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Hegel after Deleuze and Guattari
Freedom in Philosophy and the State

by

Lee Watkins

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Declaration

This thesis is my own work and has not been submitted for a degree at another university.

Preface

In the thesis I explain why an immanent approach in philosophy means taking contingency to be “irreducible”. I show why Deleuze and Guattari believe this to be the case and why they think Hegel fails to do this. I then go on to show in what way Hegel incorporates contingency into his system and how he also creates his own sense of “necessity” that emerges from the systematic treatment of contingent concepts. In this way I show how Hegel can respond to the demand for immanence made by Deleuze and Guattari. I suggest that freedom, for Hegel, consists in the systematic treatment of contingency in our lives and in our thinking.

Note on references

I have used "*Logic*" throughout the thesis to refer to the A.V. Miller translation of *Hegel's Science of Logic*.

In footnotes I have used "*Enc Logic*" to refer to the *Encyclopaedia Logic* translated by T. F. Geraets, W. A. Suchting and H. S. Harris.

All works by Hegel, Deleuze and Deleuze and Guattari have been referred to in footnotes by the title of the work (or abbreviation) followed by the page number and/or section number (e.g. "*Difference and Repetition* p.1" or "*Phenomenology of Spirit* §74"), while works by other authors are referred to by author, date and page number (e.g. "Bentall 2004 p.1").

Chapter 1: Deleuze, Guattari and the irreducibility of contingency

Introduction

In this thesis I will present Hegel as a *systematic* and *immanent* thinker. Few would disagree with the claim that Hegel saw himself as a systematic thinker; however, as we will see, some commentators believe that Hegel was unsuccessful in this regard, and commentators tend to disagree about what “systematic” means for Hegel. In this thesis I will be arguing for what Thom Brooks calls a “strong systematic reading” of Hegel’s *Philosophy of Right*: for Brooks, “a systematic reading of Hegel’s work interprets this work within the context of Hegel’s philosophical system”.¹ According to even a “weak” systematic reading of the *Philosophy of Right*, it is vitally important that we recognise “the peculiar structure of Hegel’s argumentation”, and one way that we can do this is by looking at Hegel’s logical writing (the *Science of Logic* and the *Encyclopaedia Logic*); a strong systematic reading, on the other hand, will advocate the same but will emphasise the importance of more “specific features of the system” than the weaker reading.² I would suggest that my systematic reading of the *Philosophy of Right* is a particularly strong one because I will be demonstrating that a detailed analysis of large parts of the *Science of Logic* (which I will refer to as the “*Logic*”) can help us to understand what is going on in the *Philosophy of Right*.

¹ Brooks 2007 p.22

² Brooks 2007 pp.24, 27

So much for Hegel as a systematic thinker, for now; as I mentioned above, I will also be looking at the *immanence* of Hegel's thought. We will see that the issue of the immanence of Hegel's thought is difficult because we must first work out what "immanence" consists in. Stephen Houlgate argues that Hegel should be read as a thinker who proceeds immanently, since Hegel's method for examining categories is designed to allow these categories to develop of their own accord: if we follow Hegel, we gain an immanent insight into our concepts because we do not presuppose the "system of development" that our concepts undergo, but instead allow the logic to "make its own way" and thereby allow the system of development of concepts to emerge from the subject-matter itself (from what is implicit in the concepts themselves) and not from our own presuppositions.³ For example: for Houlgate, the concept of "pure being" *itself* turns into the concept of "nothing", and into "becoming", "determinate being", "something", and so on. For Houlgate, it is important that we recognise this immanence in Hegel's thought because it is the immanence of Hegel's approach that allows him to claim that he is getting to what the concepts are *themselves* and not dogmatically imposing a framework of development upon them. That is to say, Hegel wants to avoid the accusation that he gives the account he does of these concepts on the basis of a set of presuppositions, rather than because the concepts do in fact logically lead on from one another in the way he describes.

³ Houlgate 2006 p.52

Houlgate tells us that, when we follow Hegel and proceed without presuppositions, we allow what is “implicit” in a concept to become “explicit”. What this means is that the concept turns into what it *already is: pure being* is already *nothing*, for example. That is to say, when we think “pure being”, we are already “unconsciously” thinking “nothing”, and just need to think pure being to bring out this implicit concept: by “simply” thinking being we discover that it is identical to nothing.⁴

In this thesis I will be arguing that this is how we should read Hegel in this respect: it is indeed the case, for Hegel, that we move from one concept to another because of what is implicit in that concept, since it is only in this way that we can talk about the “self-movement” of the Concept that Hegel emphasises throughout his work. However, I want to suggest that we need to further examine this implicit/explicit relation. We must do this, I argue, because Hegel cannot take it for granted at the start of his examination of concepts in the *Logic* that concepts unfold in this or that way. The method of the *Logic* must itself emerge immanently from the subject matter of the *Logic*, if Hegel is to

⁴ See also Houlgate 2005, p.17: “If human beings are indeed historically self-determining, they cannot simply *be* this, but must actively *determine* themselves in history to be self-determining. In other words, we must make ourselves into self-determining beings in history, because we are self-determining, self-*producing* beings. However, if we always already *are* self-determining beings, then the process of making ourselves into self-determining beings cannot simply bring into being something which is not already a reality. Rather, it must be the process of making us into what we already are. To put it a little less paradoxically, this process involves humanity making itself *explicitly* what it already is *implicitly*. This means that we must come to be self-consciously what we already are ‘unconsciously’.”

proceed in a way that is truly immanent. I will argue in this thesis that there is a danger that, in trying to read Hegel as proceeding immanently and without presuppositions, we come to see the development of concepts as “always already” determined in a certain direction and thereby fail to properly bring out the *self-development* of these concepts; that is to say, we fail to see how a concept *changes* into a new concept (rather than always having been that concept from the beginning, and so not needing to change at all).⁵ If we do not explain what we mean by making “explicit” what is “implicit”, I argue, we run the risk, through our lack of questioning, of allowing presuppositions to sneak in and guide our discourse despite our best efforts to the contrary (that is to say, we assert that pure being is obviously nothing, one just has to look to see that, but in this way we fail to *prove* this to be the case, and so all we are saying is that pure being turns into nothing because it seems obvious to us that it does).

In order to reassess what “immanence” means for Hegel, I will be drawing on an unlikely source: the writing of Deleuze and Guattari. This might seem controversial, since an enormous distance separates the thought of Hegel from the thought of Deleuze and Guattari, but I believe that their criticisms of Hegel can help us see what immanence in fact means for Hegel. As we will see, immanence requires that we acknowledge the “irreducible contingency” of reality, for Deleuze and Guattari, and they believe that they are utterly un-Hegelian when they assert this. Hegel, they suggest, reduces everything to

⁵ See conclusion to chapter 7 below: I argue that Alison Stone, for example, takes Houlgate’s approach in this direction and thus fails to read Hegel as a thinker of immanence.

necessity, and so cannot be truly immanent: Hegel's idealism means that reality is always mediated by the "illusions" of dialectic.⁶

However, I want to suggest that we can explain *how* Hegel's dialectic is intended to proceed immanently if we take Hegel to have a conception of immanence similar to that of Deleuze and Guattari.⁷ It is tempting to assume that when Hegel tells us to follow the development of a concept, he is telling us to hold in mind a preconception of how speculative thinking works: the problem with this is that in that case we would not truly be proceeding without presuppositions. On my reading⁸, Hegel does not begin philosophy with a conception of speculative thinking, or of negativity, but asks us to begin simply with the "resolve" to think.⁹ Furthermore¹⁰, this resolve is something *contingent* and which can never ultimately be *proven* to be the only way to proceed, so that Hegelian immanence (in its intention at least) is called immanent precisely because it begins from an irreducible contingency.

It is in this way, then, that I intend to employ the thought of Deleuze and Guattari: not to reconcile Deleuze and Guattari with Hegel, or to prove one side right on this matter, but to set out a criterion for immanent thinking – the

⁶ Beistegui 2010 pp.25-6: "The movement and immanence of speculative dialectics are not real, but abstract, and false. Despite Hegel's claim that the negative is the very engine of actuality, it is in fact nothing real. It is only an illusion."

⁷ Deleuze and Guattari think that Hegel *fails* to stick to this conception, that he betrays his own philosophical ambitions, but I want to argue that nonetheless he does have this conception of immanence, whether he achieves it or not.

⁸ And I am following Houlgate in this respect

⁹ *Logic* p.70; Houlgate 2005 p.49

¹⁰ And perhaps I am not following Houlgate in this respect

criterion that it acknowledge the irreducible contingency of reality – and see from what Hegel says about his own project whether he intends to meet this criterion. Deleuzians would undoubtedly say that Hegel fails to meet this criterion (since he ultimately reduces everything to necessity by claiming that the development of history is necessary, that we must live in the state, and so on), but my point is not to judge Hegel's success or failure, but to explore the way that Hegel saw his own project.

It should also be noted that the need to rethink the role that contingency plays in Hegel's thinking has already been recognised by other commentators on Hegel, such as John Burbidge. Burbidge has argued that by placing "historical development at the heart of systematic thought", Hegel has been able to show that contingent events determine the way that we see the world.¹¹ Opposed to this "historical" view is "classical metaphysics", Burbidge tells us, which takes everything that happens to follow from first principles, so that events flow from abstract, transcendent principles to the more concrete.¹² What I am arguing in this thesis is that we risk reading Hegel as a classical metaphysician if we talk of the progress from the implicit to the explicit and do not recognise the moment of contingency that determines what *becomes implicit* within a concept: or to put it another way, we fall into classical metaphysics if we assume from the start that

¹¹ Burbidge 2007 p.9

¹² Burbidge 2007 p.10

there is a set of speculative principles that determine what it means for something to be “implicit” in a concept.

It might be worth noting here in what respect my reading of Hegel differs from that of John Burbidge. Burbidge writes:

In the last analysis, the question comes down to what we do with contingencies. On the one hand, there is the position adopted by Hegel, who says that contingencies are necessary constituents of a process that moves toward ever more development and richer complexity. On the other hand, there is either the “modern” concern to eliminate from our human existence all evils and unexpected contingencies... or the “post-modern” expectation that contingencies will reign unimpeded... Only time will tell which response will ultimately prove justified.¹³

I differ from Burbidge in my reading of Hegel in that I do not think that it is the case that it is down to us what we “do with contingencies”, and nor do I think it is the case, for Hegel, that we need to “wait and see” whether Hegel turns out to be right or not. What I think Burbidge is failing to take into account here is the “retroactive” necessity that we find described in Hegel (I get the term “retroactive” from Deleuze’s *Difference and Repetition* and from the work of Žižek, who also uses this term to describe an aspect of Hegelian logic¹⁴), and which I describe in chapter 7 below: retroactive necessity is necessity according to which what was originally contingent *becomes* necessary (and so is not simply

¹³ Burbidge 2007 p.193

¹⁴ I have followed Žižek in that I want to suggest that, for Hegel, reality is something incomplete, so that we cannot determine what is possible and necessary until after the fact and must create possibility (see e.g. Žižek 2004 p.56), but that the “retroactive” establishment of what was necessary and possible is not a mere “fabrication” as it is for Deleuze (*Difference and Repetition* p.263), but is something concrete that describes reality. I go further than Žižek, I think, in the respect that I justify reading Hegel as a thinker of “retroactivity” by a detailed analysis of the *Logic*.

retrospective, since it was not necessary from the start). An example I give in chapter 7 is the way that ethical life is governed by principles that came into being contingently, but which come to be necessary to us, as something that we cannot imagine doing without. Thus our systematic acceptance of contingent principles makes these principles *in fact* necessary, since they become something built into our way of thinking about ethical life. I will argue in this thesis¹⁵ that the same applies to more abstract principles, such as “being”: though it is contingent that pure being is thought as nothing in our thinking, it has nevertheless *become* something truly necessary, so that we cannot think pure being without thinking nothing. On my reading, Hegel would say that, though it might have once been the case that we could have had a different conception of being, our thinking is now *in fact* structured in the way he describes in the *Logic*, and this is a necessary fact about our thinking. It should be noted that *retroactive* necessity is not the same as *retrospective* necessity: Hegel is not saying that our concepts were necessary all along, but that they have *become* necessary, and I think that the Deleuzian/Žižekian term “retroactivity” captures this *transformation* from contingency to necessity and distinguishes it from a “retrospective” movement that would simply allow us to see what was always already the case.

My aim in the current chapter is to look at the work of Deleuze and Guattari, in order to explain the concepts that I think can help us to establish to what extent and in what sense Hegel as a thinker of contingency and immanence.

¹⁵ See chapter 3 below

1: The image of thought

In *Difference and Repetition*, Deleuze writes: “Where to begin in philosophy has always – rightly – been regarded as a very delicate problem.”¹⁶ To begin in philosophy means finding a concept with which to begin, but Deleuze and Guattari tell us in *What is Philosophy?* that “there is no concept with only one component” and so “even the first concept, the one with which philosophy ‘begins’, has several components, because it is not obvious that philosophy must have a beginning, and if it does determine one, it must combine it with a point of view or ground.”¹⁷ For Deleuze and Guattari, every concept presupposes other concepts and also presupposes a point of view or a ground upon which the concept rests (and the concepts and point of view that a concept presupposes are its “components”). This “point of view or ground” that the concept combines with is the “plane of immanence”, or the “image of thought” that that philosopher has. Deleuze and Guattari write:

The plane of immanence is not a concept that is or can be thought but rather the image of thought, the image thought gives itself of what it means to think, to make use of thought, to find one’s bearings in thought. It is not a method, since every method is concerned with concepts and presupposes such an image.¹⁸

¹⁶ *Difference and Repetition* p.164

¹⁷ *What is Philosophy?* p.15

¹⁸ *What is Philosophy?* p.37

So, we can see from the passage just quoted that *the plane of immanence is the image of thought* that a philosopher has.¹⁹ For Deleuze and Guattari, each philosopher will have her own sense of what it means to “think”, and this sense of what it means to think is never fully and explicitly expressed in the concepts she uses. A philosopher will often present a concept as if it were something eternal, that responds to an ultimate question that “no one can deny” needs to be answered²⁰, but for Deleuze and Guattari *problems are specific to certain ways of thinking*, and these ways of thinking change often. Descartes’ philosophy is an example that Deleuze and Guattari give in *What is Philosophy?* Deleuze and Guattari try to show that the “cogito” is created in order to solve the problem of how to find certainty in thinking, and that this problem is a product of Descartes’ image of thought, and not the universal problem that Descartes thought it was: that is to say, while the problem of how to find a certainty with which philosophy can begin was undoubtedly a problem for Descartes, this does not mean that it is a problem for everyone else, since not everyone will have the same conception of what is required to begin thinking, or agree that the problem of where to begin thinking is a relevant or important problem. Deleuze and Guattari write:

Not only do Descartes, Hegel and Feuerbach not begin with the same concept, they do not have the same concept of beginning. Every concept is at least double, triple, etc. Neither is there a

¹⁹ See also *What is Philosophy?* p.61, where Deleuze and Guattari write of the “plane of immanence or image of thought”; and see Beistegui 2010 p.12: “the plane of immanence is ‘the image of thought’”.

²⁰ *What is Philosophy?* p.61: “everyone knows what thinking means” according to an image of thought; *Difference and Repetition* p.164: “it is presumed that everyone knows, independently of concepts, what is meant by self, thinking and being.”

concept possessing every component, since this would be chaos pure and simple. Even so-called universals as ultimate concepts must escape the chaos by circumscribing a universe that explains them.²¹

So, if beginning in philosophy means finding a first concept, we will have difficulty beginning, since every concept presupposes something else. If each concept presupposes something else, in what sense can we say that any concept is the “first”? If there were a concept that possessed every component, then we could begin with that concept, since whatever that concept presupposed would already belong to that concept and so there would be nothing prior to that concept. But we cannot talk meaningfully of a concept of everything, for Deleuze and Guattari, since a concept must “circumscribe” something that explains that concept: a concept does not have a meaning *simply* taken in-itself, for Deleuze and Guattari, but must be explained by something else that it relates to. Every concept relates to an image of thought, since *it is the image of thought that a philosopher has that makes the creation of a concept necessary*. For Deleuze and Guattari, “all concepts are connected to problems”: it is the problems that they respond to that give concepts their force by explaining what the concept is *doing*.²² As Deleuze writes in “What is the Creative Act?”:

There has to be a necessity, in philosophy and elsewhere; otherwise there is nothing. A creator is not a preacher working for the fun of it. A creator only does what he or she absolutely needs to do.²³

²¹ *What is Philosophy?* p.15

²² *What is Philosophy?* p.16

²³ “What is the Creative Act?” p.318

That is to say, for Deleuze, concepts only arise from a process of *creativity*, and such creativity only takes place out of a necessity: though the question of which problem occupies the creator is a contingent matter, because the author of the concept is responding to a problem she has encountered while thinking and which she cannot ignore, this problem is necessary. A philosopher thus has an image of thought which leads her to make a certain use of thought and to expect certain things of it. *When thought fails to be useful and does not meet the expectations of the philosopher,*²⁴ then she has found a problem which she tries to solve by creating concepts that connect thought up in new ways. In *What is Philosophy?*, Deleuze and Guattari illustrate this point by examining Descartes' "cogito" (which is "Descartes' I" and "a concept of self"). They first explain how this concept is constructed:

This concept has three components – doubting, thinking, and being (although this does not mean that every concept must be triple). The complete statement of the concept qua multiplicity is "I think 'therefore' I am" or, more completely, "Myself who doubts, I think, I am, I am a thinking thing."²⁵

That is to say, the concept of the cogito has the three components of "doubting, thinking, and being". But more than this:

As intensive ordinates the components are arranged in zones of neighbourhood or indiscernibility that produce passages from one to the other and constitute their inseparability. The first zone is

²⁴ N.B. this is why, strictly speaking, the schizophrenic does not create concepts: she expects no more than chaos from thought. It is the "schizoanalyst" who creates concepts.

²⁵ *What is Philosophy?* p.24

between doubting and thinking (myself who doubts, I cannot doubt that I think), and the second is between thinking and being (in order to think it is necessary to be).²⁶

So, the concept of the cogito does not just “have” these three components; they are also given a determinate relation to each other by the concept: for example, thinking implies being; doubting is a form of thinking and so cannot doubt thinking; and so on. An important thing to note here is *the way in which* the components of the concept are connected: that is to say, the components are connected so that they are *inseparable*. “Inseparable” does not mean “identical”. They are inseparable because there are “passages from one to the other”, and the components maintain their own identity as they relate to each other. For example, it is not the case that thinking and being are identical in the cogito, but that “in order to think it is necessary to be”: it is in this way that thinking and being are *connected*, for the Descartes of Deleuze and Guattari. By creating passages between these components, concepts provide a new way of navigating thought.

A very important point to note (as we will see) is the fact that these components of the concept already have senses and functions of their own prior to being connected in the concept, and each of these senses and functions will be emphasised more or less in the concept. In Deleuzian terms, each component is a “variation” (of senses and functions) and each “phase” of this variation will be emphasised more or less in the concept:

²⁶ *What is Philosophy?* p.25

Doubt includes moments that are not the species of a genus but the *phases* of a variation: perceptual, scientific, obsessional doubt... The same goes for modes of thought – feeling, imagining, having ideas – and also for types of being, thing, or substance – infinite being, finite thinking being, extended being. It is noteworthy that in the last case the concept of self [the cogito] retains only the second phase of being and excludes the rest of the variation. But this is precisely the sign that the concept *is closed* as fragmentary totality with ‘I am a thinking thing’: we can pass to other phases of being only by bridges or crossroads that lead to other concepts. Thus, ‘among my ideas I have the idea of infinity’ is the bridge leading from the concept of self to the concept of God. This new concept has three components forming the ‘proofs’ of the existence of God as infinite event. The third (ontological proof) assures the closure of the concept but also in turn throws out a bridge or branches off to a concept of the extended, insofar as it guarantees the objective truth value of our other clear and distinct ideas.²⁷

The concept therefore does not determine once and for all what are the important senses of each of its components. Indeed, each component will continue to have a *life of its own*, and it is this life of the conceptual component that will lead to new concepts.²⁸ It is for this reason that Deleuze and Guattari refer to concepts as “fragmentary totalities” in the passage quoted above: concepts are themselves whole but made out of components that have their own connections beyond those of the concept in question, so that it is only a part of the component that is relevant to the concept. So Deleuze and Guattari tell us in the passage just quoted that the fact that the self is a *being* of a certain sort – a “finite thinking being” – connects it up to other sorts of being that lie outside of the concept of the cogito: extended being does not belong to the

²⁷ *What is Philosophy?* pp.25-6

²⁸ N.B. This is the virtual, as we will see: the life of the conceptual components is what makes thought problematic.

cogito because it is non-thinking and so we need a new concept to deal with that; infinite being – God – does not belong to the concept of the cogito but connects to it because we can *think* about infinite being.

By creating the cogito, Descartes believes he has solved a problem, namely, the problem of how to find a truth in thought that he can be certain of. By connecting doubting, thinking and being in the way that he does, Descartes makes it so that doubting leads logically to being, so that the act of doubting proves that he exists.²⁹ Without the cogito, Descartes claims that he cannot be certain of anything: he needs to relate all truths to his own subjective being so that he can proceed by the “natural light” if he is to be certain of anything.³⁰ And so the concept of the cogito solves Descartes’ problem by connecting up thought in this way, by connecting Descartes’ doubt to being: it is necessary to start with subjective certainty if we are to proceed to have knowledge, for Descartes, and the cogito is the concept of this subjective certainty.

So, the creation of a concept is the *connection* of components, for Deleuze and Guattari, and these components have a life of their own; for this reason philosophy cannot begin with a concept, for Deleuze and Guattari, since any concept will have components that already have a living existence in our thinking. In what follows we will see further how the Deleuzian concept of the

²⁹ See Rocca pp.62-3: “the doubt was... important as a way of expressing God’s incomprehensible power over everything, including our minds”.

³⁰ *What is Philosophy?* pp.61-2; N.B. *Difference and Repetition* p.265: I’ll return to this in the next section. For Descartes, there is a resemblance between the actual and the virtual, so that the virtual is the possible. This leads to “clear and distinct” ideas being important for Descartes.

concept is complicated by the fact that a concept's components have a life of their own.

2: Schizophrenia

As I have suggested above, Descartes chose to connect these components in the way he did because he was possessed by a problem, and this problem was his own and not a universal problem, even if it is one shared by others. Deleuze and Guattari write:

There is no point in wondering whether Descartes was right or wrong. Are implicit and subjective presuppositions more valid than explicit objective presuppositions? Is it necessary 'to begin', and, if so, is it necessary to start from the point of view of a subjective certainty? Can thought as such be the verb of an I? There is no direct answer. Cartesian concepts can only be assessed as a function of their problems and their plane.³¹

Concepts are assessed only as function of their "problems" and their "plane": that is to say, the value of a concept cannot be determined in abstraction from the problems to which they are connected and the plane upon which they exist. As we have seen, the problem and the plane are closely connected to each other in Deleuzian thinking: a philosopher's plane of immanence is her image of thought (see above), and the image of thought of a philosopher determines what that philosopher finds problematic in thought, and so determines what is required of a concept (since concepts respond to problems). *The most important thing to note here is that problems and planes are to some extent indeterminate*

³¹ *What is Philosophy?* p.27

for Deleuze and Guattari: that is to say, we become possessed of certain problems that we must solve and find ourselves on certain “planes” of thought without being able to fully determine what these problems are and what our way of thinking is:

Precisely because the plane of immanence is prephilosophical and does not immediately take effect with concepts, it implies a sort of groping experimentation and its layout resorts to measures that are not very respectable, rational or reasonable. These measures belong to the order of dreams, of pathological processes, esoteric experiences, drunkenness and excess.³²

One’s image of thought, or plane of immanence,³³ is not entirely explained by one’s concepts (as we have seen), and so the problems that arise from it and which one runs into are not encountered only when we try to think with concepts, but also in our everyday, non-philosophical thinking.³⁴ Descartes’ cogito emerges not just for philosophical reasons, but also for “prephilosophical” (or “preconceptual”) reasons³⁵: Descartes has a certain mode of existence that causes him to run into the problem of subjective certainty that Deleuze and Guattari have described. Descartes, for Deleuze and Guattari, is an embodiment of the “Idiot”:

Although Descartes’ cogito is created as a concept, it has presuppositions. This is not in the way that one concept presupposes others (for example, ‘man’ presupposes ‘animal’ and ‘rational’); the presuppositions here are implicit, subjective, and preconceptual, forming an image of

³² *What is Philosophy?* p.41

³³ See above: Deleuze and Guattari identify the “image of thought” with the “plane of immanence”

³⁴ See “What is the Creative Act?” p.318: we do not need concepts in order to think; we do not need philosophy to tell us how to think

³⁵ *What is Philosophy?* p.26: Descartes demands that we have a “prephilosophical understanding” of what it means to think.

thought: everyone knows what thinking means. Everyone can think; everyone wants the truth. Are these the only two elements – the concept and the plane of immanence or image of thought that will be occupied by concepts of the same group (the cogito and other concepts that can be connected to it)? Is there something else, in Descartes' case, other than the created cogito and the presupposed image of thought? Actually there is something else, somewhat mysterious, that appears from time to time or that shows through and seems to have a hazy existence halfway between concept and preconceptual plane, passing from one to the other. In the present case it is the Idiot: it is the Idiot who says 'I' and sets up the cogito but who also has the subjective presuppositions or lays out the plane. The idiot is the private thinker, in contrast to the public teacher (the schoolman): the teacher refers constantly to taught concepts (man – rational animal), whereas the private thinker forms a concept with innate forces that everyone possesses on their own account by right ('I think'). Here is a very strange type of persona who wants to think, and who thinks for himself, by the 'natural light'. The Idiot is a conceptual persona. The question 'Are there precursors of the cogito?' can be made more precise. Where does the persona of the idiot come from, and how does it appear? Is it in a Christian atmosphere, but in reaction against the 'scholastic' organisation of Christianity and the authoritarian organisation of the church? ... In any case, the history of philosophy must go through these personae, through their changes according to planes and through their variety according to concepts. Philosophy constantly brings conceptual personae to life; it gives life to them.³⁶

So, as well as being connected to other concepts and to an image of thought (a notion of what it means to think that seems undeniable to that thinker), the concept is also connected to a "persona". "Conceptual personae carry out the movements that describe the author's plane of immanence, and they play a part in the very creation of the author's concepts."³⁷ In other words, "conceptual

³⁶ *What is Philosophy?* pp.61-2

³⁷ *What is Philosophy?* p.63

persona” is a term that describes the image of thought when it is put into action in concept creation. In the case of Descartes, his image of thought may be difficult to describe, but we get a good sense of what it is like when we see what activity it drives him to as an “Idiot”. We saw above that Descartes’ image of thought was one according to which certainty must be subjective, so that any quest for certainty must connect the objective to subjective certainty, and we see what this means in the Idiot: the Idiot is the one who must start out from subjective certainty, the one who must test everything according to his own reason, and so on. In this conceptual persona we get a vivid illustration of what Descartes’ image of thought is by seeing *how it works*. And there are other conceptual personae too, Deleuze and Guattari tell us:

The idiot will reappear in another age, in a different context that is still Christian, but Russian now. In becoming a Slav, the idiot is still the singular individual or private thinker, but with a different singularity. It is Shestov who finds in Dostoyevsky the power of a new oppositions between private thinker and public teacher. The old idiot wanted indubitable truths at which he could arrive by himself: in the meantime he would doubt everything, even that $3 + 2 = 5$... The new idiot has no wish for indubitable truths; he will never be ‘resigned’ to the fact that $3 + 2 = 5$ and wills the absurd – this is not the same image of thought. The old idiot wanted truth, but the new idiot wanted to turn the absurd into the highest power of thought – in other words, to create.³⁸ The old idiot wanted to be accountable only to reason, but the new idiot, closer to Job than to Socrates, wants account to be taken of ‘every victim of History’ – these are not the same concepts. The new idiot will never accept the truths of History. The old idiot wanted, by himself, to account for what was or was not comprehensible, what was or was not rational, what was lost

³⁸ This will be important below: to create *is* to will the absurd, and to value creativity as the highest thing is to “turn the absurd into the highest power of thought” and therefore *make something possible* (rather than merely bringing into being what is already possible).

or saved; but the new idiot wants the lost, the incomprehensible, and the absurd to be restored to him. This is most certainly not the same persona; a mutation has taken place. And yet a slender thread links the two idiots, as if the first had to lose reason so that the second rediscovers what the other, in winning it, had lost in advance: Descartes goes mad in Russia?³⁹

We can see that there is a similarity between these two Idiots: they both refuse to accept anything that they cannot be certain of. And yet they are radically different personae in that, philosophically speaking, they *do* radically different things: the cogito could not be a first concept for the later version of the idiot as it is for the earlier, Cartesian one, because the later Idiot refuses to be certain of anything and so could not accept that one's own doubt proves one's own existence. The "Russian" version of the Idiot sees *everything* as uncertain and so, if she wills anything, she must "will the absurd", since it is absurd to take any position.⁴⁰ The later Idiot recognises that subjective certainty is required if we are to be certain of anything, but also believes that such subjective certainty is impossible. An example of the latter sort of Idiot is the Russian philosopher Shestov, who Deleuze also mentions in *Difference and Repetition*:

Ah Shestov, with the questions he poses, the ill will he manifests, the powerlessness to think he puts into thought and the double dimension he develops in these demanding questions concerning at once both the most radical beginning and the most stubborn repetition.⁴¹

The difference between Descartes and Shestov is that the former believes that he can in fact find a philosophical answer to the doubts that he has about

³⁹ *What is Philosophy?* pp.62-3

⁴⁰ She *creates* this position despite its absurdity.

⁴¹ *Difference and Repetition* p.166

thought, while the latter believes that to be truly philosophical is to admit that there is no answer. As Shestov himself writes:

We know nothing of the ultimate realities of our existence, nor shall we ever know anything. Let that be agreed. But it does not follow that therefore we must accept some or other dogmatic theory as a *modus vivendi*, no, not even positivism, which has such a sceptical face on it. It only follows that man is free to change his conception of the universe as often as he changes his boots or his gloves, and that constancy of principle belongs only to one's relationships with other people, in order that they may know where and to what extent they may depend on us. Therefore, on principle man should respect order in the external world and complete chaos in the inner. And for those who find it difficult to bear such a duality, some internal order might also be provided. Only, they should not pride themselves on it, but always remember that it is a sign of their weakness, pettiness, dullness.⁴²

In other words: for Shestov, we can indeed declare something certain, but it is the non-philosophical desire for stability that makes us take up such a position, rather than a triumph of reason over uncertainty, as it is for Descartes. And this Shestovian Idiot can mutate even further, for Deleuze and Guattari:

No list of the features of conceptual personae can be exhaustive, since they are constantly arising and vary with planes of immanence. On a given plane, different kinds of features are mixed together to make up a persona. We assume there are *pathic features*: the Idiot, the one who wants to think for himself and is a persona who can change and take on another meaning. But also a Madman, a kind of madman, a cataleptic thinker or 'mummy' who discovers in thought an inability to think; or a great maniac, someone frenzied, who is in search of that which precedes thought, an Already-there, but at the very heart of thought itself. Philosophy and schizophrenia have often been associated with each other. But in one case the schizophrenic is a conceptual

⁴² Shestov 1920 p.23 (Part 1 Paragraph 9)

persona who lives intensely within the thinker and forces him to think, whereas in the other the schizophrenic is a psychosocial type who represses the living being and robs him of his thought. Sometimes the two are combined, clasped together as if an event that is too intense corresponds to a lived condition that is too hard to bear.⁴³

The “Madman” mentioned here is, I think, another name for the second type of Idiot described above: the Madman is Shestovian in that he “discovers in thought an inability to think” so that every truth that we settle upon turns out to be absurd (see the “powerlessness to think” that Shestov is said to describe in the quotation from *Difference and Repetition* above). The “maniac” described here is yet another mutation of the Idiot; the Maniac, like the Madman, believes that certainty is something that one cannot find in thinking, but who nevertheless continues to search because she believes that there is something ineffable “at the very heart of thought” that would make sense of thinking: in this way the maniac resembles the Cartesian Idiot in that, like Descartes, the maniac thinks that something can be found that would allow us to find the truth (though, unlike Descartes, the maniac has not found this yet, and perhaps cannot). Finally we have the schizophrenic, who for Deleuze and Guattari is yet another persona (more accurately, the schizophrenic is a sort of maniac, but I want to suggest – as we will see below – that the schizophrenic is, for Deleuze and Guattari, a further mutation from the maniac): we will shortly see what this persona means for Deleuze and Guattari. Note that Deleuze and Guattari tell us here that the schizophrenic lives “within” the thinker: the persona of the schizophrenic is not

⁴³ *What is Philosophy?* p.70

the persona of a thinker. The schizophrenic forces the thinker to think because of the difficulty that the former has with thinking; the thinker thinks in order to overcome the difficulties with thinking that the schizophrenic points to, which threaten to “rob” the capacity for thinking from the thinker.⁴⁴

Deleuze and Guattari do not tell us much about the schizophrenic here, but we can look to their *Anti-Oedipus* to discover more about what “schizophrenic” means for them, and the value it has as a conceptual persona:

A schizophrenic out for a walk is a better model than a neurotic lying on the analyst’s couch. A breath of fresh air, a relationship with the outside world. Lenz’s stroll, for example, as reconstructed by Büchner. This walk outdoors is different from the moments when Lenz finds himself closeted with his pastor, who forces him to situate himself socially, in relationship to the God of established religion, in relationship to his father, to his mother. While taking a stroll outdoors, on the other hand, he is in the mountains, amid falling snowflakes, with other gods or without any gods at all, without a family, without a father or a mother, with nature.⁴⁵

So far, it does not look as though the schizophrenic has a problem at all: on the contrary, the schizophrenic is free from being socially situated and can enjoy the fresh air of the mountains. Indeed, the schizophrenic Lenz seems to have extraordinary power because he “has projected himself back to a time before the man-nature dichotomy, before all the co-ordinates based on this fundamental dichotomy have been laid down” and so can commune freely with

⁴⁴ This is what is “machinic” about the schizophrenic image of thought: it is the fact that the schizophrenic works *against* the thinker that drives the latter to think more deeply (see below: a machine operates as its parts work *against* each other, for Deleuze and Guattari)

⁴⁵ *Anti-Oedipus* p.2

nature.⁴⁶ But in Büchner's *Lenz* we can see evidence for why his relationship with nature leads him into problems:

A surge swept through his breast at first when the rock seemed to leap away, the grey wood shuddered beneath him, and the mist devoured the shape of things then half revealed their giant limbs; the surge swept through him, he sought for something, as though for lost dreams, but he found nothing. Everything was so small to him, so near, so wet, he would have liked to tuck the earth behind the stove, he couldn't understand that he needed so much time to clamber down a slope to reach a distant point; he thought he should be able to measure out everything with a few strides.⁴⁷

Because he exists on a plane "before the man-nature dichotomy", he cannot understand why he is unable to follow freely the natural shapes and distances in front of him, and why he must take time for his body to make the movements required to carry him across the landscape: that is to say, the distant objects seem to him "near" and "small" because he does not understand the relationship between his body and the natural landscape in front of him. The earth seems to him something that he can pick up and tuck behind the stove because of the image of thought that he has: it is an image of thought according to which there is no man-nature dichotomy and so nature should not offer the sort of resistance to us that it does. This absence of a man-nature dichotomy is connected to the non-Oedipalised nature of the schizophrenic:

⁴⁶ *Anti-Oedipus* p.2

⁴⁷ Büchner p.141

It is often thought that Oedipus is an easy subject to deal with, something perfectly obvious, a 'given' that is there from the very beginning. But that is not so at all: Oedipus presupposes a fantastic repression of desiring-machines.⁴⁸

That is to say, the schizophrenic seems so difficult to understand because we unconsciously accept a metaphysics that takes the man-nature dichotomy for granted. Lenz notices when his desires are resisted: he feels a "surge" when he finds he cannot instantly traverse the forest, but *Oedipalised subjects do not notice such things: we repress our desires and take the man-nature dichotomy for granted.*⁴⁹ For Deleuze and Guattari, this means that schizophrenic experience is in a sense more sensitive than "ordinary" (Oedipalised) experience, since the schizophrenic is able to experience the resistance that nature offers us as something *unnatural* and not at all "obvious":

What the schizophrenic experiences, both as an individual and as a member of the human species, is not at all any one specific aspect of nature, but nature as a process of production.⁵⁰

Though above I have described Lenz as *confused*, the schizophrenic experience is not *simply* confused, if by "confused" we mean that it is unaware of what is "really" the case. Rather, we should say that the schizophrenic has an image of thought in which she finds problems that the non-schizophrenic is unaware of. *The image of thought of the schizophrenic is one that treats nature as a process of production*, and this image of thought causes the schizophrenic to run into her

⁴⁸ *Anti-Oedipus* p.3

⁴⁹ Though I'm not going into the details as to why this is an Oedipal belief, it is important to note that the fact that it is Oedipal means, for Deleuze and Guattari, that it involves repression, that is to say, the Oedipal complex forces certain desires to remain unconscious.

⁵⁰ *Anti-Oedipus* p.3

own unique set of problems, not encountered by non-schizophrenics. By treating nature as a process of production, the schizophrenic challenges the normal assumption that production is something that is carried out upon nature by man:

What do we mean here by process? It is probable that at a certain level nature and industry are two separate and distinct things: from one point of view, industry is the opposite of nature; from another industry extracts its raw materials from nature; from yet another, it returns its refuse to nature; and so on. Even within society, this characteristic man-nature, industry-nature, society-nature relationship is responsible for the distinction of relatively autonomous spheres that are called production, distribution, consumption.⁵¹

So, on this “ordinary” account of production, nature is opposed to industry, to the forces of production. According to the ordinary view, nature is the material for production, it can be altered by production, but it is always *at the end* of the process of production, so to speak: as material to be produced, as altered result, as waste, and so on. And we are not just talking about industrial production here, but also about social production: according to this conventional view, the way that we relate to nature is something learned, produced by society, a product of education, but nature itself is unchanging; also, social relations can be produced, but our fundamental *nature* cannot be altered. To return to the example of Lenz: ordinarily we grasp the fact that nature is something unchanging, and that what must be produced if we are to pass across the landscape is movement in our own bodies, so that we can resist the matter we

⁵¹ *Anti-Oedipus* pp.3-4

find in nature. We must go to the mountain, and we cannot make the mountain come to us. But for the schizophrenic:

The real truth of the matter – the glaring sober truth that resides in delirium – is that there is no such thing as relatively independent spheres or circuits... Hence everything is production: *production of productions*, of actions and of passions; *productions of recording processes*, of distributions and of co-ordinates that serve as points of reference; *productions of consumptions*, of sensual pleasures, of anxieties, and of pain. Everything is production, since the recording processes are immediately consumed, immediately consummated, and these consumptions directly reproduced.⁵²

*So nature is also a process of production, and so there is no simple matter or material for production, but all matter is also a process of production, and the process of production must itself be produced, and so on.*⁵³ And neither are our own natures, those aspects of us that we ordinarily take to be unchanging, in fact distinct from the changeable social aspects of our being, since our natures are also processes of production. Deleuze and Guattari are schizophrenic in their method in this sense:

We make no distinction between man and nature: the human essence of nature and the natural essence of man become one within nature in the form of production or industry, just as they do within the life of man as a species. Industry is then no longer considered from the extrinsic point of view of utility, but rather from the point of view of its fundamental identity with nature as production of man and by man. Not man as the king of creation, but rather as the being who is in

⁵² *Anti-Oedipus* p.4 (see also the footnote in *Anti-Oedipus* where Deleuze and Guattari oppose Bataille: Bataille does not take the “production of consumption” into account.)

⁵³ Which means (see Beistegui 2010 p.122) that there is no deepest truth that is expressed by all of this production.

intimate contact with the profound life of all forms or all types of being, who is responsible for even the stars and animal life.⁵⁴

For the schizophrenic – as we saw with Lenz – nature seems infinitely malleable, which is why Lenz is confused that he cannot cross the forest in a couple of strides. Deleuze and Guattari identify with the schizophrenic in that they agree that there is no logical necessity to separate man and nature, and so there is something rational about Lenz’s identification of himself with his natural surroundings. Thus they write:

This is the second meaning of process as we use the term: man and nature are not like two opposite terms confronting each other... rather, they are one and the same essential reality, the producer-product. Production as process overtakes all idealistic categories and constitutes a cycle whose relationship to desire is that of an immanent principle. That is why desiring-production is the principal concern of a materialist psychiatry.⁵⁵

So, we have seen that the problem that the schizophrenic faces is as follows: because she has not been Oedipalised, she has no reason to distinguish between man-made production and the production of nature. The “materialist psychiatry” that Deleuze and Guattari favour is thus against psychoanalysis in that they, like the schizophrenic, see processes everywhere, since without the Oedipus story – which explains desire in terms of familial relationships – they have no reason to limit this process of production to the family and society. The production of desire also becomes something problematic, since it is not only produced in human society but is something seemingly unlimited: why should we

⁵⁴ *Anti-Oedipus* pp.4-5

⁵⁵ *Anti-Oedipus* p.5

say that desire is found only in human subjects and not everywhere in nature? Though “conceptual persona” is not a term that Deleuze and Guattari use in *Anti-Oedipus*, we can see that the schizophrenic already serves as a persona in this work. We saw above that the Idiot, the Madman and the Maniac each had their own set of problems that called for new concepts; the schizophrenic too has a set of problems in that she cannot buy into the Oedipal story and so has a disorganised view of the world as a chaotic process of desiring-production. As a result of this, the schizophrenic does not have the neurotic desire of the Cartesian Idiot to find absolute certainty in her own thinking, but we might say she has nearly the opposite problem: *the schizophrenic cannot ignore the disorganisation that one finds in all things*, and wants to challenge the (as the schizophrenic sees it) arbitrary organisation that exists in normal thinking and everyday life, by showing that *everything has a life of its own which causes it to break free of the organisation that we impose upon it*. We have seen how this problem of disorganisation⁵⁶ is a difficulty for Lenz (he cannot understand his own body’s relationship to the natural landscape: this relationship seems arbitrary to him, and he sees no reason why he should not be able to traverse these distances in a single step), but we must also note how it causes him to be critical of what he sees as a false “idealism” that would deny the real life of reality:

Those writers, he argued, of whom it was said that they reflected reality in fact knew nothing whatever about it, but even they were a good deal more bearable than those who sought to

⁵⁶ I will return to “disorganisation” as a “problem” below

transfigure reality. The dear Lord, he said, has surely made the world as it is meant to be, and I doubt if we can cobble up anything better, our one aspiration should be to create as much as he did. What I demand in all things is – life, full of scope for existence, nothing else really matters, we then have no need to ask whether something is ugly or beautiful, both are overridden by the conviction that ‘Everything created possesses life’, which is the sole criterion in matters of art.⁵⁷

In attacking idealism, Lenz is defending what he calls “life”. Life is never *merely* beautiful nor ugly, since these terms are arbitrary constructions that falsify life by placing restrictions upon it. For Lenz, the life that things have is more important than the false notions of beauty that we use to “transfigure” life. In *Anti-Oedipus*, Deleuze and Guattari mention the moment when Lenz receives a letter from his father and becomes angry, and we can see that this illustrates what Lenz means by “life”,⁵⁸ and it is worth quoting a little more from this part of *Lenz* than Deleuze and Guattari do:

After the meal Kaufmann took him to one side. He had received letters from Lenz’s father, Lenz was to go home and give him assistance. Kaufmann told him how he was squandering his life here, uselessly wasting it, he should set himself a goal – and so on and so on. “Leave!” Lenz retorted angrily. “leave this place? Go home? Go mad there? You know I can’t bear it anywhere but here, in this countryside; if I couldn’t get out on to a mountain occasionally and see the landscape all around, then come back home and walk through the garden and look inside through the window – I’d go mad! mad! Leave me in peace, for God’s sake! A little bit of peace, that’s all, now that I’m starting to feel a bit happier. Leave this place? Three words, that’s all, and the world is ruined, I don’t understand it. We all need something, what could be better than having peace! Climbing ever higher and battling onward, forever spurning what the moment offers, always fasting in order to feast in the future, choosing to go thirsty while bright streams

⁵⁷ Büchner 1993 pp.148-9

⁵⁸ *Anti-Oedipus* p.2

sparkle right before you. Life is bearable now, and I want to stay here. Why? why? Because I feel happy, that's why. What does my father want? Can he give me more? Impossible! Leave me in peace."⁵⁹

Lenz opposes planning for the future to the more preferable option of living for "what the moment offers", and in this way he rejects organisation. Lenz just wants to be left alone. Real life for Lenz is not something merely organised but is this happiness that is impossible to describe ("Why? Because I feel happy, that's why," Lenz says, and cannot say more), so that Lenz feels that he can only live when he is left alone and no demands are made upon him by others.⁶⁰ This happiness is impossible to describe because it arises from the *life* that things have, from the variation that springs from things that we tend to stifle with the ordinary organisation of our lives and our thought. Lenz is trying to escape organisation so that he can find happiness in the life that things have. As Miguel de Beistegui writes:

The problem of the schizophrenic is precisely one of disorganisation. It is a matter of knowing how to become a body without organs, cross the thresholds of organisation and become reunited with the field of virtual intensities.⁶¹

What is interesting here is that taking the schizophrenic to have a problem of *disorganisation* is opposed to a more conventional intuition about what is problematic about schizophrenia. As we saw above, Lenz has to struggle to

⁵⁹ Büchner 1993 p.151

⁶⁰ In this way we can see in what way the schizophrenic is a "maniac": it is something impossible to describe that grounds Lenz. However, Lenz is *more* than a maniac (he is a schizophrenic) in that his *ground* is *disorganisation*, and so is not something fixed that he cannot grasp, but something that he cannot grasp precisely because it has no fixity and requires him to change, create and move about.

⁶¹ Beistegui 2010 p.55

create a separation between himself and nature, while the non-schizophrenic takes such a separation for granted. The schizophrenic thus finds it difficult to live in our Oedipalised world and from a non-schizophrenic perspective it looks as though the schizophrenic has a problem of *organisation*, since what is wrong with Lenz, for example, is that he cannot grasp his relationship to the physical world nor the importance of his relationship to his father (we might say he is childish for failing to see that he has a duty to his father). We might in that case suggest that, since he has such difficulty in working out what his place is in the world and cannot simply accept it, Lenz should be treated like an “idiot” and learn to be more Cartesian and try to find certainties that he can stick to so that he can live a normal, healthy life. But Deleuze and Guattari propose that we take the schizophrenic to be a conceptual persona (to which an image of thought belongs) and that we do this by taking Lenz to have his own problem which is different to that of the Idiot (a mutation of this problem: see above). They propose that we take this problem seriously and that this problem is a problem of *disorganisation*: we take it that Lenz has identified a real problem with the world by recognising that it is too organised or, more precisely, that it is organised in false ways; by noticing that people would prefer certainty to being truthful to the real chaos of life, that they would prefer to transfigure life rather than admit the fact that what is alive has infinite variety; and by arguing that true creativity does not consist in working out and setting down what is beautiful and what is not and trying to stick to these conventions, but in allowing ourselves to be the sort of creators who seek more and more varied and various creations.

By “becoming schizophrenic” in our thinking, Deleuze and Guattari believe that we can learn to think in such a way that we take the ultimate disorganisation of life and thought into account⁶² and not take any particular organisation (for example, the man-nature distinction) for granted. For example, we *may* assume that there is a man-nature distinction, but we must also see that this distinction is constructed, and that therefore this construction could be destroyed and replaced with another construction. Indeed, we *have* to assume that there is a man-nature distinction for much of the time, for example if we do not want to become confused when we walk around in the world, but when we let go of this certainty, and eliminate the man-nature distinction, we should not see the confusion that arises as simply *false*; instead we should see that there is a certain *truth* in this confusion, that the elimination of the man-nature dichotomy gives us a certain insight into the disorganisation that grounds our thinking.⁶³ It is this insight into the ultimate disorganisation of things that allows us to be creative. (We saw how this comes into concept creation above: concepts are made up of components that have lives of their own and that through their own variations will call for new combinations, that is to say, new creations of concepts and connections between concepts.) Deleuze and Guattari propose that we follow Lenz to the extent that we become more sensitive to the importance of the infinite variety that life entails beyond the variations found in any given set of concepts.

⁶² N.B. it is not that we think the disorganisation of thought, but that we develop our thinking in such a way that we do not stifle variation.

⁶³ See e.g. *What is Philosophy?* pp.59-60, where Deleuze and Guattari tell us that “the supreme act of philosophy” is to show that there is a “nonthought within thought”.

So, we must note that it is not, for Deleuze and Guattari, a sort of blindness or lack of perception⁶⁴ that makes the schizophrenic think in this way: the schizophrenic of Deleuze and Guattari belongs to an *image of thought*, according to which thought is utterly disorganised. For the schizophrenic, any organisation of thought is something *constructed*, and constructed amidst the chaos that will inevitably give rise to more and new variations that destabilise the organisation that we have created in our thought.⁶⁵ For Deleuze and Guattari, Lenz is a schizophrenic because of his refusal to accept anything but his own sense of peace as a guiding principle and the fact that this peace consists, for example, in the *activity* of aimlessly wandering about and peering through his window (see above): any organisation of his day (going out for a walk in the mountains) is aimed not at preparations for the future but at keeping alive the variation that is essential to his sense of “peace” and “happiness”. Lenz’s “peace” consists in freedom from any form of arbitrary organisation, freedom even from his duties to his family. Deleuze and Guattari are not advocating that philosophers spend all their time in the way Lenz does, or even that this sense of peace is the highest aim of human endeavour, but what they *are* telling us is that *the schizophrenic is right to believe that thought has no underlying organisation*, and that reality

⁶⁴ See Beistegui 2010 pp.114ff for an explanation of why schizophrenia should not be explained in terms of “lack”. For example p.115: “Psychoanalysis tries to think schizophrenia on the basis of a theoretical framework – the Freudian theory of neurosis, and the Lacanian theory of paranoia – which can’t account for its singularity.”

⁶⁵ As we have seen this applies to concepts, since they are made up of components that have variation other than those of the concept, so that the concept has to adapt, “bridge” to new concepts, and so on. In the next section we will see why the conceptual system is a system of interruptions: a concept has “virtual intensities” because it is made up of components that have tendencies other than the logical tendencies of the concept.

consists in infinite variation (we'll see in what sense it consists in "infinite variation" below).

We saw above that, for Deleuze and Guattari, the schizophrenic is a mutation of the "maniac". Like the maniac, the schizophrenic is always looking for something other than the constructions she finds in thought. However, the schizophrenic differs from the maniac in that the disorganisation that the schizophrenic seeks is not something mysterious that lies beyond thinking and experience and which cannot be found: disorganisation is immanent to organisation, for the schizophrenic. For the schizophrenic, it is not that we should clear away all forms of organisation in order to get to the disorganisation that lies *beyond* organised thinking, but instead we should recognise the variation that belongs to every object and organisation of thought. As we saw above, Lenz does not suggest that we should reject all forms of thinking; rather, he insists that we should create as much as we can (more than God, he says: see above) in order that we do not falsify the infinite variation in nature. And as with the second idiot (the "Madman": see above), the schizophrenic wants us to will the absurd and thereby create something new, rather than settle for what God has given us.

As we saw above, all thought and experience and everything about the world is *production* for the schizophrenic (it was this that meant that there could be no man-nature dichotomy for the schizophrenic: see above). It is *disorganised* production: the various elements of thought and experience work *against* one another and *produce* something, rather than each element in itself expressing a

deeper, essential and prior unity that all elements share. For Deleuze and Guattari, this means that the schizophrenic thinks of the world as consisting of nothing but “machines”, where “a machine may be defined as a *system of interruptions or breaks*”.⁶⁶ “Breaks”, for Deleuze and Guattari, are opposed to “flows”: a flow occurs when one thing logically leads to another; when one thing implies another; when the thing that follows finds its cause in another; and so on. That is to say, if everything were *organised*, if there were an underlying *unity* to everything, then the system would be one of “flows” and nothing more, since each thing would logically give rise to the next: what follows from something would be *implicit* in that thing, that is, it would follow from the nature of that thing. However, since everything is disorganised for the schizophrenic, the schizophrenic system is one according to which each thing “interrupts” other things, so that the effects that are produced in nature and thought do not follow from prior causes and so cannot be said to be implicit in what has gone before – for the schizophrenic, what happens next is always unexpected since it never flows from the thing that preceded it (we saw an example of this in Lenz when he was unable to grasp how he should move himself around in nature). It is for this reason that the schizophrenic differs from the Cartesian “Idiot” too: for the schizophrenic, finding a certainty with which to begin philosophy would not help, since nothing would follow from this certainty and so it would not serve as a foundation upon which to build our philosophical thinking.

⁶⁶ *Anti-Oedipus* p.38 (italics as in text)

Now, Deleuze and Guattari are not suggesting that we follow the schizophrenic by denying all connection between events so that we are surprised at everything that occurs (even Lenz only experiences such surprise *some* of the time). But what they are suggesting is that we should learn from the schizophrenic by becoming aware of the fact that any connection between objects in our thinking is *not* a result of the essential nature of the components themselves; instead, we should see that it is we, as thinkers, who create these connections. (As we saw above: for Deleuze and Guattari, though thoughts have *life* and so call for new connections, it requires a thinker occupied by a particular image of thought to create a specific set of connections. For example, Descartes' cogito was not created by simply thinking and following the essential nature of the concept of "thinking" or "being"; rather, Descartes created connections between thinking, being and doubting in order to solve his own particular set of problems. To say that a thought has a life of its own is not to say that it has a pre-determined essence, but to say that it is indeterminate, that it is not determined to connect in any particular way until connected by a thinker. Thoughts have no essence of their own prior to becoming component of a concept, for Deleuze and Guattari.)

