
Identity as a Process of Self-Determination in Hegel's *Logic*

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One of the striking aspects of Hegel's category of identity is that he thinks it involves a process of self-determination: the identical has established its own unity (WL260/SL411).¹ A second striking aspect of Hegel's concept of identity is that it is a relation between semblances or guises of an essence.² I will argue that with this concept Hegel grasps identity erotetically, that is, in terms of the kinds of questions and answers that are relevant to identity claims, and that these two aspects of his category are necessary to account for our everyday practice of asking about identity.

A Brief Sketch of Hegel's Category of Identity

As is well known, Hegel's category of identity is not intended as an analysis of a merely formal concept but is instead the basic articulation of what it might mean for something to be an essence (*Wesen*)—where *Wesen* is being used in a sense related to the classical notion of substance.³ The notion of an essence is just the notion of something that remains self-identical in qualitative change. In this sense even mathematical and logical notions have an essence that can be expressed in various ways, so 'essence' is not equivalent to 'substance' if the latter is taken to involve spatiotemporal continuity. Of the traditional aspects of substance, Hegel's usage of 'essence' involves the notion of a unity remaining the same through change—but a unity of "semblances," not of properties. Hegel's *Wesen* is not Locke's 'something-I-know-not-what' behind or in addition to the semblances. It does not involve active or passive powers, although it does involve tendencies

to change in certain ways. Power over attributes is involved in Hegel's category of *Substanz*, which is much richer than that of *Wesen*. *Substanz* involves the notion of an inner essence which manifests its own nature by causal power to create and destroy outer forms of itself. It also involves a relation between inner potential and outer expressed force that is missing in the bare notion of a *Wesen*. *Wesen* is the notion of something that abides in change, whereas the developed notion of *Substanz* brings to bear additional conceptual resources to explain how this abiding actually works.⁴ Neither *Wesen* nor *Substanz* can easily be translated by the English philosophical 'substance'—the former because it is more abstract, and the latter because it is more concrete.

Hegel understands the structure of essence to be "the seeming of essence within itself [*das Scheinen des Wesens in sich selbst*]" (WL258/SLA09, translation modified).⁵ That is, to be an essence is to be the kind of a thing that appears in various guises (semblances) such that no particular guise exhaustively expresses the nature of that thing. The identity of essence is the very process of the guises revealing themselves as *mere* guises. There is no object *behind* these guises, but the guises are not self-sufficient either. Instead of being independent states transformed by outside forces, the guises are dynamic, the very process of transition between themselves and another guise.

For example, the tree appears in one guise in the spring and another in the fall, and although the essence of the tree is present in both guises, neither guise exhaustively expresses that essence. Some guises—for example, leaflessness due to the application of defoliant or even a toy plastic leaf left by a tree-climbing child—need not directly express the essence of the tree, although indirectly the nature of the tree is involved in explaining why the defoliant has the effect that it does or how the toy came to be there. The notion of a guise or semblance is different from the notion of an appearance in that it does not wear its expression of a determinate essence on its face, as it were. Rather, a guise or semblance presents itself problematically as dependent on a process that may constitute a number of different essences. Identity is, however, the resolution of this problem in the connection of the guises together as parts of a determinate process.

The identity of the tree is found in the fact that the differences between its guises do not make a difference to the essence of the tree—this is what it means to be the same tree through change. That is, although they are different guises, the insignificance of their differences expresses the essential identity of the tree. The tree just is the series of these transitions, whether past, present or merely potential.⁶ Furthermore,

the essence of the tree is the process through which this takes place, that is, the process of development whereby guises are substituted for each other.⁷ On pain of circularity, the insignificance of the differences between the guises must be understood in terms of the nature of the process involved, and not in terms of a static essence that would provide the touchstone for the authenticity of each guise.

