit selbst dieses Allgemeine, das in ihren immanenten Interessen ist, zum Zweck und Gegenstand ihres Willens und ihrer Tätigkeit macht, so kehrt das *Sittliche* als ein Immanentes in die bürgerliche Gesellschaft zurück.” [“In accordance with the Idea, particularity itself makes this universal, which is present in its immanent interests, the end and object of its will and activity, with the result that the ethical returns to civil society as an immanent principle.”, p. 270. Hegel 1991

Aristotle already noted is taken up again by Hegel, namely, that in modern times at least one of these estates – that of trade and industry – is likely to accumulate disproportionate wealth in its hands, and that will mean that it will also disproportionate control over (external) state power.⁶⁰ At the same time, another force gets set in motion – all too visible in Hegel's day – to create a sub-society of have-not's (the rabble, the *Pöbel*, as Hegel calls them) who lose all motivation to cooperate and thus fail to be genuine *Bürger*.⁶¹ When that happens, there can only be

60 Hegel 1969d, §244, where Hegel famously remarks that the problem of poverty in modern civil society, like that of the problem of poverty in ancient Athens, "Das Herabsinken einer großen Masse unter das Maß einer gewissen Subsistenzweise, die sich von selbst als die für ein Mitglied der Gesellschaft notwendige reguliert – und damit zum Verluste des Gefühls des Rechts, der Rechtlichkeit und der Ehre, durch eigene Tätigkeit und Arbeit zu bestehen –, bringt die Erzeugung des *Pöbels* hervor, die hinwiederum zugleich die größere Leichtigkeit, unverhältnismäßige Reichtümer in wenige Hände zu konzentrieren, mit sich führt." ["When a large mass of people sinks below the level of a certain standard of living – which automatically regulates itself at the level necessary for a member of the society in question – that feeling of right, integrity, and honour which comes from supporting oneself by one's own activity and work is lost. This leads to the creation of a rabble, which in turn makes it much easier for disproportionate wealth to be concentrated in a few hands." Hegel 1991, p.266.] This echoes Aristotle in Aristotle 1941 1295b: "Now in all states there are three elements: one class is very rich, another very poor, and a third in a mean. It is admitted that moderation and the mean are best, and therefore it will clearly be best to possess the gifts of fortune in moderation; for in that condition of life men are most ready to follow rational principle. But he who greatly excels in beauty, strength, birth, or wealth, or on the other hand who is very poor, or very weak, or very much disgraced, finds it difficult to follow rational principle. Of these two the one sort grow into violent and great criminals, the others into rogues and petty rascals. And two sorts of offenses correspond to them, the one committed from violence, the other from roguery. Again, the middle class is least likely to shrink from rule, or to be over-ambitious for it; both of which are injuries to the state. Again, those who have too much of the goods of fortune, strength, wealth, friends, and the like, are neither willing nor able to submit to authority. The evil begins at home; for when they are boys, by reason of the luxury in which they are brought up, they never learn, even at school, the habit of obedience. On the other hand, the very poor, who are in the opposite extreme, are too degraded. So that the one class cannot obey, and can only rule despotically; the other knows not how to command and must be ruled like slaves. Thus arises a city, not of freemen, but of masters and slaves, the one despising, the other envying; and nothing can be more fatal to friendship and good fellowship in states than this: for good fellowship springs from friendship; when men are at enmity with one another, they would rather not even share the same path. But a city ought to be composed, as far as possible, of equals and similars; and these are generally the middle classes." (My underlining.) Since Hegel locates the problem in terms of ethical form, he also argues, as does Aristotle, for a comparable attitude among the very wealthy (say, the 1%), who also have no stake in the "state" since their motivational structure is marked by the bad infinite, and hence their ties are to the market, not the community. They think they can buy everything and see no need for any solidarity with those who in turn have no means to purchase their loyalty. In locating the problem in terms of ethical form, Hegel is not, it should be added, arguing for any kind of individualist, "moral" answer to the problem. The very problem of ethical form among the *Pöbel* and the 1% itself arises because of the nature of the market as unfettered by deeper ties of solidarity.

61 Frank Ruda has made this conception of the *Pöbel* into a key element for interpreting Hegel's social and political philosophy as recognizing and responding to a key feature of modern life without Hegel himself having drawn the proper Hegelian conclusions. Ruda's account deserves a more thorough description than can be given here. Nonetheless, while Ruda and I share a good bit in our general approaches, we differ on many of the specifics about the dialectic. In particular, Ruda's account of the unbinding between the *Pöbel* and civil society differs from the account of the decoupling of production and consumption given here. The Aristotelian connection – the way in which Hegel is practically translating Aristotle on the rich and poor rabble – is also not present in Ruda's account Ruda 2011. Moreover, the arrival of the *Pöbel* on the scene is, as Hegel and others note, something

some type of moral reflection on the part of the wealthier that can stop the disintegrating forces.⁶² Moral reflection on its own, however, is too weak to stop the slide. And, in any event, the wealthy have a tendency not to let the more stringent parts of morality get in their way.

Instead, as civil society itself becomes an object of reflection and concern for the various *Bürger*, and they themselves begin to think not just of their place in the medium but of the medium as a whole, they find that they are now thinking not really as *Bürger* any more but as something else: as citizens. In several places (although, interestingly, not explicitly in the *Philosophy of Right*), Hegel notes that to make that distinction, we need a different word altogether, the French word, *Citoyen*.⁶³ It is

relatively new. Hegel is taking note of this new development and bringing his classicist Aristotelian sympathies to bear on it. As Timothy Blanning notes, the development of European life between 1648 and 1815 had resulted in "impoverishment for that large proportion of the population that was not self-sufficient. A new kind of poverty emerged, not a sudden affliction by famine, plague, or war but a permanent state of malnutrition and underemployment. It was also a vicious circle, for the undernourished were not so wretched as to be unable to produce the children who perpetuated their misery. They were also increasingly at the mercy of market forces, as capitalism eroded the traditional society of orders and its values," Blanning 2007. In making his Aristotelian reference, Hegel is claiming that this modern problem of poverty has appeared for different reasons than it did in the ancient world, but from the standpoint of ethical form, it was in effect the same problem. Since modern society could not recreate the ethical form of ancient life, it also required a different solution. (See the preceding note.) Part of his pessimism had to do with the way in which, given the communications and travel technology of his time, European states were hamstrung in confronting the problem of poverty (along with the additional problems brought on by the failing harvests of the post-1815 period). On that, see the discussion in (Evans) Is Hegel's *Pöbel* the forerunner (or the same thing *an sich*) of Marx's proletariat, as Ruda suggests? For Hegel, the answer would be negative. Rather, the *Pöbel* form an apparently insoluble problem for civil society that, on Hegel's terms, has to be resolved by the "state" (as the self-consciousness of *Citoyen*). The orthodox Marxist thesis has always been that the contradiction between capital and labor does not allow the interests of the classes branded by that contradiction to be balanced in the way that Hegel claimed it had to be.

62 Hegel is responding here not so much to the problem of poverty encountered in early industrialization but to the more specific and widespread problem of his own day, that of former serfs and peasants who had lost their depressingly meager early protections against destitution when the various forms of land reform and enclosure had taken place across Europe. The eruption of poverty and the ensuing peasant discontents and revolts had also led to the sporadic creation of charitable organizations to assist the "deserving poor" (and, shortly after Hegel's time, to the infamous English workhouses). These charitable organizations of course inevitably failed to meet the problem. See the discussion in Evans, See the more Marx-influenced discussion in Hobsbawm 1996, especially pp. 47–52.

63 In civil society, Hegel says that "the basis here is an external civil (*bürgerliches*) relationship . . . here the burgher is a bourgeois. . . . The third stage is public life (*das öffentliche Leben*), where life in and for the universal is the aim . . . where the individual exists for universal life as a public person, in other words is a citizen." See Hegel, Wannenmann, and Ruhr-Universität Bochum. Hegel-Archiv. 1995, pp. 137–38. He also made a point about this in his dictations to his students in Nuremberg in 1810 as he was explaining the Greek polis to them: "(Schöner Patriotismus der Griechen. – Unterschied von Bürger als **bourgeois** und **citoyen**.)" Hegel 1969e, p. 266. He also makes the point in some other lectures on the philosophy of right. He makes it again in his lectures on Aristotle in his courses on the history of philosophy: "Freie Völker haben nur Bewußtsein und Tätigkeit fürs Ganze; moderne sind für sich als einzelne unfrei, – bürgerliche Freiheit ist eben die Entbehrung des Allgemeinen, Prinzip des Isolierens. Aber bürgerliche Freiheit (für bourgeois und citoyen haben wir nicht zwei Worte) ist ein notwendiges Moment, das die alten Staaten nicht kannten, oder nicht diese vollkommene Selbständigkeit der Punkte, und eben größere Selbständigkeit des Ganzen, – das höhere organische

when they think of themselves as citizens that they no longer think of themselves as moving solely within the sphere of civil society but as moving within another sphere whose existence consists in their thinking of themselves that way. They become *Citoyen* by being the people who bring themselves under the concept of *Citoyen*. In this way, as Hegel puts it, “the ethical substance takes on its infinite form... the form of *thought* whereby the spirit is objective and actual to itself as an *organic* totality in *laws* and *institutions*, i.e., in its own will as *thought*.”⁶⁴ The status of *Citoyen* is a form of thought that can be actual – that is, effective – only if it itself is made into a form of life.⁶⁵ The form of life, for its part, requires a set of institutions and practices for itself to be effective and enduring.

In the way that Germans of Hegel's day spoke of the matter, the point was not only to be a *Bürger*, it was also to be a “patriot.”⁶⁶ The true patriots were the *Bildungsbürger*, whom Hegel identified as the “universal Estate,” since it was they who represented the members of civil society to themselves as a whole, as a “state.” This “state” is thus not external to the self-consciousness of its members. It is not another thing standing over and against each of us, nor is it something that we might in some reflective sense identify with or resist identification with it. The state is the first-person plural of the *Bürger* but in a special sense.⁶⁷ This is not a

Leben.” Hegel 1969f, p. 228; Hegel 1963, Vol. II, p. 209. [“Free people have only consciousness an activity for the whole. The moderns are for themselves unfree as singular individuals – bourgeois freedom is the dispensing with the universal, the principle of isolation. However, bourgeois freedom (for *bourgeois* and *citoyen* we do not have two words) is a necessary moment, which the ancient states did not know, or not complete self-sufficiency of “points” and even greater self-sufficiency of the whole – the higher organic life.”]

64 Hegel 1969d, §256. “... in der Entwicklung der bürgerlichen Gesellschaft gewinnt die sittliche Substanz ihre *unendliche* Form... der Form des *Gedankens*, wodurch der Geist sich in *Gesetzen* und *Institutionen*, seinem *gedachten* Willen, als *organische* Totalität objektiv und wirklich ist.” [“In the development of civil society, the ethical substance takes on its infinite form... the form of thought whereby the spirit is objective and actual to itself as an organic totality in laws and institutions, i.e. in its own will as thought.” Hegel 1991, p. 273.]

65 See Hegel 1969d, §260: “Das Allgemeine muß also betätigt sein, aber die Subjektivität auf der anderen Seite ganz und lebendig entwickelt werden. Nur dadurch, daß beide Momente in ihrer Stärke bestehen, ist der Staat als ein gegliederter und wahrhaft organisierter anzusehen.”, p. 407. [“Thus, the universal must be activated, but subjectivity on the other hand must be developed as a living whole. Only when both moments are present in full measure can the state be regarded as articulated and truly organized.” Hegel 1991, p. 283.]

66 See Seigel 2012. Esp. pages 125-126.

67 I am drawing on the piece by Haase 2016. The suggestion here is that Haase's three senses are too restricted. Hegel's conception of the state as a “we” is that of a common project that is so fundamental that once it has been adopted, it is as difficult to disentangle oneself from it as it is to disentangle absolutely scheme from content. It is thus stronger than Haase's second sense of “we” but not a definitive as his third sense, where “We English speakers...” are said to have an immediate knowledge of what it is to count as a correct sentence of English that is not available to people who are not among the fluent speakers. This understands the “we” as a presupposed structure always already at work in life. Hegel's “we,” however, is an activity continually actualizing itself. (That the

“we” in the thinnest sense in that they become conscious that all of them share some feature accidentally (as might be the case if all of us suddenly realized that we all own copies of Hegel's *Philosophy of History*). Nor is it the “we” that accompanies a common project (as one might say that “we” are now building a house together). The state is the self-consciousness of a “we” as having a common life whose standards both precede any individual self-consciousness and are constituted and sustained by the political and social acts of the subjects who make up the state.⁶⁸ As “Idea,” it is activity, not a fixed and settled thing.

By becoming a *Citoyen*, the *Bürger* seeks not just to fill out his own place in civil society, he also has a central purpose (to give it the appropriate nineteenth century expression) the “civic improvement” of the common life. The cultured-educated *Bürger* now wishes to have a common life that is itself cultured and educated. To continue in the familiar language of the nineteenth century: The cultured–educated *Bürger* becomes personally devoted to civic improvement, progress, personal and social advancement, the correction of crude mores, elevation to the finer things – in short, to all the elements of classical *Bildung*.

Why have such a different form of self-consciousness? This “infinite form” of the “ethical substance” provides the re-integration of civil society driven only as it is by the dictates of morality and the market. The form of life in civil society comes into being as that form of self-consciousness appropriate to the thinned-out lives of those living through the “industrious revolution” and the expansion of market economies into something like “capitalism” once the industrial revolution (after Hegel's time) had really gone into high gear.

On its own, civil society (embodying the proper object of “political economy”) is structured around the bad infinite. Needs get multiplied to infinity, the necessity for either expanding capital or being swallowed by other traders pushes the traders themselves to more and more distant connections, and production and consumption become decoupled once trade extends beyond the bounds of local communities. The structure of civil society is the $n + 1$ of the bad infinite: Always one more in the

conception of a “we” as a presupposed structure already there also is too essentialist a conception of language itself is another story to be left for another time.)

68 It is always tempting to read Hegel's conception of the state as something external to individuals for whom an extra reflective step is needed for them to “identify” themselves with it. Yet Hegel himself says “it is the self-awareness of individuals which constitutes the actuality of the state.” Hegel 1969d, §265, p. 287 (Zusatz) This is also why Hegel says of such *Sittlichkeit* in general that “the subject lives within its element which is not distinct from itself – a relationship which is immediate and closer to identity than a [relationship of faith or trust.” Hegel 1969d, §147, p. 101; Hegel 1969d, p. 295. (“...und darin als seinem von sich ununterschiedenen Elemente lebt, - ein Verhältnis, das unmittelbar noch identischer als selbst Glaube und Zutrauen ist.”)

series, all the way up to the infinite and all the paradoxes it seems to bring with it. The “state” in Hegel with its *Citoyen*-citizens puts a communal authority on a different plane than the market mechanisms of civil society and provides more bonds than Kantian morality is able to provide: It furnishes, to use a word Hegel does not, solidarity as an ethical form of life and not just a Kantian moral commitment to promote the happiness of others (as a “wide” duty). Whereas civil society opens up to the world and at the same time hollows out local communal structures, the “state” (supposedly) gathers local communities to provide the resources necessary to keep civil society functioning properly in a way it on its own cannot if civil society thinks of itself purely in terms of civil society – purely in the terms of the external state and does not arrive at a representation of itself as more than a union of *Bürger*s working in an expanded and expanding market. On its own, “civil society” points itself toward the incipient globalization taking place in Hegel’s day. As Hegel notes, “the sea [is] the natural element for industry... it creates trading links between distant countries... the source from which commerce derives its world-historical significance.”⁶⁹ The “state” is a more bounded community that is supposed to preserve the civil society from hollowing itself out in the process.⁷⁰

The move to the “state” is properly dialectical. One will never get there from civil society if one remains bound to the logical form under which judgments and inferences about civil society are to be carried out. One will only get as far as “morality” and end up with a set of contradictory commitments to provide for the communal good without there being a way to specify that good in any non-arbitrary way. Introducing the “state” as civil society’s self-reflection on itself shows how what was at stake in the dilemmas civil society creates for itself was something not formulatable in the terms of civil society itself.

Hegel himself thought this only made sense if civil society develops within itself the conditions of freedom and equality and it then takes the self-reflection of the state (as the inclusive political community) to make it actual, effective: The market society of the *Bürger* makes sense only when bound by the political community of a constitutional, representative

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69 Hegel 1969d, p. 392

70 It is worth noting that Hegel himself was not clear how to describe the way in which the “state” is a unity in self-consciousness (a unity of the medium of civil society) and not a “thing” and how this reflective unity is to be characterized: At Hegel 1991, §259, he says that the “organism” of the state just is its constitution. At Hegel 1969c, §541, he says that it is the government which is the “living totality.” At Hegel 1969c, §545, he speaks of a “natural and singular people” as the state. It is not clear that these are all mutually consistent with his own dialectical derivation of the “state.” They may, of course, perfectly reflect his view of what very specific form the Prussian state was taking (although I doubt it), but in any event, that would not be dialectic.

unity. The life of the citizen as *Citoyen* has a different logical shape than the life of the *Bürger* since it is a matter of solidarity and concern (of, as it were, “fraternity” or at least solidarity) and not just orienting oneself in the social space of civil society. For that to work, civil society has to establish an ethical life within itself that makes freedom and equality basic to itself. (One of the most often cited lines in Hegel nowadays having to do with equality of citizens as completely transcending ethnicity or affiliation occurs in fact not in the section on the state but in the section on civil society.⁷¹) Civil society is pushed to moral doctrines of freedom and equality, but they cannot become real until freedom and equality is pursued at the political level of the constitutional state. The state as the self-consciousness of civil society in terms of freedom and equality takes priority for securing the genuine (actual) freedom and equality of *Citoyen*-citizens over the purely market mechanisms of civil society. Solidarity as form takes precedence over the decoupling market of civil society.

VII: Where now with Hegel?

There is a real problem with all of this. Hegel’s system requires civil society to generate a form of ethical life within itself that makes the self-reflection of civil society possible (so that the freedom and equality within civil society can be actual in the state). However, Hegel also thinks that means that the Estates and the older medieval-early modern corporations are necessary for the “state” to exist at all, at least in the sense he intends. This makes no sense historically, as Hegel himself seemed to be aware when he bemoaned the fact that the older corporations had already been abolished before he wrote his book.⁷² He is also at odds with himself about whether it is the collective body of corporations or it is the systems of estates (or maybe both) that are the bedrocks of the state, and he gives no real argument for their necessity except for his insistence that they fit the way the concept articulates itself in terms of universality and particularity. Unfortunately, even on his terms, that is no real argument but at its best only an exhibition that they are consistent with the shapes of the concept (that is, are consistent applications) of it, not that they are conceptually required in the shape Hegel actually gives them. (Even in terms of argument, one might concede that they are illustrations of the general principles, but they hardly follow from the general principles.) Moreover, the very idea of recreating the

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71 “A human being counts as such because he is a human being, not because he is a Jew, Catholic, protestant, German, Italian, etc.” Hegel 1969c, p. 240; Hegel 1969d, p. 360. (“Der Mensch gilt so, weil er Mensch ist, nicht weil er Jude, Katholik, Protestant, Deutscher, Italiener usf. ist.”)

72 See Hegel 1969d, §255 Zusatz.

early modern *Ständesstaat* – the state of estates – in the modern, thinned out terms Hegel relies upon for his account of civil society is peculiar. Besides being at odds with historical development, Hegel's conception that there can be a “universal estate” contradicts the basic idea of estates in the first place, since within the “state,” each estate is what it is in terms of the special privileges it possesses. Remove special privileges, and you have no estates.⁷³

So it seems, Hegel is not drawing out the full force of his argument. If civil society decouples consumption and production in local community through its expanding network of trade, then the state cannot be a self-reflection of civil society itself taken apart from its makeup. It has to be the self-reflection of civil society as organized into ethical spheres. All of civil society is bounded by morality, but for the ethical life of a *Citoyen*-citizen to be real, it has to be that these *Citoyen*-citizens are themselves faced with the demands of an ethical life from within civil society. If that ethical life cannot come from the estates and corporations, then civil society is returned into being the medium that is inevitably dominated by the processes described in political economy, which lead to a progressive decoupling of production and consumption, then of production itself (as the firms from the smaller towns move to the cities, hollowing out the towns) and eventually as the firms from the cities move to other cities (hollowing out the cities). (This, so I would argue, is essentially the form in which one of Hegel's most famous readers criticized Hegel. Stated that way, however, it remains, however, a criticism made from within Hegelianism.)

If that the case, then, if Hegel's dialectic is to be followed out to its conclusion, the state as the self-consciousness of civil society would under those conditions have to revert into an external state. In other words, the *Citoyen*-state would break down and collapse or simply never get going in the first place. It would follow the line of development that a species, confronted now by stresses in its environment, fails to develop the features necessary for its flourishing. Instead, it develops into be the external state most likely pretending to be a *Citoyen*-state. The external state is an accidental “we,” a body set up out of need to adjudicate

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⁷³There is another way of taking Hegel's argument for the estates, which I shall not pursue here. That would be see them and the corporations as professional bodies, all of which require licensing from the state in order for the members to perform their functions. For example, we might regard the practice of medicine as universally illegal unless practiced by somebody licensed by the state. If that is the correct view, then Hegel's argument would be that all professions must be legally (by the state) certified before anybody can practice what they embody. That would be an extreme position – nobody may teach philosophy unless certified by the state? – but it would perhaps be a consistently Hegel-by-the-letter stance. One last argument might be that the universal estate has the special privilege of not having to compete in market society but having instead its sustenance drawn and guaranteed from general revenue of the state.

justice and serve as a regulatory body. It is an other confronting the others who set it up, and they set it up only on moral grounds. Left to its own resources, the external state is an “other” setting norms for the *Bürger* – who may or may not on contingent grounds identify themselves with it – but which cannot really set boundaries to itself as a community, since the standpoint of morality alone has no resources for drawing such boundaries. Left to itself, morality pushes towards cosmopolitanism, and that provides the commercial elite of civil society with the moral permission to look the other way as they hollow out the towns. As it expands or collapses under conditions of market competition, the external state has to leave the *Bürger* to their own means, with perhaps a residual but weak moral obligation to do something about those made most vulnerable by the collapse of the towns and maybe even with compassion about it means to be living in the ruins.

Moreover, if the true state (as a self-consciousness of *Citoyen*) fails to take shape, this external state is dialectically suited to transform itself into a mere appearance of the political state, which remains the “Idea” against which civil society is measured, since it is civil society itself that generates the *Citoyen*-state as the way that civil society, as it were, adequately folds in on itself. Instead, the external state becomes a noxious version of the *Citoyen*-state, since it must find itself having to perform the impossible – preserving the “we” under the conditions that prevent any such “we” from being more than a fiction helping to preserve the power of a few. Hegel, of course, did not see this – the owl of Minerva flies only at nightfall, so he says⁷⁴ – but the external state was already hastily on the way to preserving the fictitious “we” through the means of the poisonous nation-state by which the nineteenth century rulers manage to stabilize themselves.

Now, although there is in Hegel's dialectic no historical necessity for this transformation of the *Citoyen*-state into the noxious nationalist version of the external state, that does not exclude there being be a different kind of historical necessity lying in the way that the market worked itself out in those conditions (when one views it not from the standpoint of dialectical thought but from the standpoint of “political economy,” that is, from the logic of the “bad infinite”). The decisions made by the propertied elite under the weight of historical conditions at the time managed to undermine the creation of such a *Citoyen*-state in the first place.⁷⁵ The dialectic, after all, only tells us what would make

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⁷⁴ Actually, it does not, but that is irrelevant to this story. It flies in the day, an oddity for owls in general, something the species, “owl,” does not typically do. See Knowles and Carpenter 2010/2011

⁷⁵ It is another topic altogether, but Hegel's diagnosis of the problem facing the emerging European states bears some comparison to Hannah Arendt's diagnosis for the failure of American democracy

sense, but it does not, cannot ensure that people really do make sense. In the wake of a failure of the *Citoyen*-state to establish itself, we would on Hegelian grounds have an unintelligible practical reality. “Capital” plays a big role in rendering that world unintelligible. How to get that practical reality to make sense is another, but very closely, related matter, even if it is clear that it involves how to tame or overcome capital's stranglehold. Minerva's owl flying over the ruins in darkness might see only a few new lights at work, but a few lights are better than nothing.

to take its true shape: “What [Jefferson] perceived to be the mortal danger to the republic was that the Constitution had given all power to the citizens, without giving them the opportunity of being republicans and of acting as citizens. In other words, the danger was that all power had been given to the people in their private capacity and that there was no space established for them in their capacity of being citizens.” Arendt 1963, p. 253

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Hegel on Social Pathology: The Actuality of Unreason

Robert B. Pippin

Abstract: In a famous passage in his *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, Hegel claimed that “philosophy is its own time comprehended in thought.” But our time is very different from Hegel’s, so two approaches have developed to the possible relevance of his work for the contemporary world. One looks to remaining points of contact, such as his criticism of a contractualist views of the state. Another tries to apply his general approach to contemporary issues, especially those formulated in terms he would not use. Both are valuable, but in this article the latter is taken up, and one issue is the focus. The question is: assuming there can be collective intentionality and collective agency (what Hegel calls *Geist*), how should we understand Hegel’s claim that such group agents can be collectively self-deceived? And: how would that claim bear on the contemporary political world?

Keywords: agency, intentionality, self-deceit, spirit, *Geist*, *akrasia*, unreason, irrational, pathology

Hegel is well known for having claimed that philosophy is “it’s own time comprehended in thought” The implications of this claim are immediately apparent in the *Elements of the Philosophy of Right* that follows this claim in its Preface. That is, Hegel’s *Philosophy of Right* is not a treatment of the institutions Hegel thinks constitutive of justice for anyone, anywhere, at any time. It is clearly an analysis of the modern understanding and realization of contract, crime, legal and moral responsibility, moral conscience, the modern, nuclear family, a market economy and modern political institutions. But it is also clearly neither an empirical social analysis of how such a society actually works, nor a pure normative assessment of these distinctive characteristics, measured against some trans-historical ideal.

This immediately raises the question of just how “time-bound” Hegel’s account of Right actually is, and, therewith, how we should understand the bearing of his account on our own time, a very different time of mass consumer societies, a globalized economy, very different marriage and divorce conventions, a highly commercialized and manipulable public sphere and so forth. Some have argued that, even so, there are enough points of determinate contact that some direct relevance is still possible. Some commentators refer to Hegel’s account of the limitations of contractarian models of the state or of the limitations of liberal notions of rights protection, or his reasons for insisting on a

state/civil society distinction. I will follow here another line of thought, highlighting instead the fruitfulness of his approach in general, and one unusual aspect of that approach, announced in my title.

But both aspects of his original and influential claim that philosophy has a historical-diagnostic task have proven difficult to understand. By the two aspects, I mean, first, exactly what is to be understood by the philosopher's "time," and, second, what does "comprehended in thought" amount to? Time is short, so I will simply make a suggestion about each. There would seem to be a simple, clear answer to the former question. The covering name for the historical institutions and practices that attract Hegel's philosophical attention to a time is "Geist," now commonly translated as "spirit," although that term in English has a faint "spiritualistic" tone. Geist can be manifest in subjective, objective or absolute form, whether as the subject of a unique kind of analysis, a phenomenology, whether understood as a "world spirit," (Weltgeist) or a "folk spirit" (Volkgeist). In other words, Geist, like being for Aristotle, is said in many ways, and is even what the Aristotelians call a "pros hen equivocal," a kind of cluster of converging meanings, rather than a term definable all at once. It figures in his account of individual mindedness, world history, and religion, all in differently inflected ways. For our purposes, we can concentrate on what he calls "objektive Geist." In that context, Geist refers to a collective mindedness, the forms of which collectivity (the "Gestalten des Geistes") change over historical time. In general we can consider Geist a form of collective intentionality: shared beliefs, attitudes, dispositions that the sharing members know are shared. This can be misleading because Hegel means his collective mindedness to refer to a basic level of such shared intentionality, that on which all contingent forms of collectivity must be consistent with. That is, Geist, as used by Hegel, is not meant to be manifest in every instance of collective like-mindedness, as evident in every institution. He means the term to refer to the mindedness he thinks is evident in Greek tragedies and religious practices (wherever commitments to issues of the utmost human significance are manifest), but not in bowling leagues, or condo associations. But the important point in this limited context is that anything that is to count as a common mindedness, including any concrete shape of Geist, is never treated by Hegel as some summary compilation of individually held attitudes, majoritarian views, or even as the direct object of intentional attitudes like beliefs. However, while there are similarities, Geist does not function in Hegel as something like a presupposed "form of life," as it might be found in Wittgenstein, or as "Welt" might function in the early Heidegger. This is because Hegel clearly thinks it is possible to ascribe states

and capacities to such a collective subject in a sense identical in many (though not all) senses to the way we ascribe such states and capacities to individual persons. This goes well beyond the ascription of common, deeply presupposed commitments and assumptions and dispositions. We can even say that a historical form of Geist can be reflective about itself and its commitments, can come over time to greater and greater self-consciousness (for example, in and by means of its art works), and that it can be said to do things, for which responsibility can be ascribed. (This last is especially true of states that act in our name as citizens.) We can (once we account for the unique standing of governments, that they possess authority, not brute power, a normative status that requires that those who do what governments tell them to do, believe it is right to do so, even if against self-interest) thus speak of a group agent. But this would be just an example. Governments, for Hegel, are not primary manifestations of the group-agent, Geist, but depend for their sense of a deeper and much, much broader form of collectivity. The deepest level of such shared historical collectivity or objective Geist is manifest in objective practices and institutions; that is, Abstract Right, Morality, and Ethical Life (or the Family Civil Society, and the State.

Such a postulation of a common mindedness is not a fiction, or a mere heuristic or theoretical posit. It has ontological status; there are such entities, in the sense in which we say that there are economies or religions. Now of course, Geist cannot be said to behave in all ways like an individual subject or agent. It is not embodied in the same way, can be said to "have emotions" only in a highly metaphorical way (as in a collective hysteria or panic, or in moments like the French Terror, or post 9/11 America). It has a past it carries forward and appeals to, but Geist does not remember its past as an individual does, and so on. Nevertheless, Hegel is willing to go very far in what he wants to claim about such a collective subject, as we shall see.

Finally, when Hegel describes Geist as an "I that is a We," and a "We that is an I," he is committing himself to a dialectical relation between any such collective or group subject and the individual persons who are its participants. It is possible to misread this passage as saying something like "all that it is to be an individual I is to be part of a We, and this We is what any individual I really is." But that would have the passage just say the same thing twice. He clearly means that while any individual I comes to be the I it is and maintains its sense of itself as such an individual within a common mindedness, it is also the case that this common mindedness is only possible by the attitudes and commitments of distinct, individual "I's." That is, such a collectivity is not possible except as constituted in some way by the attitudes and commitments

of these participants. It would not exist were there not these attitudes and commitments. This does not reduce in any way the reality of Geist as Geist; such attitudes and commitments do achieve the status of collective agency. But the direction of dependence famously goes both ways for him. Individuals should not be understood as, ex ante, atomistic, self-sufficient origins of such commitments, as if Geist comes into being only as a result of constituting acts by atomic individuals. They are the individuals they are only as already “formed” or gebildet within, and as inheriting, such collectivities. (So, Hegel will insist: “to take conscious individuality so mindlessly as an individual existing phenomenon is contradictory since the essence of individuality is the universal of spirit.”¹ This is expressed in full Hegelese, but in itself this is a very old idea, apparent in the philosopher equally as influential on Hegel as Kant; that is, in Aristotle’s insistence that, considered outside the polis, a human being is not comprehensible as a human being. He is either a beast or a god. But Hegel’s bi-directionality and historicity greatly complicates such a picture. This co-constituting mutual dependence is why Hegel can frequently say something that would otherwise be quite mysterious, that spirit is “a product of itself.”² (Geist is this co-constituting relation; the product of individuals who are themselves the products of their participation in Geist. Geist has no substantial existence apart from this mutual reflection.)

These are still fairly vague terms, and can be easily misunderstood. It is important to stress again that Hegel’s account of Geist is not an instance of any substance metaphysics. Group agents are not things. While it is true that Hegel readily admits that there is no such collective agency without the attitudes, intentions, and commitments of the participating individuals, his case for the “other side” of the dialectic hangs on the notion of a dependence, on various forms of dependence between such individuals and “the Geist” of which they are a part. This dependence is both historical – the individually held attitudes and commitments cannot be wholly self-generated by individual reflection, but in large part descend from an inherited, common store, often so deeply presupposed as to be unnoticeable as such – and formative. The model of a group agent’s reflection would be simplistic in the extreme if we thought of individual participation as something like bloc voting by monadic individuals. Participation in the group – debate, persuasion, the revelation of new possibilities – and a dependence on an already formed, distinctive group dynamic that is more often inherited than chosen,

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1 Hegel 2013, §304.

2 Hegel 1978, pp. 6–7.

are clearly both formative elements in the final arrival of a collective commitment, a process that can emerge in scores of different forms, depending on the institutions. And all of this is not to deny that there can be unintended consequences of group actions just as there can be for individuals, effects that occur because of what the group did, but which are not intended by the group.

(Again, it is this bi-directionality that is most often misunderstood by critics of Hegel, who read passages that sound like an organicist social theory, in which individuals seem to have no standing except as contributors to and members of the whole, and who see in Hegel the darker side of German romanticism, an anti-individualism. This is a crude, reductionist, not to mention lazy reading of Hegel that is extremely widespread still, and which above all ignores the dialectical character of every important aspect of his position, including this one.)

All of this just introduces the first of the two elements in Hegel’s famous claim about the task of philosophy; philosophy’s time refers to Geist in this “objective” sense. What could he mean by the second element: the Geist of its time “comprehended in thoughts”? Again a suggestion. Sometimes what he says sounds quite implausible. He will say that philosophy gives the form of necessity to what would otherwise appear merely contingent. When this is said about, for example, the development of the empirical sciences,³ it can sound as if Hegel wants to say that the actual course of that development could not have happened otherwise. If this is supported by a claim about a self-transforming, underlying metaphysical entity, “cosmic spirit,” or “God,” developing according to some necessary law of internal teleology, then the claim seems hopeless. At a more modest level, though (and this is how I think he wants to be understood), he could mean that a significant transition in art history, or political history, or religious history, a shift in collective ethical commitments, can be rendered intelligible by a philosophical account. This account is based on a form of practical contradiction that introduces a more familiar form of necessity, the form appropriate to: “he who wills the end must will, or necessarily wills, the means” (otherwise we have evidence that he has not willed the end). If a collective attempt to accomplish some goal can be said to learn collectively that commitment to that end is impossible without commitment to, let us say, a broader and more comprehensive end, then it must pursue such a new end or give up the enterprise. Or, if it develops that the means chosen actually make achieving the end impossible, then the means must be altered. They are not arbitrarily altered. They must be altered, on pain of practical

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3 Hegel 1971, §12A.

incoherence. A philosophical account, assuming the rationality of such a teleological enterprise, can show this. It can give the form of (practical) necessity to what would otherwise seem contingent alterations. I said: “assuming the rationality of such a teleological enterprise.” I meant to recall the Hegelian maxim announced in the *Lectures on the Philosophy of World History*: “To him who looks on the world rationally, the world looks rationally back.”⁴ Here is yet another theme worth several independent lectures.

The lesson here is that what makes a group a group agent is that it possesses a certain form of rational unity (that is a rational way of creating and sustaining a unity, where rational just initially means coherent, no being incompatibly committed), a unity that must be knowingly achieved and sustained. This minimally means that the group is sensitive to inconsistencies in group commitments, empirical facts inconsistent with shared beliefs, and a formation process for commitments and beliefs that is genuinely formative, not merely expressive of collected individual commitments and beliefs. This also implies that some group agent, like “the polis” of ancient Thebes, may take itself to be such a rational unity, but in an enactment of its commitments, discover that it is collectively committed to conceptions of familial obligation and to conceptions of political obligations, all widely shared, that are not practically compatible. Geist can appear to have, be collectively taken to have, the required rational unity, but come to discover that it does not have it. Tragedy ensues. A revision of the commitments is necessary. The community can be said to have learned, and acted on such learning, perhaps, to invoke another play, in the establishment of the homicide courts at the Aeropagus, as in Aeschylus’s *Eumenides*.

Clearly, there can be multiple institutions in a society and these need have no particular relation to one another. This fact raises the question of whether various group agents, like corporations, universities, hospitals, armies, states, churches, could also be said to be, must be understood to be, themselves elements of one “common mind.” But it is not much of a leap to claim that this would be a necessary extension of the account. For one thing, many individuals are often members of several such groups and they could be subject to conflicting or incompatible commitments. The awareness of such conflicts would be unavoidable and so practically incoherent, were there no way of thinking of such several group agents as at least compatible. “Compatible,” though, would still not get us to the more ambitious status of Geist. To reach that, we need a common like-mindedness in which institutional commitments are also

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4 Hegel 1971a, p. 23.

not indifferent to one another even if logically compatible. Rather, they must genuinely cohere, or make some sense as enterprises that belong together. These art practices, for example, would be the art practices engaged in by persons engaged in those religious practices, that civil society, those sorts of universities, that conception of the purposes of an army, that political constitution and so forth. That overall unity would be yet another name for “Geist.” Universities must take account of the religious preferences of their students. Religions must take account of the needs of an army, and so on. We can consider Geist the highest level, self-unifying rational form of unity in a community at a time.

There is little doubt that Hegel thinks of such a super-structural subject as such a substantial unity. To return to the full passage where he introduces the notion in the PhG, he calls Geist,

this absolute substance which constitutes the unity of its oppositions in their complete freedom and self-sufficiency, namely, in the oppositions of the various self-consciousnesses existing for themselves: The I that is we and the we that is.⁵

It is at this level of abstraction that Hegel wants to portray one such collective subject, Western Geist, the distinct inheritor of its Greek beginnings, as engaged in a practical, purposive project, a struggle for full self-understanding across historical time, propelled forward in that attempt by a series of breakdowns in the coherence of its self-consciousness. These breakdowns reflect the practical contradictions that we have discussed. But we are now at such a high level of abstraction that nothing interesting in any overall defense of this suggestion can be said. One way of making these notions more concrete, a way that also gives more substance to the notion of such “breakdowns” is to not the obvious fact that if we can conceive of collective intentionality and group agency, we must also be able to account for collective irrationality. There is one pathology of irrationality in particular explored by Hegel that is of great contemporary resonance.

II

The Platonic Socrates long ago introduced the idea that there is a revealing analogy between the parts of, and the inter-relation among the parts of, the soul and the corresponding parts and inter-relations of the polis. But just how far can we go in extending the categories of

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5 PhG, §174

assessment and analysis at home with individuals in understanding Geist? Psychic and political unity (and so health) is the main issue in the Politeia, and Hegel certainly focuses on that issue too. But he seems to go much farther.

One phenomenon is collective akrasia. It is easily conceivable that at the requisite level of abstraction, a community might express its allegiances to various courses of action; equality before the law, for example. Each person accused should have exactly the same status, entitlements and other freedoms as anyone else. The commitment is formally enshrined in a basic law and is implicitly and explicitly affirmed in various rituals and pronouncements. In practice however, wealthy people turn out to have an enormous advantage, and rates of conviction for persons above a certain income level are strikingly lower. Everyone knows this, and knows of, even affirms, the collective commitment, but no one does anything. The irrationality occurs, we could plausibly suggest, because while the commitment may be sincere (or at least not held hypocritically or in cynical fraudulence), the costs and efforts of realizing it are so high that when occasions emerge to address the problem, it is easier to hedge, dissemble, plead unavoidable constraints, one-time exceptions, etc. If we conceive of both individuals and Geist as some sort of unity among multiple motivational voices clamoring for attention and allegiance, it is not difficult to imagine incentives to attend to one or another voice at the expense of others, the one that provides the easiest or most self-interested path forward. How this exactly happens in either case might not be easy to understand, especially since this contradiction is available to consciousness or public explicitness. In various contexts in the *Phenomenology*, like Virtue and the Way of the World (die Tugend und der Weltlauf), or the Beautiful Soul (die schöne Seele) that cannot bring itself to act, Hegel appears to be thinking of something like this. The standpoint of political virtue demands that the agent “sacrifice” everything of his individuality, his role in the Weltlauf, the political way of the world, but when it comes to acting on such a complete self-denial, it cannot. It cannot live up to its principles without practical incoherence. (Here we have to say as well that what might look like “weakness” might actually be the result of an incomplete and distorted practical self-knowledge.) And Hegel uses the language of strength or force to explain the dilemma that The Beautiful Soul is caught up in.⁶ He says that on a

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⁶ Inasmuch as the self-certain spirit as a beautiful soul does not now possess the strength to empty itself of the self-knowledge which it keeps to itself in itself, it cannot achieve a parity with the consciousness it has repulsed, and thus it cannot achieve the intuited unity of itself in an other, and it cannot attain existence. Hence, the parity comes about merely negatively, as a spirit-less being. PhG §670.

romantic conception of inner purity and the conception of the world as fallen, such a soul cannot “possess the strength” to act on its own self conception without compromising this purity, so on this conception of the fallenness of the world, the solution is not to act. (The beautiful soul is rather like the Nader voter in 2000, repelled by the choice between Gore and Bush, unable to muster the strength actually to vote realistically, opting instead to vote purely symbolically. Or so they claimed in their self-righteousness. They remained pure, beautiful. Gore only lost, if he lost, Florida by five hundred or so votes; Nader had ninety-seven thousand votes, and there is no question Gore would have won if he had not been in the race. No Bush, no Iraq war, no ISIS, no John Roberts, No Samuel Alito, etc. The same sort of thing might be claimed about the “Never Hilary” people, those with an unlimited disgust for Trump, but who think their high-minded principles will not permit them to vote for Hilary. There may be, of course, people who genuinely experience this as a moral dilemma, but in Hegel’s understanding of their commitments, what is important is what they actually do, and how they describe what they do. Given how catastrophically our hypothetical non-voter considers a Trump victory, doing anything to make that more possible looks more like a case of irrationality than an agonized moral dedication to principle.)⁷

But how could one be “pulled” in one way by one of the possible motives at hand, and not be just as aware of the demands of coherent rationality just as clearly as if one were not so “pulled”? Or how can one know the better and do the worse? Whatever problem there is, it does not appear greater in the group than in the individual case, and it seems equally familiar in both. We know what we should do (equal protection), are committed to doing it, and yet we do not do it.

At one point in the *Phenomenology*, Hegel also begins to discuss what he calls “the world of self-alienated Spirit”⁸ and he returns to that characterization in accounting for several phenomena. These are cases of collectively held ideals, like state power and wealth [Staatsmacht und Reichtum], or the availability and inevitability of a perspective on every action of both the valet’s lower, unmasking, deflationary perspective, what Hegel calls Niederträchtigkeit, and yet also a more generous or magnanimous perspective, what he calls Edelmütigkeit. This is similar to the situation described when Hegel assesses the philosophical

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⁷ This is admittedly not a welcome form of analysis, as the exposure of posing and self-deceit never is. No one likes to be told that their high-mindedness is actually a case of narcissistic self-adoration. The issue is more difficult because this is not an empirical but an interpretive claim and its aptness depends on what we know about much else the person says and does, and cannot be settled by appeal to some single fact.

⁸ PhG § 793.

significance of tragedy, but in a state of greater Bildung, or cultural maturation, the conflicting commitments do not force a tragic choice, one whereby acting well must also be acting wrongly. Such a state of alienation is a state of irrationality, but at the self-reflective level, in which, given the level of self-knowledge attained by some community, reflective coherence is not possible, a certain kind of dissemblance is needed and is possible. It is also important that Hegel describes this situation as self-alienated Geist. This means that it is not a contingent manifestation that just happens at some moment in time. The situation has not happened to Geist; Geist has done something to bring it about, alienated itself. The phenomenon can thus be rendered philosophically intelligible, along the lines of practical necessity and contradiction discussed before. The situation also means that not only is Geist alienated from itself in this reflective sense, but individuals can not be said to be able experience as coherently satisfiable the claims made on them by their membership in the group unity. They are thus alienated from their own collective identity, bound to it but repelled by it at the same time. Moreover, the processes by which the mutual interdependence of individual and collective identity come to formed are certainly not necessarily fixed, can be as much in dispute as any result of this formation process. One might well find oneself confronted by possibilities of work, or options among ideal general commitments, or political choices, that are not experienced as possible expressions of one's own commitments and talents. They are the only ones available and can appear "strange," foreign, merely positive, and so forth, even though one might voluntarily and effectively affirm them by what one says or does. As with akrasia, though, none of this need be evidence that the group identity or agency is really not what it presents itself as, all because of this alienation. The experience itself suggests rather that something is going wrong, some necessary unity is lacking, something essential to one's practical identity and the realization of that identity is not possible.

But if that phenomenon can be borne only by a kind of dissemblance, there is a natural link with the next phenomenon. For he says such things as the following. In his initial discussion of "True Spirit, Ethical Life" [der wahre Geist, die Sittlichkeit], Hegel first points out that the commonly shared ethical substance of the polis in the classical period,

... breaks itself up into a differentiated ethical essence, into a human and a divine law. Likewise, in terms of its essence, self-consciousness, in confronting

substance, assigns itself to one of these powers, and, as knowledge, it divides itself into both an ignorance of what it is doing and a knowledge of what it is doing, and it is thus a deceived knowledge. [ein betrogenes Wissen]⁹

He is talking here, ultimately, about the way Creon and Antigone argue with each other in Sophocles' play, as if wholly ignorant of the credibility of counter-claims expressed by the other, but not really ignorant. This is an aspect of Hegel's account that is strikingly modern and not much attended to. Each knows what he or she is doing in defending the position, but in pretending not to understand such a claim's relation to credible counter-claims, he or she does not know what he or she is actually doing with its absolutism, and is, in a remarkable phrase, not making a false claim to know, but expressing a "deceived knowledge," a betrogenes Wissen. He thus introduces all the classic problems of self-deceit. How is it possible for some individuals, understood here as paradigmatic representatives of the collective commitments of a historical manifestation of Geist both to know what it knows (in this case that there is a collision of right versus right that is unavoidable) and be ignorant, in some way, make itself ignorant, of what it knows, but does not want to know, insisting instead that this is a case of right versus wrong?