We learn from the machinic thinking of the schizophrenic that no connection in our thinking can be justified by claiming that it expresses an underlying unity: concepts are *not* connected in the way they are because we have discovered something essential about them from which our system of concepts flows. As Beistegui writes:

Ultimately, Deleuze and Guattari insist we do away with the idealist category of expression, and propose instead that we understand desire in terms of units of production, that is, as a piece of a larger machine, or a factory. Why talk of machines and factories? To emphasise the fact that desire does not represent anything, and especially not something that it lacks, does not express anything in the linguistic-semantic sense, but *does or produces* something.⁶⁷

As we saw above, a concept connects components that have *lives of their own*: in this way a concept is a machine because it interrupts the flows of thought in order to make new connections. (For example, it interrupts the flow of being in order to limit it in the cogito to finite thinking being. In the cogito, the connection between thinking and being interrupts “being”.) That is to say, there is no essence implicit in a component that constitutes that component’s “life” and from which connections follow; rather, there are infinite potential connections in a component – this is what it means for something to be alive for the schizophrenic – and so the destiny of our thinking is in no way predetermined but is in fact chaotic (and as we will see, the chaos from which connections emerge means that talking of “potentiality” is perhaps misleading: we should instead talk of “virtuality”). For Deleuze and Guattari, “every machine is a machine of a machine”⁶⁸, and we saw how this applies to conceptual thinking in section 1 above: a concept is a “fragmentary totality”, because any truth that it happens to express is less important, for Deleuze and Guattari, than the fact that it is an organisation of components that have a *life of their own*: that is to say, the concept is an organisation of components that can vary in infinite ways

⁶⁷ Beistegui 2010 p.122

⁶⁸ *Anti-Oedipus* p.39

beyond those that follow from the concept. For Deleuze and Guattari, the criterion of a good concept is not its truth but its productivity, that is, the new variations of components that it creates, that resonate with other variations of these components (and, as we saw above in section 1, can lead to bridges to new concepts, or adaptations of existing concepts, and so on).

3: Virtuality

As we have seen, the image of thought that a philosopher has determines the philosophical problems that that philosopher will face. The image of thought of Deleuze and Guattari is a schizophrenic image of thought, and this means, as we have seen, that their problem is the problem of how to think in the face of the irreducible *life* that our thought has, which will take our thinking in infinite directions and make any concept that we construct unstable (“unstable” in the sense that the concept can cease to be relevant to our image of thought: it ceases to be “interesting”⁶⁹). In this section I will say a little more about what the schizophrenic conception of life as infinite variation means by looking at what “life” means for Deleuze. We will see that, given this conception of “life”, historical events only occur as a result of *discontinuity*, so that any account of an

⁶⁹ *What is Philosophy?* pp.82-3: “We cannot say in advance whether a problem is well posed, whether a solution fits, is really the case, or whether a persona is viable. This is because the criteria for each philosophical activity are found only in the other two, which is why philosophy develops in paradox. Philosophy does not consist in knowing and is not inspired by truth. Rather, it is categories like Interesting, Remarkable, or Important that determine success or failure. Now, this cannot be known before being constructed. We will not say of many books of philosophy that they are false, for that is to say nothing, but rather that they lack importance or interest, precisely because they do not create any concept or contribute an image of thought or beget a persona worth the effort. Only teachers can write ‘false’ in the margins, perhaps; but readers doubt the importance and interest that is to say, the novelty of what they are given to read.”

event – for example, a philosophical event, such as the appearance of Kant’s *Critique of Pure Reason* – that tries to explain that event by tracing a continuity, development or progression through history fails to account for the real causes of that event.

We can turn to Deleuze’s essay “Immanence: A Life” in order to see what “life” means for Deleuze. For Deleuze, life cannot consist in continuity because it does not have a fixed nature but is “pure immanence”, where “pure immanence” is “not immanent to life, but the immanence that is in nothing else is itself a life. A life is the immanence of immanence, absolute immanence”.⁷⁰ Since a life does not have a fixed nature, nothing follows from it: we cannot predict what will be caused by a life. Deleuze distinguishes between a subjective life and this pure, pre-subjective life that he takes to be more fundamental:

What is immanence? A life... No one has described what a life is better than Charles Dickens, when he takes the indefinite article as an index of the transcendental. A scoundrel, a bad apple, held in contempt by everyone, is found on the point of death, and suddenly those charged with his care display an urgency, respect, and even love for the dying man’s least sign of life. Everyone makes it his business to save him. As a result, the wicked man himself, in the depths of his coma, feels something soft and sweet penetrate his soul. But as he progresses back toward life, his benefactors turn cold, and he himself rediscovers his old vulgarity and meanness. Between his life and death, there is a moment where *a life* is merely playing with death. The life of the individual has given way to an impersonal and yet singular life, which foregrounds a pure event

⁷⁰ “Immanence: a Life” pp.389-390

that has been liberated from the accidents of internal and external life, from the subjectivity and the objectivity of what comes to pass.⁷¹

So, in order to see the radical discontinuity at the heart of things we must take a life not as *individuated* but as *singular*, so that we see a life not as having an individual nature that determines what will follow from it (for example, the man who has led a bad life and so will be likely to commit more crimes) but as a singular nature for which “all things are possible” (to use Shestov’s phrase). That is to say, when we reduce life to its “singularity” we “liberate” it from the “accidents” that have befallen it and which have shaped its character, and so there is no quality that the singular life has that would determine what is possible for it and what it not. This unlimited possibility of a life is its “virtuality”. However, this is not to say that it is *actually* the case that all things are possible for a life: the process of actualisation that a life undergoes and which individuates that life is not simply a realisation of the *possibility* contained within that life. As Deleuze writes:

A life contains only virtuals. It is composed of virtualities, events, singularities. What I am calling virtual is not something that lacks reality. Rather, the virtual becomes engaged in a process of actualisation as it follows the plane which gives it its proper reality. The immanent event is actualised in a state of things and in a state of lived experience, and these states bring the event about.⁷²

So, the singular life does not lack reality but it is *really* something that is not an individual subject, and so does not have any qualities from which certain actions

⁷¹ “Immanence: a Life” pp.390-391

⁷² “Immanence: a Life” p.392

flow. All things are possible for the singular life, since the singular life is not limited by any states of affairs, and this unlimited possibility is the reality of the singular life. But the process of actualisation is not a realisation of possibility but is rather an “engagement” with the virtual by “states” of “things” and “lived experience”: we saw this above with the creation of concepts, when we saw that concepts are not deduced from a plane of immanence, or image of thought, but instead connect up elements of the plane (existing concepts and thoughts, “being” and “thinking”, for example) while leaving them their own “lives” (their own potential for infinite variation) that will eventually lead any concept to become unstable. For Deleuze, actualisation is the engagement of the plane of immanence (the image of thought that a philosopher has) with specific acts of creation that emerge contingently from the infinite variation of life.

To be clear, I should emphasise that “virtuality” is *not* synonymous with “possibility”, for Deleuze. As Deleuze writes in *Difference and Repetition*:

The only danger in all this is that the virtual could be confused with the possible. The possible is opposed to the real: the process undergone by the possible is therefore a ‘realisation’. By contrast, the virtual is not opposed to the real; it possesses a full reality by itself. The process it undergoes is that of actualisation.⁷³

On my reading, virtuality is unlimited possibility, but the very fact that this possibility is unlimited means that virtuality is not the same as possibility: it is meaningless to talk of unlimited possibility if we are trying to decide what is possible and what is not. In other words, Deleuze’s concept of the virtual is

⁷³ *Difference and Repetition* p.263

intended to shift the focus away from trying to find the “conditions of possibility” of an event to finding instead the “real conditions” of an event.⁷⁴ For Deleuze, the real conditions of an event are not contained implicitly within any existing state of affairs, but consist in an “encounter” of ordered states of affairs with the infinite possibility of the virtual.⁷⁵ This means that any event will be aleatory, or chaotic: a given state of affairs will not make this or that outcome inevitable, given the need for a state of affairs to engage with the infinite variation and life of the virtual.

For Deleuze and Guattari, this means that we should oppose thinkers who promote the “cult of necessity”. The cult of necessity is the philosophical practice of assuming that new events arise out of the possibilities provided by the current, actual state of affairs. Deleuze and Guattari call this the “cult of necessity” because it ignores the “irreducibility of contingency”: that is to say, the cult of necessity ignores the aleatory nature of events. The cult of necessity claims that we can look at history in order to trace a development of events (for example, a development of concepts) by seeing how each actual event (for example, each actual concept) logically led to the next. For Deleuze and Guattari, such an approach does not take into account other factors, such as “geographical” factors:

Geography is not confined to providing historical form with a substance and variable places. It is not merely physical and human but mental, like the landscape. Geography wrests history from

⁷⁴ Beistegui 2010 p.ix

⁷⁵ See *What is Philosophy?* p.93 for “encounter”.

the cult of necessity in order to stress the irreducibility of contingency. It wrests it from the cult of origins in order to affirm the power of a 'milieu'... Finally, it wrests history from itself in order to discover becomings that do not belong to history even if they fall back into it... 'Becoming' does not belong to history. History today still designates only the set of conditions, however recent they may be, from which one turns away in order to become, that is to say, in order to create something new... Philosophy cannot be reduced to its own history, because it continually wrests itself from this history in order to create new concepts that fall back into history but do not come from it. How could something come from history? Without history, becoming would remain indeterminate and unconditioned, but becoming is not historical. Psychosocial types belong to history, but conceptual personae belong to becoming. The event itself needs becoming as an unhistorical element.⁷⁶

Though historians do, of course, take geography into account (they distinguish between British and Chinese history, for example), Deleuze and Guattari are suggesting here that nevertheless historians fail to account for those factors that "interrupt" the historical development that they are trying to trace. That is to say (to use the "machinic" terms set out in section 2 above), historians and historicist philosophers take development to occur as a "flow" from one event to another, and do not take into account the many factors that must interrupt any flow and create new events. For example:

The birth of philosophy required an *encounter* between the Greek milieu and the plane of immanence of thought... In short, philosophy does have a principle, but it is a synthetic and contingent principle – an encounter, a conjunction. It is not insufficient by itself but contingent in itself. Even in the concept, the principle depends upon a connection of components that could have been different, with different neighbourhoods. The principle of reason such as it appears in

⁷⁶ *What is Philosophy?* p.96

philosophy is a principle of contingent reason and is put like this: there is no good reason but contingent reason; there is no universal history except of contingency.⁷⁷

So, while philosophy did indeed emerge from past events, by responding to actual problems that existed in Greek society and Greek thinking (Deleuze and Guattari tell us that Greek philosophy emerged out of a desire to find a system for determining which of the many voices in the Greek democracy should be heard⁷⁸), nevertheless these factors (this “milieu”) had to encounter the “plane of immanence”:

This plane of immanence is not exactly philosophical, but prephilosophical. It is affected by what populates and reacts on it, in such a way that it becomes philosophical only through the effect of the concept. Although the plane is presupposed by philosophy, it is nonetheless instituted by it and it unfolds in a philosophical relationship with the nonphilosophical.⁷⁹

As we saw above, the “plane of immanence” is the “image of thought” that a philosopher has, and this image of thought is an “event”: that is, it “unfolds” in the aleatory way described above, as it relates to the “milieu”, or the infinite possibility of the virtual. As we saw above, the image of thought determines the problems that occupy a thinker; now we see that the image of thought and its problems depend for their existence upon the virtual. To say that the image of thought depends for existence upon the virtual is to say that it comes from nothing, from chaos, from the infinite variation of nature or from the pure immanence of the life of the thinker. As Beistegui writes:

⁷⁷ *What is Philosophy?* p.93

⁷⁸ *What is Philosophy?* p.9

⁷⁹ *What is Philosophy?* p.93

The real itself is not produced or moved as a result of some intrinsic negativity, some self-opposing or contradictory logic. There is, however, such a thing as non-being, Deleuze claims: it is the being of what he calls the problematical, the being of the problem, or of the question. He also calls it the virtual.⁸⁰

The virtual is thus the *non-being* upon which an image of thought rests. That is to say, there is nothing that underlies an image of thought: the image of thought is what gets us thinking since it provides us with problems that we are driven to solve by creating concepts. The image of thought is the plane of immanence (see above), but it is not immanent “to” anything⁸¹ and so cannot be explained by anything deeper than it. An image of thought cannot be entirely explained by the historical conditions that made it possible and so is something singular. Nor can the concepts that belong to an image of thought be explained by the milieu in which they were created, since they were not contained implicitly in this milieu. The image of thought and its concepts meet the milieu, but are not implicit within it, so that the image of thought does not follow from the milieu (nor vice versa):

To the extent that the possible is open to ‘realisation’, it is understood as an image of the real, while the real is supposed to resemble the possible. That is why it is difficult to understand what existence adds to the concept when all it does is double like with like. Such is the defect of the

⁸⁰ Beistegui 2010 p.26

⁸¹ *What is Philosophy?* p.45: “Immanence can be said to be the burning issue of all philosophy because it takes on all the dangers that philosophy must confront, all the condemnations, persecutions, and repudiations that it undergoes. This at least persuades us that the problem of immanence is not abstract or merely theoretical. It is not immediately clear why immanence is so dangerous, but it is. It engulfs sages and gods. What singles out the philosopher is the part played by immanence or fire. Immanence is immanent only to itself and consequently captures everything, absorbs All-One, and leaves nothing remaining to which it could be immanent. In any case, whenever immanence is interpreted as immanent to Something, we can be sure that this Something reintroduces the transcendent.”

possible: a defect which serves to condemn it as *produced after the fact, as retroactively fabricated* in the image of what resembles it. The actualisation of the virtual, on the contrary, always takes place by difference, divergence or differentiation. Actualisation breaks with resemblance as a process no less than it does with identity as a principle. Actual terms never resemble the singularities they incarnate.⁸²

So, we do not look for anything deeper than an image of thought: the task of the philosopher is to follow the vicissitudes of her image of thought as it responds to the contingencies of the milieu. To say that the image of thought depends upon the virtual (upon the milieu, upon contingencies) for its existence is *not* to say that it actualises the possibility of the virtual (or of the milieu), but that it emerges from a chaos that defies explanation and that any further changes to the image of thought will likewise arise for reasons that cannot be fully explained. There will always be a little chaos involved when we are setting up images of thought and creating concepts, for Deleuze and Guattari. We saw above that Deleuze and Guattari themselves take up an image of thought and explore it, rather than trying to find a first principle from which we could determine which plane of immanence might be the “best” one: they cannot prove that their schizophrenic image of thought is an accurate image of thought, but they can take this image as far as they can in order to show that it is “productive”, that is, that it creates concepts that we can make use of and that are “interesting”.⁸³ As we saw in section 1 above, for Deleuze and Guattari we think in response to problems, and the problems we have depend upon our

⁸² *Difference and Repetition* pp. 263-4 (my italics)

⁸³ *What is Philosophy?* pp.82-3

“point of view”. Deleuze wants to show that the plurality of points of view that we have is something irreducible, since there is a real chaos in life that can only be accounted for through a plurality of planes of immanence, and that the point of view that we take is not determined by the actual, but emerges out of chaos (out of the “milieu”⁸⁴). Thus contingency is “irreducible” for Deleuze and Guattari.

Nevertheless there is something paradoxical about this Deleuzian view, since they are trying to explain the plurality of planes of immanence through their own schizophrenic plane of immanence, and therefore they seem to imply that the schizophrenic image of thought is the best one. In *What is Philosophy?* Deleuze and Guattari write:

We will say that THE plane of immanence is... that which can be thought and that which cannot be thought. It is the nought within thought. It is the base of all planes, immanent to every thinkable plane that does not succeed in thinking it... Perhaps this is the most supreme act of philosophy: not so much to think THE plane of immanence as to show that it is there, unthought in every plane, and to think it in this way as the outside and inside of thought, as the not-external outside and the not-internal inside – that which cannot be thought and yet must be thought, which was thought once, as Christ was incarnated once, in order to show, that one time, the possibility of the impossible.⁸⁵

On my reading, what Deleuze and Guattari call “THE plane of immanence” is what Deleuze calls “the virtual”: it is the infinite possibility (which, being infinite,

⁸⁴ The milieu differs from a historical state of affairs because there is nothing we can say about it prior to its engagement with a plane of immanence or image of thought. The milieu is not something actual whose outcome we can predict but a collection of contingencies. In the thought of Deleuze and Guattari, a milieu functions as a random element that impacts upon the image of thought and shocks it into taking action, though the milieu does not determine what direction the image of thought takes.

⁸⁵ *What is Philosophy?* pp.59-60

is no possibility at all: see above) that cannot be thought but which must be engaged with if events are to come into being, the infinite possibility that ensures that events are not predictable but must have an element of chaos in them. As we saw above, the schizophrenic does not try to *think* this “nonthought within thought” as the “maniac” does (see above for definition of the conceptual persona of the maniac), but tries to create endlessly in order to keep thought alive in this chaos. The fact that THE plane of immanence is unthinkable means that the “cult of necessity” has got it wrong: there is a multiplicity of planes that affect the outcome of any event and so we cannot trace the causes of historical events just by looking at actual events and the possibilities that arose from them; we must look also to the infinite variation of life, or to the virtual.

Conclusion

In this chapter we have seen that, for Deleuze and Guattari the “supreme act” of philosophy is to show that there is a chaotic element in our thinking that cannot be thought. This chaotic element is the virtuality of our thinking: we cannot fully conceptualise the “image of thought” that we have; nor can we explain why it is that we have the image of thought that we do. As we saw, the cult of necessity tries to explain the way that we think and the concepts we have by looking only at the way actual events have developed, and it therefore leaves out of consideration the aleatory element of the event that is essential for its creation. For the cult of necessity, there is no such thing as a “milieu”, but only “states of

affairs” that contain possibilities implicit within them. For Deleuze and Guattari, Hegel is one of the philosophers who tries to explain our current philosophical situation in such a way:

Hegel and Heidegger remain historicists inasmuch as they posit history as a form of interiority in which the concept necessarily develops or unveils its destiny. The necessity rests on the abstraction of the historical element rendered circular. The unforeseeable creation of concepts is thus poorly understood.⁸⁶

So, Deleuze and Guattari tell us that Hegel and Heidegger take philosophical thinking to have a “destiny”, which they deduce by looking back over past events and (as we saw above) “retroactively” trying to discover what it was about the past events that led logically to the events that followed them. As we saw above, the problem with this is that the role that the “unforeseeable” virtual plays in the creation of concepts is ignored. In this thesis I want to show that we can read Hegel’s story of the development of concepts in such a way that the “irreducible contingency” of events – the fact that they must always emerge from the virtual and never simply develop from the actual – is taken into account. As we will see, asking that Hegel deal with this Deleuzian problem in this way will be a difficult task, since Hegel is usually read in such a way that he tries to overcome contingency to show that there is a deeper necessity at work in our thinking. For example, Stephen Houlgate writes:

In Hegel’s view... certain shifts in cultural perspectives have resulted not merely from a *change* in human self-understanding, but rather from a *deepening* of human self-understanding. Such

⁸⁶ *What is Philosophy?* p.95

shifts constitute, for him, a progressive development towards the truth. They represent humanity's increasing awareness of the essential nature of our own character, activity and thought – a growing self-awareness that brings with it a more adequate understanding of the world around us.⁸⁷

As we will see, I will be defending this sort of view of Hegel in my thesis: Hegel does indeed see the history of ideas as progressive, and believes that we can look back at the history of philosophy and see how new *and better* perspectives have emerged out of older concepts (new and better concepts make “explicit” what is “implicit” within the earlier concepts). But I will be also arguing that Hegel gets to this point – where he can make claims about the necessity in the world – only by proceeding in a way that is immanent, so that the irreducibility of contingency is recognised, even as necessity is determined in the world. I want to show that I agree with John Burbidge when he writes of events as follows:

Here is no purposive development, organising events to produce an order that matches what reason tells us ought to be. Reason works with universals, not simply the abstract universals of moral laws, but also the concrete universals where many components are fitted into a coherent whole.⁸⁸

Consequently “there is no way of knowing what will happen once we introduce these radically new events into the turbulent cauldron of human affairs.”⁸⁹ This may seem to contradict the description of Hegel given above, according to which history for Hegel proceeds through a development to new and better ideas, but what I want to emphasise in this thesis is that there is really no contradiction

⁸⁷ Houlgate 2005 p.13

⁸⁸ Burbidge 2007 p.3

⁸⁹ Burbidge 2007 p.3

here: Hegel sees history as a progressive development when we look *back* upon it, but sees the event as emerging out of a chaotic jumble of affairs at the time in which the event is coming into being. I will argue therefore that Hegel would accept the Deleuzian distinction between the aleatory moment when a concept is created and the “retroactive” explanation of that concept and yet considers the latter activity to be a valid mode of explanation for concepts. For Hegel, it is essential that we retroactively explain the development of events and of our concepts – and therefore “conceal” the moments of contingency and chance where it could have been otherwise – if we are to make sense of ourselves as subjects, and as political agents.⁹⁰ It is on this point that I think we find the most significant difference between Hegel, on the one hand, and Deleuze and Guattari, on the other: for Deleuze and Guattari, we have a false sense of our existence as political agents if we retroactively eliminate the virtual from our account of the event. Hegel’s retroactive logic is a “betrayal” of philosophy for Deleuze and Guattari precisely because it tries to explain all change in terms of necessity and so denies the contingency that in fact creates any event. As Beistegui writes:

Hegel’s dialectic is movement, and even infinite movement. As such, it gives the *impression* of being produced immanently. But it produces movement and immanence with words and representations only.⁹¹

⁹⁰ See chapter 7 below for “concealment”; see also discussion of Burbidge (and Žižek: see footnote to the discussion) in the introduction to the current chapter: on my reading of Hegel, it is not the case for Hegel that the future is radically open, which is why we need to account for “retroactive” necessity as well as contingency.

⁹¹ Beistegui 2010 p.25

“Words and representations only” because, in the final analysis, Hegelian dialectic leaves contingency out of consideration and so fabricates logical reasons for events. From a Deleuzian perspective, this means it leaves immanence out of the account, since it does not take the life that brings events into being into account. My aim in this thesis is to show that Hegel at least *intends* to take such life into account when he considers the subjective “resolve” of reflective thinking, even if on Deleuze and Guattari’s reading he ultimately “betrays” life and philosophy by turning this resolve into something necessary (as we will see in chapters 6 and 7 below, there is no necessity without an irreducible contingency, for Hegel, even if this contingency is “concealed”⁹²). In this way we will see what Hegelian necessity consists in, and see that it is a necessity that is necessarily bound up with contingency.

⁹² See chapter 7 for meaning of “conceal” here

Chapter 2: Preface to chapters 3 to 7

In the previous chapter I explained why contingency must be “irreducible” if we take immanence seriously in philosophy. I suggested that this is the case for Hegel as well as for Deleuze and Guattari (even if, as far as Deleuze and Guattari are concerned, Hegel fails to stick to the principle that contingency is irreducible and reduces contingency to necessity, nevertheless I will argue that Hegel does not *intend* to reduce contingency to necessity, and that he takes the immanent approach to mean that contingency must be irreducible).

In chapter 3 we will see how Hegelian logic emerges from an initial contingent “resolve”. We will see how the development of the *Logic* leads to an examination of “reflection”, which is a way of thinking that belongs in the modern age, and so is historically contingent.

In chapter 4 we will see how the logic of being, found in the “Doctrine of Being” in the *Logic* – the logic of reflection’s thinking about traditional metaphysical concepts – is transformed into a logic of essence, or a logic of reflection. We can call it a “logic of reflection” because in the logic of essence we are looking at concepts that are explicitly reflective, so that reflection is explicitly examining itself: after showing how reflection brings into question the various concepts of *being*, in his account of the concepts of *essence* he tries to give a positive account of reflection. The concepts of being were the concepts of being *in itself*,

being as *simply what it is*, that were shown to be inadequate (since reflection shows them to be *what they are not*). The concepts of essence are the concepts of reflection: they are the concepts of being *as what it is not*, as *always already* altered by reflection. According to *essentialist* – or *reflective* – thinking, reflection must *distort* being if we are going to have any conception of being at all. The logic of reflection is a *logic of domination*, because being must be thought *according to the rules of reflection* and can have no meaning *in itself*. This positive account of reflection shows how, by basing our thinking on reflection, we might try to avoid the inadequacy of the concepts of traditional philosophy.

In chapter 5 we will see how the logic of essence is transformed into the logic of the Concept. Reflection turns on itself: reflection is incoherent, since reflection itself turns out to have no meaning *in itself*. We cannot explain what *reflection* means and so cannot give a meaningful account of *being*: in order to offer any sort of coherent account we fall back on a conception of being as essentially *unfathomable*. What is essential is repeatedly shown to be necessarily mysterious. The problem, however, is that positing this mysterious element does not allow us to give a satisfactory account of being either, and we end up with a conception of being as what is *actual*, or as what simply *is*. Despite the mediation of reflection, we can say no more of this mysterious actuality than that it *is*. Thus the attempt to give a positive account of philosophy, to show how we can defend philosophy by learning lessons from reflective thinking and

rejecting the inadequate concepts of traditional philosophy seems to fail, since reflective thinking itself cannot stand up to its own criteria and thus comes seriously into question.

In chapter 6 we will see in what sense the Concept is *necessary*: from the contingent “resolve” to think about a contingent way of thinking (reflection), a “retroactive” necessity develops: Hegel calls this *speculative* thinking. Speculative thinking does not aim at a fixed and complete definition of being, but sees thinking as a process of developing our conception of what we are studying (in this case, *being*) by tracing the development of concepts as they are applied to the object of study. In this way, any object of study is found to consist logically of varying conceptual levels, from the most abstract to the most concrete. Whatever our object of study is, there will always remain an unfathomable element: speculative thinking allows us to remedy our lack of certainty by allowing us to form the fullest picture possible of the object of study.

In chapter 7 we will see how this method concretely applies to the study of the free will and ethical life: for Hegel, speculative thinking teaches us that, however we *concretely* grasp the free will, we must always account for the *abstract* character of free will if we are to avoid a dogmatic conception of what it means to be free. Though it may seem strange to portray Hegel, who argued that the world is rational and intelligible, as a thinker who argued that an aspect of reality must remain unfathomable, I hope we will see in what follows how these two

aspects of Hegel's thinking fit together: we can have a rational grasp of the world only once we realise that "Absolute Knowing" does not mean knowing *all that there is* about the world, but instead means thinking our concepts together *systematically*, so that we can grasp the role that the unfathomable, indeterminate and contingent plays in our rational and determinate thinking.

Overall, my aim is to show that Hegel's method is properly immanent, in that it recognises the irreducibility of contingency, even if it does this in a way very different to that advocated by Deleuze and Guattari.

Chapter 3: Hegel's logic of being

1: Beginning

I am going to argue in this chapter that Hegel examines what it means to simply think, and does this by demonstrating *how our modern way of thinking disrupts the act of pure thinking*. In the *Logic*, Hegel seems in places to lament that the spirit of metaphysics – meaning “the spirit which contemplates its own pure essence”⁹³ – seems to have more or less died in his own time. Metaphysics was a discipline that sought knowledge of things *in themselves*: the spirit contemplates its *own* essence not for some external purpose, but because self-knowledge was seen to be an end in itself. Metaphysics is *self-sufficient*, meaning that it is an end in itself: thus Hegel describes metaphysics as “the colourless communion of the spirit with itself.”⁹⁴ The metaphysics that Hegel mourns for was a form of thinking that was not subservient to practical ends but was an end in itself. In sum, metaphysics was the science of unfolding “the reason which is immanent in things themselves”, and as such metaphysical speculation did not presuppose a purpose for the things which were studied, but expected the things studied to offer their own reasons for being which could serve as a guide for living not merely for our benefit but so that we could be blessed with the knowledge that we were living in accordance with reason.⁹⁵

⁹³ *Logic* p.25

⁹⁴ *Logic* p.26

⁹⁵ Althaus 2000 p.127

For Hegel, metaphysics has been replaced by the “critical spirit” of “reflection”. Reflection is a form of thinking that takes nothing to be simply what it is: there is another side to every story and we cannot acquire a complete knowledge of things as they are in themselves. For reflection, all knowledge of things is mediated – by our senses, by our mode of thinking, and so on – and so we can never get to things as they are in themselves, since knowledge is always *distorted* by these mediating factors. Reflection represents the spirit of the age, for Hegel: all apparent knowledge – and as a result of this all political authority, tradition and even our own self-certainty – are brought into question by critical thinking. This means that the self-knowledge acquired through metaphysics is brought into question too. Now, Hegel does not advocate a return to “pre-critical” metaphysics: for Hegel, the spirit of reflection is correct to reject the faulty metaphysical proofs of the ancient and medieval philosophers. Instead (and perhaps surprisingly, given his lament for metaphysics), Hegel wants to suggest that the critical, reflective spirit of the age has not gone far enough.⁹⁶ Thus he writes that “it seems that the period of fermentation with which a new creative idea begins is past”, meaning that the new spirit of reflection has been established and nothing new remains left to be discovered about what it means to be a critical, reflective thinker, and yet he tells us that “the higher demand is that it should become systematised knowledge”, meaning that although enough has been written about what the critical spirit is so that we have all the information available, we have yet to put this information into an order such that

⁹⁶ See Nancy 2002 p.14: “Hegel resolutely turns his back on every kind of nostalgia”. Whatever the solution to the crisis of metaphysics is, it is not a return to the way things were.

we can fully grasp its implications. If we do this, Hegel believes, something new will emerge: we will become aware of the possibility of a post-reflective spirit, a spirit of “speculative thinking”.

I suggested just now that we might find it surprising that Hegel wants us to go further with reflection, rather than to dismiss it as incorrect, given that he laments the passing of metaphysics. However, once we grasp what “speculative thinking” is we will no longer consider it strange that Hegel wants to push reflection to its logical conclusion. As we saw above, metaphysics is the knowledge of things as they are in themselves, while reflection denies that such knowledge is possible, given the fact that knowledge is necessarily mediated. However, Hegel believes that, if we systematise the claims of reflection so that we can grasp their implications, we will discover a convincing case for “mistrusting the mistrust” of reflection.⁹⁷ That is to say, reflection turns upon itself and turns out to be inconsistent (it is “unstable”, to use a Hegelian term that will be revisited throughout this chapter). This does not mean, however, that this gives us cause to dismiss reflection: for Hegel, the claims of reflection are true and we cannot go back to the flawed arguments of traditional metaphysics. However, the instability of the logic of reflection does, as we will see, give us cause to rethink some of the conclusions of critical thinking. For Hegel, the logical result of reflection is not, as it has been thought to be, the denial that we can know things in themselves, but is instead the

⁹⁷ Cf. *Phenomenology of Spirit* §74, where Hegel writes that we might “mistrust this very mistrust”.

acknowledgement that all knowledge of things in themselves requires a knowledge of “spirit”. This is what Hegel calls “speculative knowledge”, which is described as knowledge of things “in and for themselves”.⁹⁸

For Hegel, reflection shows us that a naïve conception of the “self-sufficiency” of traditional metaphysics is problematic. In this way, reflection is indispensable: although thinkers of reflection are wrong to suggest that we can never have knowledge of things as they are in themselves, they rightly point out what is wrong with having too simple a conception of what knowledge of things in themselves would involve. As we will see in this chapter, we have a demonstration of this in the first part of Hegel’s *Logic* (the “logic of being”). We learn in this part of the *Logic* that things cannot *simply be what they are*: things are more complicated than this, and so if we want to talk of self-sufficiency, then we will need to work fairly hard to explain what this means. From a Hegelian point of view, this is what is wrong with much traditional metaphysics: the question of identity, of what it is for a thing to be itself, was not questioned enough (for Aristotle, for example, we do not really need to question the principle of identity: to be uncertain about such questions regarding the nature of being demonstrates a lack of education, for Aristotle⁹⁹).

⁹⁸ See e.g. *Enc Logic* §81 (Add. 1). As we will see in chapter 6 below (“conclusion” section), speculative knowledge is knowledge of “spirit” because it is a form of knowing that allows us to know ourselves as thinkers: with speculative knowing we come to know the way that thought develops as it comes to terms with what is actual and thus come to know thought itself.

⁹⁹ Aristotle 1984 p.1588 (*Metaphysics* 1006a2-9). We should note that Hegel’s relationship to Aristotle was not as simple as this example might suggest: Aristotle was not *simply* a traditional metaphysician but exhibited moments of truly speculative thinking. This will be returned to in later chapters.

For Hegel, it is this that we learn from reflection: that our thinking spirit has an impact on the nature of what is thought by us. Things cannot simply be what they are, and this is due to this mediating role played by thought. Traditional metaphysics got it wrong because it did not account for this impact of spirit on our thinking and assumed a naïve relationship between our thoughts and the objects of thought: it assumed that when we think we have access to the things as they simply are. Reflection gets it wrong because it assumes that this impact must distort the object of thought in such a way that there is no hope of having knowledge of things as they are in themselves: it does not take into account that to talk of what things are in themselves is not to talk of things simply being what they are, but is to talk of things being what they are *despite the mediation of reflection*. For Hegel, “speculative knowledge” is what results from our having learned lessons from the failures of both these approaches: we learn that if we are to have knowledge of things in as they are themselves, then we must acquire the capacity to have knowledge of things as they are “in and for themselves”. To be “in and for itself” is to remain what it is, to be *preserved*, even as it is mediated. For Hegel, this is the definition of *freedom*: not the absence of constraint, but the capacity to remain what one is even in the presence of constraint.¹⁰⁰

¹⁰⁰ This will be returned to in chapter 6 below, where we discuss the preservation of the actual in the development of the Concept. In this chapter, and in chapters 4 to 6 below, I hope to explain not only how the shortcomings of traditional metaphysics and reflection are demonstrated in Hegel’s *Logic*, but also how speculative knowledge is shown to be possible through the examination of these approaches. In sum: I hope to show how the concept of freedom explains

So, for Hegel, traditional metaphysics was characterised by its self-sufficiency. For Hegel, traditional metaphysics found its own beginning and provided its own justifications, rather than relying on claims about its “usefulness” to other areas of life for its justification. Hegel’s *Logic* will also provide its own beginning and aim to be self-sufficient. Though this might seem strange in an age of reflection (and we are still in this age, from a Hegelian point of view), where things are never self-sufficient but always mediated by another, Hegel must nevertheless do this for two reasons: firstly, Hegel does not want to presuppose the death of traditional metaphysics but wants to show how, by thinking in the naïve way of philosophers of traditional metaphysics, we are necessarily led to recognise the failure of traditional metaphysics and the truth of reflection. Secondly, Hegel believes that there is some good in the activity of metaphysics, that “the colourless communion of the spirit with itself” is something that is important and should be allowed to continue, and so he wants to begin in a metaphysical spirit, as it were, so that he can see what in fact remains of metaphysics once it has undergone the critical onslaught of reflection. In other words, *Hegel wants to show how metaphysics fares in an age of reflection*. He will thus begin by

how the naïve dream of traditional metaphysics, that things can simply be known as they are in themselves, can be realised by allowing that things can be preserved as what they are even when mediated by reflection. In the present chapter we will see how reflection destroys the naïve conception of being in itself presented by traditional metaphysics; in chapters 4 and 5 we will see how reflection defeats itself; in chapter 6 we will see how the concept of freedom allows us knowledge of things as they are in themselves. We will see that, though reflection takes into account the role that spirit plays when we think, it wrongly assumes that spirit must distort things as they are in themselves. The merely reflective (and so not properly *speculative*) spirit cannot be *free*, because it cannot see that the truth of things can be *preserved* even as we think about them.

examining the apparent self-sufficiency of philosophy and will thus have to tackle the problem of beginning (that is, the question of how philosophy, since it is self-sufficient, can find its own beginning), so that he can make his *Logic* the metaphysical investigation it needs to be.¹⁰¹ The naïve conception of self-sufficiency will be shown to be inadequate in Hegel's "logic of being", which is the part of the *Logic* that will be discussed in the present chapter. In later chapters we will see why we must nevertheless, due to the instability of the concept of reflection, return to a conception of philosophy as the study of "the reason which is immanent in things themselves". We will return to Hegel's treatment of the question of beginning shortly, once we have briefly reviewed in a little more detail what Hegel means by "reflection".

2: Reflection

Reflection is a form of thinking: more than this, it is what is, for Hegel, essential to modern thinking. That is to say, *minimally, for Hegel, thought takes the form of reflection in the modern age*. However, thought can also be much more than this. It is Hegel's view that we are capable of thinking in a way that goes beyond reflection, but that most modern thinking is merely reflection. It is Hegel's task

¹⁰¹ See Brooks 2007 pp.1-12 for a good argument for why Hegel's philosophy, even his political philosophy, should be taken to be "metaphysical". Thom Brooks reminds us that even so-called "non-metaphysical" readers of Hegel's *Philosophy of Right* do not deny that this work contains a metaphysics: the argument is not whether Hegel has a metaphysics (since all agree that Hegel offers an account of things "that exist, but not in a physical form" and so of "metaphysical existence"), but the extent to which it is useful to use this metaphysics to explain the *Philosophy of Right* (that is, whether it is useful to use works such as the *Logic* to explain what is happening in the *Philosophy of Right*).

to explain the nature of reflection, before showing how we can become sophisticated enough in our reflection to move *beyond* mere reflection. It is only then that we will be capable of “speculative thinking”.

For Hegel, the way in which we think is historically determined. That is to say, we think by using certain concepts, and the form that these concepts take depends upon the age in which we live.¹⁰² What it means to “think” changes over time. As we have seen, Hegel suggests that it is characteristic of the modern age that “thinking” is assumed to mean “reflection”. Reflection is a sophisticated way of thinking because it is thinking about thinking. As Hegel puts it, reflection recognises the “contradiction” that lies within thinking: that is to say, reflection recognises that thought can always be turned against itself and bring itself into question.¹⁰³ *Reflection is essential to modern thinking* because, since Hegel’s time, pre-reflective thinking has generally been seen to be inadequate.¹⁰⁴ That is to say, in modern times it is not generally seen to be enough to think about *things*: we must also “reflect”, and consider the way that we think about things. As I have stated above, what I want to suggest in this chapter is that the first part of Hegel’s *Logic*, the part entitled “The Doctrine of Being”, serves as an illustration of why traditional metaphysics is insufficient in

¹⁰² Houlgate 2005 pp.4ff.

¹⁰³ See *Enc. Logic* §26 for description of pre-reflective thought as “unconscious of the antithesis of thinking within and against itself”, and compare this to, for example §41 Add. 1, where Hegel discusses “critical philosophy” and explains that critical forms of thinking must “investigate themselves” (unlike “naïve thinking” which “let its determinations count as something given in advance”).

¹⁰⁴ For this reason, speculative thinking is often misjudged to be naïve, since it does not seem to be critical enough (since its opposition to the scepticism of reflection makes it appear to be naïve and pre-reflective). The modern standard is to be reflective and critical.

the age of reflection. We will see that, since reflection is a form of thinking that recognises the contradictions that must belong to thinking, its task is seemingly endless: reflection will repeatedly come to a point where its contradictions cannot be resolved and it has to start again. It is for this reason, Hegel tells us, that reflection always leads to “sublation” (this term will be explained below).

In this chapter we will be looking at the first part of the *Logic*, the logic of “being”. I aim to demonstrate that, for Hegel, the logic of being is the logic of pre-reflective thinking. The logic of being is, for Hegel, the logic of “immediacy” and “one-sidedness”: in the logic of being, immediacy and one-sidedness will be shown to be inadequate and the truth of reflection – that we must think about thinking and discover new aspects of every immediate determination – will be shown at each step.

In this chapter, we will only be looking at a small part of the logic of being: we will be looking at the first few steps of the development of this logic. However, I hope that the analysis of this small part of the *Logic* will explain why Hegel believes that reflection – the process of thinking about thinking – must prevail when we consider the concepts of “being”, which are the concepts of what is one-sided and immediate. The concepts that belong to the logic of being are the concepts of a “naïve” mode of thinking: in this chapter we will see that naivety in thinking leads to concepts that are “unstable”. For Hegel, “stability” and “instability” refer to the ease with which concepts are altered by reflection. For

example: as we will see, “pure being” is a very unstable concept because even defining it leads us to posit it as its opposite, “nothing”. All the concepts of being that we will examine in this chapter are unstable, but none so much as this concept of pure being.

We will see why, in modern times, thinking without reflection can justly be said to not be thinking at all. The reason for this is that the naïve concepts of being demand reflection if they are to be thought properly. We will see an example of this shortly: though we could perhaps, in some sense, say that we are thinking when we simply think “being” in its purity, the implications of this thought escape us if we do not move beyond this thought and reflect upon the process by which this thought is kept in mind. For Hegel, true thinking is all about reaching the implications of that about which we think, and so reflection is essential to true thinking.

3: Simply beginning

Hegel wants to bring all of our concepts, as well as all the logical rules that we might follow when we think, into question.¹⁰⁵ This notion of bringing things “into question” has the sense described above: something is in question if it is not taken to be determinate and sufficient in itself, but subject to alteration given the changing nature of the circumstances in which it finds itself. In the case of

¹⁰⁵ Houlgate 2005 p.28: thus Hegel is proceeding according to the “modern demand that rational thought should subject all human assumptions and presuppositions to critical scrutiny”.

the concepts and rules of philosophy, not one of the concepts and rules for thinking with which we are familiar is assumed to be fixed and sufficient as it is in itself, and all concepts and rules are in principle subject to alteration through reflection being brought to bear upon them. When Hegel begins his philosophical investigation in the *Logic*, no concept is assumed to be “stable”: though we seek a stable concept (see below for definition of “stable”), we will see that all the concepts of being (that is, all the concepts dealt with in the “logic of being”, which is the first of the three parts of the *Logic*) are in fact “unstable”, that is, they are all subject to alteration when they are reflected upon. That is, the self-sufficiency – the inner coherence – of each concept turns out to be insufficient and “unstable” in the sense that the concept cannot meet the demands of reflection.

Bringing all of our concepts and logical rules into question may seem to be an impossible task: after all, don't we need to presuppose rules to follow in order that we can begin thinking at all? Hegel will question this assumption, and in fact will suggest that beginning to think, before we even begin to follow rules, involves a moment of *simply beginning*, and it is this moment that he will explore at the beginning of his *Logic*.¹⁰⁶ However, we should also note that Hegel is not going to try to *prove* right away that simply beginning in this way is possible or necessary: instead, he is going to show us how a logic starting from a simple beginning might work and ask us to suspend judgement and see what arises from

¹⁰⁶ *Logic* p.69

it. Hegel aims to show that even the act of simply beginning to think implies a complex system of concepts. By examining the act of *simply beginning* we will begin to investigate what it means for something to simply be itself and will be able to begin the investigation of what is wrong with the naïve conception of being in itself.

We can call this moment of beginning a moment of “simply beginning” because all we do is begin. We cannot have any assumptions in mind when we begin. For example: we cannot presuppose the logical law of contradiction (that something “cannot be both what it is and what it is not”) since this law, like every other law that we apply when we think, is to be brought into question.¹⁰⁷ But how can we simply begin? Can the phrase “simply begin” really mean anything? Are we talking about something that it is logically possible to do? Again, we should bear in mind that Hegel is not going to try to prove that it is possible at this stage, but is simply going to suggest a process whereby we might carry out this act of simply beginning. His suggested approach is that we think the concept of “pure being”.

Hegel points out that many people, when asked to think abstract concepts such as “pure being”, say that they simply do not know what it is that they are supposed to think.¹⁰⁸ In order to think pure being, he tells us, we must learn to think in a way that is non-representational: that is, we must stop “picture-

¹⁰⁷ Houlgate 2005 p.28

¹⁰⁸ See e.g. *Enc Logic* §88 (Note)

thinking” (thinking with images) and engage in pure thinking.¹⁰⁹ “Pure thinking” may seem a difficult concept to grasp, but Hegel assures us that such thinking (thinking without images) is possible. Hegel can, to begin with, only offer us – if we are indeed uninitiated in pure thinking and are committed to picture-thinking – an *assurance* that pure thinking is possible¹¹⁰: he can only offer an assurance because pure thinking is not something that can be conceived through picture-thinking. That is to say, we cannot form a picture in our minds of what “pure thinking” might mean, and so if we only think via images we will not be able to grasp what Hegel means by “pure thinking”, and will have to learn to *do* pure thinking before we can grasp what pure thinking is. Hegel compares this to learning to swim: we do not learn how to swim before getting into the water, just as we do not learn how pure thinking works before we go ahead and start doing it.¹¹¹ Thus Hegel does not intend at the outset of the *Logic* to demonstrate that pure thinking is possible: instead we will learn what pure thinking means as we proceed. Pure thinking was the aim of traditional metaphysics: we simply think and allow pure thought to show to us the nature of things.¹¹² Hegel wants to show how the concepts that emerge from traditional metaphysics fare in the age of reflection, where the pure act of thinking itself comes into question.

¹⁰⁹ *Enc Logic* §88 (Note 3)

¹¹⁰ It should be noted that we will move from this *assurance* to something more convincing, something that we might call a “proof”. See *Phenomenology* §76: “One bare assurance is worth just as much as any other”; however, once Hegel’s one assurance has led to the unfolding of a coherent logic, Hegel believes that his position will be shown to be more convincing than the view that pure thinking is impossible, since it will serve as a tool for thinking that will allow us to solve otherwise unsolvable problems.

¹¹¹ *Enc Logic* §10 (Note)

¹¹² *Enc Logic* §28: traditional metaphysics acted with the assumption that “the cognition of things as they are *in-themselves* results from the *thinking* of what *is*” (italics as in text).

What I want to suggest is that, for Hegel, the concept of “pure being” is so indeterminate that it should not properly be called a “concept” at all (though we call it that for want of a better term¹¹³), and so by beginning by thinking it we are able to begin by examining the nature of thought without presupposing a concept: that is to say, the concept of pure being allows us to examine the subjective “resolve” to begin thinking (by seeing what results from such resolve), without basing this resolve on a supposedly firm, objective foundation (we do not claim to begin with a concept of this resolve). The concept of pure being is, for Hegel, the concept of “pure indeterminateness and emptiness”.¹¹⁴ What this means is that it has no objective content at all: when we think pure being we are not thinking of any particular *thing*, but are just thinking of indeterminateness as such. It is by thinking of indeterminateness as such – by thinking of “pure being” – that we begin to *do* pure thinking: we simply think. Again, it should be noted that, as the first step on the path of pure thinking, Hegel cannot offer a proof that pure being has such and such a nature at this stage but simply invites us to think as he suggests and see what results.¹¹⁵

¹¹³ “Thought” is a possibility, but this might cause confusion: though I will occasionally call the concept of pure being the thought of pure being, I have tried to limit this use of the word “thought”, since I mainly use the term “thought” to refer to thought in general, i.e. the process of thinking.

¹¹⁴ *Logic* p.82

¹¹⁵ And, as we will see, pure thinking turns into concrete thinking. The very notion of pure thinking is “unstable”, which means that it is transformed into concrete thinking: that is to say, by carrying out pure thinking we end up thinking concretely.

Indeed, when we look at what Hegel writes about pure being, we see that pure being does not have any determinate nature at all. Hegel tells us that the beginning – pure being – is “subjective in the sense of being a particular, inessential way of introducing the discourse”.¹¹⁶ It is important to emphasise this *subjective* character of beginning: for Hegel, our thinking must be guided by what is subjective because thinking should be “free and for itself”.¹¹⁷ That is to say, we think freely when we think for ourselves: we think freely when we determine for ourselves the way in which we think. It follows from this that thinking cannot begin from anything *objective* if we are to think freely, since this would mean that it was not *we*, but the objective thing, that determined our thinking. The concept of pure being is the beginning of the logic in a “subjective” sense and not an “objective” one. An objective beginning would be a first principle of which we could be certain and on which we could base our investigation of further concepts.¹¹⁸ A subjective beginning, on the other hand, is an “abstract beginning” or “pure beginning”: rather than claiming that the concept with which we begin is the concept of something fundamental, the concept is taken to be the first because it is utterly indeterminate and thus *cannot* form a foundation for thinking. Instead of examining the determination of the concept, then, we see *how the concept of indeterminateness is determined by our thinking, and thus learn about the nature of our subjective mode of thinking*. So we see with the concept of pure being that it is utterly

¹¹⁶ *Logic* p.67

¹¹⁷ *Logic* p.68: “The beginning is *logical* in that it is to be made in the element of thought that is free and for itself, in *pure knowing*.”

¹¹⁸ *Logic* p.67

indeterminate and that there is nothing objectively true about it upon which we could base any claims about the nature of reality: all that is determinate about beginning with pure being is the subjective and arbitrary fact that we decide (or “resolve”) to take it up in the first place.¹¹⁹

What I am suggesting, then, is that, for Hegel, we start with what is objectively indeterminate so that what determines our thinking is the subjective nature of our thought itself. By examining the concept of what is utterly indeterminate, we gain insight into how our subjectivity is determined. For Hegel, as we have seen, the way in which we think is determined *historically*: that is to say, the categories with which we think are not eternal, but have been shaped by the contingent factors that have led to the historical situation in which we find ourselves. (It is important to note that though these factors are indeed *contingent*, they are also *necessary*, in that though Hegel does not deny the contingent nature of each historical event, he also claims that we can detect a logical “development” in them: this will be returned to in chapter 6 below.¹²⁰) That is to say: we focus on the thought of sheer indeterminateness and see where our thought takes us from this point. We will thus see that the *Logic* develops from this first moment of utter indeterminateness: we simply begin thinking – that is, begin thinking without any presupposed objective content – and see what results from this. Hegel’s *Logic* demonstrates how thinking must

¹¹⁹ *Logic* p.70; Houlgate 2005 p.49

¹²⁰ See also introduction to chapter 1 above: in the logic of the Concept we see “retroactive” necessity emerge.

work if it does not presuppose any foundations for thinking: the way of thinking described in the *Logic* is a way of thinking that is utterly free and for itself because it is not determined by any *objective* facts external to it. (That is, although thought is determined by historical, social factors, which are of course “objective” in a sense, it is nevertheless governed by nothing objective *except for these minimal objective conditions without which there would be no such thing as subjectivity at all*. Also, no objective facts are presupposed regarding historical, social conditions: we only assume that there are such facts and that it is these that makes our thinking *subjective*, in the sense that our thinking belongs to a *particular* group of thinking beings.) We will see in the discussion below that the concept of pure being gives rise to new concepts, so that the entire course of the *Logic* can be said to emerge from this first moment of thinking about pure indeterminateness. Now, one might object that such “foundation-less” thinking is impossible. However, it is important to remember that Hegel is not trying to *prove* that such thinking is possible, at least not right at the beginning. He is instead inviting us to try thinking in this way in the hope that the proof will be found in the fact that such thinking functions in a coherent way: that is to say, rather than show at the beginning that this is the only way to begin philosophical thinking, Hegel would instead hope to show to readers that his system as a whole allows us to solve a great deal of the conceptual problems faced by less adequate methods of philosophical thinking.¹²¹ From a Hegelian perspective, it

¹²¹ As Thom Brooks puts it, for Hegel “the proof is in the pudding” (Brooks 2007 p.12). Also see *Logic*, for example p.75, where Hegel writes: “If impatience with the consideration of the abstract beginning should provoke anyone to say that the beginning should be made not with the

would be irrational at this stage – before more of the logical system has been revealed – to have a conviction either for or against this approach: all Hegel is asking us to do is to try this approach and see what emerges. It is for this reason that the Hegelian approach can be described as being “without presuppositions”: Hegel is not asking us to presuppose that this method will be successful, but simply to try it.

What I have just suggested might seem strange: doesn't Hegel ask us to take a “scientific” approach to philosophy? To proceed on the basis of “proofs” rather than on the basis of hunches and intuition?¹²² This is true, but it is evident from his discussion of “pure being” that he does not consider a proof to be possible at this stage.¹²³ “Pure being” is simply the concept of the first concept, of the concept with which we will begin: we accept that thinking can have no certain foundation, and so we begin with an utterly indeterminate concept. In my view, it is in fact this characteristic of Hegel's thought that means that it deserves to be called “scientific”: it begins with an experiment in thought – thinking “pure being” – and proofs will only be reached through *a methodical approach* to the results of this experiment. That is, we are *resolving* to think and no more. This resolve is *arbitrary*, since it is not justified by anything. What is important is that we resolve to think *and do no more than this*, which is why what we begin with

beginning, but straightaway with the subject matter itself, well then, this subject matter is nothing else but the said empty being; for what the subject matter is, *that will be explicated only in the development of the science and cannot be presupposed by it as known beforehand.*” (my italics)

¹²² *Enc. Logic*, “Preface to the First Edition” p.1

¹²³ Again, see *Logic* e.g. p.75

must be indeterminate (since we *merely think*, and do not think in a way that is determined by presuppositions).

It may seem contradictory to say that thinking can have no certain foundation and yet that it *must* begin with an utterly indeterminate concept. However, this contradiction disappears once we bear in mind Hegel's distinction between an "objective" and a "subjective" beginning, which I mentioned above.¹²⁴ For Hegel, there can be no objective beginning: that is, there can be no first principle on which thinking can be based with certainty. However, there must be a beginning: that is, if we are going to do philosophy then it must be the case that we begin. Hegel is pointing to an unavoidable paradox when it comes to thinking about thinking: we must begin and yet cannot know where to begin, so we begin with the most abstract act of thinking imaginable: that is, we begin *with the subjective act of thinking a concept with no prior criteria for thinking*. To put it another way: we cannot know beforehand where to begin, and yet we must begin, and so we must abandon certainty and simply begin.

Given that the first concept has no determinate content, the way that we think this concept will depend upon our subjective inclinations. Hegel is well aware that we are not obliged to think pure indeterminateness in the way that he prescribes: in fact, many thinkers treat the paradox of beginning in very different

¹²⁴ *Logic* p.67

ways to Hegel.¹²⁵ Hegel can only suggest that we can think pure indeterminateness in a certain way (a way that presupposes nothing) and assure us that if we do so a coherent logic will emerge, which will serve as a proof for the validity of the beginning. For this reason, we will see in this chapter that Hegel makes certain claims that may seem vague or uncertain: if we are to get anything out of Hegel, we must at first give him the benefit of the doubt and see what emerges from the claims that he makes.

4: Pure being

In the previous section we saw that Hegel wants to bring all of our concepts into question, and believes that he can do this by “simply beginning”. In this section we will see what happens after this simple beginning: the nature of our thinking is revealed since we see that we must move from pure, indeterminate thinking to “reflection” upon pure thinking, which leads to determinate thinking.