The tree is self-identical because the process of transformation is governed by coherent and intelligible principles that allow rational reconstruction of the transitions between the guises.⁸ The presence of sufficient explanatory regularities is what makes for the (relative) insignificance of the differences and makes the sequences of guises not a series of independent trees but the process of a single tree's development.

This process of development is equally attributable to the tree as such as to the tree at a particular time, but it is attributable to both in an attenuated sense. The minimal self-determination required by identity as such obtains when a change of guises is in some basic sense due to the nature of the guises themselves. This is different from the richer self-determination of activity, which would seem to require in addition that one of the guises *initiate* the change.⁹

The differences between the semblances need not be temporal in addition to being qualitative. We might see a certain shape of leaf on one side of the tree and another shape on the other side. We might then ask whether they were leaves of the same tree or one was the leaf of a vine or another plant growing on the tree. Answering the question—in principle and not just for us—will depend on whether the tree was subject to processes that involve its growing leaves of a different shape and/or subject to the process of being overgrown by vines.

Hegel's notion of identity provides a minimal analysis of the identity of even abstract objects such as logical statements. Consider $(A \rightarrow B)$, $(\neg B \rightarrow \neg A)$, $\neg(A \& \neg B)$, and $(\neg A \vee B)$. On the face of it, all four seem to be different, but one can easily show that they are equivalent and thus intersubstitutable without loss of truth value—and such intersubstitutability *salva veritate* constitutes formal logical sameness.¹⁰ Although we could subjectively establish their unity by deducing each from the others, it is no less natural to say that they entail each other—objectively and on their own regardless of whether any particular logician performs the relevant derivations. This is just to say that the very nature of logical statements is bound up with entailments, whether potential, actual, or past. If one thinks of entailment as the process proper to logical statements—though not of course

their activity—then this their mutual identity is a product of their own processes, processes that show their differences to be inessential.

The case of the identity of numbers is a bit more complex, primarily because quantity represents a less developed category than identity. On the one hand, a minimal analysis can be given that parallels the analysis of logical forms. Instead of entailment, calculation is the process that transforms quantitative guises. Thus one can show by addition that '2+3' and '1+4' are insignificantly different guises of '5.' Hegel himself claims that the different forms of calculation can be derived from the concept of number (EL102R). On the other hand, Hegel also claims that quantity is closely associated with sensation, and that this association makes quantity abstract.¹¹ He further claims that abstract objects are only potential, and not actual. Thus it should not be surprising that Hegel's conception of identity is much more illuminating when applied to concrete objects such as trees.

Quantitative states may take on actuality in virtue of their inclusion in objects that can also be thought through more developed categories (e.g., a quantitative state may be a property of a thing, or a term in a judgment), but part of the deficiency of the pure notion of quantity in the *Logic* is its inability to provide the resources for determinate identifications of numbers. Thus Hegel seems to think that identity conditions for numbers are parasitic on their involvement in more developed categories.

According to Hegel, identity is "the equality-with-self that has brought itself to unity [*sich zur Einheit herstellende ist*], . . . this pure origination from and within itself, *essential identity*" (WL260/SL411, emphasis in original). This means that it is not only the process but also the result of the process, or the process considered as completed.¹² It is self-identity through change, a process whereby the unity of different semblances is established through the undermining of their independence. Hegel claims that this process is the content of the notion of identity, that is, it is equally what we are actually doing when we think about identity, and what essences are actually "doing" when they are self-identical.¹³

An Erotetic Interpretation

Rather than being a set of necessary and sufficient conditions or of criteria for identity, Hegel's discussion of identity presents it as a problem. My suggestion is that we can better understand the nature

of this problem if we understand it erotetically. "Erotetic" logic is the logic of questions and answers, and within erotetic logic particular attention is paid to the presuppositions of a question, that is, the conditions under which a question arises or can be meaningfully posed. To understand a notion erotetically is connected to understanding it pragmatically, since one can identify the notion so grasped with our interrogative practice or use of the notion. When I say that Hegel grasps identity erotetically, I mean that he grasps it in terms of the whole complex of presupposition, question, and answer. Now one might think that this is overly broad, and that identity is really just the answer to the question, but on the erotetic analysis, the answer (or at least the direct answer) takes its form from the question.