Their paradigmatic status means that Hegel is treating each as manifestations of the collective's emerging consciousness of, and attempted evasion of, incoherence, and not as two isolated cases of willfulness, blindness or self-deceit. They are self-deceived as individuals, but Hegel wants to suggest that there is something quite limited in restricting ourselves to some individualistic genealogy of the origins of such self-deceit as a matter of psychological characteristics. This is not always the case of course. There are plenty of cases of self-deceit that are contingent and manifest nothing of any general social significance. But in cases like this, and the ones we will examine in a moment, the community's representation of itself as possessing the requisite rational unity (collective coherence), has to be understood as as much a matter of self-deceit (one that such tragedies begin to unmask) as what he ascribes to the two individuals. Or, each of them is self-deceived about the "basic law" that makes possible that unity, familial or civic, and we have to understand each of them, as Hegel would have it, as manifesting this collective inability to recognize the failure of any coherence in such a putative unity. That is what accounts for the self-deceit, which would otherwise be a matter of individual pathology (which of course it could be,

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9 PhG. §444.

but the fame and influence of this passage rests on the larger claim about them being something like the modality of the enactment of this social self-deceit and the pressure it creates in the lives of individuals.)¹⁰

This way of looking at individual irrationality is hardly a one off in Hegel. He had introduced the general topic of deception in the section of Reason called, “The spiritual animal kingdom and the real thing.” It is in this section that he insists on the social – that is the public and performative, and thus socially dependent – character of actions. At one point he notes,

Since within this alternation consciousness has one moment for itself as essential in its reflection, while it has another merely externally in consciousness, or for others, what thus comes on the scene is a game individualities play with each other; in this game, each finds himself to be deceiving himself as much he finds each to be mutually deceiving each other.¹¹

This seems like a kind of riot of deception and self-deception. And it is important to note again that Hegel is not talking here about individual pathologies. As with collective akrasia, there is some general disconnect between a collective self-representation, and what such a group or super-group agent actually does. In all three cases we have seen, the problem is the achievement of the unity necessary for rational (that is, minimally coherent) action. In fact, these appeals to self-deception appear to be much more important or inclusive than akrasia. Our case of an expressed commitment to equality before the law, matched by no effective action, is much more likely an indication that there is no such commitment.¹² In this sense, there can clearly be collectively self-deceit. Accounted for this way, it means that the interesting originality of Hegel's account of self-deception in this and many other cases is that it is not exclusively psychological, not a matter of a subject “hiding” something from, and

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¹⁰ I do not want to deny that Hegel's position is a disputable interpretation of Sophocles's play. He cites no evidence of lines, ignores passages where Antigone makes clear she knows that she is breaking the law, and her occasional doubts. In general, he seems just to infer that each must know that this is a conflict of right with right, but has no language or any vehicle for admitting and dealing with this.

¹¹ PhG §415

¹² In general, it is certainly possible to consider self-deceit a form of akrasia, that one is too weak to admit to oneself what one knows about one's own motives. But the two phenomena still seem to me categorically different. One can “reform” an akratic by offering help and strength, but if someone denies (successfully) that he has a commitment that he does in fact have, or is acting against what he would avow, the strategy for some remediation has to be much different.

inside, itself, prompting a hunt for deeper and real motives. The actuality of a motive is apparent only in action, in what one is willing to do. It is in this enactment that self-deception, that this disconnect, manifests itself. If we think of both individual and group agents as multitudes of possible voices for different motives, we will then look to how any agent might avow one intention that is possible but not manifest in deeds, and then dissemble. This might involve a plausible but still false description of the act content itself. At any rate, such appears to be the central claim in the Spiritual Animal Kingdom section. The Beautiful Soul could just as easily be said not to be committed to his view of action, because he does not act on it. He is self-deceived, not weak.

In discussing Diderot's *Rameau's Nephew* and what is the height of self and social alienation in the *Phenomenology*, Hegel again invokes the concept of deception. In discussing “the musician,” he means to say that the nephew's claim to be identity-less, and so capable of theatrically enacting any role, that there is no difference between such theatricality and the real social functions, is not only false, and not only deceives others, but is a case of self-deceit.

The content of spirit's speech about itself and its speech concerning itself is thus the inversion of all concepts and realities. It is thus the universal deception of itself and others, and, for that very reason, the greatest truth is the shamelessness in stating this deceit.¹³

Finally, there is Hegel's most pointed example, that of modern moralism. This occurs when some agent, or group agent, or super-structural group agent, Geist, assumes the role of moral judge and subjects everyone to a rigorous moral accounting, one in which they are always found wanting, never truly acting dutifully but always self-interestedly. (Again to say that Geist can assume the role of moral judge is just to say that there is a means of collective self-representation that is not a mere summative result, and avows adherence to such ideals.) Such rigoristic condemnation is, Hegel thinks he can show, irrational, self-contradictory even, and Hegel suggests that no one can be presumed to have adopted such a stance without also being aware that it is so. It demands that individuals not be the individuals they are, that morality is asking for some conformity to strict standards that are impossible to fulfill. He suggests also that this realization will eventually win out, that there will be something equivalent to the Christian confession that

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¹³ PhG, §521.

“we are all sinners,” and this confession will occasion some mutual forgiveness. This is a strange moment in the *Phenomenology*, as if he thinks that the burden of this rigoristic moralism and the self-deception it requires, is impossible to bear. Whereas many of the other transitions in the book seem to follow some intellectual or conceptual realization of a practical contradiction, this one seems more existential and dramatic. But no matter for our purposes, he was obviously wrong in any sense about this. Such self-deception can clearly be borne quite well. Indeed, self-deceived moralism has reached something like epidemic proportions in the post-Hegelian world, our world, something that is not merely the “fault” of the self-deceived, but also of their audience. Gullibility is also a form of self-deceit (“hearing what one wants to hear”) and is as culpable. As Bernard Williams pointed out, in such cases deceiver and deceived are actually “conspiring” with one another.

III

This leaves us with many questions. For one thing, while Hegel invokes the concept of self-deception in an ancient context, it is not an ancient notion, does not it seem to have any resonance in that literature. Hence the question: when did it first become an important analytic tool, and might this show us some characteristic of the modern condition itself? For another, the question might naturally arise: is there anything more involved in the notion of a collectivity in self-deceit than that many or most of its individuals are self-deceived? The brief answer would be yes, because self-deceit about collective commitments is not simply a fixed disposition in individuals to ignore contrary evidence. It requires in effect a kind of silent conspiracy of unacknowledgement, reinforced by mutual assurances, common strategies for avoiding the truth, support of collective practices that make this easier rather than harder, and it depends on the simple, comforting weight of common confidence that, despite failure to act on the commitment, we are at least “trying.”

There is also the question of its possibility, or how one might dispel the aura of complete paradox that surrounds it. I have already suggested one way in which that might go, given Hegel's unusual understanding of the inner-outer relation in action. But the larger question involves a return to our earlier reflections on the bearing of Hegel's treatment of historical Geist

In fact, there is, from Hegel's point of view, reason to believe that the complexity of our situation has created something quite unprecedented that only his philosophy, with its ability to explain the “positive” role of the negative, and the reality of group agency and collective subjectivity, can account for. Life in modern societies seems

to have created the need for uniquely dissociated collective doxastic states, a repetition of the various characters in the drama of self-deceit narrated by the *Phenomenology*. This is one wherein we sincerely believe ourselves committed to fundamental principles and maxims we are actually in no real sense committed to, given what we do. (This would be the sense in which Kierkegaard thought most modern people were (that is, were not) “Christians.” This is not an idle reference. How else might we explain something like some “association of wealthy robber baron Christians” (which must exist somewhere), or billionaire Communists?¹⁴ The principles can be consciously and sincerely acknowledged and avowed, but, given the principles they are, cannot be integrated into a livable, coherent form of life. (The social conditions for self-deceit in this sort of context can help show that the problem is not rightly described as one where many individuals happen to fall into self-deceit. The analysis is not a moral one, not focused on individuals. It has to be understood as a matter of historical Geist, in the sense in which it is the point of this paper to make plausible. Or, on the other hand, we are committed to various policies that, nevertheless, we would, again in all sincerity and by means of the various representative practices available to Geist at a time, disavow, even though our actions again betray us.¹⁵ In his early works, Hegel claimed that the need for modern philosophy itself arises as an attempt at a reconciliation of what modern philosophy had left in “disunity.” [Entzweiung]¹⁶ and a striking sort of disunity is this dissociated relation to ourselves. This seems especially to be the case in the political world.

Of course, it is also the case that there is in modern politics, as perhaps there has always been, massive outright, deliberate deception

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14 For all of Kierkegaard's explicit and contemptuous anti-Hegelianism, this situation is perfectly Hegelian, given that Hegel defines “the one thing needful to achieve scientific progress [as] ... the recognition of the logical principle that negation is equally positive.” Hegel 2010, 21.38. (The translator has listed the German pages cited in the margins of his translation, so reference may now be made to the German pagination alone, by the volume number of page of the German critical edition, in the manner of references to the Akademie Ausgabe of Kant.) In Kierkegaard's terms, those who take themselves to be Christian are really not Christians, where this does not mean they are Muslims or Jews or atheists; they are NON-Christians. And conversely, there is also a principled way of not-being a Christian (realizing its enormous difficulty, perhaps its impossibility) which is the only way one can be a Christian. (This touches on a well known objection to Hegel: that he confuses contrariety with contradiction.) I use Kierkegaard as a dramatic example, but there any number of ordinary ones. “We all believe” that global warming is precipitating an unprecedented catastrophe. Do we?

15 In Pippin 2008, I try to show what conception of subjective mindedness and objective, public deed we need, according to Hegel, in order to account for such states, and suggest why they should not be seen as exceptional, or isolated puzzle case. See Chapter Six of that book.

16 Hegel 1968, p. 9.

and fraud. This is sometimes even praised, not just admitted as necessary. I mean Machiavelli's famous case that the needs and interests of government are sufficiently different from those of individuals as to justify, even to regard as virtuous, practices of deception.¹⁷ So the NSA claimed not to be doing what Snowden's documents showed they were doing, and they certainly knew that. No doubt there was some self-deceit involved in the justification, but they knew they were lying through their teeth. There are also many other examples and they are not limited to politics. Cigarette companies discounted the risks of smoking, even as they knew otherwise. One could go on almost infinitely.

But collective self-deceit of the kind explored – and I would say, for the first time explored – by Hegel is a different and arguably an even more widespread phenomenon. As Bernard Williams pointed out, the entire political world now seems inconceivable without it, with politics understood as the field on which what plays out is an externalization of a particular sort of group agent, government. Political actors are presented, and present themselves, Williams suggests, like actors in a soap opera, playing roles in which they neither cynically pretend to represent positions they know to be false (not always or mostly, anyway), nor, given the theatricality, exaggeration, “posing,” and the “protest too much” rhetoric, do they comfortably and authentically inhabit those roles. Williams's description is memorable.

They are called by their first names or have the same kind of jokey nicknames as soap opera characters, the same broadly sketched personalities, the same dispositions to triumph and humiliations which are schematically related to the doings of other characters. One believes in them as one believes in characters in a soap opera: one accepts the invitation to half believe them.¹⁸

He goes on to say that

...politicians, the media, and the audience conspire to pretend that important realities are being considered, that the actual word is being responsibly addressed.

And of course it is not being addressed. The whole strategy is an

¹⁷ Williams 2005, p 607.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 615.

attempt to avoid doing so.

Despite everything that has been said here, I realize that it may still strain credibility, even plausibility, to say that this is all best accounted for by saying that Geist, in this case, the communal Geist of a nation, is, in its self-representations, engaging in collective self-deceit. Much more would have to be said to pin the notion down. But it means that there is perhaps a different and better way to assess the possible contemporary bearing of Hegel's social and political philosophy than the “remaining points of contact,” institutional approach. In point of fact, this bearing is tightly connected with the general issue of collective self-deceit. As presented here, such a phenomenon is a means for avoiding the acknowledgment of what one nonetheless knows to be true: that there is a disconnect between consciously held principles of action, and the actual actions that result. The need for such a strategy can be understood by understanding that the basic claim of the Philosophy of Right, about the practical irrationality that would result were not the institutions of Abstract Right and Morality understood as moments within an overarching, common ethical life or *Sittlichkeit*. If it is true that without such an ethical commonality, and, crucially, its distinguishability from civil society, various collective principles would appear insufficient, irrational, subject to practical contradictions, then understandably, the temptation to collective self-deceit would be great; greater and greater even.

I would suggest that this is exactly the situation we find ourselves in, in anonymous mass societies, in which the absence of what, according to Hegel, amounts to genuine commonality, *Sittlichkeit*, is a felt absence, not merely an indeterminate absence. Understanding such a situation as essential to understanding the prevalence of collective self-deceit is preferable, I suggest in conclusion, to pointing to some sort of moral decay in individuals, inauthenticity or moral cowardice, something that would itself be an instance of the self-deceit Hegel detects in the institution of modern moralism.

IV

This prompts a last, more general comment. One could say that Hegel's revolutionary innovation in modern political thought (together with Rousseau) was to identify kinds of social pathologies and wrongs beyond violations of rights and unequal material welfare. Issues like vanity, inauthenticity, psychologically damaging forms of dependence, manipulation in the guise of political dialogue, and collective irrationalities such as self-deceit, or harms that can occur in what Hegel summarized as that “struggle for recognition,” were all to be treated as critical political issues. This is because such pathologies clearly can

distort political will formation in democracies, can corrupt the public sphere in all sorts of ways, can degrade the credibility of the leaders of a regime. Allegiance to a regime, especially up to the point of the “ultimate” sacrifice, is clearly not dependent on or even much informed by, the best philosophical argument for the state’s monopoly on legitimate violence. Understanding such allegiance and what degrades it is a vital issue in political psychology, something that is not any longer a central topic in modern political theory or philosophy.¹⁹

These considerations would suggest that such a political psychology must also involve something like a depth form of social psychology. I suggested above that Hegel’s account helps us to begin to understand the strategies involved in a collective agent’s attempts to preserve and sustain a common-minded form of self-deceit about its own incoherence and pathological irrationality, and I want to endorse his suggestion that such self-deceit was ever more likely, the less our common fate is experienced as sustained by a common ethical life, a common sense of ethical purpose and significance. That is, at least, the beginning of his analysis of what has promoted the prevalence of this form of irrationality.

As I write this, the United States has, in its presidential campaign, lived through a manifestation of collective irrationality in the form of massive self-deceit; so widespread that is barely imaginable, even though we lived it. The vote brought to power a candidate so manifestly incompetent and unsuited that it is impossible to believe that Trump voters intended to do this out of sheer ignorance, or self-interested greed, or any such (barely) “rational” motive. We exhaust ourselves throwing up our hands in despair of understanding “how all the rules have changed.” It is understandable that intelligent, thoughtful people should be wary of treating their fellow citizens as “sick patients,” patronizingly thinking themselves exempt from such analysis. (And Hegel of course does not use the term. Its original context is soul-health and soul-sickness Plato’s *Republic*.) But that wariness is warranted only in participation in political life. A more spectatorial position is also possible, although modern political thought has become so empiricistic and positivist that it is difficult to imagine now how the work begun by Rousseau and Hegel, and carried on by such figures as Marcuse and Adorno, however called for, could get any kind of grip in modern social or political science or in political philosophy.

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 19 “For a fuller discussion of “political psychology” see Pippin 2010.”ts Roger Thornhill (Cary Grant)n his films wersity Press, rns and American Myth: The Importance of Howard Hawks and John Ford

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The Absolute Plasticity of Hegel's Absolutes

Borna Radnik

Abstract: In this paper I argue that Hegel's three Absolutes (Absolute Knowing, Absolute Idea, and Absolute Spirit) are best characterised by what Catherine Malabou calls "plasticity". Rather than being synonymous with a divine God, or substance monism, Hegel's Absolutes instead refer to a dialectical process that is dynamic and ever shifting.

Keywords: Absolute, Absolute Idea, Absolute Knowing, Absolute Spirit Dialectic, Hegel's Secret, Catherine Malabou, Hegel, Metaphysics.

The history of Hegelianism—and the interpretation of Hegel's philosophy—is a history of divisions, deviations, revivals, and revisions.¹ There is perhaps no better example of the stakes of Hegelianism today than the controversial status of the Absolute. Slavoj Žižek characterises the aversion that Hegelian commentators seem to have towards the concept of the Absolute, pointing out that Hegel's metaphysical conceptions of the Absolute are so ridiculous and frightening, that even Hegelian commentators are afraid of close proximity to it.² Rather than dismiss Hegel's conception of the Absolute as a product of a metaphysical absolute idealist onto-theology, or revise Hegel's philosophy to accord with contemporary philosophical trends, I argue that insofar as Hegel's Absolutes are concrete universals, they are best understood to be *plastic* in the sense advanced by Catherine Malabou.³ It is their plasticity that effectively constitutes the radical dynamism of the dialectic that makes up the kernel within the Hegelian mystical shell. Malabou defines Hegelian plasticity as 'a capacity to receive form and a capacity to produce form.'⁴ The concept of plasticity is 'the point around

1 I am here referring to everything from the Right and Left instantiations of Hegelianism immediately following Hegel's death in 1831 to the Frankfurt School adoption of Hegel's dialectics, through to the Hegel revival of the 1960s and 70s, and the contemporary revisionist anti-metaphysical and anti-systematic interpretations of Hegel's philosophy. For a history of Young Hegelianism see Breckman 1999. For a survey of the metaphysical v.s. anti-metaphysical readings of Hegel see Brooks 2007.

2 As Žižek says: 'When siding with Hegel, even the most favorable commentators refuse to step over the line into accepting Absolute Knowledge... among partisans of Hegel, their relationship to the Hegelian system is always one of "Of course, but still ..." - of course Hegel affirmed the fundamentally antagonistic character of effectivity, the de-centering of the subject, etc., but still ... ; this fissure is finally canceled through the self-mediation of the Absolute Idea that heals all wounds. The position of Absolute Knowledge, of the final reconciliation, plays the role of the Hegelian Thing. It is the monster that is both frightening and ridiculous, from which one would do best to keep one's distance.' See Žižek 2014a, p. 1-2. Žižek offers a reading of Hegel's Absolute Knowing as Lacan's *le passe*, or 'the pass,' and the image of Hegel as monstrous serves as the Lacanian Real of his critics.

3 Malabou 2005.

4 Ibid., p. 9.

which all the transformations of Hegelian thought revolve, the centre of its metamorphosis.⁵ Plasticity is the Hegelian dialectical process. To argue that Hegel's three Absolutes are plastic is to argue that they possess a capacity to give and receive form—a form that is absolute, that is to say, without limitation. The Absolutes are plastic because each one articulates the dialectical movement through an immanent, rational deduction. Logically (but also always ontologically), the *only* entity or term that is absolute, or unlimited (i.e., opposed to the relative), is relativity itself. Each of Hegel's three Absolutes (Knowing, Idea, and Spirit) retroactively engenders a dialectical dynamic movement that is best characterized as plastic. While Malabou herself develops the concept of plasticity in her work on Hegel, her analysis of the plastic nature of Hegel's Absolutes are focused on the concept of the temporality and the problem of the future in (and of) the Hegelian system.⁶ Malabou provides a detailed analysis of the plasticity of Hegel's Absolute Spirit, and while she does discuss the plasticity of Absolute Knowing and the Idea, she does not explicitly develop *how* their plastic nature unfolds in the same detailed exposition she provides for Absolute Spirit.⁷ Therefore, my aim in this paper is to supplement Malabou by developing the inherent plasticity of Absolute Knowing, and the Idea. I restrict my discussion to Absolute Knowing, the Idea, and provide a brief reiteration of the plasticity of Absolute Spirit. I submit that this reaffirmation of Malabou's central thesis regarding the radical plasticity of Hegel's three Absolutes is necessary, given the all-too prevalent misconception surrounding the term “absolute”.

Hegel's Absolutes, rather than describe a divine entity or object called “the absolute,” designate the dialectical self-movement of the concept, its plastic unfolding. As John W. Burbidge says: ‘Hegel's philosophy is more an affirmation of relativism than of absolutism, though a relativism that is able to learn from its past mistakes and grow.’⁸ Within the Anglo-American reception of Hegel's philosophy, scholars have attempted to ignore, or outright dismiss the metaphysical aspect of Hegel's system.⁹ Contrary to these rejections, we should insist on what

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5 Ibid., p. 13.

6The concept of plasticity, for Malabou, inevitably leads to a treatment of temporality. As Malabou says ‘Self-determination is thus the relation of substance to that which happens. Following this lone of thought we understand the “future” in the philosophy of Hegel as the relation which subjectivity maintains with the accidental.’ Ibid., p. 12.

7 Ibid., p. 135-142.

8 Burbidge 1997, p. 31-32.

9 For example, in an interview with 3:AM Magazine, Frederick C. Beiser takes a historical

Adorno says in his *Three Studies on Hegel*. Adorno, remarking on what is dead or alive in Hegel's thought, points out that ‘the converse question is not even raised: what the present means in the face of Hegel.’¹⁰ Just because the majority of us today are supposedly unwilling to accept Hegel's metaphysical position is not a sufficient reason for relegating Hegel's Absolutes to a bygone era.

The Plasticity of Absolute Knowing

One ever-persistent caricature of Hegel surrounds the notion of the Absolute. The Hegelian system has traditionally been understood to be an all-encompassing, totalising absolute idealism where everything is consumed in its wake (i.e., the frightening monster). This representation of Hegel is founded on a certain image of his systematic philosophy, whereby the role of the term “absolute” plays a constitutive role. It is crucial to remember that there are three Hegelian Absolutes, not one Absolute. Despite this fact, the misconception remains. As Burbidge has notes ‘there are some commentators who assume that, whenever Hegel talks about absolute idea, or absolute spirit, or indeed absolute knowledge, he is really using different terms to describe that single entity known as “the Absolute.”’¹¹ Frank Ruda has more recently reasserted this point, saying that ‘absolute knowing is not an objective knowledge of something or of the absolute. Neither is it the knowledge of an object that may be called the absolute, which is a traditional misreading of Hegel.’¹² A traditional misreading, that is still very much pervasive and dominant. So why do commentators and critics alike refer to “the Absolute” if Hegel does not conceive of such a thing? There is textual evidence that supports the existence of Hegel using the term “Absolute”. The most famous example is from the Preface to the *Phenomenology*

interpretative approach to Hegel's Absolute: ‘No one nowadays talks about the absolute, not even people with firm and deep religious convictions. The whole Hegelian project has no resonance for us, as it once had for the Germans in the 1820s and the British and Americans around the 1880s. This is not to say Hegel is unimportant, or that we should not take his philosophy seriously. We should take him very seriously, but that is essentially for historical reasons. Hegel remains of great importance to understand ourselves, but essentially because we have all grown out of a reaction against Hegel. This is to say, then, that Hegel is still important for us for essentially negative reasons, i.e., to show us what we are not. Feuerbach wrote in his *Principles of the Philosophy of the Future*: “Hegel's philosophy is the last great attempt to rescue lost and fading Christianity through philosophy...” I think that this is absolutely accurate. The more we come to terms with it, the more we can see the degree of Hegel's relevance for us. I think that for most of us nowadays, who have accepted life in a secular age, Hegel's project is obsolete. Christianity was still central to the life and worldview of my old supervisor, Charles Taylor, and that is why he went back to Hegel. But as a secular pagan Hegel's project has no resonance at all for me’ See Beiser, 2012.

10 Adorno, 1993, p. 1.

11 Burbidge 1997, p. 24.

12 Ruda 2016, p. 125.

of *Spirit*, where Hegel says ‘of the Absolute it must be said that it is essentially a *result*.’¹³ However, as Burbidge points out Hegel ‘is starting from the presuppositions of his audience, most of whom were inspired by Schelling. He is playing on their assumptions that there is an absolute, and that philosophy, by reaching the point of indifference and undifferentiation, can come to know it as it is.’ Hegel uses the term “absolute”, then, sparingly, in very specific contexts in his texts, and ‘in none of these cases, then, is there any evidence that Hegel wants to appropriate the noun ‘absolute’ to capture the ultimate focus of his own philosophy.’¹⁴ The instances where Hegel *does* use “the absolute” as a noun is with reference to the philosophies of Spinoza and Schelling, and also when he lectures on religion.¹⁵ In his *The Difference between Fichte’s and Schelling’s System of Philosophy*, Hegel refers to “the absolute” while discussing and criticizing both Schelling’s and Fichte’s respective philosophies.¹⁶ And in the *Phenomenology*, it is of course in reference to Schelling’s conception of the organic Absolute that swallows up all differences where ‘everything is the same,’ that the it is in Schelling’s understanding of the Absolute that is the ‘night in which, as the saying goes, all cows are black.’¹⁷

If Hegel does not use “the absolute” as a noun when discussing his three Absolutes, then how are we to understand his use of this elusive term? Hegel adopts Kant’s definition. Kant uses the term “the absolute” not as a noun, but rather as an adjective, and Hegel adopts this sense of the term.¹⁸ In the *Critique of Pure Reason*, Kant defines the “absolute” as that which is without limitations or restrictions.¹⁹ This drastically changes our understanding of Hegel’s three Absolutes, as Burbidge makes clear: Absolute Knowing becomes ‘a knowing that is effective without limitation’; the Absolute Idea becomes ‘an idea that is valid in all respects’; and Absolute Spirit becomes ‘spirit that permeates every

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¹³ Hegel 1977b, §20 p. 11.

¹⁴ Burbidge 2007, p. 72.

¹⁵ In his 1827 lectures of religion, Hegel says ‘God is the absolute substance...God is *spirit*, *absolute spirit*.’ See Hegel 2006, p. 117-118.

¹⁶ Hegel 1977a, p. 89.

¹⁷ Hegel, 1977b, §16, p. 9.

¹⁸ I owe this insight to Burbidge. See Burbidge 2007, p. 73.

¹⁹ Kant says ‘Sometimes used to indicate the something is valid in every relation (unlimitedly) (e.g., absolute dominion); and in this meaning absolutely possible would signify what is possible in all respects in every relation, which is again the most that I can say about the possibility of a thing...it is in this extended meaning that I will make use of the word absolute, opposing it to what is merely comparative, or valid in some particular respect.’ See Kant 2009, A324/B381-A326/B383.

relation.’²⁰ Hegel’s use of the Absolute as an adjective renders it ‘opposite of the relative.’²¹

Following Kant, Hegel understands the “absolute” as that without any conditions. But how does Hegel understand the term “knowing”? In the German original, Hegel typically employs two different words that have been translated as “knowledge” or “knowing,” namely *Wissen* and *Erkenntnis*. *Wissen* denotes “to know;” as a verbal noun (i.e., *das Wissen*) it means “knowing” or “learning”.²² *Erkenntnis* comes from the verb *Erkennen* that denotes “to know again, to recognise, to realise, or to come to know again”. *Kenntnis*, a noun, roughly means “cognise,” or “awareness of” something. With respect to Hegel, what is *erkannt* (i.e., known, understood, systematically cognised) is contrasted with *bekannt* (i.e., that which is familiar, or well-known). The closing chapter of Hegel’s *Phenomenology of Spirit* is titled “*Das absolute Wissen*” (i.e., Absolute Knowing), and not “*das absolute Erkenntnis*”. Hegel’s distinction is important because far from being simply linguistically different, the preference of *Wissen* over *Erkenntnis* has philosophical significance. As Michael Inwood notes *Wissen* ‘was originally a past tense, meaning “to have been perceived,” this is important because ‘*Wissen* can be immediate, involving, unlike *Erkennen*, no process of coming to know.’²³ For Hegel, the ‘distinction between knowing and cognition is something entirely familiar to educated thinking.’²⁴ The example Hegel provides is that between the knowledge of God and the cognition of God: ‘though we *know* that God is, *cognition* of him is beyond us.’²⁵ Indeed, to cognise something (*Kenntnis*) presupposes an object that appears to be external to the knowing conscious subject. We cannot cognise God for God is not an object to be cognised, like a sugar cube. Rather, we know (*Wissen*) that God has being.

If *Erkennen* designates the (re)cognising of what has already been encountered, or “seen”, then it is a different sort of knowledge than what constitutes the Hegelian Absolute Knowing. To illustrate the conceptual difference between Hegel’s use of *Erkenntnis* and *Wissen* it is productive for us to consider a paragraph from the Introduction to the *Phenomenology of Spirit*. Commenting on whether or not cognition

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²⁰ Burbidge 2007, p. 73.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Inwood 1999, p. 154.

²³ Ibid., p. 155.

²⁴ Hegel 2007, §445A, p. 175

²⁵ Ibid.

is to be understood as either an instrument or a medium to grasp the Absolute, Hegel contends that this presupposes a distinction between the Absolute and cognition, a presupposition that is erroneous. Hegel distinguishes between *Wissenschaft* and *Erkennen*: ‘one may set this aside on the grounds that there is a type of cognition [*Erkennen*] which, though it does not cognize the Absolute as Science [*Wissen*] aims to, is still true, and that cognition in general, though it be incapable of grasping the Absolute, is still capable of grasping other kinds of truth.’²⁶ Hegel explains, however, that the distinction between “absolute truth” and “some other kind of truth” is a fiction, for if there *were* another kind of truth besides absolute truth (i.e., unlimited), then the truth that is allegedly absolute would turn out to be limited and therefore not absolute at all. This would be because for there simple reason that some other sort of truth exists that is extraneous to absolute truth, that is somehow “outside” of this absolute. Absolute truth would be limited. Hegel’s point here is that the gulf between cognition and absolute truth is nothing but a semblance—a semblance that is unavoidable. It is unavoidable because ‘the way to Science is itself already *Science*, and hence, in virtue of its content, is Science of the *experience of consciousness*.’²⁷ Or to reiterate: the way to Absolute Knowing (*das absolute Wissen*) is through the experience of natural consciousness, that is to say, its experience of cognition (*Kenntnis/Erkenntnis*). We see here that Absolute Knowing is not the knowledge of some object or entity called “the Absolute,” if it were the knowledge of an entity it would be “*das absolute Erkenntnis*” rather than “*das absolute Wissen*.” Malabou repeats this crucial point when she says that ‘the absolute never occupies the place of referent. It could never be “*what* we are talking about”.’²⁸ Hegel’s preference of “*Wissen*” over “*Erkenntnis*” is not accidental. Absolute Knowing is *both Wissen and Erkenntnis*. That is to say, Absolute Knowing is both the (re)-cognition of the phenomenal experience of natural consciousness *and* it is the very end result of this process; a result which sublates (*aufheben*), that is, it simultaneously cancels and preserves its previous moments or terms (in this case, its previous shapes of consciousness).

How can Absolute Knowing be both *Wissen* and *Erkenntnis*? In the Preface to the *Phenomenology* Hegel asserts that not only is the truth the whole, but also that ‘the whole is nothing other than the essence consummating itself through its development.’ He goes on to clarify that ‘of the Absolute it must be said that it is essentially a *result*, that only in

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26 Hegel, 1977b, §75, p. 47-8.

27 Ibid., §88, p. 56.

28 Malabou 2005, p. 182.

the *end* is it what it truly is; and that precisely in this consists its nature, viz. to be actual, subject, the spontaneous becoming of itself.’²⁹ How can Hegel speak of Absolute Knowing as an end product without conceiving of it as an object, as an entity? Hegel repeats the same argument with a clarification on the logic of the self-repelling or self-recoiling (what Hegel calls “*absoluter Gegenstoß*”) nature of spirit.

What is *last* is seen to be that which is *first*; the *end* is the *purpose*; and when we discover it to be that purpose, indeed the absolute purpose, we recognize the product as the immediate first mover. This progression towards a result is thus at the same time a returning into itself, a repelling that is in itself its own self-repelling. It is what was described above as the true nature of spirit, i.e., of the active final purpose that creates itself. If spirit were immediate being without effective activity, it would not be spirit, indeed it would not even be life. And if it were not purpose and purposive activity, then spirit would not discover in its product that its activity consists wholly in its own merging with itself, a mediation that mediates its own determination in immediacy.³⁰

Hegel is of course not arguing that the end product (i.e., Absolute Knowing) is something that we presuppose or something which we assume at the outset. On the contrary, recall that ‘the truth is the Whole,’ and that the “Whole” in this context is the journey of the experience of consciousness through its cognition of phenomena, struggle for recognition, culture, morality, ethical community, religion, and so on. The end product can only be discovered to be the purpose of this journey once the end has been reached. Therefore, it is only at the end that we are able to ‘recognise the product as the immediate first mover’. The language of “repelling” and “self-repelling (or recoiling)” is important here. If the truth is indeed the Whole, then this Whole, as a product of the progression towards it, is only recognised as that which it is (i.e., truth) at the very end. The nature of spirit (and this is constitutive of Absolute Knowing) is not only the progression towards a determinate end, but also a repelling that is a repelling of itself. As a concrete universal, Absolute Knowing contains within itself all of its particular instantiations. However we must be careful here. It is incorrect to think that the particular is external or alien to the universal, or that the particular is located “outside” the universal. What makes concrete universality truly concrete (as opposed to abstract) is that any designated

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29 Hegel 1977b, §20, p. 11.

30 Hegel 2009, p. 11. Žižek discusses Hegel’s Absolute Recoil in Žižek 2014b.

otherness to this universal is an other only in appearance. When Hegel says that the ‘whole is nothing other than the essence consummating itself through its development’ he is effectively describing the self-repelling nature of spirit. The end result, Absolute Knowing, is not an object of cognition (recall that Absolute Knowing is not a referent to a term called “absolute”), but a dynamic process, a becoming. A becoming that only becomes what it already always was through a process of self-repelling movement. Spirit is a progression but ‘at the same time a returning into itself’, but this return only materialises (or registers) as a result through a retroactive process. This is what Hegel means when he says above that the true nature of spirit is ‘the active final purpose *that creates itself*’. The “final purpose” (i.e., Absolute Knowing) is the result of its own activity, its own immanent dialectical movement.³¹ Absolute Knowing emerges from a process of self-alienation—but throughout its spiritual development, this *self*–alienation is experienced first as *alienation*—that is, as continuous encounters with Otherness. This otherness is generated from the internal contradictions inherent in the experience of consciousness. Or that we can only discover that the repelling is actually a *self*-repelling once spirit has returned to itself, that is, at the end. This is Hegel’s entire point when he evokes the language of repelling and self-repelling in the passage above. When Hegel says that the movement towards Absolute Knowing is ‘a repelling that is *in itself* its own self-repelling’, we have to remember that for Hegel, the term “in itself “ (*an sich*) is used to denote something that is merely potential, implicit, or when something is considered separately from other things or terms. That is to say, when it is unreflective. So, the progression towards the end result (i.e., Absolute Knowing) is a progression that is also a repelling, but a repelling that is implicitly (in itself) a self-repelling. Or rather: it may first *seem as though* what gets repelled or opposed to consciousness is its external Other, but this “Other” is nothing but itself (hence the language of “return to itself”). As Hegel says ‘it usually seems to be the case, on the contrary, that our experience of the untruth of our first notion comes by way of a second object which we come upon by chance and externally,’ however ‘the new object shows itself to have come

31 Žižek is right therefore when he says: ‘The Absolute is the “result of itself”, the outcome of its own activity. What this means is that, in the strict sense of the term, there is no Absolute which externalizes or particularizes itself and then unites itself with its alienated Otherness: the Absolute emerges out of this process of alienation; that is, as the result of its own activity, the Absolute “is” nothing but its “return to itself”. The notion of an Absolute which externalizes itself and then reconciles itself with its Otherness presupposes the Absolute as given in advance, prior to the process of its becoming; it posits as the starting point of the process what is effectively its result.’ See Žižek 2012, p. 291.

about through a *reversal of consciousness itself*.³² In short, only when the movement of spirit culminates in Absolute Knowing, does consciousness retroactively discover that its perpetual encounters with an alienated “other” was in fact a, encounter with itself: a self-alienation.³³ Žižek is thus correct when he claims that ‘there is no Self which precedes alienation: the Self emerges only through its alienation, alienation is its constitutive feature.’³⁴ The dialectical movement of spirit progresses towards, and creates itself as a result through (self)-repelling.

The repelling and self-repelling nature of spirit is salient to the argument about the plasticity of Hegel’s Absolutes because it captures the extent to which each of Hegel’s three Absolutes function as concrete universals. With Absolute Knowing, Hegel is not ‘talking about *what* is known,’ but rather ‘*how* we know.’³⁵ At every stage and at each moment of the *Phenomenology*, Hegel demonstrates that consciousness attempts to make a claim to knowing the truth absolutely. Consciousness tries to obtain what it thinks is unmediated knowledge of truth through our five senses, but as the chapter on sense certainty illustrates, this certainty is crushed, and consciousness moves to adopt a new method at ascertaining true knowledge (from sense certainty it moves to perception). This process is repeated throughout each and every stage of the *Phenomenology*, and at each stage, consciousness is absolutely convinced in the validity of its knowledge of its experience. The experience of natural consciousness becomes for it ‘the way of despair’ because of these failures. ‘Absolute knowing,’ Burbidge concludes, ‘is not the prerogative of Hegel. It is, rather, central to all confident knowledge claims, whenever and wherever they occur. And all of them turn out to be relative.’³⁶ But if all preceding attempts to grasp the truth have failed, what guarantees are there that Absolute Knowing will not also fail?³⁷

The chapter on Absolute Knowing is not only a summation of all the previous stages of the *Phenomenology*, but it is also an integration of the two preceding chapters, namely the chapter on the ‘Beautiful Soul’ and ‘Revealed Religion’.³⁸ It is through the integration, or unity, of

32 Hegel 1977b, §87, p. 55.

33 Its repelling a self-repelling. It is only with Absolute Knowing that what was once thought to be merely in itself, turns out to be in-and-for-itself.

34 Žižek 2016, p. 37.

35 Burbidge 2007, p. 49.

36 Ibid., 74.

37 As Burbidge asks ‘Why does it not also collapse into despair’? See Ibid.

38 Hegel spends the first several paragraphs of the Absolute Knowing chapter reviewing the entire

these two preceding chapters that demonstrate how, for Hegel, Absolute Knowing does not give way to relative knowledge like all of the previous attempts. Both religion and the beautiful soul are ways in which the unity of self-consciousness and the external world is achieved. To put it rather simplistically, the difference between the two is that in Christianity, this reconciliation occurs as a being-in-itself (i.e., only implicitly), and in the beautiful soul it occurs as a being-for-itself (i.e., explicitly). These two moments have to be unified as a being-in-and-for-itself. Let us examine, briefly, how and why this occurs. We must remember that the ‘beautiful soul’ emerges from the failed attempts of the conscience self to construct an objective moral world which accords with its own self. It is through our willing to put our moral convictions into actions that the moral subject tries to reconcile itself with the external world. Yet there is an inherent discrepancy between our inward moral intentions and their actualisation in the world. Rarely does the actual world correspond to our intended actions. Things go awry, things go wrong. Our actions do not turn out as we intended. The moral conscientious subject retreats into itself and relishes in own moral convictions all the while scorning the impurity of the actual outside world. This conscience self ‘is in its own self divine worship, for its action is the contemplation of its own activity.’³⁹ But this contemplative, pure conscience self is entirely empty because it is always assured of its own moral validity without having to contend with *what* it is right about. This beautiful soul, says Hegel, ‘lives in dread of besmirching the splendour of its inner being by action and an existence; and, in order to preserve the purity of its heart, it flees from contact with the actual world, and persists in its self-willed impotence.’⁴⁰ However, the beautiful soul cannot simply dwell in its own purity. The beautiful soul must act in order to test out the validity of its ideals. For it is only through action that it can come to know the truth of its convictions. Yet as soon as the beautiful soul actualises its will through action, its intentions are distorted. They become distorted because we intended something universal (i.e., the good), but our intention and our action is something particular (e.g., it is *my* intention and *my* action). Our intention and action is an abstract universal. That our intentions inevitably fall short of our universal convictions to the good as such is what produces our fallibility. The beautiful soul is driven to recognise and therefore reconciles itself with others who judge its hypocrisy. The beautiful soul provides us with a process whereby a once absolute claim to knowledge is proved to be

progression of the book. See Hegel 1977b, §788-798, p.479-485.

39 Ibid. §655, p. 397.

40 Ibid., §657, p. 400.

relative.⁴¹ The beautiful soul moves through the moments of ‘action, condemnation, confession, and reconciliation.’⁴²

What the section on ‘Revealed Religion’ contributes is the unification of this reconciliation in narrative form. The defective element in religious narration is its representational form (*Vorstellung*, or “picture-thinking” in the Miller translation). The Christian Trinity (i.e., Father, Son, Holy Spirit) captures the necessary content, as Hegel says ‘it won for consciousness the absolute content as *content* or, in the form of *picture-thinking*, the form of otherness for consciousness.’⁴³ That is to say, religion has the proper content (i.e., the absolute as that without restriction) but the wrong form. Revealed Religion presents us with a movement whereby a pure, infinite entity, God, acts to create a world, but its creation, as a finite world, is impure and evil. God becomes mortal (Christ) in order to reshape the evil world by accepting responsibility for his creation. For this God is put to death, crucified on the cross. The God of the absolute beyond, the transcendent Christian God is shown to be immanent by becoming mortal. That is to say the identification of God with the world engenders a new universal possibility.⁴⁴ Likewise, the community of believers that worshipped this God realise their fault in the latter’s death and give in to despair. This also opens up new universal possibilities.⁴⁵ Finally, these two openings are shown to be actually one and the same dynamic process, the same movement. As Burbidge points out ‘in both cases, what is important is not a particular state, not even the final state of reconciliation, but a process—the action of the self, the life of spirit as community. It is the whole story of beautiful soul, the whole story of revealed religion that come together. For they embody the same, structured dynamic.’⁴⁶

In the Christianity the truth of this dynamic process is only a being-in-itself, and not yet for-itself. That is to say, religion has the absolute for

41 As Burbidge says ‘Tale of discovery where a knowing that is valid without restriction has to come to terms with its failure and thus moves on to a new stage where the previous absolute must be reconciled with conflicting conditions and restrictions, says Hegel, is self-knowing that is of itself and on its own account (*für sich*). In fact, this experience is simply the awareness, at a more encompassing level, of the process of experience and learning that has marked each stage of the phenomenological odyssey. The fact that Hegel’s summary recounts the whole story makes it clear that he is interested, not in a simple, reconciled result, but in the action of the self, the full spiritual dynamic as the epitome of what absolute knowing involves.’ See Burbidge 1997, p. 29.

42 Ibid.

43 Hegel 1977b, §796, p. 484.

44 Ibid., §780-781, p. 473.

45 Ibid., §784, p. 475.

46 Burbidge 1997, p. 30.

its content, but not its form. Christianity simply (re)presents the inner truth is a mystical shell. The for-itself is brought about by the beautiful soul: it is only with the beautiful soul's act that the essential structure of this dynamic process can be grasped from within as a self-certain moment. As Hegel says 'what in religion was *content* or a form for presenting an *other* [i.e., an absolute, infinite God], is here the Self's own act.'⁴⁷ That is to say, Christianity reveals in its representational form the truth of the absolute content: that the encounter with Otherness is in fact not an alien "other" at all—however it does so defectively, in fairy-tale stories, in picture-thinking. It is only with the beautiful soul's *act* that we obtain the proper form, a form constitutive of a knowing subject. In paragraph §798 of the *Phenomenology*, Hegel says: 'this last shape of Spirit—the Spirit which *at the same time gives its complete and true content the form of the Self and thereby realizes its Concept [Begriff]* as remaining in its Concept in this realization—this is absolute knowing; it is Spirit that knows itself in the shape of Spirit, or a *comprehensive knowing*.'⁴⁸ Spirit that 'knows itself in the shape of Spirit' is what Hegel refers to as "absolute knowing". The true content has finally been given its proper form: that of the self. Once again, here we find the language of "form" and "content": terms that are constitutive of the plastic nature of spirit and of Hegel's Absolutes. The form of the Self that Absolute Knowing engenders is of course the form of the beautiful soul; its content is the content of religion. Or as Hegel puts it 'truth is the *content*, which in religion is still not identical with its certainty. But this identity is now a fact, in that the content has received the shape of the Self.'⁴⁹ So what does this content actually consist of? Hegel says that the movement and moments of self-conscious knowing have 'show themselves to be such that this knowing is a pure *being-for-self* of self-consciousness; it is "I", that is *this* and no other "I", and which is no less immediately a *mediated* or superseded *universal* "I".'⁵⁰ The content is the "I" that 'communes with itself in its otherness,' and it is only at this point that 'that the content is *comprehended*.'⁵¹ Hegel concludes that what this amount to is that 'this content is nothing else than the very movement just spoken of; for the content is Spirit that traverses its own self and does so *for itself* as Spirit

47 Ibid., §797, p. 485.

48 Ibid., §798, p. 485. I have modified Miller translation of *Begriff* as "Notion" to the more appropriate "Concept" to keep in line with the standards of contemporary Hegelian scholarship.

49 Ibid.

50 Ibid., §799, p. 486.

51 Ibid.

by the fact that it has the "shape" of the Concept in its objectivity.⁵² We have to take Hegel seriously here: the content of Absolute Knowing is nothing but the movement, or process of the Self's attempt to grasp or know something true, its failure by virtue of an encounter with what at first seems to an "other," and a recognition that this other is nothing but its own self-sameness. Or to put is logically: Absolute Knowing is the knowing of the identity of identity and difference. The difference between form and content collapses into Absolute Knowing because Spirit has finally assumed the "shape" of its concept, that is, the form of its content. The promise of the Preface has been fulfilled here: the truth has been grasped both as Subject (i.e., the Self's act taken from the beautiful soul) and as Substance (i.e., the absolute substantial being represented in the Christian religion).⁵³ This movement occurs in both the beautiful soul and revealed religion. The religious edicts and the beautiful soul amount to the same dynamic, plastic process. They both exhibit one and the same moments: conviction, action, failure, recognition of this failure, self-correction in light of the preceding failure, and a new attempt. It is this what 'makes absolute knowing absolute is that it recognizes that it is a self-correcting process: any claim to knowledge without restriction will have within itself the means of falsifying itself. It will turn out to be relative.'⁵⁴ Absolute Knowing, then, turns out to be the absolute relativity of all claims to true knowledge. Absolute Knowing is not the knowing of an object, but a kind of knowing that knows that the only absolute (i.e., unlimited), universal type of knowing is the absolute relativism of all forms of knowing. Absolute Knowing's claim is that all form of knowing is relative. It is a concrete universal because its claim to universality includes within it its particularities.