I have suggested that, for Hegel, we must begin the examination of thinking by *simply beginning*, and that this means beginning with what is utterly indeterminate. The thought of sheer indeterminateness is the concept of “pure being”. The first question that we ask when examining the nature of thought is:

¹²⁵ In the *Logic* pp.93-103, Hegel goes over some of these different ways of responding to the paradox of the beginning. For example, he discusses Jacobi’s scepticism over whether we can make a beginning at all, since the beginning must be indeterminate. Though Hegel thinks that Jacobi is wrong, my point is that Hegel accepts that it is possible to think about the indeterminate beginning in such a way that we do not reach Hegel’s conclusions: we will fail to grasp the truth of Hegel’s position if we remain sceptical and thereby do not allow ourselves to carry out the procedure that Hegel has set out.

“What is pure being?” This is a difficult and perhaps paradoxical question: after all, pure being, as pure indeterminateness, is not a *thing* that has *properties* (since it is utterly indeterminate) such that we can ask *what it is* and expect a simple answer. Nevertheless, this question – “What is pure being?” – is essential, if we are to *reflect* upon the concept of pure being. Remember that, at the beginning of the *Logic*, all we have is pure indeterminateness and the subjective resolve “to consider thought as such”.¹²⁶ This *subjective resolve* is what will determine the *Logic*, since this first concept is utterly indeterminate. This resolve manifests itself as the question “What is pure being?”, and by asking “What is pure being?” we will be led to consider what is necessarily associated in our thinking with the concept of indeterminateness. We resolve to *formulate* and *express* the concept of pure being and in this way we are led to discover what is necessarily associated with indeterminateness: in this way we act in accordance with the demand of reflective thinking that we try to *explain* what we are thinking about. We thus learn how thinking operates when divorced from any objective content. By asking “What is pure being?” we are causing ourselves to question what it is that we have done by “simply beginning”. I suggested above that, for Hegel, to begin with what is utterly indeterminate is to merely think, that is, to think in a way that is not guided by presuppositions. However, despite thinking without presuppositions, we nevertheless do think *in a certain way*: that is, *we think indeterminately*, which means that we actively avoid thinking with any determination. This way of thinking is “unstable”: that is

¹²⁶ *Logic* p.70

to say, it is *contradictory*, because thinking has to be determined in such a way that it is not determined. In what follows we will see how Hegel argues this point: *we will see that logical development, for Hegel, consists in making explicit the determinations that are implicit in what is indeterminate*. We will also see that making these determinations explicit leads to “sublation”: we end up with a number of contradictory statements and so have to begin again, by both “preserving” and “cancelling” the position that led to these contradictions. We will also see that these moments of sublation recur throughout Hegel’s *Logic*.

I want to suggest that, by beginning with pure being, Hegel begins with a *tautology* or *absolute statement*: “being is being”.¹²⁷ By talking of “*pure being*”, Hegel is talking of being that is itself and nothing more. It is very important to note the connection between indeterminateness and tautology, for Hegel: we can explain what Hegel means by “indeterminateness” through the concept of tautology. If we want to understand how “indeterminateness” is explained through “tautology”, then we must think about what it means to be “determinate”. As Gillian Rose points out, the determination of something is discovered, for Hegel, through a gradual process (of having “contradictory experiences”) and not by simply defining something (that is, by defining a subject through a predicate).¹²⁸ What is indeterminate is what is *no more than merely defined*, while what is determinate has had its meaning concretely realised by a

¹²⁷ *Logic* p.81: “This reflectionless *being* is *being* as it is immediately in its own self alone.”

¹²⁸ Rose 2009 pp.51ff.

process of providing definitions.¹²⁹ Rose gives an example: when Hegel writes “In general religion and the foundation of the state is one and the same thing; they are identical in and for themselves”, religion is not *defined* as “the state”; rather, Hegel is saying that its meaning is only grasped through experience of the way that religion and the state meet (and experience of our encounters with both of them). As Rose reminds us, the statement that religion and state are identical is not “an uninformative tautology”, but tells us instead that we can grasp the meaning of both through *a process of thinking them together*. That is to say, we do not carry out a process of thinking in which the end result is the stable identity of religion and state (remember that what is stable is a tautology), but instead recognise this identity as unstable, but productive of its own determinations (a small amount of reflection will tell us that religion and state are not identical, and it is by this process of reflection that the non-identity in the proposition is revealed: it is the play of identity and non-identity that make the proposition productive). The concept of pure being is indeterminate because it simply *is*: that is to say, being is simply being, and we have not yet gone through a *process* of providing definitions (since we have only provided one answer to the question “What is being?”) as a result of which process we could be said to have a concrete, determinate concept. At this stage it may be unclear to the reader what such a process of definition must consist in, but I hope that this will be explained as we proceed. I have suggested that, for Hegel, offering a simple

¹²⁹ As we will see, a definition is not enough for Hegel, since any definition turns out to be a tautology: the meaning of something is only really brought out by a concrete process of coming to terms with the object that is being examined.

definition for a concept is only the beginning of making a concept determinate, and that tautology means indeterminateness, for Hegel. In what follows, we will look in more detail at why tautological and indeterminate concepts can be said, for Hegel, to be *unstable*: it is this *instability* of what is tautological that leads us from the concept of indeterminateness with which we begin (the concept of pure being) to more determinate concepts.

It might seem that the investigation must end with the phrase “being is being”: being, in its purity, is being, and that is all that can be said. However, the very fact that, by *explaining* this tautology – explaining what the concept of pure being means – we end up with more than this tautology, tells us something of the nature of thought (of the “subjective resolve” mentioned above). It is the purpose of the *Logic* to explore the nature of thought, and we begin to do this by seeing what is *necessarily associated* with the tautology “being is being” when we try to explain it. Far from seeing the truth of pure being as “being is being” and nothing more, we see that such an apparently simple answer is no answer at all (since it is no *explanation*), and that the answer to the question “What is pure being?” is an immensely complex one. What I mean is that, for Hegel, the concept of pure being, as the tautology (or absolute statement) “being is being”, or “being and no more than this”, is, through its sheer indeterminacy, *unstable*. According to the Oxford English Dictionary, “stable” means “not likely to give way or overturn; firmly fixed”¹³⁰, and I want to suggest that Hegel takes this term

¹³⁰ http://www.askoxford.com/concise_oed/stable_1?view=uk

in the same sense, so that “unstable” means “likely to give way or overturn; not firmly fixed”. In this case, the concept of “pure being” is unstable because minimal reflection will show that this concept is contradictory (since it can only be explained if we take it to be other than it is, that is, as more than simply indeterminate), so that our concept of being will have to alter and be overturned: that is to say, pure being is likely to alter because the smallest amount of reflection will show that it is contradictory and so it is a very unstable concept. When we begin to explain “pure being”, it shows itself to be unstable and alters. We will see how that happens shortly: pure being becomes “nothing”, then becomes “becoming”, then becomes “determinate being”. The *absolute statement*, “being is being”, thus needs to be *qualified*, since as it stands it is contradictory.

It is by discovering the *necessary associations or connections* between thoughts that we can be said to *derive* new concepts from this initial concept of pure being. This process of *derivation* is called the “self-development of the Concept”. For now, we need not worry too much about why it is called this: let us simply bear in mind that Hegel sees the *Logic* as, in some sense, describing a single process of development, as concepts are derived through their necessary connection to this initial concept of pure being. By establishing the way in which thoughts are necessarily connected we discover the nature of thought in general: we will see that Hegel is giving us a conception of thought such that thinking

means *looking for explanation*, which means *looking for the determinations that lie behind, or are implicit within, what is indeterminate*.¹³¹

We have begun with the concept of pure being, then, and we must explain what this means. Yes, pure being is utterly indeterminate, but we can nevertheless attempt to explain what we mean by “utterly indeterminate”. *By explaining what “pure being” means, we will see that the tautology “being is being” implies a process of thinking by virtue of which “pure being” is determined in such a way that it is indeterminate.* “Pure being”, or the tautology (or absolute statement) “being is being”, thus implies a contradiction that is overcome by a process of thinking that “holds together” the thought of pure being. Though “pure being” is the concept of simple being, the thought of pure being is complex, since it implies a process of holding together contradictory elements.

The concept of pure being is described at the beginning of the chapter entitled “Being” in the *Logic*.¹³² In a single paragraph Hegel will try to encapsulate what we mean when we try to express the concept of pure being. Among other things, we are told that we should think pure being as not having “diversity within itself or any reference outwards” and that “it would not be held fast in its purity if it contained any determination or content which could be distinguished

¹³¹ Here we can already see the connection between *reflection* and *essence*: for the latter, what *lies behind* determinations is important, since this is what is *implicit within* that determination (that is, it is what must be grasped if we are to grasp the determination itself).

¹³² *Logic* p.82

in it or by which it could be distinguished from an other.”¹³³ I hope to show in this section how phrases such as this express the concepts that are necessarily connected to the concept of indeterminateness, or pure being. That is to say: we will see in this section what concepts are required, for Hegel, for thinking the concept of pure being, in order to illustrate the thought processes that are implied by the thought that “being is being”.

Pure being is said to be “without any further determination”. This works as a definition of pure being (as pure indeterminateness). In order to express what is meant by “pure being”, Hegel thus uses the term “determination”: however, Hegel uses this term only to negate it, since he says that pure being is “without” it.¹³⁴ Hegel is telling us that we do not need the term “determination” to understand pure being at all and he does so through the use of the term “without”, by saying that pure being is “without determination”. The term “without”, we will see, will be central to an understanding of the concept of pure being. We next come across the term “indeterminate”, which is another way of saying “without determination”, but we now see this term linked to the term “immediacy”. “Indeterminate immediacy” seems to follow from “without

¹³³ *Logic* p.82

¹³⁴ See Houlgate 2006 p.79: “Without” is, for Houlgate, one of the expressions that Dieter Henrich has in mind when he mentions those expressions that “have an unmistakably negative character and clearly just have the task of keeping every further determination away from the purity of being.” (this is a translation by Houlgate of Henrich) Similarly to Houlgate (and Henrich), I will argue in what follows that, of all the determinations that come up when we try to think pure being, only some (such as “without”) are *essential* and tell us what “pure being” essentially is. For example, I want to suggest, with Henrich, that the phrase “without determination” tells us what pure being is via the *essential* term “without”: “without” is a key term for explaining “pure being”.

determination". Immediacy, then, is a term that contains the "without" that we saw in the last sentence. "Immediacy" means "without mediation".¹³⁵ By being without mediation, we see, pure being "is equal only to itself". So we now have the term "equal". But we are told that pure being "is equal only to itself", which is to say that it is not equal to anything else. The term "only" can be seen as another term, like "without", that has a negative, and limiting, quality. Again, equality is put to one side by the negative term (the former is "cancelled" by the latter), while the latter is supposed to reflect what does in fact belong to pure being.¹³⁶ We might say, if we were to stretch ordinary English usage slightly, that "only" is what is essential to pure being so that pure being is, in some sense, "only" (that it has what we might call "only-ness" about it): that is, pure being is the thought of being that is only itself and nothing else (which is why we said above that it is the tautology, or absolute statement, "being is being"). The term "equal", then, has been negated and we are left with "only", which tells us the same thing of pure being as "without" does. So far, then, what we might call the "positive" terms have been put to one side by the "negative" terms, which remain as definitions of pure being.

We now have the term "unequal". This might look like a negative term, but it in fact has a positive quality, since it translates into "greater than" or "less than". It

¹³⁵ See Houlgate 2006 p.81: "By naming the object of thought 'indeterminate immediacy,' Hegel employs ordinary, reflexive words in such a way that the reflexive connotations of those words are cancelled leaving his readers focused on pure being alone."

¹³⁶ See Houlgate 2006 p.81: "By speaking of being's equality only with itself... Hegel makes it clear that the normal connotation of *equality* is being negated here... Hegel describes pure being as equal only to itself... in order to direct the attention of the reader to the sheer simplicity of pure being."

must be remembered that we are not interested in the form of the words alone, but in the nature of the thoughts that they bring to us. We are told that pure being is “*not* unequal relatively to another” (my italics). Hegel is doing the same thing here as has been described above and that he will continue to do throughout the rest of this paragraph; that is, he is showing us that we must understand pure being negatively if we are to understand it as purely as is possible. Ideally, we would think pure being through itself alone, since this would be what an understanding of *pure* being should mean. However, since these other terms must be brought in if we are to formulate and explain our thought of pure being (and we must formulate and explain a thought if we are to think it¹³⁷), we must “cancel” these terms and thereby understand pure being in the most minimal way possible: that is, using the fewest categories (to get the *purest* conception of *pure* being that we can). The process of cancellation throughout this paragraph in the *Logic* shows us that we must understand pure being minimally as this negation of *all other terms*. Pure being turns out to be “nothing”, then, since “nothing” is a term that we might use to describe the sum total of these negations (of these *without*s and *only*s: pure being is shown to be *nothing* since it has negated all of the terms that would make it *something*.)

Before we go any further, I should defend this claim from a possible objection.

By opposing “nothing” to “something”, it might be objected, I am not following

Hegel, who makes it clear that the term “nothing”, or “Nichts”, should not at this

¹³⁷See Houlgate 2006 p.75: “thoughts cannot be pictured or felt but need to be named and explained if they are to become something definite.”

stage be opposed to “something”.¹³⁸ However, I believe that my reading helps to justify this claim by Hegel and is a Hegelian reading. What Hegel is trying to claim when he says that nothing is not opposed to something is that we should not think of nothing as being the absence of something, such as we might mean if we were to say, when asked to retrieve something from a bag and finding the bag to be empty, “there is *nothing* there”.¹³⁹ But I am not setting up nothing as opposed to something in this sense; rather, what I am arguing is that “nothing” used at this point in the *Logic* is used in opposition to something in the sense that Hegel himself opposes the two concepts when he says that nothing is *not* opposed to something. That is to say, pure nothing is understood to be *not something* in the profound sense of not being either something or even the absence of something. In a sense then, I am not opposing something and nothing at all, since they are not opposites but radically different categories (we will return to Hegel’s sense of the term “opposition” in chapter 5 below).

Another objection might be made concerning the fact that I have used the category of “negation” in order to describe pure nothing. “Negation” is a category that arises later on in the *Logic* (and will be discussed below, as will the concept of “something”) and so we should not derive the concept of nothing from it. This is true, but we can see from my reading that it is in fact negation that will be derived from the concept of nothing. This will be discussed in more detail below, but the essence of the argument is that nothing, by being the sum

¹³⁸ *Logic* p.83

¹³⁹ Houlgate 2006 p.264

total of all negations, is indeterminate, and so is not properly negation at all.¹⁴⁰

The concept of negation that is opposed to the concept of “reality” below will be a negation that is essential to determinate being since by negating in a particular way it allows a particular determination (and in this way will lead to a concept of *something*); negation could be described as a superior concept to nothing (it is certainly a more complex one), since to negate properly is to negate determinately, while to call something “nothing” is simply to discard it entirely (or, even, to deny that there is an “it” to discard: to say that something is nothing would be to deny that we even need to discard it in order to render it null and void. See below: this is why the concept of “nothing” is inadequate and must give way to negation – it is incoherent when it is applied determinately in that it discards what it is applied to but must logically deny that this act of discarding is taking place. Or, to put it in a way more consistent with the way in which I have presented Hegel so far: the concept of nothing is both determinate and indeterminate and so is “unstable”, since it will not stand up to the scrutiny of reflection. Thus when the concept of becoming gives way to the concept of determinate being, the concept of nothing must give way to the more complex, and more adequate, concept of negation).¹⁴¹

¹⁴⁰ See e.g. *Logic* p.111: “Negation taken as mere deficiency would be equivalent to nothing”.

¹⁴¹ See the Introduction to the *Phenomenology of Spirit* §79: Hegel writes of “the scepticism which only ever sees *pure nothingness* in its result and abstracts from the fact that this nothingness is specifically the nothingness of that from which it results.” (my italics) The concept of pure nothingness, then, would be a nothingness that is not the nothingness of that from which it results.

To return to the main line of argument: the concept of “nothing” thus necessarily arises from the concept of pure being. The necessity of the thought of nothing has been demonstrated through the formulation of the thought of pure being, since it shows that the thought of nothing must arise when we think pure being. That is, *there seems to be no way to think pure being without keeping in mind the thought of nothing*, whereas each of the other thoughts that can arise when we think of pure being (determinacy, equality, and so on) are not necessarily thought in order for us to think pure being, since what is essential to each of them is that they bring to mind the concept of “nothing”, and bring to light the nothingness of pure being. *The concept of nothing thus finds its genesis in the concept of pure being*: that is to say, thinking about pure being generates the concept of nothing in our minds. It is not enough to say that the term “nothing” is *useful* for describing what we think pure being to be: other terms, we saw, were useful too, such as “indeterminate immediacy”. We have now seen, however, that all these terms used to describe pure being find their meaning through the concept of pure nothing, and that we can strip them down so that what is useful about them for describing pure being is always the kernel of nothingness (the “without”) that they contain. The term “indeterminate immediacy” is useful for describing pure being only insofar as this term negates itself, as we saw above.¹⁴² It turns out that we must think pure being as *nothing*, otherwise we will not be able to think being in the empty way that we require if

¹⁴² Terms such as “indeterminate immediacy’... are intended by Hegel to explicate and help us focus on precisely what is meant by *pure*, rather than determinate, being.” (Houlgate 2006 pp.79-80)

we are to think it as pure. We thus have the concept of the thought of nothing, since we have the thought of nothing as necessary, *as generated by the concept of pure being*.¹⁴³

It will be noted that I consider the “necessity” of the connection between two concepts (in this case between pure being and nothing) to have been demonstrated, for Hegel, when there *seems* to be no way to express the one concept without recourse to the other concept. Perhaps this will not seem rigorous enough, but Hegel does not claim to go any further than this. It is for this reason that Hegel tells us that his “proof” that pure being and nothing are connected in this way could be rejected if we could come up with a way of thinking pure being that did not depend on the concept of “nothing” in this way, but that until this way of thinking is adequately described we should accept the necessity of the connection between being and nothing.¹⁴⁴ This is the nature of Hegelian “necessity”: something is necessarily a certain way if we cannot think it in a different way and so are compelled to think it in this way.¹⁴⁵

¹⁴³ Note the technical use of the term “generated”: a concept is generated by another concept where it is shown to be necessary for explaining that concept. Thus “nothing” is generated by “pure being”: or, “nothing” *finds its genesis* in “pure being”.

¹⁴⁴ *Enc Logic* §87 (Note 1): “We are bound, as we think it over, to start searching for a stable determination for being by which it would be distinguished from nothing... But none of these additional and more concrete determinations of this kind leave us with being as *pure being*”. That is to say, the only way to think pure being is as identical with nothing, try as we might to think it otherwise.

¹⁴⁵ See Burbidge 2007 for an account of the way that Hegelian necessity never entirely excludes contingency. For example, p.98: “We can never be sure that we have already mastered everything there is to know about pure thought.”

We have seen that the concept of nothing *owes its genesis* to the concept of being: that is to say, it is shown to be an essential concept because it is essential for thinking the indeterminateness that constitutes the beginning of thinking about thinking. The formulation of the thought of pure being is the formulation of the thought of pure nothing. Pure being and nothing are necessarily connected, but furthermore Hegel asserts that they are “identical”. Why should we go so far as to say they are “identical”, rather than just “necessarily connected”? Hegel has something quite specific in mind when he uses the term “identical”¹⁴⁶: identity is a concept that is central to Hegel’s philosophical thought, and grasping what it means here will help a great deal for grasping what it means in Hegel’s philosophical thought as a whole. Pure being and nothing are *identical* for the reason pointed out above, that pure being is not merely explained through the concept of nothingness (the concept of the *without*): this “without” has to be thought as what pure being *essentially is* if we are going to explain the meaning of “pure being”. “*Pure being*” and “*nothing*” are both *formulated in the same way and so are identical*: both are formulated as what we might call “without-ness”.¹⁴⁷ At the same time, we must bear in mind that pure being and nothing are *distinct*: when we say that being is nothing (or the “without”) we are not *merely* uttering a tautology. To say that pure being is nothing is an *explanation* of the meaning of “pure being”, and not a *mere tautology*, because these are *distinct concepts*. That is to say, “being is nothing”

¹⁴⁶ As we will see in more detail in chapter 5 below

¹⁴⁷ See above: each attempt to explain the meaning of pure being ends up with this description of absence, of without-ness.

is not logically equivalent to “being is being” or “nothing is nothing”: the first has a real *explanatory force*, while the last two are mere tautologies, lacking the “concrete meaning” of the first.

Before we continue, these concepts of “explanation” and “concrete meaning” must be explained: for Hegel, I want to suggest, explanation must have a certain *force*, a force that is not provided by mere tautology (this is a demand of *reflection*: see above). Now, Hegel does not use the terms “force” and “mere tautology” to explain this aspect of his work: Hegel writes instead of the “drive” (*Trieb*) that is inherent to the act of “reflection” (or “thinking things over”: *Nachdenken*), to go beyond “empty abstractions” (*leere Abstraktionen*): “the *drive* to find in being or in both [being and nothing] a stable meaning is this very *necessity*, which leads being and nothing further along and endows them with a true, i.e., concrete meaning.”¹⁴⁸ Note the use of “necessity” here: as I have suggested above, we say that a concept is necessary, for Hegel, if we have a certain degree of compulsion to think it.¹⁴⁹ So, the concept of “nothing” arises from the necessity of finding a “concrete meaning” for “being”, the necessity of providing an adequate explanation: thinking is compelled (we might even say “(reflective) thinking *is* the compulsion”) to look for concrete meaning. Finding the concrete meaning of concepts is finding their “deeper determinations” (*tiefere Bestimmungen*) which is the act of “logical thinking” (*logisches Denken*),

¹⁴⁸ *Enc Logic* §87 (Note) (italics and square brackets as found in text)

¹⁴⁹ See above: I suggested that this compulsion can arise from our not being able to come up with an alternative.

and it is this logical thinking that Hegel calls “reflection”.¹⁵⁰ Thus the concept of “nothing” arises from “pure being” due to the demands of reflection: our thinking will not allow us to settle for “being is being” as an explanation of “pure being”, since we must go beyond this tautology, or “empty abstraction”.

Now, such an account of what is going on may seem to contradict the demands of a logic that is supposed to proceed without presuppositions, since it seems that we must have a certain idea of what it means to think before we can see that being and nothing are necessarily connected. However, Hegel is not suggesting that we must presuppose this conception of thinking if we are to see that being and nothing are identical: instead, as we saw, he is suggesting that, even if we do not yet think about the nature of thinking *we will still find ourselves compelled to agree* that being and nothing are identical, given the lack of alternatives to this claim. That is to say, the necessity of the connection between being and nothing does not arise from a preconceived view of the nature of thinking, but from the persuasive nature of the argument taken on its own terms. We may want to resist calling this an “argument” at all, and this is fine, as we have seen: Hegel is not providing a “proof” here, but merely asking us to continue with this naturally compelling thought in order to see where it leads us. In sum, while it may be useful to consider Hegel’s view of the nature of thinking (as we have) in order to make his argument a little more persuasive, in fact it is

¹⁵⁰ *Enc Logic* §87 (Note): the translation I am using translates “Nachdenken” as “thinking... over”, but “reflection” would also be a suitable translation. See chapter 4 section 1 below for discussion of the relationship between *Nachdenken* and *Reflexion*, two German terms that can be translated as “reflection”.

unnecessary, since Hegel does not want to persuade us at this point to do any more than simply follow his way of thinking in order to see that, later on, proofs will in fact emerge.¹⁵¹

In this section we have seen an example of the paradoxical nature of Hegelian identity: to say that two things are identical is not to exclude the possibility that they are *different*. In fact we should go further than this: to talk *meaningfully* of identity is *never* to talk of an identity that excludes difference (where to talk “meaningfully” means to talk in a way that gives an explanation that is satisfying to thought, and not a mere tautology). This may sound quite strange, but we should hopefully be able to see that this can make sense from the example of pure being and nothing discussed above: pure being must be identical to the nothingness that it is, and yet the concept of “nothing” can only serve as an *explanation* because it gives us more than we get from the concept of “pure being” alone. We have seen in this section that, for Hegel, what is indeterminate is tautological (it is merely defined).¹⁵² What is tautological is *unstable*, which means that it is unsatisfactory to reflection because it does not explain enough. However, by explaining what is simple, we arrive at a contradiction: what is explained is said to be other than it is, because it is simple and yet explained in such a way that it is said to be complex. Thus we say that pure being is nothing: pure being turns out to be precisely what it is not, when we try to explain it. We

¹⁵¹ Albeit “retroactive” proofs: see introduction to chapter 1 above

¹⁵² As we have seen, to *merely* define a concept is, for Hegel, to make a tautological statement.

will see below that this leads us to one of the impasses to thought described above, which in turn will lead thought to “sublate itself”.

5: Becoming

In the previous section I have shown that, for Hegel, the process of (reflective) thinking means that the concept of pure being must not be taken to be simply self-identical (“being is being”), but must be taken to be identical with nothing. However, it is also distinct from nothing, which is why “pure being is nothing” is an expression that has explanatory force, or gives “depth” to the concept of being. That is to say, the tautological phrase “being is being”, by being one-sided, concealed a depth to the thought of being: the phrase “being is being” is only one side of the deeper thought that “pure being is nothing”.

As we saw, we now have the concept of nothing, which explains what we mean by “pure being”. Pure being is nothing, but now we ask “in what sense ‘nothing’?” This is how we *reflect* on this new concept: remember that reflection, at the most minimal level, is this relentless questioning of thought. It is not enough to say that being is nothing, we also have to enquire whether we can find a better explanation of what “nothing” means.

The concept of nothing is the concept of pure indeterminateness, and so is identical to the concept of pure being. Hegel writes another paragraph, after the

one on pure being, in which he tries to encapsulate what he means by “nothing”. Nothing is “simple equality with itself”, “absence of all determination and content” and “undifferentiatedness in itself” and yet it “is (exists) in our intuiting or thinking”. Nothing is, for Hegel, “altogether the same as, pure *being*.”¹⁵³

As we saw above, nothing and being must be distinct from each other if “being is nothing” is to serve as an explanation of pure being. If being and nothing were simply identical, then “being is nothing” would be a worthless tautology: if the answer to “What is being?” is “being is nothing”, but the answer to “What is nothing?” can be no more than “nothing is being”, then our explanation is circular and “being is nothing” is a tautology, of no more value than “being is being”.¹⁵⁴

Being and nothing must therefore, despite their identity, be distinct in some sense if “being is nothing” is to serve as an explanation of being. But in what sense are they distinct? “Being” and “nothing” do not *seem* to be simply the same: we seem to mean something different by “being” than we do by “nothing”. Thus Hegel tells us that we “imagine” being and nothing to be

¹⁵³ *Logic* p.82

¹⁵⁴ See Hutchings 1964: I am using “tautology” in a loose sense, as used by Hutchings when he describes Wisdom’s view that “‘God exists’ is a tautology, or that the proposition is at least *like* a tautology, in that it is not assailable on the grounds of anything that happens or does not happen in our experience”. Tautology and “unassailability” come together in my account too, even though experience doesn’t really play a role at this abstract level. A tautology is supposed to be “stable”, since it is self-contained, but for reflection such self-sufficiency is unacceptable and turns into instability.

distinct, despite our being unable to discover what is distinct about them.¹⁵⁵

Being and nothing are identical and yet distinct, and we claim this because “being is nothing” *seems* to tell us more about being than “being is being” does.

Since pure being is identical with nothing and yet (we imagine) distinct from it, Hegel describes the relationship between being and nothing as one of “transition”.¹⁵⁶ It is called a transition in order to highlight the *transformation* that the concept of pure being must undergo when it is described as “nothing”: when we say that being is nothing, we are not talking simply of its identity with itself, but of its identity with something other than it. As we saw, “pure being is nothing” must not be a mere tautology, but a new way of thinking pure being: it is an *explanation*. When we had the concept of pure being in mind to begin with, all we had was sheer indeterminacy (“being is being”), but once we *think it over* we necessarily create the deeper concept of pure being that is nothing (“being is nothing”). Pure being thus *becomes* nothing and so there is a *transition* between these concepts.

It is by thinking this transition – the identity and difference between being and nothing – that we arrive at what Hegel calls the “first concept” of the *Logic*: the concept of “becoming”.¹⁵⁷ It can be called the first concept because it is the first

¹⁵⁵ *Logic* p.105: Hegel writes of the “*initially imagined* self-subsistence” of being and nothing (my italics).

¹⁵⁶ *Logic* p.93

¹⁵⁷ *Enc Logic* §88 Add.: “Becoming is the first concrete thought and hence the first concept, whereas being and nothing, in contrast, are empty abstractions.”

concept that is not a concept of sheer indeterminateness: as I noted above, we only call pure being and nothing “concepts” for want of a better term.¹⁵⁸ Hegel suggests that the logic of pure being tells us “that neither being nor nothing truly *is*, but that their truth is only becoming”.¹⁵⁹ That is to say, since the concept of pure being is utterly indeterminate, any explanation of pure being, as we saw, must transform pure being into nothing, and so give us the concept of becoming, which is the concept of the movement from “being” to “nothing”. Since it is only with *explanation* that we truly begin to think (see the previous section: explanation is what I am calling the process by which determinations are made explicit; explanation is essential to reflection), and as soon as we *explain* pure being it *becomes* nothing, becoming is the first true concept: that is, *becoming is the first concept to emerge from the activity of logical thinking*. With the concept of becoming we recognise that “pure being” cannot be thought in its purity unless it is also thought as “becoming”, as a transition between being and nothing. It is at this point that we realise that it makes little sense to call pure being “pure” at all, since it is already more than simply “being”.

However, it is not just the case that being *becomes* nothing: nothing also becomes being. There is not simply a transition from being to nothing, but also a transition away from nothing and back to being again, since although being and nothing are (imagined to be) distinct, when we think nothing we think it as no

¹⁵⁸ As I noted above, the term “thought” might be a better term, but it might equally lead to confusion, so I have generally stuck with “concept”.

¹⁵⁹ *Logic* p.94

more than being. As we saw above, “being is nothing” is a tautology and so cannot serve as an adequate explanation of “being”: that is to say, “being is nothing” *taken by itself* is a tautology. If being could be meaningfully described as simply “nothing” – if “nothing” gave us a full explanation of what is meant by “pure being” – then this concept would be *static* and *fixed* in its determination, since we would need to go no further to define it. However, the fact that “nothing” means no more than “pure being” means that this explanation is unsatisfactory, since “being is nothing” turns out to be a tautology: if being is nothing, but nothing is no more than being, then “being is nothing” is as tautological as “being is being”. The concept of becoming is required because “being is nothing” is insufficient as an explanation. There is a movement between these two concepts as we struggle to present “being is nothing” and “nothing is being” as meaningful explanations rather than as meaningless tautologies, by presenting them as concepts that are both identical and distinct. That is to say, the concept of becoming is the concept of the movement in thought as we attempt to make more of the identity of being and nothing than is explicitly there: we *imagine* that being and nothing are not simply identified with each other, and so they are repeatedly separated from each other to emphasise the imagined difference between them which seems to serve as an explanation for what “being” and “nothing” mean. The concept of becoming is the concept of what thought requires if it is to *explain* being and nothing, even if this explanation is imaginary and (as we will see) ultimately unstable. The concept of becoming arises from a certain *creativity* on the part of thought: thought does

not settle for the simple, tautological and absolute truth that being is nothing, but attempts to make more of this truth than is explicitly contained within it.

We imagine, then, that being and nothing are two “self-subsistent” concepts despite their identity: they must be separate concepts if their identity is to provide the *depth* of an explanation.¹⁶⁰ By this stage in the development of the *Logic*, we have not discovered anything that we could call knowledge: we have tried to say what “pure being” must mean, and thus we try to claim that we have some knowledge of pure being, but we still have no more than a tautology. Or rather, we have this tautology and the continued will – or “resolve” – to acquire more than mere tautology: it is from the latter that the movement of becoming arises. That is to say, becoming is generated in our thinking out of the concepts of being and nothing because this restless movement in thought whereby being and nothing are repeatedly shown to be alike and yet not alike, is what would be required for us to explain being and nothing; that is, we would need, if we were to explain being and nothing, to take them to be identical and distinct.

We have seen that, though there is a transition from being to nothing, this is not the end of the journey, as it were: nothing is also transformed into pure being. It is the complex nature of the transition between being and nothing that leads Hegel to use the term “becoming” in the way that he does: becoming is, for

¹⁶⁰ *Logic* p.105

Hegel, the “speculative determination” of pure being.¹⁶¹ A speculative determination is one of the “deeper determinations” described above: rather than offering a mere tautology, a speculative determination *explains* a concept. That is to say, a tautology lacks determinateness, it describes what is indeterminate (and does so insufficiently, since it does not amount to an *explanation*), while the speculative determination describes the determinations required to explain this concept. Becoming is the concept of what is required if we are to acquire explanation and knowledge: being cannot simply be nothing if nothing is simply being; we need more than this and becoming is the movement that thought makes as it imagines being and nothing to be two distinct concepts that explain each other. Even as they are described as identical, thought pulls them apart so that they can be said to explain each other.

A speculative determination explains a concept by standing for every aspect of the concept that it explains: in this case, the speculative determination of pure being and nothing would have to explain both the identity and difference of these two concepts. As Hegel writes:

It remains to be noted... that the expression: “Being and nothing is *the same*,” or “*the unity* of being and nothing” – like all other *unities* of this kind (the unity of subject and object, etc.) – can fairly be objected to, because it is misleading and incorrect insofar as it makes the *unity* stand out; and although diversity is contained in it (because it is, for instance, being and nothing whose

¹⁶¹ See *Logic* p.93: transition is the simpler concept, since it is a movement between two already posited things, whereas “becoming” refers to the “inward unrest” of a concept (see e.g. *Enc Logic* §87 Note).

unity is posited), this diversity is not expressed and recognised along with the unity. So we seem only to have abstracted quite improperly from this diversity, and to have given no thought to it. The fact is that no speculative determination can be expressed correctly in the form of such a proposition.¹⁶²

Since becoming is the speculative determination of pure being and nothing, it is easy to see how it is generated by these concepts: becoming is precisely the concept of the identity and difference of the concepts of pure being and nothing that, as we have shown, is necessary for thinking these concepts *as explaining each other*. There is no way to think pure being and nothing adequately except as identical and distinct, and so the concept of becoming (the concept of the identity and difference of pure being and nothing) necessarily arises from, or is generated by, the concepts of pure being and nothing. The concept of becoming arises from the act of the imagination required for us to think the concepts of being and nothing.

We must remember that the concept of becoming arises from a creative, imaginative act of thinking: it describes the movement of thinking required if we are to explain the concept of pure being. Becoming explains what being must be, by explaining the restlessness of thought that must occur as we try to explain it. The concept of becoming is the concept of a certain vagueness and lack of determination that is implied by the concept of pure being: we learn that we cannot quite put our finger on what “pure being” might mean, and so thought

¹⁶² *Enc Logic* §88 (Note) (italics as in text)

moves restlessly, rather than fixing on a clear definition. Pure being must be determinate (it must be a self-subsistent concept that is different from the concept of nothing), and yet can seemingly only be defined as an utter lack of determination (and so utterly identical to nothing). In the next section we will see that the concept of becoming implies the concept of sublation: the imaginary and vague status of becoming (the fact that we cannot put our finger on exactly how the concept of becoming explains the concept of being) means that the concept of becoming is unstable, and this imaginary becoming leads us to the more concrete and stable concept of determinate being. This is how dialectic unfolds: we move from an unstable concept (pure being), to the unmet – and seemingly impossible – demands of thinking (pure being must be identical to and distinct from nothing) to a fresh attempt at thinking that allows the demands of thinking to be met.¹⁶³ As I suggested above, “sublation” occurs when thought reaches an impasse: thought has reached an impasse because it seems that being must be both what it is and what it is not (it must both simply be and be other than it is). The concept of pure being, we might say, is not “self-sufficient”: when we explain it we find that it is not simply what it is. The concept of pure being is unstable and must change: that is, when we explain what “being” means, we find that we have explained that it is *not* being, since we define “being” as “nothing”.

¹⁶³ See below: in my view, this is what makes Hegel’s thinking *experimental*, since it responds to problems with new attempts at formulating concepts.

6: Determinate being

In the last section we saw that, for Hegel, the concept of becoming is the concept of the identity and difference of being and nothing: though “being is nothing” is true, it must also be true that being and nothing are distinct from each other. Thus we can say “being is becoming”, since being is nothing while it is also, in some as yet indeterminate sense, other than nothing. Hegel describes this moment of identifying being and becoming in this way as the “vanishing” of becoming: it is the vanishing of the movement between “being is being” (being is self-subsistent and distinct from nothing) and “being is nothing” (being is no more than nothing). This is why we have a *movement* of becoming: it is because “being is nothing” is true but different and opposed to the equally true claim that “being is simply being” (that being is self-subsistent). “Being is being” means that being is being and nothing more: “being is nothing”, we imagine, goes beyond this tautology and is opposed to the claim that being is self-subsistent. As long as we see these two claims as incompatible, to assert both of them to be true gives us a *movement*: they are both alternately true (since they cannot be true at the same time) as one becomes the other. However, Hegel tells us that to assert that both claims are true (whether we alternate between them in this way or not) means that the movement is “cancelled”: since they are both true they must be compatible claims. Thus becoming resolves into its own vanishing, and the claim that being is becoming is not to say that being is the movement of becoming but that it is the “result” of this movement. That is to say: “being is

becoming” means “being is being and nothing”, which means that “being is being” and “being is nothing” are true, which means that these two propositions are compatible, and so there is no movement (since they are true at the same time).

When becoming vanishes, we have a concept that Hegel calls “determinate being”. The concept of *determinate being* is the concept of *being as becoming*: that is to say, it is the concept of being as being and nothing *at the same time* (and so not a movement between being as being and being as nothing). It is *simply true* that being is both being and nothing: we have a *tautology*, since to have being is to have nothing, and vice versa (that is, “nothing” is *contained* in “being”, and vice versa).

In sum: we know that we need more than “being is nothing” if we are to explain being, since “being is nothing” is tautological and thus uninformative. The movement of becoming arises out of the knowledge that we need something further if we are to have an explanation: being and nothing are held to be distinct even while they are identical, in some indeterminate way, so that they can be seen to explain each other. This movement is unstable, however, since we cannot specify what it is that makes being and nothing distinct. Becoming thus “collapses” and we are left with the tautology “being is nothing”. This tautology *as the result* of the collapse of becoming – that is, as the result of the recognition that being and nothing cannot be taken to be distinct – is the

concept of determinate being. Determinate being is being that is inseparable from nothing.

This collapsing of movement into a simple, tautological truth is what Hegel calls “sublation”. The movement of becoming was supposed to allow us to escape from mere tautology, but when we look at what “becoming” means, we see that we have not in fact done this. As I noted above, becoming is the concept of the *imagined* difference and identity between being and nothing, and with the collapse of becoming, the dream that we have a satisfactory explanation of “being” is shattered. Being and nothing are simply identical. However, sublation does not only mean the “cancellation” of a previous concept (the cancellation of the movement of becoming), but also the “preservation” of what was true about that concept. Although becoming is cancelled because it was not an adequate solution to the problem of the meaning of “being”, what we have learned is preserved, since it is still the case that being and nothing must be different even though they are identical. This, as we will shortly see, will lead to a fresh attempt to explain the tautology of being, though this time we are dealing with the tautological concept of determinate being (being that is simply identical to nothing) rather than the tautological concept of pure being (being that is simply identical to itself).

Hegel tells us that, once we have the concept of determinate being we have the concept of “quality”. “Quality” means “immediate determinacy or... determinacy

that *simply is*".¹⁶⁴ Becoming was complex: it helped to explain "pure being" because it stood for the movement between the simplicity of pure being ("being is being") and a concept that explained it (the concept of nothing). Now we take the truth of becoming (that being is being and nothing) as a simple determination (so that the movement of becoming "vanishes") and we are back to a simple truth: being is becoming (being is being and nothing) and no more.

But this simple truth requires explanation and so we are in a position similar to that in which we found ourselves with the concept of pure being: just as being was simply being, so now being is simply being and nothing, and yet this simple truth requires explanation. It requires explanation for the same reason that pure being required explanation: as simple being, determinate being claims to be indeterminate (it just *is* this way), and this indeterminateness is only part of the story (as we saw above, it is never the case, for Hegel, that something *just is*). We will see that simple, determinate being is explained through the concepts of "reality" and "negation".

In sum: the movement back and forth from being to nothing turns out not to be such after all, since to claim that both propositions are true, whether alternately or not, is to claim that they are compatible, and so they can be true at the same time. The logic of becoming is such that becoming cancels itself. That is to say: the movement that has arisen from the requirement for "depth" and

¹⁶⁴ *Enc Logic* §90 (my italics)

“explanation” (“being is nothing” as well as “being is being” is true) can also be described as a tautology (being is being and nothing at the same time). Once the movement is transformed from a movement back and forth to an established result, we have determinate being. Being and nothing are now simply one in their identity. In a sense, we are back to where we started with pure being (or “being is being”): we have a tautology that needs to be explained. However the tautology differs in that it is the result of the concepts prior to it. We already know that “being is being” means “being is nothing” and “being is becoming”, and the task now is to explain these claims, which combine to give us no more than a tautology: “being is being and nothing”.

So we now have the concept of determinate being. But we should note that we do not yet have any particular sort of determinate being. In order for being to be determinate we must have being and nothing (or “non-being”, as Hegel starts to call nothing from this point) as a unity, but this is not determinate enough to give us any *particular* determination. The German word that A.V. Miller translates as “determinate being” is “Dasein”, which might more literally be translated as “being there”. Miller rightly chooses not to translate it in this way, since, as Hegel makes clear, there is nothing spatial about the concept of *Dasein* taken, as it is here, in its pure form.¹⁶⁵ In other words, the concept of *Dasein* does not, on its own, provide us with enough to answer any particular “where?” question,

¹⁶⁵ *Logic* p.110; by “pure form”, I mean taken as a logical category with no reference to what it empirical. Of course, when we talk about empirical objects “being there”, we will often mean to bring in a conception of space.

asked of any determination in particular. For Hegel, he has given a minimal definition of what it means to be determinate: to be determinate is to simply *be* in such a way that what is determinate also *is not* in some sense.

We saw in this section that the logical outcome of becoming, its result, is that *being is becoming*. But to recognise that being is becoming is to cancel the movement of becoming, since it is to recognise that “being is being” and “being is nothing” are true at the same time. “Determinate being” is the name Hegel gives to the concept of being that is both being and nothing, but this concept demands explanation, since the simple truth that being is nothing and nothing is being does not explain enough. In the next section we will see how Hegel’s logical explanation develops.

7: Reality and negation

We have seen above that determinate being is being that is non-being. Unlike pure being, determinate being is inseparable from non-being in such a way that non-being can be said to belong to it: determinate being is being that simply is non-being. However, we have here a tautology and so it will need to be *explained* if it is to be satisfying to thought. “Being is non-being”: as a tautology this is simple. But there are “aspects”, or “depths”, to this tautology

that can be brought out by thinking.¹⁶⁶ Determinate being is explained through the concepts of “reality” and “negation”: determinate being is real insofar as it *is*, and negation insofar as it *is not*. In a sense, as being that is a unity of being and nothing, determinate being is being that *contains* nothing. This makes it appear to be stable: it is not *transformed* from being into nothing and back again but remains both of these at the same time. However, Hegel will show us why determinate being is unstable: we will see that the reality and negation of determinate being must be contained in one another while at the same time being separate.

Let us sum up what has been said so far. We sought a definition of the indeterminate concept of “pure being”, but could only define it as equivalent to the equally indeterminate concept of “nothing”. Since both concepts are utterly indeterminate, “being is nothing” is an uninformative tautology. However, “being” and “nothing” nonetheless *seem* to mean different things: we *imagine* that the fact that we call one “being” and the other “nothing” indicates a difference in their determination, though we cannot say what this difference precisely is. “Becoming” is the concept of the movement between these indeterminate concepts as we try to separate them and imagine that they are different. Becoming “vanishes”, however, once this imaginative separation of being and nothing is recognised to be precisely that: *imaginary* and thus uninformative. We do not *know* being and nothing to be separate but only

¹⁶⁶ See *Enc Logic* §89 (Note): all results must be held onto “in their truth”

imagine them to be so. However, we do know something once the concept of becoming has vanished: we know that being and nothing are identical (that is, we know that there is a certain difficulty in separating being from nothing). Thus, while *thinking* begins with the concept of pure being, *knowledge* begins with determinate being, even if this is only negative knowledge: we know that we cannot separate pure being from nothing. What remains to be known is what is implied by the fact that being and nothing are identical: until we can explain in what sense they are distinct, the claim that they are identical remains uninformative (since “being is nothing” is a tautology).

Given this knowledge, we try to explain determinate being – we try to say more than “determinate being is being that is being and nothing” – by coming up with another way in which being and nothing (or “non-being”) might be distinct while nevertheless remaining inseparable. Being and non-being are called “reality” and “negation” when they are considered to be “aspects” of the same determinate being (rather than as separate, self-subsistent concepts): determinate being is real insofar as it *is* and is negation insofar as it *is not*. When we talk of “reality” we are not talking of something utterly separate from “negation”, but as a distinct aspect of what it means to be determinate. To be determinate is to have certain real determinations, while *not* having others, and we can focus on the positive and negative aspects, even while accepting that we only have determination proper when both are taken into account.

For Hegel, then, we can talk about determinate being in different ways: we can put the “accent” on different aspects.¹⁶⁷ The being and non-being that determinate being is composed of are now described as “reality” and “negation”, in order to highlight the new way in which these concepts relate to each other. Being and nothing, we saw, flowed into one another (there was movement of becoming, or transition, between the two concepts), since we had, at the moment we thought we had difference, identity of the two concepts. With the new form that being and nothing take, as being and non-being, or reality and negation, we are shown that their difference and identity are not mutually exclusive. A consequence of this is that we cannot talk of *pure* reality in the way that we could talk of pure being. We cannot think reality except as *impure*, that is, as in a stable unity with negation. What we have is a new sort of “unseparatedness” of being and nothing: a stable unity rather than an unstable one. However, reality is a category that *conceals* negation for Hegel:

“Both [reality and negation] are determinate being, but in *reality* as quality with the accent on *being*, the fact is concealed that it contains determinateness and therefore also negation.”¹⁶⁸

Because we can describe determinateness in terms of the being that belongs to it (its reality: that is, the determination is such as it is because *it is this way*) or of the non-being that belongs to it (its negation: that is, the determination is such as it is because it is *not that way*), and both are determinate being, to describe

¹⁶⁷ *Logic* p.111

¹⁶⁸ *Logic* p.111

determinate being in either way is to conceal its other aspect. Reality and negation are thus both categories that conceal an aspect of determinate being. But they also conceal an aspect of their own truth, since to talk of mere reality is to ignore the negation involved with it, while to talk of mere negation is to ignore the reality to which this negation belongs. To utter the term “reality” is thus to utter only half of the truth of determinate being, and the same goes for the term “negation”. We can see now why we said above that nothing, being the sum total of all negations, is indeterminate, and so is not properly negation at all: the concept of negation must be determinate and can only be so by having reality and thus having a limit to what it negates.

It is for this reason that the concept of determinate being itself does not tell the whole story: since it is a concept that can be expressed by two terms that conceal the whole truth, it is clear that determinate being points to something beyond it. This “something” is precisely the concept of *something*.

8: Something

We can now understand why Hegel says of the concepts of reality and negation that “although these distinctions are present in determinate being, they are no less equally void and sublated.”¹⁶⁹ We distinguish between reality and negation in determinate being, but can only do so insofar as we see each distinct part as

¹⁶⁹ *Logic* pp.114-5

involving the other. If we say, with Spinoza, that “determination is negation” we conceal an element not only of determinate being but of negation itself, since we leave out mention of reality (Hegel agrees with Spinoza that determination is negation, but reminds us that this conceals the part that reality plays in its involvement with negation).¹⁷⁰

The fact that uttering “reality” and “negation” involves concealment causes these categories to be *sublated*. They are *sublated* for the same reason that the transition between being and nothing was sublated: the difference between them is only imaginary and so thought has reached an impasse: we want to claim something to be true that we cannot properly explain. We know that the difference is only imaginary, because in order to explain what “reality” is supposed to mean we must conceal the negation that is identical to it (that is, we must imagine reality as, *per impossibile*, not involving negation), and the same goes for “negation” (we imagine negation as not involving reality). That is to say: when we talk of reality as separate from negation we must *pretend* that there is a difference and *deny* (or conceal) their identity. Though there *must* be a difference between reality and negation if we are to explain what we mean by “determinate being”, we can only come up with an *imagined* difference by *concealing* what is in fact the case.

¹⁷⁰ Thus Hegel writes of “the proposition of Spinoza: *omnis determinatio est negatio*” that “this proposition is infinitely important; only, negation as such is formless abstraction. However, speculative philosophy must not be charged with making negation or nothing an ultimate: negation is as little an ultimate for philosophy as reality is for it truth.” (*Logic* p.113) Spinoza’s proposition is “true”, but too “simple”, since “he does not advance to a cognition of negation as absolute, that is, *self-negating negation*”. (*Logic* p.536)

Hegel argues that we can think the reality and negation of determinate being more correctly with the concept of “being-within-self” or “something”. This concept is the concept of the distinction between reality and negation as sublated and “this sublatedness of the distinction is determinate being’s *own* determinateness”.¹⁷¹ That is to say, reality and negation are identical and together belong to this form of being, this *something*: with the concept of something, or being-within-self, we now no longer talk of a distinction between reality and negation. We should note that, for Hegel, if a distinction is sublated this means that the distinction is not reduced to “nothing”; that is, the distinction is not considered to be no distinction at all, but is recognised to exist as a part of a more adequate (that is, more coherent) whole (“the distinction cannot be omitted, for it *is*”). Nevertheless, this distinction, since it could not be properly explained (we could never offer a complete explanation of what “reality” could mean as distinct from negation, and the same for “negation”), must be left to one side so that we can offer a more satisfactory explanation of what “being” might mean.¹⁷² We do this in the following way: instead of saying that being is reality, or that to be is to be real, we say that to be is to be *something*. Hegel does not *deny* that to be is to be real; he simply says that to be real is not enough, and to be must also mean to be *something*, which means to be both real and negative, since reality and negation cannot be separated. In this way he hopes to arrive at a more satisfactory explanation of “being”, where we do not

¹⁷¹ *Logic* p.115

¹⁷² *Logic* pp.106-7, 115

have to rely on concepts that are imaginary and unstable, but can instead move closer to a stable concept that meets the demand of reflection that our concepts be explained.

Once again, then, with the concept of being-within-self as being that simply contains reality and negation, we are back in a position similar to the one in which we began: we have a tautology, since though reality is negation, negation is just reality, so that to say that reality is negation is not to say anything informative. The concept of being-within-self is this concept of determinate being as this sort of absolute unity of reality and negation, so that determinate being is no longer seen as divided into reality and negation – a division that might have helped to explain it since we would be able to point to different aspects of it – but is a simple unity of reality and negation. Reality and negation are thus not so much aspects of determinate being that tell us different things about determinate being: with the concept of something, or being-within-self, reality and negation both equally “belong” to this determinate being, this “something”, so that the being in question is always at the same time “*this* and not *that*”.

We need a new formulation of the difference between being and non-being if we are to explain what “something” means: as it stands, with the unity of reality and negation, we have merely another tautology. Something is merely the reality and negation that belongs to it, but we cannot explain what “reality” and

“negation” mean, since they are simply the same, with no third term distinct from them which we could identify with them to explain them.

The concept of “something” is the concept of reality and negation taken together: a thing *is* because it has some qualities and does *not* have others. Hegel writes that “*something* is rightly credited with reality”¹⁷³: this is because, unlike with the reality of merely determinate being, we now have a true conception of reality as always involving this moment of negation. But this still raises the question: what is negation? If we cannot answer this question, then we have not explained what “reality” means, since all we know of reality is that it is inseparable from negation.

Something is the arrival at “finitude”, since we have found that to be real, something must be limited by what it is *not*. Reality and negation must always be involved when we express what “something” is: reality must belong to a thing that is *not* something else (and thus has negation as well as reality), while negation must belong to a thing that *is* what it is (and thus has reality as well as negation). However, we still have to explain what it means *not* to be something else. It is for this reason that we need to explain what it means to be “other” if we are to explain what it means to be “something”.

¹⁷³ *Logic* p.115

9: Something and other

To sum up what we have seen so far: we defined pure being as equivalent to another indeterminate concept, which meant that our definition – “being is nothing” – was uninformative. Being is becoming because, although pure being can be no more than nothing, thought must reflect on being in such a way that we imagine this definition to have more explanatory value than it in fact does: becoming arises due to the demand of reflection that we have an adequate explanation, even where such an explanation seems impossible. Becoming collapses into determinate being because the movement of becoming amounts to the simple truth that being and nothing are identical: this simple truth must nevertheless be explained, and it is explained by distinguishing between reality and negation, the aspects of determinate being (and so determinate being marks the point where thought *begins again* after becoming has been sublated). However, this distinction – between reality and negation – also collapses, since it is impossible to say precisely how there can be a distinction between these concepts. There is once again a simple identity between being and non-being, between reality and negation, and the concept of this simple unity is the concept of *being-within-self* or *something*. The concept of something is the concept of a being that is “*this* and not *that*”, and so has reality at the same time as it has negation, and vice versa: with *something*, we accept that we have as yet found no clear distinction between the sense in which a being is “*this*” and the sense in

which it is “not that”, since the reality and negation of something are indistinguishable from each other.

However, there must nevertheless be a distinction between the being and non-being of something, and so we proceed to think about the concept of something, and the sense in which it is “this”, on the one hand, and “not that”, on the other. We have the concept of “something” when we have a simple unity of reality and negation: something, or “being-within-self” is simple being that is real in a determinate way, and so is negative at the same time that it is real. But we have a similar problem to the one we had before: in what sense is being-within-self *this* and in what sense *not that*? That is to say, with determinate being, “reality” and “negation” denoted the qualities that did (reality) and did not (negation) belong to the determinate being: reality and negation were taken to be separate. But if there is no way to distinguish meaningfully between reality and negation, then there is no way to distinguish between the qualities that the determinate being does and does not have: the determinate being (now called “being-within-self” or “something”) simply has a bundle of positive and negative qualities (things that are true of the being, facts about what the being is and is not). In what sense, then, can a *something*, in this Hegelian sense of the term, be said to *not* be this or that, if to *not be* is the same as to *be*?