Furthermore, in answering the question, the answer asserts that the presupposition is true (i.e., that the question is answerable)—otherwise the question is rejected, not answered. On this view, then, the answer includes the structure and content of both the question and the presupposition, so it is a matter of indifference whether we identify the notion of identity with the answer or with the whole complex.¹⁴

One can see that Hegel grasps identity erotetically by looking at the normal context in which identity is a problem for us, that is, in which the question of identity arises. This is the context in which we have different appearances and want to know whether they are appearances of the same thing or of different things. Differently shaped leaves are on different sides of a tree, or a number of logical statements may have the same truth table or value. Or, yesterday, a white car was parked in my neighbor's driveway, but today a red car of the same make and model is there, and I want to know whether this is the same car repainted or a different car altogether. Although we would usually ask, "Is that the same car as yesterday?," a more perspicuous way of phrasing the question would be, "Were those appearances (or sightings) of the same car?" Expressed in this way, the question determines its own direct, positive answer, namely, "Yes, those are appearances of the same car." The presupposition of the identity question is that there is a plurality of qualitatively different appearances or guises.¹⁵ No one asks if the red car is identical to the red car, unless there is some significant difference.

If faced with such a question without the necessary presupposition, then we would struggle to understand what the questioner meant. In answering a question about identity, then, we assert that the presuppositions are true, that is, that a plurality of guises does obtain. This is part of what we are doing when we assert identity, and thus

part of the identity claim itself. The subject matter of the identity claim is primarily the guises, and a positive answer is an identification of the different guises as guises of one essence. To be guises of one essence involves the existence of certain processual pathways from one to the other (e.g., differential growth of leaves, logical derivations, or repainting the car). Hegel's concept of identity, then, is the problem of identity taken as presupposition, question, and answer.¹⁶ In the epistemological mode, this is an articulation of the core of our practice of identification.¹⁷

So far my argument for attributing an implicitly erotetic concept to Hegel has been grounded on the way in which this erotetic framework organizes the different aspects of Hegel's concept of identity and connects them to the practice of individuation. It is, of course, true that Hegel does not make this connection himself.¹⁸ In the one remark where he does seem to use an erotetic framework, there appear to be two problems for my view. First, he seems to focus on what questions, as opposed to the yes-no questions that I have taken to be paradigmatic. Second, the what question he poses—"What is a plant?"—does not obviously call for an individuation as an answer. How can these be reconciled with the interpretation I have just offered?

The solution to the first problem is to see that yes-no questions are contained in what questions in the sense that each answer to the latter entails an answer to the former.¹⁹ For example, the answer to "What is a plant?" that "A plant is a young tree, vine, shrub, or herb planted or suitable for planting," entails the answer "Yes" to the question, "Is a plant a young tree vine, shrub, or herb planted or suitable for planting," and it entails the answer "No" to the question, "Is a plant a fence?". What questions represent the breadth of identity questions, but yes-no (and whether) questions represent more specific and perspicuous forms of identity questions. This is because in most everyday contexts there is a fairly limited range of possible answers to the what question of identity.

The second problem also is easily solved. "What is a plant?" does not seem to call for an individuation, because we normally associate individuation with the discrimination of physical objects. But if we broaden the notion of individuation to include concepts as well, then "What is a plant?" does call for an individuation, the individuation of the concept "plant." The way we individuate concepts is to define them and thereby differentiate them from other concepts. Hegel objects to the proposed answer "A plant is a plant" because it will not individuate the concept of a plant for the questioner, who legitimately

expected a different kind of response, namely, a response that would contrast the topic "plant" with other concepts.