What makes Hegel's Absolute Knowing *plastic*, in the sense articulated by Malabou (i.e., capacity to receive and produce form) is now evident. First, plastic Absolute Knowing has a capacity to receive form. How? By acknowledging and including within itself the dynamic learning process that phenomenal consciousness struggles through. We have to remember that Hegel's Absolute Knowing does not *posit* any content of its own right, but rather takes on all the previous and past content that consciousness has experienced. But Absolute Knowing's claim to absoluteness is not to be understood, as an exhaustive claim to know all there is to know. On the contrary, as we have seen,

52 Ibid. I have once again translated *Begriff* as "Concept", rather than retain Miller's "Notion".

53 Ibid., §17, p. 10.

54 Burbidge 1997, p. 31.

the importance for Hegel is not so much the content of all previous moments in the *Phenomenology*, but the dynamic process, a dialectical movement—a movement that proceeds immanently through the internal contradictions in consciousness itself it attempts to acquire truth. So, paradoxically, Absolute Knowing receives form through acknowledging the incorporating all past content because it is only by recognising the dialectical, dynamic process inherent in this content, a process that in fact produces and engenders the content as *content*, that it is able to know the concrete universality, the *plasticity*, of all claims of knowledge. To borrow a phrase from Jay Lampert, Absolute Knowing ‘never posits content, since content is not its content; it formalizes contents, negatively by limiting each, affirmatively by including each.’⁵⁵

What about the capacity to produce form? To answer this we have to banish all conceptions of the Absolute Knowing chapter as serving as some sort of definitive end. The *Phenomenology* itself does physically end with this final chapter, but we must remember that for Hegel the *Phenomenology of Spirit* served a strictly propaedeutic function. It was written largely as an exposition to elevate natural consciousness to the level of philosophical Science proper: the *Encyclopedia*. Absolute Knowing is therefore at one an end result of the self-movement of spirit, and the beginning of Science as such, starting with the *Science of Logic*. Even conceptually, Absolute Knowing designates these two aspects: an end and a beginning. Absolute Knowing knows the absoluteness of relativity, of the limitations inherent in any and all claims to epistemological truth, and it is this knowing that enables it to serve both as an end (i.e., a result, a product of a process), and at the same time a new beginning, an openness to new claims of knowing. In this respect, then Absolute Knowing can be said to produce form because of its radical openness to the contingent. The form that it produces will necessarily turn out to be relative: it is the same self-correcting dynamic process discussed above because the means of its relative nature is intrinsic to itself. ‘Contingency is the systematic condition for the development of the only kind of absolute knowing that will not in its turn become relative.’⁵⁶

Hegel’s Absolute Knowing is not a knowledge claim about an object called “the Absolute” nor is it a claim about exhaustively knowing all there is to know. Rather, knowing absolutely means knowing without limitation. The only knowledge claim that is truly without any conditions or limits, and therefore a concrete universal, is the claim that all

55 Lampert 2015, p. 91.

56 Burbidge 2007, p. 79.

knowledge claims are relative. It is this absolute relativism of Hegel that makes Absolute Knowing universal. Hegel’s Absolute Knowing, as an unrestricting kind of knowing, is plastic precisely because, as a concrete universality, it has the capacity to both receive and produce form. This is exactly what Hegel means when in the Preface he asserts that ‘everything turns on grasping and expressing the True, not only a *Substance*, but equally as *Subject*.’⁵⁷ Therefore, Hegel’s emphasis that the truth must be grasped/conceived and at the same time expressed as both substance and subject conveys the plastic doublet of the reception and production of form in Absolute Knowing. As Malabou herself notes Hegel’s subject-substance thesis is the very core of the plastic nature of the dialectic. ‘The process of self-determination is the unfolding of the *substance-subject*,’ and ‘self-determination is the movement through which substance affirms itself at once *subject* and *predicate* of itself.’⁵⁸ The expression of revelation of Absolute Knowing as a plastic knowing is precisely its capacity and ability to receive and produce (or express) form. This is the truth that is *grasped/received* and *expressed/produced* both as substance and subject, in all its plastic glory. In Malabou’s own words: ‘it is not *stasis* but *metamorphosis* that characterises Absolute Knowledge.’⁵⁹

The Plasticity of the Absolute Idea

So far we have seen how Hegel’s Absolute Knowing amounts to knowing the absolute relativity of all claims of knowledge. It is this universal relativism that makes Hegel’s Absolute Knowing plastic. But what about Hegel’s other two Absolutes: the Idea and Spirit? Hegel’s Kantian understanding of “absolute” as that without restrictions or limitations renders the Absolute Idea as an idea without conditions or limits, an idea that can be said to be universally valid. The Absolute Idea is *not* an idea about some object or being called the “absolute,” the Absolute Idea names a process of dialectical becoming, a movement. Before we discuss the Absolute Idea, we have to first understand what Hegel’s *Logic* consists of, its subject matter, and its relation to the *Phenomenology of Spirit*. In short, we need to appreciate the relationship between Absolute Knowing and logical (but also ontological) thinking.

For Hegel, the movement of the *Phenomenology* and the *Logic* are homologous in that they both produce a comprehensive account of themselves as results of a dialectical movement: ‘logic...cannot say what

57 Ibid., §17, p. 10.

58 Malabou 2005, p. 11.

59 Ibid., p. 134.

it is in advance, rather does this knowledge of itself only emerge as the final result and completion of its whole movement.⁶⁰ Yet this movement, this immanent deductive development, is plastic: 'the presentation of no subject matter can be in and for itself as strictly and immanently plastic as is that of thought in its necessary development.'⁶¹ In the Introduction to *The Science of Logic* Hegel says that 'in the *Phenomenology of Spirit* I have presented consciousness as it progresses from the first immediate opposition of itself and the subject matter [*Gegenstand*] to absolute knowledge [*das absolute Wissen*]. This path traverses all the forms of the *relation of consciousness to the object* and its result is the *concept of science*.'⁶² Absolute Knowing as the result of the movement of the *Phenomenology* is the very deduction of the concept of pure science, 'the *Phenomenology of Spirit* is nothing other than that deduction.'⁶³ In a certain sense, the *Phenomenology* serves as a necessary, philosophical preamble to the beginning of Hegel's philosophical system.⁶⁴ The difference between the sensuous content of the *Phenomenology* and the content of logic is that the former examines the dialectical unfolding movement immanent to sensuous experience while the latter examines the dialectical unfolding movement immanent to abstract thought.⁶⁵ Hegel is quick to claim that logical thinking is not a type of thinking *about* something else an entity or object external to thought-determinations (i.e., it is not an application of categories onto things, people, the world, objects, etc.). Logical thinking is thought thinking *itself*.⁶⁶ The content of logical thought is therefore the Concept [*Begriff*], insofar as logical

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60 Hegel 2010b, p. 23.

61 Ibid., p. 19.

62 Ibid., p. 28.

63 Ibid., p. 29. Hegel goes on to clarify that 'Absolute knowledge is the *truth* of all modes of consciousness because, as the course of the *Phenomenology* brought out, it is only in absolute knowledge that the separation of the *subject matter* from the *certainty of itself* is completely resolved: truth as become equal to certainty and this certainty to truth.'

64 In the Doctrine of Being, Hegel says 'logic has for its presupposition the science of spirit in its appearance, a science which contains the necessity, and therefore demonstrates the truth, of the standpoint which is pure knowledge and of its mediation.'Ibid., p. 47.

65 Hegel says 'In this science of spirit in its appearance [*Phenomenology*] the beginning is made from empirical, *sensuous* consciousness, and it is this consciousness which is *immediate* knowledge in the strict sense; there, in this science, is where its nature is discussed [...] but in logic the presupposition is what has proved itself to be the result of that preceding consideration, namely the idea as pure knowledge. *Logic* is the *pure science*, that is, pure knowledge in the full compass of its development.' See Ibid.

66 As Hegel says 'Logic has nothing to do with a thought *about* something which stands outside by itself as the base of thought; nor does it have to do with forms meant to provide mere *markings* of the truth; rather, the necessary forms of thinking, and its specific determinations, are the content and the ultimate truth itself.' Ibid.

thinking concerns the determinations of the categories of thought (i.e., thought-determinations).⁶⁷ To this extent, the entire *Science of Logic* is concerned with the conceptual development of logical thinking, that is to say, the three Books of Hegel's logic (e.g., Doctrine of Being, Doctrine of Essence, and Doctrine of the Concept) are divisions within the concept as such.⁶⁸

What is the relation between the concept and the Absolute Idea? Hegel's answer is that the absolute idea is the unity of the concept with objectivity. Hegel uses the term "objectivity" (*Objektivität*) to refer to the set of thought-determinations, or categories, concerned with the "otherness" of subjectivity, with categories that are ostensibly non-mediated and self-constricted. That is to say "objectivity" refers to that which is beyond, or "outside" thought itself. Hegel treats these categories within "The Subjective Logic" because rather than simply describe the thought-determinations about objects themselves, the section on "objectivity" attempts to capture, as Burbidge points out, 'the way we think about objects,' that is to say 'we are now explicitly including the activity of thinking in the process of describing objectivity.'⁶⁹

The Absolute Idea emerges as the unity of theoretical idea and practical idea. In his discussion of cognition in *The Science of Logic*, Hegel argues that there are two forms of cognition: theoretical cognition and practical cognition. Both of these cases involve a process whereby subjectivity (i.e, the concept) and objectivity are made to be in unity with one another. The theoretical idea is "cognition as such," whereas the practical idea is the cognitive impulse to transform objectivity through action. The theoretical idea attempts to recreate within thought itself the truth of the objective world, but remains one-sided insofar as it simply constructs a subjective *theory* (i.e., idea of the true). The objective world remains unchanged.⁷⁰ The practical idea seeks to unite the concept with objectivity by engaging in a process to make the world into an *ought* (i.e., the idea of the good). The action of the practical idea is an attempt to realize or actualize a notion of the good by transforming objectivity. Subjectivity already has its content (i.e., the self-determining

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67 In the *Encyclopedia Logic*, Hegel says that 'Philosophy replaces representations with *thoughts* and *categories*, but more specifically with *concepts*. Representations may generally be regarded as *metaphors* of thoughts and concepts.' Hegel 2010a, §3, p. 30-31.

68 As Hegel himself says 'One must thus be reminded, first and foremost, that presupposed here is that the *division* must be connected with the concept, or rather must lie in the concept itself.' Hegel 2010b, p. 38.

69 Ibid., p. 96.

70 Ibid., p. 697.

concept), but is confronted with an objectivity (externality) that does not conform to it. So there is a discrepancy here.⁷¹ However, the practical idea remains one-sided insofar as it privileges action (as opposed to theory). The theoretical idea has united the concept with objectivity, but on the side of subjectivity. The practical idea unites the concept and objectivity, but does so with respect to the side of action/objectivity. Neither the theoretical idea nor the practical idea is able to truly unite the concept and objectivity. The Absolute Idea integrates the theoretical drive for truth with the practical drive to achieve the good. Not only do the two aspects complement each other, but each 'on its own shows up the limitations of the other.'⁷² What Hegel calls the Absolute Idea, is a reciprocal relationship that is complete in itself. 'When theory and practice continually check and reinforce each other we have a way of integrating concept and actuality that is valid in all respect,' because it is a self-correcting, dynamic process. When this dynamic is taken as a single thought, it involves a method that emerges through the immanent deduction of the *Logic* in its entirety. With the Absolute Idea 'the form determination is its own completed totality, the pure content.'⁷³ As with Absolute Knowing discussed in the *Phenomenology*, the Absolute Idea is absolute, that is to say, it is unrestricted because it describes the absolute relativity of all forms of logical thinking. In §237 of the *Encyclopedia*, Hegel says 'this content is the system of the *logical*. Nothing remains here of the idea, as *form*, but the *method* of this content—the determinate knowledge [*Wissen*] of the validity of its moments.'⁷⁴ That is to say, the content of the Absolute Idea turns out to be the dialectical dynamic movement, the immanent generative process of thought thinking itself. It is the 'rational articulation of the dynamic that is present universally in all things.' The dialectical movement that Hegel describes as "method" emerges only with the onset of the Absolute Idea, it is not externally assumed or presupposed and then applied to the content of logical thinking, quite the contrary, the method Hegel discusses in the closing pages of *The Science of Logic* only reveals itself in its totality and universality through the immanent movement of the *Logic* itself. The dialectical movement, or method, is not transcendental. It does not describe criteria or the conditions under which a certain process becomes possible, such as Kant's transcendental categories.

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71 Ibid., p. 729-734.

72 Burbidge 2006, p. 103.

73 Hegel 2010b, p. 736.

74 Hegel 2010a, §237, p. 300.

The dialectically movement is only comprehended to be what it is retrospectively, and it is this retrospection which the Absolute Idea articulates. The moments of this dialectical, or speculative method are: a) a posited, immediate beginning; b) a transition or negation into the negative aspect of the first moment or term, it's 'other'; c) a negation of this 'other' that re-joins the first moment as unity through a negation of negation; d) the emergence of a decidedly new term through the immanent, contradictory process of the preceding moments.⁷⁵ For example, the opening dialectic in the *Logic* starts with an immediate term (Being), which is shown to be its other (Nothing), the truth of both, their unity is a third moment (Becoming). However, this third moment, this becoming, emerges as a new beginning, what Hegel calls determined being or existence (*Dasein*).⁷⁶ It is this dynamic movement that constitutes the Absolute Idea; the Idea does not so much engender its own specific content but rather expresses the very relativity of all particular, logical content whatsoever, and *this* is its concrete universality as such.

Similar to Hegel's Absolute Knowing in the *Phenomenology*, the Absolute Idea of *The Science of Logic* is not an idea *about* an entity, object, or divine substance designated "The Absolute". It is rather the logical dynamic self-movement of the concept, a movement that subsists as an ontological concrete universal. The Idea is absolute because it is the absolute relativity of all thought-determinations. The plasticity of the Absolute Idea is its concrete universality: the dynamic logical movement of the concept as it unfolds itself through itself. If Hegel's plasticity is the capacity to both receive and produce form, then the Absolute Idea can be said to receive and produce a form that is identical with its content. The difference between content and form collapses with the Absolute Idea because its content *is* its form, that is to say the content (i.e., logical categories expounded upon in *The Science of Logic*) emerge *through* an immanent dynamic dialectical movement. This movement is plastic, as Malabou herself points out, because 'as it unfolds, it makes links between the opposing moments of total immobility (the "fixed") and vacuity ("dissolution"), and then links both in the vitality of the whole, a whole which, reconciling these two extremes, is itself the union of *resistance* (*Widerstand*) and fluidity (*Flüssigkeit*).'⁷⁷

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75 I am here summarizing, quite crudely, Hegel's detailed exposition of the dialectical movement outlined in the section on the Absolute Idea. See Hegel 2010b, p. 736-753.

76 Ibid., p. 59-83.

77 Malabou 2005, p. 12.

The Plasticity of Absolute Spirit

As stated in the introduction above, this section on Hegel's Absolute Spirit will be rather brief given that Malabou herself devotes considerable analysis of its plastic nature in her work. In Hegel's *Philosophy of Mind*,⁷⁸ Absolute Spirit of course constitutes the culmination of the *Encyclopedia* system. As we have seen, Hegel adopts Kant's definition of the term "absolute" as that without limitation. To this effect, a spirit that is absolute is a spirit that permeates through everything.⁷⁹

Spirit is an immanent, necessary unfolding movement that philosophy can only properly grasp and comprehend. Absolute Spirit is announces the moment where spirit is finally able to fully grasp and comprehend itself by recognizing the immanent necessary movement of its own unfolding through World Spirit. Thinking spirit is able to 'grasp its concrete universality,' says Hegel, 'and ascends to *awareness of the absolute spirit*, as the eternally actual truth.'⁸⁰

The three moments within Absolute Spirit—art, religion, and philosophy—constitutes Absolute Spirit's full actualization. Art at this juncture provides the immediate configuration which is 'the concrete *intuition* and representation of the *implicitly* absolute mind as *ideal*.'⁸¹ That is to say, what the fine arts offer is an intuition into the absoluteness of spirit, the spirit that weaves through history. Art does this through concrete, singular formations such as poetry, painting, sculpture, and theatre. However, Hegel maintains that this is insufficient to fully grasp Absolute Spirit in its totality because 'in such individuality of shaping the absolute mind [*Geist*] cannot be explicated.'⁸² It is due to the inadequacy of the fine arts that we pass onto the second moment of Absolute Spirit, what Hegel also refers to in the *Philosophy of Mind* as 'Revealed Religion'. Hegel's treatment of religion in the *Encyclopedia* is a more condensed discussion of the same Triadic structure he covers in the *Phenomenology*. Since we have already seen how in Hegel's

78The German word for "mind" and "spirit" are the same: *Geist*. Hegel, it goes without saying, is fully aware of this fact and exploits it mercilessly.

79 Hegel articulates the absolute permeation constitutive of spirit in *The Philosophy of Mind* when he says: 'That in the course of the spirit (and spirit is a spirit that does not just hover over history as over waters, but weaves in it and is the sole moving force) freedom, i.e., the development determined by the concept of spirit, is the determinant and only its own concept is the spirit's final aim, i.e., truth, since the spirit is consciousness, or in other words that *reason* is in history, will at least be a plausible belief, but it is also a cognitive insight of philosophy.' See Hegel 2007, §549, Remark, p. 249.

80 Ibid., §552, p. 250.

81 Ibid., §556, p.259.

82 Ibid., §559, p. 260.

Phenomenology of Spirit, the chapter on 'Revealed Religion' expresses the true absolute content of the dialectical movement, albeit in a representational (or in picture-thinking) form. This second moment of Absolute Spirit lacks the true *form*.⁸³ It is only with the emergence of philosophy that we are able to have a proper cognition of the content and form of Absolute Spirit. For Hegel, philosophy is the final moment of Absolute Spirit, it is *the very movement of spirit* which 'finds itself already accomplished, when at the conclusion it grasps its own concept, i.e., only *looks back* on its knowledge.'⁸⁴

Philosophy is the '*self-thinking* [Absolute] Idea,' and it is in this respect that 'science has returned to its beginning, and the logical is its *result* as the *spiritual*.'⁸⁵ At this point, Hegel introduces a discussion of the three syllogisms that 'retrospectively explain the entire speculative cycle of the *Encyclopedia* as a whole: Logic, Nature, Spirit.'⁸⁶ Rather than provide a detailed treatment of the syllogism and the inherent plasticity (something that Malabou herself does excellently), I will instead briefly sketch out how the dynamic, dialectical process emerges in Absolute Spirit.⁸⁷

The three syllogisms that Hegel discusses in the closing paragraphs of his *Philosophy of Mind* essentially articulation a tripartite process of mediation. The first syllogism demonstrates how we begin with the logic, move to nature, and end with mind (or spirit). The second syllogism is the sublation (*Aufhebung*) of the first, in that here it is mind/ spirit which reflects on its presupposition (i.e., nature), and determines logical principles. The final and third syllogism, the logical Idea as pure thought serves as a middle that 'divides into *mind* and *nature*.'⁸⁸ These two contradictory and opposite moments of the third syllogism are unified within the logical Idea. As Hegel says, 'it is the concept, the nature of the subject-matter, that moves onwards and develops, and this movement is equally the activity of cognition.'⁸⁹ It is with the third syllogism that we finally have the dynamic, dialectical process of Absolute Spirit. Nature

83 Burbidge points out that the section devoted to religion in *The Philosophy of Mind* 'reproduces the same structure and moments that we have already discovered in the corresponding chapter in the *Phenomenology*.' See Burbidge 1997, p. 32.

84 Hegel 2007, §573, p. 267.

85 Ibid., §574, p. 275.

86 Malabou 2005, p. 135.

87 Malabou 2005, p. 135 -142.

88 Hegel 2007, §575;§576;§577, p. 276.

89 Ibid., §577, p. 276.

and Mind, two opposites are reconciled, out of which a new absolute form emerges: Absolute Spirit.⁹⁰ This dynamic process is the very same process that we saw develop in Absolute Knowing, and the Absolute Idea. With Absolute Spirit, this process involves not only logic, and nature, but also the emergence of humans and our ability to rationally conceptualize and comprehend this very movement through philosophy. Absolute Spirit can be said to be plastic, then, because not only does it receive all the previous forms and shapes of spirit, but effectively produces this dynamic process by circulating back to logic. Absolute Spirit, like Absolute Knowing and the Absolute Idea, does not name an entity called “the absolute”. Absolute Spirit refers to a continuous dynamic movement that engenders ‘principled actions, reflective judgment, and mutual recognition. While any particular action and judgment will turn out to be relative, the dynamic itself turns out to be absolute and without condition. It is the structure of self-conscious life wherever and whenever it occurs.’⁹¹ Once again, the only absolute thing is the absolute relativity of all things.

Hegel’s Secret:
In 1865, the British Idealist J. H. Stirling wrote a book entitled *The Secret of Hegel*, where he submits the argument that the secret of Hegel is that ‘the universe is but a materialization, externalization, of the thoughts of God.’⁹² While there is certainly a religious dimension in Hegel’s philosophy (as we have seen, Hegel makes use of Christian theology), it is not quite correct to maintain that Hegel constructs a conception of the universe from the ‘thoughts of God’. Hegel’s three Absolutes, as I (and many other Hegel commentators) have argued function as adjectives and not as nouns: they signify a dialectical movement. Hegel’s Absolutes are absolutely plastic in that they are without restrictions and without limitations, and receive and produce form. Far from being a mystical and mysterious aporia, a secret infinite enigma that forever remains unapproachable yet inescapable, Hegel’s Absolutes turn out to be not so mystifying at all. They name no object. They signify no entity. Hegel’s three Absolutes, like the man behind the curtain at the end of *The Wizard of Oz*, turn out to be not what they at first appeared. In the final analysis, then, the secret of the Absolute this and only this: there is no Absolute. Hegel’s secret is that there is no secret.

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90 Malabou provides a detailed analysis of the third syllogism. See Malabou 2005, p. 155-166.
91 Burbidge 1997, p. 33.
92 Stirling 1865, p. 85.

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Hegel and the Possibility of a New Idealism

Jure Simoniti

Abstract: The article first detects a certain “transcendental dialectic” traversing Hegel’s philosophy; it is the tension of the world being already old and the truth needing to be ever new. The purpose of the Hegelian world being immersed in the secluded and dimmed horizons, painted “grey in grey,” is to open the possibility of truth to emerge in the absolute form and without reason. Hegel’s alleged and derided metaphysics is thus only a logical condition of the anti-metaphysical “emergentism of truth.” His theory of truth is based on the assumption that the immediate reality is unfit to give rise to truth, that truth therefore arises spontaneously and is subsequently entitled to take possession of reality. As such, it represents the final embodiment and escalation of the logic of self-consciousness. In order to point to a limit of Hegel, the text now deduces three fallacies of self-consciousness, i.e., self-reflexivity, pre-temporality, and negation, and raises the question of whether a new kind of idealism can be conceived of on the ground of the inversion of the three impasses. It is an “idealism without self-consciousness,” hence, an idealism of the essential emergence of truth, its historicity, and the positivation of reality. By identifying a specific impotence of the Hegelian Notion to elucidate a scientific realist stance, the article finally advocates a return to Hegel, but not to the Hegel of self-consciousness and the social construction of meaning, but to the Hegel of the emergent idealism of truth.

Keywords: Hegel, self-consciousness, truth, emergentism, idealism, scientific realism

In order to discern the most original, productive, and finally brilliant core of Hegel’s thought, perhaps one should first identify its fundamental “transcendental dialectics,” pervading his work and defining the function and range of its operations. In our view, one of the most essential and fruitful tensions of Hegelianism is the dialectic of the world being already old and the truth needing to be ever new. Traditionally, Hegel was most often labelled as the last metaphysician, still able to condense and encapsulate the whole of being into the system of notions, but in recent times he is also frequently recognized as a pre-modernist, who argued that there is no truth before it is created. In the history of philosophy, this discrepancy between the world assuming a conceptual form and the concepts emerging spontaneously made regular appearances and was usually resolved by the introduction of the logical figure of *self-consciousness*. Hegel’s philosophy will thus be interpreted as the pinnacle and final embodiment of the logic of self-

consciousness, placed at the crossroads of the spontaneity of reason and the necessary rationalizations of reality. For this purpose, an additional effort will be made to reconstruct a specific tendency in the historical genesis of self-consciousness, to define the reasons of its invention and the gist of its philosophical function, and, finally, to point out the inherent fallacy of its “ideology.” The method of the Hegelian enterprise is certainly distinguished by its self-conscious impetus and aspiration, but it is perhaps also because of its constraints that it eventually reaches its limits. So while, on the one hand, Hegel should be regarded as the great champion of the *emergence of truth*, his “emergentism” could, on the other hand, be shown to fail to be carried out to its ultimate consequences. However, while philosophy after Hegel freed itself from the clutches of grounding reality in the self-reflexive circuits of reason, it *ipso facto* sacrificed the entire Hegelian idealist propulsion. The claim of this article is thus to consider the advantage of returning to Hegel’s idealism without falling under the restrictive reign of self-consciousness. By attempting to define the realms which possibly exceed the powers of Hegelian speculation, we will finally imply a possibility of a new idealism, an “idealism without self-consciousness,” as it were.

I. The old world as the precondition of the truth emerging new

Goethe’s greatest literary works seem to begin at the point at which a kind of ending has already been accomplished *ex ante facto*. Werther does not stand face to face with Lotte in the pure and vestal medium of Romeo and Juliet, for she has previously given her heart to Albert; the hero is now free to experience a certain *ideality* of love, which would only be tarnished by the full presence of the object of its affection. When Hermann and Dorothea are about to be married at the end of the short epos, he finds out that she has been engaged to another man throughout their affair, which results in a wedding of three instead of two rings. In *The Elective Affinities*, Eduard and Charlotte reunite at last in their mature years, but instead of putting the final seal on their dramatic liaison, they fall in love anew and, in the famous, eerie sexual intercourse, each fantasize of their new beloved, the consequence being the birth of a child who carries the properties not of their begetters but of the two persons fantasized about. To continue with our examples, Wilhelm Meister’s path of education is being secretly followed and anticipated by the *Turmgesellschaft*, which already holds the position of “wisdom,” while the opening scene of the second novel, *Wilhelm Meister’s Journeyman Years*, places the hero at the top of the mountain and lets him subsequently descend back to the valley. One of the mottos of the book even reads:

“*Was machst du an der Welt, sie ist schon gemacht.*”¹ Finally, Faust is first shown as an old professor sitting in his study, and becomes a young man only in the aftermath of his having acquired all the knowledge of the world. To overstretch this point, Goethe’s *Maxims and Reflections* begin with the aphorism: “There’s nothing clever that hasn’t been thought of before – you’ve just got to try to think it all over again.”² These preliminary closures, secured before the narrative proper commences, perform a specific function. Goethe was neither an ancient tragedian, depicting the world as a venue for the clash of ideas, nor a classical novelist, staging the conflict between ideas and reality. In the manner of Faust reclaiming land from the sea, Goethe’s intention was rather to establish a logical space in which it is possible for ideas to create their own realities.

The same structural warranty of the ending being “logically secured” before the beginning actually takes place is the great organizing principle of Hegel’s major books. *The Phenomenology of Spirit* opens with the assurance that “we,” the *Für uns*, have already passed through all the stations of knowledge before the natural consciousness, the *Für es*, even ventures on this journey. *The Science of Logic* unfolds entirely within the divine purview, representing “*the exposition of God as he is in his eternal essence before the creation of nature and the finite mind.*”³ The *Elements of the Philosophy of Right* go even further and begin at the end of the world itself, when “a shape of life has grown old, and it cannot be rejuvenated, but only recognized, by the grey in grey of philosophy”.⁴ And in *The Philosophy of History*, history is presented as a theodicy, the ultimate reconciliation of evil within good, stretching between the nucleus, in which everything is already contained, and the already achieved final end, the freedom of Spirit in the Germanic nations.⁵ The circles of the endpoint coinciding with the starting point shift the entire domain of truth under the horizon of a *timeless anteriority*, and it is on this account that Hegel has earned a reputation of being an apologist for the Prussian state, a

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1 Goethe 2006, p. 15. [What do you make with this world, it is already made (translation mine).]

2 Goethe 1998, p. 57.

3 Hegel 2010a, p. 29.

4 Hegel 1991, p. 23.

5 See, for instance, the metaphor of the germ: “And as the germ bears in itself the whole nature of the tree, and the taste and form of its fruits, so do the first traces of Spirit virtually contain the whole of that History.” (Hegel 2001, p. 31.) We must add, however, that Hegel uses the metaphor of the germ in two very different ways, as Gregor Moder points out. On the one hand, the germ is to be considered as a plant-in-itself; thus, the organic development represents the metaphor for the process of the concept. On the other hand, Hegel also speaks of the germ of death, and it is this usage of the metaphor that should be regarded as the proper Hegelian position: “The term death, for Hegel, does not imply an organic process of decomposition, but rather the idle run of life itself, caught in the vicious circle of repetition without transformation” (Moder 2013, p. 19).

philistine, a partisan of the end of History, or, less tendentiously, at least a philosopher of teleology, closure, and categorical sublation. Naturally, the greatness of a philosopher could be measured by the level of his own responsibility even for the false interpretations of his work. And Hegel did often give an impression that, at the farthestmost verges of being, the “logical actualization” of the Notion translates into an “empirical thesis” on the state of the world. The atmosphere of completion and supra-temporality is not entirely redeemable from his work. And even if it stands only for the false understanding that Hegel had of himself, could it not represent at least a symptom of his thinking?

However, the introductory texts of his works are governed by a more commanding logic, which seems to logically overrule any Hegelian flavour of finality. Most famously, in the Preface to the *Phenomenology*, Hegel maintains that “truth is not a minted coin that can be given and pocketed ready-made.”⁶ *The Science of Logic* may merely reproduce the thoughts of God, but its introduction nevertheless begins with a caution that the labour of thinking is yet to be performed:

Logic, therefore, cannot say what it is in advance, rather does this knowledge of itself only emerge as the final result and completion of its whole treatment. Likewise its subject matter, *thinking* or more specifically *conceptual* thinking, is essentially elaborated within it; its concept is generated in the course of this elaboration and cannot therefore be given in advance.⁷

Moreover, in the Preface to the *Elements* Hegel quotes Aesop, “*Hic Rhodus hic saltus*,” and even adds his own version: “*Here is the Rose, dance here*.”⁸ And in his lectures on the philosophy of history, Hegel describes History as a slow process, put and kept in motion solely by the passions of human individuals, so that no stage of its progress can be bypassed: “One cannot skip over the spirit of his people any more than he can skip over earth.”⁹ In short, truth is never something waiting to be found; instead, the very opening chords condemn it to be always one

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6 Hegel 1977, p. 22.

7 Hegel 2010a, p. 23.

8 Hegel 1991, p. 22. It is quite telling that Marx, otherwise a great critic of all Hegelian closures, quoted precisely these lines in the *Eighteenth Brumaire*, in his attempt to provoke a break with the established order: “By contrast proletarian revolutions (...) engage in perpetual self-criticism, always stopping in their own tracks (...), until a situation is created which makes impossible any reversion, and circumstances themselves cry out: // *Hic Rhodus, hic salta!* / *Hier ist die Rose, hier tanze!*” (Marx 1996, p. 35.)

9 Hegel 1953, p. 37.

jump, one dance, one act, one effort away from being formed. To put it in a paradox, it appears as if it is precisely because the ending is already achieved that the possibility of a new beginning opens at all. And it must be initiated by ourselves, by the natural consciousness, the finite human being, the reader. Since truth can never be ready-made and given in *any* here and now, Hegel seems to be telling us, *this* here and now are the only places left where the jump toward truth can be made.

Thus, while Hegel enjoys the notoriety of being the *last* representative of many mostly negatively connoted traditions (he is regularly designated as the last metaphysician, the last theologian, the last idealist, the last academic philosopher, the last systematic thinker, etc.), he is also, along with Fichte and more so, a genuine advocate of *the pure emergence of truth*, i.e., of its essential novelty, non-derivability, and self-assertion. In Hegel, truth is not entirely deducible from any state of affairs, and even the most modest truth, an “elementary proposition” of a sort, always surpasses the fact to which it has originally referred. Already in “Sense certainty,” the first chapter of the *Phenomenology*, he insists that the truth of the senses (expressed, for instance, as “Now is Night”¹⁰) be written down, thus emancipating itself from and becoming *true* than its object. As Hegel points out, “But language, as we see, is the more truthful.”¹¹ And in the “Small Logic” of the *Encyclopaedia*, he distinguishes *correctness* as correspondence of my representations to external things from *truth* as explication of ideas, whereupon it is now the objectivity which must begin to correspond to my concepts.¹² In short, what is aimed at here is a certain *disengagement of the regime of reality from the regime of truth*. Hegel’s at least implicit purpose is to abrogate the relation of sufficient reason between (immediate, given) reality and truth, and he seems to bring this about only by showing that nothing in reality can predict the advent of a truth, and that nothing real or given can fill out or saturate its value.

Here, perhaps, we are knocking on the door of one of the innermost contradictions traversing Hegel’s philosophy. On the one hand, the prospects of the world are already dimmed and vespertine, on the other, truth has lost any ontological ground and justifies itself only by virtue of its own event. The divergence between declaring the completion of the path and at the same time facilitating and necessitating its beginning, between the world being so old that it can no longer be rejuvenated and the truth needing to be so new that it must first be produced, between

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10 Hegel 1977, p. 60.

11 Ibid.

12 See Hegel 2010b, § 213, p. 282–283.

God preparing to conceive the world and the Creation resting on the shoulders of man, seems to represent the veritable transcendental dialectic, tearing the Hegelian universe apart. However, what at first sight looks like an inconsistency, could well be deciphered as *a logical foundation of a new theory of truth*. To resolve the professed paradox, the infamous Hegelian doctrines on the already concluded and consolidated horizons (most notably the “end of History” itself) could first be divided into an empirical and a logical thesis. If Hegel is painting a grey world for our eyes, eulogizing the Prussian state in passing, this surely is a picture of a certain empiricity. Many interpret the seemingly teleological World Spirit as the last possible metaphysical encirclement of being, and within the literal perspective they have some right to do so, although Hegel’s own diagnoses of time were never entirely unambiguous. But from a speculative point of view, Hegel’s pathos of consummation, as best exemplified by the old age of the world, may admittedly be an “empirical” delusion on Hegel’s part, which nevertheless performs an indispensable “logical” operation: it prepares the ground for a truth freed from any given substance and emerging beyond the relation of correspondence between propositions and facts.¹³ The grey world is thus merely an “ontic” price to pay for deducing an “ontological” necessity of a non-derivable truth form, and given the limitations of his time, Hegel might even have had to be empirically wrong in order to be logically right. For his ultimate philosophical aspiration consists in designing a concept of truth so *factually ungrounded* that a whole new coordinate system of entirely different values must be set up, in order to bring the *absolute emergence of truth* to the threshold of probability.

Why, then, did Hegel need to buttress his theory of truth with a specific image of the state of the world? Why does his philosophy seem to tend so naturally toward the colour of evening afterglow? Paradoxical as it may sound, the answer might lie in his discovery of an innate, supplemental creativity of truth exceeding the mere spontaneity of Kant’s concepts, which still need to be filled out with intuitions, or the self-positing of Fichte’s I, who is forced to a perpetual practical belabouring of the not-I. Hegel’s system is not a static monument cast in bronze or

13 In this way, Hegel’s famous dictum “What is rational is actual; / and what is actual is rational” (Hegel 1991, p. 20), should be read not as a simple tautology, but an intersection of two dimensions required for truth to occur. The first verse establishes the space for a possible actualization of rationality *performatively*, so that the second can state its effect *constatively*. Mladen Dolar interpreted this adage precisely in terms of the tension within its *irreducible duality*: “What Hegel aims at is neither the realm of what is nor the realm of what ought to be, but the point where the two circles of ‘is’ and ‘ought’ intersect and overlap, the intersection which secretly underpins both, connects them and separates them. (...) [T]here is the dimension of becoming, *Werden*, which makes it impossible to read any ‘is’ at its face value.” (Dolar 2015, p. 883.) Truth, in short, is never a simple parallel translation of facts.

carved in marble, but an unstable structure that implodes the moment a particular subject ceases to keep it alive with the efforts of his or her self-consciousness. And this self-consciousness must reproduce itself exclusively within the ideal domain, since the very reason for its invention was to shift the entire frame of its justification away from the order of the given reality. Therefore, the first move of Hegel’s design of truth is to suspend the possibility of any external substance which truth could still approach and protrude toward, thus establishing a space of processuality in which *the innermost impulse of truth is absolutely ideal*. If truth was to be found ready-made somewhere in the world, and be it even in the Kantian or Fichtean dialectical limit of an infinite approach to the complete knowledge or mastery of the universe, then the presuppositions of the path being accomplished, of the thoughts belonging to God, of History developing from its nucleus, and the world being old, would be superfluous. But since Hegel’s truth form lacks any support in its outside, that is, in empirical knowledge or practical appropriation, it is *condemned to creation* and can thus, with no firm ground beneath its feet, arise only within an emergent, ephemeral, ungrounded *range of presupposed ideality*. And this range is so novel and unheard of that it needs an imagery of great poignancy in order to become conceivable. It is here that the metaphors of absolute knowledge, God’s thoughts, ended History, and the old shape of life play their proper role. Perhaps, Hegel intuitively felt that an image of an aged and tired world would offer the perfect venue for truth emerging ideally instead of representing a reality, and that only visions of spaces preceding or following time itself could set up a logical space beyond any temptation for us to look among the given things for the immediate embodiments of truth. Therefore, the sole purpose of the world being ended or standing on the outside of time is to push truth to the limit where its only remaining option is simply *to be created ex nihilo*; in a pallid universe, even a small truth tends to look like a creation.¹⁴

Of course, Hegel was sometimes more fortunate in conceptualizing this ideal frame (as in the case of *Für uns*) and sometimes less (as in the case of the end of History), but the logical function was always the same:

14 This is why the atmosphere of Hegelianism should not be simply tied down to a certain time of day. Instead, the contrasts seem to form an *irreducible dialectic*. It could be said that, while the most authentic time of Hegel’s “substance” may be the dusk of the owl of Minerva beginning its flight, the most legitimate hour of its “subject” is dawn, and while the typical Hegelian “preface” seems to take place in the evening, it only does so in order for the first paragraph to proceed in the morning. Even biographically, Hegel swayed between the allegories of daybreak and day’s close, between the Prussian owl and the Gallic cock. In his inaugural lecture at Berlin University on October 22nd 1818, he addressed the German youth as the “dawn of a more sterling spirit.” The “metaphorical shift” from morning to evening could even be an expression of Hegel’s personal disappointment with politics; as Zdravko Kobe sums it up: “If in 1818, Hegel is a *philosopher of dawn*, in 1820, he is a *philosopher of dusk*.” (Kobe 2013, p. 368 (translation mine).)

the presupposed ending opens and warrants the logical space in which alone an act can assume an ideal status, be radically new, and, finally, have real effects. Even though the so often disparaged Hegelian “closures” were usually read as the last cry or even the climax of metaphysics, they are, if interpreted “functionally,” a symptom of a world losing its first cause and absolute ground. In a universe of sufficient reason, all realities possess a thoroughgoing ideal underpinning; in Leibniz, an individual substance, a monad, is only a derivative of its complete individual concept. Hegel, on the contrary, could no longer draw upon the metaphysical certainty of the ultimate reason. He had to resort to the most ingenious temporal trickery in order to hollow out nooks within time in which an idea could aspire to become a reality; that is, a *Wirklichkeit* instead of a *Realität*. To this effect, he was forced to surmise a *sphere of emergent ends and purposes*, floating ethereally in the air, because only within this range of a self-fulfilling prophecy, so to say, could something as ontologically transient as an idea gain momentum to define a world.

Therefore, the real meaning of *Für uns* in the *Phenomenology* is not that the path of cognition is already trodden, leaving us only to follow in its footsteps; it means that we must first presuppose the realm of the possible totality of knowledge, so that the first step on this path can make any sense at all. The absolute knowledge at the end is merely a logical insurance that the stages of the path towards it truly constitute a *knowledge*, and not simply instances of knowings. The “exposition of God” from the *Logic* does not refer to an actual deity who, as it so happens, thinks in the categories of logic. This pretended God is rather a guarantee of the absolute ideality of *thinking*; without his assumed patronage, logical categories could still only be abstract representations of a given material. The greyness of the world from the *Elements* does not necessarily suggest that nothing more will happen in the future; instead, as awkwardly as it is worded, it implies that a certain self-foundation, accomplishment, and autarchy of the sphere of Spirit must first be enacted in order for *anything* spiritual, ideal, and true to be able to happen in this world. Solely within the frame of an already settled, approved, and consistent Spirit can a particular action be interpreted as a moral, legal, or political one; outside this sphere, there are merely movements of bodies, nothing more. Likewise, History developing from a nucleus while being already ended may be an empirically contentious proposition, but logically it inaugurates a certain *ideal range of historicity*, which alone can bestow the status of a real historical purport to a particular finite act. Paradoxically speaking, before the professed “end of History,” our deeds could be regarded as merely physical, mechanical, perhaps organic, or socially mediated at best; but only after its end can

our actions, past or future, become *utterly historical*. In short, these are the loopholes that Hegel employed and exploited in order to cultivate the scandalous conception of the order of spontaneous and emergent ideality encompassing and over-determining the order of the given reality.

2. The ideology of self-consciousness

In Hegel, the feasibility of truth has become so tortuous that it seems to be able to appear only in displaced spaces and disjointed times: nature is gone, history is already ended, the world is grey, while God has not even created it yet. However, this extravagant scenery is merely a somewhat overblown metaphorical expression of a new *truth mode*, which could presumably be reduced to three formal conditions: first, the immediate reality proves to be insufficient to give rise to truth; second, truth arises spontaneously; and, third, the truth thus originated is subsequently entitled to take possession of the reality originally deprived of a full truth value. There is, of course, a form which fulfils all these conditions and meets their requirements perfectly: it is called *self-consciousness*. This almost magical emergent entity, capable of making ideas feel more real than reality itself, played this role not only at the end of German Idealism but throughout the history of philosophy. Nevertheless, it is no coincidence that the so-called “philosophy of self-consciousness” peaked precisely in Hegel. Perhaps no one epitomizes the point of transition from metaphysics to post-metaphysics as abundantly as he does. He occupies a unique historical tipping point where reality still had to be held in the reins of reason, while reason, on the other hand, could only justify itself with the acts of its own spontaneity. Unlike Nietzsche, who already called “the Earth itself, like every star, a hiatus between two nothingnesses, an event without plan, reason, will, self-consciousness, the worst kind of necessity, *stupid necessity...*”,¹⁵ Hegel was still prone to stylize the world into a “place of truth,” so to speak. And yet, the Hegelian truth should never be *deduced from* the world but could only *emerge within it*. The most sublime accomplishment of Hegel’s speculative philosophy is thus to bring every single metaphysical category to its collapse and then back to life with great amounts of projective, performative, self-asserting, essentially subjective energy. The Spirit is the “certainty of being all reality (...) raised to truth”,¹⁶ but it can only materialize in a bone, a skull, and be kept in existence by the incessant efforts of a spiritual community; God

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15 Nietzsche 1988, KSA 13, 16 (25) (translation mine).

16 Hegel 1977, p. 165.

is not yet entirely dead, as with Nietzsche and Marx, but he does have to descend to Earth to die, and it is up to man to maintain him in his being; the State still represents the ultimate horizon of the activities of social beings, and yet, it is embodied in the formal signature of the otherwise powerless monarch and can at any time be overturned by a “world-historical individual”; etc. In predicaments like these, the form of self-consciousness becomes most operative and achieves its fullest blossom. To outline both the potency and the limits of the logic of self-consciousness, let us attempt a very short reconstruction of its historical genesis.

Outside philosophy, self-consciousness may be an effect of the uncircumventable sense of self, or it may be a mere discursive product; this is not the place for this debate. Here, we are only interested in particular constellations in the history of philosophy, in which the appearance of the “loop of self-examination” seems to address and resolve a very specific problem. Wherever the bond between ideal entities, such as our notions and representations, and the real entities of the outside world loses its natural congruity, philosophy shows a tendency to respond by introducing one of its versions of the “way inward,” the most famous examples being Plato, Augustine, and Descartes. Great hopes are then placed in these self-reflexive circuits to provide a substitute for the sudden lack of reference and re-establish it on a new ground.

Plato's method of *anamnesis* could be regarded as one of the early – possibly *the* earliest – impulses of self-consciousness in Western philosophy. In the second appearance of this subject in Plato, in the dialogue *Phaedo*, Socrates deduces the argument of recollection from many cases, the most important being the case of the *imperfect likeness between real things*. If we compare two sticks or two stones and recognize them as instances of the *same* kind, and yet, due to their imperfection, also perceive a difference between the two, then the idea of Equality, which allowed us to notice the resemblance in the first place, must be present in our mind before the actual perception of the two similar things:

Well then, he [Socrates, already dead at the time the dialogue takes place] said, do we experience something like this in the case of equal sticks and the other equal objects we just mentioned? Do they seem to us to be equal in the same sense as what is Equal itself? Is there some deficiency in their being such as the Equal, or is there not?

(...)

Whenever someone, on seeing something, realizes that that which he now sees wants to be like some other reality but falls short and cannot

be like that other since it is inferior, do we agree that the one who thinks this must have prior knowledge of that to which he says it is like, but deficiently so? (*Phaedo* 74d-e)¹⁷

Apparently, it is the inferiority of the world before our eyes that compels us to turn inside, look in ourselves for the vestiges of a world more real, and start remembering undiluted, immediate experiences of truth. Where reality does not seem to fully conform to words, only an act of *self-contemplation* may reassure us about their original, adequate meanings. What Plato discovered here underhandedly and subconsciously is an *effect of idealization*: because we name similar things with the same word, in this case “stick,” the word, by way of abstraction and generalization, undergoes a certain *spontaneous idealization*. Once having had the ideas induced by mere words in our minds, we start believing that things by themselves somehow strive to match the artificially produced ideals; and because of this belief, the things necessarily lag behind. Of course, sticks and stones have no innate intention whatsoever to meet any ideal standard, and the given world is not there to feel bad when faced with the ideal claims of words. It is we, the users of words, who overrate the jurisdiction of language, and for this reason alone find ourselves in a bland, incomplete, and flawed world. The way out of the impasse, in which notions begin to set the criteria of things, is to institute a timeless, pre-temporal, dislocated realm of pure semantic ideality. In this we might recognize the minimum requirement for the philosophical invention of self-consciousness. It seems that the impulses of self-reflexivity – even the pre-modern ones, from the times when the term “self-consciousness” did not even exist – were conceived to heal the wounds of language overstraining itself and becoming presumptuous. And what we call the “self-conscious loop” is a logical space vouching for the existence of the pure meanings of words to which the things of the real world are reluctant to give an adequate representation.