The answer is that, while there is no distinction between reality and negation *within* the being-within-self (it just *is*, even where it *is not* this or that), the being-

within-self, the something, is distinct from what is *external* and *other* to it. Something *is* insofar as it is itself (and all the positive and negative qualities that belong to it), and *is not* insofar as we can point to something *other* than it, to something outside of it from which it is different.

Something and its other “are... indifferent to one another.”¹⁷⁴ Something and other must both be things, they must each be something. Something and the *other* something, that we point to in order to highlight what the first something is not, are both these bundles of qualities that are in themselves neither positive or negative but simply *are*. The negation between them is found in their *relation* to each other: we can say what the first something *is not* by pointing to what the other something *is*. We thus have a distinction between the reality of something and the negation of this reality: this distinction is found once we compare something to its other.

However, there is a question that can be asked here: how do we determine what is other than something? As we have seen, what is other is not *intrinsically* other: an *other* is a *something* that is real in its own right, and just like any something, its reality is bound up with its negation, so that it cannot be said to be merely negative. The other is the negation of something due to its *relation* to something. But this relation works both ways, and the first something is the other of the other something, just as the second something is the other of the

¹⁷⁴ *Logic* p.116

first. Just as something and other are both “somethings”, so to speak, so both are *others*. The same being is thus both something and other. The being is something insofar as it has reality and negation bound up as its quality. The being is other insofar as it is related to another something. To repeat the question just posed: how do we determine what is other than something? It cannot be anything about the other something itself, since each something simply *is*: that is to say, a something is just this bundle of qualities, and does not contain its relation to other within it. This must be the case: the whole reason that the question of an *other* came up was that there can be nothing distinct about the *negation* aspect of the something, of the being-within-self, since all negation is reality and all reality is negation. Or to be more precise: it is impossible to explain what we might mean by saying that there is an aspect of something that is its *negation*, since we cannot distinguish this from the something’s *reality*. The concept of an other came in because we needed something external to explain how the reality of something might be distinct from the negation of this reality.

So we seem to run into a problem explaining the difference between something and its other. Each something is simply that: a unity of reality and negation and nothing about it tells us what its other might be like, or in what sense it is itself an other. Some *external* factor must come into play that determines what is other than something. This external factor is otherness *as such*: we think not merely of a something and its internal qualities (its inseparable aspects of reality

and negation), but we think also of an *abstract* concept of an other, and use this concept to determine what it is about something that makes it an other. That is to say, we have a concept of the other as such, and use this concept as a sort of template for determining, for a given something, which somethings qualify as an other to that something. We therefore posit an other, and in this way ascribe “to the other a *nature* of its own”.¹⁷⁵ That is to say, since there can be nothing about the something in itself that makes it other, we posit something called “otherness”, which allows us to take something as other. Something is thus taken to be “external to itself”: it has the characteristic of otherness, even though this quality does not belong to it.¹⁷⁶ That is to say, each something has the quality of otherness, even though otherness must be external to something (since otherness must be otherness in itself, and so must subsist separately from something, since if it did not, as we saw, the existence of otherness would rely on a distinction between reality and negation that we cannot explain). Something is thus always *other than itself*: despite being “being-within-itself”, being the simple unity of reality and negation, it is nevertheless always more than this for reflection. For reflection, something is always *more than it is*.

With this realisation, that something is always more than it is because it must, paradoxically, always have the property of otherness that does not belong to it, we have the concept of “alteration”. To say that something is more than it is, being a paradoxical expression, lacks meaning: we instead say that something is

¹⁷⁵ *Logic* p.118

¹⁷⁶ *Logic* p.118

never what it is for more than a moment at a time. Something is simply what it is, but must always already have transformed into something else. This is what “alteration” means: something, by having the quality of otherness, is always other than itself, and the being of something is more than its simple reality and negation; *something* is its transformation beyond itself. There is always a surplus of being, such that, whatever the something is, it is always already more than this.

Conclusion

With alteration, then, we are assured that whatever thing we grasp, when grasped fully, a surplus will nonetheless arise. The thing that we have grasped, we will find, is always undergoing a process of alteration. Something is always what it is not. Alteration is thus “unstable” in the sense described above: it is unsatisfactory to reflection, since it means that what something *is* and what something *is not* (what is other than something) are always identical. What the concept of alteration tells us is that, if we are to talk in such terms that we refer to this or that as “something” when describing the world, we will not be able to have a fixed conception of what we are talking about. Our view of the world will necessarily be made *vague* by the fact that any given something is never simply what it is.¹⁷⁷

¹⁷⁷ I use the term “vague” in the way suggested by Deleuze’s reading of Spinoza: Deleuze points out the connection between the French word “vague”, used in the expression “expérience vague” (which can be translated as “vague experience” or “random experience”) and the Latin

I should point out that Hegel's examination of "being" does not end with his discussion of alteration. Alteration is one aspect of "finitude", which Hegel continues to talk about at some length, before discussing how finitude makes the concept of infinity necessary; Hegel then goes on to discuss "quantity" (up to this point he has only been discussing "quality") before showing how quantity and quality are ultimately inseparable; he then shows how "measure", as the unity of quality and quantity, reveals to us the need for a logic of "essence", which goes beyond the logic of "being" that has been discussed so far. I will try to explain in the next chapter how the need for a discussion of "essence" arises from Hegel's reflections on the concepts of being: however, I will not give a detailed explanation in this thesis of how we get from the concept of alteration through quantity and measure to the concept of essence. One thing I would like the reader to take from what has been discussed above is the following: for Hegel, there are certain concepts that, while being indispensable (we must, for example, talk of "reality" sometimes), are nevertheless *vague* and *unstable*. They are *essential* to thought, despite their lack of clarity and certainty. "Something" is such a concept: whatever "philosophy" is, for example, it is certainly "something". But, to stick with the philosophy example, it is also more than this. If we say that we are examining "something", that we have "something" before us, we should not expect that we can get a full picture of what this something is

word "vagus", which means "wandering". Our view of the world is vague because it is subject to alteration and so can never be fixed. (See translator's notes in Deleuze's *Expressionism in Philosophy: Spinoza* p.424)

as something. Any something will always be part of a dynamic process of alteration.

It is a simple, perhaps even trivial point to make, but Hegel's analysis of "something" shows us that the answer to the question "What is philosophy?" must be a complex one, since we must account for the fact that philosophy will change over time. Again, this is a trivial point that Hegel has gone to such lengths to demonstrate, but this is characteristic of his philosophical method: everything is brought into question. The hope of reflective thinking is that bringing everything into question to arrive at trivial points is not a waste of time: by reflecting upon itself, thought is supposed to become stronger and clearer to itself. This is what we saw happening with "sublation": when concepts are sublated, we note the vagueness and instability of these concepts and accept that they have a place in a logical system even as we recognise that they are vague and unstable. *Thought becomes stronger, we might say, for having recognised which concepts, necessary to thinking, are nevertheless unstable and therefore limited in their value.*¹⁷⁸ We saw this above (when we discussed Rose's reading of Hegel): a mere definition for a concept is not enough, and we must develop a system of concepts through a process of finding newer and better definitions, if thought is to be determinate. That is to say, thought becomes

¹⁷⁸ Wood 1990 p.2: "Hegel argues that the proper way to resolve dialectical paradoxes is not to suppress them, but to systematise them. If you become master of them, they can do positive philosophical work for you. Just as thought inevitably gives rise to contradictions, so it also inevitably reconciles them in a higher unity, as a human self that grows through self-conflict proves its growth by emerging from the conflict into a higher self-harmony."

determinate not through finding the perfect, simple definition, but by creating layer upon layer of concepts so that thought becomes more determinate as it becomes more complex. By examining the process of sublation, we have learned that we can either have simplicity or explanation: we cannot have both. For example, we saw that the concept of pure being was *simple*, but that to explain it we had to use uncertain concepts and talk of imaginary “movement” in order to *explain* what we meant. Thoughts that are simple and yet unexplained are useless, and yet when we explain them we discover that they are unstable. For reflection, this must be the way it is, which is why the modern reflective spirit tends to be sceptical. As I noted in the introductory comments above, Hegel wants to show that the modern reflective spirit is itself dependent on unstable concepts, and so we must “mistrust the mistrust” of reflection. We will see how he shows this in the following chapters.

In the following chapters we will see how this logic of alteration is a logic of freedom: we are free when we act and do not settle for tautology or sheer identity. Hegel’s experimental mode of argumentation makes him stand out from lesser philosophers (and alongside thinkers like Deleuze and Nietzsche): that is to say, Hegel knows that, though we must meet the demand of reflection that all concepts come into question, it does not belong to the philosophical method to set out definitions of terms beforehand. As I suggested above, reflection is a creative and imaginative way of thinking, since reflection involves repeatedly coming up with new ways of questioning the concept that is under

examination and allows us to come up with new ways that a particular concept might relate to other concepts. I hope that I have shown in this chapter what it means to say that philosophy must be thought of as a “process”: our concepts gain their meaning from their *use* and so we define concepts by *systematising* them, and this gives meaning and life to the concepts we use. Each concept is *something*, and *as such it alters depending on its context*. As we will see in later chapters, the method of the *Logic* will become more determinate as it progresses: that is to say, the method will become more comprehensive, so that we will end up with a method that can inform our investigation of more concrete things, such as actual political institutions.

Thus I have suggested in this chapter that Hegel makes the concept of “pure being” a concept of his very own, and via this concept he is able to come up with a sophisticated and convincing system for thinking about the concept of “being” in all of its various manifestations. This system of thinking is sophisticated and convincing, I believe, because it meets the demands of reflection, which is to say that it responds to the various difficult questions that our thinking can put to it. Reflection makes everything appear unstable, and yet, by systematising our concepts, we can find a place for them in our thinking, despite their instability. It is for this reason that the logic of alteration makes us free: by recognising that all concepts must alter, we can take control of them and allow them to work for us in their limited and finite way, without allowing an impossible desire to see all concepts fixed in their determinations to dominate our thinking and ultimately

ruin us. We will see this as the *Logic* develops: we discover that, since concepts can have no fixed meaning in themselves, we can only learn to *use* concepts properly by tracing their *development* (that is, by working out how they are *connected* to each other). The speculative method teaches us to use concepts, and so we gain control of our concepts.

I have shown, I hope, that Hegel consistently resists going so far with his proofs that they give us fixity and certainty; Hegel argues instead for the necessity of leaving an argument in such a way that there is a possibility of its being disproved. By bringing the necessary and the contingent together, Hegel brings into question the notion of necessity and does not argue that we should rest when we have a tautology. Philosophy is *something*: this means that it is not simply *abstract*, but is to some extent concrete and so subject to change.¹⁷⁹ In the next chapter we will begin to look more closely at the thought processes that determine the way in which philosophy must change, by looking at Hegel's "logic of essence" which deals explicitly with the concept of "reflection."

¹⁷⁹ Note that, though we are still in this part of the *Logic* dealing with what is very abstract, the concept of something is, for Hegel, *more* concrete than the concept of, say, pure being.

Chapter 4: Hegel on Essence (I: Reflection)

Introduction

In the last chapter I suggested that the first part of Hegel's *Logic* – Hegel's "logic of being" – was an examination of how traditional metaphysics fares in the age of reflection. The concepts of traditional metaphysics are concepts of *immediate being*, that is, of being as *simply what it is*. Over against these concepts was reflection, which is the mode of thought peculiar to modern thinking (though earlier thinkers, for example Aristotle, demonstrated reflective thought, such thinkers were never typical of their time, and it is only relatively recently in history that we have been able to say that thinking in general takes the form of reflective thinking). Reflection, we saw, brings everything into question: for reflective thinking, it is not enough to say that something is what it is. Reflection demands an *explanation* of everything, and the act of explaining always shows the thing in question to be what it is not. Traditional metaphysics was shown to fare badly in the age of reflection, as its dependence on concepts of simple being, on a conception of being that simply is what it is, was shown to be unable to stand up to the demands of reflection.

In the last chapter, reflection was characterised as a *self-subsistent entity*, distinct from the concepts of "being" (that is, the concepts of traditional metaphysics). Reflection had a character of its own (though we only described

this character in a vague way: reflection is relentless questioning, always asking “What is...?” and so on): reflection, characterised in this way is *something*, it is what it is and is *other* than the concepts of being that it questions. Now, if reflection is to be consistent, when it reflects on itself it will bring its own immediacy (its being simply what it is) into question. The beginning of the “Doctrine of Essence” (the Doctrine of Essence being the second part of the *Logic*, after the “Doctrine of Being”) marks the beginning of this process of reflection questioning itself. The task of the Doctrine of Essence is to see how reflection fares when it examines itself.

Hegel writes that “essence issues from being”.¹⁸⁰ The concept of essence arises from the concept of being because, as we have seen, the immediacy of each of the concepts of being leads us to consider in each case a deeper process of reflection that lies behind them, so that the concepts of being are not essentially what they are, but are essentially something other than what they are. To put it another way: the concepts of being claim to be *simply* what they are in themselves, but this is shown to be untrue: we see that they must be more than this, since they must be dependent on a process of reflection.¹⁸¹ For example, we saw that “pure being” cannot simply be “pure being”, but must also be

¹⁸⁰ *Logic* p.393

¹⁸¹ It may sound strange to say that concepts “claim to be” this or that, in this case that they claim to be simply what they are in themselves. However, what this means is that simplicity is essential to the concept, so that we cannot think pure being except as simple. Thus if we use the concept of pure being, the concept could be said to *make a claim upon us*, since we cannot talk of pure being without talking of simplicity: to talk of simplicity is, we might say, the price that we must pay for uttering the phrase “pure being”. Of course, as we saw in the previous chapter, implicit in the concepts of being is also in each case a certain *complexity*, which is what makes these concepts unstable.

“nothing”, and this in turn can only be true if we think of “pure being” as “becoming”, that is, as a process of transition between being and non-being. With the concepts of being, we looked at what being is in itself. With the concepts of essence, we will look at the process of reflection that “lies behind” the concepts of being and is thus *essential* to them.

The logic of being leaves us in a paradoxical position: after all, how can we accept that all things must be what they are not? If this were the final conclusion of Hegel’s *Logic* then we would have to conclude that Hegel is a sceptical thinker, since the result of his philosophy would be wholly negative: “the only true wisdom is in knowing you know nothing”, is how we might summarise Hegel’s position, since he would have shown that, whatever it is that we know, we can also be sure that we do not know it, since whatever is known must alter and become something else. In this chapter, however, I am going to show how this paradoxical and negative conclusion of the logic of being serves to illustrate a *positive* point about the nature of reflection. I am going to show that, for Hegel, reflection must have three aspects: it must be absolute (“absolute reflection”), it must therefore contain within it what is external to it (it is “external reflection”) and therefore it must determine what is external to it (it is “determining reflection”). The logic of essence that issues from the logic of being gives us an account of reflection, and by studying the logic of essence we can discover what it is about modern thinking that causes us to be sceptical about the *all-too-simple* concepts of being, by studying the nature of the reflective processes

according to which we must think (and therefore alter) these simple concepts of being.

It is the *simplicity* of the concepts of being that makes them problematic, for Hegel. Hegel argues that the term “simple”, wherever it is applied, is always untrue. For Hegel, “‘simple’ is... a determination which... is incapable of grasping what is true because it is itself untrue.”¹⁸² This is what we learned in the logic of being: not merely that there are no concepts to which the term “simple” applies, but that the concept of simplicity itself is flawed. Simplicity, to reflective thinking, always means tautology, and tautology is always unstable for modern, reflective thinking. Thus wherever there is simplicity there is always more to be said, and so there is always complexity where we find simplicity, which makes “simple” a contradictory term (since it refers to complexity as well as simplicity). Thus Hegel believes he has shown that there is a logical flaw in the very notion of a *simple* element of thought.

Each concept that we looked at in the last chapter was shown to be contradictory: far from being simply what it is, each concept proved to be “unstable” and so more than it is. Each concept became part of a process of *transition*, as it changed from being one concept to being another. But more fundamental than this was the process of *sublation*, as it was shown that transition, implying as it does a movement from one self-subsistent concept to

¹⁸² *Enc Logic* §28 (Add.)

another, did not quite get to the heart of what was happening: rather than merely transforming one concept into another, it is instead the case that reflective thinking collapses the distinction between the two concepts, so that, rather than saying that one concept *becomes* the other, we should say that each *is* the other at the same time as it is itself.

What I want to suggest is that the repeated collapse of transition into sublation points to a movement from transition to “positing”, for Hegel. Positing is another movement of thought, but one which does not refer to the transformation of one concept into another, but to the fact of a concept “always already” being other than it is.¹⁸³ The truth of the sublation of transition is positing, we might say, since what we learn throughout the logic of being is that being could be said to *always already* be nothing, becoming, something, other and so on. That is to say, we learned from the logic of being that to explain what we mean by “being” we must think it as nothing, becoming and so on, so that to think being properly (according to the demands of reflection) we must think it as always already nothing, becoming and so on.

As we saw in the previous chapter, reflection – that is to say, reflective thought – is always questioning itself. Reflection is supposed to provide its own criteria for

¹⁸³ See Houlgate 1999 for a discussion of the “(quasi-)transcendental” approach that takes each thing to be “always already” what it is essentially, and for a comparison of essence as Hegel understands it and the essentialist thinking of such (quasi-)transcendental thinkers. As we will see, Hegel’s analysis of “essence” allows us to formulate a Hegelian critique of such (quasi-)transcendental figures, including, arguably, Deleuze.

thinking, and accept no criterion as beyond question.¹⁸⁴ No concept is simply as it is when it is given, since the movement of reflection will alter it. For reflection, each concept is always already sublated, and this (as we will see) is the standpoint of thought that Hegel calls “positing”.

Let us see how Hegel introduces the notion of positing. In the *Encyclopaedia Logic*, we are told that “in the sphere of Being, relatedness is only *implicit*”.¹⁸⁵ The sphere of Being is what we looked at in the previous chapter: it is the first part of Hegel’s logical system devoted to examining the concepts of being. We saw in the previous chapter how it is that we can say that relatedness is only implicit in the concepts of being: *explicitly*, the concepts of being are concepts that simply are what they are, and it is only due to the demands of reflection (that we *explain* the tautological truths of being) that we see that they must be related to other concepts (and that this circumstance, of being simply what it is and being necessarily related to an other makes the concept in question contradictory, in each case).

“In Essence, on the contrary, relatedness is posited.”¹⁸⁶ That is to say, in the logic of essence, which follows the logic of being, the concepts of being are taken to be always already related to other concepts. *This is the nature of reflection, as we will see*: that is, for reflection, concepts are taken to be always already

¹⁸⁴ Unlike pre-reflective “metaphysics”, which based its thinking on the nature of objects as they were given prior to their being thought about (see e.g. *Enc Logic* §31 (Note)).

¹⁸⁵ *Enc Logic* §111 (Add.) (italics as in text)

¹⁸⁶ *Enc Logic* §111 (Add.)

related to other concepts. *We will see that this means that anything can be related to anything else, and this will cause the logic of reflection to break down.* So, for example, reflection *is*, and so is always already *nothing*. It is self-sublating, or *positing*, making it *absolute*. That it is positing makes it *absolute* because it can only transform into what it always already is (that, we must remember is what is meant by “positing”: it is always already sublated) and so there is nothing that reflection can become that it isn’t already. This leads us from “absolute reflection” to “external reflection”: reflection is always already transformed, and so we must think of reflection as always already what is other than reflection. From external reflection we come to the concept of “determining reflection”: because it is absolute *and* other than itself, it is reflection’s own nature that determines what is other than itself (since there is no other nature than reflection’s own nature). In other words, reflection is all that there is (and that there can be) but must be “restless”, it must always be in a state of becoming what it is not.¹⁸⁷

Since, in the logic of essence, the concepts of being are taken to be always already related to other concepts, in the movement from the logic of being to the logic of essence we have a movement from transition to positing. We get a movement from transition to positing because it is no longer the case that concepts are seen as simply what they are *and then* transformed into other concepts (these other concepts also being simply what they are, *until* they

¹⁸⁷ See Nancy 2002 p.6: this restlessness, as we will see in later chapters, will remain a characteristic of thought, since thought is defined by its movement.

themselves are transformed): instead, each concept is known already to be other than itself, and so we have “positing” (that is, the movement of thought according to which concepts are taken to *always already* be other than themselves). In other words, we move from a way of thinking according to which concepts are assumed to be simply what they are, and are then shown to be other than they are (transition), to a way of thinking according to which we assume that concepts are always already other than they are (positing). This latter way of thinking, we might say, is justified by what we have seen of the logic of being: that is, that no concept of being is simply what it is. With this latter, “essentialist”, or “reflective”, way of thinking, we are no longer considering how the naïve metaphysical view fares in an age of reflection: the naïve view is assumed to have failed, and we just examine the claim of modern reflective thought that things always alter and are always already other than they are. The question that we ask of reflection is: how can we describe a way of thinking for which concepts are always already what they are not and so concepts are each related to all other concepts? Whereas the logic of being was an examination of metaphysics in an age of reflection, the logic of essence is an examination of *reflection itself*, that is, of a way of thinking that assumes from the start that traditional metaphysics is impossible, and that *thought* will always get in the way of certain, stable and fixed truths about *reality*: with reflection, everything is always already transformed and transforming.

1: *Nachdenken and Reflexion*

In the present chapter we will see how discussion of essence is, for Hegel, discussion of “reflection” (as a result, I will be using the terms “reflection” and “essence” more or less interchangeably). The logic of essence begins with the concept of reflection: however, at the beginning of the “Doctrine of Essence” (the second “book” of the *Logic*, which deals with the concepts of essence) Hegel looks at the concepts of the “essential” and the “unessential” and “illusory being”, before getting to discussion of reflection proper. The Doctrine of Essence thus deals not only with the logic of essence, but also with concepts that are technically prior to the concepts of essence, and could be said to belong to the logic of being. The reason Hegel has presented these concepts in this way is that these concepts that come before reflection, and so before the logic of essence, are *transitional concepts*: that is to say, these concepts are the concepts of being that lead us into the logic of essence. In sections 2 and 3 of this chapter we will discuss these transitional concepts.

In the previous chapter we saw how important the concept of reflection was for grasping what was going on in the logic of being (even though, until reflection is examined properly, in the logic of essence, we can only have a vague notion of what the concept of reflection might be. That is to say, we know it has to do with relentless questioning and refusing to settle for *tautologies* – the latter

being where things are taken to simply be what they are, unrelated to anything else that might explain them – but this is nevertheless an incomplete picture of what reflection means). As we saw, reflection means “thinking over”, and is a translation of the German term “Nachdenken”. Related to “Nachdenken” is the term “Reflexion”, and we find a discussion of the relationship between these two terms in an Addition to the *Encyclopaedia Logic*. It is worth reproducing a large part of this Addition here:

The standpoint of essence is in general the standpoint of reflection [*Reflexion*]. The term “reflection” is primarily used of light, when, propagated rectilinearly, it strikes a mirrored surface and is thrown back by it. So we have here something twofold: first, something immediate, something that is, and second, the same as mediated or posited. And this is just the case when we reflect on an ob-ject [*über einen Gegenstand reflektieren*] or “think it over” [*nachdenken*] (as we also say very often). For here we are not concerned with the ob-ject in its immediate form, but want to know it as mediated. And our usual view of the task or purpose of philosophy is that it consists in the cognition of the essence of things. By this we understand no more than that things are not to be left in their immediate state, but are rather to be exhibited as mediated or grounded by something else. The immediate being of things is here represented as a sort of rind or curtain behind which the essence is concealed.¹⁸⁸

There are three important points to take from this passage: *firstly*, the “twofold” nature of both types of reflection (that is, both the reflection that occurs in nature and the reflection of thought); *secondly*, the priority of what we might call

¹⁸⁸ *Enc Logic* §112 (Add.) (German terms in square brackets added by me)

the “mediation” side of *Nachdenken*, or “thinking over”; and *thirdly*, the priority of essence over being. We will deal with these points in order.

Firstly, then, we can see that there are two aspects of reflection. We saw this in the previous chapter: on the one hand we had, in each case, the immediate concept of being (whether it was pure being, determinate being or something), while on the other hand we had the reflective process of thinking, according to which what is immediate is subjected to scrutiny and so is mediated. Where we have reflection, we must also have what is immediate, so that we have something “given”, which can be mediated by reflection (or “thought over”). Given that the logic of essence is an examination of the nature of reflection, we might assume that it will be an examination of only one aspect of this twofold process, that is, an examination of pure mediation with consideration of immediacy excluded. However, as we will shortly see – the examination of the transitional concepts of the essential, the unessential and illusory being demonstrate this – such an examination of pure mediation would be contradictory and would not be an examination of reflection proper. To talk of pure mediation would be to talk of mediation that is mediation and no more than this, which would be a tautology and an immediacy and so would set us back in the realm of Being, or the realm of immediacy. Reflection, grasped properly, is always twofold: it is immediate on the one hand and has mediation on the other. This will be returned to below.

Secondly, the second (mediation) side of reflection has priority: reflection always destroys what is merely immediate and shows it to be mediated. We saw this illustrated in the previous chapter: reflection looks for *explanation*, and so is interested not in the concept as immediate, but as mediated in such a way that it is explained. For example, to say “being is being” is not enough: we must explain this, and the explanation begins with the claim that “pure being is nothing”. Though reflection is “twofold”, it is nonetheless primarily concerned with mediation.

Thirdly, this priority of reflection over immediate being amounts to a priority of *essence* over being, for Hegel. When we come to examine the concept of reflection, we are looking at the logic of essence because we are looking at what *lies behind* and is *essential* to the seemingly immediate concepts of being. The logic of reflection is thus the logic of essence. The reflection (*Nachdenken*) that was described in the previous chapter is thus *essential*: this leads us to the first transitional concept of the Doctrine of Essence, the concept of the “essential”.

2: The essential and the unessential

In the logic of being, then, we saw being divided into two: on the one hand we have the immediate concepts of being, that is, what being is in itself, or being as simply what it is; on the other hand, we have the mediating process of reflection that is required if we are to think being as it is, or to explain what we mean by

“being” (and which, ultimately, leads us to conclude that being must always be what it is not). The logic of essence, as we have seen, also wants to maintain what we might call a “twofoldedness”: any mediating process of reflection must be only one aspect of the story, and there must be an immediate element, or that which is *given* to be mediated. However, the *twofoldedness* of essence must be different in kind to the *two-sidedness* of being: the new twofoldedness must reflect the fact that being is *always* what it is not, and so, despite its immediacy is mediated through and through (whereas, in the logic of being we had moments where being was thought as simply what it is). This is what we might call the “hardest thought” of essence: though being is immediate, it is also thoroughly mediated. In the logic of essence Hegel wants to describe what this difficult thought amounts to, and I will hopefully be able to explain this in the current chapter and the next.

In this section we will look at the concepts of the “essential” and the “unessential”, introduced by Hegel at the beginning of the Doctrine of Essence. The essential and the unessential are terms used to distinguish between two aspects of being, that is, between the immediacy of being and the mediation of being (the reflection upon being) that we have seen is essential to it. We will see, however, that this division of being into the essential and the unessential is problematic, and when we try to explain what these terms mean we will find that we need a new concept, the concept of illusory being, to explain what we mean. When we ask the questions “What is the essential?” and “What is the

unessential?” we will find that they are what they are and no more than this, which is to say that they are immediate and tautological: that is to say, the unessential is the unessential and the essential is the essential. As we know from the previous chapter, this must mean that they are unstable concepts and must give way to new concepts if we are to explain what they mean. The unessential, we will see, is being that is merely immediate and so is non-being, while being that is more than this, and is mediated, is true, essential being. We thus arrive at a concept deeper than the concepts of the essential and the unessential: this new concept is the concept of illusory being, which is being which, as merely immediate, is non-being, and so is illusory. The concept of illusory being thus *explains* what the unessential must mean: unessential being is not merely unessential, but can also be described as being that is merely immediate, and so is non-being.

As we saw in the previous chapter, throughout the logic of being we discover various ways to formulate the immediacy of being but all of these are found to be inadequate (that is to say, each of the concepts of being turns out to require further mediation if it is to be explained). It is for this reason that we pass into discussion of essence. The concept of essence is the concept of things that are in a relation of dependence, one dependent on the other. Thus when Hegel writes “the truth of being is essence” he means that being has shown that being owes its immediacy to something else, since all attempts to present it as merely

immediate have failed.¹⁸⁹ We saw an example of such a failure with pure being, where pure being was shown to require that we think it as nothing as well as being, and so as becoming; this failure, however, leads to another attempt to render being immediate, with the concept of becoming leading to the concept of determinate being. However, by the end of the logic of being all attempts have failed and we must think of being as essence, that is, as *depending* for its immediacy on something *essential*, something without which we could not have being: being is dependent upon reflection, since we cannot think being properly without reflection.¹⁹⁰

When we begin the Doctrine of Essence, then, we begin with the thought that essence is *superior* to being, in the sense that being owes its being to essence (that is, to reflection). Essence, as the truth of being, “is sublated being”.¹⁹¹ That is to say, we are re-thinking the concepts of being as always already sublated, and so as always already dependent upon a process of reflection, which determines what the concepts essentially are. It is for this reason that essence is taken to be the truth of immediate being: essence, as the mediation that explains what immediate being means, is the truth of immediacy. Thus Hegel writes of essence:

¹⁸⁹ *Logic* p.389

¹⁹⁰ Thus we see in *Enc. Logic* §111 that immediacy is always mediated and so we arrive at a conception of being as essence.

¹⁹¹ *Logic* p.394

It is the *negation* of the sphere of being in general. Essence thus has its immediacy confronting it as an immediacy from which it has become and which in this sublation has preserved and maintained itself.¹⁹²

That is to say, we do not reject the notion of the immediacy of being, but talk of this immediacy as *dependent* upon mediation, so that the truth of immediacy is revealed in the mediating process of reflection (or “essence”, as we also now call it, given that reflection is now recognised as *essential* for grasping the truth of being). That is to say, we have essence because we are trying to think the immediacy of being *properly*, and not in an inadequate and merely immediate way. We have immediate being on the one hand, and the mediating essence, that explains immediate being, on the other: the former depends upon the latter. We saw this to some extent in the logic of being (see previous chapter): the concepts of being, on the one hand, and the process of reflection, on the other, were seen as two “self-subsistent entities”, in a certain relationship to each other. It is this relationship of two entities that is explored as we look at the logic of the transitional concepts of the essential and the unessential.

We have seen, then, that the thought that we are asked to think at the beginning of the Doctrine of Essence is the thought of *being* that is dependent on another, superior form of being, which Hegel calls “essence” (it is *superior* because immediate being depends upon it, while it does not depend upon immediate being). Taken in this way, essence and being are referred to by Hegel as the

¹⁹² *Logic* p.394

“essential” and the “unessential” respectively. Their immediacy (the fact that they are two self-subsistent entities that are what they are) means that the essential and the unessential (or essence and being) “are indifferent to each other”: that is to say, they are simply what they are, so that the essential is not the unessential, and the unessential is not the essential.¹⁹³ Since they are immediately what they are, essence and being, as the essential and the unessential, are not characterised by their relationship to each other: the essential is what it is by virtue of being essential, and the unessential is what it is by virtue of being unessential, we might say.¹⁹⁴ This indifference, however, makes the thought unstable, since it is a contradiction to say that two things are indifferent to one another *and* in a relation of dependence. That is to say, they are simply what they are, and yet are in a relationship to one another: though the essential is what it is, it is essentially not the unessential, and vice versa. We are seeing here, once again, the problematic nature of the notion of immediacy as simplicity: if something simply is what it is, then we lack an explanation of what it is. In this case, what we lack is an explanation of how the essential and the unessential relate to each other, and what it is that makes the essential essential, as it were.

¹⁹³ *Logic* p.394

¹⁹⁴ Cf. Plato *Phaedo* 100: “All beautiful things are beautiful by the Beautiful”: such a claim as this might seem strange, but such appeals to self-relation as Plato is making here are at the heart of essentialist ways of thinking, for Hegel.

As essential and unessential, essence and being are merely “other” to one another.¹⁹⁵ Such a relation of simple otherness, saying that essence is other than being (and being, of course, is thus other than essence) and that there is no more that we can say of this relation, is a way of formulating the immediacy of each concept, but it does not give us the relation of dependence that the thought of the essential and the unessential demands. The problem is that both essential and unessential are immediate *being*, and so there is nothing to *distinguish* them in a relation of dependence: they both simply *are what they are* (as we have seen, this is what it means to *be being*, as it were), and nothing about this tautological truth gives us any reason to think one as superior to the other, or indeed to distinguish them from each other in any way at all.

The identity of being and non-being that was demonstrated in the logic of being gives us the solution to this problem. If both are immediate being, and so are indifferent to each other, we can put these two in a relation of dependence by taking one to be *non-being*, while the other is genuine being. But they remain immediate and indifferent to one another, and so it cannot be that we take one side to become non-being in recognition of the truth of the other side; that is, we cannot take unessential being to be non-being due to the fact that it is not the essential. Rather, the thought of the essential and the unessential demands that being become “in and for itself a nullity”.¹⁹⁶ That is to say, being does not become non-being on account of the fact that it is not the essential, but due to

¹⁹⁵ *Logic* p.394

¹⁹⁶ *Logic* p.395

its immediacy: as we have learned from the logic of being, whatever is merely immediate is non-being. Insofar as they are merely immediate, then, the unessential *and* the essential are non-being: formulated in the inadequate way that has been described, as simply essential and unessential, both are non-being and so are unessential. Whatever is *truly* essential (and this notion of “true” essence will become important shortly, as we will see) must be more than immediate.¹⁹⁷ What is (truly) essential is not so by virtue of its simply being essential, but by virtue of its being more than simply what it is. The essential and the unessential are flawed concepts, then, because when they are opposed in this way it seems that the essential is what it is and no more than this: this opposition must be overcome by saying that the unessential is unessential by virtue of its being merely immediate, and whatever is essential is not so simply because it is essential but because it has more than mere immediacy about it. The unessential is simply what it is and so is non-being, while the (true) essential is more than it is and so can *truly* be called essential being. This notion of “true being” is very important: we now move from the concepts of the essential and the unessential to the concept of “illusory being”, and I will explain how illusory being (being that is non-being), for Hegel, brings in a contrast between illusory being and true being.¹⁹⁸

¹⁹⁷ *Logic* p.395: “in so far as the distinction is made of an essential and unessential side in something [*Dasein*], this distinction is *externally* posited” (German term in square brackets and italics as in text of the Miller translation). That is to say, without this external positing, the essential and the unessential are merely immediate and so are equivalent to each other.

¹⁹⁸ *Logic* p.397: illusory being “is distinct from essence” (i.e. distinct from *true being*).

The distinction between the essential and the unessential has been shown to be inadequate, since it must be supplemented by a distinction between the (true) *being* of essential being and the *non-being* of unessential being, and this being and non-being can in no way owe their status as being and non-being to their essential and unessential nature respectively. That is to say, to talk of essential and unessential first of all is to get things the wrong way round: something can only be said to be essential or unessential *by virtue of* its being or non-being. *The distinction between the “essential” and the “unessential” has thus become redundant as a way of pointing to a real difference*, since it is in the being and non-being of essential and unessential being, and not in the fact that they are essential and unessential, that the real difference is found. We are now at the logic of “illusory being”, where unessential being is defined as illusory being, non-being and “non-essence.”¹⁹⁹ The concepts of the essential and the unessential are redundant because they do not say enough: nothing is *simply* essential or unessential, but is essential or unessential by virtue of whether it is being or non-being.

3: Illusory being

With illusory being, then, what is unessential is what is non-being, while all true being (being that is not merely immediate, and which is therefore not non-being) is essential. Being is essence, and whatever is not essence is not being, that is to

¹⁹⁹ *Logic* p.395

say, what is not essential has no being and is merely illusory being: that is, its having being is an illusion. The distinction between the essential and the unessential is relatively worthless, because they do not tell us enough about what it means to be essential. However, now we know what it means to be essential: to be essential is to *be*, and whatever *is not*, or is merely *illusory*, is unessential. The former, the essential, is being that is essence, and so through mediation becomes what it is, while the latter, mere being, is the unessential, since it is being that is merely immediate, and so is mere non-being. By the end of this section, however, we will see that even this distinction, between being and non-being, does not get to the heart of the matter: in fact we should say that all being is non-being, and is both immediate and mediated. By the end of this section we will see that there is no “outside” of essence (what is essential – that is, reflection – is *absolute*), so that while it is true that, as with illusory being, all that is not essence is nothing, since non-being also has being, what *is not* is essential too. We come to these conclusions as we come to realise that the logic of “sides” – of “two-sidedness” – is flawed, and with it the logic of “true” (essential) versus “false” (illusory) being. Instead of two-sidedness we come to think in terms of *two-foldedness*, so that nothing belongs strictly to one “side” of a dualism, but is always already what it is not. This is how Hegel’s logic of being becomes a logic of essence, and we will see how this happens in what follows.

We have seen above that the requirements that being be taken as immediate and that essence be taken in a relationship of superiority to non-essential being

requires that non-essential being is thought of as an immediate nullity, and we know what this means: taken by itself (that is, immediately), it is taken to be non-being. The problem with thinking in terms of the essential and the unessential was that each side had being, and we needed another criterion, a “third term”, in order to decide between these two “sides”: it wasn’t enough to simply say that one side was essential while the other was not, and we needed something that we could claim made the one side different from the other.²⁰⁰

With illusory being, we still hold onto the notion of one “side” versus the other, but now the balance has shifted: the one side has being while the other does not. The logic of illusory being, then, could be described as “one-sided”: there are two sides to this conception of essence, but only one of these sides is considered to be *true*, while the other is merely illusory and *false*. The essential is essential because it is essence: that is to say, because it is not merely immediate being and so is *true* being.

Illusory being might be seen as a last attempt to think of unessential being as *dependent* upon essence while thinking of these as *independent* and immediate forms of being (it may seem strange to consider both as forms of *being*, when the one side is characterised by its *non-being*, but we must remember that being and non-being are identical for Hegel, so that even nothingness *is* in some

²⁰⁰ “In so far as the distinction is made of an essential and an unessential side in something, this distinction is *externally* posited, a separation of one part of it from another that does not affect the something itself, a division that has its origin in a *third*.” (*Logic* p.395)

sense). In the logic of being we tried out various ways of thinking of being as independent and immediate (as simply what it is), and found these all to be inadequate. In the logic of the “essential” and the “unessential” we found these terms to be inadequate too and we will soon see that the concept of illusory being, as being that is false and opposed to true being, is also inadequate. Illusory being is simply what it is, and what it is is illusion: this way of describing illusory being, as merely immediate, will be shown to be inadequate, and we will find that we have to think of all being, illusory or not, as what it is not, and so we think all being as reflection.

As we have seen above, the logic of illusory being is the logic of two immediacies, one that is non-essential and is to be identified by its non-being, one that is essential and is to be identified by its being. That is (and this is important to note), even though essential – or true – being is essential because it is mediated, it is nevertheless immediate, insofar as it constitutes just one side of a dualism: it simply is what it is. The logic of illusory being that comes out of the logic of the essential and the unessential differs from the latter in that essential and non-essential being are distinguishable in the logic of illusory being (through their being and non-being respectively); it is similar in that essential and non-essential being (being and non-being) are both immediately what they are and not mediated by each other and so the distinct character of each form of being does not determine the character of the other. Illusory being is what it is immediately; the same goes for essence. “Illusory being” is a translation of

“Schein”, and we might just as well translate this as “mere appearance”. When we take something to be mere appearance, we do so because it has about it nothing of the essence of what it purports to be. This is what Hegel is trying to get at here: illusory being is taken to be illusory and false precisely because it is immediately what it is and is not mediated by essence. That is to say, all mediation is on the side of essence (remember that there are two sides to the logic of illusory being, though it is a one-sided logic in the sense that all mediation, and thus true being, is on one side). By the end of the account of the logic of illusory being, Hegel will have shown that the concept of illusory being, of mere appearance, is inadequate, and that there is in fact always something of the essential in appearance. What has to be shown next “is that the determinations which distinguish [merely immediate being] from essence are determinations of essence itself”.²⁰¹ In this way, the very immediacy of illusory being (immediate non-being) will reveal itself to be mediated by essence.

In so far as being is immediate, Hegel tells us, it is a nullity. We saw this above: in order to take being as immediate *and* as dependent on essence, being must be taken to be non-being. Thus “in essence, being is non-being”.²⁰² However, essence, as we also saw above, is also immediate being. That is to say, only one side is mediated and so has true being, but by being just one side, *simply* one side and no more, it is immediate (it simply is what it is): this means that its being is non-being.

²⁰¹ *Logic* p.397

²⁰² *Logic* p.397

Since essence is also immediate being, it is also indifferent non-being: if, with unessential being, immediate being is non-being not due to a relation to essential being (due to the fact that it is unessential being) but in and for itself (due to the fact that it is immediate being), then it follows that essential being, if it is immediate being, must also be non-being. This is a difficult thought, and requires careful consideration. Of course, on some level, it is due to the fact that we are trying to think immediate unessential being as *unessential* that we must think it as non-being: this was precisely the argument of the logic of the essential and the unessential presented above. If this were the whole story, then the move presented here, of immediate *essential* being into immediate essential non-being, would be illegitimate, since it is the *unessential* nature of immediate unessential being that leads us to regard it as non-being. However, if we think back to the logic of the essential and the unessential, we must remember that we saw that this logic was unstable. It was unstable precisely because it cannot be the unessential nature of unessential being that distinguishes it from essential being; the distinction between unessential and essential being is thus shown to be an inadequate one, and has been replaced by the distinction between being and non-being; that is, the distinction between essential being and unessential being has been replaced by the distinction between essential being and *illusory* being. Hegel is not denying that there is no distinction to be made between essential and unessential being, but is saying that in order to make this

distinction, we must rely on the more adequate distinction between being and non-being.

It is because the distinction between “essential” and “unessential” is not enough to distinguish the two forms of being that we rely on the distinction between “being” and “non-being”, and, consequently, that the collapse of the distinction between being and non-being leads to a collapse of the distinction between essence and illusory being. The distinction between being and non-being collapses due to the immediacy of essence. Hegel writes:

The negativity of essence is its equality with itself or its simple immediacy and indifference. Being has preserved itself in essence in so far as the latter in its infinite negativity has this equality with itself; it is through this that essence itself is being. The immediacy of the determinateness in illusory being over against essence is consequently nothing other than essence’s own immediacy; but the immediacy is not simply affirmative, but is the purely mediated or reflected immediacy that is illusory being – being, not *as* being, but only as the determinateness of being as opposed to mediation; being as a moment.²⁰³

The logic behind what Hegel is saying here has been explained above, and from this logic Hegel has arrived at the conclusion that the immediacy of illusory being is mediated. Essence, as immediate, has “infinite negativity” and “equality with itself” (that is, it *is what it is*). We should not be confused by the expression “infinite negativity”. In the discussion of “quality” in the logic of being (a topic

²⁰³ *Logic* p.397

we did not cover in the previous chapter), Hegel has told us that infinity, if it is to be “genuine” must consist in self-relation (that is, infinity is *explicitly* what finitude – including determinate being, something, and so on – is only *implicitly*: it is self-relation, that is, it is what it is and nothing more).²⁰⁴ Infinite negativity is thus self-relating negativity: essence, as immediate being, must be non-being that is the negation of the non-being of illusory being, *and* must be self-relating. That is to say, essence must be negative, and so have non-being, because it is (paradoxically) *not* non-being. To say that essence is “infinite negativity” is thus to say what we have already said: that essence is both immediate and in a relation to unessential being such that the latter must take itself to be non-being. In the thought of these two immediate forms of being, we must recognise that each is the negation of the other, even if we cannot logically say this of them *insofar as they are merely immediate*. Hegel writes:

Being has preserved itself in essence in so far as the latter in its infinite negativity has this equality with itself; it is through this that essence itself is being.²⁰⁵

We have seen that essence and illusory being are both immediate but that illusory being must have a mediated side if it is to be dependent upon essence. In so far as illusory being is dependent upon essence it is mediated. We know this because the ways in which we tried to distinguish essential and unessential being (or illusory being) while thinking of them as immediate have failed, and so

²⁰⁴ *Logic* pp.150-1

²⁰⁵ *Logic* p.397

illusory being can only be taken to be dependent on essence if it is taken to be mediated by essence. But essence is immediate, and does not depend upon illusory being for any determination of its character. However, we cannot separate illusory being from essence, since essence is immediate as well as mediated, just as illusory being is mediated as well as immediate. There is no way to distinguish illusory being from essence:

The illusory being in essence is not the illusory being of an other, but is illusory being *per se*, the *illusory being of essence itself*.²⁰⁶

This follows due to the immediacy of essence: the mediation of essence produces the immediate determination (or character) of illusory being, but essence is not mediated by another (it mediates: it is true being and is not determined by the false being that is other than it), and so it must be something that can be recognised in essence taken by itself, immediately, that produces this mediation. Taken immediately, then, *essence is mediation*. Therefore we now have a conception of essence as both immediacy and mediation. This conception of essence is the conception of essence as *reflection*.

To sum up what we have seen so far: Hegel shows that there is no coherent way to think of immediate being as separate from the reflection that mediates it. Immediacy and mediation are both aspects of essence, and so are both aspects

²⁰⁶ *Logic* p.398

of reflection. With reflection, immediacy and mediation come together, so that we do not have one on one side and one on the other (as we have seen, it is not logical to talk of mediation being one “side” if we want to keep immediacy and mediation apart, since this is to make mediation immediate), but have to think them together. In the remainder of the current chapter, we will see what this means: reflection, as *all that there is* (it is not merely a self-subsistent “side” to a bigger picture but is a two-folded, absolute entity) must have a certain character. Reflection, we will see, must be *absolute* (or *positing*: any transformation it undergoes must have always already happened), *external* (it must contain what is other than it within it) and *determining* (what is other than it is determined by it: what is external to reflection always already belongs to reflection). These terms will be explained in the next few sections.

4: Absolute (positing) reflection

Given the conclusion of the logic of illusory being described above, we can now make sense of what Hegel means when he describes reflection at first as “absolute reflection”.²⁰⁷ If something is “absolute”, then it is all that there is, in some sense. Absolute reflection is thus a mediation that is not the mediation of an other; it is the mediation of itself. The logic of illusory being has shown us that the distinction between essence and illusory being collapses, and so to make such a distinction is simply to point to the mediation by essence of itself.

²⁰⁷ *Logic* p.400

In sum: we have now got to the point where we must think reflection as absolute, since we cannot coherently think reflection as merely one “side” of what is going on when we think. Just as, following Hegel, we began thinking of being as *pure* being, as absolute, as *being and no more than this*, so now, at the beginning of the logic of essence, we are thinking of reflection as *absolute reflection*, as *reflection and no more than this*. But the way that we think reflection as absolute, is informed by what we have learned so far (in the logic of being and the beginning of the Doctrine of Essence): the thought of absolute reflection is not *simple* (and so not *pure*). Absolute reflection is complex because it must involve both mediation and immediacy (unlike pure being, which simply *is*, and so is sheer immediacy).²⁰⁸

It is worth noting the circularity of the reasoning that has brought us to this point. As we saw in the previous chapter, reflection tells us that nothing can be simply what it is, and we assume (as modern thinkers) that reflection is correct. If reflection is correct, then nothing can be simply what it is, and if nothing is simply what it is then reflection must be correct, and so we leave behind the logic of being – the logic of immediacy, or everything being simply what it is – and move onto the logic of essence and study reflection itself. However, this is not problematic, as long as we take note of what Hegel is doing: Hegel is not

²⁰⁸ See next chapter: in the logic of essence there is no concept of sheer immediacy. Immediacy is always already mediated, and so identity must be “identity within difference”, or “the identity of identity and non-identity”. In this way the concepts of essence always already take into account the transformation they must undergo.

arguing that reflection is correct (we will see that, in an important sense, he does *not* believe this), but is unpacking the logic of reflection *as he finds it*. For Hegel, the circular reasoning of reflection can be found in and is fundamental to modern thinking, and we need to explore the logic of such thinking if we are to learn more about ourselves.

Thought more adequately, then, the immediacy that the mediation of essence presents us with is the immediacy of essence itself: essence, or reflection (since reflection is what is essential, these terms are more or less interchangeable) is always already what it is not, since it perpetually mediates itself (there is nothing about what it immediately *is* that is not mediated). In this way, essence is through and through the act of “positing”. “Positing” is a translation of the term “Setzen”.²⁰⁹ A more natural translation of this word would be a “placing”, or “setting”; however, its translation by Miller as “positing” gives it a more academic philosophical flavour, and thus allows us to tie in Hegel’s philosophy with that of other post-Kantian thinkers (such as Fichte, for example). In what follows I would like to urge the reader to take the term “positing” to have both of these senses, as a placing as well as a positing, but perhaps to give more emphasis to the “placing” sense, since I think that it is easier in this way to make sense of the meaning of the concept of reflection for Hegel.

²⁰⁹ For example: *Logic* p.401; *Werke* vol. 6 p.26

As we have seen above, reflection is through and through a positing: the process of positing is all that reflection is. As such, all that we have with absolute reflection, or “positing reflection”, is the act of positing. All reflection is, is positing, and, since reflection is all that there is, what it posited is therefore the process of positing itself. *By making what is posited the process of positing*, we have thus left ourselves as the only logical option the task of examining what positing consists in, without reference to something “other” than reflection as what is posited.

Absolute reflection is described by Hegel as “sublated negativity”.²¹⁰ As mediation, essence is negativity, since it is the negation of the immediate non-being of illusory being. It is sublated negativity because, as the negation of the immediate non-being of illusory being, it is “the negating of its own self”.²¹¹ We do not have the thought of essence as simply the negation of illusory being any more; now that the distinction between illusory being and essence has broken down, we have the thought of essence as the negation of itself. The problem of the logic of the essential and the unessential and the logic of illusory being has thus been made explicit. With the essential and the unessential and the transition from this to illusory being, we saw that the problem was that whatever we said of the unessential side, we could not relate this to the essential side, and vice versa; and so we could not conceive of a relation between essential and unessential being. This is made explicit in reflection, since essential being is now

²¹⁰ *Logic* p.400

²¹¹ *Logic* p.400

considered as infinite self-relation. "It is a *positing* in so far as it is immediacy as a returning movement", writes Hegel: if we think of "positing" as having the sense of "setting down" we can make sense of this.²¹² Hegel is asking us to think of an act of "placing" or "setting" in the most minimal way possible, that is, such an act abstracted from *what is set down*. We find that it is impossible to think of an act of placing without something immediate (and by "immediate" we mean "having its own existence") *being placed*; such a thought would be merely the thought of a movement, not a placing. So we must think of the act of placing as separate from what is placed, but not separately from placing *something*. To use Kantian terminology, perhaps we could say that instead of thinking of a concrete something or other as what is placed, we think of placing as having a sort of "transcendental object" or "=x": the act of placing must involve placing something though we can say nothing of what this something is, if we are to follow the logic immanently (and thus only be as concrete in our thinking as the concepts so far allow us to be). But this would be an impossible thought unless we filled this "=x", or "place holder" with some thought or other. The only thought available to us at this stage in the logic is the thought of reflection, since we have logically arrived at the conclusion that reflection is all that there is. And so what is placed is the placing itself.

This is a difficult thought, but a necessary one. Its difficulty comes in part from its inadequacy: of course no concrete act of placing is an act of merely placing a

²¹² *Logic* p.401

placing, as it were. This inadequacy leads us to the concept of “external reflection”, however, where we realise that the placing that is placed can also be described as something placed, as a “positedness”.²¹³ We might call this a “having-been-placed”, which we could describe as a characteristic of any object that has been placed, and which perhaps it will be agreed is a (marginally) more concrete concept than the concept of “placing a placing”. Once we arrive at this positedness, we have arrived at “external reflection”.

5: External reflection

“External reflection”, writes Hegel, “presupposes itself as sublated, as the negative of itself.”²¹⁴ We have seen this above: the act of positing becomes positedness, which introduces a moment of difference into the act of reflection that allows us to conceive of a product of reflection as different from the activity of reflection itself, as a positedness and not merely a positing. This is described as a “presupposing”, since if the movement of positing that essence (reflection) can be taken to be is a positedness, then it must follow that a positing is already a positedness, since what is posited can be nothing other than essence itself, and all essence is is positing. “Presupposing” is a translation of “voraussetzen”, which might be translated as “to *pre-posit*”: the act of positing presupposes that there is something to be posited, and this presupposing is what must come before an act of positing, as, in some sense, the ground or condition for positing.

²¹³ *Logic* p.402

²¹⁴ *Logic* p.403

This gives what is posited the character of something external to reflection since, before the act of reflection has taken place there must be something, and so this something must be something other than reflection.

External reflection has worried many philosophers, and the logic of external reflection presented here should explain why. With positing reflection, what is essential is reflecting upon itself, and so reflection seems to be the way to get to the essence of things. But now this reflection involves something prior to reflection: reflection cannot take place without a presupposition, and so reflection does not give us what is essential, but what is prior to essence, as an immediate presupposed other that is “found”.²¹⁵ This problem is solved, however, as we move from external reflection to determining reflection:

But a closer consideration of the action of external reflection shows it to be secondly, a positing of the immediate, which consequently becomes the negative or the determinate; but external reflection is immediately also the sublation of this its positing; for it *presupposes* the immediate; in negating, it is the negating of this its negating. But in doing so it is immediately equally a *positing*, a sublation of the immediate negatively related to it, and this immediate from which it seemed to start as from something alien, *is* only in this its beginning. In this way, the immediate is not only *in itself* – that means, for us, or in external reflection – *identical* with reflection, but this identicalness is *posited*.²¹⁶

²¹⁵ See *Logic* p.403 for “finds”.

²¹⁶ *Logic* pp.403-4

As a positing – an act of placing or setting down – reflection is the negative of what it presupposes. We could put it as follows: no matter what reflection is presented with, its act of positing will always be what determines the nature of what is in front of it. Any presupposition is thus sublated by reflection, since as an act of positing it always brings something to what is before it, and so determines its presupposition. Positing is always what is essential, and so the truth is never found outside of essence: to think otherwise is to fail to think essence properly. What external reflection is confronted with is never merely a starting point or “beginning”, but is a beginning that is posited by essence. In other words, the “positedness” is posited by essence itself, and is nothing other than a positing, and so we see that the moment of (external) reflection as the activity of “finding” a “positedness” is precisely that: a *moment* of reflection alongside the moment of positing. From external reflection we have learned that the positing of essence is a positedness, but now we learn that this positedness is nonetheless still a positing. What is “external” about reflection is just as much internal to it: in fact the distinction between external and internal cannot properly be made yet. Once we have learned this we have arrived at the concept of *determining* reflection.