The Value and Necessity of Hegel's Concept of Identity

One important way in which Hegel's concept of identity articulates the core of our practice of identification is to provide a solution to the common puzzle about how questions of identity are possible in the first place. Many philosophers have noted the paradoxical nature of identity. To take two well-known examples, Wittgenstein writes, "To say of *two* things that they are identical is nonsense, and to say of *one* thing that it is identical with itself is to say nothing at all,"²⁰ and Hume writes, "As to the principle of individuation; we may observe, that the view of any one object is not sufficient to convey the idea of identity. . . . On the other hand, a multiplicity of objects can never convey this idea."²¹ For reasons connected to this problem, both the early Wittgenstein and Hume reject identity as either unnecessary or largely fictitious. From a Hegelian perspective, this puzzle is generated by thinking of the identity relation as a relation only between objects, not between states or semblances.²² If differences between semblances are allowed into the identity relation itself, then both the possibility and importance of identity questions become clear. The greater the difference between the semblances, the more significant the identity is: The identity between the caterpillar and the butterfly is fascinating for the young child, precisely because it expresses an identity relation between very different appearances.²³

Even more than this, I argue that the specific characteristics of Hegel's category of identity are in fact *required* for an erotetic understanding of individuation. The best way to see this is to explore the consequences of their denial for this project. To begin with, one might think that it is unnecessary to import the presupposition of a question into the very *answer* itself, even if the *answering* implicitly endorses those presuppositions. If one distinguished this presupposition from the pure identity relation between objects (as the answer proper), then one could still account for the practice of individuation without introducing differences between semblances into the identity relation itself. To see why this will not work, consider the consequences of such a maintenance of the absoluteness of identity in the view of Colin McGinn.

McGinn holds a common view that identity is a unitary, indefinable, reflexive, symmetrical, and transitive relation that satisfies Leibniz's

Law (the indiscernibility of identicals).²⁴ Although McGinn acknowledges that identity is importantly correlated with difference, the unity of identity excludes difference from the identity relation itself. Thus he characterizes identity as “simply the relation x has to y when x is nothing other than y , when there is no distinction between x and y , when x is y .”²⁵ This exclusion of the differences of states results in a conception of identity that is incapable of articulating the structure of our practices of individuation.²⁶ This exclusion results in a virtual identity (or at least coextension) of identity and objecthood broadly construed: “Whenever we have a subject of predication—existent, merely possible, non-existent—we have an application of the concept of identity to that subject.”²⁷

Questions about identity arise and are significant “because we don’t always *know* the truth about distinctness and identity . . . If we were omniscient about identity, then indeed identity truths would not inform us of anything; but the same could be said of *any* kind of truth.”²⁸ While this is certainly true, there remains an important difference between the problem with identity truths and other truths, namely, that we do not have to know about the *applicability* of other predicates in order to raise the question of their applicability.

On McGinn’s view of identity as just the relation of an object to itself, it seems like we cannot raise the question of the applicability of an identity predicate without presupposing the answer. To raise the question we need to have an object that may or may not be self-identical, but once we have the object we know that it is self-identical. And if we have two objects, then the question is already decided in the negative. Every mistake in predication reflects at least some correct comprehension—for we must grasp the subject as a subject even in order to predicate falsely.

But on McGinn’s view that identity comes with even the most abstract and tenuous grasp of the subject of predication, it is incomprehensible that we could ever be in doubt, since the knowledge required to raise the question answers it as well. This problem is not primarily temporal but rather arises from the need for a certain gap in our understanding to motivate questions at all. The same problem would arise if we took the question to come after the answer. Thus it appears that Hegel’s internalization of the differences between semblances in the identity relation itself is required to account for our practice.