To skip, for brevity's sake, a few remarkable instances of employing the method of “turning to one's self” for the purpose of a new re-foundation of being, as in the stoics or Augustine, the one who conferred a reflexive structure to his concept of *cogitatio* and thus marks the beginning of the “philosophies of self-consciousness” is, of course, Descartes. The Cartesian *doubt*, the origin of modern philosophy, expresses precisely the presumed disaccord between the ideas of the mind and the entities of the outside world. The most interesting angle in this method is, however, a certain *change in direction* in the procedure

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17 Plato 1997, p. 65.

of verification. Originally, doubt ensues from the objects of the outside world *posing as a measure* of the inadequacy of the ideas in our mind. Because of the deceptiveness of the senses, the ideas first fall behind reality. However, the “trick of self-consciousness” always produces a surplus and subsequently re-instates the ideas, found within itself without recourse to experience, as *standards* for the insufficiency of things. It is now the things that lag behind the ideas. This means that a particular lack in the heart of the subject finally results in his own overvaluation, and the very entity initially incapable of representing the world adequately, i.e., an idea, now becomes a measure of the truth of the world. Hence, the self-reflexive move, which brings the path of doubt to its end, does not stop at the attainment of the Archimedean point, the certainty of the ego, but proceeds toward ascertaining *the ontological self-sufficiency of ideas*. Perhaps the best example of what is the true object of Cartesian self-reflexivity is the definition of Idea in the *Second Set of Replies*:

Idea. I understand this term to mean the form of any given thought, immediate perception of which makes me aware of the thought. Hence, whenever I express something in words, and understand what I am saying, this very fact makes it certain that there is within me an idea of what is signified by the words in question. Thus it is not only the images depicted in the imagination which I call “ideas.” Indeed, in so far as these images are in the corporeal imagination, that is, are depicted in some part of the brain, I do not call them “ideas” at all; I call them “ideas” only in so far as they give form to the mind itself, when it is directed towards that part of the brain.¹⁸

What Descartes is after is not to strengthen the connection between ideas and things, that is, to improve the accuracy of our sensual knowledge, but to secure the clarity and distinctness of ideas – what he calls the “objective reality of an idea” – by way of “reflecting upon one’s own mind.” The “real” ideas are not depictions of the outside world, but rather spiritual entities signified by words. If we dare to interpret this situation linguistically, thereby slightly exceeding the range of Descartes’ intentions, it could be said that the purpose of the introduction of self-consciousness is to *reassure the meaning of words before they could refer to anything external*. Once again, it seems, the words failing to perform their reference adequately are in need of the trick of self-consciousness to obtain a full ontological justification.

Kant’s design of self-consciousness follows the same line of argumentation. His philosophy rose from the ashes of empiricism,

¹⁸ Descartes 1996, p. 160–161.

where the concepts of substance, primary qualities, cause, and effect were suddenly bereaved of any reality: since they couldn’t be perceived *in situ*, they were finally suspected not to exist at all, as in Berkeley’s immaterialism and Hume’s agnosticism. Hence, a number of most fundamental and indispensable notions hovered in the air, demanding for a new ontological foundation. Kant’s revolutionary idea was to transpose them from the realm of receptivity to the realm of spontaneity, from sensibility to understanding and reason. But in order to ensure the completeness and systemic coherence of these concepts, a new figure had to enter the scene and substantiate their spontaneity within its own self-reflexive drive: the transcendental apperception. The flow of impressions is now *supplemented* by the spontaneous act of self-consciousness: “the proposition *I think* (taken problematically) contains the form of every judgment of understanding whatever and accompanies all categories as their vehicle” (*KrV* A 348/B 406).¹⁹ The Platonic anamnesis, referring to a foreknowledge, and the Cartesian self-reflection, leading us to innate ideas, are now substituted by the transcendental deduction of categories, and only within the dynamic, “self-lubricating” circuits of apperception can the pure concepts independent of experience find their proper legitimation and efficacy.

However, Kant did introduce an important distinction in the theories of self-consciousness. His transcendental unity of apperception is not a substance, a soul, i.e., an empirical subject, accessible introspectively; it is a logical entity, “a merely *intellectual* representation of the self-activity of a thinking subject” (*KrV* B 278). This emphatic displacement from the “sense of self” to a “vehicle of concepts,” a move perhaps only implicit and latent in Plato and Descartes, pinpointed the gist of the *philosophical* need for the invention of self-consciousness: apperception is not an original intuition, an expression of a primary feeling of oneself, a return to one’s personal core, but an *argumentatively auxiliary entity*, designed to accommodate and functionalize the concepts, which had lost their foothold in the given reality.²⁰

This evolution reaches its climax in Hegel. He adopted and developed the Kantian improvements on the traditional doctrines of self-

¹⁹ Kant, 1998, hereafter cited in text as *KrV*, by A and B, representing the original pagination of the 1st and 2nd editions, respectively.

²⁰ This is why, in contemporary readings of Kant and Hegel, self-consciousness is considered less as a presupposed ontological totality of everything ideal or a central organ encompassing all experience, and more as a *supplement*, necessary for the “space of reasons” to establish itself, as, for instance, in Pinkard: “Whatever self-conscious life is at any given point – a perceiver, a theorist, an individual outfitted with this or that set of dispositions – it is capable of attaching the ‘I think’ to that status and submitting it to assessment.” (Pinkard 2012, p. 89.) Self-consciousness is thus not a primal impulse, but rather the final touch, *der Punkt auf dem I*, in the process of cognition, so that the previously gained knowledge can become rationally transmittable, communicable, and assessable.

reflexivity: the spontaneity of reason, the division of the logical and the empirical subject, the formal and processual, rather than contemplative, design of the I, the synthetic and active, instead of analytic and representational, model of the truth form, etc.²¹ In Pippins words, Hegel “turns to Kant as the first thinker who freed us from our misleading, commonsense, understanding of the ‘I’ and its ‘thoughts’”.²² Henceforth, the theory of self-consciousness is neither an account of the mind processing sensual impressions, nor a practical assignment to belabour the outside world. There is no such thing as an original I who thinks or acts by way of the concepts he possesses in his head; instead, the self-conscious architecture of the I is an *effect*, a derivative, of Notions thinking themselves, as the famous passage in *The Science of Logic* goes:

True, I *have* concepts, that is, determinate concepts; but the “I” is the pure concept itself, the concept that has come into *determinate existence*.²³

Flesh-and-blood individuals are still the most potent instruments of conceptual self-determination, but, once the Notion establishes its full function, they become “logically deducible” from it, and not vice versa.

Kant surpassed the Cartesian frame of self-consciousness as a self-reflexive structure of human introspection, but Hegel took this shift from the recollection of the ground to the progression toward a full processuality a step further. The I is no longer the Kantian vehicle of concepts; instead, the Notions seem to have become the carriers of the I, whereby the ego only marks the necessary self-conscious dynamics of notional self-determination. The name of this subjectively vitalized, i.e., emergent and processual, conceptuality is, of course, *Spirit*. It is on this account that the ultimate subject of Hegel’s philosophy is not a “single person,” a lonely contemplator, but rather the spiritual community and, even more so, the World-Spirit itself, its necessary and comprehensive process of manifestation in the figures and stages of World History. Consequently, self-consciousness is not fully embodied in this or that I, but only in the movement of constant externalization, of “coming into existence” *along with* the unfolding of the Notion in the forms of language, society, history. It is not a turn inwards, but rather a turn outwards. As such, it reflects an intrinsically externalized, manifested, and surficial activity.

21 As Pippin puts it, Hegel “accepts a Kantian rather than a Cartesian version of the ‘self-grounding of modernity,’ ... (...)The mind is a ‘spontaneity,’ not a ‘mirror of nature,’ not even a mirror of itself.” (Pippin 1997, p. 160–161.)

22 Pippin 1989, p. 18.

23 Hegel 2010a, p. 514.

It is thus Hegel who is finally capable of recognizing and distinguishing the “truth” of self-consciousness, the reason of its philosophical exploitation. Even if, commonsensically, it is usually imagined as a reticent and intimate retreat from the world of treacherous externals, a motive still present in Plato’s *anamnesis* or Descartes’s meditation, its functional employment in philosophy, even in Plato and Descartes, shows that it tends to come to our aid when the spontaneous and explosive creations of truths are in need of a logical space, which could grant them any kind of semantic solidity, logical systematicity, and historical memorability. In other words, self-consciousness was invented as *the ontological guarantor of the emergentism of truth*. Wherever there are more truths cropping up than the inertia of this world could vouch for, only the self-reflexive momentum seems to be able to authorize them.

It is here, however, that the fundamental paradox of this somewhat bewitching, intangible entity ensues. Where, or should we say, *when* does self-consciousness take place? Do we experience its incalculable vitality in the medium of the present or in some inconceivably distant past? Is it a product of time, a historical artefact, or rather a placeholder for eternity? *For there seems to be a specific temporality of self-consciousness, extending between the spontaneous creativity of the present moment and the absolute past of its justification*.²⁴ The Hegelian “transcendental dialectics” of evening and morning, end and beginning, seems to manifest these warps of time most perfectly. But why does the balancing act between the imminence of the now and the atopia of time develop? Is not a-temporality only an effect of the *ideology of self-consciousness*, waiting to be decoded and debunked?

Let us try to answer the question of where these contradictions of self-consciousness come from, and why its temporality is such a circuitous business. As our diagnoses have shown, self-consciousness is a *natural organ of idealism*; it is a linchpin of turning ideas to reality. And in order to atone for the scandal of something ideal intervening in reality, a series of smokescreens has been invented: the path inward, the recollection of an absolute past, the claim to appropriate the totality of the world. However, all these tricks and manoeuvres are, in our view, only *symptoms of the inability to face the ultimate reason of idealism, which is the process of spontaneous idealization of words*. While self-

24 Manfred Frank pointed out this unusual liaison between self- and time-consciousness: “Novalis inferred from the unprethinkability [Unvordenklichkeit] of the presupposition of being in self-consciousness to its temporality. Being, which is always already presupposed, is interpreted, when the self seizes itself (reflexively), as its past.” (Frank 1993, p. 476–477 (hereinafter translation mine).) And the same goes for Kant: “From the rigid labor division between sensibility and understanding seems to follow that self-consciousness (as the principle of understanding) is entirely excluded from the relation to time. Otherwise put: self-consciousness as founded in a non-sensual root of knowledge is designed in a timeless domain.” (Ibid., p. 477.)

consciousness always becomes philosophically operative where idealist pulses and throbs need an ontological justification, it also designates a certain obstacle to their full unfolding. As we will try to demonstrate, the logic of self-consciousness marks a *repressed idealism*, as it were, an “idealism without the emergent process idealization.” Thus, in an attempt to deconstruct this self-referential entity, we might point out three basic fallacies of its logical structure.

First, *the fallacy of self-reflexivity*. The authentic claim of self-consciousness is that the imperfect and diffuse relations of the immediate world can be re-considered and re-calibrated under the ideal standards of pure thought. From the historical perspective, self-consciousness was certainly the most powerful instrument of dissolving dogmatic substances; some sort of self-reflexivity defines the method behind the Socratic dialectic, Cartesian doubt, Kantian critique, and Hegelian negation. And yet, since it is designed as a place of self-examination of ideas without recourse to experience, this possibility of retreating to pure thought has a propensity to gain normative momentum. For it is only within the normative perspective that ideas can be conceived as something effectively real.²⁵ There seems to be no substitution of dogmatic substances with self-conscious justifications without setting ideas as norms of reality. Therefore, it is probably safe to say that the logical space of self-consciousness is an irreducibly normative one; even Hegel's philosophy is labelled by some as “normative ontology.” Therefore, today, the logic of self-reflexivity is most operative in the realms of the social construction of facts, the inter-subjective justification of meaning, and the historical mediation of rationality. It works best in morally connoted spheres, and seems to have survived in contemporary philosophy only as an ethical affair.²⁶ However, although normativity may be a possible *application* of idealism, it is not its original impulse. It is our intent to show that the self-sustained circles of self-reflexivity were introduced in order to suppress the *essentially emergent* character of the process of idealization. Within its time loops, the act of self-reflection only neutralizes and veils the historical and discursive emergence of ideas.

Second, *the fallacy of pre-temporality*. When confronted with the effects of idealization in the here and now, self-consciousness seems

25 Bandom often invoked this “short circuit” between the ideal and the real order as something authentically and exclusively self-conscious. For example: “A being is called ‘essentially self-conscious,’ if, what it is *for* itself, its self-conception, presents an essential component of what it is *in* itself.” (Bandom 2004, p. 46 (translation mine).)

26 See, for instance, Pippin's entanglement of the normative idealism and self-reflexivity: “Hegel is an Idealist; communities are the way they are fundamentally because of how they have come to regard and evaluate themselves.” (Pippin 1997, p. 167.)

to “get cold feet,” so to say, as if frightened by the outrage of this occurrence, and opens an escape route to the realm of pre-temporality. It arises at the place of the spontaneous surplus of ideality, but then tends to interpret this excess in terms of an absolute anteriority. Hence, it is an event, misconstruing itself as an origin, and it compensates the egregiousness of the New with the time offset of the Perennial. *The first act of self-consciousness is thus to make unconscious its own appearance within time*. In order to suppress its supplemental nature, which only skims off the cream of the emergent surpluses of truth, it justifies its content from the regions preceding time: it refers to a previous life of the soul, to innate ideas, the eternal structure of the mind, even to God's thoughts themselves.²⁷ Its typical ideology is that one only has to withdraw to one's own self, and the *notions behind words* will come to light. In this sense, self-consciousness was conceived as a warranty of the ontological primacy of notions over words, thus maintaining the belief into a possible *retreat to the absolute past of meanings*. However, by pre-determining words with notions, it perverts the very origin of idealism, that is, the process of words being elevated to notions.

Third, *the fallacy of negation*. There is a tendency of self-consciousness to exert an infinite right of subsequent usurpation of the imperfect world from which it initially retired. Thus, it is designed as an *a posteriori* power to negate the given world. Famous are the lines of Descartes that through his philosophy, at that time still synonymous with science, we could “make ourselves, as it were, the lords and masters of nature,”²⁸ which is a quintessential modern claim. What in Descartes was still an argument of improving our technical skills, became in German Idealism an argument of “ontological necessity,” as it were. Hegel brought it to the point of escalation. In the *Encyclopaedia Logic*, he asserts that man's right to subdue, reshape, even annihilate reality follows directly from the Kantian solution, according to which thought determinations have their source in the I; and he continues: “Human beings' striving is directed generally at knowing the world, appropriating and submitting it to their will, and towards this end the reality of the world must, so to speak, be crushed, that is, idealized.”²⁹ While self-consciousness may incipiently have been designed as a silent refuge

27 Today, in our secular world, the only sphere capable of sustaining the minimal illusion of pre-temporality is the space of normativity. Within the moral purview, there are many ways to uphold a timeless horizon: one either appeals to universal values, or aspires an infinite approach to the regulative idea of justice, or adheres to the claim that the world is merely becoming what it should always have been, etc.

28 Descartes 1985, p. 142-143.

29 Hegel 2010b, § 42, p. 86-87.

to one's private chambers, it ultimately completes its self-reference by encapsulating and incorporating the world into itself – and this final step must be interpreted not as an arbitrary inclination of modern subjectivity, but rather as an expression of its logical structure. The reason for this inversion might lie in the fact that, since the world proves to be unfit to deduce and produce the spontaneity of reason, the self-conscious subject is now allowed to conquer and master it in return. Even though self-consciousness is actually a logical consequence of truth and reality not conforming to each other, it gains momentum to “make reality true” by instituting a sphere of pure, warranted meaning, a realm exempt from time as the last place from where the marriage of truth and reality can at least be aspired to. Hegel's meta-category of *negation* is the utmost logical expression of this complot of the spontaneity of truth and its deferred realization. The Hegelian negativity ensues from two seemingly contradictory demands: first, the Notion must eternally maintain its emergent, non-deducible status; and, second, it must be actual and make itself into what it is; it must be both out of this world and inside it. And only within the logical space of pure negativity can both the ontological primacy of ideas and their ontic actuality be defended. Which means that the ideas can intervene in reality only by virtue of annihilating it. Thus, Hegel's method consists in surrendering the entire immediate world to the process of decaying, passing by, and eradicating itself, because it is only a destructive movement that gives evidence to the actual workings of the Notion. However, this negative activity can still be regarded as a *symptom of the bond between truth and reality not being entirely severed*, hence, a symptom of a still half-baked idealism. While the final claim of self-consciousness is to engage reality in the process of becoming true by way of self-negation, the accomplished idealism will be freed from this last possible *back-coupling* from the emergence of truth to the positivity of reality.

In sum, Hegel seems to represent the culmination of the logic of self-consciousness. First, his articulation of the logical dependence between the emergent character of truth and its self-conscious vindication goes farthest. Second, no one played with the a-temporal loops as readily as he did. And, third, hardly anyone pressed for a more thorough annihilation of the given world in the process of idealization. Thus, Hegel brought self-consciousness to its final possibilities, squeezed out of it everything he could, and then nevertheless reached a certain limit in its scope. It is now time to point to the possibilities for breaking its spell.

Following the sequence of the three fallacies of self-consciousness, three inversions of its logic could be proposed.

First, *the shift from self-reflexivity to emergentism*. Outside philosophy, self-consciousness may or may not be something simple and primal, but within philosophy, it only surfaces under definite logical requirements: where an essence outweighs the presence of reality, where an idea is too clear and distinct for the empiricity of the world, where categories need a vehicle, and where the Notion claims the spontaneous energy of the I, self-consciousness experiences its “philosophical re-invention.” It *emerges at a place of emergence*, so to say, and appears where something appears out of nothing, where there is a surplus source of knowledge for which the world itself refuses to provide a reason. Even if it usually purports to represent the most immediate self-evidence, the Cartesian *fundamentum inconcussum*, we should, in order to decipher its singular incision in the ontologies of the West, first stress its essentially emergent character and then *define the origin of these emergences*. Examples from Plato to Hegel have taught us to shift focus from intuitively knowing, sensing, and feeling oneself towards the conceptual structures of ideas, categories, and notions. From this it seems to follow that the primary impulses of self-consciousness are merely *words elevated to notions by reason of a spontaneous idealization*. The genesis of the *ideal purview* of words is in itself nothing enigmatic or mysterious. Words are ordinary “things of this world”; they are simple signals and symbols referring to states of affairs. But in order to increase their utility, they must generalize their applicability. Plato's “stick” or “stone,” for instance, are not proper names, but can refer to many sticks and many stones. However, every abstraction carries within itself the seed of idealization: the moment the word “stick” attains a certain level of universality, it begins to harbour an illusion that it simultaneously designates a *stick-in-itself* existing somewhere. Out of mere words, becoming ever more abstract and generally applicable, suddenly *notions arise*: from Sticks and Stones all the way to Equality and Difference, Being and Nothing. The entire philosophy of mature Wittgenstein is directed against these effects of idealization, the fallacious predicament of looking for an *incarnated meaning of words*.³⁰ However, what in Wittgenstein is the great source of errors, philosophers long before him hailed as the preeminent impetus of truth. They placed their highest bets on the possibility of being able to *re-think the notions behind words* beyond their usual context of everyday, pragmatic usage of referring to given things or instances. And to the “mental cramp” of

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30The first page of *The Blue Book* already raises this issue: “The questions ‘What is length?’, ‘What is meaning?’, ‘What is the number one?’ etc., produce in us a mental cramp. We feel that we can't point to anything in reply to them and yet ought to point to something. (We are up against one of the great sources of philosophical bewilderment: a substantive makes us look for a thing that corresponds to it.)” (Wittgenstein 1969, p. 1.)

needing to point to something when hearing a word, philosophy replied by instituting self-reflexive circuits. Self-consciousness was the only place left where words like “cause,” “effect,” “being”, “nothing,” “universal,” “particular,” “equality,” “difference,” “God,” etc. could still *point to a thing of meaning*.³¹ If words hadn’t produced an ideal surplus and started designating something exceeding the immediacy of facts and situations, thus becoming notions, philosophy probably wouldn’t have developed the need for the subjective, self-reflexive grounding of being. And therein might lie the *origin of all illusions* of self-consciousness: if, historically and genetically, all notions were once mere words, the logical space of self-consciousness is based on the ideology, according to which *every word was once a notion*. However, in our view, by pre-determining words with notions, self-consciousness fails to recognize the prime impulse of idealization, its *absolute emergence*. And in order to do justice to this idealist emergentism and become capable of *following the process of words idealizing*, we must now pre-determine notions with words again.

Second, *the shift from pre-temporality to historicity*. Self-consciousness represses its historicity within the frame of timelessness. Its logic is much more prone to explain and enact the mechanism of ideas taking possession and shaping the world than, vice versa, the course of heterogeneous and peripheral facticity of the world suddenly and irregularly giving rise to ideas. At the peak and end of idealism, the most genuine area of influence of the Idea is, typically, the Hegelian World History; Hegel’s logic seems to feel most at home in the accounts of the world assuming a conceptual structure, of becoming increasingly more *wirklich*. It is highly questionable whether the temporal, inner-worldly constitution of the Notion itself could be thought within this perspective.³² And, generally speaking, Nietzsche’s method of genealogy can hardly find any incentives within the self-reflexive recourse. As expected, Hegel, the apostle of self-consciousness, believes that (rational) history is the product of (true) ideas, and Nietzsche, an adversary of self-consciousness, holds that (fallacious) ideas are the product of (irrational) history. Here, however, we stumble across two inhibitions of idealism: in Hegel, ideas are entities of positive value, but he seems to

31 Here, one can draw parallels with Freud’s handling of *Traumdeutung*, where it is the gesture of pointing, *Deuten*, that ultimately manufactures the contours of meaning. For a comprehensive interpretation of the emergence of meaning through pointing see Vranešević 2017.

32 Hegel usually even distances himself from treating the non-conceptual pre-history: “The only consistent and worthy method which philosophical investigation can adopt is to take up History where Rationality begins to manifest itself in the actual conduct of the World’s affairs (not where it is merely an undeveloped potentiality) – where a condition of things is present in which it realizes itself in consciousness, will and action. The inorganic existence of Spirit – that of abstract Freedom – unconscious *torpidity* in respect to good and evil (and consequently to laws), or, if we please to term it so, ‘blessed ignorance’ – is itself not a subject of History.” (Hegel 2001, p. 75)

be unqualified to think idealization as a *historical process*³³; in Nietzsche, on the other hand, the ideas (of good, morality, truth, essence, etc.) are conceived as temporally contingent artefacts, but only insofar as they represent something innately negative and deceptive, something to be eliminated. Thus, a new, post-Hegelian idealism will have to satisfy two requirements: the historical reconstruction of the process of words being elevated to notions as well as a certain necessity and “truth” of the ideas thus formed. A discursive historicity will have to be conceived which does not exclude the formation of systematic relationships and logical dependencies between ideas, but rather induces and necessitates it.

Third, *the shift from negation to positivity*. In the times in which all truth arises without sufficient reason and only justifies itself self-reflexively, negation offers the logical ground upon which reality can still be coerced to truth. Hegel never shied away from displaying his philosophy at the grandest possible scale, and staged its final enactment as the World History, a series of empires, kingdoms, and states absolving one another, of wars, upheavals, and subsequent restorations. Nonetheless, this also means that the emergence of truth is still “ontologically dependent” on the presence of a certain reality, even if this reality can do justice to truth only by first ceasing to be. Hegel’s negation can thus be interpreted as the last attempt to “ontologize truth,” and since reality is no longer translatable into truth, truth at least derives itself from its nothingness.³⁴ While negation represents the ultimate “schematism” of the “idealism of self-consciousness,” there perhaps remains an overlooked effect of idealist moves, which abstains from the pretences to rationalize the world and instead *unfolds a space of pure positivity*.³⁵ If truth is to maintain its *essentially emergent status*, it cannot be “verified” by crushing the world and obliterating it, but rather by divulging an indifferently positive substratum of outside reality, which could never predict its emergence. The great idealists presumably sensed, albeit sparingly and unsystematically, the necessity of this *positivation on the outside of emerging ideas*. In *Timaeus*, Plato introduced the concept of *khôra* as a material substructure underlying the incarnation of forms, Descartes designed space as a geometrical continuum without

33 Again, in Hegel, “idealization” denominates an, albeit historical, process of reality becoming actual, ideal, and true; and not a process of ideas forming in the first place.

34 The situation is not unlike that of a solipsist, who pays the price of truth in the form of adequacy with the non-existence of the world itself.

35 Of course, the Hegelian logic of negation remains pertinent in the domain of constituting truths. Our critique of negation concerns only the realm of immediate, given reality. Hegel proved to be capable of thinking Nature as deprived of any sense, any positive meaning, any affirmative substance. But the question remains whether he can also afford to conceive of Nature as immune to any form of negativity?

discriminants, the purpose of Kant's transcendental turn was to enable a thorough quantification of reality, and Hegel conceived of Nature as an "otherness of the Idea" lacking any form or order. But these are only hazy notions of the relation between idealization and the *disclosure of positivity*, which might represent the true touchstone of idealism.

In summary, if idealism tended to proliferate under the provisions of self-reflexivity, timelessness, and negativity, it is now perhaps time to consider the prospects of placing idealism on a new ground, defined by the conditions of emergence, historicity, and positivity. Indeed, this goes beyond the scope of this article, whose goal was merely to point out a few impasses of idealism when constrained by the logic of self-consciousness. Thus, we will restrict ourselves to a very specific limitation within the Hegelian mind-set and, from there, only touch upon the possible approach to both surpassing Hegel and returning to him in the interest of a different, new idealist stance. The final chapter is nothing more than an announcement of further investigation in this regard.

3. A possibility of a new idealism

Is there an area where the conditions of emergence, historicity, and positivity apply? Is there, perhaps, a field of competence which is committed to an idealist stance, but to which the apparatus of self-consciousness offers little or no viable conceptual tools? At first sight, the logic of self-reflexivity seems to fail to retain its charm outside the value-laden spheres of society; it is hardly a successful means to explain and determine the functioning of value-free domains, as, for instance, the genesis of a scientific revolution. And this is where we might come across a somewhat trenchant symptom of Hegel's thought. Could we, then, define the point at which his philosophy actually gets out of breath?

Today, Hegel is certainly more popular in philosophies of the social determination of meaning than in the fields of philosophy of science. To put it bluntly, Hegel did depict the life of Notion as the "history of kingdoms," and not as a sequence of scientific innovations and breakthroughs. It is perhaps a non-trivial observation that the movement of the Notion in Hegel will more likely appeal to the French rather than the Copernican revolution; and that the World Spirit is more prone to assume the appearance of Napoleon than that of Newton.³⁶ Why is it, then, that the Hegelian logic seems to function better within the scope of history than that of science? Slavoj Žižek poses the question:

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³⁶ As a curiosity, let us mention that, in the register of Suhrkamp's *Theorie-Werkausgabe* of Hegel's more or less comprehensive body of work, Copernicus is mentioned only three times, very briefly, while references to Newton are slightly more numerous, though sometimes very deprecating; see Hegel 1986. His treatment of Newton in the *Encyclopaedia* is certainly one of the most grotesque known encounters between philosophy and science.

Modern science from Galileo to quantum physics is thus characterized by two connected features: mathematization (the statements to be proven are mathematized formulae) and a reliance on measurement which introduces an irreducible element of contingency. Both aspects imply the meaningless real of the silent, infinite universe: the real of mathematized formulae deprived of sense, the real of radical contingency. Is there a place for modern science in Hegel? (...) Is not the explosive growth of the natural sciences from the eighteenth century onwards simply beyond of the scope of Hegel's thought?³⁷

On the one hand, there is a realism of brute facts and cosmic contingency, on the other, the idealism of reality historically becoming rational; Hegel's processes of idealization seem to instinctively oppose any possibility of a quantitative grasp of reality. Usually, the roots of the purported Hegelian anti-realism are suspected to lie in his idealism, in the self-referential, negating movement of the Notion. This appears to be the most self-evident of all equations: anti-realism = idealism. But, since Hegel is often referred to as "the last idealist," this begs the question: did philosophy *after Hegel* compensate for the deficits of anti-realism? Did it become more compatible with the anti-humanism of science?

Marx's historical materialism, Nietzsche's genealogy, Heidegger's analytic of *Dasein*, Wittgenstein's therapy of language, Derrida's deconstruction, the Anglo-Saxon philosophy of ordinary language – all these methods were designed to undercut any possibility of ideas to emerge, and to bestow any eventual impulse of idealization with a negative sign. All philosophy after Hegel could be summed up as "repression of the effects of idealization." However, with the demise of idealism, realism seems to have gained little. Post-Hegelian philosophy began to confine its scope to issues of class struggle, power relations, critique of values, existential projects, everyday practices, and language games. Again, science got the short end of the stick, perhaps more than before, and even earned some disparaging judgments from Marx, Nietzsche, Heidegger, Wittgenstein, and others.

Nevertheless, in our view, it is precisely the field of scientific realism which offers the most striking case *for a possible re-valuation of idealism*. How, then, could we discern and construe the idealist impulse within the scientific purview, and sketch it as briefly as possible? By what means should this new relation between idealism and realism be thought?³⁸ In the citation above, Žižek mentions two features of modern

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³⁷ Žižek 2012, p. 458–459.

³⁸ For a lengthier discussion of the unallocated relation between idealism and realism, see my book *The Untruth of Reality. The Unacknowledged Realism of Modern Philosophy* (Simoniti 2016).

science, formalization and measurement. It can be argued that these two conditions of the scientific space are correlates, whereby the one conditions and enables the other. It is because the phenomena could be translated into the ideality of mathematical formulae that their reality could finally start manifesting the feasibility of measurement. Let us outline the perhaps most famous example of quantifying the field of reality by way of idealizing a variable: the Newtonian concept of *force*. While before Newton force was an innate property of a body, it now becomes the intensity and direction of the interaction between *two* bodies. It is the great invention of modern physics that there is no force acting on one body alone. With this, the concept of force forfeits its “real embodiment” and gains “ideal momentum.” It no longer designates a substance, but rather a relation; in static systems, the sum of forces always equals zero. And only by idealizing a concept, which was once substantialized, can now the movements of masses of bodies become measurable and calculable. The *emergent viewpoint*, obtained by elevating the notion of body-dependent force into an idea of interaction, establishes the field of reality which was previously constrained under the symbolic weight of innate forces, but is now susceptible to quantification. It is thus the “idealist” move that opens the space of realism, if by realism we mean the possibility of an empirical, quantifiable apprehension of reality.³⁹

However, it is worth stressing that, in order to be a scientific realist, one must remain a rigorous, draconian *historical discursivist*. Newton’s concept of “force” is not a name for an eternal idea; it does not express the perennial order of things; it is a strictly discursive product, which facilitated the scientific appropriation of reality in its time, yet will be surpassed and absolved in the future. Newton did not introduce a new physical quantity but only de-substantialized a traditional one. And this is exactly *the operation of idealization*: the meaning of a concept was shifted from referring to an inner quality of a body to expressing a necessary, systematic, computable relation between bodies. There is nothing “directly objective” or “forever verifiable” in Newton’s concepts; there are no things-in-themselves out there carrying “masses” and exerting “forces.” In this sense, the laws of classical mechanics are fabrications of an irreducibly historical, that is, irreducibly idealist position. But, at the same time, all attempts to justify them within any kind of self-conscious recourse fall hopelessly short. No rationale of the for-itself constituting the in-itself, or of the way a community holds itself to be,

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 39 To refer to two more examples, Galilei separated the concept of “motion” from the Aristotelian essential nature of bodies, thus rendering its quantity measurable; and Freud transposed the “unconscious” from the romantic obscure inner life of the soul to the calculable, re-constructible grammar of its effects.

can in any way specify the functioning of an idealized scientific concept and its contribution to the measurability of quanta. The entire idealist claim exhausts itself between the historical process of the idealization of concepts and the amount of the released quantifiability of reality.

To conclude, this brief reference to science was invoked for the sole purpose of implying that there is a dimension of “idealism” which exceeds the scope of the Hegelian Idea negating its other. The remit of science is not to usurp the world but to *create its positivity* in the first place. And this might be a task for a new idealism: to define the conditions of setting up the space for an empirical conception of reality. While in the “idealism of self-consciousness,” timeless ideas descended to the temporal world and engaged it in a process of assuming a rational structure, in this new idealism, historically constituted concepts undergo the process of idealization, thus establishing a perspective in which the phenomena become perceivable in their measurable quantity for the first time.

And this is the point at which two diverging tendencies meet. First, in view of the fact that the paramount goal of philosophy after Hegel seems to have been to repress any impulses of idealization, we advocate instead *a return to Hegel* and the last remnants of his idealism. Our speculation suggested that by losing the idealist edge of the Hegelian Notion, we might squander the very opportunity of capturing reality in the form of positivity. However, *ours* is not the Hegel of self-consciousness, negation, and the sociality of reason, but rather Hegel as the last philosopher with a feeling for the absolute, non-derivable, supplemental emergentism of truth. Second, by detecting a certain limitation in the Hegelian method, we should perhaps consider the possibilities of a new kind of idealism, a non-normative idealism divested of the yoke of self-consciousness and negation, an idealism not of the soul, mind, or Spirit, but of words becoming concepts historically and thereby disclosing reality to realism.

In this light, Hegel was not too much of an idealist, but rather not enough of one. He dissociated the regimes of truth and reality, and then succumbed to the temptation of re-involving reality in the process of truth. World History is an idealist endeavour which still pursues the ambition to make reality true; science, *per contra*, is an idealism capable of keeping both domains, the constitution of scientific laws and the disclosure of reality, apart. In this, idealism finally lives up to the standards of the emergentism of truth.

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Freedom and Universality: Hegel's Republican Conception of Modernity

Michael J.
Thompson

Abstract: I argue that Hegel's political philosophy can be seen as having a republican structure. I contend that a reading of Hegel's political philosophy must begin with exploring the metaphysical infrastructure of his ideas about human life and the essential sociality of what it means to be a human being. This constitutes an ontological structure to our sociality, one that, once it achieves cognitive reflection in the subject, becomes the basis for an expanded form of agency and individuality. This provides us with the requisite basis for reworking the ideas about individuality, freedom, the state and the common good that provides us with a thoroughly modern form of republicanism. Hegel's political philosophy can therefore be shown, through its metaphysical structure, to endorse a modern form of republicanism and serve as a critical bulwark against the limitations of modern liberalism.

Keywords: Hegel, republicanism, metaphysics, social ontology, individuality

I. The Problem of Modernity

Perhaps one of the central problems that confronts the project of modernity has been its capacity to instantiate its core, self-proposed goal of the rational society. Through the trials and tribulations of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries and the vicissitudes of progress and reaction, liberalism has emerged as the dominant mantle upon which this project of political and social rationalism now rests. Liberalism has been the primary political theory that has guided the pursuit of this ideal. For modern liberals, the essentially rational character of its commitments consists in its protection of private property, a basic respect for persons, legal equality and equality of opportunity, a social ontology of particularist individuals and their particularist conceptions of the good, as well as a formal and ethically neutral conception of law and the state. It leaves the overall purposes and ends of the society to the "free" choice of its members. They consent to their relations of authority – to political leaders and so on – and relate to one another through rational contract in the economic sphere. But there are to be no collective ends or purposes, no content to what the society is to pursue. The good is formal, subjective, and politics is the sphere that should allow me to pursue that personal conception of the good.

I would like to challenge this liberal account of modernity and instead suggest that it represents its defective expression. As I see it, Hegel's entire political philosophy shreds this conception of modern

society and sees something far more compelling and rich. Hegel offers us a very different path to a rational, modern way of life rooted in the basic principles of republicanism: of the commitment to a common purposes and good to which individuals would be able to organize their political institutions and to provide for a sense of social and individual development and freedom. I think that Hegel's political philosophy in particular is an attempt to rework classical forms of republicanism in order to overcome its previous deficiencies. Hegel's ideas provide us with a deep structure for a modern form of republicanism that can offer a richer, more compelling conception of political life and human freedom than that of liberalism.

One of the core commitments of liberalism and its understanding of the rational society is the thesis that autonomous individuals can, through a process of reflective endorsement on abstract principles of fairness, maintain a society of tolerance and equality to opportunity that can allow each to fulfill his or her conceptions of the good life. The social ontology is atomistic, the epistemology is individualist, and the normative idea of the good is particularist. Hegel, by contrast, working in line with thinkers such as Rousseau, seeks a modern republican conception of political life by deepening the conception of the individual and maintaining the concept of a common good or public good that can secure a deeper, richer understanding of human freedom. I think this is the basic end sought by Hegel's political and moral philosophy and I will outline its main ideas and defend it as a post-liberal theory of politics in what follows.

For far too many, Hegel's ideas still hang between the poles of conservatism and radicalism. As a theorist of modernity, he has been particularly targeted as an apologist for the faults and excesses of rationalism and a bloated outdated metaphysics. I want to consider how Hegel's ideas can be seen to be essentially critical of our own age and the shapes of culture that pass for modern, or even postmodern. This essay will provide a description and defense of Hegel's unique conception of modernity – a conception of modernity yet to be realized. According to this view, the dialectic between the particular, individual and universal plays a unique role in the way that Hegel views the structure of modernity. His concepts of freedom, agency, sociality, institutions, the economy and state – all have at their basis the important pulse of the dialectic of this disjunctive syllogism. I will describe how this metaphysical interpretation differs, and is in many ways superior to, the dominant form of Hegel scholarship in the Anglo-American tradition which is based on the post-metaphysical and post-foundational turn and then go on to describe how Hegel's conception of modernity can be construed as a critical one, rather than an apology for its actually-existing forms.

This paper outlines Hegel's vision of what we can call a republican understanding of modernity. By this I mean that Hegel stands at the apex of a tradition of thought that saw the modern social world as defined by a kind of reason that allowed the individual to reach a higher conceptual grasp of himself and the social world. The nature of this rational understanding was the concept of human beings as interdependent members of a social totality that My thesis is that Hegel's ideas about politics and society are rooted in a republican structure of thought that is reworked by the modern ideas of highlighting the importance of the individual, of freedom and of universality. The republican structure of his thought consists in a concept of the common good of a society based on the essential social basis for human life and culture.

II. An Inquiry into the Good

Since the central category of republicanism is the concept of the common good or common interest, it seems to me that this is the place to enter into the connection between Hegel's thought and his republicanism. In many ways, Hegel's social and political philosophy is centrally concerned with some of the most basic and traditional questions in political theory. What is the good, the basis of obligation, of the nature of justice and freedom? The predominant interpretation of Hegel's philosophy that predominates Anglophone scholarship maintains that Hegel's ideas are post-metaphysical and thoroughly post-foundational. They emphasize the need to see that the essential character of Hegel's ideas are only valid today insofar as we jettison its metaphysical baggage and the concepts of essence, ontology, and so on, that come with it. But to do this seems to me to gut Hegel's ideas of their more radical potential. What I want to suggest here is that the metaphysical infrastructure of Hegel's political philosophy provides us with access to richer ideas about the nature of freedom, individuality, autonomy and the good, rational society. What is needed here is to enquire into the ontological structure of human sociality and see this as an essential basis, or ground (*Boden*) for Hegel's political and ethical ideas. When we see this, Hegel becomes not a post-metaphysical thinker at all, but a metaphysical thinker who reflects on the real, rational ontology of human life as the foundation for a critical judgment capable of guiding our norms.

What can it mean for the common good, for a rational society, to be conceived as having a *rational structure*? This is an important concern and one that I will seek to defend in the remainder of this paper. In brief, I believe that Hegel's metaphysical categories laid out in his *Logic* can be seen as constitutive of a rational structure of social relations that also inform the rational will of free, self-determining individuals. What

the common good is, is not so much a particular set of values or norms, but rather that the norms, ends and institutions of the rational society be constituted by the kind of relational, interdependent structures of sociality that constitutes man's life. Unlike Aristotle who saw human sociality as natural and therefore as determinative from the outside of our reflection, Hegel's thesis is that a modern form of republicanism would be one where our sociality serves as the basis for the correct and rational concepts and norms that constitute our ethical life. Only when we have made the social world – the norms, institutions, habits and practices – in accordance with the needs and projects of the totality of the community, of which each as an individual is an integral and nonetheless self-differentiated member, can we understand what a free, common good could be like.¹

This is to be contrasted with the defective forms of modernity that falsely claim to be able to represent the whole, but only in terms of its particular parts. Hence, capitalism, liberalism, and so on, are defective in that they project a totality through the fractured parts: self-interest, subjective desire, personal choice, etc. This is why Hegel believes that modern, free people are only satisfied when they are “at home” (*zu Hause*) in the social world they inhabit. This is not meant to convey that each of us must reconcile ourselves to the modern world *as it exists*, but rather to a world that we have generally made, that we have rationally constructed and that we can rationally endorse. This means that the concept of reason, of rationality, is the key concept that grants Hegel's ideas their power and depth. The key thesis here, as I see it, is that any rational comprehension of human life must grasp its social essence. Human life is essentially social, it consists of self- and other-relations that are dynamic, processual and reciprocally interdependent. Once we are able to grasp this, we are moving in a space of reasons that can grant each of us the appropriate rational content for an expanded conception of autonomy and sociality. Hegel's modern conception of republicanism therefore means that the concepts of the good, of freedom, of individuality, and so on, are all rooted in the ontology of social relations that constitute us and which we as members of that community also constitute in turn.

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1 A.S. Walton notes that “it is only when we have appreciated that men are essentially social beings that we can properly understand the conditions under which they can coherently relate to one another in the community. It is therefore from the premise that men are social beings that the theoretical possibility of determining the common good, and, indeed, its desirability, is deduced.” Walton 1983, 760.

III. The Metaphysics of Sociality

We can begin with this more controversial claim concerning the metaphysics of human sociality. Hegel's most basic claim, one that serves to frame his entire political philosophy, is that human beings are essentially social. They belong to a nexus of relations that have certain properties and which can be grasped through reason. Unlike many contemporary scholars who have recently defended the view of a “metaphysics without ontology,”² I contend that Hegel's views describe an *ontology of sociality*, or a rational, dialectical account of where what it means to live and to exist as free person means comprehending, at a conceptual level, that this means living, developing, existing within a structure of social relations that are not abstractions, but possess objective, ontological existence. Now, according to the prevailing view in much of contemporary Hegel scholarship, Hegel's metaphysical ideas are seen to be structures of thought, of thinking. As Robert Pippin notes, the essential project of Hegel's concept of modernity concerns “the very possibility of discursive intelligibility” by which he means that modernity is characterized by processes of reason-exchange that can justify and endorse certain forms of life. These kinds of life are characterized by our recognition of others as having statuses that allow each to be free. As Pippin notes: “being a free agent – an actual or successful agent – is said to depend on being recognized as one by others whose recognition itself depends in turn on their being recognized as such free recognizers.”³

But the view I privilege sees Hegel's logical categories of constitutive not only of thought itself, but of a rational structure of the world itself. This structure goes much deeper than the recognition of others and their statuses; it must also grasp the totality of our social relations and interdependencies as an ontological structure that has constitutive powers over our lives.⁴ When individuals possess rational comprehension of their social world, they will also be able to think in universal terms, i.e., in terms of the social-ontological structures that constitute the essence of human life. Hegel's logical ideas developed in his metaphysics are therefore the crucial undergirding structure of his political philosophy. Hegel sees that the structure of spirit is rational only when it is able to reflect into itself the truth of its object. As Willem deVries argues, “Hegel is quite convinced that any ‘knowledge’ that is not of the object as it is in itself is not *knowledge* at all. Hegelian concepts, like those of the great classical thinkers, must be objective, humanly

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2 See Pippin 2000 as well as Bowman 2015.

3 Pippin 2008, 214.

4 For important discussions of unique category of sociality, see Israel 1977 and Brown 2014.

graspable features of things as they are in themselves.”⁵ In this case, the object is social life itself. In this sense, when we talk about rational forms of agency and subjectivity, we must be referring to the object of sociality in its entirety and complexity and linking this to the concepts of the good, freedom and the will. This will constitute a basic theory of a modern form of republicanism that Hegel believes will serve as the context for modern freedom.

We can begin to understand this thesis by turning to Hegel’s theory of “recognition” (*Anerkennung*) which I think can be seen as a phenomenological opening to how modern subjects can come to self-conscious of the deeper structures of their subjectivity through their awareness of others, an awareness not only of the concrete other, but ultimately of the community as a whole and the self’s integral partnership with it. The thesis about recognition therefore asks us to consider the post-liberal concept of the self, of the human individual, as a self-aware, self-conceiving individual who is aware and acts upon his interdependent status with others. One is a social being, but not in the classical Greek or Roman expression of the term since it is our rational self-consciousness of this sociality that is key to our freedom. What the rational subject realizes through the process of recognition is that the ego’s relation to the world can no longer be conceived in mere subject-object terms, in a Kantian-Copernican sense, but instead as an intersubjective and independent structure of reality. As recent accounts of Hegel’s theory of recognition point out, there is a four stage process at work here: that of autonomy, union, self-overcoming and release. Autonomy is seen by Hegel not in atomist terms, but in dialectical relation with the unity of the self with others, leading to a self-overcoming where the individual’s solipsism is broken down and replaced with a more enriched understanding of the self as mediated-by-others. Finally, the other is seen as different, but nevertheless as also constituted by shared relations. This stage of release (*Freigabe*) allows the self to achieve a synthesis of particularity and individuality via universality, thereby allowing for an expansion and deepening of our subjectivity that will be able to move in a space of reasons that grasps essential sociality of our lives. We begin to grasp the ontological reality of the social totality. As Robert Williams explains: “*Freigabe* makes it clear that the ‘We’ Hegel is after is a community of freedom that does not absorb or reduce individuals in their differences. . . . Union with the other is also an expression of difference. Only such reciprocal release makes the ‘We’ a

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5 deVries 1993, 226-227; also see Houlgate 2008.

concrete universal rather than an abstract identity.”⁶

What this means is that each comes to realize rationally not only that the other exists, and that the other comes to count, although this is true. On a deeper level, each ego comes realize that the world he inhabits is really constituted by a structure of relations and that these relations not only emanate from me, but in fact constitute a dynamic structure of reciprocity.⁷ This is an important point since, as Hegel makes clear in his *Science of Logic*, the concept, or the rationality of the world, is brought forth through the process of reciprocal interaction (*Wechselwirkung*) and not simply something that is statically cognizable. Reciprocal interaction between cause and effect, subject and object, and so on, means “the unity of the two substances in reciprocity, but in such a way that they now belong to freedom, for the identity they have is no longer blind or inner (*Innerliches*), and their essential determination is that they are show (*Schein*) or moments of reflection where each has immediately coincided with its other or its positedness, and each contains its positedness in itself and thus is simply posited as self-identical in its other.”⁸ What this means is that the concept is an expression of freedom in the sense that each moment of the concept taken out of its mechanistic role of relating to another as a separate, and determined aspect of the totality, and now achieves a self-determined role as a constitutive part of a systemic structure of reciprocal relations.

Although this is abstract, we can see the parallel between Hegel’s metaphysical thesis about the nature of the relational structure of the concept (i.e., of rationality and freedom) on the one hand, and the way this instantiates itself in spirit, in the actual social interaction of human beings. Our sociality can therefore be seen as the substance that can only achieve conceptual – i.e., rational, free form – once it is grasped as a systemic process of reciprocal interactions. If the process of recognition is allowed to play itself out, it leads us, he seems to be saying, to a situation wherein each of us conceives of ourselves as belonging to this social-ontological structure of relations; that we realize that they mediate, shape and can be shaped by us. Indeed, these relations, once they are grasped as having *ontological*, rather than merely *natural* or *abstract*, status are the very substance of what it means to be a rational,

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6 Williams 2003, 69; also cf. Siep 1978.