To summarise what we have learned about external reflection in this section: though reflection is only positing (it is absolute), it must also be a pre-positing, or presupposing (it is external). That it is *only* positing and yet is *also* presupposing is not contradictory: it means that positing is *always already* presupposing.

Positing must always already be presupposing because of the absolute nature of reflection. What is posited is not created anew, but must always already be a part of reflection (since reflection is absolute). Through positing, reflection *finds* something that always already belonged to it, and this *finding what is always already there* is presupposing, and can be described as reflection being external to itself (because what is found is prior to, and thus external to, the process of positing that reflection is). But since reflection is *through and through positing* (it is positing and absolute), the act of presupposing must be positing: what is presupposed is not *merely found* but is *determined* by reflection, since the act of *finding* must also be an act of *positing* (since all reflection is is positing).

6: Determining reflection

“Determining reflection is in general the unity of *positing* and *external reflection*,” writes Hegel.²¹⁷ This is because the move from “positing” as what is posited to “positedness” is recognised as being only a partial movement: positedness, we realise, is still a positing, and so we have not escaped fully from the inadequacy (we might say “absurdity”, given the strangeness of the thought of placing a placing) of the logic of positing reflection. The immediate other with which external reflection is confronted (the “something immediately given which is alien to it”²¹⁸) is recognised as being a determination of reflection itself, since

²¹⁷ *Logic* p.405

²¹⁸ *Logic* p.405

positing determines what is presupposed.²¹⁹ Reflection is thus *two-folded*, because what is external to it is not absolutely other than it, since what is external to reflection is determined by reflection. Reflection is all that there is, while it is nevertheless not the case that it is *simple* and *pure*: reflection is a complex process, a dialectical play between positing and externality which we call the *determination* of reflection. The “determinations of reflection” will be explored in the next chapter.

It is worth noting here that the three modes of reflection demonstrate nicely the difference between “transition” (as the way that we move logically from one concept to the next in the logic of being) and “positing” (as the way that we proceed logically in the logic of essence). With being, each category is immediately what it is, before it shows itself to be what it is not. For example, the concept of something in itself is intelligible, even if we then realise that it is better thought as something *for other* at the same time. With essence, it is not that, for example, external reflection is taken as something immediate opposed to something that is immediately positing reflection, and only then realised to be the truth of positing reflection. Positing reflection is positing, external and determining reflection, and the same goes for external and determining reflection. On the other hand, while we can say that the concept of something is

²¹⁹ *Logic* p.404: “The fact is, therefore, that external reflection is not external, but is no less the immanent reflection of immediacy itself; in other words, the outcome of positing reflection is essence in and for itself. Reflection is thus *determining reflection*.”; *Logic* p.406: “What is *posited* is consequently an other, but in such a manner that the equality of reflection with itself is completely preserved; for what is posited is only as sublated, as a relation to the return-into-self.”

the concept of other and of alteration, we could not say that the concepts of other and alteration are the concepts of something in the same way that we could if these were determinations of essence. Even though the concept of determining reflection is a more adequate concept than that of positing reflection, we can nonetheless say that determining reflection is simply positing reflection; whereas we could not say that the concept of alteration is simply the concept of something. This is because the concept of positing reflection posits itself as the concept of determining reflection, whereas the concept of something does not posit itself as alteration, but simply turns out to be such. This is worth noting here, as it points out the externality of essence in relation to being: something must enter a process of transition, move away from itself, in order to reach its essence; whereas in the realm of essence such a movement need not occur, since the element that essence moves in is its own.

It is for these reasons that progress in the logic of essence might be called “transcendental”: whereas in the logic of being, *something* must be taken to be immediately what it is before it becomes *for other*, with essence positing reflection is “always already” external and determining reflection, since what is posited in positing reflection must already be a positedness, as a condition for its being posited, and such presupposed positedness must be determined.²²⁰ It is impossible to explain this further here, but it is hoped that this digression will

²²⁰ Perhaps we should more correctly use “(quasi-)transcendental” (rather than the more narrow “transcendental”) to describe the sort of thought that belongs to essence. (See footnote on “always already” in the introductory section in the present chapter.)

prepare the reader for the discussion of the Concept in chapter 6: we will see that essence and being are re-united, so that being is properly thought alongside essence, in the Concept. It will turn out that to think about what is actual, such a union of the logic of being (the logic of the immediate: concepts are simply what they are) and the logic of essence (the logic of mediation: concepts are always already what they are not) will be required so that we will have a notion of “development”: we have a concept of the *actual* as simply what it is, supplemented by the logical *development* of the actual, that is manifested in our attempts to come to terms with the actual as we look at the way that each concept of what is actual turns into yet another, and the rationality of the actual is therefore described.

Conclusion

In this chapter we have seen how transition becomes positing, and through this have been able to see how reflection works, for Hegel. We saw that transition involves *two-sidedness*, where there are two sides between which we move, while positing involves *two-foldedness*, where the two sides are always already identical. Because the two sides are always already identical, it is better not to think of them as *sides* at all: instead, we should see reflection as relating to itself. As we saw, the most difficult thought of the logic of essence is the notion of reflection as “always already” what it is not: reflection is not simply what it is since it is always reflecting upon itself: reflection is both immediate and

thoroughly mediated. For example, we saw that *positing* reflection must always already be *positedness*: any process of reflection implies further processes, and is always already identical with these further processes. This follows from the *absolute* nature of reflection: since *reflection is all that there is*, it is always already anything that is other than it. If this seems strange, we should note that this fits with our ordinary conception of way it means to posit: if I *posit* something, I am not claiming to have *created* that thing, but I am instead claiming that that thing was already there (so if I posit that there is, say, a parcel at the bottom of the moat, I do not mean to bring this parcel into existence but mean to claim that it already exists, at the bottom of the moat): similarly, reflection's act of positing is not absolutely separable from the positedness (that is, *what is posited*) upon which it turns out to be grounded.

We saw in the previous chapter that the logic of being dealt with traditional metaphysics: that is, the logic of being deals with entities that simply are what they are in the hope of reaching a fixed and stable truth. However, we also saw that, when it comes to thinking, being *fixed* and *stable* at the same time is impossible: fixed concepts turn out to be tautologies and so are unstable, since they cannot stand up to the relentless questioning of reflection. In the current chapter, we have seen that the logic of essence deals with thinking that is not fixed, and is always already moving. Thus an examination of reflection, we might say, looks different to an examination of traditional metaphysics, since the former does not consist in a series of attempts to fix a concept of being, but

describes the various stages of the fluid movement of thinking. The logic of essence thus makes explicit what we saw was implicit in the logic of being: rather than allowing us to have a fixed definition of being, the examination of the (supposedly fixed) concepts of being gave us instead an illustration of the movement of reflective thought. The various concepts of being turned out to be contradictory (and so the attempt to find a fixed concept of being failed), but what lay behind these various contradictory concepts was the movement of reflective thought: the way in which these concepts were found to be contradictory illustrated the way that reflective thinking *works*, that is to say, we found illustrated in the logic of being what the demands of modern reflective thinking are, by seeing what was found to be contradictory in the process of relentless questioning carried out by reflection. In the logic of essence we look at reflection itself, and each concept examined is not supposed to be fixed, but is part of the complex process of reflection. Thus the descriptions of reflection given above in the current chapter do not refute each other so much as complement each other: they describe the complexity of reflection so that we get a sense of why reflection must render all fixed things unstable. Reflection involves positing reflection, external reflection and determining reflection, and these three processes (of positing, relating to what is external and determining) are all part of the same process of reflection. Whereas with, say, pure being, there is something *wrong* with trying to think being as pure (in that it does not meet the demands of reflection), with positing reflection we do not discover that

the process of positing is false but that it is only part of the overall process of reflection.

Obviously, we cannot get a full and fixed picture of reflection: this would be contradictory, since it would reduce reflection to a category of being, to a “self-subsistent entity”. In the next chapter we will see the consequences of this: reflection must continue to posit itself in different ways, until (see chapter 6 below) it finally refutes itself altogether. It is only once reflection, as thinking that is positing and absolute, has refuted itself that we can properly grasp that the movement of reflection constitutes a “development” of thinking, and it is this important concept that takes us from the logic of essence into the logic of the concept, where the relentless questioning of reflection becomes a calm development of thought that takes us closer to the truth, rather than moving aimlessly. In the current chapter we have seen our conception of what “thinking” means move closer to this conception of thinking as development: we go from thinking reflection as a self-subsistent entity, as a simple *fact* about the modern age (“this is just how we think in the modern age”, we might say), to thinking more carefully about the structure of reflection and seeing it not as a fixed fact about modern thinking but as a process with a certain structure that we can gain insight into. It is by gaining this insight that we open up the possibility of *changing* the way that we think: thinking, we will see, need not *merely* be the restlessness of reflection, but can move in such a way that it takes us in a direction of our own choosing, so that by thinking we can become free.

Thinking, done properly (“speculatively”, to use Hegel’s own term), can be a progress towards a goal, rather than a fixed fact or a restless movement.

We will be able to see more clearly in the next two chapters how what we have seen in the current chapter relates to the Deleuzian ideas described in chapter 1. We saw in chapter 1 that, for Deleuze, no concept is fixed, but each concept is determined by its relation to a structure. Concepts are determined by the structure of thought in which they subsist at any given time. If we take a Deleuzian view, reflection might seem to be arbitrary: it is a historical accident that we think in our “modern” way. For Hegel, on the other hand, reflection refutes itself and becomes speculative thinking: arbitrariness is thus sublated and becomes logical development. This will lead us to think about being in a different way: the logic of the Concept follows the logic of essence, just as the logic of essence followed the logic of being. The logic of being took the concepts of being each to be fixed and stable entities; the logic of essence takes these concepts to exhibit different aspects of the process of reflection itself (this will be discussed in the next chapter); the logic of the Concept will show this process to be a logical development, so that we will finally see what is true about the different concepts of being, by seeing how they fit into a logical, developmental structure.

In the current chapter, we have seen something of the role that “function” and “development” play in Hegelian logic. The former term came up when I tried to

explain the relationship between being and essence: being, which is simple – that is, must have its meaning in itself (see chapter 3 above) – becomes *subordinate* to reflection (reflection *dominates* being and is *superior* to it), which is to say that its real meaning is explained when it is considered not to have its meaning in itself after all, but to find its meaning through the function that reflection gives it. To put it another way, reflection has a certain structure, and the concepts of being are explained through their place in that structure. This is *distortion* rather than *destruction* of the concepts of being: the concept of being is not eliminated due to the contradiction that is shown to belong to it (we could see this happening in the logic of being: the concept of pure being, for example, was shown to be *inadequate*, so that we needed a transition from the old concept to a *new* concept of being – determinate being – in order to start the examination of being over again); instead, the concept is allowed to survive, but what it was taken to be in itself is altered so that it fits with the demands that reflective thinking makes of it (so the concept is distorted, since it cannot simply be the immediacy that it is, but must conform to the demands of the mediation of reflection: the demands of reflection *dominate* the immediacy of being, so that the demands of reflection take priority over the immediacy of being). Reflection is “restless”, as we saw: there can be no fixed meaning in itself and meaning can only be found where concepts are taken to be subordinate to the eternal movement of reflection. In later chapters we will see how this *restlessness* becomes *development*: that is to say, this eternal movement will be shown to have a structure that is fixed in a certain way, rather than a structure

that is eternally changing and chaotic. Nevertheless, we will also see that a certain element of chaos (or contingency²²¹) is a necessary part even of this “development”: this is one reason why we must grasp what “reflection” means if we are going to have an adequate sense of “development”.

As I have suggested, another reason why we must grasp the concept of reflection is that “reflection” describes the character of modern thought as Hegel found it in his time (and as we still find it today). One of Hegel’s aims is to describe reflection *as it is*: that is, reflection is circular and flawed, and yet is essential to modern thinking. As we can see from Hegel’s introductory remarks to the *Logic*, Hegel wants to show that the way we think in the modern age has a certain value (since it can lead us to speculative thinking), and a certain historical necessity (we cannot escape from the way in which we are historically determined to think, which means that speculative thinking must be a development of reflective thinking, and not an absolute rejection of it). (One thing we will see in later chapters is that, though we have seen that immediacy and mediation cannot be absolutely distinct according to the logic of essence, these concepts must nevertheless be distinguished in a certain way: the role that immediacy and mediation must play is something that is described by speculative thinking. As I suggested, the “hardest thought” of the logic of essence is that the concepts of essence – that is, the concepts of being thought as subordinate to the function of reflection – must be taken to be immediate and yet thoroughly mediated: we will

²²¹ See quotation from Shestov in chapter 1 above: in the passage I quoted, the term “chaos” is used to describe the contingent nature of our inner life.

see that, in speculative thinking, this is taken into account. We can only have a concept of development if we think the unity of immediacy and mediation in a certain way.)

In the next chapter we will look at Hegel's account of the "determinations of reflection". We will learn why these determinations are, for Hegel, too chaotic and arbitrary, and so begin to see why reflection must give way to a new way of thinking if we are to find stability and truth in our concepts.²²²

²²² The determinations of reflection are arbitrary because they are all always already each other, so that (for example) diversity collapses into opposition, and opposition into contradiction, and so on. We might put it like this: these determinations are all too *subjective* without this subjectivity being explicit, so that these determinations are *empty*, since they do not tell us what they purport to tell us.

Chapter 5: Hegel on essence (II: Determinations of reflection, ground and existence)

Introduction

“Ground”, for Hegel, is a term used to describe essence as distinguishing “itself from itself”. In this chapter we will look at this concept of ground: we will see how this concept arises when we consider the “determinations of reflection”. We have already seen, in chapter 4, that essence distinguishes itself from itself, since the logic of reflection has shown that essence, as determining reflection, is a unity of itself with itself that nonetheless includes the “external”. In this way (as we have seen), reflection is not simply one “side” of a process, but describes a whole *two-folded* process: as we saw in the previous chapter, reflection, on the one hand, and immediate being, on the other, cannot be two independent sides since they depend on one another to be what they are. This is what we learned from the logic of the essential and the unessential and the logic of illusory being: that reflection should be described as “two-folded” rather than “two-sided” because the two aspects of being – its immediacy and its mediation – cannot be absolutely separated. We will see in the present chapter that this two-foldedness of reflection – that it has two aspects, one of which takes the form of externality – means that reflection is always already *ground*. The notion of *taking the form of externality* might seem a little vague at this stage: I hope that by the end of this chapter we will have a better idea of what this means. I want to suggest that, for Hegel, what is *external* is what is necessarily *complex* to the

point of *unfathomableness*, and it is by identifying what is external – by identifying the *ground* – that we are able to think clearly and logically. It is in this way that we move from *ground* to *Concept*, for Hegel: *ground* is the concept of what is unfathomable about essence and so points to the incoherence of modern reflective thinking (since it shows that reflection cannot explain itself), and this leads us to move beyond a logic of essence to a logic of the Concept, where the structure of externality and unfathomableness is properly taken into account.

We have already seen that essence must be all that there is (reflection is *absolute*): by the end of the logic of essence Hegel will have shown us that essence, by always already being what it is not, necessarily comes back round to being simply what it is. *Ground*, a concept that arises in the middle of the logic of essence and is then developed into *existence*, the *thing*, *appearance* and so on, is an example of a concept that is supposed to denote something that is what it is not, but ends up conflating being and non-being (ground and non-ground) in such a way that it is *simply what it is* and lacks the complexity that is essential to our concept of reflection (as described in the previous chapter: reflection is *absolute (positing)*, *external* and *determining* and so is necessarily complex). This pattern will keep emerging through the logic of essence so that we will see that the concept of ground (as well as the concepts of existence, the thing, appearance, and so on) proves to be inadequate. For Hegel, it is not until we

grasp ground as *Concept*, and thus move from the logic of essence to the logic of the Concept, that we will have formulated essence adequately.²²³

So: whereas, with the logic of being, we repeatedly tried to think being as simply what it is but were thwarted each time by reflection showing being to be other than it is, with the logic of essence reflection is repeatedly shown to be simply what it is, despite the fact that it cannot be simply what it is (see chapter 3: the notion of simplicity is flawed, since we cannot explain what it means) and despite our attempts to think it as *complex* and *what it is not*. Each time reflection is shown to be simply what it is we have to rethink it so that we think reflection as the complex concept that it has to be.²²⁴

“Identity” is the first concept that Hegel uses to describe determining reflection taken as a “determination of reflection”. We saw in the previous chapter what such a “determination” is, for Hegel: reflection is *determining* when it distinguishes itself from itself by creating what is other than it out of itself. This strange concept emerges from the dual demand that reflection must be both *absolute* and *external*. Determining reflection was described in the previous chapter as arising from a *dialectical play* between absolute and external

²²³ See *Enc. Logic* §115 (Note): The Absolute, for Hegel, should be understood to be “the identity that is inwardly *concrete*. The latter... is first the *ground* and then, in its higher truth, the *Concept*.”

²²⁴ See previous chapter: *is has to be* such because this is how modern reflection sees itself. Reflection, by definition, reflects: that is to say, reflection must distinguish itself from itself. It is “restless” (to use Nancy’s term that we referred to in the previous chapter: remember that, on my reading, “restless” means “determining”). Reflection demands “explanation” (see chapter 3 above) because it must be complex: complexity must be found as simplicity refers to nothing (it is a flawed concept, for Hegel, as I have suggested above).

reflection: when we try to think reflection in both these ways together we have a concept of reflection transforming itself into what it always already is.²²⁵ The rest of the chapter in the *Logic* on “determinations of reflection” tackles a problem that arises when we take essence to have this form: that is, how can what is other than something essentially belong to it? We have seen (as far back as the logic of being – see chapter 3) that this must logically be the case, for Hegel; nevertheless, it cannot be ignored that conceptual problems arise when we try to think this thought concretely. For example, as we shall see, if identity contains difference within it then the term “identity” appears to be meaningless, since everything, including difference, is reduced to identity. Such a conception of identity I will refer to as “empty”, and I will argue that the section of the *Logic* that I am dealing with in this chapter can and should be read as an attempt to show the logical necessity of replacing an *empty* notion of identity with a more concrete one. An empty conception of identity is not merely useless but also illogical, since an empty concept of identity cannot be said to be a mediating concept, since it fails to find an other with which to mediate (that is, what is *other* turns out to be simply identical to essence, and so it is not “other” in any meaningful sense). Thus, if we are to think essence as properly distinguishing itself from itself, then we will have to come up with an adequate conception of the other of identity (that is, an adequate conception of what is *external* to identity); in order to think essence as distinguishing itself from itself, we will find

²²⁵ Again, the reason this sounds so strange is that it refers to an inadequate way of thinking, which nonetheless must be thought through if we are to think *concretely* and *accurately* (when we think in accordance with the logic of the Concept).

that we have to think its unity with difference as “ground”, which is the concept of identity and difference mediated by an other. However, as I will attempt to show, there still remain with the concept of ground problems arising from its *suppression of difference* (that is, ground *conflates* being and non-being, rather than separating them in a meaningful way); these are problems that will not be eliminated until we arrive at the logic of the *Concept*.

In this chapter, then, I hope to show that many of the most common worries that critics have about Hegel – namely, those regarding the dangers that arise when we allow contradiction into our logical system – are dealt with in the parts of the *Logic* that deal with determinations of reflection, ground and existence, since it is in these parts that Hegel begins to confront the conceptual difficulties facing ordinary understanding when we follow Hegel’s lead and take contradiction seriously.²²⁶ I hope in this chapter to begin to show that such criticisms are aimed at the apparent “emptiness” of Hegel’s conception of identity, so that in the following chapters we can see how Hegel’s discussion of *essence*, and of the *Concept* that follows it, can, in principle, provide us with a convincing response to such criticisms. In this chapter I hope to demonstrate that, at the very least, Hegel was probably aware of the problem of empty identity, since his logic of essence can be read as a logic that is driven by the need to solve this problem of *emptiness*: that is, the problem of the *conflation* of identity and non-identity.

²²⁶ See Burbidge 1981 p.3: for example, Karl Popper writes that “Hegel’s intention is to operate freely with all contradictions. ‘All things are contradictory in themselves,’ he insists, in order to defend a proposition which means not only the end of all science, but of all rational argument.”

1: Identity and difference as determinations of reflection

The logic of essence, as we saw above, is the logic of relation. We are no longer looking at immediate being and trying to put the relations to one side in order to grasp this immediacy, as we were with the logic of being, but doing the opposite; immediate being is put to one side since we have logically shown that it is the relations that are most important (indeed, we might say “essential”) while immediate being is false and transitory. With essence, immediate being has no value taken alone (it is illusory) and only the relations that mediate being have reality. In the logic of being, each immediate category of being gave rise to a new mediation, until it was finally shown that the absolute cannot consist in immediacy alone (the “unity” of measure was shown to be “self-sublating”, so that being has to be thought not as merely immediate but as “self-relation” and so as “mediation with itself”²²⁷). Thus, as we saw in chapter 3, being cannot be simply what it is, and in fact cannot be thought separately from the mediation of being by reflection. When Hegel says that “essence is being that has gone *into itself*”, he means nothing more than this: that immediacy has been shown to be what it is only when grasped as involved in a complex process of mediation.

With the logic of illusory being, we saw that essence must minimally be a relation. Essence is the relation of identity: this arises from the various logical demands that we encountered when looking at reflection. Essence must be

²²⁷ *Enc. Logic* §111

absolute, must be all that there is (“absolute” or “positing” reflection), and yet it must have an object (“external” reflection): essence, or reflection, is two-folded because it is the identity of reflection with its object. Once both positing and external reflection are recognised as necessary characteristics of essence, we arrive at determining reflection, with which concept we grasp essence as reflection that takes itself as its own object. We will see as the logic of the determinations of reflection progresses that the absolute and external characteristics of determining reflection are, taken together, contradictory, and this will drive this part of the logic of essence. The difficulty will be, we will see, that each time we try to unite positing and external reflection in determining reflection, we end up reducing external reflection to positing reflection. Note that positing reflection is also called “absolute reflection” (see chapter 4 section 4), so that when we talk of positing we are talking about the absolute relation of essence to itself (since – see chapter 4 – what is posited is what essence *always already is*). Essence each time proves to be sheer self-relation but without properly taking itself as its own object, and so each time runs into the problem of empty identity (since what is *external* to reflection turns out to be *identical* to reflection).

When we say that essence determines itself as identity, we seem to suggest that essence is “pure reflection”.²²⁸ That is to say, though we have established by now that essence always involves relation, we seem to be suggesting that

²²⁸ *Enc. Logic* §115

essence, as identity, is simply *self*-relation. Essence is simply what it is, and what it is is a process of relating itself to itself. However, since we are *reflecting* upon reflection, this process must be *explained*: it cannot *simply* be the case that reflection relates itself to itself, since we must be able to explain what it *means* for something to relate itself to itself. Or to put it another way: reflection is *external* reflection as well as *absolute* reflection. Essence is all that there is (it is absolute), but it must also have an object (it involves externality and so is external to reflection: see chapter 4). Reflection is *complex* because its *absolute* nature implies a further *external* nature. What this means is that identity, as self-relation, must take itself as its own *object*, and so must be *external* reflection as well as being absolute. Identity involves what is external to it: in this case, identity takes itself as its own object, so that the self-relation of identity is a *two-folded* process.

This is a reiteration, we might say, of what has been shown in the logic of being: that the concept of simplicity is inadequate. Whatever identity is, it must also be non-identity if it is to be explained (that is, identity is not explained if all we can say is that it is *simply identity*), and so must be *difference* (which is what is other than identity). That is to say, identity is other than itself when it takes itself as its own object, and what is other than identity is difference. Identity, we have seen, as absolute *and* external, is what contains its other within it (it is always already its other: see chapter 4) while difference is defined as what does not contain its other within it. Difference is the “simple *not*”. This is called “absolute

difference” by Hegel: such difference is *simple*. When we claim to have identity, we must always make a *distinction* between the identical thing and itself. Thus the negativity implied by the concept of identity means that identity is difference. The first sort of difference is called “absolute difference” and is defined as essence that does not contain its other within it. Difference is negative, but not in the way that identity is negative, since it does not contain its other within it; difference is negative because it is the “simple not”²²⁹; it is thus defined as not being identity. We can see why the concept of absolute difference arises from the concept of identity: if identity contains its other within it, and what is other than identity is what does not contain its other within it, then identity turns out to contain difference within it (identity is identical to difference).

However, as we have seen in the previous chapter, essence moves by *positing* rather than by *transition*, and so the concept of identity is not left behind. Identity is *always already* difference: it is always already this “simple not”. This is because absolute difference shows itself to be identity as well as difference. Identity showed itself to be difference, that is, to be such that it does not contain its other within it, as a result of the fact that it *does* contain its other within it. Similarly, difference will turn out to contain its other within it (it will turn out to be identity) as a result of the fact that it does *not* contain its other within it. The logic of this should be familiar by now from what has gone above: difference, as

²²⁹ *Logic* p.417

simply not what is other than it is related to its other. But since difference is a determination of *essence*, difference is all that there is, so that the other that difference relates to, what is *external* to difference, is difference itself. Thus difference is *self*-related, and so it is identity. It is for this reason that Hegel tells us that “difference in itself is self-related difference”: *in itself* – that is, at its most simple – difference is merely *absolute* – that is, purely self-related.²³⁰

We have now looked at the first two determinations of reflection: identity and difference. In the rest of this chapter we will look at the others – diversity; opposition and contradiction – until we get to the concept of ground.

If we are to make sense of the logic of identity and difference, and so of the logic of ground that follows it, we must keep in mind that each of these logical stages – identity, difference, diversity, opposition, contradiction and, finally, ground itself, are all determinations of reflection. In chapter 4, above, we saw that the logic of illusory being demonstrated that essence, as self-relation, must minimally take the form of identity. The logic of illusory being showed not only that being is necessarily mediated, but that we must necessarily arrive at a concept of two-folded reflection. The logic of such two-foldedness has been examined in the logic of reflection so far, which consists in various forms that sheer self-relation might take. Such *sheer self-relation* is two-foldedness: reflection relates *always* to itself when it relates to another, since it is not merely

²³⁰ *Logic* p.417

one *side*. Positing reflection resulted in external reflection, but these showed themselves to result in determining reflection, according to which positing and external reflection form a unity: just as positing reflection showed itself to be external reflection, external reflection shows itself to be positing reflection (since what it presupposes is essence itself, and so it turns out to be just as much absolute as absolute reflection, albeit in a different and more complex way – see chapter 4). With determining reflection we arrive at determinations of reflection, which are various ways in which the “reflectedness-into-self”²³¹ of positing reflection relates to the “positedness” of external reflection. That is to say (as I have stated above), we are trying to answer the question of how what is *other* than something can essentially belong to it.

2: Diversity

Hegel writes that “identity... immediately sublates its negating and in its determination is reflected into itself.”²³² We have already seen what this means: though identity should exclude difference (since identity and difference are opposites: what is *identical* to something, insofar as it is identical, is not *different* to it), it nonetheless must incorporate what it excludes and thus we have a moment of difference (externality and otherness) and identity (reflection back into self). The necessity of thinking essence (or reflection) as both identity *and* difference means that we require a new determination of reflection: *diversity*.

²³¹ *Logic* p.407

²³² *Logic* p.418

According to the concept of diversity, identity is the “ground and element” of difference²³³: what is diverse is regarded as different, but on the *basis* of an identity that *grounds* the comparison.²³⁴

The reason that identity must be the ground and element of diversity can be found in what we have already said about identity so far. Identity cannot be simply distinct from difference, since if it excludes difference then it is identical to it (see above). *It is therefore uninformative to talk of the identity of something if we take identity to be absolute, since the term “identical” also means the opposite of “identical”, i.e. “difference”.* Identity is thus characteristic of everything; thus the term “identity” is an empty one, with the sense of “empty” that was described above in the introduction to this chapter (that is, what is “empty” is both what it is and what it is not, in such a way that these are *conflated* and thus cannot be separated). Identity, as we saw above, is what contains its other within it, but this sense of “other” could be described as empty, since we are describing an otherness that is immediately identical to identity. There is another sense of “other”, however, which is that sense which belongs to the otherness of difference; that is, otherness that is external to what it is other than. The search for a conception of essence that is not empty, we will see, is the search for a sense of unity with other, where other does not have the

²³³ *Logic* p.418

²³⁴ See below for a discussion of the concept of “ground”; with diversity we have an inadequate notion of ground (as we will see when we see that the concept of diversity fails to solve the problem of empty identity), since the concept of ground, we will see below, must be the concept of what is radically other than identity. The failure of diversity and opposition to solve the problem of empty identity will demonstrate the need to think ground in this more adequate way.

former, empty meaning; if we are to have a satisfying conception of essence, then it must be absolute and yet *related* to its true other. The sublation of absolute identity and difference must thus be a concept of identity alongside difference, or “identity within difference”, since only in this way can we take both senses of “other” into account. However, since reflection is all that there is (it is absolute) everything is identical, and all difference belongs to this identity.²³⁵

That reflection is identity, and thus everything is identical, and so to talk of identity is *uninformative*, makes up one of two truths that have emerged from the discussion of absolute identity and difference. On the other hand, we have the fact that everything is different. In this way the identity of absolute identity and absolute difference has been divided into two; on the one hand we have identity and on the other we have difference. Identity and difference are *finite* because they turn out not to be entirely self-contained since they are understood as complementing each other. With the concept of diversity, identity and difference have turned out to be infinite only when abstractly understood, and, concretely understood, turn out to be finite. This division of identity from difference thus arises from the demand that we think *essence* (that is, *reflection*) as absolute (we cannot settle for a definition of essence as part of the whole, as identical while what is not essence is different, since the logic of

²³⁵ Though this attempt will fail, as will all attempts to think otherness – or externality – properly until we come to the logic of the Concept.

the essential and the unessential has been shown to be inadequate²³⁶). The fact that essence must be absolute thus leads us from the empty claim that everything is identical to the less empty claim that everything is *also* different (and so everything is diverse). Whether this “less empty” formulation allows us to escape the empty identity problem remains to be seen: we will see that we do not escape the empty identity problem until we reach the logic of the concept.

The movement of difference is the logic of perpetual self-externalisation. A moment is absolutely different in this way if it is *not* something or other, but is also utterly external to this something or other that it is not. Thus what is different (and we must remember – see the previous paragraph – that *everything* is different) is also “indifferent” to what it is different from, since otherwise it would contain reference to its other within itself and so would contain a moment of identity. We saw this indifference, characteristic of absolute difference, in the logic of absolute difference above. This logic showed itself to be unsustainable, however, since difference, having been generated from identity, could not remain indifferent to it.²³⁷ Here, however, we attempt to sustain this logic by setting to one side this identity so that we can examine difference in its purity: that is, identity and difference are separate apart from

²³⁶ See chapter 4 section 2 above

²³⁷ See above: note that it is central to Hegel’s argument that identity is logically prior to difference, since essence shows itself to be identity, before it shows itself to be difference. This can be seen from the argument above: essence is (see above) minimally a relation, and it can be a relation most minimally if it is taken to be the relation of identity.

the *ground* they share in diversity (see above). Difference, taken finitely in this way (alongside a finite conception of identity), is “positedness”.²³⁸

Taken finitely, identity is the unity of identity and difference, while difference is the distinctness of identity and difference, so that the unity of identity and difference is a relation of determining reflection; that is, identity and difference are distinct but united (by their ground: they are not absolutely united, as they would be if they were taken to belong only to positing reflection). Hegel thus says that identity and difference become likeness and unlikeness: likeness describes the identity that all things share even while they are different, and so likeness is the moment of positing reflection, since it is an absolute unity (“everything is like everything else” can be truly said); unlikeness, on the other hand, describes the infinity of differences that make identical things separate from and external to one another and is thus the moment of external reflection (each diverse moment is an immediacy, since, as indifferent, it must be something taken on its own). These two moments must belong to identity if we are to think identity alongside difference and not merely think sheer identity.

However, it turns out that likeness and unlikeness are inseparable, so that to talk of “like” is also to talk of “unlike”. Unlikeness was supposed to be the *positedness* of diversity (that is, the moment of external reflection), which results from likeness, the latter being the absolute (or positing) unity of reflection-into-self: if

²³⁸ *Logic* p.419

we are to explain what is going on here, then, we must remind ourselves what is meant by “positing” and “positedness”. As I suggested in chapter 4, if I *posit* something, I am not claiming to have *created* that thing, but I am instead claiming that that thing was already there (to use my previous example: if I posit that there is, say, a parcel at the bottom of the moat, I do not mean to bring this parcel into existence but mean to claim that it already exists, at the bottom of the moat). The *positedness* refers to what is posited which, in accordance with what I have just said, must refer to what is external to the act of reflection itself. That everything is “like”, or identical in some way, is what leads us to posit “unlikeness”, or a certain element of difference. This is in line with what I suggested above: identity leads us to posit difference (so that the element of identity, likeness, is positing reflection while the element of difference, unlikeness, is what is posited as *always already* there in order for there to be identity).

Unlikeness, as the moment of external reflection, is the “found” element of reflection that we discussed above in chapter 4. With diversity we repeat the logic of reflection discussed in chapter 4, as we will with all the determinations of reflection discussed above. Essence is all that there is and is absolute reflection, but this means that it must take itself as its object; the object, although it is reflection, must nevertheless be taken to be external to reflection, since it seems that the object must have some character or other before it is reflected upon. With diversity, the object judged to be diverse is taken to have a certain

character before it undergoes comparison and is judged to be like another moment (it is “indifferent”, and so what is indifferent is something external to reflection). On the one hand, then, we have the utter likeness of every moment; on the other, we have utter unlikeness. However, such a division, between reflection, on the one hand, and external indifferent objects of reflection, on the other, goes against the logic of essence. Essence takes only itself as its object since it is all that there is, and so what is external must be thought as fully determined by reflection. As a determination of reflection, then, the moments of diversity must be taken to be fully determined by reflection; reflection not only judges all things to be like, but also is responsible for determining the unlikeness of everything. Everything, according to the logic of diversity, is both like and unlike, and is so due to the activity of reflection.

Thus we end up with the same problem as we had at the beginning of the logic of identity: how do we avoid an empty notion of essence? Diversity turns out to contain what is external and other within it, and difference has been, once again, reduced to identity, to absolute reflection.

The problems that face the concept of diversity point to a possible solution: instead of taking one half of the opposition, likeness, to be absolute reflection, we take the two sides of the opposition to be external to one another while united in a third that is their ground. Thus Hegel is led to explore the logic of “opposition”.

3: Opposition

With opposition, then, the truth of the inseparability of likeness and unlikeness has been recognised. Whenever we have likeness we have unlikeness, and so identity and difference cannot be held apart provided that we think of identity and difference merely as likeness and unlikeness. And we must remember that identity and difference have to be held apart if the concept of identity is to have any meaning. If we were to simply say that likeness and unlikeness were identical and that that was the end of it, then we would have reached an empty truth, and Hegelian thought could justly be accused of saying a great deal about nothing at all, since we would have to say that the only means of pointing to difference at our disposal in reality only pointed to identity, and what we mean by identity is identity and nothing more (since identity is all that there is).²³⁹ As we saw above, we have to give meaning to the concept of essence as including its other within itself if we are to reach a logical conclusion. Fortunately, opposition proves to be a more satisfying way to think about difference, even if it, too, proves to be a logically inadequate one which will have to give way to yet another, more complex way of thinking difference.

Likeness and unlikeness collapse into absolute reflection since they are both reduced to an empty form of identity. However, we do not simply reduce unlikeness to likeness; we avoid this for the same reasons that we gave above for

²³⁹ See above: identity is the determination of *essence*, and essence is all that there is, so identity is all that there is.

not simply reducing difference to identity: such a formulation would be empty, so that to say that all unlikeness is basically likeness is true but is an empty truth, since the “unlikeness” that is reduced to likeness ceases to have a meaning that is distinct from the meaning of “likeness”. The absolute unity of likeness and unlikeness (their identity) is thus thought alongside their difference. This is done by taking them to be distinct not insofar as they are like and unlike, but insofar as they are *aspects* of the same unity.²⁴⁰

With this step we move into the logic of opposition: talk of likeness and unlikeness is replaced with talk of opposed sides of the same thing. Likeness is unlikeness and unlikeness is likeness, so that to point to either is to point to both. If we do not take them to be aspects of the same identity, then they can have no meaning at all, since they do not have distinct identities of their own and each can only refer to the same empty identity. With diversity, as we saw, we were talking about different aspects of identity, but now these aspects are taken to essentially belong to the same thing, rather than being merely external, indifferent moments in an identical ground and element. Only in this way, by taking likeness and unlikeness to be defined as moments *within* a unity, and thus as opposites, can we have the unity that is required by the thought of essence as absolute. With the thought of opposition we have the thought of essence as absolute, since it is absolute reflection and so is all that there is, and yet we can

²⁴⁰ Note “aspect” here: what is *two-folded* has *aspects* rather than *sides* (see chapter 4 section 1 above).

talk about difference as distinct from identity, since difference tells us about different aspects of self-identical essence.

With opposition, likeness and unlikeness become the “positive” and the “negative”. This is the “external” moment of opposition. With the absolute moment of opposition, the inseparability of likeness and unlikeness is recognised, since they are aspects of the same thing; however, these aspects must have characteristics of their own if they are to be distinguished from each other. They are distinguished by the fact that they tell us different things about that identical thing. These aspects must have a moment of indifference so that there is something peculiar to each by virtue of which they can be said to be distinct from absolute reflection. What belongs to them prior to the self-relating activity of positing reflection is that one aspect is positive, while the other is negative (they are “found” to be such; they are *external* to reflection).²⁴¹ Thus, if we are to avoid an empty conception of identity, the positive and the negative has each to be what it is “on its own account” as well as in relation to each other.²⁴² If this were not the case, then the positive and the negative would be defined entirely according to their identity with each other, and thus we would have an empty conception of identity, since the positive and the negative would amount to nothing more than identity. We would have the same problem as we faced with absolute identity and, following that, with diversity: the positive and the negative would collapse into each other and we would be left only with

²⁴¹ See chapter 4 section 5 for “external reflection” and being “found”.

²⁴² *Enc Logic* §120; *Logic* p.431

empty identity. Thus the moment of positing reflection becomes a moment of external reflection; the positive and the negative, though aspects of identity, have to have a value of their own (prior to their being absolute reflection), so that they do not merely amount to the same thing (that is, they must be more than mere expressions of the truth that essence is identity). The activity of positing reflection (identity), thus results in something being posited (difference, as the positive and the negative).²⁴³

The positive and the negative, then, are “self-subsistent”.²⁴⁴ As such, they are first of all the “found” or “external” element of reflection, since, as aspects of identity, they must have a certain determination (as positive or negative), before they are reflected upon and thus taken to be certain aspects of reflection. What makes the positive and the negative distinct from absolute reflection is that they have a character prior to reflection. However, we run into the same problem as we did with diversity: we cannot divide concepts of essence into what belongs to reflection (and so is essential), on the one hand, and what is determined prior to reflection (and so is unessential), on the other. Any determination that the positive and the negative have, therefore, must be determined by reflection itself. (Thus the logic of reflection, discussed in the previous chapter, is repeated: absolute reflection plus external reflection means determining reflection.)

²⁴³ *Something being posited*: remember, from chapter 4, that external reflection is *positedness*.

²⁴⁴ *Logic* p.426

The positive and the negative thus come together in determining reflection. They are not prior to reflection but are determined by reflection. Each is self-relating (identical) and defined by its not being the other (different). These two aspects of absolute reflection are thus each absolute reflection, while at the same time being external reflections upon each other. We are then, in a sense, back where we started, with an empty concept of identity (an identity that is absolute by virtue of its being what it is not). The difference between this stage and the earlier stage at which we only had absolute identity is that now we have an explicit formulation of contradiction: contradiction is identity within difference, or the unity of the positive and the negative. That is to say, the positive and the negative are identical, so that what is positive is negative, and what is negative is positive: thus we have “contradiction”. With contradiction, we learn that any aspect of anything opposed to another aspect is identical to that aspect. We see, then, that we have been dealing with contradiction all along; absolute identity was *always already* contradictory by virtue of its being a determination of reflection, just as determining reflection was always already contradictory by virtue of its being a unity of positing and external reflection. Essence thus shows itself to be, essentially, contradictory.

Because essence is contradictory, we are told, it “has fallen to the ground”. If we think back to what we have already seen, we can see that, due to the quasi-transcendental method according to which the logic of essence proceeds, we have, in an important sense, got no further than the logic of reflection discussed

in the previous chapter. Ground is the concept of essence as “immediately only distinction of itself from itself”²⁴⁵. What the logic of opposition (and the resulting logic of contradiction) has shown us is that the determinations of reflection all unavoidably result in empty identity. With the contradictory nature of the positive and the negative, we arrive once more at empty identity and now we call this empty identity “ground” for reasons that will become apparent. In the logic of ground we will once again attempt to escape an empty notion of essence by finding a true other of identity.

4: Ground

Ground is the concept of a relation between two relations (between identity and difference), a concept made necessary when these two relations are shown to be immediately identical, since, in the logic of essence, any immediacy must be sublated into a higher mediation. Since identity has been shown to be absolute and empty, I want to suggest that difference has been shown to be *illusory* (as has identity, insofar as it is difference). And, as we saw above, “illusory”, for Hegel means “requires mediation” (“illusory” does not mean simply “false”, but refers to an *aspect* of what is absolute).²⁴⁶ So far, each step of the way we have only been able to talk about difference in so far as it is identity, and we have seen why we must get beyond this state of affairs.

²⁴⁵ *Enc Logic* §120

²⁴⁶ See chapter 4 section 3 above

We are told in the *Encyclopaedia Logic* that “the so-called principle of sufficient reason or ground... only asserts that things must essentially be regarded as mediated.”²⁴⁷ Ground, taken most abstractly, is the thought of identity and difference as mediated (note that we saw this above: the concept of diversity was the concept of identity as a ground for identity and difference).²⁴⁸ We arrived at the immediate unity of identity and difference with the culmination of the logic of the positive and the negative; identity is absolute and so empty, which means that there is no way of distinguishing, or mediating between, identity and difference. Ground is the concept of the mediation of this immediacy (a mediation that is necessary given the logical history of the unity of identity and difference, since the logic of essence tells us that being must be mediated). There is no more to the abstract thought of ground than this.

Ground is a solution to the problems that relate to the determinations of reflection, given above. If the concept of identity is to have meaning, then it must not be empty. For this, it must have an other that is not merely reducible to itself (see above: this is what it means for something not to be *empty*). We have already seen that difference cannot be this other, and it is for this reason that we introduce an other that mediates identity and difference, which are thus allowed to remain identical. They are allowed to remain identical because we now have a concept of an other of identity, so that it is no longer necessary that

²⁴⁷ *Enc Logic* §121 (Addition)

²⁴⁸ Diversity was the concept of identity as a ground for identity and difference because it qualified the sense in which “identity” and “difference” can be said.

difference plays the role of the other of identity. Difference has now been fully reduced to identity; as far as the logic of essence is concerned, difference will remain an aspect of identity. The true other of identity (and difference) is now ground, though we will see that this concept, taken *abstractly*, is also inadequate.

Up until this point it has been identity that has played the role of the ground that unites identity and difference (see discussion of diversity above). However, we saw that this failed, since if identity is taken as ground then difference is reduced to identity and, with no other of identity, we find that we only have an empty conception of identity. It is for this reason that ground should not be thought of as “abstract identity”²⁴⁹; it is clear that ground could be taken to be identity in some sense, since it is the unity (which suggests the identity) of identity and difference. Even if this is the case (though I would suggest that thinking ground as identity is unhelpful), we must see that ground cannot be abstract identity, since ground must minimally be the thought of what is radically other than identity.

We examined the relations of identity and difference, each being defined as not being the other. This definition collapsed, however, and we were left with *identity that is identical to and different from difference and difference that is identical to and different from identity*. It is not difficult to see that such a

²⁴⁹ *Enc. Logic* §121 (Addition)

definition of identity and difference is not going to be of much use as it stands; as we have seen, such a definition may be regarded as empty. However, Hegel will show that, despite the apparent incomprehensibility of this formulation of identity and difference, we can gain something useful from it and reach a useful conception of difference, as *united* with identity and *different* according to its ground. We see how the illusion of identity and difference is explained as belonging to the higher mediation of ground, so that we can talk about identity and difference, but only as *grounded* relations. For example, we might say that A and B are the same, but have to appeal to *grounds* in order to do so meaningfully, since otherwise we are saying nothing, given that all things have been shown to have identity. So, with grounds, we are able to say “given X and Y, A and B are identical”.

“Ground”, then, has replaced identity as the unity of identity and difference. Ground can be thought of as a more complex formulation of identity than we have dealt with so far (bearing in mind the above warning with regard to thinking ground as identity at all), one that has learned from the mistakes that have necessarily been made so far, insofar as we can call logically necessitated moves “mistakes”. We have learned by now that identity and difference are not separated by their difference from, opposition to and contradiction with each other. Contradiction was a relation between identity and difference, but this relation resulted in an empty unity. Ground is thus a new way of formulating the unity of identity and difference. The higher concept of *ground* mediates the

empty unity of identity and difference in such a way that we can meaningfully talk about identity and difference, without denying the logic that shows that these are nothing more than an empty unity when taken without a ground.

It is useful to use the term “illusory” to describe the status of identity and difference here, because it describes an immediacy that lies outside of essence (see chapter 4), and this is what identity and difference have shown themselves to be. By showing themselves to be an empty unity they have shown themselves to be unessential determinations in one sense, since ground is now taken to be the unity of identity and difference (an other that unifies identity and difference), so that ground is absolute essence and identity and difference are what arise as the result of ground’s distinguishing itself from itself. On the other hand, if this was all there was to the concept of ground, then it would be difficult to see how ground was a more advanced concept than the previous concepts of identity that we have dealt with, since a concept of ground that reduced identity and difference to itself would be an empty concept of ground as identity, just as the earlier concepts of identity that we looked at were empty. It is useful to invoke the logic of illusory being here as it reminds us that even if identity and difference are illusory in relation to ground, they are nonetheless essential, just as illusory being was shown to be essential after all.²⁵⁰

²⁵⁰ See chapter 4 section 3 above

“Illusory being” was defined as “reflected immediacy, that is, immediacy which *is* only by means of its negation and which, when contrasted with its mediation, is nothing but the empty determination of the immediacy of negated determinate being.”²⁵¹ This is what the unity of identity and difference has shown itself to be: the unity of identity and difference is supposed to be a mediation of essence with itself, but, if we only have an empty conception of identity, we do not properly have a conception of mediation, since we do not have a proper conception of an other with which essence, as identity, can mediate. In relation to ground, then, identity and difference are illusory since they cannot properly be said to mediate one another and so appear to be immediate, while ground is other than them and mediates them.

5: Ground and unfathomableness

As I have noted above, the *abstract* concept of ground is quite simple: ground is what *mediates* that which is immediate. In this way, we can say, for example, that reflection is the *ground* of being (since being is, by definition, immediate) and that, according to the concept of diversity, identity is the *ground* of identity and difference (since identity and difference are shown to be an immediate unity). Taken *abstractly* in this way, ground is *indeterminate*. Furthermore, ground *must* be indeterminate: all attempts to determine ground in a certain way (as diversity, as something with positive and negative aspects and so on)

²⁵¹ *Logic* p.396

have failed, and all we are left with *is the fact that identity and difference must be grounded if they are not to be conflated*. It is the logical necessity that ground be indeterminate that I refer to as ground's *unfathomableness*. Hegel writes as follows:

The principle of ground reads "Everything has its sufficient ground," i.e., the true essentiality of something is not the determination of it as identical with itself or as diverse, as merely positive or as merely negative, but the fact that it has being in an other, which (as the identical-with-itself that belongs to it) is its essence. The latter also is not abstract reflection into self, but reflection into another. Ground is the essence that is within itself, the latter is essentially ground, and it is ground only insofar as it is the ground of something, of an other.²⁵²

We now have a new definition of "essence": essence must be unfathomable, which is to say two things: firstly, that it must be the *ground* of an *other*, and secondly, that there is no more to essence than this. To be essential is to be the ground for something and to be indeterminate (to have no determination further than the fact that it grounds an other).²⁵³ Since essence is ground, and essence is all that there is, Hegel is telling us that, according to the logic as it has developed so far, everything that *is* must have a ground: nothing is *simply* identical with itself but everything must find its ground in what is other than it.

²⁵² *Enc Logic* §121 (Note)

²⁵³ See Nietzsche 2006 p.105: It is perhaps interesting to note that, with this definition of essence, we have reached something like the position of Anaximander: what is essential – "primal being" – gives meaning to everything, but this essence must be indeterminate.

However, since essence is all that there is – and essence is ground, so that *ground* is all that there is – a question arises: What grounds ground? The necessary but unsatisfactory answer is that ground grounds itself: essence, as ground, is self-grounding. It is a *necessary* answer because there is no other option: essence – which is ground – is all that there is, and so what grounds ground must be ground itself. It is *unsatisfactory* because it leaves us with another conception of essence as *empty* identity: the other of ground that grounds it is ground itself. Ground was supposed to help us by being a conception of an other that grounds identity so that identity is not just identical with itself. However, we see now that the concept of ground leads by its own logic (by the fact that ground, if it is essential, must itself be grounded) back to a concept of empty identity.

Conclusion

I will conclude this chapter with a brief explanation of how we get from the logic of essence (the second part of the *Logic*) to the logic of the Concept (the third and final part). Since I do not have space to explain this in great detail, there is a risk that the account that follows will be a little confusing. However, I hope it will nevertheless be useful as an introduction to what is to come in the next chapter, where some of these themes will be picked up again and discussed in more detail.

Where Deleuze writes in *Nietzsche and Philosophy* that “contradiction appears for what it is: a perpetual misinterpretation of difference itself”, on my reading this is also Hegel’s view: the concept of contradiction is flawed because it reduces difference to identity.²⁵⁴ Of course, Deleuze suggests that contradiction drives Hegel’s logic, and this is why it would, on his reading, be problematic for Hegel if the concept of contradiction were flawed and distorted our conception of difference. But for Hegel, I have suggested, the concept of contradiction constitutes just one of the “determinations of reflection” and is not the highest concept of difference that we can have. On my reading, when Hegel says that the concept of contradiction collapses and “goes to ground”, he means that the concept of contradiction cannot express the separation of difference from identity, and that we need to move beyond mere contradiction if we are to think difference in such a way that it is not merely reduced to identity. This does not mean that Hegel rejects the concept of contradiction altogether, of course, but that the concept of contradiction is a concept of difference as reduced to identity, and that in order to think difference more adequately we need a concept of *ground*, which is a concept of what is radically other than and external to what is grounded. In this chapter we have seen how we arrive at the concept of *ground* in Hegel’s *Logic*. The problem is that, taken abstractly in the way we have seen, ground is not enough to solve the problem of empty identity. Ground is reduced to identity due to the claim, implicit in the concept of ground *as essence*, that *everything* must have a ground (see above: it is implicit in the

²⁵⁴ *Nietzsche and Philosophy* p.149

concept of ground because ground is a concept of *essence* and so must be all that there is, so that everything must have a ground).

The rest of the logic of essence is an attempt to think ground more concretely, so that the problem of empty identity can be solved. Thus we move on to the concept of “existence”, which is the concept of a “world” that consists in the totality of the *relations* between the multitude of “existents” that serve as the ground of these existents.²⁵⁵ The world that grounds the existence is self-identical and all that there is, while otherness is found between the existents. However, this totality of existents collapses into the “thing”, where all the relations in the world are found in one self-identical thing. Thus we have another case of otherness collapsing into empty identity. This process of positing otherness only for it to collapse into empty identity – what is posited as external turns out to be identical to the absolute reflection that posits – continues until we get to the concept of “actuality”, which is the concept of “the unity, become immediate, of essence and existence, or of what is inner and what is outer”.²⁵⁶ Actuality is thus another concept of empty identity. Once again, Hegel looks for a way to conceive actuality as more than this empty identity: in order to avoid conceiving actuality in an empty way, *actuality* is distinguished from *possibility* (that is, what is possible is the *other* of what is actual), but this distinction also collapses, so that any *real* possibility is only such due to the nature of actuality. Actuality is conceived as *necessity*, meaning that any possibility – any possible

²⁵⁵ *Enc. Logic* §123; Taylor 1975 pp. 263 ff.

²⁵⁶ *Enc Logic* §142

actuality – is determined by actuality itself: that is to say, actuality is necessity because it is only in what is actual that we find the conditions for real possibility.

We pass from the concept of actuality to the concept of the Concept, which is the concept of something as self-relating and not dependent on what is other than it. The Concept is the concept of actuality conceived as necessity: that is, the Concept is the concept of something that contains within it the conditions for its own development. With the concept of the Concept, we move from the logic of essence to the logic of the Concept. The culmination of the logic of essence was the demonstration that, according to the logic of essence, the problem of empty identity is unavoidable: as long as we operate with a concept of essence as both *thoroughly mediated* (always already other than what it is) and *all that there is*, the problem of empty identity cannot be solved. With essence, whatever exists, exists necessarily: there is nothing other than – or external to – that which is actual, so that to talk of non-actual possibilities would be meaningless. With the logic of the Concept we move beyond the logic of essence, and we do this by dropping the concept of actuality as *all that there is*: the concept of essence has been shown to be flawed, since we always end up with a concept of essence as empty identity. Actuality as Concept (rather than as essence) is self-identical and thoroughly self-determining, but does not preclude the possibility that there is something external to it. It is this that causes Hegel to describe the Concept as “free”: to be actual according to its Concept, something must be determined by *its own* necessity, *rather than* being

determined by what is external to it. With actuality as *essence*, such a distinction is impossible, since to distinguish between inner and outer (or external) necessity could not be done, given the fact that actuality as essence is all that there is (so that to talk of what is inner is always already to talk of what is outer, and vice versa). But with actuality as Concept, actuality is by definition free, since to be actual as Concept is not to be all that there is, but to be *oneself, regardless* of what else there is.