The other distinctive component of Hegel’s conception of identity—that it is a process of the self-establishment of unity—is also required for an adequate erotetic analysis of individuation. To see that some

sort of process is involved, consider briefly Hume’s view of identity. Due to precisely the problem just discussed with respect to McGinn’s view, Hume makes a distinction between the *unity* of a thing at any given time as opposed to its *identity* across time. To say that something is identical is to say “that the object existent at one time is the same with itself existent at another,” which means to say that it is invariable or unchanged throughout that time.²⁹ What Hume acknowledges, then, is that some kind of change—namely, temporal change—is required in order to make sense of the identity relation.

In our common practice of individuation, however, more than mere temporal change is required in order to raise the question of identity. In order to avoid Hume’s rejection of this practice of individuation, it is necessary to see identity itself as the process of remaining the same through qualitative and not merely temporal change.³⁰ Once one allows qualitative diversity, the issue of temporality becomes secondary. This is true whether one takes identity in the epistemological mode (i.e., as the process of connecting diverse representations) or in the metaphysical (i.e., as the process of the essence staying the same through change). But this only shows that identity has to involve some process of change. To see the necessity of specifying that the process is the self-establishment of unity through change, consider David Wiggins’s neo-Aristotelian view of identity.

Wiggins thinks that we individuate objects according to principles of the normal activity, behavior, or functioning of kinds of objects. When we identify things, we say that “ a is the same F as b ,” where F is a sortal or kind term that specifies such a principle of activity for a and b . On Wiggins’s view, if we did not have such a principle then we would be unable to specify what changes an object could undergo and nonetheless remain self-identical, and so we would be unable to individuate objects either in the world or across possible worlds.³¹ For example, even the individuation of a rock across possible worlds or qualitative changes within a world requires an understanding of what kind of changes in state are consistent with the normal processes of rocks (e.g., that they resist outside pressure but can be broken down gradually, that they cannot transform themselves into donkeys). Like Hegel, Wiggins’s view does not essentially involve temporal change but does try to model our everyday practice of individuation in time and space.

Also like Hegel, Wiggins’s approach emphasizes the closeness of ontological and logical questions about identity, but there are important differences in how this closeness and the ontological import of identity

are construed.³² First, Wiggins's notion of identity entails essentialism, but identity is not itself the model of essence. The identity of objects does not have even a structural isomorphism to the processes that subjects consider when identifying objects. For Hegel, identity is not just the abstract self-relation of the thing but includes the sortal specification within itself: The identity of a thing is an answer to the question of *what it is*, and so identity essentially includes the processes a thing undergoes (either actually or potentially). I take this to be an interesting though nondecisive advantage for Hegel's view, since it connects the abstract notion of identity to our use of "identity" in social contexts. When we are posing the question of gender or racial identity, for instance, we are asking whether the question "Who is Jane?" has to be answered in terms of race and/or gender.

Second, the terms of Wiggins's identity statements ('x is the same F as y') are objects, substances, or continuants, not Hegel's semblances.³³ Thus although the point of knowing the kind of an object to be individuated is to know what sorts of changes it typically and possibly undergoes, the identity of the object is not the process or result of such change. Identity is not mere continuity, as Hume or McGinn would have it, but it is nonetheless an absolute relation between objects.³⁴ There are no differences in Wiggins's identity relation, which is crucial to his rejection of relative identity.³⁵

These first two points are closely related to a third difference, which is that Wiggins denies that the practice of individuation has any metaphysical equivalent. As Wiggins puts it, "The object does not single itself out. . . . [E]dges [in nature—even causally effective ones] mark out imperfectly or scarcely at all the boundaries that are drawn by the singling out of continuants or substances."³⁶ Although our tracking of objects requires "a dialectic of same and other," this subjective dialectic must be regulated by an objective principle of identity in the classic sense.³⁷ Furthermore, Wiggins holds that there is an essentially deictic element in individuation (the *this* of the 'this such') that seems ineliminably subjective.³⁸

