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## THE IDEA OF THE GOOD

The paper offers an interpretation of the "Idea of the Good" in the *Science of Logic* (SL) that is independently interesting and systematically instructive with respect to Hegel's treatment of practical matters.

Central to Hegel's treatment of the idea of the good in SL is a rather unorthodox thesis concerning actuality, namely that what is actual -as opposed to what just is, either spatiotemporally or abstractly- is properly called actual, if it embodies a value, the value of maximal determinateness.<sup>1</sup> The good that is actual is a good that embodies the value of maximal determinateness.

Section 1 addresses some methodological issues, including the debate about the nature of Hegel's logic. Section 2 contains the main argument about the "Idea of the Good". Section 3 sketches some of the broader implications of the ambitious conception of goodness I attribute to Hegel and uses it to address a minor interpretative puzzle about the conclusion of *Encyclopedia* with a long quote from Aristotle (GW 20, 572).

### 1. The *Logic*, the good, and actuality.

The presence of a section on the good in a book on logic is puzzling. This is of course not the only puzzling section; "life", "chemism", and "mechanism" are not traditional logical topics. Nor is it usual to treat of "Being" and "Nothing" in such context. The debate about what Hegel is up to in this book is long and opinion is far from settled. The two poles are categorial/conceptualist and metaphysical/substantive.

On one side, Hegel is seen as continuing Kant's remarkable and groundbreaking project of supplying us with a logic of being, which in contrast to formal logic aims to be a logic of all possible objects of experience - a priori concepts and laws of understanding "**solely** insofar as they are related to **objects** a priori" (B82) – and so in some sense a logic of reality. In Béatrice Longuenesse's elegant summary:

Hegel owes to Kant the idea that the modal categories express nothing other than the degree of unity between existence and a unified system of thought-determinations. But he opposes Kant in that for him, that

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<sup>1</sup> The argument in section 2 overlaps with what I present briefly and with different focus in K. DELIGIORGI "Hegel on Addiction" in: *Hegel Bulletin* 39:2 (2018) (forthcoming) and also in more detail in K. DELIGIORGI, "The Good and The Actual", in *Zweite Natur. Stuttgarter Hegel-Kongress 2017. Veröffentlichungen der Internationalen Hegel-Vereinigung* edited by A. Honneth and J. Christ (forthcoming).

unity leaves no room on the side of existence for a world of the beyond. And on the side of thought-determinations, the unity brought about by reflection is not that of an immutable subject faced with an object external to it. Rather, it is that of a thought process that is immanent to existence and transformed in its very forms by its confrontation with multiplicity.<sup>2</sup>

At the other pole, Hegel is seen as engaging in post-Kantian metaphysics; that is, having identified problems with Kant's transcendental approach - mainly its incipient subject relativity- he seeks to vindicate a place for constructive metaphysics in modern philosophy. The issue then is how Hegel understands 'metaphysics'. For Markus Gabriel it is a "transcendental ontology", which, as he explains, "*investigates the ontological conditions of our conditions of access to what there is*".<sup>3</sup> More precisely,

[The investigation] sets out with the simple insight that the subject (in whichever way conceived) *exists*, that the analysis of the concept of existence is, hence, methodologically prior to the analysis of the subject's access to existence. The subject with its conceptual capacities actually exists; it is part of the world. Therefore, the question arises: what conditions have to be fulfilled by being (the world) in order for it to appear to finite thinkers who in turn change the structure of what there is by referring to it? (ibid.).

For James Kreines, metaphysics is the topic of "why?" questions, or "philosophical inquiry into explanatory reasons, or reason in the world, and ultimately into their completeness".<sup>4</sup> So it turns out that interpreters in this group are also highly alert and seek to make sense of Hegel's entwining of epistemological and ontological issues in SL.

At a sufficiently general level then, the level at which we are at now, wondering about the sort of logic that is SL, it would be fair to say that there is consensus; most interpreters take fully on board the idea, forcefully defended by Robert Pippin, that Hegel is a post-Kantian, and that means a post-critical, metaphysician.<sup>5</sup> This is too general of course to be informative, but at least

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<sup>2</sup> Béatrice LONGUENESSE, *Hegel's Critique of Metaphysics*, translated by Nicole J. Simek, Cambridge 2007, 119.

<sup>3</sup> Markus GABRIEL, *Transcendental Ontology: Essays in German Idealism*, London 2011, ix.