7 Stanley Rosen comments on this point that: “Hegel’s meaning, which does not become clear until after we know the logic, is that I can recognize myself in the other because we are both instances of the self-consciousness of Absolute Spirit. The structure of my relations to the other is the externalized version of my ‘relations’ to myself. And these interior ‘relations’ are the expressions of the Absolute.” Rosen 1974, 159.

8 Hegel 1969, 251.

self-determining, and hence *free* being. The freedom consists of the fact that the universal is now seen not as a homogenizing force, but as encompassing the differences of its components while still preserving those differences. The universal concept integrates these differences and relates it its other as it relates to itself. As Hegel notes in the *Science of Logic*: “The universal is therefore free power; it is itself and it grabs after (*greift über*) its other, but not by force, but is peaceful and at home (*bei sich selbst*).”⁹ Hence, we begin to see the deeper metaphysical structure of the social dimensions of human freedom as the self-conscious grasping of our sociality and as the constitutive structure of processual relations that shape the world within which we, as individuals, move and operate.

We can therefore think of his discussion of the problems inherent in “civil society” (*bürgerliche Gesellschaft*) as associated with the condition of not achieving this higher, conceptual grasp of the ontology of our social relations. In a sense, this is a defective form of modernity insofar as the members of this social condition lack the sufficient cognitive grasp of the ontology of social relations necessary to grant them the conceptual (i.e., free) clarity needed to live in a rational community as rational selves. In civil society, dominated as it is by markets, egoism, and particularity, each particular member of the community work for their own ends and desires, and they are unaware – as was pointed out by Adam Smith and other Scottish political economists – that there is a larger, common end that they work toward. But Hegel seems to have rejected the idea that this was true, that what was needed for a genuinely modern and rational society was that each would be able to pursue one’s particular interests, but self-consciously within the framework of social relations that constituted one’s ethical life (*Sittlichkeit*); that the crucial concern is the passage from particularity to individuality as the crucial turn for a rational and free political community. It is therefore only once we have achieved the rational re-construction or re-cognition (literally, an *An-erkennung*) of our reality through integrating the structure of our other- and self-relations into conceptual thought that we will, be able to render self-conscious our reality as socially constituted selves.¹⁰

The problem with civil society is that the process of recognition is stopped from revealing the deeper, conceptual richness of the structure of our relations with one another. They remain formal and are halted from

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9 Hegel 1969, 277.

10 Jean Hyppolite rightly argues here with respect to the structure of the *Logik*, that “c’est la catégorie du sens qui devient la vérité des catégories de l’être et de l’essence.” Hyppolite 1953, 222.

revealing the ontology of our relations.¹¹ It is only when the ego comes to see himself as a “We” via the process of recognition, that a totality of social relations and others constitute his world. His solipsism is not only exploded, but the concept of the good, of his interests, of happiness and so on will all come to be enlarged in scope as well. The totality of these relations constitute not an oppressive external scheme for him, but rather the very truth of his own being and his potentiality.¹² He achieves the status of an ethical being insofar as he takes into himself the other and the structure of relations that bind each to the other. He begins to grasp the ontological status of the relations that govern his sociality and his own agency. Only equipped with this self-consciousness can he begin to enter a wider space of reasons and to see the dynamic relations of sociality as the context for a rational, modern expression of spirit (*Geist*).

But where this leads us on a political level is altogether a new matter. What I think Hegel is asking us to consider is the extent to which we can grasp through reason the reality of a common good – of a kind of good to which our common goals and purposes can be judged against. The basic idea here is that the ontological reality of the social-relational and interdependent qualities of human social life can be a kind of substance that is shaped and ordered in different ways. The key Hegelian project must be to find a desideratum for what shapes of sociality promote the common good of its members best; which institutions, norms, practices and so on will best enhance and keep in view the ontology of social relations and shape them most rationally. Clearly, there will never be a single formula, it will consist in an open-ended and even experimental process. But there will be little doubt that this structure of social relations is the very substance of what a free life will consist. This will be the most rational form of social arrangements and it will take not a liberal cast, but a modern republican one insofar as we take the view that concept (*Begriff*) is able to organize our reflective capacities around the concrete universality of the structure of social relations. This means that the triadic feature of the concept – of universal, particular and individual – is also the immanent rational structure of our social reality itself. A modern, rational culture would therefore be one that realizes the

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11 David Kolb maintains on this point that: “In civil society, structures of mutual recognition are not done away with, but they become formal. . . . The self-sufficiency characteristic of the members of civil society is a first attempt to have the freedom of true individuals but an attempt still too much caught up in being different from the whole. Its ‘freedom from’ is too much defined in terms of opposition to be able to reach the self-completeness and independence characteristic of true individuality.” Kolb 1986, 68, 71.

12 Herbert Marcuse notes here that: “The locus of truth is not the proposition, but the dynamic system of speculative judgments in which every single judgment must be ‘sublated’ by another, so that only the whole process represents the truth.” Marcuse 1954, 102.

concept, that realizes the actuality (*Wirklichkeit*) of a free, rational society through anchoring its practical reason in the cognitive grasp of the ontological structure of social relations as the totality, the Absolute Idea, of our human reality. This therefore becomes an insurgent Idea (*Idee*) that can be used to judge and interrogate the existing social structures and institutions that pervade our world. The metaphysical structure of Hegel's political ideas provide us with a powerful tool for critical rationality.

IV. Rational and Irrational Wills

One of the core ideas that we get from reading the *Philosophy of Right* is that modernity insists upon a specific kind of agency, a particular kind of subjectivity. What I explored in the above section was a thesis about what I see to be a consequence of reading the metaphysical layer of Hegel's theory about recognition and sociality. But Hegel is an objective Idealist, he may see that the true, objective and ontological reality of human life is social and that this sociality points toward freedom only when its various members come to self-consciousness as members of this ontological structure of relations. But the key here is that, as for any Idealist, the emphasis is placed on the individual and his ability to achieve and maintain that cognitive level of awareness of the conceptual truth of the totality. What Hegel is after in his discussion of the rational as opposed to irrational will, of the *Wille* as opposed to the *Willkür*, is the idea that only an expanded form of subjectivity will be up to the task of achieving and maintaining a modern, rational form of freedom.

This idea goes back to Rousseau and his idea of the "general will." For Rousseau, the general will was to be seen as a particular kind of cognition that governed the agent's reflection on civic affairs as well as constituted through his thoughts, practices, norms and actions a specific kind of community: a republic. Rousseau was essentially pursuing what we can call an expanded notion of subjectivity: a form of cognition that each would possess where they were aware of the general needs of the community as well as the individual and that a violation of one was a violation of the other.¹³ What Rousseau was after was a conception of the self, a conception of individuality that was able to hold in view the general welfare of the community but also see simultaneously that his own individual welfare was integral to that common good and vice versa. It was the common advantage that created the context for any kind of good individuality to emerge. But Rousseau was not interested in having the general welfare, the *res publica*, overcome and dominate the individual. Rather, the proper, modern expression of civic freedom

13 See Thompson 2017.

would be one where individuals rationally were aware of themselves as interdependent beings; aware of themselves, through reflection, that this common structure of the good community and the common goods needed to maintain and enhance it, were placed at the center of the rational self's reflective reasoning.

Hegel was working in the same structure of thought as Rousseau on this question.¹⁴ He saw the limits of liberalism and its particularism as expressions of a degenerated form of individuality and community. Most important was the fact that civil society, when left to itself, would fail to achieve the true freedom of the community and its members. Only when the process of recognition was able to reveal for each member of the society the ontological structure of their social-relational interdependence would one begin to achieve the status of individuality that Hegel explores in his *Science of Logic*. Hence, Hegel writes that: "the mutually related self-conscious subjects, by setting aside their unequal particularity, have risen to the consciousness of their real universality, of the freedom belonging to all, and hence to the intuition of their specific identity with each other."¹⁵ What is happening in this process of recognition is that it serves as a kind of phenomenological membrane through which we pass into the cognitive grasp of the ontological structure of human sociality. Our ideas about the nature of human life are now shaped by the true structure of that reality which we were able to put together through the struggle for recognition. What this new achieved status of individuality comes to grasp is not that he is negated by the social whole, but rather that, *qua* individual, he is an integral part of a sociality that shapes him as well as which he helps to shape and constitute. Indeed, Hegel's holism must be contrasted to any sense of monism where the various parts of the totality are mere accidents of that totality. As Robert Stern correctly points out: "holism stresses the dependence of finite things on another, in its *modest* form it can still respect the individuality of finite things in so far as parts can be individuals, to the extent of having identity conditions that make it intelligible to treat a part as the *same*, and so as persisting over time."¹⁶

14 A distinctive difference is the way that Hegel conceives of the will, not as a general will, per se, but as he says, the free will wills the concept of the will. As Paul Franco correctly notes: "In opposition to Rousseau, Hegel interprets the universal will in terms of the rational will. Unlike the individual will, the rational will does not derive its content from something other than itself – from our inclinations, fancies, or desires. Rather, the rational will derives its content from the concept of the will, freedom, itself. The rational will is simply the will that wills freedom – in the form of objective rights and institutions developed over the course of the *Philosophy of Right* – and hence wills itself." Franco 1999, 289.

15 Hegel 1970 §436z.

16 Stern 2009, 64.

So what we come to recognize as rational agents through the process of recognition is not an oppressive communitarian scheme, but a more ontologically rich structure of interdependencies that are constitutive of myself and my social reality. The recognitive processes that are embedded in modern forms of life – of marriage, exchange economy, the state, and so on – all contain processes of recognition pushing the ego out of a solipsism that opposes it to an alter or set of alters and into a “we-consciousness” where ego absorbs the alter into his own self-conception. Only when this is achieved can the individual begin to emerge by which is meant the I’s capacity to think in universal terms, i.e., as what he actually is: a social being with the capacity to reason and cognize as a member of that totality.¹⁷ The key seems to me here that Hegel would say to us that proper concepts about our political life must be made from within a space of reasons that is populated by true concepts about who we are; that the norms we seek to create, to be worthy of our endorsement, be those that reflect and be constitutive of our sociality and the kinds of selves that will be shaped by the forms of sociality that our community manifests.

We can judge our social arrangements, on this view, as either enhancing our individuality, as fulfilling the ontological potentialities of our sociality or as diminishing them and making them defective, as the different explorations in the *Phenomenology* make evident. Even more, in his own political reflections, Hegel was consistent in his condemnation of those social forms that did not enhance the common welfare of all seeing the economic system of England, for instance, as being particularly defective in its capacity to realize freedom and a humane existence. Capitalist society, to take a contemporary example, would be condemned to the extent that the institution and practices of capital do violence to our social relations and also fail to produce rational individuals capable of universal forms of reflective endorsement.¹⁸

What this means is that Hegel’s concept of the social whole, of the universal, is nothing akin to the oppressive form of social whole seen in the Greek *polis*, for instance, nor the problems inherent in communitarian schemes. He is emphatic that the individual is not the narrow particularity of liberalism, but rather a self-conscious members of a totality of dynamic, interdependent structures of relations. We

17 See the discussion also by Michael Quante who argues that: “Innerhalb dieser Perspektive darf man den Willen nicht als eine individuelle Entität auffassen, sondern muss ihn als ein Universale mit philosophisch angebbarer Bestimmung verstehen. Dieses Universale, in Hegels Terminologie das Allgemeine, individuiert sich selbst aufgrund eines logischen Selbstbestimmungsprozesses.” Quante 2011, 160.

18 See Thompson 2015.

come to grasp this ontology of our sociality through recognition and recognize our self- and other-conceptions about the world as a result. This is why, in the *Philosophy of Right* there is a transition from the sphere of “morality” (*Moralität*) to that of “ethical life” (*Sittlichkeit*). To possess the *Wille*, the rational will, is to be informed by this universality; to achieve true individuality and have one’s thoughts, actions, practices and so on imbued by universality. And not in a formal sense, as in civil society, but in the content of one’s beliefs and actions. Freedom is therefore not an abstraction, something left to the whim of each particular member of society. Rather, it is something that must be manifest in the world, it must become *Recht*, objectified in our institutions, practices and norms, not simply remain abstract *principle*. As Stephen Houlgate notes: “The ethical will is theoretical in that, like the moral will, it knows freedom to be universal, to be the freedom of all free individuals, but, unlike the moral will, it understands freedom in the form of right and welfare to be actually present and realized in the world.”¹⁹

This is a very different kind of agent than that proposed by modern liberalism. Indeed, through the processes of individualization shaped and structured by the institutional forms of “ethical life,” modern individuality should be seen as an achieved status where the ego – transformed into a we-thinking self by the process of recognition – has as the basis of his will the concept of sociality that make up the groundwork for the universal grasp of the social world. What Hegel is after is a kind if individuality that possesses universality as an integral part of his self.²⁰ It is an expanded understanding of subjectivity that has at its core, its basis the concept of spirit itself.²¹ Indeed, it is the sociality of our reason, but also the ontological structures of social relations that serve as the ground of our individuality and the will that corresponds to this kind of reflection is a rational will, the *Wille* as opposed to a will that simply does what it pleases arbitrarily according to its own particularity (*Willkür*). This is why he maintains that the final stage of ethical life, the state, must be seen in terms that are embedded within the expanded sphere of individuality which, as we have seen, has spirit as its ground. To have spirit as its ground means that the rational subject thinks with concepts that are

19 Houlgate 1995, 875.

20 Michael Quante correctly points out that “Hegel versteht dabei Subjektivität generell als Individualisierung und Verwirklichung eines Allgemeinen in einem Einzelnen.” Quante 2011, 164.

21 Joshua D. Goldstein insightfully remarks that “when spirit becomes the will’s foundation, the concept of individuality expands, bursting through the distinctions between an interior, true self and an exterior world of objects and forces. We are required to rethink the nature of the self and its willful activity once neither can be contained in a single unit.” Goldstein 2006, 131. Also see the important discussion by Yeomans 2012.

logically consistent with the ontological features of his sociality; it means that he as an individual, realizes himself as no longer being a solipsistic particular, but rather a constitutive and constituted member of a social totality.

The essential idea here is that the state is only modern, only truly an objectification of human freedom, when it is able to serve as a higher form of sociality, as allowing the rational individual to be informed by the universal and for the rational self to have universality guide his reasons, norms and practices. As Hegel says in detail in the *Philosophy of Right*:

The state is the actuality of concrete freedom. But concrete freedom requires that personal individuality and its particular interests should reach their full *development* and gain *recognition* of their right for itself (within the system of the family and of civil society), and also that they should, on the one hand, *pass over* of their own accord into the interest of the universal, and on the other, knowingly and willingly acknowledge this universal interest even as their own *substantial spirit*, and actively pursue it as their ultimate end. . . . The principle of modern states has this tremendous power and depth because the principle of subjectivity itself is permitted to develop to its self-determined extreme of personal particularity while at the same time it is brought back to a substantial unity and so maintains this unity in the principle of subjectivity.²²

Clearly what Hegel is after here is the complex but essential point about the relation between the modern individual and the rational community and its institutions. The purpose of the modern political community is one that is able to unite the rational individual and the rational community. The rational individual is one who knows that his freedom is functionally dependent on the ontology of social relations that constitute him and the rational community will be that very shape of social relations that constitutes the field for his freedom and self-determination not to mention his self-realization, as well. Since this individual knows that he is part of this structure of relations, and that his own good is a function of it, the rational will wills only what is good for his welfare which is also the welfare of others.²³ We have broken through the

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22 Hegel 1971, §260.

23 Eugène Fleischmann insightfully remarks on this point that: “*Réaliser* la subjectivité, cela veut

liberal dividing lines of civil society and state, private and public and now see that each is constitutive of the other. Rationality keeps in view the concrete universal, without which there can be no freedom because no true individuality exists.²⁴

So now we can see that the ontology of sociality that I posited as the metaphysical foundation for Hegel's political philosophy is also essential to grasp how his conception of individuality, the will, self-determination and freedom work together. Hegel is clearly saying that the concept of the good can no longer be an issue for the particular person alone; nor can it be something that finds itself expressed in formal and abstract principles. Rather, the good now is seen to be, as he puts it, “The Idea as the unity of the concept of the will with the particular will. . . . The good is thus freedom realized, the absolute end and aim of the world.”²⁵ This is also the passage of the particular into the realm of the individual: for now the particular self begins to grasp that the good is only possible by keeping in view the welfare of all and not only in a formal sense, but in a concrete, *actual (Wirklich)* sense. It means that each individual is truly free once he inhabits a world of others, relations, practices, norms and institutions that make real in the world the common good of its members, when each of these members has in view this common good, and where each is able cognize oneself and others as being ensconced in a structure of relations that can be shaped and oriented toward the fulfillment and good of its members. As Richard Bellamy rightly points out: “our projects only gain meaning and purpose, become expressions of our individuality and autonomy, within the context of a shared set of norms. These norms make social life possible, since they enable us to relate our own interests with those of others as part of the complex tapestry of universal values which make for a worthwhile life.”²⁶ Hegel's political philosophy is, in the final analysis, a groundwork for a modern republicanism.

donc dire créer une réalité commune, obligatoire, valable pour tous les sujets libres, un *système* des devoirs et obligations selon les règles de la liberté et de la raison. La notion la plus universelle et la plus concrète de l'*objectivité libre* sera donc l'État où *toutes* les exigences de la liberté peuvent être posées et satisfaites, où la raison est à la fois le sujet et l'objet (celui qui exige et ce qui est exigé), où l'universalité se réalise pleinement, c'est-à-dire aussi bien par la satisfaction de la conscience individuelle subjective que par l'érection d'un système objectif et universel des lois.” Fleischmann 1964, 180.

24 As Dieter Henrich rightly notes: “it is clear that the substance of the state is the actuality of free persons who not only recognize the state, but also bring it into being through their own activity – not in the reflected distance of some purely external ‘production’ but in the entire self-consciousness of their own free activity.” Henrich 2004, 263.

25 Hegel 1971, §129.

26 Bellamy 1987, 701.

V. The Republican Structure of Hegel's Political Thought

We can now begin to square the ideas I have been exploring above with my thesis that Hegel's republicanism is a distinctly modern form of republicanism and to consider my next proposition: namely that Hegel's republicanism possesses radical implications for our understanding of modern society. There are several aspects to the political theory of republicanism that Hegel instantiates. One of them is the connection between the individual and society. Republican thinkers in the classical period saw human beings as naturally social or naturally political. They saw the city as the natural context for the perfective development of the human being. Plato, Aristotle, Cicero and a host of other classical writers all shared the view that the social nature of human beings led to the argument that the common good of all members of the society was the highest political and ethical ideal. The shared life of its members was, for them, more important than the individual members themselves taken on their own. They opted for a communitarian view of the good and saw it as a natural feature of human life.

I have shown that Hegel's republicanism is also concerned with the good, the common good, of its members. This common good is not grounded in our nature, as it was for classical authors, but does take as its ground (*Boden*), as I have sought to show here, the ontological structure of social relations as constituting the dynamic and developmental context for the actuality of human freedom. The republican idea still structures Hegel's concept of what it means to be a free being, to be a part of a totality and yet maintain the modern achievements of autonomy. Since he is wedded to the principle of subjectivity, there cannot be a conception of the common good that excludes the principle of individuality. As Andrew Buchwalter has rightly claimed, "for Hegel, political sentiment does express an organic and even an immediate relationship between individual and community. Though cultivated rather than instinctive, that relationship must still be regarded as a 'second nature.'"²⁷ But even though this is the case, it is essential to point out that a common good is still the aim of the free state. The common good is based on the premise that human beings are essentially social, that they are who they are because of the ontology of social relations that shape their inner and outer world.

If we look at the matter in this way, Hegel's republican modernity emphasizes the need for a new, expanded form of subjectivity that will be able of thinking the universal, of grasping that the common welfare of all is rooted in the concepts and norms that I follow. Even though each is

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²⁷ Buchwalter 1993, 5.

free in his or her subjectivity, this can only be truly free as long as I relate to others and myself as taking part in the collective ends and purposes of the association of all. This entails a very different understanding of modernity from that expressed by liberal theory. Hegel's idea about modernity is one where common ends and purposes are pursued freely by individual agents through their own rational understanding of their sociality. Since their own lives and the products of their culture are known to possess a social basis, that our relations with others are not simply created by contract or arbitrarily chosen by us, but are rather ontological facets of human life, Hegel's modern free community would not allow its members to make the institutions of the society into vehicles for their particular interests.

Hegel retains his radicalism once we are able to keep in view the idea that his political ideas rest on a kind of rationality that explodes all forms of particularism and fragmentation. The deep-seated theme of republicanism, of the quest for a kind of political society that is rooted in the twin values of common, universal goods and the autonomous freedom of the individual, remains a political and cultural project yet to be realized. And if we push the matter, we should say that Hegel's political philosophy describes for us the concept of a post-liberal idea of society. It would not allow it to create technological and economic ends that would alienate and oppress the members of the community. The social world would be a very different one from what we see around us today. Perhaps this, in the end, is what makes Hegel's ideas so persistently salient in our own time and also so potentially radical as well. What he offers us is a more rational view of what modernity could look like. What a more humane, rational and free community would look like. In this sense, we can see that the promise of modernity must take a post-liberal path if his ideas are to have meaning in our age.

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Freedom is Slavery

Oxana
Timofeeva

Abstract: The paper presents an original account of Hegel's master and slave dialectics as it relates to the human/non-human distinction and the category of the undead. It analyzes various social and cultural phenomena, from Haitian zombies to the contemporary 'black market' in slaves (human trafficking etc.), and reflects upon the paradoxical emancipatory force of non-human forms and conditions of labor.

Keywords: slavery, freedom, dialectics, negativity, non-human, zombie

The Black Market

According to the Global Slavery Index report for the year 2016, the number of slaves in the contemporary world is approximately 45.8 million. 58 % of those are working in India, China, Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Uzbekistan. Involuntary labor is used in almost all countries, including those with the highest standard of living.

The report is published annually by the Walk Free Foundation, an international human rights organization founded in Australia in 2010 which has since been engaged in the struggle against contemporary forms of slavery. The first was published in 2013 and referred to the smaller figure of 29.8 million. Foremost among the reasons for this dramatic upsurge, besides improvements to the technology used to collect statistical data (an extremely complex project), is the massive rise in the flow of refugees from the Middle East due to the military crisis there. It is clear that the war now raging, which can no longer be localized or pinned down to particular regions, a war which crosses national boundaries with the speed of capital, is going to bring about the enslavement of many more people: refugees, migrants, inhabitants of ravaged or abandoned areas, or simply poor people.

It goes without saying that such official records represent only those people who have been 'counted'. The real number of slaves in the world is impossible to state, since we are talking about illegal activity, in which the most varied actors become involved, from petty pimps to high-level representatives of power structures who cover up human traffic or the use of forced labor, including on an industrial scale. Slavery is convenient: every person who labors under compulsion, on pain of death or beatings, in exchange for lodging or for food, receiving no remuneration, brings enormous profit to those who have deprived him of his freedom. As studies carried out by the International Labor Organization (ILO) have shown, the actual share of profits rises through the use of slave labor, but this shadowy aspect of the world economy is

not reflected in official statistics. The yearly gross income brought by slaves amounts to more than 150 billion dollars (the greater part of which, 99 billion, is earned by sex workers).¹

Forced, involuntary, unpaid labor is used in construction, manufacturing, extractive industry, mineral production, agriculture, and on private farms. Children from poor families are sold into sexual or military slavery, into assembly-line production or to be domestic servants.² One well-known path into slavery, often traversed at the cost of money or documents, is illegal migration or travel by the indigent to major cities in search of a better life. People are hunted, used to pay debts, exchanged, sold and re-sold; they are transported from city to city, from country to country, from continent to continent in buses, containers, boxes, dinghies; held in basements, in warehouses, in non-residential spaces— 'in inhuman conditions', as journalists underscore.

This appears monstrous, scandalous – and yet discussions of contemporary slavery never move much beyond the frame of human rights discourse, as if the problem consisted of some isolated incidents, vestigial throwbacks, some lamentable misunderstandings, rather than a many-branched global network of forced labor which is gaining momentum. We live in a world where slavery is officially a thing of the past. We all know it is. The last country to outlaw slavery was Mauritania in 1981. As Article 4 in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, ratified by the UN General Assembly in 1948, declares, 'No one shall be held in slavery or servitude; slavery and the slave trade shall be prohibited in all their forms.'³

In analyzing the global slavery index, human rights experts compare quantitative indicators of various countries, each of which has its own methods for observing or violating this universal ban, its 'corpus delicti' and its measure of suppression or accountability: contemporary slavery is not fully recognized as a universal global problem. Viewed as a violation of moral and juridical law, it is localized at various points throughout the criminal world and thus moves entirely outside of the field of social representation: it receives precisely the same amount of attention as other illegal forms of violence. However, in the final analysis, what is essential here is not the fact of a law being transgressed, but rather the fact that the crime reveals the underside of the law, or even its heart (its true nature, kept hidden and denied). Beyond morality and law, beyond the moral customs and juridical norms of individual countries, slavery

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1 ILO 2012b

2 UN 1991

3 UN 1948

becomes the unbounded total fact of the world economy. More than that, in a certain sense, slavery systematically funds that economy.

The market in slaves was literally black when it was still (figuratively) white: since the period of the great geographical discoveries, when ships sailed the Atlantic with slaves from black Africa to European colonies on the Caribbean and Antillean islands, up until the recent moment when rubber dinghies with Africans, sometimes already dead, began washing ashore on the island of Lampedusa, one of the traditional transfer points for migrants on their way to the European Union, this market has only changed its legal status and thereby finally taken on the nominal color of its commodity. Having become entirely 'black', i.e. criminal, the slave market now intersects with two other markets— the arms trade and the drug trade. The scale of the circulation of money, goods, life and death inside this black triangle is such that the entire law-abiding 'white' market economy appears as a superstructure to that statistically non-transparent base, an aggregate of the mechanisms of 'laundering' its profits, or simply a decorative screen or curtain for it.

What if contemporary society, thinking itself inside a paradigm of emancipation, believing in the increase in the degree of its freedoms and step by step expanding the area throughout which its rights are distributed, is in fact still constructed on the pyramid principle, at whose base we find not a crowd of hired workers but an invisible, black, anonymous mass of slaves, deprived of their status as human beings (or never having possessed it)? Members of this stratum often find themselves literally below the ground: somewhere between the underfloor and the underground, in basements or semi-basements, illegal houses of prostitution or gambling are situated, workshops and factories using slave labor are organized, and migrants, on whose brutal exploitation the material wealth of the host countries is based, dwell. Through these dens, bunkers, and tombs grows the powerful root system of contemporary capital.

'The basic premise of the democratic sort of regime is freedom'; these are Aristotle's words,⁴ undoubtedly true not only for the Athenian democracy of his time, but for the liberal democracy of our time as well. Among the differences between these two systems, attention is drawn to both the fact that in one of them the will of the people was expressed directly, and in the other, it is implemented through a government, and the fact that the Athenian democracy was a slave-owning society: the people expressing its will directly consisted of free citizens, a group that did not include the large numbers of slaves – whereas liberal democracy

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4 Aristotle 2013, p.172

overcame slavery and recognizes all of its people as free citizens. And yet, as we have seen, the word 'overcame' does not completely correspond to the facts.

A Marxist analysis of the dynamics of productive forces and production relations or property relations in any given era underlies the widely held progressivist view according to which slavery belonged to antiquity and has exited into the past with the ancient world. Slave ownership, feudalism, capitalism and so on are thus presented as successive historic formations. Each succeeding stage not only comes to replace the previous one, but actively negates it, and the force that drives this negation arises again at that stage, which is subsequently negated and, in the final reckoning, is superseded, as are all of its constituent elements. So that capitalism, according to Marx, is progressive in that its ruling class, the bourgeoisie, puts an end to the traditional estate society and all of its remnants such as religion and morality, but also gives birth to its own gravedigger, the proletariat, who in their turn, will destroy it.⁵

This scenario, however, begins to look somewhat more complicated when we remember that one of the main components of what later became historical materialism was the Hegelian dialectic, in which negation necessarily mediates becoming. It is important that this is not simple (empty) negation, but a definite (full) kind– it understands what it is negating and, in negating, preserves and endows upon the negated both content and form⁶. This is the meaning of the Hegelian term *Aufhebung*, traditionally translated into English as 'sublation'.

Let us move this mechanism from the Hegelian element of the spirit, consciousness and self-consciousness to the Marxian sphere of productive forces and production relations– and then it seems that in the course of history social formations do not so much rescind and overcome each other as negate while preserving each other, such that each new global politico-economic system in its sublated aspect (whatever that might mean) contains within it all preceding forms. If the society of antiquity knew only the principal form of forced labor, namely, slavery, the contemporary world has at its disposal several traditional practices inherited from the past, including all the 'sublated' ones. 'How can the poor be made to work once their illusions have been shattered, and once force has been defeated?'⁷. It can be done using various methods simultaneously (not only by luring them with consumption, as the theorists of the society of the spectacle

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5 arx, Engels 1929

6 Hegel 1999, p. 45

7 Debord 1992, p. 4

thought). Should we not then acknowledge that the higher the degree of freedom thought to be reached on the scale of progress in the history of humanity, the broader the range of potential methods of oppression?

The 'sublation' of a paradigmatic form as ancient as slavery through universal abolition only fortifies it. To understand the source of this strength, another non-standard form of negation will help, one introduced into discourse by psychoanalytic theory. It provides a kind of coda to the scenario we have examined so far. Unlike Hegelian negation, the Freudian version does not remove but out of hand affirms that which is negated: 'no' means 'yes'⁸. The negative form of expression simply allows us to say what cannot be said– i.e. the truth. Truth, in the Freudian formulation, is, if anything, the truth of desire, rather than the truth of what we consider to be reality. Language uses negation to get around the censor of consciousness. The patient's words, 'You ask who this person in the dream can be. It's not my mother', Freud interprets, as we know, to mean: "'So it is his mother'"⁹. There are things that can only 'reach consciousness'¹⁰ in an inverted form. Here, negation is nothing less than the 'hall-mark of repression, a certificate of origin– like, let us say, "made in Germany"'¹¹.

Upon examining history from a psychoanalytical perspective, rather than *Aufhebung* – or even, in a dialectical way, together with it – the main 'engine of progress' is seen to be repression, which, as Lacan underscores, always coincides with the return of the repressed¹². Thus the preceding layers of our psychohistory do not disappear, yielding their place to their successors, but undergo repression, in order to return in the next breath in new, sometimes terrible forms. Slavery, sublated by the universal formal abolition or repressed by it beyond the borders of the periphery of social consciousness, did not go anywhere, did not disappear, but continues to dwell here, at the very heart of the free contemporary democratic world– not as its accidental aberration, but as its censored memory and unrecognized true nature. This true nature can only be approached from the back door or the back stairs¹³ (like those that were designated for use by the servants and other rabble in bourgeois

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8 See Dolar 2012

9 Freud 1925, p. 235

10 Ibid., p. 236

11 Ibid., p. 237

12 Lacan 1991, pp. 158–159

13 Note that "back door" is translated into Russian as "black entrance door," and "back stairs" as "black stairs."

houses).

However, the precipitous argument that the democratic freedom of the contemporary world is nothing more than empty dogma and ideological tinsel to conceal the harsh truth of the cruel exploitation of human beings in numbers exceeding those of ancient slavery should be considered worthy of discussion only at the level of everyday common sense– and dispensed with as rather uninteresting. Our hypothesis here will consist of a different argument, at first glance more paradoxical: the Aristotelian claim that democracy is founded on freedom does not, we assert, lose its meaning when juxtaposed with the existence of a black market in slaves.

The point here is not that the freedom of the contemporary world is compromised by slavery, or that we nonetheless have a democracy that is somehow inauthentic, or that the creeping proliferation of slavery in some way poses a threat to democratic freedoms. Slavery, by definition, is contrary to freedom, but this contradiction is dialectical in character. There is a point where the two opposing forces meet. Let us remember that in the time of Aristotle it was precisely slaves who guaranteed citizens of the polis the freedom essential to their implementation of democracy, administration of government, and even their philosophy: through their work, the slaves *freed* the citizens, and it was precisely that freedom, guaranteed by the slaves, that was the core element of Athenian democracy. So the question, it appears, is not how it happened that democratic freedoms today organically coexist with unprecedented levels of slavery. The question is something else: if the basic element of democracy is freedom, then what is the basic element of freedom?

This Space Could Be Love's

The most well-known and oft-quoted example of an analysis of slavery in the history of philosophy is the fourth chapter of Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*, dealing with the dialectic of master and slave. That text is so difficult and multilayered that practically every philosopher worthy of consideration since Hegel has tried to find a new approach to cracking it open– hence the wealth of clashing interpretations. Opinions, including positive ones, were expressed on slavery in philosophy before Hegel as well: the first order of business in this regard is usually referencing the regrettably famous justification of slavery made by Aristotle, who in the *Politics* (the same place where he writes about freedom as the source of democracy) declares that some people are slaves 'by nature' and are therefore better off living in subordination

to those whose station is higher¹⁴. In antiquity, in the Middle Ages, and in modern times various definitions of slavery have been put forward and a variety of arguments for and against it have been made. In the process, slavery has been examined as, on the one hand, the really existing institutional social practice of forced labor, and on the other, as a metaphor for spiritual dependence, for unfreedom in general. However, it was in the *Phenomenology of Spirit* that slavery was endowed with its full significance as a philosophical concept, concentrating both of these meanings in the complex knot that so many have been keen to untangle.

The Phenomenology of Spirit is Hegel's first major, system-forming work. In it, he presents an outline of the science whose object is the form of 'phenomenal knowledge.'¹⁵ Immersion in these forms is realized as an experience of consciousness, or as the life of the spirit, passing through stages in the study of its own morphogenesis toward the level of science. That is what we call absolute idealism: the spirit passes through a defined path, or rather, is itself the path through which it passes; a path passing through itself. Hegel calls it 'the path of despair'. Why? Because the forms of phenomenal knowledge through which the path to truth leads are themselves obsolete, inauthentic, untrue forms. We not only doubt the material integrity of things, doubt ourselves, doubt others – we despair time and time again, we do not see the exit– nd there is none: each step leads into a dead end. And suddenly from this same dead end and nothingness, despair disgorges us, separating and alienating us from untrue form. It is as if we jump out, hind-foremost, and thereby manage to 'catch' it, like a photographer who jumps out of a burning house without letting go of his camera.

In order for this movement of surmounting and self-surmounting, contrary to natural inertia, common sense, and so on, to become understandable and habitual, we should patiently practice dialectics, which, as Hegel himself, according to legend, aptly noted, cannot be articulated either briefly, or popular, or in French'¹⁶. Here, for the time being, it suffices to imagine the self-traversing path somehow in reverse: each of its previous stages only becomes truly functional in the moment when it is sublated: traversed, known, understood, lived, and survived in despair. The life of spirit is an afterlife. In each of its forms here and now, revealed in this moment to be untrue, spirit was itself until it survived its own self. Surviving itself, it becomes functional as a form of concept, and from a concept develops into absolute knowledge and thus reappropriates

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¹⁴ Aristotle 2013, p. 9

¹⁵ Hegel 2008, p. 78

¹⁶ Gulyga 2008, p. 250

itself as history and as science.

As far as history, Hegel says that it constitutes ‘mindful, self-mediating coming-to-be’,¹⁷ in which spirit remembers itself.¹⁸ From what kind of oblivion does it remember itself? –We could have responded to such a ‘Heideggerian’ question with another Heideggerian answer, ‘the oblivion of being’, and Heidegger in fact, in his introduction to the Introduction to *Phenomenology of Spirit*, defines the experience of consciousness as ‘to expound what constitutes the thingness of the thing’,¹⁹ thereby reading into Hegel his own problematic of being of beings; if it were the Hegelian unforgettable, pure being would not be identical with nothingness.²⁰ In fact the Hegelian spirit remembers itself from the very oblivion of itself. Not from being or from nothingness (which in themselves do not exist, or rather, each of which in itself only amounts to its opposite), but only from becoming, from the transition of being into nothingness, from its own self-oblivious movement outside itself, at every turn of which consciousness and the world reflect each other and negate each other. History simultaneously presents both memory and oblivion, a syncope of the spirit in which it unfolds before itself as something not its own. The forms of phenomenal knowledge are just such traversed moments of self-alienation, one of which is slavery.

In *Phenomenology of Spirit*, Hegel, unlike Aristotle and other authors, does not write from the position of a master about how to deal with slaves, whether slavery is right or wrong, whether slaves should be freed or not. Slavery is not good or bad. It is a form of phenomenal knowledge at the level where consciousness, led outside itself by the fragile certainty of sensual things, approaches itself as a thing, testing the truth of its own self-certainty. Before us we no longer have simply consciousness (it must be admitted that consciousness is never a simple thing, and if it is, then not simply simple, for any kind of simplicity is formed in retroactively through mediation). What we have before us is self-consciousness: something is happening with consciousness that rather resembles what happened in the previous stage– in chapter of Phenomenology (Consciousness) – with the world of things: a split into ‘in-itself’ and ‘for-itself’, which furthermore is essentially possible only for an Other.

Let us remember that in Western, primarily French, twentieth-

17 Hegel 2008, p. 734

18 Ibid., p. 735

19 Heidegger 1994, p. 85

20 Hegel 2010, p. 59

century philosophy – in existentialism, phenomenology, structuralism and post-structuralism, psychoanalysis, and deconstruction – the Other is reckoned among the most important problems. But if the question is raised as to where that other came from, how he entered, the answer should be looked for precisely here, in Hegel, in his *Science of Logic*, *Encyclopedia of Philosophical Sciences*, and of course, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, especially in the fourth chapter, where the spirit has a prominent part in the dialectic of master and slave: ‘Self-consciousness exists *in* and *for* itself because and by way of its existing in and for itself for an other ...’²¹. Hegel discovers the Other for philosophy. The relationship with the Other, without which there would be no self, consists of such elements as desire, power and struggle. Desire (*Begierde*) points to the existence of objects independent from the self, whom self-consciousness, in order to achieve self-certainty, negates, but at the same time produces over and over again: one after another, objects of desire flash before us. The desiring activity of self-consciousness cannot bring itself to focus on any one of them, insofar as these objects in their self-sufficiency are ‘... the universal, indestructible substance, the fluid essence in-parity-with-itself’²². Self-consciousness is intended to achieve satisfaction not in the object, but in another self-consciousness like itself.

This space could belong to love. As Jean Hippolyte notes in his authoritative commentary, ‘it would have been possible to present the duality of self-consciousnesses and their unity in the element of life as the dialectic of love’²³. However, love, that ‘lacks the seriousness, the suffering, the patience, and the labor of the negative’²⁴, preoccupies Hegel much less in the *Phenomenology* than power as a kind of paramount truth of the relationship to the Other (including– let us observe parenthetically – as the truth of a love relationship; it is said, after all, that ‘love is power’). Self-consciousness could find satisfaction if the self and the Other, encountering each other via their desires, recognized each other ‘recognizing each other’—such is the ‘pure concept of recognition’²⁵. But in the experience, at the moment of this encounter self-consciousness acts as inequality and divides into two extreme terms, ‘which are, as extreme terms, opposed to each other, and of which one is merely

21 Hegel 2008, p. 164

22 Hegel 2008, p. 163

23 Hyppolite 1974, p. 164

24 Hegel 2008, p. 16

25 Ibid., p. 167

recognized while the other merely recognizes'²⁶.

The basic relationship to the Other is not love, but the struggle for recognition, out of which one emerges as master, the other as slave. At stake in the struggle is life: he who risks his, exhibiting valor, will be master. He thus demonstrates his independence from the physical conditionality of individual life, his freedom. He who values life more than freedom, who clings to his life, recognizes another as his master and will be his slave. 'The relation of both self-consciousnesses is thus determined in such a way that it is through a life and death struggle that each proves his worth to himself, and that both prove their worth to each other. –They must engage in this struggle, for each must elevate his self-certainty of existing for himself to truth, both in the other and in himself. And it is solely by staking one's life that freedom is proven to be the essence [...] The individual who has not risked his life may admittedly be recognized as a person, but he has not achieved the truth of being recognized as a self-sufficient self-consciousness'²⁷. As the most elementary kind of example of such a direct confrontation with the Other, we might consider how slave ranks were formed in antiquity– through the acquisition of war captives who survived defeat at the price of their freedom.

From that point unfolds the famous dialectic, in which the slave serves as a mediating link between master and thing. In order for the apparent object of desire, a thing in the world of things, to provide satisfaction to the master, the slave subjects it to processes of elaboration, depriving it of its primordial autonomy and making it available for consumption. 'On account of the thing's self-sufficiency, desire did not achieve this much, but the master, who has interposed the servant between the thing and himself, thereby merely links up with the non-self-sufficiency of the thing and simply consumes it. He leaves the aspect of its self-sufficiency in the care of the servant, who works on the thing'²⁸. In order for there to be sweet sugar on the master's table, someone must grow, gather, and process the sugar cane. In this, in fact, we see the essence of labor. But not only in this. While the master is enjoying his dominance, prestige, recognition and direct access to material goods, the slave is developing himself and by means of his work is actively transforming the surrounding world.

Labor is the negative relationship to reality through which, according to Hegel, the acquisition of the self-consciousness of authentic

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26 Ibid., p. 167

27 Ibid., pp. 168-169

28 Ibid., p. 172

autonomy is possible. The thing processed by the slave participates in the process of his self-education, or formation: in laboring, it is as if he were creating things out of their very nothingness, out of his own nothingness. The master, after all, is on a downward path, his freedom is revealed to be inauthentic– reveling in consumption, he is not self-sufficient; he is helpless in his dependence on the slave: 'the *truth* of the self-sufficient consciousness is the *servile consciousness*'²⁹. It is through work, not through consumption, that a free, thinking consciousness is born. Slavery, not mastery, paves the complex path to freedom. As Althusser writes in his short essay 'Man, That Night': 'The triumph of freedom in Hegel is not the triumph of any freedom whatever: it is not the mightiest who prevails in the end; history shows, rather, that human freedom is engendered by the slave'³⁰.

Unrestrained Anthropocentrism

Among specialists in the field of interpreting the *Phenomenology of Spirit* and that passage in particular, a decisive consensus has yet to be reached concerning what Hegel is 'really' saying. Is he speaking of slavery in terms of an eternal symbol of coercion and self-restraint, as a recurring structure, in the form of a matrix that reproduces itself endlessly, or in terms of the description of a particular, bygone historical era in antiquity? Where does the encounter of slave and master take place? In the ether, on earth, in history, in theory, or in our heads? Does their struggle represent a social antagonism or the duality within one consciousness? I hold to the unassuming and undistinguished idea that the dialectic of master and slave unfolds on all of these levels (which at the same time themselves displace and negate each other) at once, but other, more radical theories exist as well.

The most controversial treatment of the Hegelian dialectic of master and slave belongs to Alexandre Kojève. Precisely this interpretation exerted enormous influence on all mid-twentieth century French thought, which was extremely responsive in particular to such themes as desire and the Other. Kojève's interpretation bases itself on a presupposition which I find unconvincing– namely, that negativity, which Hegel links to the historical unfolding of spirit, is the exclusive property of human beings: "Spirit" in Hegel (and especially in this context) means "*human Spirit*" or *Man*, more particularly, collective Man— that is, the People or State, and, finally, Man as a whole or humanity in the totality of

.....
29 Ibid., p. 104

30 Althusser 2014, p. 172

its spatial-temporal existence, that is, the totality of universal History³¹. For Kojève, any negation of the material fact of being always presupposes an active, causative human subject. For all of his ostensible faithfulness to the Hegelian letter, Kojève transforms the *Phenomenology* into a kind of historical anthropology, from which any and all nonhuman elements are excluded.

Whereas for Hegel, the negative is restlessness, the impossibility of staying in one place, movement outward from the self, alteration— it is the main element of ontology, which for that reason teaches neither about being nor nonbeing, but about becoming, which draws everything in the world inside it, for Kojève it becomes a description of human existence. In the Hegelian world, neither elements of inorganic nature, nor plants, animals, or any other being, are alien to negation; the essence of any such being can and must therefore be understood and expressed ‘not merely as *substance* but also equally as *subject*’³². Each entity relates with its otherness— with that which it is not, with the Other— in a state of contradiction, out of which truth is born through negation. As Hegel writes in the *Philosophy of Nature*: ‘[t]he animal world is the truth of the vegetable world’³³ – and at the same time its death: ‘[t]he animal process is higher than the nature of the plant, and constitutes its destruction’³⁴. Kojève hurriedly discards the *Philosophy of Nature*, finding therein only idealism and the spiritualization of matter, and thus loses sight of this fundamental moment³⁵, confining the horizon of negativity to a single solitary species which, having appeared on Earth, suddenly transforms nature into History. Nature itself and all nonhuman being, as a space deprived of negativity and time, remain somewhere in parentheses. The ‘experience of consciousness’ is transformed into the history of humanity, which starts from the primal scene of the encounter between two people.

For Kojève, the master and slave are not two parts of one and the same self-consciousness, but literally two different people. They meet and enter into a battle of desires. Each participant in this battle wants to be recognized in his human dignity, but recognition is given only to the one who goes all the way and demonstrates his fearlessness by risking his life. It may be said that this is the precise moment where Kojève demarcates the boundary of the human— the line that separates man from

31 Kojève 1969, p. 138

32 Hegel 2008, p. 15

33 Hegel 1970/1, p. 213

34 Hegel 1970/3, p. 101

35 imofeeva 2013

the natural and animal world, wherein the slave, shackled by fear for his life, remains and abides. In the negativity of work, however, he overcomes his slavery, acquires self-sufficient self-consciousness and, in the end, becomes free.

To attain that state, though, it was necessary to cross over through slavery. As Kojève notes quite aptly: ‘... to be able to cease being a slave, he must have been a slave’³⁶. Being master merely means to be the “catalyst” of the History that will be realized, completed, and “revealed” by the Slave or the ex-Slave who has become a Citizen³⁷. It is not the master, but the slave, he who was initially refused recognition of his human dignity, who achieves authentic freedom, in which he makes the historical essence of humanity a reality. When this fulfilment reaches its plenitude, history, composed of wars and revolutions, ends. None will be slaves any more, for all are citizens of the total, homogeneous state of universal mutual recognition. In fact, according to Kojève, this state has already been achieved, and Hegel’s *Phenomenology* bears witness to nothing less than the end of history, embodied in the Napoleonic Empire, after which ‘there will never more be anything new on earth’ (Kojève 1969: 168). Popular interpretations (such as Fukuyama’s) here insert the idea of capitalist globalization, or of liberal democracy, gradually spreading to all countries of this world in which slavery has been overthrown and a declaration of rights that recognizes each person in his or her human dignity has universal validity.