It is in this *being oneself*, that we can trace a line between the concept of *ground*, examined above, and the concept of the Concept that I am now describing. As we saw, the concept of ground was the abstract concept of an *other*, an other that was necessarily *unfathomable* because any attempt to qualify it would fail, and yet an other was nevertheless required. Similarly, the concept of the Concept is the concept of something being what it is regardless of whatever is external to it. With the development of essence into Concept, then, we do not so much move from the *denial that there can be anything external to actuality* to the *affirmation that there is something external*: instead, we move from the *denial that there can be anything external* to the *indifference to the question of whether there is anything external*. That is to say, by ceasing to insist that what is external is identical to actuality, and so not truly other (which, as we saw, was the result of essence being all that there is), we allow ourselves to entertain the possibility that there may be something external, but insist that we are focussing on what is internal to the thing in question (that is, internal to the Concept).

How this procedure works, and allows for a more satisfying way of thinking about being, will be discussed in the next chapter.

I want to suggest that it is this indifference to the question of what is external that ends the *suppression of difference* I mentioned above: difference is allowed to subsist, and we do not reduce this difference to identity by trying to explain how it relates to being. What I am suggesting is that the logical necessity that, in order to grasp something according to its Concept, we focus on the inner necessity of something and exclude what is external is what allows Hegel to *let difference be* and – contrary to many readings of Hegel (including that of Deleuze) – to resist reducing difference to identity, contradiction, a ground, and so on. In this way, as we will see in the next chapter, by focussing on the inner necessity of the Concept to the exclusion of what is other than the Concept, we take externality, unfathomableness and difference properly into account: we realise that any other way of treating what is external, unfathomable and different would be to reduce difference to identity.

Chapter 6: Hegel's logic of the Concept

Introduction

At the end of the previous chapter we saw that, for Hegel, actuality is the immediate unity of the inner and the outer. What this means is that, with actuality, which is the highest concept of essence²⁵⁷, the problem of empty identity has still not been solved: actuality *is what it is* (what is actual “just is”, we might say), but it seems that we cannot explain what this self-identity consists in, since there is no real other distinct from what is actual. It is from the concept of actuality that we get to the concept of the Concept, which is the concept of the *inner necessity* of actuality. The question that we must answer in the course of the present chapter is: if actuality is the immediate unity of the inner and the outer, so that we cannot satisfactorily distinguish between the inner and the outer, how can it make sense to define the Concept as the *inner necessity* of the actual? Can it mean anything to talk of “inner necessity” when it seems that “outer necessity” must mean the same thing?

The Hegelian answer, in a sense, is to say “no it cannot”: to talk of inner necessity is relatively meaningless (it is not sufficiently explained and so lacks meaning, from the point of view of reflective thinking), since inner necessity

²⁵⁷ Though “substance” and “causality” are concepts that are dealt with after the concept of actuality is introduced in the *Logic*, and so may be read as being higher concepts of essence, I take substance and causality to be aspects of actuality and their descriptions to be a further elaboration of the concept of actuality (which ultimately collapse back into the simple being of actuality).

simply is what it is (since to be other than it is is to be outer necessity, which is identical to inner necessity – the concept of actuality suffers from the problem of empty identity, since even *not* being identical to inner necessity is to be identical to it, making the concept of identity relatively meaningless here). With the concept of actuality, we have arrived at a concept of essence as actuality, as simply what it is, and as being made necessary by itself: actuality is itself and its own ground.²⁵⁸ The quest for meaning has left us with a concept that must be meaningless according to the criteria of reflection: the concept of actuality is meaningless for reflective thinking because it is what it is, it is self-identical, and yet this identity cannot be explained. We have seen in previous chapters that, on my reading of Hegel, the logic of being and the logic of essence are both *driven by the demands of reflection*. I argued for this in chapter 3: for Hegel, we do not use our reason in a vacuum, so to speak, but our way of thinking depends upon the historical conditions in which we find ourselves. So, if our concept of being – actuality – does not meet the demands of reflection, then it must be sublated, just as all the other inadequate concepts have been sublated in the *Logic* so far. Given the failures we have encountered in the logics of being and essence to find an explanation of being, we arrive at the conclusion that *the sort of explanation demanded by reflection is flawed*. According to the reading of Hegel I have presented so far, reflection demands an explanation so that we can determine what “being” *means*: I am going to argue in the present chapter that

²⁵⁸ *Logic* p.570

this quest for meaning must, for Hegel, be abandoned, and we must look for the *function* of our concepts of being instead.

From a Hegelian perspective, the demands of reflection can never be met, since reflection will always ask more questions and demand more explanation. We need to turn away from the question of otherness that arises from the obedience to the demands of reflection: Hegel uses the term “inwardness” to describe this act of turning away from the question of what is outer.²⁵⁹ Now, we must be careful about what this means: turning away from reflection and its demands does not mean showing that reflection is an out and out false way of thinking, or that reflection has no value at all. The *inwardness* of speculative thinking (for we have now moved from merely reflective thinking to speculative thinking) is a mode of thinking that turns away from the demands of reflection while nevertheless affirming their legitimacy. Speculative thinking acknowledges that coming up with the concept of actuality, as the meaningless identity of being with itself, is a necessary result of thinking rationally. And as we will see, for speculative thinking, turning away from the demands of reflection will lead us to a solution to the problem of empty identity raised by reflection, and to an adequate conception of otherness.

As far as reflection is concerned, then, there is nothing more to be done with the concept of actuality, for Hegel. Actuality simply is what it is, despite being other

²⁵⁹ *Logic* p.571

than it is. We could say that the logic of being and the logic of essence have collapsed into each other: to explain what being meant we stopped trying to think of being as simply what it is and turned to the concept of essence – the concept of being as other than it is – but the concept of essence turns out to be the concept of actuality, which is the concept of being as simply what it is. Whether we think of being as immediate being – as we did in the logic of being – or as always already mediated – as we did in the logic of essence – being is nevertheless immediate, and so simply is what it is. This does not constitute a dead end for thought, however: merely an end to reflective thought. Or, more accurately, a *development* of reflective thought into speculative thought. We can see how this happens by examining the concept of *inwardness* I mentioned above.

We have seen that, for Hegel, we cannot explain what we mean by “being”. We cannot distinguish being from what it is not – from non-being – and so we cannot talk meaningfully about being. Nevertheless *there is a distinction* between being and non-being, and this distinction “manifests itself” even if we can’t give a satisfactory explanation of it, for Hegel:

This *inwardness* or this in-itself, sublates the movement of causality, with the result that the substantiality of the sides standing in relation is lost, and necessity unveils itself. Necessity does not become *freedom* by vanishing, but only because its still *inner* identity is *manifested*, a

manifestation which is the identical movement of the different sides within themselves, the reflection of the illusory being *as* illusory being into itself.²⁶⁰

So, as we have seen, the two “sides” (being and what is other than being) cannot be thought as having any meaning on their own (they lack “substantiality”): Hegel calls the realisation that the sides of actuality cannot be separated the *unveiling of necessity*, because the necessary collapse of the one into the other – the fact that the conditions that make being necessary, the ground of necessity must be identical with being – has been revealed.²⁶¹ But the truth of necessity, for Hegel, is *freedom*, and so the unveiling of necessity means the discovery of freedom in what is necessary. As we see from the passage just quoted, necessity does not vanish so that necessity is replaced by freedom: necessity is shown to *be* freedom. Necessity becomes freedom when the substantiality of the two aspects of actuality has been shown to be illusory, so that the two aspects are only *manifested* in the movement, or relation, between these two sides. In other words, though we cannot say what it would mean to be a “side” of actuality, since neither side is anything in itself, the fact that actuality has sides is manifested in the relationship of actuality to itself. There is something happening with actuality, there is a movement, even if we cannot adequately break this movement down into substantial parts. Though it might sound strange (this is the most abstract conception of freedom that we can have, for

²⁶⁰ *Logic* p.571

²⁶¹ See chapter 5 section 4 above for the reasons why the ground for something must be identical to that ground. Also, it is perhaps worth adding another reminder here that, in the language I have been using, we would call these “aspects” rather than “sides”, since it has been shown that they are aspects of a “two-folded” process, rather than substantial sides of a “two-sided” thing.

Hegel), this is what freedom means according to the Hegelian view: *freedom is the manifestation of the movement of what is indeterminate*. Being is non-being and so is indeterminate (Hegel describes being as “illusory”, because being once again cannot be distinguished from non-being: it *requires further mediation* if it is to have meaning, and so is indeterminate as it stands²⁶²). In the current chapter, we will be exploring this abstract definition of freedom in more detail. In the next chapter we will get a more concrete conception of what freedom means, by looking at how freedom is manifested in our political lives. For something to be “free”, according to Hegel’s definition of the term, is for something to develop according to its own inner necessity: however, since the inner necessity of something, what it *actually* is, must be indeterminate (since we cannot give a meaningful explanation of what it is), we only discover what the inner necessity of something is by how freedom manifests itself. We might say, then, that the logic of the Concept is like the logic of essence, in that being is distinguished from its manifestation: however, since the concept of being *in itself* has been shown to be meaningless, all truth is found in the *manifestation* of being, and nothing true remains hidden behind a “veil” of appearance.

In the logic of the Concept we have a new definition of immediacy: for something to be *immediately* is for that thing to be *what it is*, but now we also say that what something is must manifest itself in movement. We call this movement *development*, for Hegel, and I am calling the manifestation the *function* of the

²⁶² See chapter 4 above for discussion of this definition of “illusory”.

thing in question. I use the term “function” in the way I used it above: the development manifests itself in a process of applying concepts to the object of study and connecting these concepts to each other, and in this way we do not rely on discovering what these concepts mean *in themselves* but instead try to discover the way that they relate to each other, which is to discover the *function* of the concepts. Being remains mysterious, but if it is allowed freely to develop in accordance with its inner necessity, then we can have a functional grasp of what the concept of being in question *is*. Speculative thinking takes up the new sense of “immediacy” and deals with the *development* (and *function*), rather than the *meaning*, of being (though we must remember that *function* and *meaning* are not absolutely opposed, the functionalist approach is opposed to a simplistic account of meaning, where the nature of the relativity of individual terms is not taken into account – see chapter 1). The new concept of immediacy that we have is immediacy that is *free*, and I hope in what follows to explain in more detail what this “freedom” consists in.

To summarise: the logic of essence has shown that whatever is actual must be indeterminate to reflective thinking, since we cannot find an other of actuality that would explain it. Actuality is what it is, and reflection is identical to actuality, since there is no distinction between what is *inner* and *outer* to actuality. Nevertheless, what is actual does have a nature of its own and so we must think differently if we are to work out what this nature is (and are to say more of it than *that it is*). It is for this reason that reflective thinking gives way to

speculative thinking. As we will see by the end of this chapter, speculative thinking is thinking that, though it cannot break actuality down into substantial parts (and so cannot solve the problem of empty identity by pointing to two or more distinct things that would explain each other), it can follow its own process of trying to come to terms with actuality and in this way discover the movement of actuality as it manifests itself. For speculative thinking, thought and being (or what is actual) are identical (the logic of reflection has demonstrated this), and so we can trace the nature of what is actual in the way our thought develops as we think.

1: The universal

The Concept is the actual that moves according to its own inner necessity, and so has become free in the way that has been described above. The Concept is “an infinite, self-relating determinateness.”²⁶³ Hegel calls this the “universal”. The universal is immediate, since it is not related to a distinct other, and so it does not determine, nor is it determined by, what is external to it (since inner and outer are identical), and so it only determines itself.²⁶⁴ This self-determining immediacy of the universal is described by Hegel as an “original unity”.²⁶⁵ Any determination of the universal, we are told, does not alter the immediacy of the

²⁶³ *Logic* p.601

²⁶⁴ Thus the universal is described as “simple relation to itself; it is only within itself” (*Logic* p.602) and “the simplicity which constitutes the very nature of the universal is such that, through absolute negativity, it contains *within itself* difference and determinateness in the highest degree” (*Logic* p.601)

²⁶⁵ *Logic* p.602

universal. With the immediacy of the universal, which is immediacy that is self-determining, we now have a form of immediacy that is, in a meaningful sense, non-mediated. By thinking this immediacy as self-determining (as inner identity), we can think of it as not mediated *except by itself*, and so describe immediacy as non-mediated (that is, not mediated from the outside) while it is, nevertheless, mediated (that is, mediated by itself). Thus we do not violate the principle that arose from the examination of the logic of being, that immediacy cannot be non-mediated, and yet we have an opportunity to avoid the problems of the logic of essence, in which immediacy was thoroughly mediated.

Hegel tells us that “the universal is the *substance* of its determinations; but in such wise that what was a *contingency* for substance, is the Concept’s own self-mediation, its own *immanent reflection*.”²⁶⁶ We have seen above why we cannot say that there is anything contingent about the Concept: to talk of contingency is to talk of what is *external* to the Concept (or *outer*), and we cannot meaningfully talk of an inner/outer distinction. Of course, there is a movement between the aspects of the Concept that manifests itself, but we could not find anything to justify describing either one of these aspects as “contingent”, and so more essential, or *inner*, than the other.

However, though the *outside* as conceived in the logic of essence has vanished, owing to the failure of essential categories to distinguish between outside and

²⁶⁶ *Logic* p.603 (translation amended)

inside, this does not mean that we are forced no longer to talk of an “outside” in the logic of the Concept. Hegel reminds us that, though we began with “inner identity”, the universal cannot *only* be this inner identity, otherwise it would amount to no more than “formless substance”.²⁶⁷ In other words, if we just took the universal to be inner identity that determines itself but does not manifest itself, the universal would be no more than the concept of actuality (since it would be the concept of what is merely self-identical), and would itself constitute a dead-end for thought, since we would end up without having solved the problem generated by the logic of essence: that is, we would have failed to make a distinction between what is inner and outer, essential and non-essential.

Thus, rather than abandon the concept of externality altogether, we arrive at a new concept of externality that fits with what we have said about the universal so far. The universal is self-determining and *immediate*, and this immediacy means that it only determines itself and is determined by itself. Whatever is external to it neither determines it nor is determined by it. Thus Hegel writes:

The universal is therefore *free* power; it is itself and takes its other within its embrace, but without *doing violence* to it; on the contrary, the universal is, in its other, in peaceful communion with itself. We have called it free power, but it could also be called *free love* and *boundless blessedness*, for it bears itself towards its other as towards *its own self*; in it, it has returned to itself.²⁶⁸

²⁶⁷ *Logic* p.603

²⁶⁸ *Logic* p.603

Since the universal only determines – and is only determined by – itself, any relation to other it has must amount to a relation to itself. With the logic of being, concepts were, when related to other, lost in that other (since concepts of being are what they are and no more); with the logic of essence, concepts were, when related to other, fused together and mutually altered each other (since any concept, taken immediately, was also mediated by other and so determined from the outside). With the logic of the concept, however, a concept's relation to other amounts neither to losing itself nor to being altered. This is a *free* relation. It is called a “free relation” because its relation to what is other is indeterminate: the universal is not determined by, nor does it determine, what is other than it.

We have seen in this section that freedom emerges from the concept of necessity. Inner necessity amounts to self-determination. This self-determination is free if, related to this inner necessity, there is something external that is not determined by the inner necessity, but is freely related to it. What this free sort of relation consists in remains to be seen. For now we can at least say what this relation is not: it is not a relation of determination, and so we do not return to the logic of essence, and so we do not return to a model according to which what is self-determining determines what is other than it.

2: The particular

When Hegel begins to discuss the particular, he tells us that we have had the particular in mind already in our discussion of the universal. He tells us that “we cannot speak of the universal apart from determinateness which to be more precise is particularity and individuality, for the universal, in its absolute negativity, contains determinateness in and for itself.”²⁶⁹ If particularity is the determinateness of the universal, then it must belong to the universal, since the universal only determines – and is determined by – itself. (In the passage just quoted, Hegel also mentions that we also have “individuality”: we will return to this below.)

Thus universality necessarily involves particularity. Nevertheless, we can abstract the moment of universality from the moment of particularity. In this way the immediacy (universal) is taken to be distinct from its determinations (particular). However, this leaves us with no more than immediacy *alongside* determinations that are external to it. But this makes the concept of abstract universality identical to the concept of being, since it is the concept of immediacy that is only distinct from the determinations that mediate it. Thus abstract universality is equivalent to the concept of being: or, to put it more accurately, *it is the principle of abstract universality that governs the logic of being*, since each concept is taken to be opposed to its determinations.

²⁶⁹ *Logic* p.603

As self-determining immediacy, the universal is distinct from what is other than it. As self-determining, the universal is *not* its other: it is distinguished from what is other than it. The immediacy of the universal thus contains what Hegel calls the “first negation” of the universal, and this first negation is the particularity of the universal. (We will see that it is called the “first negation” because it is one of two negations: there must also be a second negation, where the universal is determined as not determined by what is other than it.)

The particularity of the universal constitutes its “character”.²⁷⁰ The universal, if it is not to be merely abstract universality, is not merely immediacy but is immediacy that has determined itself in a certain way. Particularity, as character, is the *self*-determining of the universal.

It is the character of the universal, its particularity, that determines the particulars that come under it. Particulars are said to come under the same concept insofar as they are identical with the character of the universal.²⁷¹ The “diversity” of particulars “exhibits” the character of the universal. For this reason, Hegel describes the universal as a “totality”: each particular gives us the character of the universal as a whole.²⁷² However, this diverse collection of particulars is not arbitrarily put together under the universal: the particulars

²⁷⁰ *Logic* p.604

²⁷¹ *Logic* p.606

²⁷² *Logic* p.606

relate to each other and are constituted according to a “principle” that belongs to the universal and to its particulars.²⁷³

It is in this way that a Hegelian account of the universal and the particular differs from a certain sort of non-Hegelian account. A non-Hegelian account might tell us that particulars acquire certain characteristics from somewhere external to them (things are caused to be a certain way due to, say, natural processes), and are then brought under universals through our recognising marks belonging to the particulars that cause them to come under the universal. So all things with the characteristic ‘x’ come under the universal “things that are ‘x’”. The problem with this sort of account, for Hegel, is that it belongs to the logic of essence. According to this account, each particular is what it is, not on its own terms, but according to a presupposed category intended to classify it. The immediacy of the particular becomes irrelevant, since it is only seen through the mediating category of the universal. Certain characteristics of the thing are ignored in the attempt to classify it and bring it under a certain universal. The immediate is altered in our thought by the universal that mediates it (and so we are thinking in terms of essence – see chapters 4 and 5 above), and so what is immediate about the particular is left out of the account. The problem with this account is not based on some sort of demand that we account for the specificity of every particular, but on the fact that the account is internally in conflict: the particular is supposed to be described through the universal, but we know that something

²⁷³ *Logic* p.606

must always be left out of the account, so that we never get to things “in themselves”. Now that we have seen the problems connected with essentialist thinking (with thinking according to which what is immediate is *distorted* by what mediates it), Hegel can say that this way of thinking – according to which *true* being (being *in itself*) is distinguished from appearance – is inadequate, and a new way of thinking the universal must be found.²⁷⁴

Hegel’s way of thinking the relation between the universal and the particular is thus a way of replacing the essentialist way of thinking the particular as dependent upon the universal with a way of thinking the universal and the particular *in their freedom*. The universal mediates the particular, but according to a principle that belongs to the particular, since *all the particular is, is the determination of the universal*. The universal and the particular are thus aspects of the same process of self-determination – rather than one determining the other – and so we do not run into the problems of distortion²⁷⁵ encountered in the traditional, essentialist account of universality and particularity.

We saw above that particularity is only the first negation of the universal, and so only means that the universal is distinct from its other. However, we also saw that, in order for the relation of universal and particular to make sense as a solution to the problem of essentialism, which it solves by conceiving the

²⁷⁴ See conclusion to chapter 4 above for discussion of “distortion”.

²⁷⁵ That is, the fact that, since what is immediate is always already mediated, what is immediate is never simply what it is.

particular not as *determined* by the universal but as being the *determination* of the universal, a second negation had to come into play, so that what is distinct from the universal (is *not* the universal) is also *not* determined by the universal. Without this second negation, the relation of universal to particular would be an essential relation, since the particularity of the universal, its relation to the particular, would be a relation to something that it determines or is determined by. The universal thought as the second negation is the “individual”. Though its role has already been explained in what has been said above (we think the universal as individual when we take the Hegelian, rather than the non-Hegelian, account of the universal and the particular), we will, in the next section, look in a little more detail at what “individual” means for Hegel. To think of the particular as *other* than the universal would be to revert back to an inadequate conception of essence: we know that we cannot adequately conceive of the particular as the other of the universal because, since both are aspects of the same immediacy, it is impossible to find anything on which to base a distinction between them. So, we have to *negate the negation* that we have here: the particular is *not* the other of the universal: particularity thought in this way is *individuality*.

3: The individual

Hegel describes particularity as “creative power”: insofar as it is particular, the universal determines itself and so can be called “creative”.²⁷⁶ This is the “second

²⁷⁶ *Logic* p.605

negation"²⁷⁷: whereas the first negation was the distinction from what is other, the second negation is where we determine the universal as not determined by what it is distinct from (there are two negations here, since a distinction is a negation, and is the first negation in this sentence, while the "not" constitutes the second negation). Taken as this negation of negation, the universal is an "individual".

The individual is immediacy determined as immediately determined (that is, as a self-determining immediacy, so that it is immediately what it is). Universality, taken abstractly, is merely immediacy (it simply *is*): thus the concept of pure being is abstract universality and is lost once it is taken to be determinate (since it has no characteristics other than being immediate, and so further determination causes the original immediacy to be lost). However, if we take universality to be determined as immediate and self-determining, we take it to be an individual. Whereas particularity denotes the specific character that belongs to something immediate, and thus the immediacy determined as "such and such", individuality is the immediate determined as immediately self-determining *per se*. If being is taken as an abstract universal, it is lost as soon as it is defined, as we saw in the case of pure being; taken as an individual, however, being is taken to be determined as immediate in a determinate way and thus is preserved even as it shows itself to have more determinations than

²⁷⁷ *Logic* p.605

this determination of immediacy (or purity: the universal is not *purely* immediate²⁷⁸).

Hegel points out that any immediacy can be taken to have individuality, provided that it is taken to have certain determinations that belong to its own particular immediacy. Even abstract universality, Hegel tells us, is in truth individuality, since it is determined as immediate and no more, and so concretely is a negation of a negation. According to the logic of the concept, then, sheer immediacy is *concretely* understood as negation of the negation.²⁷⁹ This explains why, when we leave the concept of pure being behind and arrive at the concept of determinate being (in the logic of being), we can say that we are grasping pure being according to its concept: concretely understood, the abstract universal is the negation of the negation. The reason that this was problematic for the concept of pure being was that we were trying to think this concept as abstract and no more, in accordance with the concept of being we had to begin with. With the “*concrete* universal”, we have thought the logic of actuality through: instead of taking otherness to be one aspect of actuality, actuality is taken to be thoroughly identical, while what is “other” is defined as what does not determine, nor is determined by the universal.

In sum: we have seen in this chapter that the logic of the universal describes a response to the problem of the actual. We started with the universal as what

²⁷⁸ See the discussion of *pure being* in chapter 3 section 4 above

²⁷⁹ *Logic* p.621

has *inner necessity* and *simply is*: the universal is the actual that moves according to its own inner necessity. Particularity describes not what is *other* than universality (particulars do not exist independently of universals waiting to have universals applied to them), but instead describes the further logical aspects that must belong to anything that *simply is* in a *determinate way*: whatever *is*, *is in a particular way*. Individuality describes a further element of this same universality: the universal, as actual, must be driven by its *own inner necessity* and so it must be *creative*, which is to say that its particular way of being must be determined by *the individual itself* and by *nothing else*.

The story of the universal signals a move away from reflective thinking because this “creative power” is something that must, in a certain sense, remain mysterious. We do not look for an ultimate explanation of the nature of individual things. Instead, we take it that the universal, as individual, is self-determining, and that therefore the way that the universal manifests itself reveals something *about the nature of the universal*. Speculative thinking is thus a *functionalist* approach of sorts: something remains inexpressible (we do not have a complete picture of the individual thing in question), and yet we find that the development of our thinking as we try to come to terms with the individual object of study expresses the nature of that object in a certain way. I describe this as functionalist for the same reason as we might describe Deleuze’s thinking as functionalist: we examine the way our thinking *works* in order to grasp its nature. As Žižek writes:

When we try to establish the function of some organ in an animal, we are thereby repeating the “objective” process itself through which the animal “invented” this organ as the solution of some problem. Our process of approaching constituted objective reality repeats the virtual process of Becoming of this reality itself.²⁸⁰

That is to say, whereas reflection repeatedly asked questions in order to come to a full explanation, speculative thinking instead traces the movement of thought as it moves in accordance with its own inner necessity and thereby manifests the mysterious nature of the actual. Speculative thinking means *taking what is actual on its own terms*, since it allows us to trace the nature of the actual in the development of our own thought. Thus it turns out that, in retrospect, the *Logic* has been an exercise in speculative thinking, since in the *Logic* we have been tracing the development of reflective thinking as it comes to terms with itself.

Conclusion

With the concept of individuality we have a full picture of universality and the beginning of a clear picture of the Hegelian concept of freedom. In the account of the universal given above, we have seen that we are concerned with immediacy and determination, just as we were in the logic of being and the logic of essence. However, in the logic of being, immediacy was taken to be non-mediated, and so whatever belonged to something immediately was lost once

²⁸⁰ Žižek 2004 p.56 (previously quoted in chapter 2 above)

mediation could be shown to ground the immediate. In the logic of essence, immediacy was taken to be necessarily mediated, but this meant that immediacy was necessarily always already *distorted* (that is, *altered* in such a way that it was *always already* not immediate). Not only did this mean that the essentialist account led us to the view that knowledge of the immediate was impossible (since the immediate was distorted by the mediation of essence, so that the only truth is the processes that mediate knowledge of the immediate), but it showed itself to be inadequate, since mediation and the immediate could not be adequately distinguished: actuality turned out to be simply *what it is*. Only in the logic of the Concept do we have immediacy that is free from being destroyed or distorted by mediation.²⁸¹ The destruction of concepts found in the logic of being (the fact that concepts were lost as they became other concepts) was symptomatic of a radically unfree way of thinking, since whatever *is* is reduced to nothing; the distortion found in the logic of essence was a symptom of a way of thinking dependent upon hierarchy and domination, where freedom is only bought at the expense of servitude (of the immediate to the mediation through which it expresses itself: what is essential is not *what is grounded* but the *ground*, reflection and not immediate being). With the logic of the Concept, on the other hand, the development of concepts proceeds while the *actual* object in question is allowed to remain *simply what it is*, so that the actual object is not distorted: no single concept is said to define the immediate object (as we saw, the particular is not subordinate to any universal concept), but the development

²⁸¹ See conclusion to chapter 4 above for discussion of “destruction” and “distortion”.

of concepts continues precisely because such a final and fixed definition is impossible, and so we can only get a sense of the nature of the object by seeing how the development of concepts manifests itself.

In the next chapter we will look at the role that the categories of the *Logic* play in key parts of the *Philosophy of Right*. The discussion provided above in the present chapter has hopefully served as a useful preparation for this discussion, by pointing to the way in which determination does and does not play a role where freedom is concerned. What is free must be determined (otherwise the object in question will be destroyed by any determination), but must also not be determined (otherwise the object in question will be distorted by what determines it).²⁸² This is the meaning of “self-determination” in Hegel. In this chapter I have described the tools that allow Hegel to provide a *speculative* philosophical account: we will see in the next chapter how, by thinking in terms of concrete universality, Hegel believes we can think adequately about political concepts. I have described the *Logic* up to the end of the logic of essence as a “quest for meaning”: we saw in the present chapter that this quest has failed, since no individual concept has been found that has a stable meaning. The only hope we have for carrying out an investigation into something (in our case, this *something* is the political) is to think speculatively and look for the universal, which is to allow the truth of what is before us to unfold for itself. The logic of being and the logic of essence have served to rule out any method other than

²⁸² See conclusion to chapter 4 above for “destruction” and “distortion”

this, whereby a conception of being could be fixed prior to any investigation and determine the course of the investigation. "Allowing what is before us to unfold for itself" might sound mysterious, but what it amounts to is quite straightforward, as we will see: it means not fixing upon any one concept as a principle with which to begin, but allowing ourselves to proceed *dialectically*, so that each concept that we apply is seen as part of a *development*, which means that concepts are systematically taken up and transformed as the investigation proceeds.

We will see that the functional approach takes the *unfathomableness* of ground into account and so gives us a true conception of externality: the account of the political is, for this reason, always *incomplete*, in a certain sense, for Hegel. As I suggested in chapter 5, the logic of the Concept gives us an adequate conception of essence: according to the logic of the Concept, in contrast to the logic of essence, what is essential does not determine what is other than it, and so the other to which what is essential *freely relates* must be taken to be indeterminate. That is to say, a key element of speculative thinking (thinking in accordance with the logic of the Concept), is being able to establish how far our knowledge can take us: we will see that certain things must remain indeterminate for the political philosopher. Fundamental to Hegel's conception of political philosophy is the notion that the political philosopher looks at what *is*, rather than starting with principles that tell us what *ought* to be the case: for Hegel, we can only meaningfully make this distinction, between *is* and *ought*, if

we approach philosophy *speculatively*. We focus on what *is* the case, for Hegel, and this allows what *ought* to be the case to manifest itself: we will see that our study of what is the case, of the actual, allows us to glimpse the conditions that allow what is to have come to be, the rational, even though we can never get a fixed and absolute picture of what it means to be rational. For Hegel, our political development is always ongoing, and we cannot come up with a formula that would tell us what we should do in every case, even though through philosophy we learn to grasp that there must be a rational order of things.

Chapter 7: Hegel's *Philosophy of Right*

Introduction

In the previous chapters we have learned a great deal about Hegel's method. We have seen the way that Hegel proceeds: that is, dialectically. Proceeding dialectically means thinking speculatively, and this means beginning without presuppositions, that is, letting the subject matter speak for itself. By *beginning with reflective thinking and allowing ourselves to be guided by the demands of reflection*, it turned out that we were thinking speculatively, as *we were taking reflection on its own terms* (and taking the subject matter on its own terms is the purpose of speculative thinking). In this chapter we will see how this method applies, for Hegel, to his exposition of "right".

The logic of the Concept, discussed in the previous chapter, illustrates how a subject matter – in this case the political concept of *right* – can be approached without bringing in presuppositions, or principles that distort the subject matter. As we saw in chapters 3 to 5 above, the *Logic* can be seen as a study of reflection: the *Logic* takes the reflective spirit of the modern age and tries to discover where it ends up. As we saw in chapters 5 and 6 above, Hegel believes he has shown in the *Logic* that the reflective spirit is self-defeating, insofar as reflection must give way to a new way of thinking, that is, to speculative thinking. Reflective thinking seeks objectivity by repeatedly questioning what is

before it: as we saw in chapter 3, the reflective spirit repeatedly asks “What is...?” about the thing in question. The problem is that this question leads to a dead-end for reflection, to the concept of *actuality* according to which, despite the mediation of reflection, being is simply what it is. In order to escape this dead-end, reflection must transform itself into speculative thinking, which is a type of thinking that is not characterised by the repetition of “What is...?” but which is able patiently to wait and see what emerges from what is actual. There is nothing mystical about this patience with mysterious actuality, however (and what is actual must be mysterious, since we can, for reflection, say no more about it than to point out *that it is* despite its mediation by reflection): concretely, speculative thinking means taking seriously the claim that no concept has any meaning taken on its own, and so we will have to pass through many ways of thinking about the matter in hand until we get a reasonably full picture of the actual thing we are considering. The truth of something is discovered not by hitting on the correct, fixed concept of that thing, but by recognising how the various concepts that can apply to that thing fit together in a process of development: this is what it means to think something in accordance with *its Concept*, for Hegel. In the current chapter I hope to illustrate what this means.

Hegel’s account of the political must be distinguished from “an ordinary compendium” of law.²⁸³ It is to be distinguished from such a compendium, we are told, by its “method”. This is an important point to note, since it will be

²⁸³ *Philosophy of Right* “Preface” p.3

shown to be a key point in what follows: Hegel does not want to provide a work that introduces radical new concepts to political philosophy so much as he wants to give a *rational* account of the *actual* ethical institutions that existed in his day. However, this does not mean that Hegel was uncritical of the ethical institutions that existed in his day. Instead, it means that Hegel stuck to the critical method that we have been discussing in the chapters above: we can only properly criticise something by doing so immanently, by looking at what something *is* and seeing what the subject matter itself demands for its own realisation, that is to say, by methodically applying concepts to what is before us in order to see how this allows our sense of what is actual to develop. It is by the methodical application of concepts that we develop a *systematic* grasp of the object of study.

1: The will

In accordance with the task he has set himself, Hegel proceeds to *systematically* examine all of the concepts that could be associated with right.²⁸⁴ The first concept to be discussed by Hegel is the concept of the “will”. The will, we are told, is by definition free, and so we are beginning the discussion of right with the concept of freedom.²⁸⁵ Of course, since we are talking about freedom, it

²⁸⁴ Note that “systematically” does not mean “in accordance with a principle”, but means instead something like “examined as a part of a system of concepts”. This must be the method, since no concept has meaning on its own.

²⁸⁵ “Will without freedom is an empty word” (*Philosophy of Right* §4 Add.); we cannot go into the justification for this claim about the will, since this lies outside the scope of this thesis (since this

looks like we have returned to a discussion of universality (see chapter 6 above). And sure enough, we are told that “the will contains... the element of *pure indeterminacy*” which is “the unrestricted infinity of *absolute abstraction* or *universality*, the pure *thought* of oneself.”²⁸⁶

Hegel believes that we must think of the will as more than this indeterminacy (than this indeterminate “I” or “pure thought of oneself”). The way in which he shows this demonstrates what is interesting about his method. We must note that Hegel does not want to eliminate such indeterminacy, since it is a crucial moment of what the will is: instead he wants to fit this moment into a logical system, so that the role of such a moment can be determined. “Abstraction”, we will see, is central to the concept of freedom, though its precise role can only be grasped systematically (that is, where abstraction is a concept that is grasped as one concept in a system of concepts).²⁸⁷

We are told that “at the same time, the I is *also* the transition from undifferentiated indeterminacy to the differentiation, determination, and positing of a determinacy as a content and object.”²⁸⁸ What Hegel is stating here is his claim that *even indeterminacy is a determination, since abstraction must have a content, even if the most abstract one* (we saw this in chapter 3 above:

claim is justified in the *Philosophy of Mind*). I simply point out here the correspondence of the concepts “will” and “freedom” for Hegel.

²⁸⁶ *Philosophy of Right* §5

²⁸⁷ See Houlgate 1995, where the connection between freedom and abstraction is discussed.

²⁸⁸ *Philosophy of Right* §6 (My italics)

even “pure being” had a content). We should notice the “also” that I have italicised in the text quoted here: while Hegel tells us that indeterminacy turns out to be determination (since it must result in a determinate content), he wants to say that this new moment exists in some sense alongside the earlier moment, so that both are true. This is central to the concept of “dialectic”: earlier and later moments both belong to the system of concepts.

Of course, from these two passages, on the indeterminacy and the determination of what is abstract and universal, we are effectively learning nothing new: as we have seen in chapter 6 above, this is the logic of the universal, according to which what is abstract *develops into* its negation and so is explicitly preserved in it. However, perhaps we can now see a little more clearly the significance of the logic of the universal: this logic makes explicit the fact that this process retains the earlier moment, and what this means for Hegel is that we are proceeding *systematically*, that is, in such a way that each concept finds its place in a system, rather than each in turn being proved false and worthless. As this chapter progresses we will see that this is important: human beings are the sort of political creatures that are essentially indeterminate even in their determinacy.

And so we see in the next section of the *Philosophy of Right* that “the will is the unity of both these moments.”²⁸⁹ The will is not “always already” determined,

²⁸⁹ *Philosophy of Right* §7

but *contains* this moment of universality, of abstraction. What it means to say that the will “contains” the moment of abstraction is that *we cannot give a full explanation of the will without accounting for this moment*. The will is something that is determined, but which has brought about this determination through a process of abstraction. We do not say that the will is “always already” determined, since this would suggest that we had made a mistake in attributing this moment of abstraction to the will, and that its choice²⁹⁰, its fixing on a determination, was an illusion.

So the will is not *only* abstract: it must become determinate. But this new determination of the will is itself too abstract. The will as it has been described – as a moment of abstraction alongside the determinate content arising from this – is called “the *immediate or natural will*”.²⁹¹ The trouble with this characterisation of the will, is that the determinacy of its determinations turns out to be a certain *lack* of determinacy. This lack becomes apparent once we realise that, according to the stages just described, any determination is equal to any other. In other words, since all that arises from indeterminacy is determination, the will is indifferent to the precise character of the determination that arises. Thus at this stage, the determinate content of the will is described as “a medley and multiplicity of impulses”²⁹², with no additional

²⁹⁰ We should note that “choice” is technically too concrete a term. We will not see that this abstraction will come to mean “choice” until we get a little further.

²⁹¹ *Philosophy of Right* §11

²⁹² *Philosophy of Right* §12

determinate content that would provide us with a principle for choosing between them.

Now, since determinacy of this sort turns into a certain indeterminacy, we are faced with a contradiction. The way that this contradiction is dealt with is through the “resolve” of the will: the will gives preference to an indeterminate impulse over other impulses and thereby *gives* determinate content to it. Again it is worth taking care to note that this way of solving the problem, positing the will as something that essentially *resolves* upon its chosen course of action, does not mean saying that the previous, merely impulsive will was incoherent and so must be rejected. Instead, this contradictory nature of the impulsive will is seen to be a necessary stage in the development of the will, which gives rise to the more thoroughly determinate notion of a will that resolves. For Hegel it is essential that we see the logical organisation of the will, as a creature that resolves, or chooses, as arising from an essential contradiction and from an unstable creature of impulse.²⁹³

The will, as something that resolves in this way, is connected in a certain way to its impulses. It is not determined by them entirely (as we saw, the determination of an impulse can only go so far, and turns out to be quite indeterminate), but at the same time cannot be free of them. Thus “it is tied to its content” but “it is

²⁹³ *Philosophy of Right* §12-13: the will “resolves” and thus becomes an “individual” will, rather than a sheer multiplicity of impulses.

not tied to this or that content”.²⁹⁴ We should compare this to the logic of essence (chapters 4 and 5 above): impulse plays the role of what is immediate and external to essence, which keeps revealing itself to have an essential, determinate role despite the way that the concept of essence works against this alien essential determinacy.²⁹⁵ We have, when we consider impulses and resolve, a return to the logic of *domination* (the impulses are dominated by the resolve of the will), which as we saw was a contradictory position, but one nevertheless implicit in the concept of essence.²⁹⁶ We might note in support of this the widespread use of the language of domination when it comes to talking about our impulses and our “control” over them. We should also note that both sides here – resolve and impulses – are sides *of the will*: it is not that the will dominates its impulses, but the *resolve* of the will dominates the *impulses* of the will.

With this contradictory state of affairs we have reached the level of “arbitrariness” (“Willkür”).²⁹⁷ The most simplistic notion that I should be allowed to “do whatever I want” finds its home here. The arbitrary will recognises freedom only in carrying out those impulses that it has resolved upon. The problem with this position, however, is found in the contradiction that we have just identified: the resolve is in an unstable relation of essence, or domination,

²⁹⁴ *Philosophy of Right* §14

²⁹⁵ That is to say, immediacy was shown to persist, despite the necessity that being must be mediated by reflection.

²⁹⁶ See conclusion to chapter 4 above for description of the logic of essence as a logic of *domination*.

²⁹⁷ *Philosophy of Right* §15

with the multiplicity of impulses, and so the arbitrary will cannot be sure whether it is acting in accordance with its resolve or not. The life of the arbitrary will is one of perpetual struggle for this reason. Thus Hegel writes:

What the will has decided to choose... it can equally easily renounce... But its ability to go beyond any other choice which it may substitute, and so on *ad infinitum*, never enables it to get beyond its own finitude, because the content of every such choice is something other than the form of the will.²⁹⁸

In other words, the resolve (the form of the will) must be dominant if the arbitrary will is to be able to say that it is free, that it is guided by its resolve and so is doing what it wants. But the arbitrary will, no matter how it shifts its preferences, can never find a resolution that is more than one choice among many. We can see, then, that the arbitrary will does not fully overcome the problem of the impulsive will, since its resolution does not manage to give enough determination to the chosen impulse so that it can be truly elevated above the others.

We might say that this begs the question: surely, if we take the arbitrary will on its own terms, then the chosen impulse simply *is* the one that is elevated above the others and freedom is found in following the impulse precisely because the will says it is so. However, this is to ignore the logic of essence and domination: the problem is not that Hegel is denying that the will can give such elevation to

²⁹⁸ *Philosophy of Right* §16

an impulse, but that this elevation involves the struggle of domination, so that the arbitrary will can never be sure whether it is its own resolve or sheer blind impulse that guides him.

So far, then, we have looked at what we will refer to as the “abstract will” (the will as utterly indeterminate), the “impulsive will” (the will as a multiplicity of impulses – the “immediate” or “natural” will) and the “arbitrary will” (the will that chooses an impulse arbitrarily from the multiplicity available to it). We have seen that each of these is an essential element in the complex nature of the will, since the most complex concept of will so far, the arbitrary will, can only be explained with reference to the earlier stage, the impulsive will, while the latter can only be explained with reference to the abstract will. Thus the explanation of the arbitrary will involves an explanation of all three levels, and only through such an explanation do we begin to get a clear picture of what the will looks like for Hegel. This illustrates the *systematic* nature of Hegel’s exposition, which arises from the dialectical method.

Next, Hegel contrasts this endless struggle of the arbitrary will with the project of the “purification of impulses”.²⁹⁹ While Hegel says that the demand for the purification of impulses is “vague”, it nevertheless constitutes an improvement on the arbitrary will. A demand for purification of impulses would involve finding criteria according to which impulses could be deemed worthy or unworthy of our

²⁹⁹ *Philosophy of Right* §19

acting upon them. In this way, impulses can find the determinacy they lack both in the impulsive will and the arbitrary, according to which they are each ultimately just one impulse alongside another. Hegel is saying, then, that the impasse that we have reached with the struggle of the arbitrary will is such that it calls for *external* criteria, or a principle, according to which impulses can be determined. In other words, the impulses cannot find their determination in themselves, and so must be judged to have a certain determination according to something external to them.

Universality thus re-enters the picture here. In response to the arbitrary will's struggle for domination, we must look for an abstract principle according to which *any* given impulse can be judged. We have here a sort of moral will, though we will see that the "moral will" does not properly arise until later on in the *Philosophy of Right*. I will thus refer to this stage of the will's development as the "abstract moral will". Thus the development so far goes: abstract will, impulsive will, arbitrary will and abstract moral will.

"Only in freedom of this kind", Hegel tells us, "is the will with itself without qualification, because it is related to nothing except itself and so is released from every relation of dependence on anything else."³⁰⁰ Note that the will is properly free because it is no longer *dependent* (as least not in the way that it was before): the logic of domination that was evident in the arbitrary will has been

³⁰⁰ *Philosophy of Right* §23

overcome. Instead of being determined by impulses, the will finds universal principles and acts only in accordance with these if it is to be free. Once again, we should note the dialectical nature of the process that Hegel is describing: the logic of domination does not simply vanish, but remains as the very aspect of the will that necessitates the move to acting in accordance with a universal principle.

In fact, it is quite clear at this stage that the struggling, domination-seeking aspect of the will remains in the picture. The will remains, in a sense, split here, since the impulses stand on one side, while the universal principle stands on the other. "The will is then universal", we are told, "because all restriction and all particular individuality have been superseded within it".³⁰¹ But when Hegel tells us this, he is describing the point of view of the abstract moral will. From our point of view, we can see that the arbitrary, particular side of the will remains. In other words, while the appeal to a universal principle arises quite legitimately in response to a demand that impulses find a determination, this principle can only determine the impulses at the cost of splitting the will into its particular and universal side. The impulses can thus only be said to be properly determined from the point of view of the abstract moral will and not in and for themselves. What this means is that the abstract moral will is in a sense arbitrary, and so has not fully escaped the essentialist logic of the arbitrary will. We still find, in other words, that the determination of the impulses here depends on our accepting the domination of the impulses by a moralising will. The concrete problem with

³⁰¹ *Philosophy of Right* §24

this is that one could refuse to recognise the authority of such a will on the grounds that it ignores the essential indeterminacy of the impulses. While such a refusal would in a sense be irrational (since it would accept an unstable determination of the impulses as “determined as indeterminate”), it finds its justification in the fact that subordinating the impulses to a universal principle does not in fact solve the problem of the indeterminacy of the impulses, but merely asks us to arbitrarily take up a determination for these impulses, so that the indeterminate side of the impulses becomes inessential.

Thus the problem we are faced with at the level of the abstract moral will is the fact that the “self-conscious side”, or the will “for itself”, which acts according to principles, is separated from what the will is “in itself”.³⁰² In order to overcome this unstable concept of the will, we must think the will as “in and for itself”. In other words, this split between the impulses and the universal principle must be “thought away”, so to speak. However, this must not be done in yet another arbitrary way, otherwise, we will remain caught in the logic of domination. The problem is that the will is, on the one hand, determined as indeterminate, and so is contradictory; on the other hand, it is fully determined, but according to a principle that is not its own (or at least, that does not belong to any of the impulses that constitute the will). In order to overcome this problem, the principle that is not its own must be recognised as necessarily its own. Since, as we saw, the very indeterminacy of the impulses led the will to look for an

³⁰² *Philosophy of Right* §25 (See chapter 3 for discussion of “in itself”. The logic of the in itself is unstable, as is the logic of impulses here.)

external principle, we can see already that the external principle of the abstract moral will is the will's own, since it arises in response to an internal need of the will. As we have seen, the problem is parallel to the problem faced by the arbitrary will in that, while the fact that a principle is required is necessary, the particular choice of principle itself is not. Why this principle and not another? However, if this problem is allowed to remain, then we can get no further, and impulses, and our pursuit of impulses, must always remain arbitrary. What is required is that we recognise not only that a principle is necessary, but that in seizing a principle, this principle must be concrete and so a particular principle. The principle is not arbitrary, since a principle is needed and must have a concrete form.

This requires more explanation, since it is a truly radical moment of Hegel's thought and runs counter to the intuition of many philosophers today, even of many seemingly sympathetic Hegel commentators.³⁰³ To return to the abstract moral will: we have, on the one hand, the side that is contradictory, since it is determined as indeterminate. This is the side of the impulses. Even the arbitrary favouring of impulses by the will cannot elevate these impulses so that they are properly determinate, since the arbitrary will does not do this according to any

³⁰³ One such commentator is Robert Pippin (see Pippin 2008), who argues that the Hegelian project of "practical philosophy" can only be completed if we continue to look for ways to justify the principles according to which we make moral decisions, but do this while taking Hegel's "historical" approach into account. In this chapter I am arguing that Hegel takes a different line: the taking up of an arbitrary principle as necessary, in the way I will now describe, means that, for Hegel, we can never achieve what it seems to me that Pippin wants Hegelian practical philosophers to achieve, that is, a convincing justification for liberal democratic values as the highest values that spirit can attain. (See also the Conclusion below for discussion of Pippin's reading of Hegel.)

fixed principle but must by definition be allowed to change its mind regarding which impulses it favours. On the other hand we have the side of the abstract moral will that acts according to a fixed principle. This fixed principle allows the will to be fully determinate, since we can fully explain why we are performing an action, and arbitrariness is eliminated. But arbitrariness slips in through the back door, so to speak, since the principle itself is one among many principles. So what is required is a principle that is necessary, and not one among many principles. By saying this, we have in effect said that the very “indeterminate determinacy” (or “determinate indeterminacy”, either way is fine) of the impulsive and arbitrary will demands a principle that is necessary. If the story presented so far is correct, therefore, the appearance that we in fact have more than one choice of principle must be illusory: by arriving at a universal principle according to which our impulses become fully determinate, we demonstrate that the impulses must necessarily be pursued (or rejected) according to this principle.

To put it another way: the universal principle, once it has been chosen, “conceals”, so to speak, the other options that seemed to be available prior to the selecting of this principle.³⁰⁴ To some, this may seem to be an irrational claim to make, since Hegel may seem to be saying “yes, we have a choice, and ultimately our choices are arbitrary, but we must *pretend* that we only have one

³⁰⁴ This concealment of the other possible principles makes our principles “ideological” in the sense that Žižek uses the term: “‘ideological’ is a social reality whose very existence implies the non-knowledge of its participants as to its essence” (Žižek 1989 pp.15-6).

choice in order to save ourselves from relativism!” However, Hegel is not really saying this. In effect, what Hegel is describing is the familiar social phenomenon that finds perhaps its best example in Martin Luther’s words: “Here I stand, I can do no other.” To be Hegelian, I am arguing, we must take seriously that there is a sense of “necessity” that is often not recognised by philosophers, that describes this social phenomenon. When we say something is necessary in this Hegelian sense, we say “yes, of course I *could*, in some sense have acted in that way, but who I am precludes this.” So, for example, I *could* tomorrow go and join a terrorist organisation (“there is a possible world in which Lee joins a terrorist organisation”, we might say), but at the same time I really *could not do this*, since my character, including my conscience, but also simply the way I have been brought up and the social choices I see as realistically being available to me, precludes this option.³⁰⁵

It is this that Hegel means when he talks of “the free will that wills the free will”.³⁰⁶ The free will is not imposed upon my irrational impulses, but is *genuinely* (not just seemingly, unless we only take the pre-Hegelian concept of necessity to be valid) elicited by my impulses, so that the only way I can respond to these impulses is to proceed according to this freely chosen principle. In sum: the positing of the principle as necessary is required to avoid contradiction (the principle must be the only one: see above) and an example of this is a social

³⁰⁵ Of course, we are not at this stage dealing with a concrete enough conception of the will that we can really talk of choices of this kind: we should remember that we are dealing with only an abstract aspect of what is involved in such a concrete choice.

³⁰⁶ *Philosophy of Right* §27

norm that is contingent in one sense, but necessary in another. In this way, the will is free because “it is related to nothing except itself”: it is not dependent upon a principle that is *external* to it, but it takes up a principle that must belong to it necessarily, since without this concrete principle it would not even be the impulsive will that it is.³⁰⁷ That is to say, in moving from the *abstract moral will* to the *free will* (the latter being the free will that wills the free will) we gain a conception of the will that is self-related, since the principle according to which it determines itself is not taken to be simply external to it.

This concludes the discussion of the “will” in Hegel’s *Philosophy of Right*, in a sense, since we now move on from will to discuss “right”. But this concept of the will remains throughout, and we will see that the concept of will develops as we examine these concepts that describe more than will, since they describe external social practices. Most importantly, we will see that Hegel’s elaboration of the concept of right solves some of the problems that we might seem to face with this Hegelian concept of necessity, namely: can’t we justify any action with this logic? Can’t we effectively say that even the most evil action is justified because “I can do no other”? We will see in what follows that the existence of concrete social practices precludes a reading of Hegel of this sort and in fact eliminates the capacity to justify evil that remains, for Hegel, implicit in many philosophical systems.

³⁰⁷ *Philosophy of Right* §23

In this section I have tried to highlight some aspects of Hegel's philosophy that, I hope to show in the following sections, are essential for grasping what is most interesting about Hegel's *Philosophy of Right*. I have tried to show how Hegel's attention to the form and method according to which we examine political concepts allows us to gain a *systematic* grasp of the political, rather than one based on principles that we have presupposed and thus distort our grasp of the facts of political philosophy. Hegel's systematic approach means that we grasp the will not merely as, say, moral (and so guided by absolute moral principles), but as a will that brings such principles into play as a result of its impulsive nature, and which sticks to such principles, therefore, owing to a kind of necessity. Rather than beginning with principles that we take to be absolute, then, Hegel shows us the proper place for principles in our conception of the will. Without such principles, we could not fulfil the logical demands placed upon us by the very fact that we consist in a multiplicity of impulses. But just as there can be no multiplicity of impulses without principles with which to control them, so there are no principles without such a multiplicity: for this reason, the fact that we are impulsive creatures gives a certain form to human self-determination. That is to say, we are only able to get a clear picture of the way that human beings determine themselves by examining the moments of indeterminacy that define us to some extent. We are moral and rational creatures, but this morality and rationality arises in response to and alongside the abstract, impulsive and arbitrary nature of the will. We will see below, especially in the discussion of

ethical life, that this is very important if we are to grasp the reasoning behind the picture of the state that Hegel gives us.

2: Abstract right

In order to be free, then, the will must act in accordance with a principle. What this principle is precisely, is difficult to elaborate for good logical reasons. The principle according to which the will acts finds its necessity in the act of choosing and not merely in its initial, formal character: for this reason we do not begin political philosophy with an ethical or moral principle, since one principle is as good as another until it is chosen. However, we will see in what follows that the very fact that this principle arises from the will, and that the will must be characterised in the way described in the previous section, means that the principle according to which we act does in fact take on a certain shape, so that we are mistaken if we think the account given above amounts to a certain “any principle will do as long as we stick to it” sort of story.³⁰⁸ We will see that while this initial self-concealing choice is an essential aspect of the ethical will, it can only be seen to be so on the basis of the development the will undergoes as a result of this choice. I use the term “self-concealing” to describe what we saw going on at the end of the previous section: the fact that the principle is one

³⁰⁸ In fact, we will see that this aspect of the will, the *moral resolve*, is a necessary aspect of the will. But this is only an aspect and formal considerations also come into play, meaning that the state must take a certain form, which is specified by Hegel in the *Philosophy of Right*.

among many is concealed when the principle that has been chosen is recognised to be necessary.