<sup>4</sup> James KREINES, *Reason in the World. Hegel's Metaphysics and its Philosophical Appeal* Oxford, 2015, 9.

<sup>5</sup> This characterization, "post-critical metaphysician" does not say much of course. Here's how Brady Bowman puts it: "Prior to ontology is a deeper metaphysical account of negativity designed to explain *both* the emergence of a finite cognitive mind that finds itself over against a categorially structured world of finite things, *and* the specific limits finite cognition encounters in trying to render that world intelligible to itself. Ultimately, the structure of the Concept and the dynamic of absolute negation serve to integrate the two great models from which post-Kantian philosophers drew their inspiration: Spinoza's monism and Kant's idealism. They do so by supporting a unified account of the source of determinacy in nature and intentionality, that is, by identifying a single structure that is at once the structure of being and the structure of thought" (Brady BOWMAN, *Hegel and the Metaphysics of Absolute Negativity*, Cambridge, 2013, 23-24). For a recent account by Pippin himself, see Robert R.

shows why SL legitimately or at least unsurprisingly contains a discussion of the metaphysics of the good.

There is a long tradition of metaphysical thought about the good that is alert to the logical form of goodness and uses logical exposition -understood broadly rather than as an effort to axiomatize the domain- to guide thinking about the nature of the good. Examples include classical debates about whether or not the good has existential or logical priority over things, and following from this, whether it is independent of or necessarily indexed to things, mid-twentieth century meta-ethical debates about whether or not the 'good' is analyzable, and whether it is a descriptive or attributive term. Hegel's very dense treatment of the good is a contribution to these kinds of debates.<sup>6</sup> Very briefly the argument I attribute to Hegel is that unless *the* good is fully and non-contingently realized, it cannot be called 'good', therefore, he concludes that the good must be "actual".

What Hegel means by 'actual' is an interpretative question familiar to those who try to understand Hegel's political philosophy. Cryptic remarks in the *Philosophy of Right* about the rationality of the actual are not immediately clarified by reference to Hegel's usage in a logical context. This difficulty is nicely illustrated by the following *Zusatz* from the *Encyclopedia Logic*:

[It] happens not infrequently in practical matters that evil will and inertia hide behind the category of possibility, in order to avoid definite obligations in that way; what we said earlier about the use of the principle of "grounding" holds good here, too. Rational, practical people do not let themselves be impressed by what is possible, precisely because it is only possible; instead they hold onto what is actual -and, of course, it is not just what is immediately there that should be understood as actual. (GW 20, §143 Addition)<sup>7</sup>

Tackling Hegel's use of modal categories is therefore of some urgency if we are to make sense of such passages and indeed of the relation between the good and the actual in SL.<sup>8</sup>

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PIPPIN, "Hegel on Logic As Metaphysics", in *Oxford Hegel Handbook*, edited by D. Moyar Oxford, 2017.

<sup>6</sup> I will not be covering the relation between the good in the *Logic* and Hegel's substantive normative commitments, such as the notion of the ethical life. Dean Moyar offers an excellent treatment of the topic. While my discussion is not explicitly concerned with these transitions, it is, I believe, complementary to Moyar's analysis and certainly shares a concern with unpacking the commitments of Hegel's holism. As Moyar puts it: "The logical core of Hegel's account of ethical life is that the rationality of any action depends on it being embedded within a totality of conditions" (Dean MOYAR, "Urteil, Schluss und Handlung: Hegels logische Übergänge im Argument zur Sittlichkeit" in: *Hegel-Studien* 42 (2008) 51-80). My account of actuality is an attempt to explain what this 'totality of conditions' might mean.

<sup>7</sup> Thanks to Mert Can Yirmibes for bringing the passage to my attention.

<sup>8</sup> Paul Redding has perhaps done the most in recent years to draw attention to this important issue and to tease out Hegel's modal position; see especially Paul REDDING "Actuality: Hegel Amongst the Modal Metaphysicians", Presidential Address, Australasian Association of Philosophy Annual Conference 2015.