If we go back to the Hegelian dialectic to ascertain what exactly does not fit here, we find that Hegel never states outright that human beings constitute the focus of his argument. Perhaps for Kojève that was obvious, but for us, it is no longer so. Nevertheless, in the unrestrained anthropocentrism of his interpretation there is something extremely curious for a symptomatic reading: do not these insistently repeated litanies of the human essence of freedom, which today appear rather inescapably comical, indicate what is being repressed or forgotten here, namely the nonhuman essence of unfreedom, out of which slavery builds both history and freedom? As Georges Bataille observes, contemplating in particular the feasibility of Kojève’s theory, human dignity, the struggle for which is a fight to the death, ‘is not distributed equally among all men’³⁸, and until inequality has been eradicated, history will not end. Inequality among people cannot be eradicated to the extent that it is founded upon another kind of inequality— between

36 Kojève 1969, p. 47

37 Ibid.

38 Bataille 1991, p. 333

humans and nonhumans. As long as universal humanity affirms its human nature and freedom at the expense of another— for example, an animal— there will exist those who are denied recognition of their humanity. This is, incidentally, why Bataille does not believe in communism and the classless society: ‘The man of “classless society” owes the value in the name of which he destroyed the classes to the very impulse that divided humanity into classes’: human dignity grows out of the negation of the nonhuman³⁹.

This perspective allows us to shed some light on certain aspects of contemporary slavery. Why is it so difficult to examine it in the context of human rights violations? Because in the legal context of contemporary bourgeois nation-states there exists a confusion between human rights and civil rights. Those who are deprived of civil rights— primarily stateless persons, illegal migrants, refugees— fall into a kind of gray zone, where the validity of human rights has yet to make itself strongly felt. The basic guarantor of rights and freedoms is, in the final reckoning, the state, whose free citizens are human beings. Where there is no citizen, there is no human being— that is precisely how the situation is viewed by black market agents whose first order of business is to remove the documents that prove a person’s identity. As in the archaic situation of prisoners of war, the price of life becomes freedom. And in precisely the same way, just as Hegel explained it, contemporary refugees often settle and take up servile, forced or ill-paid work in countries that are waging war on their own soil.

Each citizen is free. As in the time of Aristotle, freedom belongs to the citizen, but in the universal state according to Kojève all are citizens. They are proceeding toward their own freedom via slavery, not dependent on the work of others like the idle, consumption-crazed masters of antiquity. Today’s slaves are undocumented or overlooked statistical units. They somehow exist, yet it is as if they were not there. If we speak of the free citizen of the contemporary capitalist society, then what, we must ask, differentiates him a) from the free citizen of the ancient polis and b) from the slave of that same ancient polis? In the first instance, the answer is that the contemporary free citizen in most cases works, and in the second, that in most cases he exchanges his labor for money (where the slave exchanges it for life, food, lodging, and so on). Money thus acts as a kind of recognition of the human, a universal equivalent and measure of human dignity.

In Marx’s view, on the other hand, there is no significant structural difference between the slave and the wage-worker— as he writes in the

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39 Bataille 1991, p. 337

Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844, alienated labor for money is just as coercive as slave labor⁴⁰. Among Marx’s ‘scholastic’ works, that one is the most humanistic. It deals with the way that the human essence becomes alienated in wage labor. The worker goes to work in order to be able to get up and go to work the next day. The wretched infrastructure of the regeneration of his labor-power (the landlords of rented basement apartments, these dirty forms of ‘cave dwelling’, threaten at any moment to throw the worker out into the street for failure to pay ⁴¹ bears witness to the fact that his subjectivity is constituted around the loss of the essence of his humanity. At the same time, real power belongs to money, which stands ‘between man’s need and the object, between his life and his means of life’, between me and the other person, whose love, whose kiss I wish to buy⁴².

Living Dead

‘The need for money is for that reason the real need created by the modern economic system, and the only need it creates’ – in the revised edition of the *Society of the Spectacle*, Guy Debord links this conclusion of Marx’s directly to the Hegelian theory of money presented in his *Jenenser Realphilosophie*⁴³. Money here operates as a materialized concept, a form of unity of all existing things: ‘Need and labor, elevated into this universality, then form on their own account a monstrous system of community and mutual interdependence in a great people; a life of the dead body, that moves itself within itself [...], and which requires continual strict dominance and taming like a wild beast’⁴⁴. It is curious that in this work, written not long before the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, Hegel, describing the civil society of his time, already speaks of recognition, based on property, but does not yet speak about slavery. The master and slave appear in his philosophy in the period 1805-1806. As Susan Buck-Morss asserts, this is not accidental: the dialectic of master and slave does not emerge from the philosopher’s head, but from the very historical reality that shaped him.

‘No one has dared to suggest that the idea for the dialectic of lordship and bondage came to Hegel in Jena in the years 1803-5 from reading the press— journals and newspapers. And yet this selfsame

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40 rx 2007, pp. 23, 81

41 arx 2007, p. 125

42 Ibid., p. 135

43 Debord 1992, p. 62

44 Hegel 1979, p. 249

Hegel, in this very Jena period during which the master-slave dialectic was first conceived, made the following notation: “Reading the newspaper in early morning is a kind of realistic morning prayer. One orients one’s attitude against the world and toward God [in one case], or toward that which the world is [in the other]. The former gives the same security as the latter, in that one knows where one stands” – thus Buck-Morss, quoting Hegel, in her book *Hegel, Haiti, and Universal History*⁴⁵, persuasively shows that the Hegelian dialectic of master and slave is not simply a commonplace explanatory philosophical metaphor, corresponding to the two-faced Western discourse of emancipation.

In Buck-Morss’s view, what Hegel is really writing about is not the symbolic slavery from whose chains the ideologues of the French Revolution call for breaking free, but the real slavery in those very French colonies on which the Revolution kept its eyes shut, as if emancipation were solely a matter for those with white skin. It is not the French Revolution, as has hitherto been thought, that preoccupies Hegel, so much as another revolution that took place in Haiti from 1791 to 1803. That was the first large-scale uprising in history, which led to the overthrow of slavery and the establishment of a self-governing Haitian republic: ‘... the half-million slaves in Saint-Domingue, the richest colony not only of France but of the entire colonial world, took the struggle for liberty into their own hands, not through petitions, but through violent, organized revolt’⁴⁶. Hegel could not have failed to notice an event of such massive dimensions. It was being discussed by all enlightened Germans of the time, readers, without exception, of Archenholz’s journal *Minerva*, in which it received extensively detailed coverage.

‘Conceptually, the revolutionary struggle of slaves, who overthrow their own servitude and establish a constitutional state, provides the theoretical hinge that takes Hegel’s analysis out of the limitlessly expanding colonial economy and onto the plane of world history, which he defines as the realization of freedom – a theoretical solution that was taking place in practice in Haiti at that very moment’, Buck-Morss writes⁴⁷. Haitian slaves were not freed by a decree from on high; they destroyed their hateful masters with their own hands and made themselves free people– was this not the fight to the death of which Hegel spoke in the *Phenomenology*? ‘Mutual recognition among equals emerges with logical necessity out of the contradictions of slavery, not the least of which is trading slaves as, legally, “things”, when they

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45 Buck-Morss 2009, p. 49

46 Buck-Morss, p. 36

47 Ibid., pp. 10-12

show themselves capable of becoming the active agents of history by struggling against slavery in a “battle of recognition” under the banner, “Liberty or Death!””⁴⁸.

Buck-Morss underscores the fact that none of Hegel’s interpreters has previously taken this historical reality into consideration. Nobody cares about Haiti, while every reader strives to see a high-minded metaphor in the Hegelian dialectic– including Marx, for whom it is one description of the class struggle. Furthermore, forgetting real slavery in favor of metaphorical is, in a sense, one of Marxism’s contributions, as it taught us to think history in terms of successive economic formations, and correspondingly to categorize slavery as an outmoded archaism. The matter is, of course, much more complex in Marx, but it is nonetheless impossible not to concur with Buck-Morss that without an understanding of issues at the heart of post-colonial studies and the crucial role of the slave trade in the formation of contemporary capitalism, our reading of the Hegel passage in question is, of course, utterly inadequate⁴⁹. Continuing this line of inquiry in some respects, we must once again place real slavery front and center, this time the contemporary kind, existing in Haiti, incidentally, on a colossal scale: according to the data collected by *Walk Free*, over 200,000 people are currently living in slavery there, most of them children. It appears that after the revolution everything took a turn for the worse, as usual: slavery led not to freedom, but to lordship. Former slaves became masters and themselves took slaves. History began all over again.

Wherein lies the problem? Why does the mechanism of liberation falter? Our suspicion falls on its ‘too human’ character, already indicated in connection with Kojève’s interpretation: the recognition of any person’s human dignity is a moment of masterhood, and a master cannot exist without a slave. Who will work if all are masters? Those who are not or, as it were, ‘are not fully’ human- the unrecognized. In fantastic scenarios of the future, most frequently post-apocalyptic (for example, in Hollywood films), people are rarely truly free, but often are masters whose freedom, as in the past, in Athens, is secured by someone’s slave labor. People have their work done for them by mechanical animals, robots– until the point when self-consciousness emerges in them together with life (the biotechnological utopia).

The living dead could be this kind of future slaves, if they were to return to their mythological and historical roots. It is well known that not only slaves were brought to Haiti from black Africa. Along with

.....
48 Ibid., p. 12

49 See Williams 1944

the slaves, new forms of worship appeared on the new continent— in particular the syncretic cult of voodoo, incorporating elements of African religions, Catholicism, and traditions of the local indigenous peoples (Dutty Boukman, one of the leaders of the first wave of the 1791 uprising who was executed in November of that year, was a voodoo priest). With the cult of voodoo, another new participant staggered out onto the world stage— the zombie, the living corpse, the sorcerer's slave. The zombie is a product of colonialism which, before becoming one of the central post-human figures in contemporary mass culture with its vision of the end of history as the end of the world, was an integral part of Haitian folklore. As Sarah Juliet Lauro and Karen Embry argue in their 'Zombie Manifesto', quoting Wade Davis's *Passage of Darkness: The Ethnobiology of the Haitian Zombie*: 'The roots of the zombie can be traced back to the Haitian Revolution, when reports of the rebelling slaves depicted them as nearly supernatural: "fanatic and insensate hordes of blacks rose as a single body to overwhelm the more 'rational' white troops'"⁵⁰.

There are numerous accounts of how zombies first appeared. According to the most realistic, voodoo sorcerers used poisonous substances to put living people in a coma-like state or one of clinical death, when awoken from which, after having been buried alive, a person retained only certain bodily functions, sufficient to automatically carry out a set of very simple instructions or commands. Aside from the pharmacological, we find other explanations of the zombie phenomenon as well, particularly psychosocial ones. The living dead could, for example, work on sugar-cane plantations at night. In any case, the original meaning of the zombie related not to impersonal evil and destruction, as in contemporary mass culture, but to forced labor.

Before becoming an insensate horde, wandering about the desolate earth in search of human flesh, the living dead were slaves. In the era of colonialism, death appeared to the inhabitants of San Domingo as more or less the only way out from the situation of slavery to which they were condemned in life: a return to their native African land, the soul's passage to a new life. There was therefore no punishment more terrifying than zombification, which reduced the human being to slavery eternally, taking away his last hope of actually dying and thereby becoming free. For Africans in Haiti, zombification represented not only slavery for life, but after life as well. If in Ancient Egypt enslaved captives were called the 'living dead', here the slavery of the dead (or, to be precise, the undead) is understood literally. The slogan of the slaves in revolt, 'Freedom or Death!', takes on deeper meaning in this context. Can death bring

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50 Lauro & Embry 2008, p. 98

liberation, or does the living soul in the slave's dead body continue its grueling labor? Unlike a living human being, the zombie has nothing to grab hold of; he cannot engage in the struggle for recognition, since he has no life either to risk or to cling to by remaining in bondage.

On the other hand, the zombie is also a figure of resurrection. He rises from the dead. Obviously zombies in contemporary mass culture represent a peculiar kind of negative distortion of the old Christian idea of the resurrection of the dead (among the various variations on this idea, we might also name, for example, Russian cosmism). In a certain sense, zombies are immortal souls. Not only does the word 'zombie' come from the Bantu-Congolese *nzambi*, meaning 'god, spirit, soul', but their very existence reveals the impossibility of dying. Zombies are undead souls in dead bodies which they animate and set in motion. Let us remember, among other things, their brain. In many films whose plots deal with zombies, the creatures can only be destroyed by a bullet to the brain. The brain of a zombie, in all likelihood, is the sinister celluloid equivalent of what Christians called the soul. Here is the posthumous afterlife of the human being, from which everything human seems to have been subtracted— memory, reason, feelings, dignity, and so on. He has lost everything, but there is something that rises up in the midst of this very loss.

What if it is precisely from therein, from this maximally nonhuman substance of slavery, that the new radical subject of emancipation is born? Is that not what contemporary culture is hinting at by producing figures of the collective imagination who associate rebellion, protest, the toppling of a repressive regime or unjust lordship with a nonhuman— animal, mechanical or altogether lifeless— element? The machine, the animal, the monster, the insect, the reptile, the doll, the corpse and other archetypal Others reveal themselves in the form of the oppressed, charting the difficult path from life to consciousness, which cannot be traced by any man, for this path lies through the Goethean 'absolute lord' -- death. First they come to life and begin to move, and then to feel, think, and act against the system that does not recognize them as forms of the free citizen, the human being, the subject.

Zombies occupy an exceptional place among such post-human subjects of emancipation— in part due to a certain invulnerability they inherited from their Haitian ancestors, who felt neither heat, cold, or pain, in part due to the despair, that is, the complete absence of any kind of hope whatsoever, that we might call their natural element. Zombies are the survivors, not only of catastrophe (the apocalypse), but of themselves. Together with all humans they have survived and left behind everything that could have rendered them dependent. There are

no sorcerers anymore– the post-apocalyptic zombies are without any masters. They have survived their own slavery and moved beyond the limits of the human with its dialectic of masters and slaves. Thus, in George A. Romero's film *Land of the Dead* (2005), the zombies acquire class consciousness and, as the lowest stratum among the oppressed, take upon themselves and accomplish what we will call the historical revolutionary mission of the proletariat, which has proven beyond the strength of human beings. They learn a new type of collective organization that does not consist of separate human individuals and is founded solely on the despair of those with literally nothing to lose: even their bodies have already lost their integrity. They are driven not by hope, but only by despair, and this despair makes them do impossible things. And what if they have gone through absolute negativity, through the apocalypse, through death and disintegration, through utter hell, to lay the path (let us call it the path of despair, as Hegel would) for some new kind of subjectivity? As long as the human continues to be confused with the citizen, or freedom with lordship, such future scenarios will continue to be vitally relevant.

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The politics of Alienation and Separation: From Hegel to Marx... and Back

Slavoj Žižek

Abstract: The aim of this paper is to reconsider the relation between Marx and Hegel. In doing so, it takes on two crucial concepts that determine this rather complicated relation: that of alienation and separation. In order to discuss and develop the Marx-Hegel relation, the present paper engages with Lacan, Lukacs, Lenin and other theorists.

Keywords: Hegel, alienation, Marx, Lacan, separation

Alienation, Constitutive and Constituted

The topic of alienation plays a central role in so-called “warm” humanist Marxism. To put it briefly, humanist Marxism remains stuck within the confines of the abstract opposition of mechanism and organism, i.e., its vision of overcoming alienation remains that of the early Romantic Hegel. As such, it does not provide a sufficient reply to the “cold” Stalinist orthodoxy – it’s not a solution but part of the problem. It is here that Lacan’s intervention is crucial: it enables us to break out of the alternative between “warm” humanist Marxism which sees the main task of the revolutionary process in the overcoming of alienation and the establishment of a transparent society of free individuals, and the “cold” universe of dialectical and historical materialism with its “objective laws of history,” a world in which there is no place for concepts like alienation. Lacan also asserts a fundamental alienation of the human subject, an alienation which is constitutive of being-human, the alienation in the symbolic order: a human subject is not only a speaking being but, more radically, a being spoken, traversed by language, its truth lies outside itself, in the decentered symbolic order which forever eludes human control; every dream – of “appropriating” this alienated symbolic substance, of subordinating it to human subjectivity – is a humanist illusion... Does, however, this mean that alienation (in the symbolic order) is simply an unsurpassable condition of human subjectivity, a kind of transcendental apriori of being-human? Furthermore, when Marx writes about alienation, it is clear that he perceives the goal of the revolutionary emancipation as the overcoming of alienation; even in his “mature” work where the notion is rarely used, the vision of Communism is clearly that of a society organized in a transparent way and regulated by free collective subjectivity. “The flip side of commodity fetishism is the appearance that there is a more fundamental and unalienated position in the background, a position from which it would be possible to cognize the mistake that determines commodity fetishism”(92) – true, but is precisely this “appearance” not the basic premise not only of the early Marx but also

of the “mature” Marx of the critique of political economy? So it is Marx himself who doesn’t follow consequently the basic axiom of his critique of political economy, the notion of alienation as a structural a priori which implies a gap between knowledge and truth, between a subject fully (self-)conscious of his social position, and the properly politicized subject, a subject caught in an antagonistic process which precludes any self-transparency... If, however, we accept that the alienation of the labor force is unabolishable, what are the precise political implications of this thesis? For Marx, alienation of the labor force is directly identified with its self-commodification – should we then distinguish some more “basic” ontological alienation, a kind of transcendental a priori of human history, from the specific case of self-commodification? To resolve this deadlock, Tomšič introduces

“the distinction between constitutive alienation – alienation that is equivalent to structure – and constituted alienation – for instance, commodity fetishism, which follows from the misperception of the relation between the appearance of value and the structure that causes this appearance.”¹

Conceived in this way, Communism does not stand for the end of alienation but merely for the end of the commodity form as the form of social relations, i.e., not for the end of “constitutive” alienation but merely for the end of a historically specific form of “constituted” alienation – however, the question to be raised here is: but is the greatest illusion not the illusion that we can get the “pure” constitutive alienation without its fetishist mystification? How, then, can we bring together Marx and Lacan? Tomšič formulates the alternative between humanist-subjectivist Marxism and his version of reading Marx through Lacan in the following terms:

“Does a radical political program of liberation necessitate the dissolution of the link between subjectivity and negativity? Should one not, rather, determine the subject of politics by following Marx’s example when he recognized in the proletariat the symptomatic and negative point, from which the capitalist mode of production can be undermined?”²

But a Lukacsean Hegelo-Marxist approach has no difficulty in fully asserting the link between subjectivity and negativity – within

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1 Tomšič 2015, p.92

2 Ibid., p.234.

this approach, proletariat is precisely “negative point, from which the capitalist mode of production can be undermined.” In combining the assertion of proletarian subjectivity (as that of radical negativity) with the project of liberation as overcoming of alienation, the young Lukacs remains within the basic coordinates of Marx’s thought – for Marx, the “critique of political economy” (with its notions of alienation, labor force as the self-commodified subjectivity, etc.) is only meaningful on the background of the vision of a non-alienated self-transparent society. In other words, Marx’s theory simply does not provide the theoretical apparatus to think some more primordial and constitutive alienation that precedes the alienation imposed by capitalism. In order to conceive correctly this Marxian notion of proletariat, of the proletarian subjective position, one has to distinguish this subjective position from the “orthodox” Stalinist notion of Communist Party as the bearer of the objective knowledge” about the historical process. Lacan himself is guilty of confusing the two:

“The proletariat means what? It means that labour is radicalized on the level of pure and simple commodity, which also reduces the labourer to the same price. As soon as the labourer learns to know himself as such through theory, we can say that this step shows him the way to the status of – call it what you want – a scientist [savant]. He is no longer a proletarian *an sich*, if I may say so, he is no longer pure and simple truth, but he is *für sich*, what we call class-consciousness. He can even become the Party’s class-consciousness where one no longer speaks the truth.”³

Lacan clearly conflates here two distinct positions, two distinct notions of class consciousness. First, the Stalinist notion of consciousness as “objective knowledge,” a cognition of objective social reality with no immanent practical dimension – praxis enters afterwards, i.e., after I get to know how things objectively stand, I decide to act accordingly. This is how Stalinist Marxism distinguishes between scientific theory and proletarian ideology: first, objective theory provides a true insight into reality; then, on the basis of this insight, revolutionary party develops a revolutionary ideology in order to mobilize the working class and their allies. It is in this sense that, in his “On Dialectical and Historical Materialism,” Stalin wrote how

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3 Lacan 2006, p.173

“we must not base our orientation on the strata of society which are no longer developing, even though they at present constitute the predominant force, but on those strata which are developing and have a future before them, even though they at present do not constitute the predominant force. / In the eighties of the past century, in the period of the struggle between the Marxists and the Narodniks, the proletariat in Russia constituted an insignificant minority of the population, whereas the individual peasants constituted the vast majority of the population. But the proletariat was developing as a class, whereas the peasantry as a class was disintegrating. And just because the proletariat was developing as a class the Marxists based their orientation on the proletariat. And they were not mistaken; for, as we know, the proletariat subsequently grew from an insignificant force into a first-rate historical and political force. / Hence, in order not to err in policy, one must look forward, not backward.”⁴

In short, first I establish through a cold objective analysis which is the winning horse, and then only I put my bets on... a stance totally opposed to that of Lukacs who, in his *History and Class-Consciousness*, uses “(self)consciousness” not as a term for passive reception/representation or awareness, but as the unity of intellect and will: “(self)consciousness” is inherently practical, it changes its subject-object – once the working class arrives at its adequate class consciousness, it changes into an actual revolutionary subject in its very social reality. The idea that knowing changes reality is what quantum physics shares with psychoanalysis (for which interpretation has effects in the real) as well as with historical materialism for whom the act of acquiring self-consciousness of the proletariat (of becoming aware of its historical mission) changes its object - through this awareness, proletariat in its very social reality turns into a revolutionary subject. Adorno mentioned somewhere that every great philosophy is a variation on the ontological proof of God’s existence: an attempt to pass directly from thought to being, first formulated by Parmenides in his assertion of the sameness of thinking and being. Even Marx belongs to this line: is his idea of “class consciousness” not precisely that of a thought which directly intervenes into social being. The ontological paradox of this Lukacsean position is that it combines universal truth with radical “partiality,” with taking side (for the oppressed in the class struggle): a universal truth can only be accessed from an engaged “partial” position; every stance of neutrality

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4 Stalin 1938

(“to see the truth, one should elevate oneself above the melee of particular struggles”) is false, it masks its own hidden partiality.

Lacan thus blurs the distinction between the dialectical-materialist notion of Consciousness as the cognitive reflection of objective reality, as a medium passively mirroring it, and Georg Lukacs’s notion (deployed in his *History and Class Consciousness*) of the act of Self-Consciousness as the constitution of a historical agent, an act of cognition which changes the object of cognition - this “performative” dimension is what is missing in dialectical materialist notion of cognition. What disappears thereby is the surprising proximity of Lukacs and Lacan who is interested precisely in how the gestures of symbolization are entwined with and embedded in the process of collective practice. What Lacan elaborates as the “twofold moment” of the symbolic function reaches far beyond the standard theory of the performative dimension of speech as it was developed in the tradition from J.L. Austin to John Searle:

“The symbolic function presents itself as a twofold movement in the subject: man makes his own action into an object, but only to return its foundational place to it in due time. In this equivocation, operating at every instant, lies the whole progress of a function in which action and knowledge alternate.”⁵

The historical example evoked by Lacan to clarify this “twofold movement” is indicative in its hidden references:

“in phase one, a man who works at the level of production in our society considers himself to belong to the ranks of the proletariat; in phase two, in the name of belonging to it, he joins in a general strike.”⁶

One can venture that Lacan’s (implicit) reference here is Lukacs’ *History and Class Consciousness* whose widely acclaimed French translation was published in mid-1950s. For Lukacs, consciousness is opposed to the mere knowledge of an object: knowledge is external to the known object, while consciousness is in itself ‘practical’, an act which changes its very object. (Once a worker “considers himself to belong to the ranks of the proletariat,” this changes his very reality: he acts differently.) One does something, one counts oneself as (declares

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5 Lacan 2007, p.72-73

6 Ibid.

oneself) the one who did it, and, on the base of this declaration, one does something new – the proper moment of subjective transformation occurs at the moment of declaration, not at the moment of act. Marx's name for such engaged universality is "proletariat," which is why the following observation misses the point:

"One can sometimes hear astonishment over the fact that Marx does not use the term 'proletariat' or 'proletarian' in Capital. He does not need to because 'labor power', 'surplus population' and 'industrial reserve army' designate the very same subjective position."(89)

"Surplus population" and "industrial reserve army" precisely do not designate a subjective position – they are empirical social categories. In a subtle implicit way (not unlike Freud's implicit distinction, unearthed by Lacan, between Ego-Ideal and superego), Marx does distinguish between proletariat (a subjective position) and working class (an objective social category).

Marx and Lacan

This brings us with all force to the question:

"what does the combination 'Marx and Lacan' stand for? Lacan next to Marx questions the optimistic and humanist readings, according to which Marx's critique aims to break out of symbolic determinations, negativity and alienation. Marx next to Lacan questions the pessimistic and apolitical readings, according to which Lacan's reformulation of the structuralist project supposedly amounts to the recognition of the 'universal madness' and autism of *jouissance* which dissolve the social links, and to the affirmation of the discursive a priori which determines human actions and presumably reveals the illusory features of every attempt in radical politics."(237)

What does this "third way" (neither naïve Marxist idea of sexual and economic liberation which allows us to break out of alienation nor psychoanalytic dismissal of every revolutionary project as imaginary illusion) effectively amount to? It is all too easy to resolve the problem by way of introducing a distinction between general alienation constitutive of humankind and commodity alienation as one of its species (or historical forms): capitalism gives birth to a de-substantialized subject

and, in this way, functions as a unique symptomatic point of entire history. We should mobilize here the dialectic of universal and particular: in the same way Marx simultaneously claimed that all hitherto history is the history of class struggles, *and* that bourgeoisie is the only true class in the history of humanity, we should say that all history is the history of alienation *and* that the only true alienation is the capitalist one.

It seems that Hegel himself misses this dialectical coincidence of opposites when, in his political thought, he criticizes universal democracy as abstract-formal: individuals partake directly in the universal, by way of casting their vote as abstract individuals, independently of their concrete position in the social edifice. Against this immediacy which prevents any actual representation, Hegel advocates corporate representation mediated by my particular belonging to an estate: I participate in the universal through my engagement in some specific field which constitutes my concrete identity (an artisan, a farmer, a professor...). What Hegel ignores here is the fact that in our societies, as a rule, the particular place that I occupy in the social edifice is deeply antagonistic, it is experienced as thwarting the full deployment of my potentials. What he ignores is a class antagonism that cuts across the entire social edifice – it is being caught in this antagonism that makes a subject universal, it is antagonism that cannot be reduced to particularity. More precisely, when and how do I experience myself as universal (subject), i.e., when does my universality become "for myself," a feature of how I relate to myself, not just "in itself," not just my objective property? When I am brutally dislocated from my particular identity. Say, how does my desire become universal? Through its hystericization, when no particular object can satisfy it, when, apropos every particular object, I experience how "*ce n'est pas ça!* (That's not it!)". This is why, for Marx, proletariat is the universal class: because it is a class which is a non-class, which cannot identify itself as a class. We thus have to turn around the standard Platonic notion of particularity as a failed universality, as a fall from the purity of the universal Idea: the Universal only emerges at the site of a failed particularity. Jean-Claude Milner wrote:

"Value represents what of labour-power is contained in each object that carries value, but it can only represent it in commodity exchange, that is, for another value. But labour-power is simply the subject. It is Marx's name for the subject."⁷

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7 Milner 2011, p.90

It is true that, for Marx, labor force is subject in the precise Hegelian sense of *substanzlose Subjektivitaet*, the zero-point of pure potentiality deprived of any substantial content.⁸ Fanon wrote in *Black Skin, White Masks*:

“There is a zone of non-being, an extraordinary sterile and arid region, an utterly bare downward slope from which an authentic upheaval can be born. In most cases, the black man lacks the advantage of being able to accomplish this descent into a real hell.”⁹

Not all black men lack this advantage: Malcolm X was certainly aware that, in order to reach freedom, one has to descend into the European Hell... While in prison, the young Malcolm joined the Nation of Islam, and, after his parole in 1952, he engaged in its struggle, advocating black supremacy and the separation of white and black Americans – for him, “integration” was a fake attempt of the black to become like the White. However, in 1964, he rejected the Nation of Islam and, while continuing to emphasize black self-determination and self-defense, he distanced himself from every form of racism, advocating emancipatory universality; as a consequence of this “betrayal,” he was killed by three Nation of Islam members in February 1965. When Malcolm adopted X as his family name, thereby signalling that the slave traders who brought the enslaved Africans from their homeland brutally deprived them of their family and ethnic roots, of their entire cultural life-world, the point of this gesture was not to mobilize the blacks to fight for the return to some primordial African roots, but precisely to seize the opening provided by X, an unknown new (lack of) identity engendered by the very process of slavery which made the African roots forever lost. The idea is that this X which deprives the blacks of their particular tradition offers a unique chance to redefine (reinvent) themselves, to freely form a new identity much more universal than white people’s professed universality. Although Malcolm X found this new identity in the universalism of Islam, he was killed by Muslim fundamentalists. Therein resides the hard choice to be made: yes, Blacks are marginalized, exploited, humiliated, mocked, also feared, at the level of everyday practices, yes, they experience daily the hypocrisy of liberal freedoms and human rights, but in the

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⁸What raises a question is Milner’s implicit reference to Lacan’s formula of the signifier (which represents the subject for another signifier): is the appropriate homology not that of exchange-value and use-value where, as Marx put it, the exchange-value of a commodity can only be represented in the use-value of another commodity?

⁹ Fanon 1967, p.8

same movement they experience the promise of true freedom with regard to which the existing freedom is false – it is THIS freedom that fundamentalists escape.

What this means is that, in the struggle for Black emancipation, one should leave behind the lament for the loss of authentic African roots – let’s live this lament to TV series like the one based on Alex Haley’s *Roots*. Consequently, instead of desperately searching for our authentic roots, the task is to lose our roots in an authentic way – this loss is the birth of emancipatory subjectivity. To put it in speculative Hegelian terms (and one of the great points of Glick’s book is a continuing reference to Hegel), the true loss is the loss of the loss itself: when a black African is enslaved and torn out of his roots, he in a way not only loses these roots - retroactively he has to realize that he never really fully had these roots. What he, after this loss, experiences as his roots is a retroactive fantasy, a projection filling in the void.

The Politics of Separation

Is, however, this contraction of subjectivity to a substanceless evanescent point, the ultimate fact? In other words, is alienation the unsurpassable horizon of our existence? Although Tomši seems to endorse this notion, he points the way beyond it when he claims that

“constitutive alienation does not address solely the alienation of the subject but above all the alienation of the Other: it makes the Other appear in its split, incompleteness, contradiction and therefore inexistence. The correlate of this inexistence is the existence of the subject, the actual agency of the revolutionary process, which, however, does not assume the position of knowledge but the place of truth, as Lacan persistently repeated. Because the subject is produced, brought into existence in and through the gap in the Other, in other words, because there is a social entity, the proletariat, which articulates a universal demand for change in the name of all (being the social embodiment of a universal subjective position), this very enunciation grounds politics on the link between inexistence, alienation and universality.”¹⁰

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¹⁰Tomši 2015, pp.92-93. However, in Lacan’s formula of the discourse of the analyst, knowledge and truth are no longer opposed, they coincide as element and place: in this discourse, knowledge is not replaced by truth, it occupies the place of truth. It is in the Master’s discourse that subject occupies the place of truth.

One should be careful when one talks about “constitutive alienation.” There are two (main) ways to think the topic of alienation. From the humanist perspective, alienation is conceived as a temporal inversion, a state of things which should be set straight when humanity will succeed in re-appropriating the alienated substance of its existence. From the tragic perspective, alienation is irreducible since it is constitutive of being-human, grounded in the finitude of human existence. Lacan’s theory is unique in how it proposes a third position: alienation is not our ultimate destiny, it can be overcome, but not in the triumphalist humanist sense. For Lacan, alienation is by definition *subject’s* alienation, and Lacan has a specific concept for the “alienation of the Other” – *separation*. The core of Lacan’s atheism is best discerned in the conceptual couple of “alienation” and “separation” which he develops in his *Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-Analysis*.¹¹ In a first approach, the big Other stands for the subject’s alienation in the symbolic order: the big Other pulls the strings, the subject doesn’t speak, he is “spoken” by the symbolic structure. In short, this “big Other” is the name for the social substance, for all that on account of which the subject never fully dominates the effects of his acts, i.e. on account of which the final outcome of his activity is always something other than what he aimed at or anticipated. Separation takes place when the subject takes note of how the big Other is in itself inconsistent, lacking (“barred,” as Lacan liked to put it): the big Other doesn’t possess what the subject is lacking. In separation, the subject experiences how his own lack with regard to the big Other is already the lack that affects the big Other itself. To recall Hegel’s immortal dictum apropos of the Sphinx: “The enigmas of the Ancient Egyptians were enigmas also for the Egyptians themselves.” Along the same lines, the elusive, impenetrable *Dieu obscur* has to be impenetrable also to Himself; He has to have a dark side, something that is in Him more than Himself.¹²

The same goes for Christianity: we are not FIRST separated from God and THEN miraculously united with him; the point of Christianity is that the very separation unites us – it is in this separation that we are “like God,” like Christ on the cross, i.e., the separation of us from God is transposed into God himself. So when Meister Eckhart speaks about how, in order to open oneself to the grace of God, to allow Christ to be born in one’s soul, one has to “empty” oneself of everything “creaturely,” how is this *kenosis* related to the properly divine *kenosis* (or, for that

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¹¹ See Chapter XI in Lacan 1977

¹² The same goes for woman in psychoanalysis: the masquerade of femininity means that there is no inaccessible feminine X beneath the multiple layers of masks, since these masks ultimately conceal the fact that there is nothing to conceal.

matter, even to the *kenosis* of alienation, of the subject being deprived of its substantial content)? Chesterton is fully aware that it is not enough for God to separate man from Himself so that mankind will love Him – this separation *has* to be reflected back into God Himself, so that God is abandoned *by himself*:

“When the world shook and the sun was wiped out of heaven, it was not at the crucifixion, but at the cry from the cross: the cry which confessed that God was forsaken of God. And now let the revolutionists choose a creed from all the creeds and a god from all the gods of the world, carefully weighing all the gods of inevitable recurrence and of unalterable power. They will not find another god who has himself been in revolt. Nay (the matter grows too difficult for human speech), but let the atheists themselves choose a god. They will find only one divinity who ever uttered their isolation; only one religion in which God seemed for an instant to be an atheist.”¹³

Because of this overlapping between man’s isolation from God and God’s isolation from himself, Christianity is “terribly revolutionary.” We are one with God only when God is no longer one with himself, but abandons himself, “internalizes” the radical distance which separates us from Him. Our radical experience of separation from God is the very feature which unites us with Him – not in the usual mystical sense that only through such an experience, we open ourselves to the radical Otherness of the God, but in the sense similar to the one in which Kant claims that humiliation and pain are the only transcendental feelings: it is preposterous to think that I can identify myself with the divine bliss - only when I experience the infinite pain of separation from God, do I share an experience with God himself (Christ on the Cross). This moment of “Father, why have you abandoned me?”, of the separation of God from Himself causes great difficulty for commentators – here is a standard comment by Mark D. Roberts:

“This side of heaven, we will never fully know what Jesus was experiencing in this moment. Was he asking this question because, in the mystery of his incarnational suffering, he didn’t know why God had abandoned him? Or was his cry not so much a question as an expression of profound agony? Or was it both? What we do know is that Jesus entered into the Hell of separation

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¹³ Chesterton 1995, p.145

from God. The Father abandoned him because Jesus took upon himself the penalty for our sins. In that excruciating moment, he experienced something far more horrible than physical pain. The beloved Son of God knew what it was like to be rejected by the Father. As we read in 2 *Corinthians* 5:21, 'God made him who had no sin *to be* sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.' I can write these words. I can say, truly, that the Father abandoned the Son for our sake, for the salvation of the world. But can I really grasp the mystery and the majesty of this truth? Hardly. As Martin Luther once said, 'God forsaking God. Who can understand it?'"¹⁴

Separation is thus not simply a redouble alienation but a specific case of the "negation of negation." When the subject's alienation (in the Other) is redoubled by the (self-)alienation of the Other itself, this redoubling radically changes the status of the alienated subject: the alienation of the Other itself (the lack/antagonism that undermines from within the consistency of the Other) opens up a unique space of freedom, of active intervention of the subject into the Other. Fully assuming the Other's lack and inconsistency means that the Other is no longer a complete mechanism that controls me: I can exploit its inconsistencies, play the Other against itself. So instead of getting caught in desperate attempts to distinguish between constitutive and constituted alienation, one should focus on *how to determine separation in political terms*. According to Tomši, in traditional Marxism, the standard social-democratic scenario proposes

"including the workers in a more just distribution of profit, collective ownership of the means of production, regulating financial speculation and bringing the economy down to the solid ground of the real sector. More radical political experiments were equally unsuccessful in abolishing alienation: 'It's not because one nationalizes the means of production at the level of socialism in one country that one has thereby done away with surplus-value, if one doesn't know what it is'. Nationalization does not produce the necessary global structural change, which would abolish the market of labour and thereby the structural contradiction that transforms the subject into a commodity-producing commodity. The non-relation between labour-power and surplus-value remains operative, and nationalization in the last instance evolves into a form of state capitalism. Marx, however, did not claim that

¹⁴ Quoted from <http://www.patheos.com/blogs/markdroberts/series/the-seven-last-words-of-christ-reflections-for-holy-week/>.

the appropriation of surplus-value would abolish the capitalist forms of alienation and fetishization. This would suggest that the abolition of capitalists, these social fanatics of the valorization of value and personifications of capital, would already solve the problem. Marx's point is rather that capitalism can exist without capitalists because the capitalist drive to self-valorization is structural, systemic and autonomous – but there cannot be any capitalism without the proletariat." (65-66)

OK, nationalization doesn't work - but what, then, *does* work? In what does then consist "the necessary global structural change, which would abolish the market of labour and thereby the structural contradiction that transforms the subject into a commodity-producing commodity"? Again, if signifying alienation is unsurpassable, constitutive of subjectivity, and if the homology is full between surplus-enjoyment and surplus-value, is then the economic alienation also unsurpassable? If yes, in what precise sense? What, then, can the overcoming of capitalism achieve, what is its goal or horizon? What is the third way between resigning oneself to capitalist alienation and the humanist fantasy of reconciled transparent society? Our wager is that, even if we take away the teleological notion of Communism (the society of the fully unleashed productivity) as the implicit standard by which Marx as it were measures the alienation of the existing society, the bulk of his "critique of political economy," the insight into the self-propelling vicious cycle of the capitalist (re)production, survives.

The task of today's thought is thus double: on the one hand, to repeat the Marxist "critique of political economy" without the utopian-ideological notion of Communism as its inherent standard; on the other hand, to imagine effectively breaking out of the capitalist horizon without falling into the trap of returning to the eminently premodern notion of a balanced, (self)restrained society (the "pre-Cartesian" temptation to which most of today's ecology succumbs). A return to Hegel is crucial in order to perform this task, a return which gets rid of all the classic anti-Hegelian topics, especially that of Hegel's voracious narcissism, of a Hegelian Idea which endeavours to swallow/internalize entire reality. Instead of trying to undermine or overcome this "narcissism" from the outside, emphasizing the "preponderance of the objective" (or the fact that "the Whole is the non-true" and all other similar motifs of Adorno's rejection of "identitarian" idealism), one should rather problematize the figure of Hegel criticized here by way of asking a simple question: but *which* Hegel is here our point of reference? Do both Lukacs and Adorno

not refer to the “idealist-subjectivist” (mis)reading of Hegel, to the standard image of Hegel as the “absolute idealist” who asserted Spirit as the true agent of history, its Subject-Substance? Within this framework, Capital can effectively appear as a new embodiment of the Hegelian Spirit, an abstract monster which moves and mediates itself, parasitizing upon the activity of actual really-existing individuals. This is why Lukacs also remains all too idealist when he proposes to simply replace the Hegelian Spirit with the proletariat as the Subject-Object of History: Lukacs is here not really Hegelian, but a pre-Hegelian idealist.¹⁵

If, however, one problematizes this shared presupposition of Lukacs and Adorno, another Hegel appears, a more “materialist” Hegel for whom reconciliation between subject and substance does not mean that the subject “swallows” its substance, internalizing it into its own subordinate moment. Reconciliation rather amounts to a much more modest overlapping or redoubling of the two separations: the subject has to recognize in its alienation from the Substance the separation of the Substance from itself. This overlapping is what is missed in the Feuerbach-Marxian logic of des-alienation in which the subject overcomes its alienation by recognizing itself as the active agent which itself posited what appears to it as its substantial presupposition. In the Hegelian “reconciliation” between Subject and Substance, there is no absolute Subject which, in total self-transparency, appropriates/ internalizes all objective substantial content. But “reconciliation” also doesn’t mean (as it does in the line of German Idealism from Hoelderlin to Schelling) that the subject should renounce its *hubris* of perceiving itself as the axis of the world and accept its constitutive “de-centering,” its dependency on some primordial abyssal Absolute which is beyond/ beneath the subject/object divide, and, as such, also beyond subjective conceptual grasp. Subject is not its own origin: Hegel firmly rejects Fichte’s notion of the absolute I which posits itself and is nothing but the

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15 Although some motifs seem to connect the Frankfurt School appropriation of psychoanalysis and Lacan’s “return to Freud,” actual contacts between the two are more or less inexistent. As for the “Kant avec Sade” motif, there are no clear indications that Lacan was directly influenced by Adorno’s and Horkheimer’s *Dialectic of Enlightenment*: his approach is totally different, so we have nothing more than a contingent overlapping. There is only one proven direct contact: Juan Pablo Luchelli (in his “Lacan, Horkheimer et le déclin du père” – see <http://www.journaldumauss.net/?LACAN-HORKHEIMER-ET-LE-DECLIN-DU-PERE>) discovered that Lacan, in his early *écrit* “Les complexes familiaux dans la formation de l’individu” (1938), referred to Max Horkheimer’s essay on “Authority and Family” (from 1936) to sustain his thesis on the decline of (what Lacan at that time called) “the paternal imago.” (The reason this reference to the Frankfurt School went unnoticed was that the literature to Lacan’s text (which he submitted) was printed at the end of the collective volume in which Lacan’s text appeared.) Although one shouldn’t make too much of this (the notion of the decline of paternal authority was widespread among conservative critics of culture at that time), it does provide a further link to the Hegelian and Marxist background of the early Lacan

pure activity of this self-positing. But subject is also not just a secondary accidental appendix/outgrowth of some pre-subjective substantial reality: there is no substantial Being to which subject can return, no encompassing organic Order of Being in which subject has to find its proper place. “Reconciliation” between subject and substance means the acceptance of this radical lack of any firm foundational point: subject is not its own origin, it comes second, it is dependent upon its substantial presuppositions; but these presuppositions also do not have a substantial consistency of their own but are always retroactively posited.

What this also means is that Communism should no longer be conceived as the subjective (re)appropriation of the alienated substantial content – all versions of reconciliation as “subject swallows the substance” should be rejected. So, again, “reconciliation” is the full acceptance of the abyss of the de-substantialized process as the only actuality there is: subject has no substantial actuality, it comes second, it only emerges through the process of separation, of overcoming of its presuppositions, and these presuppositions are also just a retroactive effect of the same process of their overcoming. The result is thus that there is, at both extremes of the process, a failure-negativity inscribed into the very heart of the entity we are dealing with. If the status of the subject is thoroughly “processual,” it means that it emerges through the very failure to fully actualize itself. This brings us again to one of the possible formal definitions of subject: a subject tries to articulate (“express”) itself in a signifying chain, this articulation fails, and by means and through this failure, the subject emerges: the subject is the failure of its signifying representation – this is why Lacan writes the subject of the signifier as \$, as “barred.” In a love letter, the very failure of the writer to formulate his declaration in a clear and efficient way, his oscillations, the letter’s fragmentation, etc., can in themselves be the proof (perhaps the necessary and the only reliable proof) that the professed love is authentic – here, the very failure to deliver the message properly is the sign of its authenticity. If the message is delivered in a smooth way, it arouses suspicions that it is part of a well-planned approach, or that the writer loves himself, the beauty of his writing, more than his love-object, i.e., that the object is effectively reduced to a pretext for engaging in the narcissistically-satisfying activity of writing.

And the same goes for substance: substance is not only always-already lost, it only comes to be through its loss, as a secondary return-to-itself - which means that substance is always-already subjectivized. In “reconciliation” between subject and substance, both poles thus lose

their firm identity. Let us take the case of ecology: radical emancipatory politics should aim neither at the complete mastery over nature nor at the humanity's humble acceptance of the predominance of Mother-Earth. Rather, nature should be exposed in all its catastrophic contingency and indeterminacy, and human agency should assume the whole unpredictability of the consequences of its activity - viewed from this perspective of the "other Hegel," the revolutionary act no longer involves as its agent the Lukacsean substance-subject, the agent who knows what it does while doing it.

From Kant to Hegel, Politically

The inner logic of the passage from Kant to Hegel, the key reversal that defines the very core of German Idealism, is much more convoluted than it may appear. One totally misses this logic when one simply reproduces Hegel's critique of Kant – if one does just this, it is easy for Kantians to demonstrate that Hegel is criticizing a straw-man, that he effectively reduced Kantian thought to its primitive caricature. What one should do is to begin with the simplified version of Hegel's critique of Kant, and then listen to the Kantian reply to it – and when we do it consequently, things start to get interesting: we soon discover that, in their defense of Kant, the Kantians have to bring in the gap between what Kant literally says (more precisely: what he seems to be saying in a first, immediate, reading) and what he is effectively saying without being fully aware of it (a dimension rendered visible only through their detailed interpretation of Kant)... in short, they defend Kant by showing how Kant is really more refined, not what Hegel's critique targets, even if Kant simplifies himself and sometimes writes as if he doesn't know it. And then comes the crucial Hegelian counter-move: to show that this self-corrected Kant asserted against Hegel's critique IS Hegel. "Hegel" is not a simple overcoming of Kant, Hegel is the Kant which emerges as a reaction to the standard Hegelian critique of Kant, the Kant (self-) corrected through this reaction, the Kant whose unsaid is brought out to awareness through it. Let's take just one simplified example. According to the standard Hegelian critique, the limitation of the Kantian universalistic ethic of the "categorical imperative" (the unconditional injunction to do one's duty) resides in its formal indeterminacy: the moral Law does not tell me *what* my duty is, it merely tells me *that* I should accomplish my duty, and so leaves room for an empty voluntarism (whatever I decide will be my duty *is* my duty). It is easy for a true Kantian to reply that, far from being a limitation, this very feature brings us to the core of ethical autonomy: it is not possible to derive the concrete obligations pertaining to one's specific situation from the moral Law itself — which means

that the subject himself must assume the responsibility of translating the abstract injunction into a series of concrete obligations. The full acceptance of this paradox compels us to reject any reference to duty as an excuse: "I know this is heavy and can be painful, but what can I do, this is my duty..." Kant's ethics is often taken as justifying such an attitude — no wonder Adolf Eichmann himself referred to Kant when trying to justify his role in planning and executing the Holocaust: he was just doing his duty and obeying the Führer's orders. However, the aim of Kant's emphasis on the subject's full moral autonomy and responsibility was precisely to prevent any such manoeuvre of putting the blame on some figure of the big Other... But are we here still fully in Kant? Are Kant's statements often not ambiguous with regard to the full meaning of moral autonomy? My point is, of course, that by defending Kant in this way, we *are already in Hegel*.