Hegel describes the process of choosing and concealing choice as the development of the “subjective” into the “objective”.³⁰⁹ It is not the case, for Hegel, that we proceed with political philosophy “by the assertion that various things ‘exist’ and then by the ‘application’ of the universal to extraneous material”³¹⁰; instead, when we say that something is “objective” we mean (if we are using the term in a Hegelian way), that the thing is concrete. The principle of the free will is objective in this way: its authority comes from the fact that it is “actualised” in the ethical choices that we make. As we saw, abstractly speaking, a principle is one principle among many; objectively, it is an actual decision, a decision determined by my character. The *Philosophy of Right* does not, therefore, depart from the examination of the will to look at things “out there” and see if our concept of the will corresponds to them, so much as it continues to develop the concept of the objective, necessary universal principle of the will, and by doing this first and foremost we will get a sense of what objectivity means and only then will we be able to see how this corresponds to our pre-conceptions about what the world is “actually” like. This exercise in correspondence, of matching the objective with what is “really out there” will not be decisive in testing Hegel’s theory: for Hegel, our pre-conceptions about what the objective world is like are in no way superior to our rational conception

³⁰⁹ *Philosophy of Right* §28

³¹⁰ *Philosophy of Right* §31

of the world developed through dialectic thinking, and in fact reality is tested to see if it matches up to the *concept* of reality.³¹¹

In the last section I divided Hegel's discussion of the will, in the "Introduction" to the *Philosophy of Right*, into five stages: the abstract will; the impulsive will; the arbitrary will; the abstract moral will and the free will (though the term "will" always refers to something free for Hegel³¹², I am using the term "free will" here as shorthand for "the free will which wills the free will" described in the previous section). In (most of³¹³) the rest of the *Philosophy of Right*, Hegel explores the concept of "right", which is the will considered more concretely, just as the will is the concept of the Concept (of universality, particularity and individuality) considered more concretely. So with the concept of right we revisit the forms of the will that we looked at above, but we do so by looking at the will in relation to others. We will see that abstract right takes on certain forms, the first of which is that of the "person".³¹⁴

³¹¹ See the discussion of particularity in chapter 6 section 2 for more on this point.

³¹² *Philosophy of Right* §4 (see also Addition to §4)

³¹³ "most of" because this excludes the section on world history

³¹⁴ On this point there is a contrast between my reading and that of commentators such as Adriaan Theodoor Peperzak, who suggests that "the emergence of 'others' at this point in the text is in anticipation of a further development" (Peperzak 2001 p.228). On the subject of property as it is discussed in the "Abstract Right" part of the *Philosophy of Right*, Peperzak writes: "The reference of someone's property to other persons who should respect it *if* they exist (i.e., its reference to the abstract concept or *possibility* of other persons) was anticipated in Hegel's definition of property, but the interpersonal relations that develop from it were not yet made explicit." (Peperzak 2001, p.264) On my reading, however, a stark contrast between the *mere possibility* of other persons and the *explicit* involvement of others should not be made: the emergence of the concept of the will and its relationship with others is a gradual one, as will be seen below, and the reference to others will become *more* explicit as we continue. As we will see, on my reading there is always room for a further "fleshing out", so to speak, of the conception of the individual agent in relation to others: will becomes person (in the "Abstract Right" sections), which becomes subject (in the "Morality" sections) which becomes human (in

The concept of the person is the concept of the will as the simple thought of itself as one among others: it is “the inherently *individual* will of a subject”.³¹⁵ It is thus the concept of right parallel to the concept of abstract will, which was “the pure thought of oneself” (see above), the difference being that this is the pure thought of oneself *among others*. This individuality, the person, is “the self-conscious but otherwise contentless and simple relation of itself to itself *in its individuality*.”³¹⁶ Note this “in its individuality”: the concept of right is not just the thought of oneself but the thought of oneself as an individual, and thus as existing freely alongside others.³¹⁷ As a person and no more, however, there is nothing determinate to distinguish myself from other persons. We must note that each person will have determinate characteristics, such as age, place and so on³¹⁸, but I will have these only insofar as I am “this” person. Since personality is the *simple* relation to self, and not a determinate relation to self, in so far as I am a person (rather than “this” person) I am no more than the abstract relation to myself, as one among others.

the “Ethical Life” sections), and the conception of the *human* can always be developed further. In sum, in contrast to Peperzak, I would suggest that there is no value in distinguishing Hegel’s discussion of the *possibility* of other persons from his discussion of other persons proper: instead we should distinguish Hegel’s treatment of *persons* from his treatment of *subjects*, *humans* and so on, and take it that otherness is always involved where we have these concepts, even if it is treated *more concretely* as we approach the concrete concept of the human.

³¹⁵ *Philosophy of Right* §34

³¹⁶ *Philosophy of Right* §35 (My italics)

³¹⁷ See discussion of individuality in chapter 6 section 3 above.

³¹⁸ *Philosophy of Right* §35 (Addition)

Now, since *as a person* there is nothing to distinguish myself from others, each person is identical as a person. It is from this fact that the principle “Be a person and respect others as persons” arises.³¹⁹ If we are to be capable of considering ourselves in this abstract way, if we are to *be a person*, then it follows from the fact that we cannot distinguish between ourselves and our fellow human beings that all persons must be allowed to be persons, and so must be *respected as persons*. However, at this abstract stage this principle doesn’t mean very much, since respecting others as persons means no more than thinking of others as persons too, and no more concrete right than this is attached to this principle at this stage. However, this abstract step will turn out to be necessary and will remain part of the complex story of right that will develop in what follows.

So, all that the demand that we respect others as persons means at this stage is: “Do not infringe personality and what personality entails.”³²⁰ Since personality entails no more at this stage than the individual’s relation to itself, no properly moral or ethical demands are explicitly demanded by this rule. (Such moral and ethical demands will, we will see, turn out to be *implicit*.) As Hegel puts it, we are dealing here only with “possibility” rather than actuality when we are talking about the abstract concept of the “person”: in order to be actual, the concept of the person will have to be filled out, so that what is implicit in this concept can emerge. But note the dialectical method: as we saw in the previous section, this mere possibility is not something that we can forget about once we find a more

³¹⁹ *Philosophy of Right* §36

³²⁰ *Philosophy of Right* §38

concrete concept of the human being (of the moral and ethical individual), since this abstract element of sheer possibility persists in the later more concrete concepts of the individual, so that we will see that it is the very fact that the human being is the sort of being that has *possibilities* available to her that makes her the sort of ethical individual she is.

All that the abstract person is, then, is this self-relating individuality, which is to say that she relates to herself as one among others. But, as we have seen, insofar as the person is a person, she is indistinguishable from other persons. We have here, then, a case parallel to what we saw in the discussion of the will in the previous section: the indeterminacy of the person (it is self-relating individuality and no more) is nevertheless determinate, since she is an individual among others (development of what is *abstract* into a *multiplicity*), but we can find nothing about simply being a person to distinguish one person from another, and so must seize upon what is contingent in order to distinguish persons (development of the *multiplicity* into *arbitrary* distinction). In order to do this, the person defines herself by what belongs to her: through “possession” or “property ownership”.³²¹

I have described this initial determination of persons by their property as “arbitrary”, and so it is. At this most abstract level of property ownership, we must consider human beings to have an “absolute right of appropriation” over

³²¹ *Philosophy of Right* §40

“things” (objects that are not human), since we have not yet got a principle according to which property is divided.³²² “I make something my own”, Hegel tells us, “as a result of my natural need, impulse and caprice”.³²³ Thus, as with the development of the will discussed in the previous section, impulse, and the arbitrary prioritising of one impulse over another, brings about the initial determination of the indeterminate will. However, this arbitrariness must turn into something necessary if it is to tell us something essential about what it is to be a person. Just as the arbitrary will implicitly demanded the appeal to an external principle in order to justify the choice of impulse, so the arbitrary division of property implicitly demands an appeal to something external that can determine possession of property and thus adequately determine the individual person. Now, since we are proceeding dialectically, we should not be surprised that the right of appropriation does not vanish: all persons, however concrete, have this right. However, this right is limited to things that are not already claimed by another person: “private property”³²⁴ emerges as a result of taking possession, and the fact that private property exists limits the application of the absolute right of possession (note: the right itself is not limited, but its *application* is).

The transformation of the arbitrary division of property occurs when we arrive at the concept of “contract”. “The sphere of contract”, Hegel tells us, “is made up

³²² *Philosophy of Right* §44

³²³ *Philosophy of Right* §45

³²⁴ *Philosophy of Right* §46

of this mediation whereby I hold property not merely by means of a thing and my subjective will, but by means of another person's will as well and so hold it in virtue of my participation in a common will."³²⁵ With the concept of contract we arrive at the next dialectical step: the determination of the person was lacking (so that we had a person determined as indeterminate) and so the person gave rise to the concept of property, according to which possession of property gave the person determination; however, since property is determined by the arbitrary will of the person, we find that property does not in fact solve the problem of the indeterminacy of the person, since the person is still ultimately defined by his indeterminate will (the domination of the person's will over the thing); so the necessity of my having property is found to rest upon a principle, and this is the principle of "contract".

Now, Hegel does not propose a concrete principle according to which property should be divided, but is more interested in the "recognition" that allows property, however gained and divided, to belong necessarily to a person. We must remember that it is not the amount of property owned or what is owned, but ownership *simpliciter* that gives the person her determination. So, in describing the concept of contract, Hegel does not describe a concrete principle upon which contract should be based, so much as explain why principles upon which property ownership is based are necessary, and that these principles are what are referred to as "contract".

³²⁵ *Philosophy of Right* §71

Contract allows for a more determinate concept of personality through the introduction of “absolute difference between independent property-owners”.³²⁶ What this means is “that each, in accordance with the common will of both, ceases to be an owner and yet *remains* and *becomes* one.”³²⁷ To grasp this, we need to refer back to the concepts of identity and difference discussed in the section on “essence” in the *Logic* (see chapter 5 above). As we have seen, the problem with the concept of personality is that it is too indeterminate: the person in its very determination cannot be distinguished from another person. The introduction of the concept of property fails to solve this problem, since its essential element is still the arbitrary will of the person and so is still the concept of what is determined by the indeterminate will. With the concept of contract, the unity of the persons into a “common will” is granted, so that the persons are in this sense indeterminate and are not distinct from each other, but it is precisely this common will that “posits” their difference: that is to say, the form that contract takes dictates the way that individuals are determined. This should bring to mind Hegel’s logic of identity: the identity of the person with itself (and with any person), results in the positing of an internal difference. In other words, *I*, an individual will, gain my determinate identity from the identity of the common will, that posits such a determinate identity.

³²⁶ *Philosophy of Right* §74

³²⁷ *Philosophy of Right* §74

We should also note the parallels between this and the discussion of the will in the previous section above. Just as the arbitrary will demanded, for dialectical reasons (because the arbitrary will was contradictory, since it was both determinate and indeterminate), that a principle external to it be posited, so the arbitrary possession of property demands (because it is still both determinate and indeterminate) an appeal to an external principle. This is what the differentiation of the common will through contract amounts to: a difference is posited since the common will is contradictory, since it is sheer self-identity, and thus both determinate and indeterminate (that is to say, it is determined as identity, but this sheer self-identity is *empty* and so is indeterminate).³²⁸

Though this description of contract is very abstract, we can see how this fits with a more concrete conception of what “contract” means. With the concept of the person, the person was the immediate bearer of rights, so that, in order to respect rights, as we saw, we must respect others as persons. Then we saw that in order to have a determinate conception of what a person is, we had to conceive the person as the owner of property. However, this conception of the person is too indeterminate, since the possession of property is based on the subjective decision of a still indeterminate person. The answer to this problem arises with contract, according to which we respect others as persons according to what we have agreed constitutes the person’s rights. We now have a less abstract concept of what it is to respect another: by contractual agreement we

³²⁸ See chapter 5 above for the problem of empty identity.

arrive at the point where we know concretely what it means to infringe the rights of another, since I now know what things I may use and otherwise interact with without obstructing the rights of others. This moment of *positing* that contract introduces allows us to conceive of a system according to which we respect the rights of others according to a set of explicit rules that have been posited by us.

Thus: “In contract right in itself is present as something *posited*, while its inner universality is there as something common in the arbitrariness and particular will of the parties.”³²⁹ This is in line with what we have seen above, and what we know about Hegel’s dialectical method. What Hegel is saying is that the very arbitrariness of the person is what gives rise to the demand for an external set of rules for determining the person, and so what is posited is posited as something that applies to the “arbitrariness” of the person (we do not abandon this arbitrariness and replace the arbitrary person with some sort of higher rational being: the “higher rationality”, if we want to call it that, belongs to the still arbitrary and indeterminate person, since this arbitrariness remains an important part of what the person is: the point of contract is that it *negotiates* the very arbitrariness and immediacy of the person, and so this arbitrariness and immediacy remains as an essential part of what it is to be a person.).

³²⁹ *Philosophy of Right* §82

Contract thus gives a sort of external necessity to the determination of the person through his possession of property, an external necessity that is posited by the “common will”, or by the mutual recognition of persons. The next concept to arise is the concept of “wrong”. Wrong first arises when the rights of one person “clash” with those of another.³³⁰ Hegel divides the different sorts of wrong that he identifies into three types. First of all comes “non-malicious wrong”. Non-malicious wrong is relatively unproblematic: since there is a “common ground”³³¹ (as we saw that there must be where there is contract) that both parties recognise, it is simply a matter of separating particular, and so arbitrary, demands from those that are made by the common, mutually recognised right. With non-malicious wrong, we are effectively still in the realm of contract, since these “clashes” arise from misunderstandings of the recognised authority of the law, rather than wilful rejection of the law.

However, the possibility of misunderstanding of the law points to a larger problem, which is parallel to the problem of the external principles of abstract moral right discussed in the previous section. What it points to is the fact that, although the positing of rules by the common will in the form of contract gives necessity to the determination of the person, which particular rules are posited is nevertheless, ultimately, arbitrary. Remember, it is the *positing* of rules that lends necessity to the determination of the person through property, not the rules themselves (as we saw, the rules themselves arise arbitrarily, but they are

³³⁰ *Philosophy of Right* §84

³³¹ *Philosophy of Right* §85

then affirmed and “retroactively” determined as necessary). Thus the individual person can fail to see what is right at first, until what has been agreed in common has been explained to her. Once again, then, we have a split in the will: on the one hand we have the particular, indeterminate conviction of the will, while on the other we have the posited right that in fact gives the person determination. It is this split that allows for the possibility of wrong.

Non-malicious wrong becomes the second type of wrong, “fraud”, when the ultimate lack of necessity of what is posited is taken to reduce right to something “merely subjective, and so inessential”.³³² Just as the common will can arbitrarily decide on who owns a piece of property, so can the fraudulent will. As an “Addition” to the *Philosophy of Right* has it: “In the case of civil and non-malicious wrong no punishment is imposed, because in such cases the wrongdoer has willed nothing in opposition to right. In the case of fraud, on the other hand, punishments come in, because here it is a matter of the infringement of right.”³³³ In other words, with non-malicious wrong the problem is that the indeterminacy of the person’s individual will reigns until right, that truly determines the person, is pointed out; with fraud, on the other hand, the person takes himself to be determined by his own will in opposition to the common will. Thus right is infringed, since the fraudulent will opposes itself to right³³⁴, rather than simply being indeterminate through its neglect of right.

³³² *Philosophy of Right* §87

³³³ *Philosophy of Right* §89 (Addition)

³³⁴ *Philosophy of Right* §89

“Coercion” and “crime”, which together constitute the third type of wrong, reflect the problem of the possibility of wrong in a different way. Again, the problem is the split in the person, so that the ultimate lack of necessity of contract can be seen. Coercion involves the subjection of a thing (whether an object or the body of a person – though, Hegel notes, never the free will of a person³³⁵) to an arbitrary will (and again by “arbitrary” I mean the determinate and yet indeterminate will of the person not yet determined by contract). Just as with fraud, coercion can only be possible given the split in the person we have identified: the person can fail to see (or wilfully ignore) the essentiality of the contract, and so can act on the basis of his indeterminate will. Of course, such an act is contradictory for Hegel, since it is to act according to a will that is both determinate (it makes a choice) and indeterminate (since the person can not be properly said to be determinate without contract, for the reasons given above).

Thus Hegel writes:

Since it is only insofar as the will has an existence in something determinate that it is Idea or actually free, and since the existent in which it has laid itself is freedom in being, it follows that force or coercion is in its concept self-destructive because it is an expression of a will which annuls the expression or determinate existence of a will.³³⁶

³³⁵ *Philosophy of Right* §91 N.B “except in so far as it fails to withdraw itself out of the external object”.

³³⁶ *Philosophy of Right* §92

In other words, coercion effectively reduces all determination to the pre-contract level of indeterminacy, since it destroys the binding principles of contract by an arbitrary act of will. However, we should note that it is not enough, for Hegel, to say that this means we should simply (at least at this stage) defend contract and reject coercion for the wrong it is, since the very possibility of wrong points to the problem that we have identified with contract (that it can be taken to be ultimately arbitrary). “Abstract right” we are told “is a right to coerce”³³⁷: we must remember what we have learned above, namely, that the arrival at the concept of contract does not mean that we are now talking about rational beings elevated above their initial, arbitrary selves, but instead should note that contract arises dialectically, so that the abstract person is not eliminated from consideration, but is precisely what remains and is negotiated with in contract. In other words, since abstract right remains, so does the arbitrariness of the person, and thus so will an element of coercion. Coercion is only wrong, we are told, “taken abstractly”³³⁸, that is, in abstraction from the contractual relations that negotiate abstract right and personality and so provide the principles according to which property may be physically taken, kept or used by the subjective will.

When coercion is concretely wrong, it is called “crime”. Crime is, for Hegel, “an exercise of force which infringes the existence of freedom in its concrete sense,

³³⁷ *Philosophy of Right* §94

³³⁸ *Philosophy of Right* §92

infringes right as right”.³³⁹ In other words, crime is coercion that is not mediated by the posited contractual rules that have arisen as a result of the mutual recognition of persons. Stephen Houlgate reminds us that “crime... is based on an illusion – the illusion that my own freedom can be abstracted as I please from the intrinsically universal freedom of personhood.”³⁴⁰ From what we have seen so far in this section, we can see that crime can be said to be based upon an illusion: without the posited universal law of contract, we have seen, the person cannot have a determinate identity, and yet the criminal asserts his will against the law in spite of this. The very idea, then, that the criminal serves his own ends is, for Hegel, an illusion. At the very best, the criminal serves a very indeterminate notion of “person”, a notion that cannot be said properly to belong to him due to its indeterminacy. Houlgate continues: “In so far as I succumb to this illusion and do so abstract from the universal character of freedom I cause the universal character of freedom as right (which must be respected) to be reasserted against me in the form of just punishment. By not allowing my criminal violation of the rights of others to stand, and by thus ‘negating’ my crime, punishment reestablishes the authority and validity of rights as the rights *of* all persons that have to be respected *by* all persons.”³⁴¹ Through punishment then, the criminal is able to find his true self despite the illusion he is under: through punishment the criminal is once again determined by the law. Houlgate further suggests that “what is interesting about crime and punishment

³³⁹ *Philosophy of Right* §95

³⁴⁰ Houlgate 1995 p.871

³⁴¹ Houlgate 1995 p.871

in Hegel's account is that, by abstracting themselves from the universal dimension of their own freedom as persons, criminals turn that universal dimension of their own freedom against themselves, that is, turn it into an abstract, external power or 'essence' that negates their purely personal freedom in the name of the universality of right."³⁴² We might add to this what we have seen above: that crime arose precisely because this possibility of turning universal right against the abstract person showed itself in the very logic of contract, since contract arises from positing, which is ultimately dependent upon the will of persons (so, just as we are free to posit contract, we are also free to break the rules we have set for ourselves). This is what I referred to above as the "split" in the person, a split that arises between the indeterminate and determinate person due to the fact that the person can always (so to speak) reassert himself in the knowledge that he is the creator of law.

We are now approaching the end of the discussion of "Abstract Right" in the *Philosophy of Right*. I have tried in this section to bring out similarities between the development of the logic of abstract right and the logic of the will discussed in the previous section. Just as the abstract moral will posited necessity, so the person posits necessity with contract.³⁴³ The discussion of wrong (including fraud, coercion and crime) is the discussion of the failure of this positing alone to

³⁴² Houlgate 1995 p.871

³⁴³ See previous section, as well as chapter 4 section 4 above: to say that the will "posits" necessity means that there is a certain arbitrariness involved here (which is, however, *concealed*). That is to say, the will brings about contract due to its own (impulsive, abstract moral and free) nature, and, we might say, does not "recognise" or "find" contract as an absolutely necessary feature of its environment.

give us necessity. We will see that the move Hegel makes next should be familiar to us, if we are familiar with the logic of the will's development discussed in the previous section.

Hegel's next move is, of course, to formulate universal and necessary right in such a way that it can be said to be absolutely right. In order to grasp this step, we have to grasp how the fact that the criminal causes universal right to be brought against him leads to the claim that the criminal *deserves* and *needs* to be punished. As we saw, the criminal arises as a logical result of the split in the person, of the fact that the law of contract posited by the common will can be seen to be ultimately arbitrary. There is a genuine problem with the attempt to explain law as necessitated by common will, since the choice of the common will is ultimately arbitrary. Nevertheless, this arbitrary common will must punish the criminal for the reasons discussed above (that is, because the law must be shown to be universal if it is to be coherent), whether it is truly necessary or not. To the unrepentant criminal, this presumably gives the law a tyrannical and spiritless aspect, since it punishes due to the brute fact that it exists in the way it does, rather than because it is justified by a real necessity. Nevertheless, even without such justification, the law in fact is able to assert its own necessity through the fact that its punishment demonstrates its universality. In this way, the law becomes "actual" and the will learns to be lawful "for itself".³⁴⁴ Though initially

³⁴⁴ *Philosophy of Right* §104: Hegel divides the will into the "will in itself" and the "will for itself". The will in itself is the universal free will, while the will that is "merely for itself" is particular. The

only posited, the law thus demonstrates its necessity through its effective elimination of opposition to it (and through its potential elimination of even those criminals it does not catch). Just as in the previous section we saw that the principles of the abstract moral will were shown to be necessary once they were willed by the free will, so the posited laws are necessary once the individual will recognises the effective *necessity* of the will *as it exists*.

Once again, this may seem to be a strange argument that dodges the question that we are raising: that is, “Why these laws and not others?” And once again, in a sense this is precisely what Hegel intends to do: he is showing that this question is the wrong question, and is pointing to a form of necessity that exists in society neglected by this faulty line of questioning. This is the necessity which we invoke when we say “I can do no other”. The law may be contingent in its origins, but as members of society we can construct no logical way to describe the law, other than in terms of necessity. If we really believed the law to be contingent, then law would cease to exist, and so would society as we know it. Such destruction of society simply lies outside of the bounds of “actual possibility” for us, and so it is necessary that we recognise the necessity of the law.³⁴⁵

will in itself becomes “for itself and actual” through the punishment of crime and demonstration of the necessity of the law.

³⁴⁵ See Žižek on this point (e.g. Žižek 2004 p.56): we “retroactively” recognise the necessity of the law (see also discussion of Žižek in the introduction to chapter 1 above).

We might explain this Hegelian logic in a different way. We have already seen where the positing of the law comes from: it comes from the logical necessity – the internal demand – for an external solution to the contradiction of the determinacy and indeterminacy of the abstract person. The lack of necessity can be pointed out, since the specific form of law that is posited (the specific character of the law that this particular group of people has come up with) is one among many that could have been posited. However, the fact that the common will could have resolved differently does not in fact mean that the individual can cause the common will to will differently.³⁴⁶ The law is necessary due to the fact that it is the only law we have. The choice available to the individual will is thus to obey the law or not to obey it: to behave in accordance with right or to behave wrongly. Since behaving wrongly leads to indeterminacy, so that the wrong-doer cannot even properly be said to be helping himself, the individual must necessarily act in accordance with right.

The will that recognises the truth of this is what Hegel calls the “moral will”. Houlgate describes the moral will as “the will that acknowledges and internalises the explicit difference between individual arbitrariness and universal individual freedom and right”.³⁴⁷ The moral will “internalises” what it sees as the only way

³⁴⁶ Note: of course, some of the greatest criminals, e.g. Napoleon, acted on the knowledge that they could in fact change the common will. But for this reason they could never be happy – see e.g. *Philosophy of History* pp. 26-7: “The History of the World is not the theatre of happiness. Periods of happiness are blank pages in it, for they are periods of harmony – periods when the antithesis is in abeyance.” In other words, in order to be happy one must be content and not oppose the common will in such a way that historical changes occur.

³⁴⁷ Houlgate 1995 p.872

to be free (or, to stick to the language we have been using so far, to be “determinate”).

So we have seen in this section that the positing of law gains necessity “retroactively” (to use the Deleuzian/Žižekian term³⁴⁸). The necessity means that, in practice, the moral person has a stark choice between being moral or not, and does not in fact have the opportunity to create his own values (to draw on the infinite range of possible options that are abstractly available to him). Thus we are concretely presented with an unalterable and necessary set of moral rules. Just as we saw with the material discussed in the previous section, this move describes something seemingly undeniable about the necessity we in fact claim for our actions in everyday life. If the process of granting necessity by concealment of possibility seems unsatisfactory, we will soon see that it is the very unsatisfactory nature of this move that points to the truth of it. We will see below that Hegel is effectively claiming that if we think about the meaning of “absolute knowing” incorrectly, then we will remain unsatisfied.

In section 1 we saw that, for Hegel, we must not begin our examination of the political with principles that we take to be absolute, but must arrive immanently at the reasons for the *positing* of such principles. The use of the term “positing” fits with what we saw in chapters 4 and 5 above: positing is, for Hegel, an appeal to something external, but the latter arises due to the immediate character of

³⁴⁸ See introduction to chapter 1 above (footnote to discussion of Burbidge)

that which posits. In the case of contract, this arises as something that must mediate the will externally, even though it arises due to the intrinsic requirements of the (arbitrary) person. (In the case of the abstract moral will, as we saw in section 1, principles determine the will externally, but these principles arise due to the intrinsic requirements of the arbitrary will.) Also discussed in this section was the concept of “self-concealment” of the origin of principles, which was used to describe the way in which the move from abstract moral will to free will, or contract to the necessity of contract (morality), involves a necessary sublation of the possibility of choosing different principles or laws. We say that this possibility is “sublated”, rather than merely “cancelled out”, since abstraction, or possibility, remains an essential part of the systematic picture that Hegel gives us of the political subject. As we saw in section 1, we are impulsive creatures as well as moral, law-following creatures and this (as we will see below) determines the sort of law-following creatures that we are. By the end of this chapter, we will see that the Hegelian concept of “absolute knowing” is important for this reason: we must know ourselves in a certain way if we are to know ourselves while taking into account the necessary concealment of our impulsive and arbitrary natures.

3: Morality

With the “person” of abstract right, we were dealing with what we might call a “one-dimensional” creature. As we saw, the person is the abstract will put into a social setting. The person either gets its way, or is hindered from doing so by an external “principle”. At the end of the section of abstract right, where the principle is internalised (since, as we saw, it is recognised as necessary as a result of the universality of the law) we move from consideration of the person of abstract right to the *moral* will, which is, we might say, “two-dimensional”, since it retains the character of the person, by opposing itself to “principles”, and yet has made these principles internal to it: the moral will thus recognises itself to be both impulsive and law-following. The moral will always has these two sides, so that it is defined by this relation to itself, by this relation of its principles to its person. We might bring out the contrast between abstract right and morality by comparing this with the contrast between being and essence in the *Logic*: while abstract right was governed by the necessity of making the simple being of the person determinate (just as in the logic of being was governed by the necessity of finding a determinate concept of simple being), morality is governed by our thinking about the very movement that arises from the determination of the person in this way (just as essence was governed by our thinking about the movement according to which indeterminate being was rendered determinate by what was external to it).

It is for this reason that Hegel tells us that, with morality, “a higher ground has been determined for freedom”.³⁴⁹ Freedom is no longer sought merely in the being of the determinate person, but in the very movement that allows such determination of the person to exist. To refer to the *Logic* again, we are thus talking about morality as the realm where principles are seen as what is *essential* to the determination of personality (the latter being, on its own, indeterminate and contradictory).

With morality we move from examination of the mere “person”, to the examination of the “subject”. “Subjectivity” is the name Hegel gives to the movement through which the person can be determinate. The subject and the person are opposed, so that the subject “demands” certain things of the person.³⁵⁰ The person is the “object”, so that the formal principles of the subject are realised when they are *objectively* realised, when the person acts in conformity with them.³⁵¹

However, we have a problem here which should be familiar from our discussion of essence in previous chapters. If a person is only determinate due to moral principles, what can we say that there is about the person that guarantees that it will in fact conform with such a principle? In other words, we have split the will into the determining side of the subject, on the one hand, and the determined

³⁴⁹ *Philosophy of Right* §107

³⁵⁰ *Philosophy of Right* §108

³⁵¹ *Philosophy of Right* §110

side of the person, on the other, so that the person has no concrete character taken on its own. The person, as what we might call the “raw material” of the determining principle, can thus be of a character such that it is incapable of meeting the demands of the moral subject.³⁵²

So, by expressing this problem I am re-stating the position that the person was shown to be in at the end of the discussion of abstract right: without external determination, the person is contradictory and indeterminate. Subjectivity (so, the moral will) is now “the will’s ground of existence”³⁵³, and so the person can only be said to *be* in any determinate way if it is in conformity with the moral will, though there is nothing about the person that guarantees such conformity. We can put this in the terms of “domination” that correspond to relations of essence: a strong moral will is required that can control the person, since the person, as indeterminate, cannot bring itself to act freely but must be forced to be free.

When the moral will, or the subject, dominates the person in such a way that its moral “purpose”³⁵⁴ is achieved, the result is “action”. Action, as Hegel defines it, must have “an essential relation to the will of others”.³⁵⁵ We cannot have action, Hegel tells us, until we have moral will. This might at first seem strange, since what is contract if not a relation to others demanded by social rules? However,

³⁵² *Philosophy of Right* §111

³⁵³ *Philosophy of Right* §112

³⁵⁴ see *Philosophy of Right* §109 for “purpose”

³⁵⁵ *Philosophy of Right* §113

contract was “grounded in arbitrariness”³⁵⁶: as we saw, contract arose from the demand that the person have property, but the details of *what* is seized by a person and *how much* were arbitrary, until the posited law of contract was posited as necessary, at which point we arrive at the moral will. It is only with moral will, then, that the necessity of contract can be recognised, and contract can be seen as an *essential* relation to the will of others, and not an arbitrary one.

The story we have so far of morality, then, allows us to fill out, as it were, our story of the way that contract works. Prior to morality, contract had a certain “content”, which might appear arbitrary to the individual person, and thus, as we saw, wrong might arise (either through ignorance of the law, or through fraud and crime, which actively oppose it). Prior to morality, contract established certain rights, but the individual had no right to question the authority of the law, since the law was what ultimately established what right was. With morality, now that the law has been shown to be necessary, we can talk of the “right of action” according to which “the content of the action, as carried out in immediate existence, shall be entirely *mine*, that thus the action shall be the *purpose* of the subjective will.”³⁵⁷ If I am acting morally, then the action I take in accordance with contract is recognised by me as necessary, so that my relation to others, mediated by contract, is seen as essential by me. Thus my own purposes, in accordance with the law, are met by the act of obeying the law.

³⁵⁶ *Philosophy of Right* §113 (Remark)

³⁵⁷ *Philosophy of Right* §114

We have seen, then, that the Hegelian story runs as follows: persons each have their own aims and intentions, and these aims and intentions must be mediated by contract if the persons are to have a determinate existence. Contract is required so that determinate persons can have their desires realised. Once the necessity of contract is recognised, I develop a moral inclination, a desire to act in such a way that the laws are obeyed. Since I act in such a way in order that the needs and desires of determinate persons can be met, the purpose of the moral will is the “welfare” or “happiness” of myself and others.³⁵⁸

However, welfare turns out not to be enough, since it can, in certain circumstances, conflict with abstract right. If one’s life is in danger, then one has a “right of distress”, according to which property rights can be ignored in order to protect life.³⁵⁹ Hegel stresses that this is “a right, not a mercy”³⁶⁰, which means that we have a contradiction: consideration of welfare brings into play new rights that can contradict the old ones. Right and welfare, which were both supposed to be necessary (since right must be universal, and the welfare of all is what logically emerged from the concept of right), thus turn out to be

³⁵⁸ *Philosophy of Right* §123; see also §124- §125: note that it is not until §126 that Hegel talks about the welfare of others. The moral will at first recognises that its *own* happiness is made possible by the law, but this turns out to depend upon the happiness of others.

³⁵⁹ *Philosophy of Right* §127

³⁶⁰ *Philosophy of Right* §127

contingent.³⁶¹ Again we have a contradiction, since right and welfare are both necessary and contingent.

From this contradictory state of affairs arises the “good”, which is “*freedom realised*, the absolute end and aim of the world”.³⁶² It is the unity of right and welfare: not only does the will that wills the good will according to the interests of others, but also wills in accordance with right.³⁶³ However, this does not mean that we think each (right and welfare) in abstraction from each other, and then put these abstract concepts together, since we have seen that this cannot work (since abstract right and welfare can conflict when life is threatened).³⁶⁴

The good, then, is something that stands above abstract right and welfare and *mediates* their relation to each other. We might put it as follows: since it turns out that right and welfare are contingent they are indeterminate; we need to appeal to something other than right and welfare in order to determine the necessary rules according to which right and welfare are dealt with. Without something to mediate right and welfare, we can find no necessary rules for their application, that is, we can never be sure that we withhold right or welfare justly in those circumstances where a conflict emerges. The good is the principle, external to right and welfare, which arbitrates the application (again, not just enforcement and provision) of right and welfare. The good will does its duty, we

³⁶¹ *Philosophy of Right* §128

³⁶² *Philosophy of Right* §129

³⁶³ *Philosophy of Right* §130

³⁶⁴ *Philosophy of Right* §130: “If either of these moments becomes distinguished from the good, it has validity only insofar as it accords with the good or is subordinated to it.”

are told, when it acts in accordance with right and promotes welfare; however, the good will must do more than this since it must perform its task of mediation of right and welfare, and the search for a principle according to which this mediation can be carried out leads to the question: “what is my duty?”³⁶⁵

For Hegel, to do one’s duty is precisely to mediate right and welfare in accordance with the good, and we can say very little more than this, for Hegel.

“All that is left to duty... is abstract universality, and for its determinate character it has *identity without content*, or the abstractly positive, the indeterminate.”³⁶⁶

The good must determine right and welfare by providing necessary principles according to which they are determined, thus saving right and welfare from the indeterminacy and contradiction in which they were sunk. In this way we have, with the good, once again a moment of positing an external rule in response to the immediate demands of the prior concepts, in this case right and welfare. The problem is, once again, that although the good can provide a principle according to which right and welfare can be mediated, the good itself is indeterminate and so arbitrary.

All that the good will amounts to, for Hegel, “is the subject’s absolute inward certainty of himself, that which posits the particular and is the determining and decisive element in him, his *conscience*.”³⁶⁷ It might be helpful to compare Hegel

³⁶⁵ *Philosophy of Right* §134

³⁶⁶ *Philosophy of Right* §135

³⁶⁷ *Philosophy of Right* §136

and Kant on this point: Kant's categorical imperative, on a Hegelian reading, does no more than provide such certainty for the moral agent. It does not, for Hegel, in fact provide a coherent and determinate notion of the good. The categorical imperative is, for Hegel, an "empty formalism"³⁶⁸, since it only provides an "absence of contradiction" in the rule which, if the principle of non-contradiction is central to your logic, will give the moral agent the sense of certainty. For Hegel, then, Kant's moral philosophy cannot demonstrate to us the nature of the good (since the concept of the good must ultimately be "indeterminate" and "abstractly positive" when taken on its own – that is, when taken as the highest principle), but can provide a model for developing a sense of moral certainty.

This sense of moral certainty – "conscience" – is the "formal side" of the good will; the good itself would be the *content* of the good will.³⁶⁹ Both conscience and good will are indeterminate, so that, as long as my conscience can posit something as non-contradictory, the moral will can justify just about anything. The will can take up what is good, or can simply act in accordance with its own particularity: since it has no principle for telling one from the other (since both are indeterminate), reliance on conscience can thus result in "evil".³⁷⁰

We end up at a point, then, where the will recognises its own activity as self-motivated and self-justified, in such a way that it can either take up what is good

³⁶⁸ *Philosophy of Right* §135 (Remark)

³⁶⁹ *Philosophy of Right* §137

³⁷⁰ *Philosophy of Right* §139

as its principle, or else take up its “own particularity” or “self-will” as its principle, and so the moral will is capable of evil. Just as we saw that the capacity of the will of abstract right to do wrong pointed to a contradiction in the concept of abstract right, so the capacity of the moral will to do evil points to a contradiction in the concept of will. Once again, the moral will turns out to be indeterminate in its very determination: though the moral will is defined as the will that acts in accordance with principles, it can take these principles from where it chooses and so lacks determinacy.

Once again, then, we are in a familiar position. The moral will finds its determination in the posited principles according to which it acts, but the necessity of these principles themselves, by being essentially in question, leaves the moral will indeterminate. Once again, the posited principles have to be posited as necessary, which is done by recognising the lack of choice that the moral will has. The moral will cannot in fact determine the externally posited principles, but must either accept these principles or be evil.

The moral will must thus recognise that it finds its determinacy necessarily in the good that is posited. Thus to define “subjective will” as something separated from the good is to give an indeterminate definition: the determinate subjective (moral) will is the good will, where the good is posited (we might say “pre-posed” or “presupposed” – see chapter 4 above) as external to the moral will and not created by it, but only “determined” by it, in the sense that it is actively

taken up by the moral will (again, see chapter 4 above: this is the logic of “determining reflection”).

Morality thus becomes ethical life, when the moral will recognises that the determinate “good” that it requires in order to be determinate itself cannot be found in or created by the activity of the moral will, but must come from the outside, must be found by the moral will in the ethical life in which it finds itself.

In sections 1 and 2 we learned that the *systematic* treatment of political concepts by Hegel allows us to see that we are impulsive creatures, as well as the sort of creatures that follow laws (as we saw in chapter 6, we only think freely, for Hegel, when we think systematically in this way and allow ourselves to see many sides of a situation, that is, to recognise various steps in the development of the Concept).³⁷¹ This truth becomes explicit to the moral will, as we have seen in this section. We have seen that when these two sides (the impulsive and the law-following) are taken in relation to each other as belonging to a unified whole we have the political “subject” proper (though subjectivity and objectivity were discussed prior to discussion of the moral will we do not, for Hegel, have a full picture of the political *subject* until we have a picture of the moral will). We have seen that with this subject we have something *essential*, that takes up the form

³⁷¹ See Althaus 2000 p.141: it is this characteristic of Hegel’s thought that led Sulpiz Boiserée to write of Hegel’s “absolutism”. For Boiserée, Hegel is “the philosopher of everything the same, the philosophy of yes on the one hand, and no on the other.” So, in this case, *yes* we are rational, but we are also non-rational: in order to think these aspects together in a coherent way (so that we are not simply making a contradictory statement) we must think them systematically.

of domination that characterises essence (the impulsive and arbitrary side of the will is governed by moral principles). We have also seen that the moral will is the form of the will that *desires* to act in accordance with the law, so that its laws belong to it (the laws are “mine” for the moral will). Moral action, we saw, consists in the mediation of right and welfare (human happiness – welfare – thus comes into the picture so that we are not only concerned with what people have a right to, but also how they can be happy), and to do one’s duty is to act in such a way that this mediation can occur in accordance with what is good. However, this consideration of what is good turns out to be arbitrary, unless our certainty of what is good is made necessary by what is external. In the next section we will examine the ethical life, external to the moral will, that makes good action necessary.

4: Ethical life

“The *concrete* identity of the good with the subjective will, and identity which is therefore the truth of them, is *ethical life*”.³⁷² In ethical life the “the ethical substance and its laws and powers are, on the one hand, an object over against the subject, and from the latter’s point of view they *are* – ‘are’ in the highest sense of self-subsistent being... On the other hand, they are not something alien to the subject. On the contrary, his spirit bears witness to them as to *its own essence*, the essence in which he has a *feeling of his selfhood*, and in which he

³⁷² *Philosophy of Right* §141

lives as in his own element which is not distinguished from himself.”³⁷³ This is because the good found in ethical life has been posited as necessary by the moral will, so that ethical life is not merely external, but is something willed by the moral (now “ethical”) will, as that which makes the will determinate.³⁷⁴

Ethical life brings with it “duties”, since the recognition by the will that it must be determined by ethical life means that it must obey the rules of ethical life, the objective rules of society, that exist externally to our subjective inclinations.³⁷⁵

Now, Hegel tells us the following about “duty”:

The bond of duty can appear as a *restriction* only on indeterminate subjectivity or abstract freedom, and on the impulses of the natural will or of the moral will which determines its indeterminate good arbitrarily. The truth is, however, that in duty the individual finds his *liberation*; first, liberation from dependence on mere natural impulse and from the depression which as a particular subject he cannot escape in his moral reflections on what ought to be and what might be; secondly, liberation from the indeterminate subjectivity which, never reaching reality or the objective determinacy of action, remains self-enclosed and devoid of actuality. In duty the individual liberates himself so as to acquire his substantial freedom.³⁷⁶

I have considered it worthwhile to quote this passage in full since here we find a clear justification of the reading I have offered so far of the *Philosophy of Right* as developing in accordance with the concept of *freedom as determination*. That is,

³⁷³ *Philosophy of Right* §§146-7

³⁷⁴ This is important: ethical life is *willed* by the moral will, but its precise nature does not logically follow from any characteristics of the moral will.

³⁷⁵ *Philosophy of Right* §148

³⁷⁶ *Philosophy of Right* §149

the individual is free in doing her duty because it is in this way that she escapes the indeterminacy of one who merely follows her impulses or subjective aims: the one who does her duty is free because she is determinate, because the ethical good allows the will to escape the indeterminacy of the will that follows arbitrarily decided principles.

By acting in accordance with ethical rules, the ethical individual follows “custom”. Such custom is a “second nature” for the ethical individual: what Hegel is pointing out is the fact that the ethical individual does not need to create principles like the moral will does, but merely follows the rules that are available to it.³⁷⁷ Of course there is nothing preventing the will from calling custom into question, but when it does it acts *morally* rather than *ethically*. Now, this does not mean that the ethical will (insofar as it remains ethical and does not revert back to morality) blindly follows rules. We must remember at what point the ethical arose: it arose when the moral will looked for a principle that could determine the good that mediates right and welfare. Thus the ethical will can only exist where ethical rules exist in society that so in fact mediate right and welfare for the sake of the good. Of course, the will is also capable of obeying laws that do not meet these criteria, but insofar as it does this, the will is not ethical. Such a will would be “evil”, since it follows a principle that negates

³⁷⁷ *Philosophy of Right* §151

right and welfare (decides when right and welfare must be limited) according to a principle that exists for its own sake and not for the sake of the good.³⁷⁸

The ethical individual should not, then, be viewed as a mindless creature that obeys orders, but as someone who recognises the good to be found in the ethical institutions and practices of his day. “For, when his character is ethical”, Hegel tells us “he recognises as the end which moves him to act the universal which is itself unmoved but is disclosed in its specific determinations as rationally actualised.”³⁷⁹ The ethical will looks to the universal just as the moral will does, but recognises the universal in the institutions and practices of her day, rather than trying to capture the universal in a principle as the moral will does.

In ethical life, as we have seen, the will need not create principles for itself but can find them instead. The ethical will does not seek certainty through rigorous application of principles in the way that the moral will does, but recognises good in existing institutions and practices. One way that the will can find such principles is in the “family” through “love”.³⁸⁰ Love shows us how to act through feeling, and the will is able to recognise its actions in the family as good by allowing itself to be guided by this feeling. This feeling is described in an Addition as a sort of “consciousness”: it is “the consciousness of my unity with another, so that I am not in isolation by myself but win my self-consciousness

³⁷⁸ We can find this definition of “evil” in the *Philosophy of Right* §139 and *Enc. Logic* §24 (Addition 3)

³⁷⁹ *Philosophy of Right* §152

³⁸⁰ *Philosophy of Right* §158

only through the renunciation of my independence”.³⁸¹ So, through feeling we are reminded that, independently of the duties brought upon us by fellow human beings we are indeterminate and so unfree.

Of course, we are not bound to all of our fellow human beings by love. “Civil society” denotes another form of ethical society based not on love but on self-interest and recognition that my self-interest is bound up with the interests of others. Of course, the moral will has already recognised this, which was, we recall, where the concept of “welfare” came from. However, civil society describes the determination of such interests not by a subjective principle, but by an objective set of rules embodied in ethical life. As objective and ethical, such rules will have been *found* by the moral will as already existing, just as all of ethical life is, and these rules take the form of necessity due to the will’s acceptance of the necessity of being governed by ethical life for the sake of its own determination. Within civil society we find the “system of needs”, which is where we first arrive at the concept of the “human being” proper.³⁸² Until now we have dealt with abstract aspects of the human being – her personality, her subjectivity – but the human being is, unlike these aspects, concrete and objective. By saying that the human being is concrete we should note that Hegel does not mean that she is the sum total of all the abstract aspects of the will that we have seen so far (though she is all of these), but that the human is properly *objective*, in the sense that the *humanity* of the person or the subject is

³⁸¹ *Philosophy of Right* §158 (Addition)

³⁸² *Philosophy of Right* §190 (Remark)

something external to personality and subjectivity, and which subjectivity can only reach by making the move described at the end of the section on morality: by recognising what is external (and “found”) as the principle that determines it. As concrete, the human being will have concrete needs that are not determined by the abstract character of the person (by right) or by the subject (by morality), but which are wholly external to these aspects.

In order to clarify what Hegel is getting at with the concept of the human being we might put it as follows. We could perhaps describe this “finding” as something *stupid* about our logical development³⁸³: we abandon our own principles and accept something contingent and ready made, the “human being” with its concrete needs, and so something made not according to rational principles, but *accepted* on the basis of such principles. In other words, what we have learned from the logical development of the *Philosophy of Right* is that pure rationality leads to rationality being determined by what is *concrete* and contingent, though made necessary by an act of will.³⁸⁴

With civil society we see a sort of repetition of what has gone in previous sections, only now we are not dealing just with the abstract concepts of right and welfare, but are talking about what is concrete (that is, this “real” element that is

³⁸³ See e.g. Žižek 1989 p.208, where Žižek makes this point with regard to the role of the king in the state as Hegel conceives it. It is the “non-rational, biologically determined presence” of the king that is important.

³⁸⁴ And this is what is meant by what is free and universal *giving itself over* to another and so on (see discussion of “free love” and “boundless blessedness” in chapter 6 section 1).

determined, in the way that I have described, by what is abstract³⁸⁵). As we have seen, these abstract concepts give way to what is concrete, so that their limits can be determined and the will can be determinate. In order to satisfy *need* work must be done, but this work will be determined by “the nature of the material worked on” as well as “the arbitrary will of others”.³⁸⁶

But how, we might ask, is this determination by material and by arbitrary will conducive to the good? We must remember that the will is determinate insofar as its actions are governed by a principle that can mediate right and welfare in accordance with the good (and so not arbitrarily, which would lead to “evil” – see previous section). For it to be the case that our being governed by such contingent circumstances is *good*, the conditions of work must be regulated by “the administration of justice”, which provides the principles according to which right and welfare can be mediated in accordance with the good.³⁸⁷ Now, the administration of justice cannot simply bypass the contingency and arbitrary nature of needs and work: justice must be administered in accordance with the concrete demands that reality makes. “In civil society”, Hegel writes, “property rests on contract and on the formalities which make ownership capable of proof

³⁸⁵ Note use of “real” here: using the term in this way diverges slightly from Hegel’s use of the term (as we saw in chapter 3 section 7 above, *reality* is a very abstract concept). We need to keep in mind that I am using the term “real” in the way that Žižek uses it, to describe a non-rational “kernel” of the actual (see Žižek 1989 p.45: on my reading, this “insupportable, real, impossible kernel” is that aspect of actuality which simply *is*, that is to say, actuality as it turns out to be once the logic of reflection has drawn to a close).

³⁸⁶ *Philosophy of Right* §197

³⁸⁷ *Philosophy of Right* §188

and valid in law.”³⁸⁸ It is only with the introduction of such contingent formalities that we move from contract considered as abstract right to contractual law proper.

With this concrete conception of law comes the concept of “danger”.³⁸⁹ With abstract right the requirement for law (for “contract”) was absolute, since with the concept of the person was abstract and simply demanded that each individual “be a person and respect others as persons”, alongside the recognition that a person is defined by the fact that she owns property. Of course, in a sense, given what we know about the meaning of “dialectic” for Hegel (see discussion above of Hegel’s systematic approach), concrete law also has this absolute character, since we can take it abstractly if we wish. But in addition to this abstract, absolute character, law now protects the concrete social (and economic) situation in which we find ourselves. Thus crime is not just an absolute breach of right, but creates a danger for the stability of the concrete conditions of society. Now that the law has this concrete character, is embodied by its task of protecting the concrete social (and economic) situation, it exhibits more “leniency” than before: the level of punishment will be related to how strong the society feels itself to be and how dangerous the crime is.³⁹⁰ It is precisely this pragmatic character of ethical life which differs from the abstract and moral notions of right: since the realisation of the abstract and the moral is

³⁸⁸ *Philosophy of Right* §217

³⁸⁹ *Philosophy of Right* §218

³⁹⁰ *Philosophy of Right* §218

found in the concrete, the law cannot cling to the abstract and absolute conceptions of right but must make decisions based on how right realises itself in concrete ethical conditions.

Thus, “by taking the form of law, right steps into existence”.³⁹¹ However, there is a problem with this, namely: who decides what the nature and strength of the concrete social situation is? With concrete law (and ethical life in general) we have entered the realm of contingency, and one contingent factor is the perspective of the individual in that society, determined by (among other things) their social and economic standing. In other words, the concrete and contingent reality of right is necessarily embodied in self-interested individuals. Necessity is found within contingency through the “court of law”, which serves to eliminate “the subjective feeling of particular interest” from consideration when passing judgements.³⁹² This is done by appealing to the *demonstrability* of the right in question: the right is only recognised if it can be proved to the satisfaction of the court, which has its own procedures for deciding whether or not a right has been sufficiently demonstrated.³⁹³ Of course, there is a certain element of contingency involved here, and we are told in an Addition: “A person may be indignant if a right he knows he has is refused him because he cannot prove it. But if I have a right, it must at the same time be a *posited* right. I must be able to explain and prove it, and its validity can only be recognised in society if its

³⁹¹ *Philosophy of Right* §219

³⁹² *Philosophy of Right* §219

³⁹³ *Philosophy of Right* §222

rightness in itself is also posited.”³⁹⁴ So the contingent element is the fact that, for example, there might happen to be insufficient evidence available to prove a right; on the other hand, such contingency is necessary, since (as we saw in the previous section) the will must be determined by what is concrete. We cannot rely on what is simply in our hearts, but must be able to explain our rights in such terms that fellow members of society can agree, and in this way we can say that our rights are posited (and, by our recognition of this, posited as posited) and are thus determinate.

The court of law, then, determines what is right, and judges individual cases concerning right where right is disputed. As such, it forms an essential part of ethical life, where, as we have seen, ethical life involves the concrete realisation of right. With the court of law, then, we have a good example of the way in which the institutions of ethical life actualise right. We see that, for Hegel, there is a huge difference between the pure concept of justice that the moral will might have, and actual justice as realised in ethical life. For Hegel, this distinction is necessary, since the pure justice of the moral will has been shown to be problematic.

We should note here that Hegel is not saying that we should settle for something that falls short of true justice. Ethical institutions will always run the risk of letting people down, but they can be improved. What Hegel *is* arguing is that,

³⁹⁴ *Philosophy of Right* §222 (Addition)

given the logic of freedom, the moral sense of justice and the justice of (for example) the courts must relate to each other in a certain way. We cannot impose an absolute sense of justice upon the courts, but must realise the limitations of the absolute sense of justice of the moral will and allow ethical life to be formed accordingly. Thus we have *freedom* and not *domination*: the principle is determined by what is contingent.³⁹⁵ Ethical life comes into being due to the logical demand of morality, but does not *directly* embody the principles of the moral will. This follows the logic of freedom because it follows the logic of the universal as described in the previous chapter.

We have seen above the way in which, at different stages, the will demonstrates that its freedom lies in what is external to it. So the abstract will fixes upon a principle that it presupposes; abstract right gives itself over to the moral law that it presupposes; the moral will accepts that it must presuppose the concrete social conditions according to which the good is determined and administered. In addition to this, we have already seen (in the previous chapter) the way in which logic moved away from being a logic of domination and dependence (a logic of essence) to being a logic of freedom (a logic of the Concept). It is precisely this move from dependence to freedom that we see each time we make the step from a form of will to what is external to it. To demonstrate this I will conclude this section by looking again at the moral will, and its transition into

³⁹⁵ See chapter 6 above for this definition of freedom: what is free acts according to its own inner necessity, which is the same time contingent because it is mysterious and indeterminate.

ethical life. Through doing this we will also be able to see what makes Hegel's approach to political philosophy so different from other approaches.

As we saw, the moral will can be described as the will that, first and foremost, seeks self-control: it is defined as a will that is divided against itself and operates according to necessary principles in order to bring its contingent side under control. The moral will fails to act in accordance with necessity when it turns out to be dependent upon anything other than its own principles. Thus, when we pursue our desires without consideration for the principles according to which we judge an action to be good, we fail to act morally, from the point of view of the moral will, and act in accordance with a pre-moral form of will. Thus the moral will follows a logic of domination and dependence because of this one-sidedness: the moral will is dominated by its principles that it depends upon for its freedom. As we saw, the logic of morality breaks down when it turns out that the moral will is dependent upon socially determined rules for its conception of the good. However, rather than the arrival of this social element (ethical life) meaning the destruction of the moral will altogether (which would be a domination, by ethical life, of the will that dominates and so would be subject to the same logical difficulties), it instead means a development of the logic of morality from a logic of dependence and domination to one of freedom. Rather than taking its dependence on what is contingent (social norms) to be a refutation of its domination of contingent passions, desires and so on, the moral will (as it becomes the ethical will) wills this moment of contingency (its appeal

to external social norms) in order that it can control contingent passions and desires. This is now a logic of freedom, since the contingent social factors are seen as themselves necessary, so that it is seen that they must be allowed to continue in their own way and do not need to be negated and dominated by the moral will, while the moral will nevertheless continues to follow its own path and perform its task of creating necessary principles for action. Thus freedom is not the absolute negation of domination and dependence, but is what allows domination and dependence to find their proper place, as it were: the will to dominate finds that it cannot be absolute and is itself dependent on something external to it. That is, the moral will is still the will of domination, but only on the basis of its *concealment* of the fact that its principles are *found*.