Although in what follows I stay close to the text, I find contrastively useful two sets of non-Hegelian discussions of actuality. First is the late medieval conception of the actual world as something embodying a value, a direction of thought motivated by the need to explain why, given the various simultaneously available options that confront God before creation, God chooses to bring the actual world into existence.<sup>9</sup> This same intuition, albeit systematically presented and defended, guides also the argument in Leibniz in the *Theodicy*, namely that the world God chose to create is the best possible one.<sup>10</sup> This background is useful at least proleptically to show that actuality can be thought of as a value term or which comes to the same thing what is actual is not satisfactorily defined ostensively. What motivates Hegel is not a desire to explain the divine creative act, but rather, equally ambitiously, to give a rational vindication of actuality and what is interesting and distinctive about it, in contrast to standard theodicies, is that he argues that it is the notion of goodness that pushes the argument in that direction.

The second set is contemporary work on actuality. That our world is somehow special is an assumption shared also by modern actualists, there is no further question about what makes it special; in the absence of the theological context there is no reason to explain the good that guides the divine will. The main question motivating the contemporary discussion is: how is it best to settle claims about *possibilia* while avoiding ontological claims about such entities.<sup>11</sup> This is relevant to Hegel's discussion of the good, because he wants to show that assigning entities to forms of thought (or linguistic expressions), in order to vindicate thinking or talking in a certain way is precisely the wrong way of going about it; if something is to be called good, then we must be able to offer a full account of why the good in question is truly good.

## 2. How the good can be true.

The purpose of this section is to substantiate the claim about the goodness or value of actuality and the relation of this notion of actuality to the idea of the good. To anticipate somewhat, the main argument is that Hegel identifies a number of problems with different conceptions of the nature of the good and then brings them down to the logical form of the idea of goodness as a practical idea. Once he makes this move, it is then possible to see how

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<sup>9</sup> See C. HARSTHORNE *Anselm's Discovery. A Re-examination of the Ontological Proof of God's Existence*. La Salle Ill, 1965.

<sup>10</sup> See the "Preface" and paragraph 8, "Essais de Théodicée sur la bonté de Dieu, la liberté de l'homme et l'origine du mal", in: *Oeuvres philosophiques de Leibniz*, edited by Paul Janet, Paris 1900. What the Leibnizian thesis is and how it is defended are matters of controversy, which exceed this paper, but see Brown and Check 2016 for a recent treatment.

<sup>11</sup> See K. BENNETT, "Two Axes of Actualism" in: *Philosophical Review* 114:3: (2005), 295-326; also B. LINSKI and E.N. ZALTA 1996, "In Defense of the Contingently Nonconcrete" in: *Philosophical Studies: An International Journal for Philosophy in the Analytic Tradition* 84:2/3 (1996), 283-294. For an important discussion that straddles the medieval and contemporary concerns illuminating both, see R. M. ADAMS, "Theories of Actuality" in: *Noûs* 8 (1974), 211-231.

actuality presents a solution to these problems, but also how the solution, in a way, is just that the good *becomes* actual.

The argument starts by establishing certain parallels with the treatment of the good in the "Morality" section of the *Philosophy of Right*. The key point is the idea that the will aims at the good in the process of realizing itself, so the good is not some arbitrary external object for the will (GW 12, 178; see too GW 12, 231 and 232). Abstracted from the psychology of agency, which is not relevant to SL, the notion of "will" would appear senseless, unless we take it as reminder of a claim that is key to the whole section, namely that the notion of goodness is a practical notion, specifically it aims at becoming real, so it can concessively be described as having a will-like character. The claim needs defending, of course, so the first task is to find out the good to be a practical idea. If a satisfactory account can be given, then we will also have made some progress towards understanding how an idea, even if it is only the idea of the good, can have dynamic character.

What does it mean for? Hegel explains practicality with respect to goodness through a contrast between theoretical and practical. He describes each as if they are two distinct entities, two different forms of thought. Each, he claims, has a different relation to what he calls "the objective world". The theoretical idea is a universal (*Allgemeine*), it is subjective and also "lacks determination" *as such* it 'stands opposed to the objective world' and derives from it "content and filling" (GW 12, 231). The practical idea "stands against" the actual. The relation to substantial being is different: the practical idea has an active relation to the objective world; the (objective) world is *denied* actuality, the practical is to become actual (as opposed to gaining content from the world). This formal distinction suggests and can easily be captured by the metaphor of the direction of fit. That is, we can understand theoretical and practical to stand for a different relation to truth: the theoretical idea is true, when the content of cognition is adequate to what is, the "objective world", the practical idea *becomes* true, when it is realized in the objective world.