While the Kantian approach relies on the unsurmountable gap that forever separates the universal transcendental form from its contingent empirical content, Hegel overcomes this gap with his notion of "concrete universality" which mediates form and content. The Kantian subject can be said to be "castrated" in the sense that it is constitutively separated from the real Thing (the supreme Good which remains forever out of reach), and the universal form (of the ethical injunction) is a stand-in for the absent content (the real Thing). Here enters a specifically Laclauian dialectic of universal and particular: since universality is empty, since all content is by definition particular, the only way for a universality to get filled in with content is to elevate/transubstantiate some particular content into its place-holder, and the struggle for which this element will be is the struggle for hegemony.

An exemplary case of Laclau's theory of hegemony is his detailed analysis of populism.¹⁶ Populism is for Laclau inherently neutral: a kind of transcendental-formal political dispositif that can be incorporated into different political engagements. Populism is not a specific political movement but the political at its purest: the "inflection" of the social space that can affect any political content. Its elements are purely formal, "transcendental," not ontic: populism occurs when a series of particular "democratic" demands (for better social security, health services, lower taxes, against war, etc.) is enchained in a series of equivalences, and this enchainment produces "people" as the universal political subject. What characterizes populism is not the ontic content of these demands, but the mere formal fact that, through their enchainment, "people" emerges as a political subject, and all different particular struggles and antagonisms

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¹⁶ See Laclau 2005.

appears as parts of a global antagonistic struggle between “us” (people) and “them.” Again, the content of “us” and “them” is not prescribed in advance but, precisely, the stake of the struggle for hegemony: even ideological elements like brutal racism and anti-Semitism can be enchain in a populist series of equivalences, in the way “them” is constructed.

It is clear now why Laclau prefers populism to class struggle: populism provides a neutral “transcendental” matrix of an open struggle whose content and stakes are themselves defined by the contingent struggle for hegemony, while “class struggle” presupposes a particular social group (the working class) as a privileged political agent; this privilege is not itself the outcome of hegemonic struggle, but grounded in the “objective social position” of this group – the ideologico-political struggle is thus ultimately reduced to an epiphenomenon of “objective” social processes and their conflicts. For Laclau, on the contrary, the fact that some particular struggle is elevated into the “universal equivalent” of all struggles is not a pre-determined fact, but itself the result of the contingent political struggle for hegemony – in some constellation, this struggle can be the workers’ struggle, in another constellation, the patriotic anti-colonialist struggle, in yet another constellation the anti-racist struggle for cultural tolerance... *there is nothing in the inherent positive qualities of some particular struggle that predestines it for such a hegemonic role* of the “general equivalent” of all struggles. The struggle for hegemony thus not only presupposes an irreducible gap between the universal form and the multiplicity of particular contents, but also the contingent process by means of which one among these contents is “transubstantiated” into the immediate embodiment of the universal dimension – say (Laclau’s own example), in Poland of the 1980, the particular demands of *Solidarnosc* were elevated into the embodiment of the people’s global rejection of the Communist regime, so that all different versions of the anti-Communist opposition (from the conservative-nationalist opposition through the liberal-democratic opposition and cultural dissidence to Leftist workers’ opposition) recognized themselves in the empty signifier “Solidarnosc”... Does Laclau not come uncannily close what Hegel calls concrete universality? In the struggle for hegemony, universality is never neutral, it is always colored by some particular element that hegemonizes it? Laclau’s difference from Hegel resides merely in the fact that, for Laclau, the mediation between universality and particularity ultimately always fails since the gap between empty universal form and the element filling it in persists, and the struggle for hegemony goes on forever. Laclau’s basic argument is rendered succinctly by Oliver Marchart:

“on a formal level, *every* politics is based on the articulatory logics of ‘a combination and condensation of inconsistent attitudes’, not only the politics of fascism. As a result, the fundamental social antagonism will always be displaced to some degree since, as we have noted earlier, the ontological level – in this case, antagonism – can never be approached directly and without political mediation. It follows that distortion is constitutive for every politics: politics as such, not only fascist politics, proceeds through ‘distortion’.”¹⁷

This reproach remains caught in the “binary” tension between essence and appearance: the fundamental antagonism never appears as such, directly, in a directly transparent way (in Marxist terms: the “pure” revolutionary situation in which all social tensions would be simplified/ reduced to the class struggle never takes place, it is always mediated by other – ethnic, religious, etc. – antagonisms) – the “essence” never appears directly, but always in a displaced/distorted way. So while it is true that “human relations exist in the way in which they are distorted. There are no human relations without distortion.”(172) However, this reference to distortion allows for different readings. It can be read in the standard way, as a reminder of the complexity of historical situations – recall how, in 1916, Lenin replied those who dismissed the Irish uprising as a mere “putsch” of no interest for the proletarian struggle:

“To imagine that social revolution is *conceivable* without revolts by small nations in the colonies and in Europe, without revolutionary outbursts by a section of the petty bourgeoisie *with all its prejudices*, without a movement of the politically non-conscious proletarian and semi-proletarian masses against oppression by the landowners, the church, and the monarchy, against national oppression, etc. – to imagine all this is to *repudiate social revolution*. So one army lines up in one place and says, ‘We are for socialism’, and another, somewhere else and says, ‘We are for imperialism’, and that will be a social revolution! Only those who hold such a ridiculously pedantic view could vilify the Irish rebellion by calling it a ‘putsch’.

Whoever expects a ‘pure’ social revolution will *never* live to see it. Such a person pays lip-service to revolution without understanding what revolution is.

The Russian Revolution of 1905 was a bourgeois-democratic

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17 Marchart 2007, p. 174.

revolution. It consisted of a series of battles in which *all* the discontented classes, groups and elements of the population participated. Among these there were masses imbued with the crudest *prejudices*, with the vaguest slid most fantastic aims of struggle; there were small groups which accepted Japanese money, there were speculators and adventurers, etc. But *objectively*, the mass movement was breaking the hack of tsarism and paving the way for democracy; for this reason the class-conscious workers led it.

The socialist revolution in Europe *cannot* be anything other than an outburst of mass struggle on the part of all and sundry oppressed and discontented elements. Inevitably, sections of tile petty bourgeoisie and of the backward workers will participate in it — without such participation, *mass* struggle is *impossible*, without it no revolution is possible—and just as inevitably will they bring into the movement their prejudices, their reactionary fantasies, their weaknesses slid errors. But *objectively* they will attack *capital*, and the class-conscious vanguard of the revolution, the advanced proletariat, expressing this objective truth of a variegated and discordant, motley and outwardly fragmented, mass struggle, will he able to unite and direct it, capture power, seize the banks, expropriate the trusts which all hate (though for difficult reasons!), and introduce other dictatorial measures which in their totality will amount to the overthrow of the bourgeoisie and the victory of socialism, which, however, will by no means immediately ‘purge’ itself of petty-bourgeois slag.”¹⁸

A biographic detail should be kept in mind when we read these lines: they were written immediately after the period at the beginning of WWI when, out of despair at the nationalist breakdown of almost all Social Democracies, Lenin withdrew into “pure” theory and engaged in a detailed reading of Hegel’s logic. One usually associates Hegel with linear teleology and progressive “historical necessity” – but the basic lesson that Lenin drew from Hegel was exactly the opposite one: the complex contingency of the historical process, over-determination of every “basic” tendency by an intricate network of specific historical conditions where “the exception is the rule.” Lenin goes up to saying that, in a concrete situation, the fate of the entire revolutionary process can hinge on seizing (or not) a particular historical opening. (Later, in 1917, he wrote that, if Bolsheviks do not seize the unique revolutionary chance,

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18 Lenin 1916.

it may last for decades before the next chance will arrive.) This is Lenin’s own “materialist reversal of Marx” (of Marx’s historicist evolutionism whose manifesto is the (in)famous “Preface” to the *Critique of Political Economy*) into Hegel. One should thus note that the reference to Hegel enabled Lenin to get rid of the very feature of orthodox Marxism that Althusser attributed to Hegel’s influence on Marx (linear historical determinism, etc.).

For Laclau, these Lenin’s ruminations remain all too “essentialist”: in spite of all flexibility, Lenin clearly privileges the “class-conscious vanguard of the revolution, the advanced proletariat,” able to express the “objective truth of a variegated and discordant, motley and outwardly fragmented, mass struggle.” So although a revolution can “no means immediately ‘purge’ itself of petty-bourgeois slag,” in its further development it will nonetheless be obliged to enforce “dictatorial measures” which will amount to the purge of petit-bourgeois slag... The problem is, of course, where to set the limit, i.e., whom can the “class-conscious vanguard” accept as partners in their struggle. Today, it is obvious that (some version, at least) of feminist, ecology, struggle for religious freedoms, etc., fits the bill – but what about, say, Boko Haram? For its members, the liberation of women appears as the most visible feature of the destructive cultural impact of capitalist modernization, so that Boko Haram (whose name can be roughly and descriptively translated as ‘Western education is forbidden’, specifically the education of women) can perceive and portray itself as an agent fighting the destructive impact of modernization, by way of imposing a hierarchic regulation of the relationship between the sexes. The enigma is thus: why do Muslims, who have undoubtedly been exposed to exploitation, domination, and other destructive and humiliating aspects of colonialism, target in their response what is (for us, at least) the best part of the Western legacy: our egalitarianism and personal freedoms, inclusive of a healthy dose of irony and a mocking of all authorities? The obvious answer is that their target is well-chosen: what for them makes the liberal West so unbearable is not only that it practice exploitation and violent domination but that, to add insult to injury, it presents this brutal reality in the guise of its opposite: freedom, equality and democracy.

So, again, how to enact Lenin’s insight here? Laclau’s solution is obvious: why even continue to talk about the “fundamental social antagonism”? All we have is a series of antagonisms which (can) build a chain of equivalences, metaphorically “contaminating” each other, and which antagonism emerges as “central” is the contingent result of the struggle for hegemony. Is, however, the rejection of the very notion of “fundamental antagonism” the only alternative to “class essentialism”?

My Hegelian answer is a resounding NO. Laclau's position is here Kantian: struggle for hegemony is his transcendental *a priori*, a form filled in with different contingent contents, or, to put it in another way, Laclau's Kantian position is the one of symbolic castration as the ultimate horizon of our experience. "Castration" refers here to the irreducible gap between the transcendental form and its contingent content, and, for Laclau, Hegel disavows castration by way of enacting the move from the Kantian split ("castrated") subject, a subject divided between its form and its contingent content, to the Hegelian allegedly self-reconciled subject in which all antagonisms are sublated (*aufgehoben*) through dialectical mediation. However, the move from Kant to Hegel in no way abolishes "negativity, in the guise of castration" and enacts a return to "essentialism"; on the contrary, it radicalizes negativity (or the Kantian gap) in a very precise way. In Kant, negativity is located into the gap that forever separates us, finite humans, from the Thing, so that we only have access to its place-holder, the empty form of the Law. What Hegel does is to transpose the gap between appearance and the inaccessible Thing into the Thing itself, thoroughly redefining it as the coincidence of opposites at its most radical – the Real as that what is always distorted in its symbolic representations and the Real as the very force (thrust) of this distortion.

What this means is that "castration" is not just the gap between the empty form and its content but a torsion in content itself which gives rise to form, more precisely: to the gap between content and form. We only attain the level of proper dialectical analysis of a form when we conceive a certain formal procedure not as expressing a certain aspect of the (narrative) content, but as marking/signalling the part of content that is excluded from the explicit narrative line, so that - therein resides the proper theoretical point - if we want to reconstruct "all" of the narrative content, we must reach beyond the explicit narrative content as such, and include some formal features which act as the stand-in for the "repressed" aspect of the content.¹⁹ To take the well-known elementary example from the analysis of melodramas: the emotional excess that cannot express itself directly in the narrative line, finds its outlet in the ridiculously sentimental musical accompaniment or in other formal features. Exemplary is here the way Claude Berri's *Jean de Florette* and *Manon des Sources* displace Marcel Pagnol's original film (and his own later novelization of it) on which they are based. That is to say, Pagnol's original retains the traces of the "authentic" French provincial community life in which people's acts follow old, quasi-pagan religious patterns,

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¹⁹The thesis that form is part of content, the return of its repressed, should, of course, be supplemented by its reversal: content is ultimately also nothing but an effect and indication of the incompleteness of the form, of its "abstract" character.

while Berri's films fail in their effort to recapture the spirit of the closed premodern community. However, unexpectedly, the inherent obverse of Pagnol's universe is the theatricality of the action and the element of ironic distance and comicality, while Berri's films, while shot more "realistically," put emphasis on destiny (the musical leitmotif of the films is based on Verdi's *La forza del destino*), and on the melodramatic excess whose hystericality often borders on the ridiculous (like the scene in which, after the rain passes his field, the desperate Jean cries and shouts at Heaven). So, paradoxically, the closed ritualized premodern community implies theatrical comicality and irony, while the modern "realistic" rendering involves Fate and melodramatic excess... In this respect, Berri's two films are to be opposed to Lars von Trier's *Breaking the Waves*: in both cases, we are dealing with the tension between form and content; however, in *Breaking the Waves*, the excess is located in the content (the subdued pseudo-documentary form makes palpable the excessive content), while in Berri, the excess in the form obfuscates and thus renders palpable the flaw in content, the impossibility today to realize the pure classical tragedy of Destiny.

Therein resides the key consequence of the move from Kant to Hegel: the very gap between content and form is to be reflected back into content itself, as an indication that this content is not all, that something was repressed/excluded from it. This exclusion which establishes the form itself is the "primordial repression /*Ur-Verdraengung*/," and no matter how much we bring out all the repressed content, this gap of primordial repression persists – again, why? The immediate answer is the identity of the repression with the return of the repressed, which means that the repressed content does not pre-exist repression, but is retroactively constituted by the very process of repression. Through different forms of negation/obfuscation (condensation, displacement, denegation, disavowal...), the repressed is allowed to penetrate the public conscious speech, to find an echo in it (the most direct example from Freud: when one of his patient said "I do not know who this woman in my dream is, but I am sure she is not my mother!«, mother entered the speech) – we get here a kind of "negation of negation," i.e., the content is negated/repressed, but this repression is in the same gesture itself negated in the guise of the return of the repressed (which is why we are definitely not dealing here with the proper Hegelian negation of negation). The logic seems here similar to that of the relationship between sin and Law in Paul, where there is no sin without Law, i.e., where the Law/prohibition itself creates the transgression it tries to subdue, so that, if we take away the Law, we also lose what the Law tried to "repress," or, in more Freudian terms, if we take away the "repression," we also lose the repressed content.

But still, what do all these obscure distinctions amount to politically? How do they open up the space for a political practice that reaches beyond the alternative of Leninist “class essentialism” and Laclauian “chain of equivalences” with no element destined in advance to play hegemonic role? One should make a detour here and bring into debate another paradoxical figure of universality which we can provisionally call “surnumerary universality,” the universality embodied in the element which sticks out of the existing Order, i.e., the element which, while internal to it, has no proper place within it, what Jacques Ranciere calls the “part of no-part” and what Hegel called *Poebel* (rabble). In its very status of the destructive excess of social totality, rabble is the “reflexive determination” of the totality as such, the immediate embodiment of its universality, the particular element in the guise of which the social totality encounter itself among its elements, and, as such, the key constituent of its identity. Although the two universalities seem to share a minimal common feature (a particular element stands for universality), what separates them is the aspect of negativity that pertains to the second one: in hegemonic universality, all elements emphatically identify with the particular feature that hegemonizes universality (“Solidarity is all of us!” in the case of Poland), while the surnumerary universality is experienced as the excremental element of non-identification, as a negation of all particular qualities. The struggle is ultimately not just about which particular content will hegemonize the empty form of universality but *the struggle between these two universalities*, the hegemonic one and the surnumerary one. More precisely, the two universalities are not thoroughly incompatible; they rather operate at different levels, so the task is to combine them – how? Hegemonic universality designates an empty place and surnumerary element is the element in the social space which lacks a proper place and is as such a stand-in for universality among the elements. The minimal definition of radical politics is thus that the “part of no-part,” the excremental element, occupies the hegemonic place, or, to quote the line from “International,” that those who are nothing (excrement) become all (hegemonize the entire field).

We are dealing with three main positions here. According to the first, orthodox Marxist, one, class opposition provides a hermeneutic key for decoding other struggles (feminist, ecological, national liberation) which are all forms of appearance of the “true” class struggle and can only be resolved through the victorious proletarian revolution. The second position, the conservative-populist one, turns this relationship around: Leftist multiculturalism, ecology, etc., are a matter of upper class elitism which despises the “narrowness” of the hard-working lower classes.

The third, Laclauian, position asserts open struggle for hegemony: there is no ontological guarantee that feminist struggle, ecological struggle, etc., will become part of the same “chain of equivalences” with economic class struggle, their enchainment is the stake of the open struggle for hegemony. There is, however, a fourth position: class antagonism is not the ultimate signified of other struggles but the “bone in the throat” of all other struggles, the cause of the failure of Meaning of other struggles. The relation of each of these struggles towards class antagonism is an index of its inherent limitation/inadequacy – say, the US mainstream liberal feminism at some point obfuscates the basic dimension of women’s exploitation; or, today’s humanitarian compassion for the refugees obfuscates the true causes of their predicament. Class struggle/antagonism is thus not the ultimate referent-signified, the hidden meaning, of all other struggles but a measure of the “(non)authenticity” of all other struggles – and the paradox is that the same holds for class struggle itself: in Hegelese, class struggle necessarily encounters itself in its oppositional determination (*gegensaetzliche Bestimmung*) – say, when, in the US, the Tea Party members “encode” their opposition to multiculturalism, feminism, their racism, etc., in class terms, as a working class opposition to the preoccupations of the rich educated classes, this direct class reference functions as a false screen dissimulating the true link between class antagonism and the issue at stake (feminism, racism...) - again, class difference can serve as its own best mask.²⁰

Bringing in the Chorus

This brings us to the key feature of what one could call the politics of separation: the ultimate separation to be fully assumed and endorsed is the separation of the very goal of the emancipatory process, the separation of this goal from itself. What we have in mind here is neither accepting different ways to reach this goal (the old mantra “each country will build socialism in its own way”) nor the historical relativization of the goal itself (“each country will build its own socialism”), but the full acceptance of the fact that, in the process of its actualization, the goal itself changes. Etienne Balibar opposes Hegel (teleological movement towards a final resolution) and Spinoza (antagonism, being on the way

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20The link between antagonism, *objet a* and failed interpellation resides in the fact that interpellation as such always displaces-“betrays”-obfuscates antagonism. The antagonistic character of “class struggle” means precisely that members of the two classes are never directly interpellated as pure class subjects (Capitalists and Proletarians), but always in a mystified-displaced way (as in the case of fashion: today’s rich are interpellated – like to experience themselves - as populists, wearing stoned jeans, etc.). In this precise way, *objet a* is the remainder which emerges as the index of the failed interpellation, of the fact that the interpellation of individuals into their symbolic identity always displaces the underlying antagonism.

towards..., without a final guarantee of the outcome, since the same logic that causes and multiplies the Good - that of *imitatio affecti* - causes and multiplies also the Evil). (It is easy to note how this opposition is homologous to the one between the Jewish notion of wandering on a divine mission without the ultimate teleological closure and the Christian eschatology.) But is the opposition of Hegel and Spinoza really the one described by Balibar? Hegel's position is subtly different: yes, at the end we reach the goal *because the goal is the state of things we reach*, i.e., whatever (contingently) happens, whichever turn things take, a teleological order is established retroactively which changes contingency into necessity. Recall how the Hegelian dialectical *process* begins with some affirmative idea towards which it strives, but in the course its actualization *this idea itself undergoes a profound transformation* (not just a tactical accommodation, but an essential redefinition), because the idea itself is caught into the process, (over)determined by its actualization.²¹ Say, we have a revolt motivated by a request for justice: once people get really engaged in it, they become aware that much more is needed to bring true justice than just the limited requests with which they started (to repeal some laws, etc.). A revolutionary process is not a well-planned strategic activity, with no place in it for a full immersion into the Now, without regard to long-term consequences. Quite the contrary: the suspension of all strategic considerations based upon hope for a better future, the stance of *on attaque, et puis, on le verra* (Lenin often referred to this slogan of Napoleon), is a key part of any revolutionary process.

Lukacs himself later changed his position with regard to this key point: the ignored obverse of his accommodation to Marxist orthodoxy (he no longer conceives the social practice of collective historical subjectivity as the ultimate horizon of thinking but endorses a general ontology with humanity as its part) is the acceptance of the tragic dimension of the revolutionary subject. This ignored aspect of Lukacs's thought was brought out in Jeremy Glick's *The Black Radical Tragic*²², a book we were all waiting for *without knowing it*. Glick goes much further than the standard notion of revolutionary tragic deployed by Marx and Engels who locate the tragedy of a revoluti(on in the figure of a hero

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 21 In his famous Preface to the *Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*, Marx wrote (in his worst evolutionary mode) that humanity only poses to itself tasks which it is able to solve: "Mankind thus inevitably sets itself only such tasks as it is able to solve, since closer examination will always show that the problem itself arises only when the material conditions for its solution are already present or at least in the course of formation." (Quoted from <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1859/critique-pol-economy/preface.htm>.) One is tempted to turn this statement around and claim that humanity as a rule poses to itself tasks which it cannot solve, and thereby triggers an unpredictable process in the course of which the task (goal) itself gets redefined.

22 Glick 2016.

who comes too early, ahead of his time, and is therefore destined to fail although, in the long view, he stands for historical progress (their exemplary figure is Thomas Munzer). For Glick, tragedy is immanent to a revolutionary process, it is inscribed into its very core defined by a series of oppositions: leader(ship) versus masses, radicality versus compromise... For example, with regard to the first opposition, there is no easy way out, the gap between leader(ship) and masses, their miscommunication, emerges necessarily – Glick quotes a touching passage from Edouard Glissant's play *Monsieur Toussaint* (Act IV, Scene V) where Toussaint, laughing in delirium, sadly reflects how he "can barely write":

"I write the word 'Toussaint,' Macaia spells out 'traitor.' I write the word 'discipline' and Moyse without even a glance at the page shots 'tyranny.' I write 'prosperity'; Dessalines backs away, he thinks in his heart 'weakness.' No, I do not know how to write, Manuel."²³

(Note the irony of how this passage refers to the racist cliché about the Black who cannot write.) The background of this passage is the tension in the revolutionary process as reflected in personal relations: Toussaint's nephew Moïse advocated the uncompromising fidelity to Black masses and wanted to break up large estates, while Toussaint himself was possessed by a fear of masses and saw as his task to retain discipline and the smooth run of the production process, so he ordered Moïse to be executed for sedition. Dessalines later triumphed and, after the establishment of a Black state, proclaimed himself emperor of Haiti, introducing a new form of domination (as well as ordering the massacre of all remaining white inhabitants of Haiti) in the very triumph of the revolution. In order to grasp these tragic twists, it is crucial to count the crowd (which, in the theatrical dispositif, appears as Chorus) as one of the active agents, not just as the passive commentator of the events – the title of Chapter 2 of Glick's book is, quite appropriately, "Bringing in the Chorus" (and I realized with pleasure that I did the same in my version of *Antigone* where, at the end, Chorus intervenes, arresting and executing both Antigone and Creon).

The principal antagonism which underlies this tension is the one between fidelity to the universal Cause and the necessity of compromise – and, at least from my standpoint, Glick's deployment of this antagonism is the theoretical and political climax of his book. Glick starting point is

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 23 Ibid., p. 117.

the reference to C.L.R. James who clearly saw that the early Christian revolutionaries “were not struggling to establish the medieval papacy. The medieval papacy was a mediation to which the ruling forces of society rallied in order to strangle the quest for universality of the Christian masses.”²⁴ Revolutions explodes with radical millenarian demands of actualizing a new universality, and mediations are symptoms of its failure, of thwarting people’s expectations. The quest for universality of the masses “forbids any mediation”²⁵ – was the tragic turn-around of the Syriza government not the last big case of such a “mediation”: the principled NO to European blackmail was immediately followed by a YES to the “mediation”... Glick mentions here Georg Lukacs, the great advocate of “mediation” who, in 1935, wrote “Hoelderlin’s Hyperion,” a weird, but crucial, short essay in which he praises Hegel’s endorsement of the Napoleonic Thermidor against Hoelderlin’s intransigent fidelity to the heroic revolutionary utopia:

“Hegel comes to terms with the post-Thermidorian epoch and the close of the revolutionary period of bourgeois development, and he builds up his philosophy precisely on an understanding of this new turning-point in world history. Hoelderlin makes no compromise with the post-Thermidorian reality; he remains faithful to the old revolutionary ideal of renovating ‘polis’ democracy and is broken by a reality which has no place for his ideals, not even on the level of poetry and thought.”²⁶

Lukacs is here referring to Marx’s notion that the heroic period of the French Revolution was the necessary enthusiastic break-through followed by the unheroic phase of market relations: the true social function of the Revolution was to establish the condition for the prosaic reign of bourgeois economy, and the true heroism resides not in blindly clinging to the early revolutionary enthusiasm, but in recognizing “the rose in the cross of the present,” as Hegel liked to paraphrase Luther, i.e., in abandoning the position of the Beautiful Soul and fully accepting the present as the only possible domain of actual freedom. It is thus this “compromise” with social reality which enabled Hegel’s crucial philosophical step forward, that of overcoming the proto-Fascist notion of “organic” community in his *System der Sittlichkeit* manuscript and engaging in the dialectical analysis of the antagonisms of the

24 Ibid., p. 138.

25 Ibid., p. 139.

26 Lukacs 1968, p. 137.

bourgeois civil society. It is obvious that this analysis of Lukacs is deeply allegorical: it was written a couple of months after Trotsky – another figure that appears in Glick’s book – launched his thesis of Stalinism as the Thermidor of the October Revolution. Lukacs’s text has thus to be read as an answer to Trotsky: he accepts Trotsky’s characterization of Stalin’s regime as “Thermidorian,” giving it a positive twist – instead of bemoaning the loss of utopian energy, one should, in a heroically-resigned way, accept its consequences as the only actual space of social progress... For Marx, of course, the sobering “day after” which follows the revolutionary intoxication signals the original limitation of the “bourgeois” revolutionary project, the falsity of its promise of universal freedom: the “truth” of the universal human rights are the rights of commerce and private property. If we read Lukacs’ endorsement of the Stalinist Thermidor, it implies (arguably against his conscious intention) an utterly anti-Marxist pessimistic perspective: the proletarian revolution itself is also characterized by the gap between its illusory universal assertion of freedom and the ensuing awakening in the new relations of domination and exploitation, which means that the Communist project of realizing “actual freedom” necessarily failed – or does it?

There is a third way beyond the alternative of principled self-destruction and compromise: not some kind of “proper measure” between the two extremes but focusing on what one might call the “point of the impossible” of a certain field. The word “synthesis” is here totally misleading: the concluding moment of a dialectical is not some kind of a middle term between the two extremes, maintaining what is good in both of them and combining them into a balanced unity, but a total change of the terrain. My friends from Israel reported to me enthusiastically how, in a Palestinian village near Jerusalem, there were joint demonstrations in which veiled Palestinian women marched together with provocatively dressed Jewish lesbians... My reaction was that yes, such events are miracles, but, as all miracles, they are rare, they will forever remain marginal: it is illusory to see in them a germ of future solidarity, of a common front that will be built through patient work and will gradually encompass majority. This, of course, does not mean that the battle is lost in advance – it means that a much more radical change is needed where the basic identity of each of the two will be thoroughly transformed: Palestinian women will have to drop their identity as part of the traditional Palestinian community, and Israeli women will have to drop their middle-class multicultural stance. The third term of the Hegelian “synthesis” is something genuinely new, an invention which breaks the deadlock of the existing situation.

The great art of politics is to detect it locally, in a series of modest

demands which are not simply impossible but appear as possible although they are de facto impossible. The situation is like the one in science-fiction stories where the hero opens the wrong door (or presses the wrong button. . .) and all of a sudden the entire reality around him disintegrates. In the United States, universal healthcare is obviously such a point of the impossible, in Europe, it seems to be the cancellation of the Greek debt, and so on. It is something you can (in principle) do but *de facto* you cannot or should not do it — you are free to choose it *on condition you do not actually choose it*.

Today's political predicament provides a clear example of how *la verite surgit de la meprise*, of how the wrong choice has to precede the right choice. The general epistemological premise that underlies this necessary role of misrecognition can be nicely rendered by the reversal of the well-known phrase "You have to be stupid not to see that!" – *la verite surgit de la meprise* means that, precisely, you *have* to be stupid to see that, i.e., as Lacan put it, *les non-dupes errent*, those who are not duped are in the wrong (this is the best critical description of cynics). In order to arrive at the truth, one has to be taken into an illusion - just recall how emancipatory politics can only be sustained by a belief into the (in some sense obviously "illusory") axiom of universal justice.

In principle, the choice of the Leftist politics is the one between social-democratic reformism and radical revolution, but the radical choice, although abstractly correct and true, is self-defeating and gets stuck in Beautiful Soul immobility: in Western developed societies, calls for a radical revolution have no mobilizing power. Only a modest "wrong" choice can create subjective conditions for an actual Communist prospect: if it fails or if it succeeds, it sets in motion a series of further demands ("in order to really have universal healthcare, we also need...") which will lead to the right choice. There is no short-cut here, the need for a radical universal change has to emerge through such mediation with particular demands. To directly begin with the right choice is therefore even worse than to make a wrong choice, it is a version of the Beautiful Soul, it amounts to a position of "I am right and the misery of the world which got it wrong just confirms how right I am." Such a stance relies on a wrong ("contemplative") notion of truth, it totally neglects the practical dimension of truth. In his (unpublished) *Seminar XVIII* on a "discourse which would not be that of a semblance," Lacan provided a succinct definition of the truth of interpretation in psychoanalysis: "Interpretation is not tested by a truth that would decide by yes or no, it unleashes truth as such. It is only true inasmuch as it is truly followed." There is nothing "theological" in this precise formulation, only the insight into the properly dialectical unity of theory and practice in (not only)

psychoanalytic interpretation: the "test" of the analyst's interpretation is in the truth effect it unleashes in the patient. This is how we should also (re)read Marx's Thesis XI: the "test" of Marxist theory is the truth effect it unleashes in its addressee (the proletarians), in transforming them into emancipatory revolutionary subjects. The true art of politics is thus not to avoid mistakes and to make the right choice, but *to commit the right mistake*, to select the right (appropriate) wrong choice. In this sense, Glick writes that "the revolutionary leadership as vanishing mediator – the only responsible vanguard model. Political work in order to qualify as radical work should strive toward its redundancy."²⁷ He combines here a sober and ruthless insight into the necessary tragic twists of the revolutionary process with the unconditional fidelity to this process; he stands as far as possible from the standard "anti-totalitarian" claim that, since every revolutionary process is destined to degenerate, it's better to abstain from it. This readiness to take the risk and engage in the battle, although we know that we will probably be sacrificed in the course of the struggle, is the most precious insight for us who live in new dark times.

We should thus fully accept the fact that, since revolutionary activity is also not a self-transparent act but an act caught in conditions of alienation, it unavoidably includes tragic reversals, acts whose final outcome is the opposite of what was intended. One should follow here Badiou who elaborated three distinct ways for a revolutionary movement to fail. First, there is, of course, a direct defeat: one is simply crushed by the enemy forces. Then, there is a defeat in the victory itself: one wins over the enemy (temporarily, at least) by way of taking over the main power-agenda of the enemy (the goal is to take state power, either in the parliamentary-democratic – Social-Democratic - way or in a direct identification of the Party with State – as in Stalinism). On the top of these two versions, there is perhaps the most authentic, but also the most terrifying, way: guided by the correct instinct telling it that every solidification of the revolution into a new state power equals its betrayal, but unable to invent and impose on social reality a truly alternative social order, the revolutionary movement engages in a desperate strategy of protecting its purity by the "ultra-leftist" resort to all-destructive terror. Badiou aptly calls this last version the "sacrificial temptation of the void":

"One of the great Maoist slogans from the red years was 'Dare to fight, dare to win.' But we know that, if it is not easy to follow this slogan, if subjectivity is afraid not so much to fight but to win, it is because struggle exposes it to a simple failure (the attack didn't succeed), while

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27 Glick 2016, p. 12.

victory exposes it to the most fearsome form of failure: the awareness that one won in vain, that victory prepares repetition, restauration. That a revolution is never more than a between-two-States. It is from here that the sacrificial temptation of the void comes. The most fearsome enemy of the politics of emancipation is not the repression by the established order. It is the interiority of nihilism, and the cruelty without limits which can accompany its void.”²⁸

What Badiou is effectively saying here is the exact opposite of Mao’s “Dare to win!” – one *should* be afraid to win (to take power, to establish a new socio-political reality), because the lesson of the XXth century is that victory either ends in restoration (return to the State power logic) or gets caught in the infernal cycle of self-destructive purification. This is why Badiou proposes to replace purification with subtraction: instead of “winning” (taking over power) one maintains a distance towards state power, one creates spaces subtracted from State... Is, however, this solution adequate? What about heroically accepting the risk of self-obliteration? This is the reason Lukacs (surprisingly for a Marxist) fully endorses Hegel’s refusal to engage in any projects of a better future society: “That Hegel stops at the present is related /.../ to the most profound motives of his thinking – to be precise, of his historico-dialectical thinking.”²⁹ In other words, it is precisely Hegel’s silence about future which opens up the space for it, namely for a future that is not just an extrapolation of the predominant tendencies of the present but the unforeseeable result of risky decisions.

We thus need to subtly change the formula of the big revolutionary Event as the moment of final Judgment when, as Benjamin put it, even the past of the failed revolutionary attempts will be redeemed, the moment first clearly formulated in *Joe*/ 3:14: “Multitudes, multitudes, in the valley of decision! For the day of the Lord is near in the valley of decision.”³⁰ But the decision is always risky, with no ontological guarantee, destined to fail and to be repeated. It can happen that Lord (or whatever agent stands for him) makes the wrong judgment, that the wrong multitude is finished off in the valley of decision. The true emancipatory work of love enters at this tragic moment.

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28 Badiou 2009, p. 28.

29 Lukacs 1968, p. 136,

30The “valley of decision” is the location of God’s inflictions on his enemies at the moment of Armageddon: the armies of the world will gather into this valley where God will announce his final judgement and destroy his enemies.

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Hegel and Freud: Between Aufhebung and Verneinung

Alenka Zupančič

Abstract: The paper analyses two concepts, or conceptual operations, coming from very different traditions and contexts. One is Freud's concept of *Verneinung*, "Negation", developed in his short yet extraordinary piece bearing this title, and the other is the Hegelian notion of *Aufhebung*, "sublation", described by him as "one of the most important notions in philosophy". The methodological approach consists in proposing a parallel staging of the two conceptual operations, against the background of which come to light some of the singular, less obvious, yet absolutely crucial aspects of these two concepts, as well as of the broader theoretical settings within which they appear. The paper aims at demonstrating a perhaps surprising proximity between the Freudian method and what Hegel called "the speculative in act".

Key words: Hegel, Freud, *Verneinung*, *Aufhebung*, double negation, repression,

What I would like to do in this text is consider together two concepts (or two conceptual operations) coming from very different traditions and contexts. One is Freud's concept of *Verneinung* (developed in his short yet extraordinary piece bearing this title, and translated in English simply as "Negation"). The other is the Hegelian notion (operation) of *Aufhebung* – in all respects a crucial operation of dialectical movement; defined also as a "negation of negation", yet which does not bring us back to the thing from which we started, but instead produces something new and different. In the famous "speculative remark" in the *Science of Logic* Hegel refers to the notion of *Aufhebung* as "one of the most important notions in philosophy". Usually translated as "sublation" or "suppression", it remains notoriously untranslatable, since it unites several different, even opposite meanings: to negate/cancel/annihilate, to preserve, and to "lift" or elevate (to a higher level). ...

In his short spoken commentary of Freud's paper on *Verneinung*, which he delivered upon Lacan's invitation, Jean Hyppolite pointed out the extraordinary "philosophical" (speculative) dimension of Freud's paper. Hyppolite was also the one to hint, even if only in passing, at the way in which Freud uses the word *Aufhebung* in this text, relating it to how Hegel distinguishes between several kinds of negation in the "Lordship and Bondage" ("Master and slave") chapter of the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, as well as more generally.¹

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¹ See Hyppolite 2006.

I will take this hint seriously, and try to develop it further to see where this leads us – the wager being that the two concepts might shed some unexpected and productive light on one another. The idea is to propose a kind of *parallel staging* of the two concepts, against the background of which some of the singular, distinguishing marks of each of them could perhaps bring out some of the less obvious, yet potentially quite interesting traits of the other.

Freud's paper (from 1925) starts out from a series of very concrete and amusing examples of negation that one encounters "during the work of analysis". Here are two of them: "Now you'll think I mean to say something insulting, but really I've no such intention". And there is of course the most famous: "You ask who this person in the dream can be. It's *not* my mother."² It is crucial that the person denying something in this way unsolicitedly introduces, puts on the table, the denied content – what is at stake is not an answer to, say, the analyst's question; the analysand could simply not say what s/he says and denies. Which is why Freud concludes that this kind of negation is actually used in order for the analysand to introduce or bring forward, within its framework, a certain content. Furthermore, Freud suggests a kind of technique useful in analysis, as well as in other kinds of situations, and which consists of asking: "What would you consider the most unlikely imaginable in a given situation? What do you think was furthest from your mind at that time?" – If the person you are talking to lets herself fall into your trap and tells you what she considers to be the most unbelievable thing, that is what you have to believe.

It is clear, however, that we are not dealing simply with an inversion: if the other says no, this can only mean yes. What is at stake is that, considering the way it is used here, the negation is irrelevant for the content it accompanies: it does not deny this content, but transmits it, hands it over. In this sense the negation is both unessential and absolutely essential (because without it, this would never take place or "come out").

The blue-print of these examples, concisely formulated already by Hyppolite, is thus the following: it is "a mode of presenting what one is in the form of not being it"³. What comes across (or what we should hear) is something like this: "I am going to tell you what I am not; pay attention, this is precisely what I am."

In spite of what might look like to be the case, Freud does not precede here by simply dismissing the negation. He does not say: Once

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2 Freud 1984, p. 437.

3 Hyppolite 2006, p. 747.

it has handed over the content, we can forget about the negation, it is there only for the sake of the form, and it is only the content that matters. What he says is something else. Namely: the "'no' is the hall-mark of repression, a certificate of origin – like, let us say, 'made in Germany'"⁴.

The pivotal point of this statement – which is also the pivotal point of psychoanalysis, its crucial discovery – could be formulated as this: the repressed/unconscious content is not just like any other content (except that it is repressed), it doesn't have the same ontological status. In order to understand this we have to bear in mind the fact that the "repressed" is repressed even *before it (first) appears* (as something). This, for example, is what Lacan is aiming at in his seminar on *The four Fundamental concepts of psychoanalysis* with a series of intriguing claims, such as: "the unconscious is manifested to us as something that holds itself in suspense in the area ... of the *unborn*"; "the gap of the unconscious may be said to be pre-ontological" "the emergence of the unconscious ... does not lend itself to ontology"; "the unconscious ... is neither being, nor non-being".⁵ Whenever we are dealing with an unconscious content, we are dealing with something which is *constitutively* unconscious, that is to say that it only registers in reality in the form of repression, as repression (and not as something that first *is*, and is then repressed). This is why if we simply focus on the content, we lose this specificity (we lose this dimension of not-fully-being as the very *mode of being* of this particular thing, which is precisely the mode of repression). Repression is not something that we can simply *lift* and get access in this way to the "unstained" unconscious content/representation. If we do this, we lose something quite essential. As a matter of fact, Freud describes this as a "bad", inoperative *Aufhebung*, which is already at work in the very mechanism of *Verneinung* itself: "Negation is a way of taking cognizance of what is repressed; indeed it is already a lifting (*Aufhebung*) of the repression, though not, of course, an acceptance (*Annahme*) of what is repressed."⁶ In other words, "taking cognizance of what is repressed" is not what analysis is really about.

One would be also wrong to assume, however, that the true (analytical) *Aufhebung* would amount to (for Freud) something like a conscious acceptance of the repressed content. For only a couple of lines further Freud adds: "In the course of analytic work we [often] succeed in conquering the negation as well, and in bringing about a full intellectual acceptance of the repressed; but the repressive process itself is not yet

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4 Freud 1984, p. 438.

5 Lacan 1987, pp. 23, 29, 39.

6 Freud 1984, p. 438.

removed (*aufgehoben*) by this.”⁷

Freud came across this difference between the simple lifting of repression and a way of working through it (by working with it, to some extent at least) very early; this was already at stake in his rejection of hypnosis as a suitable technique by means of which we first – in the state of hypnosis – establish the repressed content, and then – when she is awake – make it known to the subject. Freud realised that this simply didn’t work.

Whatever the true Freudian *Aufhebung* (as, say, a successful outcome of analysis) may be, it is clear that it cannot be simply an operation performed *on* the repressed content, but something that actively involves the repression (repressive process) itself, drawing it into a kind of dialectical movement, using it against itself, so to say; the dialectical movement being in this case a movement that preserves and works with what is neither being nor not-being, with something that does not count (not even “for nothing”).⁸

Now, if we consider Hegel’s repeating insistence that *Aufhebung* means to both negate and preserve, is it not rather striking how the *Verneinung* itself seems at first to be an almost comical (“mechanical”) embodiment of this very definition? Defined as “a way of taking cognizance of what is repressed”, while preserving “what is essential to the repression”, *Verneinung* does indeed seem to function as a comedy of the *Aufhebung* (of the repression). Is this really what it is? Or does *Verneinung* rather correspond to what Hegel calls the “abstract negation”?

It would seem so at first. “Abstract negation” is defined in *The Science of Logic* as what a determinate Being *is not*. And we can see how this resonates with the Freudian “This is what I am not.” (For example: “I am not the person who wants to insult you.”) We can indeed say that, in both cases, what a Determinate Being *is*, is dependent on what it is *not* for its own determination. However, we can also immediately see that with *Verneinung* this means something slightly different from what it means in the case of Hegel’s abstract negation. Quickly put: what (I say)

.....
7 Ibid. This, again, would be a “bad” version of the Hegelian “negation of negation”, the way *not* to understand it...

8 If we reduce the Freudian notion of the unconscious to the difference between a content that is present to the conscious and a content that is “repressed from it”, if we reduce it to the opposition between being or not being *conscious* of something (or between consciously *accepting* or not accepting something), we lose it entirely. The repressive process is something different from the repressed content. (And, to be said in passing, this is also a crucial lesson to keep in mind in these politically heated times. We could say that whereas the “liberal left” has been for a long time preoccupied by “lifting the repression” and making us *accept* the repressed content (accept and tolerate the Other, the differences...), the repressive process remained absolutely intact. If anything, it has intensified.)

I’m not, determines me not only negatively (like in the abstract negation: I am the *other* of this), but also in its own right, directly. In a way, *I am* what I say I’m not. We are actually closer here to a “negation of negation”.

In this sense *Verneinung* is already an *Aufhebung* (albeit a “false” one), and not simply an abstract negation. We could also say: the unconscious is structured like a false *Aufhebung*. The other important thing, however, is that if *Verneinung* thus appears as a false *Aufhebung* of the repression, whereas analysis should bring out its proper *Aufhebung*, we should not forget that *Verneinung* is at the same time the very thing *from* which the analysis develops in a direction that will effectively do something to and with the repression. Or, in other words: the “true” *Aufhebung* necessarily starts out as a “false” one, it necessarily starts out as a comedy of itself. Freud’s practical and theoretical break-through was to take this comedy very seriously. And something similar could be perhaps said for Hegel: is not the *Phenomenology of Spirit* actually a *Comedy of Spirit*, taken with all philosophical seriousness?⁹

This ambiguity of *Verneinung* (the fact that it appears as a comedy of the *Aufhebung*, such that it already carries in itself a true *Aufhebung*) becomes even more evident if we put side by side the following conceptual elements of Freud and Hegel. In the case of *Verneinung* the very indifferent, universal symbol of negation, is the *carrier* of the “stain” of the singular, of the distinguishing mark similar to the label “made in Germany”. (It is because of the “not” that this or that particular content turns out not to be simply indifferent; at the same time, the negation, the “not” somehow bears the scent of the Thing the “not” of which it is.) What is *preserved* in it of that singular content (“mother”) is its *specific character* (“property”) – that of the *repressed*. In other words, what Freud gets out of this particular *Verneinung* is not: “oh, but in truth it was the mother” (as if this were something deeply significant in itself), but rather: “something appeared here, in this nexus, that is of the order of the repressed”. (“Mother” becomes interesting for analysis because she is marked by repression and not because “mother” is supposedly always significant in analysis. In other words, what Freud gets out of this episode is not this or that thing (“mother”), but a peculiar quality/property of it (“repressed”).

It is quite amazing how very similar to this is the configuration in which the first *Aufhebung* takes place in Hegel’s *Phenomenology of Spirit*, when the initial quandary of the sense-certainty is “sublated” on the grounds of “perception”. What is this quandary? Hegel famously

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9 No wonder, then, that a good many of the chapter titles in *Phenomenology of Spirit* read as perfect comedy titles: “Lord and Bondsman,” “The Unhappy Consciousness,” “Pleasure and Necessity,” “Dissemblance or Duplicity,” “The Beautiful Soul”...

starts with what usually seems to us most immediately certain, pointing to the impossibility of saying it. I see a tree and I say “This is a tree.” I look through the window and say “Now it is nigh.” Yet if I look in another direction (from the tree) or let some time pass, these statements will no longer be true. All that remains certain of the sense-certainty are words like “here”, “this”, “now”, which – in their very negativity – are the universal.

