

Hegel and the Possibility of a New Idealism

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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 farthest 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 *truer* 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

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 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:

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 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,

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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-

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19 Kant, 1998, hereafter cited in text as *KrV*, by A and B, representing the original pagination of the 1st and 2nd editions, respectively.

20This 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.

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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-

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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

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 25 Brandom 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.” (Brandom 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

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 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 Vraneševi 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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³⁹To 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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