Although it is helpful and relevant to signal the importance of truth to the discussion about the good, there is another point Hegel makes that suggests that the direction of fit metaphor is really of no help. The point is this: the theoretical idea describes a relation between subject and world, the "subject has ...vindicated *objectivity* for itself", and a world that looks by implication to lack determinateness in itself, "in itself [the world] eludes the unity of the concept and is of itself a nullity" (GW 12, 231). Let us call this an impositionist model of conceptual activity: to think about worldly things, subjects need to impose conceptual structure on what subjects call 'world' but which is just a name for something that is intrinsically devoid of conceptual form. The point Hegel wants to make is that if we have such an impositionist understanding of the idea of the good, an idea that is practical in ways we have yet to clarify, then we shall have trouble with it. The idea of the good, he says, "entails a demand for external actuality" (*ibid.*). The argument of the section, as I see it, is that this demand, which can be re-described as the transformation of a theoretical idea *to* a practical, cannot be met as long as we hold onto an impositionist model of conceptual activity. The question of truth is posed now

in a way that looks unanswerable: although the problem likely generalises for any instance of concept use that assumes the impositionist model, it is particularly vexing when we want to predicate goodness of something.

Hegel devotes most of the rest of the section to showing how the three characteristic features of the idea of the good, that it is *of* the good, that it has some content, in other words, *something* is good, and that it is *practical*, simply cannot hold together unless we revise upwards our expectations of what we do when we use the idea of the good. The basic thought is that the good cannot be fully good, and so truly an idea of the good, unless it is realized. The realized good is truly good because there is no unrealised residue or constraint in its realisation. Simply put, here are in crude outline the basic steps of Hegel's argument: if the theoretical idea which gives us the concept of the good does its job well, then we will have grasped that the good is a practical concept and if we grasp it as such, then we cannot be satisfied that we know the good, unless it is realised in every respect. And this explains how, for Hegel, the assertion of the truth of the idea of goodness entails certain ontological commitments. Because my main aim is to say something about Hegel's alternative to impositionism I will not spend much time in critically examining and defending the dialectic that leads to it; I simply hope to do enough to motivate Hegel's alternative.

Let us start with the unexceptional thought that we have an idea of the good and we want to see how it is realized. We need not concern ourselves with how we got the idea. Hegel argues that the realized idea, whatever it is we have in our sights, a good *x*, is "finite and *restricted*" (GW 12, 232). He then gives different glosses on the problem of finitude or restriction in order to show that there is no easy way of holding together the features of the idea of the good just identified and that we need to think more radically about it (effectively throwing away the impositionist model).

One version of the problem concerns the content of the idea of the good, that is, the content may be finite and restricted. We have an idea of the good. Hegel grants this us thought, that is, what we call 'good' may well be good. The problem is not that we are mistaken but that the form of the concept of goodness is infinite (GW 12, 232) whereas the content of the idea is finite, it is restricted to "determinate content" (GW 12, 231). That there is a problem can be seen if we ask the question: what is it about the content we call good in virtue of which it is good, i.e. earns the designation 'good'? Hegel's point is that, unless one is a nominalist, one would expect that the content is not "just something posited arbitrary or accidental" (GW 12, 232). But if the form of the concept is infinite, then we cannot be in position to say in virtue of what this content is good, because any such content, however long a list we draw, will be restricted.<sup>12</sup> Restriction may not be the best way of describing this problem

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<sup>12</sup> The passage is: "The mentioned finitude of the content ... does not yet have the form of the being-in-itself" (GW 12, 232). The thought here can be illuminated with reference to Moore's open question argument without needing to follow Moore to his conclusion about the irreducibility of the good. But something like this insight about the form of goodness exceeding its expression in a set of necessary and sufficient conditions, exceeding definition

since it seems Hegel is concerned with avoiding arbitrariness and allowing us to be in possession of genuine and necessary features of goodness (see GW 12, 232).