Hegel, however, thinks that objects individuate themselves in roughly the same way that we individuate them. For Hegel, the activity of an essence is in part the self-establishment of its identity in roughly the same way that *we* would establish its identity for ourselves. For example, in discussing Leibniz, Hegel claims that

the more intimate sense [of the maxim of the identity of indiscernibles] is, however, that each thing is in itself something

determined, distinguishing itself from others implicitly or in itself. . . . The difference must be a difference in themselves, not for our comparison, for the subject must have the difference as its own peculiar characteristic or determination, i.e., the determination must be immanent in the individual. Not only do we distinguish the animal by its claws, but it distinguishes itself essentially thereby, it defends itself, it preserves itself.³⁹ (VGP458/LHP333-34).

Thus the identity of ontological and conceptual structures reaches higher up for Hegel. Although the ontological picture of processes rooted in the nature of the object is similar in Wiggins and Hegel, the conceptual structure of Hegel's category of identity maps onto the structure of those processes, whereas Wiggins's notions of identity and individuation do not. Leaving Hegel's vocabulary for a moment, we might call the common structure of both identical essences and our practices of individuation "discrimination," which is a more complex process than Wiggins's "edges," which are the extent of common structure on his view. I take it that the Hegelian position is that discrimination becomes "singling out" when it is interpreted in terms of the subject and object distinction. Then designation becomes an appropriate, partial way of making the connection between something subjective and something objective. But the Hegelian point must be that this is only possible because the same basic process of discrimination operates objectively as well as subjectively.

Hegel's view is preferable as an analysis of our practice of individuation because it avoids a certain counterintuitive result of Wiggins's view that is at odds with that practice.⁴⁰ Specifically, Wiggins thinks that there can be two objects in the same place at the same time, as long as the objects are of sufficiently different kinds. For example, Wiggins thinks that there can be both a tree and a collection of wood cells, with different persistence conditions, in the same location.⁴¹ But Hegel can accommodate our intuition that, in this case, constitution is identity, and there is only one object. To put Hegel's point in a slightly different way, we might say that the conditions of the nonpersistence of the collection of cells are precisely the persistence conditions of the tree. Without the mobility of cells that would eliminate one collection and establish another, the tree could not remain the self-identical entity that it is. Furthermore, a quantitative state of a tree such as a collection of cells does not present itself to us as an independent entity but as dependent on the lifecourse of the tree. Perhaps a better

way of expressing this dependence is to say that the collection of cells does not present itself to us at all but is a theoretical abstraction away from the tree that does present itself.⁴²

On Wiggins's view, the only way to accommodate our practice of saying that there is only one object there—the tree—is to identify the tree with the collection of molecules. This, however, would require the abandonment of Leibniz's Law, since the two objects have different persistence conditions and thus different properties.⁴³ As I have suggested, Hegel's ontology need not countenance the object-status of the collection of wood cells. Thus there need not be any violation of Leibniz's Law, since the involvement of the wood cells in the identity of the tree is more complex than simple coincidence as objects. Any given collection is just an aspect of the identity of the tree and subordinate to it.

This is related to the metaphysical status of individuation because the nonself-sufficiency, and thus nonobjecthood, of the collection of cells follows from the objectivity of the process of discrimination as Hegel describes it. Thus what might look like a minor point based on a strange (if not tendentious) understanding of 'identity,' 'discrimination' and 'individuation' does have substantial weight, since it is connected to Wiggins's counterintuitive result and Hegel's avoidance of the same.⁴⁴ This is a kind of inference to the best explanation: The best explanation for why we are able to individuate objects the way we do is that objects individuate themselves.

What I think all of this shows is that Hegel's model or *concept* of identity—though it at first seems far-fetched—in fact does a better job than the competition of matching our *conception* of identity, that is, the range of our practice of asking and answering identity questions and the range of the objects identified. To transpose an important Hegelian reminder from another context, one might say that Hegel's category of identity is so complicated precisely because "philosophy does not waste time with . . . empty and unworldly stuff. What philosophy has to do with is always something concrete and strictly present"⁴⁵ (EL94Z).