We can compare this to what we saw in the previous chapter to see that this reflects the logical structure of freedom. Morality has the character of essence, since what is immediate (an impulse, passion or desire) must be mediated (by moral principles). However, as we saw, we cannot determine the nature of the good in this way, since the principles of the moral will cannot with certainty be said to mediate right and welfare. The principles of the moral will are thus indeterminate, and the immediate requirements of the will, right and welfare, are *distorted* by the very principles that are supposed to guarantee them (and thus we can be misled into acting evilly, and even if we act in accordance with

good we do so blindly to some extent³⁹⁶). In the same way we saw (in chapters 4 and 5 above) that the categories of essence necessarily distort what is immediate, so that we do not get true being when we look for what is essential through the categories of essence alone, but the very vague and distorted view of being that essentialist thinking was supposed to avoid. Now, in order to overcome this problem, we cannot, as we saw, return to an unmediated conception of being, since this view has been shown to be inadequate in the logic of being. In the same way, we cannot abandon morality in favour of a view of the will as simply motivated by personal interest, drives and so on, since such a view of the will is inadequate (see section 2 above). Instead we take this essentialist view – that being is necessarily mediated – to its logical conclusion: not only is the activity of the will mediated by necessary principles, but these principles are themselves necessarily mediated, and we cannot discover an absolute principle to which the moral will must conform. As we saw in the previous chapter, this leads us to the negation of the negation: we learn that what is essential is *not* what is *not* determined (reflection brings itself into question). This not being not determined differs from merely being determined (as being was – see chapter 3), since it reminds us that we have come back to determination through the logic of essence. That is to say, we arrive at the point where we realise that the non-mediation of any principle is an impossibility. There are, in a sense, no absolutes, since moral principles are mediated by what

³⁹⁶ There is plenty of support for this view of what it means to act morally in Kant and in some of those who follow him: see especially Fichte, who tells us that a certain faith is required so that we can believe that our good actions will lead to beneficial results (see e.g. Fichte 1994 pp.149-50).

is contingent, while what is contingent is (by definition) mediated. The knowledge of this is what constitutes “absolute knowing” for Hegel: we know our duties not through a transcendent knowledge of something non-mediated, but through the negotiation of what is contingent through the sort of concrete assessment described above (that is, we appeal to traditions, to tried and tested methods and rules). Absolute knowing in this way constitutes a kind of wisdom, a sense of the way in which we can co-exist with our concrete, and thus contingent, surroundings.³⁹⁷

It is important that we have come back to determination via essence because it means that we do not have the simple and inadequate view of determination that we had at the level of being, or abstract right. The ethical will, just like the universal in the *Logic*, is what *persists* as it *develops*.³⁹⁸ So, it has a certain complete character, while also being subject to the contingent conditions in which it finds itself. To say that it has a complete character is to say that it is absolute in a certain sense. The character of the ethical will is what has been described above: it is abstract, impulsive, arbitrary, moral and free. It is abstract because it always turns out to be indeterminate: as we have seen, for the ethical will, one principle turns out to be as good as any other. It is impulsive because it

³⁹⁷ See Geuss 1999 p.94: “In some sense the outcome of Hegel’s theory is to show us that nothing in the world is any the worse for being in some sense ultimately contradictory and a necessary failure, provided one understands its appropriately limited place in the overall philosophical process which is his System.” Thus the absolute knowing that we become capable of through philosophical thinking means that we attain wisdom by seeing that contingency and contradiction have a place in the true picture of the world.

³⁹⁸ See chapter 6 above (see also Trisokkas p.140: Trisokkas takes “persistence” and “development” to be synonymous in the context of the *Logic*)

is always determined by immediate impulses and desires. It is arbitrary because it must make a choice between these impulses on the basis of an indeterminate principle. It is moral, because it will seek a necessity beyond itself for its indeterminate principle. It is free, because it does all this while conforming to external conditions which are beyond its control (which it does not entirely dominate) but which it can nonetheless exist alongside.

What this means is that the lesson of the *Philosophy of Right* is that political problems are ultimately solved non-philosophically. That is to say, a complete philosophical account of the ethical will gives us an account of something that is incomplete, in a sense, since it is governed by what is contingent. With essentialist philosophical thinking, such a claim could make no sense: philosophy gets to the truth, and the truth must be something eternal and unchanging as opposed to what is contingent, to the flux of daily life. Hegel does not abandon the quest for the truth, but the truth is found when we discover the nature of freedom, and so when we discover that philosophical principles cannot be called upon to determine the nature of the just society, but only to remind us of the distance that must exist between philosophical truth and concrete good. The important (for Hegel) concept of “duty” arose, we saw, when duty was thought of as the action that is determined to be good by our moral principles. In this section, we have seen that duty comes to refer to those good actions that are determined to be good by ethical life. To be free is (as we have seen all along) to be determined, and in this section we have seen that we must be determined by

ethical life, for Hegel. Thus duties are followed not because they are deduced from rational principles, but because we are determined by ethical life to perform such duties due to “custom” which ensures that the performance of such duties becomes “second nature”. However, this does not mean that we become automatons, incapable of *assessment* of whether certain actions are good or not: the rules that are found in ethical life are recognised as rules that allow for the mediation of right and welfare, so that ethical individuals follow ethical rules due to their (more or less explicit) recognition of the fact that these rules are good. The love that exists between family members is an example of the less explicit manifestation of the good in ethical life: we do the right thing by our family members – respect them as persons and look after their welfare – by acting in accordance with the way that we feel about them. In a different way, the rules of civil society guide us towards the good without us having to explicitly seek the good: we follow our own interests and, provided that we act in accordance with the law, the good is taken care of. Both of these elements of ethical life point to a continuation of something we recognised as an important aspect of morality: good is now inseparable from desire, so that we act ethically when we not only act in accordance with right but when we desire this course of action, so that we desire our own welfare and the welfare of others. This amounts to what I have described as the *stupidity* of the human condition: the fact that we find what is good in the conditions of the ready-made, desiring subject. There are, abstractly considered, an infinity of possible ways in which one could realise the good, but concretely this realisation is determined by

contingent factors. Thus the administration of justice involves a *negotiation* of material conditions that cannot be assessed in a merely abstract way: not only will the “danger” of a situation (the threat it poses to right and welfare, rather than an abstract judgement of whether it is wrong or right) affect the outcome of our assessment of it, but the fact that concrete procedures must be followed will mean that the ideal of “pure” justice that the moral will has is bound to be missed. One might ask: “who decides what constitutes danger?” and “who decides on procedures?”, but we have seen that this would be to ask a question that misses the point, since what constitutes danger and the way that procedures are carried out (including the way that they alter over time) is determined to a large extent by established rules and traditions, by rules that were developed owing to rational human activity but which, due to the incoherence of abstract moral thinking, cannot and should not be determined by any given person or group of persons.

Any moral judgement – any action which imposes rules on a given situation – must also be determined by established social factors. Thus any act of domination also involves living in harmony with circumstances beyond the individual’s control. I have argued that knowledge of this constitutes “absolute knowing” in the Hegelian sense: absolute knowing is not having the highest abstract principles, but knowing that these principles cannot themselves constitute the good, but only begin to do so when we learn, through wisdom, to negotiate between these principles and social conditions. Neither principles nor

material conditions constitute what is “real”: instead, their *relationship* constitutes what is *absolute, ideal and therefore most real*.

I suggested above that the advantage of Hegel’s philosophical system over many other philosophical systems is that we cannot justify evil practices through Hegel’s system. In fact, it would be truer to say that the justification of evil does not exist in Hegel’s system *because it is the only one that is truly systematic*: that is to say, the one-sidedness of evil, the holding onto a principle for its own sake is precluded by the fact that each and every principle found in Hegel’s work is systematised, so that it is always mediated by the other aspects of the system. We learn in this way that the fault of morality is looking to principles as the highest guide for our activity, rather than, as Hegel does, look to the mediation, or negotiation, of principles for ethical truth.

Conclusion

As I suggested in the introduction to chapter 1, my main aim in this thesis has been to present Hegel as a systematic thinker of immanence. Furthermore, I have tried to argue that being a thinker of immanence means taking contingency to be “irreducible”. To conclude this thesis, I will show how the reading of Hegel I have presented in this thesis achieves these aims. I will explain how my reading responds to the Deleuzian criticisms of Hegel described in chapter 1, and by showing how my reading responds to these concerns I will explain how and why my approach offers a productive and viable approach to Hegel. (Note that I am suggesting that my reading responds to these criticisms in a way that is productive for Hegel studies, not necessarily in a way that would satisfy Deleuze and Guattari.) I will also try to show what contribution my thesis makes to the field of Hegel studies, by discussing some of the ways in which my reading differs from those offered by other commentators on Hegel.

As we saw in chapter 1, Deleuze and Guattari might criticise Hegel for a number of reasons. Firstly, they argue that contingency is real and irreducible, so that the Hegelian attempt to reduce everything to necessity creates an illusion, rather than accurately explaining how events come into being. Secondly, ways of thinking are pre-conceptual for Deleuze and Guattari (they are unconscious “images of thought”), and so analysis of concepts and conceptual structures will

not provide a full explanation of the thought of a philosopher. This means that, for Deleuze and Guattari, Hegel's attempt to show that previous philosophical positions can be sublated and shown to be completed only in Hegel's systematic thinking cannot work: Hegel does not account for the fact that the philosophers he studies had very different problems in mind to his own. Thirdly, philosophy is not simply "thinking about thinking" but is a specific mode of thinking, and we cannot therefore assume that philosophy is the highest form of thinking. Also, concepts create *external* relations between their components, and do not reveal anything essential or "implicit" in those components: since philosophy is not the highest form of thinking, there is no reason to believe that philosophical concepts reveal anything essential about their components. We saw that Deleuze and Guattari also argue that we should think in terms of "interruptions" and not "flows" since no developmental flow is implicit in anything, and any construction of a story of development is imposed *externally* onto the components that the developmental story connects together. We also saw that, for Deleuze and Guattari, "life" (or, more accurately "a life"³⁹⁹) comes before "idealism": idealism imposes values on the world, and doesn't take contingency into account; that is, idealism does not take into account the fact that our values are contingent and that new events do not emerge merely out of the structures that we find in the world, but also out of the *disorganisation* of these structures.

³⁹⁹ "Immanence: a Life" pp.390-1

In sum, Hegel is criticised by Deleuze and Guattari because, they say, he *presupposes* a method and conception of philosophy which he then claims is *necessary* and represents the actual state of affairs: Hegel claims that the dialectic that he describes is real and is what generates events in the world, and ignores other real factors, such as the *disorganisation* that brings new events into being. Hegel has created the “illusion” of immanence because he conceals the fact that he presupposes his dialectical method and so he claims that he is describing a *real* dialectic in the world: as Miguel de Beistegui puts it, “the greatest and possibly most dangerous illusion of all... is that of speculative dialectics, and of negativity, in so far as Hegel believes them to be the immanent source of movement and becoming.”⁴⁰⁰ My aim in this thesis has been to offer a reading of Hegel that responds to this concern, by showing in what sense *contingency*, and not a presupposed dialectic, is the “source” of Hegel’s speculative system.

In chapter 3 I explained that part of what Hegel is trying to do is bring into question what it means to think. We saw that Hegel lamented the death of the spirit of metaphysics in his time: metaphysics sought knowledge of the things *themselves*, but the reflective age in which Hegel lived (and in which we still live today) denied the possibility of such knowledge. Also, metaphysical knowledge was supposed to be an end in itself, and the “critical spirit” of reflection denies

⁴⁰⁰ Beistegui 2010 p.25

that this is possible: for reflection, there is nothing that is simply what it is. However, as we saw, Hegel did not suggest that we turn away from reflection and go back to pre-reflective metaphysical thinking: instead, we must see that reflection has not gone far enough. Hegel tells us in the *Logic* (see chapter 3 above) that we must study reflective thinking systematically, and in this way we will see that reflection points to a new way of thinking beyond it: what he calls “speculative” thinking. For Hegel, *speculative thinking* is *systematic reflective thinking*, and so we get beyond mere reflective thinking – to speculative thinking – by systematising reflective thinking. Though Hegel’s *Logic* is an examination of reflective thinking, it is speculative from the start because it is a *systematic* study of reflection.

We saw that speculative thinking is knowledge that involves knowledge of “spirit”: that is to say, speculative thinking involves knowledge of the process of knowing. It is an improvement upon both traditional (or “classical”⁴⁰¹) pre-reflective metaphysics *and* critical, reflective thinking because it enables us to seek self-sufficient knowledge of things themselves by explaining what must be involved in such knowledge (rather than leaving the notion of things in themselves relatively vague, as traditional metaphysics does): speculative thinking connects knowledge of things in themselves with knowledge of the process of knowing, so that we cannot have the one without the other. For

⁴⁰¹ See discussion of Burbidge below

Hegel, we learn from reflection that our thinking spirit impacts on what we think about, and the speculative thinking that emerges from the systematic approach to reflection ends up reconciling this truth of reflection with the truth that metaphysical knowledge – knowledge of things in themselves – is possible.

In the examination of Hegel's analysis of "pure being" in chapter 3 above, we saw something of how Hegel's systematic study of reflection proceeds. We saw that Hegel's analysis of pure being constitutes a study of reflection, because Hegel formulates being as sheer indeterminacy, and therefore as having no objective content of its own: to think about pure being thus allows us to *think about thinking*, since there is nothing objective about pure being to guide us and so we follow thought where it leads us. I suggested that Hegel *created* the concept of pure being for this very reason: as a way to carry out an *experiment* in thought that allows us to think in a radically new way. Hegel creates the possibility of reflecting upon reflection, and thus creates speculative thinking. (It is in this way that logic *teaches us* to think speculatively, rather than simply dictating how speculative thinking should be carried out. As Hegel tells us in the introduction to the *Logic*, thought requires *practice* if it is to learn to think speculatively. We develop certain habits of thought, which lead us to make certain assumptions and we need to train ourselves if we are to learn to think in the abstract way required for speculative thinking.⁴⁰²)

⁴⁰² see *Logic* pp.56-57

For Hegel, reflecting upon the concept of pure being allows us to draw out necessary associations or connections between thoughts. Furthermore, we learn what constitutes a necessary connection for thought (that is to say, we learn what “necessary” means, for Hegel), and so learn something about what it means to think. I suggested that reflective thinking means *looking for explanation, or looking for determinations that are implicit within what is indeterminate*. I showed that it is our attempt to explain what pure being means that leads us to identify pure being and nothing, according to Hegel. Looking for “explanation” means eliminating mere tautology, I suggested, so that reflective thinking comprises a “drive” (“*Trieb*”) to get beyond mere tautology. In the reflective age, thinking means explaining, and explaining means eliminating mere tautology.

“Nothing” necessarily arises out of “pure being” because there is no way to think pure being without keeping in mind the thought of nothing, if “think” means “explain” (as it does for reflection). Other terms that could be used to explain pure being are reducible to the term “nothing”, so that “nothing” is the only term that is what pure being irreducibly *is*, for Hegel. I suggested that this way of describing a necessary connection between being and nothing tells us something about the Hegelian conception of “necessity”: pure being and nothing are identical not because they have been proven to be so, but because we cannot

prove that it is *not* so; it is for this reason that Hegel tells us that we are free to keep searching for another formulation of pure being, but until we come up with one we have to admit that pure being is simply nothing. However, the fact that we find ourselves compelled to agree with Hegel tells us that Hegel has discovered something essential to our thinking, so that when we think pure being and discover it is nothing we discover that reflective thinking means explanation and therefore means elimination of tautology.

I then looked at Hegel's treatment of the concepts of becoming, determinate being, reality, negation, something, other and alteration, in order to show how we learn about the nature of reflection from the treatment of these concepts too, so that we see that the concepts of being (of the logic of being, as described in the "Doctrine of Being") are considered *unstable* as insofar as they are tautologies, and cannot be explained. The development of the logic of being, I suggested, takes place as reflection searches for deeper and deeper explanation, and rejects tautologies. This is why, in the logic of being, a contradiction leads us to a new concept: reflective thinking will not accept that what a concept *is* and what it *is not* could be identical, since this means a concept is explained only through itself, and so we have a tautology rather than a real explanation.

The reading of Hegel that I offer here responds to Deleuze and Guattari in a number of ways. Firstly, I have tried to show that the logic of being does not

develop in the way it does due to sheer *necessity*: the identity of pure being and nothing comes into being as a result of an experimental strategy employed by Hegel, according to which he tries to explore the nature of reflective thinking by suggesting that we reflect upon an utterly indeterminate concept. By telling us what is “necessarily” connected to the concept of pure being, Hegel is actually exploring the reflective way in which we *in fact think*, and is not telling us (yet) that we *should* think in this way. At this point we are *simply thinking*: on my reading such simple, presuppositionless thinking does not rely on any claim that the way in which we happen to be thinking is a strictly *necessary* way of thinking. This is not to say that the transition between being and nothing *might* not be a strictly necessary one; what I am trying to point to is the way that Hegel’s argument *works* here; that is to say, Hegel argues that we should take being and nothing to be identical because this is where thought *in fact* leads us, and we are unable to think of any other way of formulating being. At this point in the *Logic* Hegel has not got beyond saying anything that is ultimately contingent: he says that our thinking leads us to identify being and nothing, and this can be called “necessary” only because *in fact* we cannot think of any other way to formulate being.

To deal with another of the Deleuzian criticisms, we do not need to assume that the view that Hegel is putting forward is one that is *higher than* or *superior to* other philosophical positions – for example, Parmenides, who would deny that

being and nothing could be identical and claim that being is simply being. On my reading of Hegel, what is essential is not that Hegel proves Parmenides wrong, but that he shows us that, given our way of thinking, we cannot deny that being and nothing are identical. (This is not to say that Hegel does not claim that his position is superior to that of Parmenides – he does that at length – but that his argument in the logic of being does not depend on that claim being true. It is because I am not ultimately denying that Hegel *does* take his philosophical position to be *superior to* and *truer than* others that I am not offering here a refutation of Deleuze and Guattari on this point; I am only trying to show here how this particular Deleuzian criticism that I have identified does not apply here, to the beginning of the *Logic*, where we do not need to make any absolute claims in order to proceed in the analysis of being.)

Also, we do not need to assume that the philosophical method we are employing here tells us anything essential about “being itself” in order to read it in the way I have. So we do not need to assume that philosophy is the highest form of thinking in order to grasp what Hegel is saying here. (Again, I am not denying that Hegel does in fact want to make claims about being itself and about philosophy’s role as “thinking about thinking”, but I am saying that, in the logic of being, Hegel has not got to a point where his argument depends upon such claims.) For this reason we can also see that we do not yet need to claim that this is the only way of thinking being that is implicit in the concept of being: on

the contrary, Hegel accepts that we can stubbornly refuse to develop being in this way and hold onto the claim that “being is being”; only, if we do this, we must accept that we are not being *reflective* in our thinking. Also, as we saw, Hegel can – without harming his argument – leave open the possibility that we could think being differently.

We should also note that nowhere in Hegel’s arguments about pure being does he put developmental “flow” before the “interruption” of thoughts by each other. On the contrary, on my reading Hegel is suggesting that the concept of pure being is interrupted by the reflective way of thinking, so that we cannot simply say that “being is being”.⁴⁰³ Hegel *will* of course get round to explaining the history of ideas in terms of development, but he does not rely on an externally imposed ideal of development at this point. Similarly, Hegel does not yet bring in an account of how we arrived at reflective thinking; on my reading, Hegel is trying to show us how reflective thinking works, but has not yet tried to prove that we *must* think in this way. If we are not naturally compelled to follow Hegel’s argument then, on my reading, there is nothing for us in the *Logic* (and maybe we should start somewhere else, perhaps with the *Phenomenology of Spirit*).⁴⁰⁴

⁴⁰³ See chapter 3 above: the notion that “being is being” calls for an interruption in the sense that we must *start again* with a new concept of being (determinate being, for example) each time we reach such a tautology, according to the demands of reflection.

⁴⁰⁴ In this way I’m agreeing with Houlgate that the *Logic* presupposes that we are modern thinkers who are prepared to begin thinking without conscious presuppositions (see Houlgate

On my reading, then, Hegel is being *creative* at this point in the *Logic*. He is not trying to impose organisation onto our thought but is setting up what I have called an “experiment” in thought that would enable us to construct a speculative system of thinking. Hegel does not describe what he is doing in these terms because ultimately he *does* want to claim that his speculative way of thinking is the best and only way of really thinking, but again he does not rely on this claim at this point.⁴⁰⁵

In sum, in chapter 3 I described the way that Hegel opens his *Logic* and suggested that it is offering us no more than contingent truths, that is, things that *happen* to be true, given our way of thinking. We saw that Hegel explicitly states that his aim in the logic is to systematise reflective thinking, and since he is proceeding without presuppositions he cannot assume at this stage that reflective thinking is *necessarily* the way we should think, he can only treat the way that we in fact think as a “brute fact” about us that he wants to study.⁴⁰⁶ In this way I hoped to show that “speculative dialectics” is not intended by Hegel to be the “source” of movement and becoming in Hegel’s system. Instead, Hegelian logic begins with consideration of a contingent point, namely, the way

2005 p.49: “For Hegel... nothing is needed to begin presuppositionless onto-logic except a willingness freely to suspend one’s favoured assumptions about being and thought and to start from the bare thought of being as such.”).

⁴⁰⁵ So, Hegel does ultimately want to claim that the truths that emerge from the argument of the logic are necessarily true, but he does not rely on this yet. See chapter 3 section 3 above for discussion of Hegel and his *scientific* and *experimental* approach to philosophy.

⁴⁰⁶ See Burbidge on “secondness”: Burbidge 2007 pp.48-55

that reflection thinks sheer indeterminacy. As we saw in chapters 6 and 7 above, dialectic proper is something that comes later, when we establish the *need* for logical necessity (for a systematic ordering of our concepts) in the logic of the Concept.

(It is very important to note that I am *not* saying here that Deleuze and Guattari are mistaken in their reading of Hegel, since all I have said here is that we need to note that Hegel *intends* his logic to begin with contingency: the possibility remains that Hegel is deceiving himself when he claims that he is beginning with sheer indeterminacy and not with speculative presuppositions. This is how I am using Deleuze and Guattari in this thesis: to help us sharpen our understanding of how Hegel wanted to be read – as a thinker of immanence – by showing us why it is that Hegel cannot be a thinker of immanence if we take speculative dialectics and negativity to be the “motor” or “source” of movement and becoming in the *Logic*.)

There are many obvious objections that could be made to my approach to Hegel, some of which I will address here. Firstly, it might seem that since *truth* is important for Hegel – the point of his logic is to get to the truth – then the fact that I am playing down the importance of *necessity* will be problematic. Houlgate writes that “the truth does not simply spring out at us; we must come to meet it in the right frame of mind”, and so it might seem to a commentator

such as Houlgate that I am neglecting the fact that there is, after all, a *right* way of thinking for Hegel.⁴⁰⁷ It is not just the case that pure being *happens* to transform into nothing in our thinking, the objection might continue: we must also note that pure being transforms into nothing because pure being *itself* is nothing, and Hegel's *speculative thinking* allows us to see this truth about being. This leads us on to a second potential objection: the reason that I do not see that, for Hegel, the move from pure being to nothing is *necessary*, is that I fail to note that Hegel's philosophy is *speculative* from the start, because I insist that Hegel begins by *reflecting* upon reflection. That is to say, by beginning with reflection I fail to note that the *Logic* begins where the *Phenomenology* left off: that is, with the identity of thought and being, so that our thought of the identity of being and nothing arises because pure being is *itself* identical to nothing.⁴⁰⁸

I will deal with the second of these potential objections first. My response would be to point out that, on my reading, Hegel *is* thinking speculatively from the start (he is proceeding in such a way that the subject matter is allowed to reveal its own inner development), but that the object of this speculative thinking is *reflective thinking*. I have pointed out above that Hegel introduces his *Logic* by saying that his aim is to systematise *reflective thinking*, and it is this claim that I focus on in my reading: I do not deny that, for Hegel, thought and being are

⁴⁰⁷ Houlgate 2005, p.6

⁴⁰⁸ See Houlgate 2005 p.50: it is the job of the *Phenomenology* to "show ordinary consciousness why it is rational, rather than perverse, to believe with the speculative philosopher that the true structure of being can be found within the structure of thought itself."

identical, but I suggest that this identity does not need to be presupposed in order for the initial arguments in Section One of the Doctrine of Being to work, and that these initial arguments *work* if they offer the beginning of a systematic way of thinking about reflective thinking.

But one might ask: what do I mean by “reflective thinking” anyway? Alfredo Ferrarin points out that modern thinking, for Hegel, is higher than ancient thinking because “it starts from the concrete and individual subjectivity” and so is less “abstract” than ancient thought; however, in beginning with subjectivity some modern thinking allowed itself to introduce an opposition between thought and being (“of which ‘*cogito ergo sum*’ is the best illustration”).⁴⁰⁹ That is to say, “the subject is for itself free, man is free as man because he is in his individuality divine spirit”, and this sense of our own freedom leads us to oppose our essential, divine nature to the contingencies of everyday life.⁴¹⁰ Ferrarin reminds us that, for Hegel, this “principle” of our freedom was unknown to the Greeks: it arose “with the dawn of Christianity”, and “with it man is infinite spirit regardless of birth, citizenship, rank, race or even culture”.⁴¹¹

⁴⁰⁹ Ferrarin 2001 p.45

⁴¹⁰ Ferrarin 2001 p.45

⁴¹¹ Ferrarin 2001 p.45

It is this vision of man as infinite spirit that I take to belong to reflective thinking.⁴¹² On my reading, the logic of being describes the attempt to deal with pre-reflective concepts via reflective thinking, and it is the fact that we are historically determined as reflective beings that, for example, will not allow us to think of pure being as simple, absolute being, without also taking it to be nothing. The logic of being thus reveals to us what reflective thinking is by revealing how reflective beings must think about non-reflective categories. I described how this works in chapter 3. Then in chapter 4 I described how this examination of pre-reflective concepts becomes an analysis of reflection itself: reflection now has to deal with its own principle of its own infinity stated explicitly, so that nothing is simply what it is. In chapter 5 above, we saw how this examination results in the collapse of reflection, which is transformed into speculative thinking. On my reading, then, I am trying to emphasise the fact that, for Hegel, speculative thinking is a development of reflective thinking, since Hegel never abandons the notion that we are “infinite spirit”. It is this that drives my reading of the *Philosophy of Right* in chapter 7: I do not believe that we do justice to Hegel if we claim that, for him, “freedom” is the simply the same as doing one’s duty in an ethical state. Yes, freedom *does* mean this, for Hegel, but it *also* means the sheer infinity of the will: when the abstract will is sublated it nevertheless remains, since it is an essential part of what it means to be an

⁴¹² See previous paragraph: to say that man is “infinite spirit” for reflection is to say that he is free in himself, as an individual. As we saw in chapter 7 this is only true to a certain extent, for Hegel: man must be free in himself, but a higher form of freedom is found in doing one’s duty to others in the state, and so man is not *simply* free in himself, and so is not *simply* infinite spirit, for Hegel. As we saw in chapter 7, it is the fact that we are infinite spirit and so free simply by virtue of being ourselves that we must have *rights* for Hegel: slavery is illogical for Hegel because it signals a failure to realise that all people are free in themselves.

individual, for Hegel. My reading was intended to reflect this *logical truth*: it is a logical truth because it follows from speculative examination of reflection, that is, from a study that allows reflection to reveal its own logic and so reveal itself as systematised knowledge.⁴¹³

So, I am trying to emphasise in this thesis this aspect of Hegel's speculative project: that Hegel has not only to allow *being* to speak for itself and develop according to its own inner necessity, but also has to allow for *thought* to speak for itself and develop according to its own inner necessity. And the form that thought takes today is *reflection*. As Ferrarin tells us: "Hegel's system will have precisely the task of showing *the actuality of the Idea*, the Greek identity of thought and being, *in the individual*, in spirit".⁴¹⁴ So, on my reading, Hegel is indeed carrying out speculative thinking from the start because he is allowing these two truths – that thought and being are identical and that we are infinite as thinking beings – to reveal themselves in his examination of thought. We saw in chapter 3 above that, for Aristotle, the question of the meaning of being was not a philosophical one, and anyone who felt the need to question the meaning of "being" too deeply (for example, by questioning the principle of identity) showed not a keen philosophical mind but merely a lack of education. This is because the nature of being was taken to be something that revealed itself in all

⁴¹³ This is the definition of "speculative thinking", and it connects the "systematicity" of Hegel's thinking with the notion that speculative thinking allows the subject matter to develop of its own accord (so that we see what reflective thinking is like).

⁴¹⁴ Ferrarin 2001 p.46

of our thinking, because the ancient Greeks did not entertain the notion that our thinking might get in the way of a true conception of being. Reflection *does* entertain this possibility, and it is up to Hegel's speculative thinking to show that we can be infinite spirit *and* have a true notion of being.

And this brings us back to the first potential objection I mentioned above: if I admit that, for Hegel, the identity of thought and being is a *truth*, and that it is being *itself* that is identical to nothing (and not merely the thought of it), then how can I ignore the fact that the transition from being to nothing must be something *necessary*? If we follow Houlgate's reading of Hegel, in the *Logic* we see that dialectical development occurs if we think about concepts in the right frame of mind so that we can see what is *implicit* in a concept and make what is implicit *explicit*. History, including the history of philosophy, also develops in this way: for Houlgate's Hegel, history (both world history and the history of philosophy), is the history of freedom being allowed to become more and more what it already (implicitly) is; that is to say, as history progresses people come to realise and make explicit what is implicit in the concept of freedom and come to live their lives accordingly (so that, for example, we learn that universal rights are essential to freedom and so we demand that slavery be abolished in the state).⁴¹⁵ Similarly with the pure thinking that is described in the *Logic*: on Houlgate's reading of the *Logic*, pure being becomes nothing because it *already*

⁴¹⁵ See Houlgate 2005 pp.185ff.

*implicitly is nothing.*⁴¹⁶ On Houlgate's reading, in order to transform pure being into nothing we have to suspend all presuppositions and simply think, openly and self-critically (that is, in such a way that we are prepared to question any of the beliefs we might already have about the subject matter), about what is there before us, so that we can reveal what is already implicitly the case.⁴¹⁷ Furthermore, for Houlgate, when we talk about the equivalence of pure being and nothing we are not talking only of the *thought* of pure being but of "being itself": Hegel's *Logic* is an ontology, and not just a study of the categories of reflection.⁴¹⁸ If Houlgate is right to read Hegel in this way, it might seem that Deleuze and Guattari are right and that Hegel does in fact turn out to be a thinker of the "cult of necessity": for Houlgate's Hegel it is indeed the case that the developments in thinking and in history arise because we discover – through the act of thinking – something about what a concept already *actually is*, so that the modern state arises as we realise what freedom *must be* and speculative thinking begins when we realise that pure being *in fact* is implicitly nothing, becoming, determinate being, and so on. Development is thus determined by what is implicit in the actual state of affairs. Since the cult of necessity is the practice of assuming that new events arise by virtue of the possibilities provided by the current, actual state of affairs, it seems that Houlgate's Hegel – according to whom new events arise as a result of what is implicit becoming explicit – must belong to the "cult of necessity".

⁴¹⁶ Houlgate 2006 p.269

⁴¹⁷ Houlgate 2005 p.17

⁴¹⁸ See Houlgate 2005 p.39: Hegel shows "humility", because he does not impose his way of thinking upon the subject matter but waits to see how it will turn out of its own accord.

However, as I have stated above, part of what Hegel is trying to do in the *Logic* is bring into question what it means to think. I suggested that “thinking” can mean different things for Hegel, and part of his task is to persuade us that *speculative* thinking is the best mode of thinking for modern times. In his reading of Hegel, Houlgate describes what he thinks critical thinking consists in for Hegel, but it is important to note that this very notion of critical thinking itself has to be derived immanently in the *Logic*.

So: the notion of what it means to think has come into question in the *Logic*. What I have tried to suggest in this thesis is that the way in which we think critically must be derived from *reflective* thinking. As we have seen, on my reading of the logic the reflective mode of thinking has its own sense of what it means to think and it is this sense of what it means to think that the *Logic* seeks to examine. It is reflective thinking that seeks to be fully self-critical by trying to make explicit what is implicit, by seeking for explanation of everything that it encounters. This is why Hegel can say that we begin with the subjective “resolve” to think: Hegel is not asking us to be already initiated right at the start in the practice of speculative thinking, but only that we resolve to think and see how *our own thinking* is transformed by its own logic. To do so is to think speculatively. At the start of the *Logic*, therefore, Hegel asks us to resolve to think speculatively, but he does not ask that we begin with any speculative

assumptions. Though Hegel does in fact believe that pure being is *in fact* identical to pure nothing, he does not ask that we assume this at the beginning of the *Logic*, since the *Logic* is an attempt to systematise reflective thinking, and it is not until we have done this that we will arrive at the truth of speculative thinking and the fact that being and nothing are identical.

It is also indeed true that Hegel believes that he has offered a proof that being and thought are identical in the *Phenomenology* (and so our immanent *thought* of being, as identical to nothing, would be the thought of *being itself*): nevertheless, on my reading of Hegel the *Logic* also stands on its own, and as long as we are prepared to reflect upon reflection we will be able to trace the development of reflective thinking until we see the truth of speculative thinking, and therefore the truth that being and thought are identical. In short: on my reading, Hegel's philosophy is indeed a "philosophy without foundations", and therefore the fact that we have – in the *Phenomenology* – a potential foundation for the *Logic* does not count for anything in the final analysis, since foundations will not, for Hegel, offer any certainty that what is built upon them will be true.⁴¹⁹ It is for this reason that Hegel distrusted prefaces and introductions and yet still continued to write them: though offering a basis on which to start can be helpful for getting us to begin thinking, they offer nothing certain on which to

⁴¹⁹ Maker 1994; cf. Maker 1990 p.28

base what follows. I am suggesting that the *Phenomenology* should be read as a preface to the *Logic*, rather than as a foundation.⁴²⁰

As we have seen, for Houlgate, thinking critically is thinking in such a way that we can see “the way thought itself develops” by thinking through “the intrinsic, dynamic determinations of thought”.⁴²¹ In other words, our thinking is already determined in a certain way, and by opening ourselves up to this true way of thinking (rather than thinking according to presuppositions) we can allow the subject matter itself (thought) to develop of its own accord.⁴²² In my view, the danger with an account like this is that it can be misinterpreted as a “classical metaphysical” approach. That is to say, it seems to proceed by placing a principle – in this case, the principle of the identity of being and thought – at the beginning of our investigation. In his *Hegel’s Systematic Contingency*, Burbidge tells us that Hegel opposes “classical metaphysics” by making history “primary” for philosophy. Burbidge tells us that “for the first time in the history of philosophy, he [Hegel] has placed historical development at the heart of systematic thought.”⁴²³ For Burbidge, history proceeds not by one event logically flowing from another, but by a series of contingent “events” that radically alter the conditions in which we live and think. Burbidge opposes this historical understanding of philosophy to the approach of “classical metaphysics”:

⁴²⁰ Cf. Maker, for whom the *Phenomenology* is a “self-sublating mediation” (Maker 1990 p.31)

⁴²¹ Houlgate 2005 pp. 39-40

⁴²² See Houlgate 2005 p.39

⁴²³ Burbidge 2007 p.9

“whenever we take history seriously”, writes Burbidge, “we have to radically transform what we mean by philosophy. Classical metaphysics and a respect for history are not compatible.”⁴²⁴ “Classical metaphysics” puts “rational principles” or “universals” first and claims that logical truths are what dictate the order of things. Historical thinking, on the other hand, rejects the view that we should put universals first:

When we make history primary, we reject the maxim of Dionysius of Halicarnasus that ‘history is philosophy teaching by examples.’ What happens is not simply an instance of a general rule or law of human behaviour. Rational principles do not determine the order of things. A single action, whether by an individual, a political institution or any social group, is decisive. Into a situation formed by the past, the agent introduces something new. Various constraints are confronted and transformed by a distinctive and singular happening. To decipher what is significant about that event, we dare not ignore the novelty that the action achieves. It is unique *both* in terms of the specific setting in which it takes place *and* in terms of its decisive initiative. What makes the action significant for history, therefore, is its unique particularity.⁴²⁵

So, by putting history at the heart of thought, Burbidge tells us, Hegel is opposed to a (classical metaphysical) view that would claim that there are eternal principles that govern history: history is more than a series of examples of eternal principles put to work. Instead, history proceeds by the creation of singular events, which themselves “transform” the “constraints” that previously

⁴²⁴ Burbidge 2007 p.9

⁴²⁵ Burbidge 2007 p.10

entangled thinking and thereby create new logical principles. I would suggest that this rules out any position that would take the *Phenomenology* to be a foundation for the *Logic* because it shows us why we can never take a principle as a *proven* basis for further study: any “constraint” that has in fact been placed upon our thinking is always liable to be removed by unpredictable circumstances; that is to say, our way of thinking can be changed by contingent events. The *Phenomenology* cannot be an absolute foundation for thought for the same reasons that I suggested that the identity of being and nothing cannot be a foundation in Chapter 3 above: Hegel must always leave open the possibility that something he has not thought of will allow for a new formulation of the concept of pure being, and the connection between being and nothing is considered “necessary” on the basis that our thinking currently offers us no other way of thinking pure being. At the beginning of the *Logic* Hegel is only examining a way of thinking, and can consider nothing to have been *proven* true if he wants to carry out an immanent examination of this way of thinking.⁴²⁶

Now, Hegel tells that the “unity of pure being and nothing” is “the primary truth” that “now forms once and for all the basis and element of all that follows”⁴²⁷ This seems to clearly tell us that the identity of being and nothing is necessary: however, when discussing the thought of pure being in the logic of being, Hegel makes all sorts of claims about being, only some of which are strictly relevant at

⁴²⁶ N.B. see the introduction to chapter 1 above for discussion of where I differ from Burbidge’s position.

⁴²⁷ *Logic* p.85

this point in the *Logic*. While it is important to note that these are all true for Hegel – it is necessary, its unity with nothing is absolute, and so on – I am arguing that we also need to note that Hegel cannot claim these truths to support his argument at this stage in the *Logic*: Hegel does not require that we presuppose that thought and being are identical in the logic of being, since the logic emerges not from the identity of being and nothing but from the subjective “resolve” to think.⁴²⁸

In making the above arguments, I am suggesting that we should not follow Alison Stone, when she suggests that Hegel’s *Logic* “presupposes existence”.⁴²⁹ Though I agree with Stone that Hegel’s *Logic* is an ontology, I think that this *turns out* to be the case as the logical argument progresses, rather than being something presupposed at the start. Even though the *Phenomenology* “proves” that being and thought are identical, I have explained above why I cannot agree with Stone that the standpoint of “Absolute Knowing”, or any other standpoint, can be “proven uniquely true”: we cannot “exhaustively” eliminate all rival conceptions in any given case, because any “constraint” placed upon our thought can be removed by unforeseen circumstances, opening up new possible rival conceptions, and forcing us to think again.⁴³⁰ (In this respect, Hegel’s thought is closer to Deleuze than is usually recognised.) Also, in my discussion of “essence”

⁴²⁸ See Houlgate 2005 p.49 for discussion of this “resolve”

⁴²⁹ Stone 2005 p.102

⁴³⁰ Stone 2005 p.97: “Hegel believes that his general metaphysics, according to which all reality is structured by forms of thought, has been proven uniquely true by the exhaustive critique of rival metaphysical outlooks in the *Phenomenology*.”

in chapters 4 and 5 above we saw why Hegel's *Logic* cannot presuppose existence: "existence" is a concept that is not derived from the immanent unfolding of the *Logic* until we get to the Doctrine of Essence, and so existence is not something that Hegel can base his argument on at the beginning of the *Logic*, in the Doctrine of Being.

In sum, it is necessary to follow Houlgate and read Hegel as a presuppositionless thinker, because if we do not then we lay Hegel open to the Deleuzian charge described above: that the "source" of the development of the *Logic* and the rest of Hegel's system is a presupposed "speculative dialectics" and not the subject matter itself. However, I have argued that if we do not see that the meaning of "critical thinking" is something in question for Hegel, then we do in fact, despite our best efforts, allow our thinking to be guided by presuppositions: we make it impossible for anyone to follow the argument of the *Logic* who is not willing to presuppose the identity of thought and being. The identity of thought and being is the *result* of the *Logic*, and so we cannot take this as a first premise too, if we are to avoid making speculative dialectics the source of movement in the *Logic*. The identity of thought and being was also the result of the *Phenomenology*, but as I have argued we cannot take the result of the *Phenomenology* to have been "proven uniquely true" and so we cannot use the *Phenomenology* as a foundation for logical thinking, but must take the *Logic* on its own terms as something self-sufficient that will prove its own validity. We think critically, for

Hegel, when we think reflectively, and so demand explanation for every concept, and demand that nothing is simply what it is. Thus the *Logic* develops from a contingent, historical standpoint, that is, from the standpoint of modern, reflective thinking.

So, on my reading, even this initial truth, that pure being and nothing are identical, is just as much a contingent as a necessary truth. What we learn from the identity of being and nothing is that being and nothing are *necessarily identical for reflection*, and so this truth is necessary in one sense and contingent in another. To put it another way: the identity of being and nothing is essential to reflection, but we cannot at this stage in the *Logic* go any further than this and make any claims about being itself (as I have suggested, these will come later, once we reach the speculative thinking of the Concept). The *Logic* will show that, given that we are modern, reflective thinkers we can (and should) also be speculative thinkers. But if we fail to see that reflection is the starting point, and bring in at the start the identity of thought and being, then we fail to proceed immanently.

As I have stated above, it is the *danger* connected with Houlgate's interpretation of Hegel that I want to draw attention to: I do not want to reject Houlgate's approach; on the contrary, I want to say that something along the lines of Houlgate's reading – according to which Hegel is a presuppositionless thinker – is

the only way to read Hegel as he intended to be read. If we strip this demand for immanence away from Hegel, then I think we miss something vital about Hegel's thought: Hegel did not intend for his thinking to be one point of view among others, which needs to be defended "externally" against other, equally valid points of view; rather, he intended his system to be self-sufficient and capable of ultimately proving its own validity. When I suggest that we need to resist claiming that Hegel's system is *based* on the view that being and thought are identical, I am trying to suggest that this is the only way that we can begin to *prove* Hegel's system to be valid and self-sufficient. The danger of the presuppositionless reading is that it can easily fall back onto presuppositions.

As well as describing in what way Hegel is an immanent thinker, I also want to show that Hegel is a systematic thinker: more specifically, I wanted to show that we should read the *Philosophy of Right* in a systematic way. On my reading, the fact that our reflective thinking should make us speculative thinkers should also lead us to a better conception of what it means to be free, since this new, post-reflective way of thinking allows us to re-formulate the concept of right.

In his *Hegel's Political Philosophy: A Systematic Reading of the Philosophy of Right*, Thom Brooks presents us with a "systematic reading" of Hegel's *Philosophy of Right*. Brooks offers what he calls a "weak" systematic reading, but doesn't rule out the possibility that a "strong" systematic reading would be

possible: for Brooks, “a systematic reading of Hegel’s work interprets this work within the context of Hegel’s philosophical system”.⁴³¹ According to even a weak systematic reading of the *Philosophy of Right*, it is vitally important that we recognise “the peculiar structure of Hegel’s argumentation”, and one way that we can do this is by looking at Hegel’s logical writing (the *Logic* and the *Encyclopaedia Logic*): a strong systematic reading, on the other hand, will advocate the same but will emphasise the importance of more “specific features of the system” than the weaker reading.⁴³² In this thesis, I have made the case for a relatively strong systematic reading: the “peculiar structure of Hegel’s argumentation” is best understood, I suggested, by paying careful attention to the details of the *Logic*: I want to suggest that we have a better sense of the value of Hegel’s work when we have more than a “general picture of Hegel’s system and its relationship to the *Philosophy of Right*.”⁴³³

However, not all commentators on Hegel think that a systematic reading of Hegel of this sort is possible. Though Allen W. Wood – in his *Hegel’s Ethical Thought* – tells us that, if we are to grasp properly “Hegel’s theory of society and politics”, we must not neglect its “philosophical foundations”, he goes on to say that these foundations are *not* Hegel’s “speculative metaphysics”; instead, by “philosophical foundations”, Wood means “the *ethical theory* on which Hegel

⁴³¹ Brooks 2007 p.22

⁴³² Brooks 2007 pp.24, 27

⁴³³ Brooks 2007 p.27

rests his critical reflections on modern social and political life.”⁴³⁴ In this thesis I have tried to present a reading of Hegel that opposes Wood’s view: in my view, if we take the foundation of Hegel’s political thought to be an ethical theory and not a speculative metaphysics, then we end up with an account according to which Hegel is too dogmatic. The reasons for this have been discussed above: Hegel’s speculative metaphysics allows us to think about the object of enquiry (in this case, modern social and political life) in a way that takes into account its various logical aspects and so does justice to the object of study. On the other hand, basing our conception of modern society on an ethical theory (rather than on a theory of *philosophical method*) means that our account will always be one-sided, since we will judge modern society to be more or less good, just, fair and so on, not on the basis of an objective study of society, but on the basis of our pre-established ethical theories. My objection to Wood is that if we take Hegel to be basing his political theory on an ethical theory and *not* on a speculative metaphysics, then we are missing the fact that Hegel might have been justified in believing not *only* that he had a viable ethical theory, but also that this theory was borne out by an impartial study of the state, where the criteria for an impartial study are determined elsewhere in the system, in Hegel’s logical writings.⁴³⁵ As we have seen above in chapter 7, Hegel emphasises the point that

⁴³⁴ Wood 1990 p.xiii (italics as in text)

⁴³⁵ We should note that the issue here is not over how Hegel saw his own work, but over whether Hegel was *right* to see his work in this way; see Thom Brooks 2007 p.14 who, having advocated a “systematic reading” of Hegel’s work (this will be returned to below), writes as follows : “Commentators *agree* that Hegel’s self-understanding is how I have described it above; however, they *disagree* on the question of whether or not applying a systematic reading of Hegel’s *Philosophy of Right* will make the text more intelligible and improve on contemporary interpretations.” (italics as in text)

he does not think that it is the primary task of philosophers to determine what *ought* to be the case: any philosophical conclusions about what ought to be the case must arise from a “scientific” study of the state, where a “scientific study” denotes an examination of what *is* the case. In my view, though Wood correctly tells us that Hegel’s ethical theory is one of “self-actualisation” – that is, a theory according to which what we are (and should be) as political animals develops logically out of what we are as creatures with free will – he is wrong to rule out the possibility that this *ethical* theory is based upon a more abstract *logical* theory which *justifies* this sort of “dialectical” approach to political philosophy.

A writer who runs into similar problems, in my view, is Robert B. Pippin. Unlike Wood, Pippin does not dismiss detailed study of Hegel’s speculative logic as a waste of time.⁴³⁶ In his *Hegel’s Idealism: The Satisfactions of Self-Consciousness*, Pippin offers a detailed examination of Hegel’s “idealism”, which includes careful attention to the argument of the *Logic* as well as the *Phenomenology*. However, in my view, Pippin fails to connect Hegel’s logic to his political philosophy. As a result of this, Hegel comes across in Pippin’s *Hegel’s Practical Philosophy: Rational Agency as Ethical Life* as rather uninteresting as a political philosopher, since Pippin’s Hegel seems to be unable to defend himself against some quite simple objections. For Pippin, the fact that Hegel defines freedom as doing one’s duty in accordance with the ethical principles of the society in which one lives,

⁴³⁶ Wood 1990 p.xiii

means that he runs into a problem: what if the ethical principles of the society in which you live mean that “because I am a member of the National Socialist party” constitutes a justification?⁴³⁷ On my reading, this cannot arise as a problem for Hegel, since the speculative method – which we come to after we have carefully read and understood the *Logic* – tells us that we *must not* define freedom as simply doing one’s ethical duty, but must *also* see that freedom consists in the more abstract activities of the will, such as *doing what you want*, and *doing the right thing*. On my reading, since “because I am a member of the National Socialist party” could only count as a reason for acting in an *evil* state, then it cannot count as a reason for a free person, since a free person lives in a society where laws are *good*, which means (see chapter 7 above) that laws are created for the purpose of “welfare” and “rights”. In an evil state, as we saw above in chapter 7, moral certainty finds its basis not in good ethical institutions, but in *mere conviction*, and those who act on the basis of mere moral conviction are not free, for Hegel (though acting freely *must* include acting in accordance with one’s convictions, for Hegel, free action must be based on *more* than mere conviction: that is, free action must be grounded upon the existence of good ethical institutions). Thus Pippin’s reading of Hegel has similar weaknesses to that of Wood, in my view, since it does not pay close enough attention to the way that the speculative method influences the argument of the *Philosophy of Right*.

⁴³⁷ Pippin 2008 p.275

In attempting to read Hegel in such a way that he is immanent and systematic I have, I hope, offered a reading that is consistent with what Hegel himself said. Throughout this conclusion, the main point I have tried to emphasise is that fact that, although Hegel makes all sorts of claims about the way he conceives being, thought, the absolute, ethical life, and so on, it is important not to be distracted by these statements of *belief* that Hegel makes and to look instead at the way that Hegel *argues* for these beliefs. I am not trying to argue for what Hegel *should have said* against what he in fact *said*; however, I am saying that not every statement Hegel makes is an axiom with which we should begin an investigation. So, for example, the fact that thought and being are clearly identical for Hegel should not mean that we begin by assuming that this is the case, if we want to take Hegel seriously in his claims to want to proceed immanently. That is to say, I am saying that we need to take care to work out *how* Hegel gets to the beliefs he has, and not to jump straight to his conclusions and work from there. When looking at the “opening” of the *Logic* (Hegel’s discussion of pure being), this meant not taking the identity of thought and being as the first principle and instead looking at the original unity of “pure knowing” – pure reflection – that Hegel presents us with at the beginning of the *Logic* and seeing how we get from this “subjective resolve” to speculative knowing and the knowledge of the identity of thought and being.⁴³⁸ Above we looked at Hegel’s discussion of right and saw that, on my reading, we must not begin with what Hegel said about this

⁴³⁸ *Logic* pp.68-9

or that concrete political matter and must instead see how he gets from the abstract consideration of right to these more concrete principles.⁴³⁹

This leads me to a certain sort of problem, however. That is to say, it might be argued that I am not following Hegel if I begin with a conception of the way things are that is not Hegelian: Hegel did indeed have a concrete concept of freedom as duty, so why not begin with this concept of freedom, if you are trying to accurately describe what Hegel said? Why begin with the abstract conception of freedom that Hegel rejects? Thus, it might be argued that, by trying to conceive Hegel's concept of freedom in such a way that it answers Deleuze and Guattari, I have misrepresented Hegel's conception of freedom: perhaps I have formulated freedom in the non-Hegelian way that Taylor writes about:

But this whole tradition, whether Marxist, anarchist, situationist or whatever, offers no idea at all of what the society of freedom should look like beyond the empty formulae: that it should be endlessly creative; have no divisions, whether between men or within them, or between levels of existence (play is one with work, love is one with politics, art is one with life); involve no coercion, no representation etc. All that is done in these negative characterisations is to think away the entire human situation. Small wonder that this freedom has no content.⁴⁴⁰

⁴³⁹ See e.g. Houlgate 2005 p.182: "Speculative philosophy does not proceed by setting up definitions or propositions and defending them through argument or supporting evidence, but... seeks to understand and articulate the immanent development of the concepts which it considers."

⁴⁴⁰ Taylor 1979 p.155

The answer to this sort of criticism would be that this is how Hegel himself proceeds: he believes that it is necessary that we work through the more abstract (and so relatively false) concepts of freedom to the more concrete. Furthermore, his notion that the more concrete notion of freedom sublates and therefore includes the more abstract conceptions of freedom means that we cannot get a full picture of what Hegel meant by “freedom” if we do not proceed in this way. So in my view we miss an important aspect of Hegel’s conception of “freedom” if we begin with the concrete and ignore the systematic nature of Hegel’s thought. And I believe that I have shown in this thesis that we can proceed in this way without ultimately rejecting Hegel’s more concrete claims about freedom.

In this conclusion I have suggested that Deleuze and Guattari can show us something of what is required in an immanent approach: we must recognise the role that contingency plays and not try to proceed from a presupposed conception of what is necessary. I suggested that Houlgate offers a reading of Hegel that responds to these Deleuzian complaints, since he argues that Hegel *does* proceed immanently, since Hegel claims to begin not with a conception of negativity but with the simple act of thinking. However, I suggested that we need to emphasise that what “thinking” means is what is in question, for Hegel; otherwise we risk ending up basing Hegel’s logic on the truth of speculative thinking – that thought and being are identical – and so Beistegui’s claim, that for

Hegel the source of logical movement is speculative dialectics and negativity, might turn out to be true, and Hegel cannot even *claim* to be proceeding immanently (that is to say, the identity of thought and being turns out to be something we have to *presuppose*, and so the truth of speculative thinking turns out to be the source of all Hegel's claims). I suggested that we need to take the *Logic* to be an examination of *reflective thinking* and thus the study of something *contingent* if we want to maintain that it is an immanent study: immanent because it is the unfolding of an image of thought, and not immanent "to" something, such as being⁴⁴¹). We saw that Hegel still remains radically opposed to Deleuze and Guattari, since ultimately he does not share Deleuze and Guattari's conception of freedom, of the image of thought (since Hegel believes that we can analyse ways of thinking by examining their structures, while Deleuze and Guattari believe that images of thought remain unconscious and disorganised⁴⁴²) and of many other things; also, I have only shown that Hegel *claims* to be immanent in the Deleuzian sense (by taking contingency to be irreducible at the beginning of the *Logic*) and have not shown that Hegel ultimately is not of the "cult of necessity" (since he tells a story whereby "retroactively" necessary development explains historical change, and so from a Deleuzian perspective Hegel does reduce contingency to necessity).

⁴⁴¹ See Chapter 1 above for the argument by Deleuze and Guattari that immanence must not be immanence "to" anything other than itself.

⁴⁴² See Guattari 2011 pp.9ff. for a description of the unconscious understood as disorganisation

I have largely relied on what Hegel says in the *Logic* to justify the claims I have made in this thesis. I have taken care to avoid arguments that claim that Hegel *should have said* this or that, and tried to make my reading fit with the text of the *Logic*. My reading offers a way to read Hegel as he intended to be read (as presuppositionless) without falling into dogmatism (that is, onto hidden presuppositions), by re-interpreting the Deleuzian requirement that contingency be “irreducible”.

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