The second version of the finitude problem is that what is being *realized* is finite and restricted (*beschränktes*).<sup>13</sup> This seems an odd problem to have; it looks as if Hegel is saying that any realization of the good that falls short of realizing the full infinite idea is restricted and as such flawed. While it is true that no single instance can exhaust all there is to goodness, it seems odd to expect this; it looks like a misunderstanding of how general concepts relate to particular things.<sup>14</sup>

But this is exactly what Hegel is asking: how *do* they relate to particular things so that we can answer with confidence the question: is *this* any good? By virtue of what is *this* any good? If we answer, by virtue of its matching somehow the content of the idea of the good, we have not just a recurrence of the earlier problem but also an obligation to make clear the relation of this matching: does it resemble it? if so, how?<sup>15</sup>

While more detail and analysis can be added to this basic statement of the problem of restriction, for example, by identifying differences between different conceptions of content, which can be definitions, sets of propositions, entities or states of affairs, it is clear that there is an underlying unresolved question about what it takes for the idea of the good to be "for itself already the true" (GW 12, 232). The solution, or rather the direction from which a solution might arise, is to make a virtue of finitude by making finite contents or realizations merely provisional on the way to full realization of the good. The first step in this direction is to acknowledge the practicality of the idea of the good, the fact that, according to Hegel, the good entails a *demand* for actuality (GW 12, 231). We can understand this claim in a fairly straightforward way to mean that goodness guides action. Thinking logically about it, this is to say that we are looking for practical forms of thought. An obvious candidate is practical syllogism.

Practical syllogism is thought directed towards doing. Given some end, the agent thinks about how the end can be realized, and because the end of the action is already being pursued in the thinking, the gap between thought and

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(*horismos*, from *horizein* which also means to mark a boundary) is a classical Platonic problem.

<sup>13</sup> I think the relevant passage admits of both readings: "self-determination is essentially *particularization*, since the reflection of the will is in itself, as negative unity as such, also singularity in the sense that it excludes an other while presupposing it" (GW 12, 232)

<sup>14</sup> This can be illuminated by a Platonic point that the good is the last form to be seen and is multiply realisable in the world; see "in the region of the known the last thing to be seen and hardly seen is the idea of good, and that when seen it must needs point us to the conclusion that this is indeed the cause for all things of all that is right and beautiful, giving birth in the visible world to light, and the author of light and itself in the intelligible world being the authentic source of truth and reason, and that anyone who is to act wisely in private or public must have caught sight of this" (Plato, *Republic*, trans. B. Jowett, Clarendon, 1888, VII 517c-d).

<sup>15</sup> The relevant passage is "The realized good is good by virtue of ... not a realization corresponding to the idea" (GW 12, 232)

action closes.<sup>16</sup> For many who have grappled with this issue, there remains a problem about what exactly the conclusion of a practical syllogism is and what constitutes a valid practical inference. Although the issue is of concern in the present context given that Hegel too wants to close the gap between thought and being, this is not his immediate concern here. His concern rather is this: the advantage of a practical form of thought, the syllogism of realization, is that it promises to offer an orderly and un-mysterious way to connect whatever is to be our major premise, containing the idea of the good, with something that realizes the good. This is why the relevant shape of thought is the syllogism of external purposiveness (GW 12, 232).

The syllogism of external purposiveness, however, presents with a problem namely that the end stated in the conclusion is not readily distinguishable from the *means* to some good, rather than the good. Standardly, the major premise of a practical syllogism gives the good, the minor premise states facts that need to be taken into account, if the good is to be realized, and the conclusion is the practical inference that guides the action or retrospectively justifies it. The problem that Hegel finds with this classical structure is that the conclusion is not internally connected to the good in the major premise, hence the goodness of the conclusion can be just as well described as means to the good rather than part of it. But to sustain a part/whole relation a solution would need to be found to the earlier problem of restriction, so that we can tell that this good is indeed good. The recurrence of this problem shows how tempting it is to fall back onto a static model of the good. Instead, we need to forge ahead and find a dynamic way of relating part and whole.

Here is how Hegel diagnoses the problem: there is a gap between the first premise, which states some infinite good "absolute purpose" "in and for itself" (GW 12, 233) and the restricted good that is the realized -or to be realized- good. The problem is internal to the thought of the good even in this context in which we acknowledge its practicality, because the syllogism aims to bind something general, the idea of the good, to something particular, whatever content falls under the idea given some circumstances. It is, Hegel says, as if we have two worlds in opposition to one another, thought and external being (GW 12, 233). If the notion of practicality or realization seem promising, perhaps as bridge concepts, then this is where we should turn, specifically what Hegel calls the syllogism of action (GW 12, 233).