“Of course,” writes Hegel, “we do not *envisage* the universal This or Being in general, but we *utter* the universal; in other words, we do not strictly say what in this sense-certainty we *mean* to say. But language, as we see, is more truthful; in it, we ourselves directly refute what we *mean* to say (...) it is just not possible for us ever to say, or express in words, a sensuous being that we *mean*.”¹⁰

This is the first introduction of a fundamental discrepancy that will propel the dialectical process all through *Phenomenology*. It is the first “shape” of this divergence, which – as said above – is resolved through the passage from sense-certainty to perception. How? Here is the crucial quote that should remind us directly of Freud:

“The This is, therefore, established as *not* This, or as something superseded (*aufgehoben*); and hence not as Nothing, but as a determinate Nothing, the Nothing of a content, namely of the This. Consequently, the sense-element is still present, but not in the way it was supposed to be in [the position of] immediate certainty: not as the singular item that is ‘meant’¹¹, but as a universal, or as that which will be defined as *property*. Suppression (*Aufhebung*) exhibits its true twofold meaning which we have seen in the negative: it is at once a *negating* and a *preserving*.”¹²

Freud takes the *Verneinung* to be precisely such “a determinate Nothing” which can bring us, in analysis, *not* to the singular item that was “really” meant, but to a universal *property* of statements volunteered in this way, and this property is that of the repressed. The indifferent, universal symbol of negation *itself* has managed to bring forward, to produce some characteristic, of the dismissed/negated original content – yet a characteristic which was not simply there, discernible in this content at the outset.

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10 Hegel 1977, p.60.

11 As in Freud, this is not about whether the analysand really “meant” mother.

12 Hegel, p 68. Or, as Hegel put it in the “speculative remark”: “What is sublated is thereby not reduced to nothing. Nothing is *immediate*; what is sublated, on the other hand, is the result of *mediation*; it is a nonbeing but as a *result* which had its origin in a being. It still has, therefore, in itself the determinateness from which it originates.” (We are here borrowing Jean Luc Nancy’s translation from Nancy 2001, p. 25.)

What is preserved is thus something that *only came to light* (or, more precisely: that only *came to be* something, or part of something) *in the very process of its negation*. It is not that one of the properties of the “original” object is preserved; rather, it is that some essential property of the object first emerges (in reality) at this stage. We can therefore see that even if it starts out as a comedy of *Aufhebung* (or perhaps even *because* it starts as comedy), *Verneinung* – when looked at from the Freudian perspective – turns out to be much less superficial and more far-reaching than it seemed.

And this now allows us to raise the question of whether we could not also see the (Hegelian) *Aufhebung* as something essentially double: as a movement (a dialectical “operation”), but also as a *mode of being* of something that has no other being outside this movement (“operation”). In other words, and in this perspective, the question of *Aufhebung* would not only, or simply, be a question of the outcome (that is a question of what remains there after its operation), but also a question of something immanent to it: what is it exactly that this speculative, dialectical “operation” grasps, and gives some form of being to, with and *within* its own structure and movement? What is it that it keeps “preserving” (at every stage) – what is the status of this something?

Are we not dealing here precisely with something in being that is not fully being, something *unborn* that not so much waits to be born as it influences and shapes the being of what *is* born? Is it not because it involves this third element (which, by definition, “does not lend itself to ontology”, although it is inseparable from being) that, in a dialectical process, each “next” step brings about the truth of the previous one? This element is not the truth that is revealed in the next step, rather, it is the point of view (a singular perspective) from which a truth gets to be seen.

It is also not a kind of metonymical object that drives the dialectical movement ahead because it is the only point that cannot be *aufgehoben*; the movement of *Aufhebung* is not *after* this element/point, as if chasing it, rather, it is *generated* at/from this point (to which it also gives its form). It is generated at the point of the very gap in Spirit which, in Hegel, takes the form of a repeated, reoccurring *split in two* of the reality of the Spirit – and we’ll be returning to this. What is at stake is thus not “that which *remains*” (which is basically how Derrida and Nancy read this¹³), something that the spirit and its movement can never fully digest and liquefy (and which thus drives this movement further), but something that strictly speaking only comes to be in/with this movement – it comes to be (“is produced”) as a heteronymous element *of this* (and out of this)

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13 See for example Nancy 2001.

movement itself.

What comes light at this point is also the difference between (correct) knowledge and truth. On the one hand, there is knowledge which, albeit correct, has no implications or consequences (for analysis). This is the situation where we can “bring about a full intellectual acceptance of the repressed; but the repressive process itself is not yet removed (*aufgehoben*) by this.” And, on the other hand, there is knowledge as truth, knowledge that “makes place” for the very negativity that has produced it.

In order to hopefully illustrate this more efficiently, let us now introduce yet another one of Freud's short but brilliant pieces of writing, his paper on *fausse reconnaissance* (“wrong recollection/memory”). As we'll see, the phenomenon of *fausse reconnaissance* has a structure that is homologous to that of *Verneinung*, negation, although it takes the form of affirmation.

Let me quote the first paragraph of Freud's paper, which is also a very good example/outline of what we may call Freud's *dialectical* process in analysis:

“It not infrequently happens in the course of an analytic treatment that the patient, after reporting some fact that he has remembered, will go on to say: ‘*But I've told you that already*’ – while the analyst himself feels sure that this is the first time he has heard the story. If the patient is contradicted upon the point, he will often protest with energy that he is perfectly certain he is right, that he is ready to swear to it, and so on; while the analyst's own conviction that what he has heard is new to him will become correspondingly stronger. To try to decide this dispute by shouting the patient down or by outvying him in protestations would be a most unpsychological proceeding. It is familiar ground that a sense of conviction of the accuracy of one's memory has no objective value; and, since one of the two persons concerned must necessarily be in the wrong, it might just as well be the physician as the patient who has fallen a victim to a paramnesia. The analyst will admit as much to the patient, will break off the argument, and will postpone the settlement of the point to some later occasion.”¹⁴

Indeed, this reads almost like the beginning of the “Lordship and Bondage” (“Master and slave”) dialectics: truth can only come about through a postponement (of the decision about who is right and who is wrong), by way of putting things in motion, and thus allowing them to develop their own truth (which is not simply there at the outset). Neither of the two convictions should be “put to death” (defeated) if

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¹⁴ Freud 1955, p. 201.

we are to arrive to the truth of what is actually at stake. Moreover, the truth will come out from the *development of the “wrong”* conviction (the development of the slave's position in Hegel's case), whereas an insisting assertion of the “right” conviction can only end up as empty, useless, indifferent (albeit “correct”) knowledge. (As Hegel puts it: if the struggle ends in the killing of one or both parties involved, “the two leave each other free only indifferently, like things.”¹⁵)

But what interests us first and utmost here is the *logic* of the phenomenon of *fausse reconnaissance* (which includes things like *déjà vu*, *déjà éprouve*, *déjà entendu*, *déjà raconté*), for this logic is indeed strikingly similar to that involved in *Verneinung*. This is how we could put it to make the point as clear as possible: like in the case of *Verneinung*, the repression persists *not* simply *in spite of the acceptance* of the repressed, but rather *with its help*. What happens in the case of *fausse reconnaissance* is that a present, con-temporary “event” of the unconscious (a surprising, unexpected finding) takes place in the form of a memory of a *fait accompli* (of something that seems to be “found again”), that is to say in the form of something that is of no immediate concern (to us). Something that has just arisen is thus looked at as belonging to some other time (or temporality). We are looking straight at it (it is right there, in front of our noses), yet we see it as coming from far away, as strange and indifferent. The *fausse reconnaissance* thus paradoxically maintains the unfamiliar (strange, foreign, other, indifferent) character of what appeared by means of the very *feeling of recognition* and familiarity. (The peculiar form of affirmation accomplishes the same task here as negation does in the case of *Verneinung*). We could also say that it maintains it by means of cutting the thing from its possible articulation as presence (in the present time) in reality: for this articulation appears already the first time as its own memory. And Freud's point is, again, that what comes to us in this estranged, indifferent way, is usually something essential.

Yet, here again, we must not commit the mistake of projecting everything into the (traumatic) content, as if this content were a full being (fully constituted being) that the subject is defending, shielding herself against. Rather, we should take this *shield* itself as the very *mode of being* of the “unborn” (that is of this specific content), as its genuine manifestation. We are not dealing with something that is prevented, by some other agency, to articulate itself as presence and in present time; it is prevented from doing so *by its own* paradoxical ontological (non-)status. This is precisely the difference between the unconscious understood as the subject not being aware of something, and the

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¹⁵ Hegel 1977, p. 114.

unconscious in the stronger Freudian sense, which *actively creates* different formations of the unconscious. This is also why the unconscious can only appear as something that interrupts, discontinues the presence and the present time, and not simply as an alternative content.

Also, the unconscious is not something that is “always-already” repressed – as if repressed in some unattainable past, or in the mode of a “transcendental constitution”; the mode “always already” does not properly describe its ontological status: it is not that it can never be “present”, “contemporary”, “actually happening”, that it can never take place as being – rather, it takes place *all the time*, but it takes place precisely as a *discontinuity* (of the present, and of being). It appears as a complication, torsion of the (present) being as such.

What is thus crucial to emphasize in relation to this kind of *fausse reconnaissance* is, like in the case of *Verneinung*, the following: it is not simply a way of holding something back, keeping it cut off from the reality in spite of (or by the very way of) recognizing it; it is also a means by which what is repressed *belongs to* (is part of) this same reality (influencing its very structure).

The screens of false memory, or the “not” of *Verneinung* do not mediate between my conscious and the thing (“mother”); rather, they make something that starts out as a (mere) thought (of my mother) a *thing*: they im-mediate it, make it im-mediate. If things are always mediated by our thinking them (if they are thoughts), then here we witness another process, or the same process from another direction: that of a thought becoming a thing. And we have to take (and follow) it from there, instead of trying to conceive it (and ourselves with it) as “a mere thought” (or merely a wrong, mistaken memory). The mistaken memory *IS* the objective and immediate presence of this Thing, the latter doesn’t get to be any more “objectively present”.

The *Fausse reconnaissance* is not a way in which something (which would be too traumatic in its immediate presence) is mediated by the screen of false memory. What is at stake is rather that the false memory *IS* the immediate presence (it is the very externalisation, Hegelian *Entäu erung*) of the essence of the traumatic knowledge itself, of the traumatism as such.

This move or shift of perspective is of course profoundly Hegelian. If we look, for example, at the Hegelian dialectics of lord and bondsman, what would correspond in it to the Freudian move in his reading of the *Verneinung* and of the phenomenon of *fausse reconnaissance*? What corresponds to it is the following description by Hegel of what the life-and-death struggle presupposes: “its [self-consciousness] essential being is present to it in the form of an ‘other’, it is outside of itself and

must rid itself of its self-externality.”¹⁶ This appearing of one’s essence in the form of an “external other” is the very form of *Verneinung*. It is not, as we may be tempted to think, the move to strike the other, to annihilate (kill) him that corresponds to the movement of (the Freudian) “negation”, but the very *setting* that this configuration implies, and presupposes: namely the self-conscious as split in two, and my essence appearing as independent being outside myself.

However – and this is really Hegel’s stroke of genius – the point is not simply that whereas it *appears* to be an exterior, independent being, it is *in truth* only a “projection” of one (and only) self-consciousness’ own interior essence (it is not that we have to “*recognize*” ourselves in this other). Hegel’s point is on the contrary that this exterior has its own reality, it exists as another being. (Similarly to this, Freud, in the case of someone saying “Now you’ll think I mean to say something insulting, but really I’ve no such intention”, does not put an end to the discussion by asserting: “Oh, but this is *YOU*, *YOU* want to insult me”. Or: “This memory of yours is wrong, you’ve never told me about this thing before.” He does not try to deny the reality of what appears here. Instead, he takes this reality as it appears and follows it from there.) Which is why – back to Hegel – the latter insists, all along and with some intensity, on the structure of *Verdopplung* and of *Doppelsinn*: a double movement of one thing as a movement of two things, which is itself redoubled.

“This movement of self-conscious in relation to another self-consciousness has in this way been represented as the action of *one* self-consciousness, but this action of the one has itself the double (*gedoppelte*) significance of being both its own action and the action of the other as well. For the other is equally independent and self-contained, and there is nothing in it of *which it is not itself the origin*.”¹⁷

Which is why “action by one side only would be useless because what is to happen can only be brought about by both.”¹⁸

This, I think, would also be a very good way to read Freud. The *Verneinung* (negation) induces two symmetrical realities (mother/not mother), both of which are real, and the fact that one is “wrong” makes it no less real (part of reality). And it is also crucial to emphasize that the unconscious is not simply one of these two realities (in the same way that “master” and “slave” cannot be seen as the conscious and the unconscious, or the “slave” as the unconscious (truth) of the master). The unconscious is not one of these two realities, it is *what makes them*

¹⁶ Hegel 1977, p. 114.

¹⁷ Ibid., p. 112, my emphasis.

¹⁸ Ibid.

two, and what links them (with its formations) in their very (logical and real) incompatibility. The subject of the unconscious is not the one who secretly thinks of his mother, but the subject of the mechanism of negation; or, if we take the simple configuration that Hegel also put at the very outset of the *Phenomenology*: I want to say something, but in fact I say something different. The unconscious is not simply the difference between what I want to say and what I actually say, but refers to the work/process taking place between the two, and which cannot be reduced to either of the two sides without the risk of losing something quite essential.

Psychoanalysis clearly proceeds by way of working with two realities or texts (“manifest” and “latent”). It takes the occurrences such as that of *Verneinung* seriously, and follows, even enforces the split they introduce in the narrative. It sees this split as a sign of conflict or contradiction that is not simply a contradiction between the two sides involved, but the contradiction that structures the very field in which their appear. This is why it is not enough to establish which side is right and which is wrong. Actually, the question who is right even turns out to be pretty much beyond the point. As it does in Hegel. What matters is that some knowledge comes to occupy a certain place (place of truth), and thus changes *the way in which* the repression belongs to (is part of) the reality of what is there.

This is precisely why Freudian proceedings fit perfectly what Hegel calls “the speculative in act”:

“The sublation of the form of the proposition must not happen only in *immediate* manner, through the mere content of the proposition. On the contrary, this opposite movement must find explicit expression; [...] This alone is the speculative *in act* [das *wirkliche* Spekulative], and only the expression of this movement is a speculative exposition [*Darstellung*].”¹⁹

If the mere lifting of the repression (inscription of the repressed content in the conscious reality) doesn’t change much, it is because it fails to locate and to name the point of repression *in* this very reality (which is the point of the unconscious). In other words, the crucial thing is never simply to reconstruct the other, repressed story, but to work in the direction of circumscribing the point *in the present reality* where the repression (of some aspect of this reality) is being actively sustained. It is only here that we arrive to something like truth.

Could this, in turn, not also be said for the Hegelian *Aufhebung*?

Whatever is preserved by *Aufhebung*, it is not preserved in the sense in which we take something and conserve it (as if putting it in a

box and then transmitting it to the next dialectical stage); it is preserved by being activated as the motor of dialectical movement. *Aufhebung* activates the very point that separates the two realities (like the points of *Verneinung* or of a wrong memory), puts this point to work. It relates something and its other in the same (new) Being. Not by encompassing them in a bigger whole containing both, but by a qualitative change/shift that “unites” them from the point of view produced by their very contradiction. By accomplishing this it changes the very way in which they are determined.

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¹⁹ Hegel 1977, p. 40.

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Volume 4 /
Issue 1

Interview of Fredric Jameson: Hegel, Ideology and Contradiction

Agon Hamza & Frank Ruda

Brief introduction to the interview

We want to give the readers of the following pages a few points of in-advance orientation. As for the last issues of "Crisis and Critique", we sought to include an interview into the issue on Hegel, an interview with someone whom we (obviously) consider to be pertinent to our topic. So, we tried to entice Fredric Jameson into doing this with us. Not only because he more or less recently published a short book on Hegel (more specifically on his *Phenomenology of Spirit*), and not only because he has been one of the most vivid and eloquent contemporary defenders of a (reworked and historicized form of) dialectics, but also because to us, his own project overall appears to be in very close proximity to certain aspects and maybe even to the overall thrust of Hegel's thinking. Fredric Jameson agreed and kindly replied – in the form of "free association", as he himself charmingly puts it – to some of our questions. These were structured into four larger fields: we raised questions concerning the status of Hegel's thought today in general, in relation to politics, to art. Finally, we tried to decipher where precisely and of what kind there is a Hegelian substratum or surface appearance in Jameson's thought. You will find Jameson's freely associating and thus somewhat generic answer below. We do not wish to reproduce the questions here, as Jameson's answers stand on their own and because we hope that (comparable to philosophical jeopardy) that his answers will allow you to imagine questions that are much more brilliant than the ones we actually raised.

We agreed with Jameson to continue this form of conversations in the coming months and make the outcome of them accessible in the form of a collective book.

Agon Hamza / Frank Ruda

The famous (or infamous) question "Can one be a Hegelian today?" then can be answered by two alternatives (yes or no) – or a third one: is Hegel's philosophy a kind of toolkit? - or finally, might it not be preferable to substitute the word dialectical for the proper names?

But probably the preliminary answer must be another question, namely whether in that sense one can *be* anything today (a Kantian, a Wittgensteinian, a Platonist, a Heideggerian, a Deleuzian, and so forth)? This question, which is itself a different kind of response to the first one, presupposes a named philosophy as a kind of system, one which covers all the bases and solves all the problems (excepting those

minor ones acknowledged by most adherents - the fateful wobbling of the orbit of Mercury). Hegel is sometimes supposed to have put an end to philosophical systems by producing the ultimate one; and yet there are still Kantians, apparently, and Aristotelians (and even Marxists). What happened to the grand philosophical system after Hegel (or after Nietzsche, if you prefer) is that it became recognized as the cognitive form of ideology as such, at which point it becomes clear that to declare yourself a Hegelian (for example) is to identify your ideological adversaries (the various anti-Hegelians from the Kantians to the anarchists, from the empiricists to the political liberals) - inasmuch as an ideological stance is always the selection of friend and foe. In that sense, I would be glad to declare myself some kind of Hegelian (a Hegelian Marxist, no doubt), inasmuch as it means a commitment to History (as a process of negative struggle) rather than to Absolute Spirit as a progress towards Truth (to be sure, on my reading, Absolute Spirit is History anyway).

This means, according to me, that one can never “be” an identifiable “named” philosophical subject any longer, inasmuch as philosophy in the sense of a system of truths no longer exists; but one cannot discard the philosophical system either (with some lighthearted Crocean decision about “what is living and what is dead” in [your product here]). Let me offer a formal example here, a literary one indeed, if that is not too frivolous (we could pick Joyce or Proust if that would lend philosophical respectability).

A novel exists on two distinct levels: the plot as a whole (the premise that the book is about the writing of the book, or somehow replicates the ancient Greek epic) and the style (the individual sentences, the occasional atmospheric effects, the dramatic scenes and so forth). The first of these is not an empirical object, not an object of perception no matter how we describe or characterize it; it remains a general idea (or an ideal totality, if you like). The phenomena of the second category, however, are tangible: you can quote them, take them apart, visualize them, assign them for an explication de texte, or whatever. But the fact that these two dimensions are incompatible, or I would rather say incommensurable, does not mean that you can do without one or the other of them. To be sure, Lem wrote reviews of imaginary books in which he omitted the second dimension, the sentences and the passages, the textual embodiment, of the books themselves. And any number of critics have abused works by singling out this or that individual passage for celebration, while denouncing the plot as a whole (I’m thinking of Leavis here). But on the whole we have come to understand that the plot is the

necessary precondition for the sentences, the sine qua non, and that we would not have the latter without the obligatory pretext of the former. So we are willing to admit a “suspension of disbelief” for the plot, the overall organizational structure, which, as eccentric ofr improbable as it may be, is the indispensable requirement for the production, nay more the very existence, of the sentence, or remark, the character trait or affective mood, we love, we remember, we experience as an event.

This is more or less how I feel about that antiquated thing, the philosophical system. We have to have it for the individual thoughts and concepts; and to read and understand those we have to bring a kind of suspension of disbelief to the system within which they could alone have emerged. Hegel’s analysis of the passage from Opposition to Contradiction would not have been possible without “Hegelianism”, and I therefore provisionally accept the latter even though I am well aware that it is not a system but rather a systematization, a slogan, a publicity campaign, in this case devised by the philosopher himself (even though in other cases, as in the fabrication of Marxism by Engels, it may have been done by an ally or a disciple). But my skepticism about Hegel’s system is no greater and no different from what I feel about the combination of “absolute presuppositions” devised for all the other systematic philosophies, those of Locke no less than for Heidegger, of Derrida no less than for Aristotle. But my ideological inclinations vary a good deal from one to the other of these. So I cannot really be a Hegelian, but i am as willing to be called that just as much as I am unwilling to be called a Bergsonian or a Wittgensteinian. The real problem arises when I am also called an Althusserian, which would seem to involve some very serious and unaddressed internal contradictions between these “masters” and their “systems”.

In that sense I “am” a Hegelian (or better still a Hegeliano-Marxist”) but I do admit (with some reluctance) that I use Hegel as a toolkit. Part of that reluctance, to be sure, comes from an irrational, uncontrollable and yet political dislike for Foucault and a profound suspicion of his work and methods (except for *Les mots et les choses*, which I consider a great book and which I teach often). We don’t need to pursue that further here, except to say that the notion of the “toolkit” is a characteristic coinage aimed at promoting a sham heterogeneity and an undeserved anti-systematicity (the promotion of the thematics of power to which his name is attached as a slogan and a brand-name is certainly systematic enough, either as a tactic or a metaphysic). But it’s a clever named concept, proposing itself as a good pragmatism as opposed to a bad eclecticism, eluding any call for theorization and ideological analysis (of the type that Croce’s above-mentioned and functionally very similar

formulation at once cries out for).

But it's not wrong, and one does use bits of Hegel as so many operative wrenches and screwdrivers (the "Master and Slave", for example), just as one borrows his witty asides ("war is the health of nations") for rhetorical purposes without acknowledging, as Brecht did, that Hegel was a great comic writer (he has to be seen as turgid and obscure). I would simply point out that there is always a material unity to any given tool box, the instruments are chosen for their functionality, the electrician's equipment is not the same as the plumber's (even though some utensils may look the same, "out of context" as they say). This means that the apparently heterogeneous and pragmatic "method" Foucault's slogan seems to recommend is in reality dialectically unified by the unity of its object, its conceptual dilemma, contradiction or aporia, in short its problem. This is then how unity comes to heterogeneity, or better still, how heterogeneity betrays its unification by way of its raw material (you might also talk about this in terms of Althusserian production, in which not the solution - "truth" - is produced but rather the problem itself). One way, then, in which a contemporary dialectic functions is by way of figural synonymy, in which we vary the other ways so easily reified terminology ("fixed ideas", Hegel called them) and grasp the deeper situation behind them, which is bound to be in one way or another historical.

It is by way of an example like this (which began with the second solution to the Hegel problem - the toolkit) that we can modulate towards the third solution, which is dialectics itself or as I prefer to say, the dialectical, something always hard enough to explain on its own. Justice Potter Stewart's observation about pornography - that he found it difficult to define but that he knew it when he saw it - probably applies here as well, to an effect that looks rhetorical, in which the terms and the whole appearance of a given issue are suddenly recast, reshuffled, translated, reorganized, disassembled, restructured, refunctioned (sorry, it's my parody of a Foucauldian tic) in such a way that something comes into being behind them which I will merely call History for short.

Whatever this dialectical process is (and it is probably easier to say what it is meant to correct - namely, empiricism, the fact, the literal, the affirmative or positivistic, etc.), we may see Hegel as one of the first great laboratories or gymnasias, built in monumental neoclassical and by now unfashionable nineteenth-century style, for exercise in this new mental training. There were later, more specialized and more up-to-date versions; and as I have proposed elsewhere, the proper use of contemporary semiotics is as a certain kind of dialectical practice (that of binary oppositions) and probably psychoanalysis is another one. My

own version of the dialectic tends to insist, as I've suggested earlier, on the way in which our discovery of the limits and the contradictions of our thinking about this or that specific problem always brings us up short against the historical situation.

Meanwhile, the increasing spatiality of contemporary capitalism has had the advantage of allowing us to rethink what Hegel saw as a kind of temporal or diachronic series in the spatial terms of enlargement. The dialectic can be described as a prodigious enlargement of any given thought until it begins to "include history" (as Pound said about the epic poem), it being understood that history itself includes economics, or rather that what we continue to talk about in terms of economics or capitalism is in fact History itself. And this is of course where we encounter Marx and the permanence and persistency of class struggle in all its (sometimes unrecognizable) forms, a permanency that we can sometimes only perceive by way of that thought experiment of stepping outside of it which we call Utopia, or better still, Utopian thinking.

Now I come to another feature of my relationship to Hegel which I must discuss in the more Kantian language of the category (since I think Hegel has no particular term for this peculiar function). Derrida used to make fun of the "category of the category", and of course he was right, it is funny; but it is also for me the very central operation of the dialectic as such, the crucial place at which to dig for ideology and to probe for the historical limits of our thought.

Historically the categories essentially consisted of Aristotle's list of all the lands of things that could be said about a given topic: why, when, how, who, etc. (*Metaphysics*, 1029b, 24: list varies in number from text to text); why he should have called them kategoria or stumbling blocks is an interesting question, as philosophical as it is philological. But for us the most important feature of this initial theorization - besides its logical productivity as the very source of modern semiotics - is the extraordinarily original form Kant gave these items by way of his already pre-semiotic and indeed pre-dialectical fourfold arrangement of them, a visual schematization which already has an uncanny resemblance to what will later on become the semiotic (or Greimassian) square.

Now Hegel's position in all this would seem to be an immense expansion of Kant's categories, an abandonment of their fourfold classification and a proliferation whereby innumerable variants are arranged (in the greater *Logic*) in what looks like a sequential order, whereby the thinking confined to each moment restlessly breaks out of

the narrow confines of its immediate contradictions (bad dreams in a nutshell) and produces a new and fresh categorical form which seems to us, in hindsight, like a kind of progress on a somehow evolutionary ladder towards that ultimate (and Spinozan) identification of the parallel dimensions of logic (the syllogism) and life. This identification (in what he calls the Absolute Idea) is what I call Hegel's metaphysics: an ideological position which corresponds to the truth-positions of the older philosophical systems, the survival of those systems in Hegel (Slavoj Žižek objects strenuously to my notion of some properly Hegelian metaphysics here, a quarrel, if it is one, which bears very much on the question of the "validity" or uses of Hegel today). But in all fairness, it should be pointed out that this apparent climax of the Hegelian system, in Absolute Spirit, is by virtue of the very cyclical structure of the system itself, designed to be in fact yet another beginning, as it feeds back into the great new loops of the dialectics of Nature, of Logic, of Psychology (or human nature), and so forth.

At any rate, all this is for professional Hegelians to argue about, and I do take a lively interest in their debates and in the new Hegel emerging from them consistent with the modifications of our new stage of history, or perhaps I should say our new moment, if not of late capitalism, then of a capitalism born again. But my own personal stake in all this, coming back to the issue at hand, lies in the categories themselves and the kinds of analysis - I am happy to go on calling it ideological analysis if that expression is helpful in underscoring its distinction - that the very notion (or category) of the categories enables. The categories are for one thing immanent; they are not forms or structures outside the work or the thought, the text or the argument, the opinion or the episteme - rather, they are part and parcel of it, flesh of its flesh, and to make visible their rippling movement, like the muscles under the skin, is not to replace the "text" with some abstract interpretation or other, it is to expand our phenomenological comprehension of it; it is not to substitute one thing for another, but rather to enlarge the object of analysis to its most concrete proportions.

Now the next thing to be said, before coming to some of these categorical analyses themselves, is that a category, in Hegel, is always implicitly a contradiction; it is always in movement, never at rest as some static idea (under which we might range a series of examples like so many boxes of typologies into which we sort our exhibits). The category in Hegel, is never a moment in which we can dwell, a moment in which we can come to rest for a time. It is always too confining, it pinches and cramps is, it intensifies our restlessness (to use a favorite Hegelian word), urges us on to something new, to the next step, to the development

already latent in it. This is a process without an end, without any final success and apotheosis; it is a bad infinity to believe that when we arrive at Absolute Spirit, that vantage point of the present from which we can look back on all of history (including the history of philosophy), we are at the end of any history other than our own personal and historical one (itself, to be sure, an outcome impossible to think in any case).

Add to this our own contemporary affinity for breaks rather than continuities in history; our conviction that - if only generationally the next thing will be absolutely unpredictable and radically discontinuous with the previous one - and you have a situation in which our complicity with our own historical categories and contradictions marks a painful and uncomfortable limit to our attempts to think reality from whatever direction or aspect happens to be congenial to us.

Now I take on a few of the categories themselves. For me the moment I find recurring the most frequently in a variety of contexts - including the political ones - is that of the opposition between Identity and Difference, as they turn ceaseless into one another. It is no longer a paradox, I suppose, that the politics of identity turns out to be the politics of difference, and vice versa; or that the politics of heterogeneity should turn out to be the politics of the homogeneity of consumer society, with its thousands of identical brands. Atoms, Hegel showed us, are the multiplicity of the same (and the famous "swerve" or clinamen is a pious hope of liberalism and scarcely the "freedom" for which the ancients thought it testified). This dialectic of Identity and Difference can then lead us in two directions: the first is the increasing sense of suffocation and imprisonment in our own historical moment, in which even revolt reconfirms the system itself. The other is the path taken in the *Logic* in which this seemingly static pendulum swing from the one to the other in reality leads to opposition and contradiction - the very allegory of a whole systemic revolution, whose consequences we cannot now foresee.

Then we might think again about the ambivalence of the famous Master-and-Slave (in reality a serf, in Hegel's medieval fable): from being credited with a first approximation of Marx's class struggle (complete with workers toiling to produce the masters' luxuries) to a liberal mantra of mutual recognition and universal democratic or multicultural harmony. Excluded from these incompatible opposites is the Utopian outcome of an end to classes as such, along with the Fanonian call to redemptive violence and the blow that strikes fear in the masters themselves, if not death. But the fateful mythic encounter (in the forest of Brocéliande?)

was an individual one; and perhaps a genuinely dialectical path out of this cul de sac lies in the transformation of the opposition into one involving collectivity, in which either the individual is the one and the collectivity the many, or the collectivity is the one (that bad thing called “totality”) and the individual is the locus of heterogeneity and singularity (another word for Difference).

That might lead us to the Hegelian monarch, but also to the question of groups, to which I will return. I once speculated on the possibility of something I called “socialist monarchy”, in which the undoubted necessity of the revolutionary leader (Lenin, Mao, Fidel) gradually led to the transformation of this enlightened despotism into constitutional monarchy and the eventual abdication of Rousseau’s law-giver (although not necessarily, as in his rigorous logical argumentation of the matter, to the latter’s suicide). But Hegel’s thought has more to do with centrality, I think, and with the necessity for the social order to be an order with a geometrical, if not a substantive, center - a thought profoundly abhorrent to those anarchistic postmoderns we all really are whether we like it or not. Democracy and equality, as the Huntington people and the Trilateral Commission argued long ago (and Leo Strauss before them), are incompatible with authority and hierarchy: envy is their great essence, the hidden secret of everything we politely call political theory, a “sad passion” that can be translated either into class struggle or into fascism, depending on... well, depending on what? That is the question. Let’s suspend it for a moment and take on yet another crux which has to do with the related problem of conceptualizing the group as such.

I’ve said that only Rousseau managed to think this through to his stopping point, namely the General Will, which of course satisfies no one. My friends and colleague Michael Hardt and Toni Negri have worked up a new collective concept or category which they call multitude and which certainly corresponds historically to the population explosion and also to new mutations in the political demonstration of the type of Seattle, the color “revolutions” in the East, or Tahrir Square, but whose ultimate political efficacy remains to be seen. At any rate, I want to suggest that we have as yet no adequate way of thinking collectivity (“class” is a structural and an economic category and not a quantitative one), and that therefore one should perhaps propose to open a new empty space in the Hegelian system for “categories to come”, categories as yet uninvented or at which History itself has not yet arrived (something on the order of

Deleuze’ marvelous formula, “un peuple à venir”). On such a category, as yet unimaginable, the notion of a center - this problem of the empty or geometrical center of the Hegelian monarch - would also depend (and probably that, equally unrealized as yet, of the Party in the revolutionary sense, as an alternative to some parliamentary or representative system).

Perhaps this example might also serve to illustrate the way in which Hegel’s seemingly “closed” system (and I underscore that word to remind us how profoundly ideological this opposition open-closed has become, or perhaps always was, in the Popper sense but also, perhaps, in that of Umberto Eco’s “open work”) - how his “closed” system is open in a different methodological spirit, by producing the new problem of new categories...

Finally, and I mean this merely by way of concluding these notes, some free associations stimulated by your remarkable interview questions, which remain formally to be answered in much greater detail - finally, then, I turn to the matter of contradiction and how we stand with it today. I continue to insist on the relevance of the notion of ideology, which at once necessarily modifies all our seemingly neutral discussions. As for contradiction, it is also a concept which, if recalls, directs our discussions and our thinking in new ways and in particular to the uniqueness of new historical situations and to the limits of our own historical capacities to think them (rather than to more immediate problem solving). It seems to me that the fundamental contradiction of our moment, which subsumes all questions of ecology, class, nationalism, political forms, economic self-determination, is that of population and the unconceptualizable, unrepresentable totality of all the beings currently alive on earth. When in my little book on *Capital* I insist on its central theme of unemployment it was towards this ultimate reality I was deliberately trying to steer the reader. But we must think of population not in some statistical or sociological sense, nor in terms of a crisis one solves (by reducing births or increasing food production, etc.) but rather as a problem for thought. Population is the ultimate “untotalizable totality”, the simultaneity of billions of individual consciousnesses or existences is that very species being on which Marx began to reflect in his early writings; and religion, political theory, ethics, are all absolutely out of place for thinking it. To call for a new metaphysics to confront this existential and conceptual scandal is merely to call for a new ideology. But perhaps that would be better than nothing.

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Notes on Contributors

Stefania Achella is researcher and Adjunct Professor at the University of Chieti-Pescara, Italy. In 2014 she obtained her habilitation as Professor of Moral Philosophy. From 2014–2016 she held a position as Adjunct Professor at the Scuola Normale Superiore in Pisa. Her main research interests are Hegel's and Jaspers' philosophy. She translated into Italian the 1821 Manuscript of Hegel's *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*. Her publications include the book *Tra storia e politica: la religione nel giovane Hegel (Between History and Politics: Religion in the early Hegel, 2008)*, and numerous papers, such as: *Nodes, Networks, Flows: Categories and Concept in the Hegelian Logic* (2017); *Das "unbegreifliche Geheimnis": innere Zweckmäßigkeit und Leben bei Kant und Hegel* (2017); *Time, Kairos and Choice. A contribution to the question of "Presentism" in Ethics* (2015); *Das Leben denken: Ursprung und Zweck in der Hegelschen Philosophie* (2015); *Memory and Fate: Recollection in Hegel's Philosophy of Religion* (2013)

Alain Badiou, born 1927 in Morocco, is a world renowned French philosopher, political activist, mathematician, novelist and playwright. Among many things he is known as author of the Being-and-Event trilogy: *Being and Event* (2005), *Logics of Worlds, Being and Event, 2* (2009), *Immanence*

of Truths, Being and Event, 3 (forthcoming).

John W. Burbidge is Professor emeritus of Philosophy at Trent University, Canada. He is author of *On Hegel's Logic: Fragments of a Commentary* (1981); *Real Process: How Logic and Chemistry combine in Hegel's Philosophy of Nature 1996*; and *Hegel's Systematic Contingency* (2007).

Andrew Cole is Professor of English and Director of the Gauss Seminars in Criticism at Princeton University. He is author of *The Birth of Theory* (University of Chicago Press, 2014), which is the first of a three-volume work, of which the forthcoming *Foundations of the Dialectic* and the subsequent *Unmodernism* are a part. His essays on dialectics, idealism, materialism, and the histories of philosophy and theory appear in *Artforum*, *PMLA*, *October*, *Problemi*, *the minnesota review*, *representations*, and elsewhere. He has also co-edited *The Legitimacy of the Middle Ages: On the Unwritten History of Theory*, with an Afterword by Fredric Jameson (Duke University Press, 2010), as well as authored a major study of medieval literature entitled, *Literature and Heresy in the Age of Chaucer* (Cambridge University Press, 2008).

Mladen Dolar, born in 1951 in Maribor, Slovenia (former Yugoslavia), is Professor and Senior Research Fellow at the Department of Philosophy, University of Ljubljana. His principal areas of research are psychoanalysis, modern French philosophy, German Idealism and philosophy of music. He has lectured extensively at the universities in USA and across Europe, he is the author of over hundred papers in scholarly journals and collective volumes. Apart from a dozen books in Slovene his book publications include most notably *A Voice and Nothing More* (MIT 2006, translated into nine languages) and *Opera's Second Death* (with Slavoj Žižek, Routledge 2001, translated into three languages). Two new English books are forthcoming with Duke UP and Bloomsbury. He is one of the founding members of what has become known as 'the Ljubljana Lacanian School'.

Christian Ingo Lenz Dunker, psychoanalyst and full professor at Universidade de São Paulo, Dept. Clinical Psychology.

Andrew Haas is the author of *Hegel and the Problem of Multiplicity* (2000), *The Irony of Heidegger* (2007) and *Unity and Aspect* (2017), as well as numerous articles in history of philosophy and contemporary European philosophy. He is an Associate Professor of

Philosophy at the Higher School of Economics, Moscow.

Fredric R. Jameson is Knut Schmidt-Nielsen Professor of Comparative Literature, Professor of Romance Studies (French), and Director of the Institute for Critical Theory at Duke University. He is the author of many books, including *Marxism and Form* (1971), *The Political Unconscious* (1981) and *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (1991, recipient of the MLA Lowell Award). His more recent works include *The Antinomies of Realism* (2013, recipient of the Truman Capote Award), *The Ancients and the Postmoderns* (2015), and *An American Utopia: Dual Power and the Universal Army* (2016). Jameson received the 2008 Holberg International Prize and the 2012 MLA Life Time Achievement Award for his scholarship.

Adrian Johnston is a Professor in the Department of Philosophy at the University of New Mexico at Albuquerque and a faculty member at the Emory Psychoanalytic Institute in Atlanta. He is the author of *Time Driven: Metapsychology and the Splitting of the Drive* (2005), *Žižek's Ontology: A Transcendental Materialist Theory of Subjectivity* (2008), *Badiou, Žižek, and Political Transformations: The Cadence of Change* (2009), and *Prolegomena to Any Future*

Materialism, Volume One: The Outcome of Contemporary French Philosophy (2013), all published by Northwestern University Press. He is the co-author, with Catherine Malabou, of *Self and Emotional Life: Philosophy, Psychoanalysis, and Neuroscience* (Columbia University Press, 2013). His most recent book is *Adventures in Transcendental Materialism: Dialogues with Contemporary Thinkers* (Edinburgh University Press, 2014). He currently has two books forthcoming: *A New German Idealism: Hegel, Žižek, and Dialectical Materialism* (Columbia University Press) and *Irrepressible Truth: On Lacan's "The Freudian Thing"* (Palgrave Macmillan). Moreover, he presently is finishing *Prolegomena to Any Future Materialism, Volume Two: A Weak Nature Alone*. With Todd McGowan and Slavoj Žižek, he is a co-editor of the book series *Diaeresis* at Northwestern University Press.

Jean-François Kervegan is Professor of Philosophy at the University Paris 1 Panthéon-Sorbonne and Senior Fellow of the Institut Universitaire de France. His research areas are: practical philosophy of German Idealism (especially Hegel, Kant), contemporary philosophy of law, theories of normativity. His last books as Author are: *La raison des normes. Essai sur Kant*, Vrin, 2015; *Que faire de Carl Schmitt ?*, Gallimard, 2011; *L'effectif et le*

rationnel. Hegel et l'esprit objectif, Vrin, 2008; *Hegel et l'hégélianisme*, PUF, 2005. His last books as editor include: (J.-F. Kervégan, M. Plouviez et P.-Y. Quiviger, eds) *Norme et violence*, Olms, 2015; (J.-F. Kervégan et H.J. Sandkühler, dir.) *Manuel de l'idéalisme allemand*, Editions du Cerf, 2015; (J.-F. Kervégan and B. Mabilille, eds.) *Hegel au présent. Une relève de la métaphysique*, CNRS Editions, 2012; (J.-F. Kervégan, ed.) *Raison pratique et normativité chez Kant*, ENS Editions, 2010.

Zdravko Kobe teaches German Classical Philosophy at the University of Ljubljana. He has published extensively on German Classical Philosophy, especially on Kant and Hegel. His latest book on Kant's theory of subject Appeared in Slovene as *Automaton transcendental III. Kantová teorija subjekta* (Ljubljana: DTP 2014).

Pierre Macherey, born in 1938, has taught philosophy in Paris and in Lille, after working with Louis Althusser. His research was mainly focused on the thought of Spinoza, the philosophical activity of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries in France and on the relations between philosophy and literature. Recent publications: *"Marx 1845: les "Thèses" sur Feuerbach"* (éd. Amsterdam, Paris, 2008), *"Petits riens - Ornières et dérives du quotidien"* (éd. du Bord de l'eau, Bordeaux, 2009), *"La parole*

universitaire" (éd. La Fabrique, Paris, 2011), "De l'utopie!" (éd. De l'Incidence, 2011), "Études de philosophie "française" de Sieyès à Barni" (Publications de la Sorbonne, Paris, 2013), "Le sujet des norms" (éd. Amsterdam, Paris, 2014), "S'orienter" (éd. Kimé, Paris, 2017).

Todd McGowan teaches theory and film at the University of Vermont. He is the author of *Capitalism and Desire: The Psychic Cost of Free Markets, Enjoying What We Don't Have: The Political Project of Psychoanalysis*, and other works.

Gregor Moder works as a researcher and teaches Philosophy of Art at the University of Ljubljana, Slovenia. He is a member of the editorial board of *Problemi*, the foremost Slovenian journal for philosophy, psychoanalysis and culture, and the author of *Hegel and Spinoza* (Vienna: Turia+Kant, 2013, in German) and *Comic Love: Shakespeare, Hegel, Lacan* (Ljubljana: DTP, 2016, in Slovenian). The English version of *Hegel and Spinoza: Substance and Negativity* is forthcoming with Northwestern University Press (Evanston, IL: NUP).

Terry Pinkard is University Professor of Philosophy at Georgetown University. His publications include *Hegel's Phenomenology: The Sociality of Reason* (1994), *Hegel: A Biography*

(2000), *German Philosophy 1760-1860: The Legacy of Idealism* (2002), *Hegel's Naturalism: Mind, Nature and the Final Ends of Life* (2012), *Does History Makes Sense? Hegel on the Historical Shapes of Justice* (2017)

Robert B. Pippin is the Evelyn Stefansson Nef Distinguished Service Professor in the Committee on Social Thought, the Department of Philosophy, and the College at the University of Chicago, and has been the Chair of the Committee on Social Thought for the past twenty-two years. His books include *Kant's Theory of Form, Hegel's Idealism: The Satisfactions of Self-Consciousness; Modernism as a Philosophical Problem: On the Dissatisfactions of European High Culture; Idealism as Modernism: Hegelian Variations; The Persistence of Subjectivity: On the Kantian Aftermath; Hegel's Practical Philosophy: Rational Agency as Ethical Life; Hollywood Westerns and American Myth: The Importance of Howard Hawks and John Ford for Political Philosophy; Hegel on Self-Consciousness: Desire and Death in The Phenomenology of Spirit; Fatalism in American Film Noir: Some Cinematic Philosophy; After the Beautiful. Hegel and the Philosophy of Pictorial Modernism*. His most recent published book is *Interanimations: Receiving Modern German Philosophy*. His latest book, *The Philosophical Hitchcock:*

Vertigo and the Anxieties of Unknowingness, will be published in autumn, 2017.

Borna Radnik is a Ph.D. Candidate in Philosophy at the Centre for Research in Modern European Philosophy, at Kingston University, London England. His Ph.D. dissertation is entitled "Hegel's Double Movement of Necessity and Freedom". He has published with *Continental Thought and Theory* (2016), and has also published reviews in *Radical Philosophy*.

Jure Simoniti is researcher at the University of Ljubljana. His main research topics are: German Idealism, philosophy of language, philosophy of science, realism, and theory of truth-values. His latest publications include *Die Philosophie der kleinsten Prätextiösität* (Wien, Berlin: Turia + Kant, 2014) and *The Untruth of Reality. The Unacknowledged Realism of Modern Philosophy* (Lanham etc.: Lexington Books 2016).

Michael J. Thompson received his BA in Languages and Literature from Rutgers, studied philosophy at Humboldt University, Berlin, and received his PhD in Political Philosophy from the Graduate Center, City University of New York. He is currently Associate Professor of Political Theory in the Dept. of Political Science at

William Paterson University. His recent books include *Constructing Marxist Ethics: Critique, Normativity, Praxis* (ed.) (Leiden: Brill, 2015); *The Domestication of Critical Theory* (London: Rowman and Littlefield, 2016); *The Palgrave Handbook of Critical Theory* (ed.) (New York: Palgrave, 2017); and the forthcoming *Hegel's Metaphysics and the Philosophy of Politics* (ed.) (New York: Routledge, 2018); and *The Perversion of Subjectivity: The Eclipse of Autonomy in Modern Society* (New York: Columbia University Press).

Oxana Timofeeva is a senior lecturer on contemporary philosophy at the European University in St. Petersburg, a senior research fellow at the Institute of philosophy of Russian Academy of Science (Moscow), a member of the artistic collective "Chto Delat?" ("What is to be done?"), a deputy editor of the journal "Stasis", and the author of books *History of Animals: An Essay on Negativity, Immanence, and Freedom* (Maastricht, 2009), and *Introduction to the Erotic Philosophy of Georges Bataille* (in Russian, Moscow, 2009).

Slavoj Žižek is a senior researcher at the Institute for Sociology and Philosophy, University of Ljubljana, International Director of the Birkbeck Institute for the Humanities, and Professor of Philosophy and Psychoanalysis

at the European Graduate School.
His latest publications include
*Less Than Nothing: Hegel and the
Shadow of Dialectical Materialism*
(2012), *Absolute Recoil* (2014),
Disparities (2016).

Alenka Zupančič is a research
advisor at the Institute of
Philosophy of the Slovenian
Academy of Sciences and Arts
and professor at the European
Graduate School, Switzerland.
Notable for her work on the
intersection of philosophy and
psychoanalysis, she is the author
of numerous articles and books,
including *The Odd One In: On
Comedy; Why Psychoanalysis: Three
Interventions; The Shortest Shadow:
Nietzsche's Philosophy of the Two;
Ethics of the Real: Kant and Lacan*,
and (forthcoming) *What is Sex?*.