The discussion of the syllogism of action is characteristically dense and not easily amenable to the sort of reconstructive approach I use here, because Hegel relies more heavily in this passage on what he considers the internal achievements of SL. Nonetheless, the contribution of this final syllogism to the argument can be extracted if we get to grips with the notion of "actuality" as it is used here in both first and second premise of the syllogism. The first premise states that action contains an "immediate reference of the good purpose [*Zweck*] to the actuality which it appropriates" (GW 12, 233-4), the second premise states that action also requires something that functions as

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<sup>16</sup> I follow A. W. PRICE, 'The Practical Syllogism in Aristotle: A New Interpretation' in: *Logical Analysis and History of Philosophy* 11(2008)151-162.



"means against the external actuality" (GW 12, 234). When end and means are brought together we arrive at the conclusion, that "the idea of the good can ... find its completion only in the idea of the true" (GW 12, 233).

To interpret what is going on, we can use the two points Hegel makes most emphatically and repeatedly in this whole section: that the impositionist model of conceptual activity is wrong and that the idea of the good is liable to the problem of restriction. Impositionism is unsatisfactory, if the following two conditions obtain: we want our ideas to be true, and this is certainly the case with the idea of the good, and secondly, truth is understood as correspondence of the idea to some fact of the matter. Restriction is a problem that has been presented as internal to the idea of the good as it is given so far, it signals a mismatch between the idea and its content. Impositionism and the problem of restriction have a similar structure. The positive proposal is that thinking differently about the idea of the good is a solution to the problem of restriction and shows how to avoid impositionism. In particular: if we think of the practical form of syllogism not as a tool of thought but as a *form* of thought, and specifically a *practical* form of thought, we make a start in thinking differently about what is. Here is where the concept of actuality is important.

Actuality is discussed in earlier sections of the SL, where it is contrasted with empty possibility and with abstraction; so something would be actual if it is really possible, so instantiable, and also if it is actually instantiated, some particular or some content. These senses of the concept though do not help here because they merely push the dialectic a step back: we are where we are because the idea and whatever so far has counted as actual are apart. This apartness is thoroughgoing: we have no reason to believe that the forms of thought capture what is thought about. Hegel suggests the problem is both in how we think about what is thought about and of the conceptual activity of thought. What is, or what is thought about, is treated a "realm of darkness" (GW 12, 233) and the conceptual activity of thinking is treated as something thinkers do. To let go the impositionist model is to take seriously that thought has practical form and that actuality is not "in and for itself worthless" (*ibid.*), that is, something brute or inert, but rather that it embodies a value.

The value interpretation assumes that the concept of actuality develops as the argument of the SL draws to its conclusion, that is, from a rather abstract understanding of actuality in earlier sections, we reach one that is more definite; "actuality" gains the sense of full, maximal or "complete" (GW 12, 233) determinateness. Maximal determinateness is a value – we can understand this by considering the disvalue of lack of clarity or definition of ideas. If we think of what is as possessing the value of maximal determinateness, we think of a maximal consistent set of properties that are true of the region in question. Maximal determinateness is the consistent set of all true propositions that hold in that region. If the good is to be actual then, we should be able to identify the maximal set of value properties that are true of some region and so the actuality of the good will be the set of all true value propositions that hold in some region. Effectively then, the set that represents

the actuality of goodness gives us the conjunctive fact of what is the case evaluatively and so makes the good true without any distance or remainder.

But how can such a fact be known? How can we escape the standpoints that shape our perspectives, the locality of the regions we pick, the basic limitations of what we know of the good such as we know it? Here is where the presentation of actuality in the context of a syllogism of action is relevant: while undeniably ambitious the idea of the good presented here is one that renders local limitations merely contingent. They do not describe conceptual impossibilities (i.e. the problem of restriction). The practical form of thought is what it takes for content to be fully determinate.

### 3. The real world and the divine intellect.

The analysis of the idea of the good in SL remains at a level of abstraction that seems removed from the real world in which we are called to make judgements about goodness, act in light of our ideas of what is good and even entertain doubts about *the* good. There are two takeaway lessons that illuminate Hegel's broader practical commitments. The first is that the good is something we get to know and realize in historical time. This is the reflective rationalist inheritance Hegel appropriates and endorses: the good is what we are capable of knowing and doing and ultimately, in the long run, manage to know and do. The second lesson is that the realization of the good is not and cannot be a task for an individual; however well-motivated, well-brought up, sincere and fully reflective about the ends they pursue, individuals can only tackle parts of the good and can only do so intermittently, when things fall right for them.

The historical and collective aspects of Hegel's practical philosophy are familiar enough and the connection to SL merely shows the conceptual motivation that underpins them. A more controversial implication of the analysis of the good concerns Hegel's relation to Aristotle. Contemporary neo-Aristotelians who see in Hegel an ally are motivated in part by the desire to formulate an ethics that has an internal connection to human form, and so provides us with a vision of the good that is constrained by the contingencies of human life, and is essentially within reach. The contrast would be a transcendent conception of the good like a *summum bonum*, that is an idea only or an abstract object. Hegel certainly has no track with the latter. At the same time, he offers a very ambitious conception of goodness, which is, I think relevant to understanding his relation to Aristotle.

In the long concluding quote in the *Encyclopedia*, Hegel appears to endorse the view that what is most good is available for divine inspection as that which most is:

And thinking in itself deals with that which is best in itself, and that which is thinking in the fullest sense with that which is best in the fullest sense. And thought thinks on itself because it shares the nature of the object of thought; for it becomes an object of thought in coming into

contact with and thinking its objects, so that thought and object of thought are the same. For that which is capable of receiving the object of thought, i.e. the essence, is thought. But it is active when it possesses this object. Therefore the possession rather than the receptivity is the divine element which thought seems to contain, and the act of contemplation is what is most pleasant and best. If, then, God is always in that good state in which we sometimes are, this compels our wonder; and if in a better this compels it yet more. And God is in a better state. And life also belongs to God; for the actuality of thought is life, and God is that actuality; and God's self-dependent actuality is life most good and eternal. We say therefore that God is a living being, eternal, most good, so that life and duration continuous and eternal belong to God; for this is God.<sup>17</sup>

Putting to one side the metaphysics of what is best and what is in fullest sense that sustain Aristotle's position, I want to show what in Hegel's position permits the use of this quote unmodified and unqualified.

The move towards the syllogism of action is motivated by the search for conditions that allow for the good to be true; the quick answer is that the good is true when it is actual. Hegel is a realist about truth and goodness. Ethical realists are committed to propositions about goodness being truth apt. The oddity of Hegel's realism is that the fact that would make such propositions true is neither spatiotemporal nor abstract. Truth is indexed to actuality. Actuality comes in degrees. So the truth of the good is possible and attainable though not ready to hand. For any finite human community this truth cannot be fully available. The best case scenario for any individual or community, given that they are reflective about goodness, is that they can have good reasons to think their good is part of the good; the worse case scenario is that they have no reasons to see that their good is only partially good. Some good is partially good either because its concept is flawed or through its consequences, which count because there is no a priori criterion of goodness in the offing. So given reasoning about goodness the semantics of the good Hegel presents allows for some local goods to be in fact good. Epistemically, the model allows for genuine disagreements and even conflicts and localized skepticism about the good. In other words, it is part and parcel of the historical project of realizing the good to figure out what the good is in a way that draws from all provisional knowledge gained. So although value-theoretically the position is committed to a single good that is most good, and to a single best answer to all value questions, at any historical time the search for this answer can only be considered as ongoing.

Following this brief sketch, which is merely a description of meta-ethical commitments that follow from the earlier analysis, it appears that both for truth and for knowledge, there is an assumption of something like an endpoint, which would eventually connect local answers and partial insights into actuality. The endpoint is just what we called before the conjunctive fact that forms the consistent set of *all* value predicates, the fact that makes the good

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<sup>17</sup> Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, translated by W. D. Ross, Clarendon, 1924, 1072a21-1073a12.

true. It is easy to think of this endpoint as a set of propositions that give us extremely fine-grained descriptions of what is – and therefore instantiate the value of actuality – and that no proposition or conjunct in that set can be other than worthy of being called good. It is less easy to add a temporal dimension to this thought, because we have no idea of when that endpoint is. If there is a fact of the matter then it is tempting to think that it can only be available at some time beyond historical time and therefore available for the inspection of a divine intellect. The dichotomy between abstract and concretely spatiotemporal we encountered in the early stages of the analysis of the idea of the good threatens to resurface. A clue of how Hegel might mitigate this threat is given programmatically at the start of SL when he describes logic as an insight into divine thought (GW 21, 34). So how seriously we take this threat depends on how persuasive we find the idea that thought, or at least thought about the good, is practical in the sense that it brings about its contents, and is guided, and corrigible, by what it brings about. This has to remain, for present purposes, an open question.

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