Conclusion

Once Hegel's conception of identity is understood as articulating the problem of identity along with its direct answer, good sense can be made of the notion that identity involves differences between

semblances and the tendency of those semblances to undermine the significance of their own differences. Although I will not argue for it here, I think that the erotetic interpretation is confirmed by the fact that the architectonic function of identity in Hegel's *Logic* is to articulate a problem bequeathed to it by the preceding Doctrine of Being. Briefly, the category of identity rephrases the problem left to the Doctrine of Essence by the Doctrine of Being in terms of a new form of determination, namely, "reflection." The remainder of the Doctrine of Essence is, on this view, an attempt to work out exactly how this form of determination must be filled out in order for it to provide the basis of a more substantial solution to the problem of identity, namely, criteria for the concrete identity of essences. For this reason, my argument here has been limited to showing that the characteristics of Hegel's category of identity are necessary for an erotetic understanding. Hegel himself does not think that they are sufficient—the sufficient conditions are only provided in the further development of the *Logic*. In closing, I briefly point out two aspects of this further development. The first is that Hegel immediately turns from the problem of identity to what he calls "Ground" relations, that is, relations in virtue of which one state of an essence is explained by another state on which it is dependent. So the summer state of the tree is dependent on the spring state of the tree, by which it is explained. Hegel thinks that for essences to be independent in any significant sense they have to be *self-dependent*.⁴⁶ This points the way to a criterion of identity that involves a richer notion of self-determination.

The second point is that the Doctrine of Essence culminates in just such a notion of self-determination, a real substantial freedom in the reciprocal interaction of substances. This in turn becomes the model for what Hegel calls the "freedom of the concept," which is in turn the model for freedom of the will.⁴⁷ The whole *Logic*, then, can be read as a transcendental defense of the inescapability of that form of independence that the human will exemplifies.

Notes

1. Parenthetical references are to be read as follows: (WL#/SL#) refers to Hegel's *Science of Logic*. The first reference is to the pagination of the German critical edition edited by Hogemann and Jaeschke (Hamburg: Meiner, 1984, 1978). References to the Doctrine of Being have the form (WL21,#) to indicate that they come from volume 21; otherwise, references are to volume 11. The (SL#)

reference is to the translation by A.V. Miller (Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press, 1969). The (EL#) reference is to Hegel's *Encyclopedia* version of the *Logic*, trans. Geraets, Suchting, and Harris (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett, 1991) and (EN#) to the *Philosophy of Nature* in the *Encyclopedia of Philosophical Sciences*, and the references to these are by section number. Quotations from the *Philosophy of Nature* are from M. J. Petry's translation (New York: Humanities Press, 1970). The (VGP#/LHP#) reference is to page numbers in Hegel's *Vorlesungen über die Geschichte der Philosophie (Dritter Band)*, (vol. 19 in *Sämtliche Werke* [Stuttgart: Frommanns, 1928]); and vol. 3 of his *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*, trans. E. S. Haldane and F. H. Simson (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1995).

2. I will use 'appearance,' 'semblance' and 'guise' to translate the German 'Schein,' and 'to appear [problematically]' or 'to seem' to translate the verb form 'scheinen.' I do this even though 'appearance' is usually reserved for the translation of 'Erscheinung,' which receives a more detailed articulation later in the *Logic*. Briefly, the difference between the terms is that 'Erscheinung' designates a more determinate relation, whereby the appearance expresses the nature of the essence that appears. In the case of a 'Schein,' however, whether this relation of expression obtains is precisely what is in question. In my exposition, I will mark this difference simply by insisting on the problematic character of 'Schein' and identity, so that we will not be misled into thinking that the relation between a 'Schein' and an essence is more definite than it is. I do not follow A. V. Miller in rendering 'Schein' as 'illusory being,' because this seems to me to prejudge the question of the relation between *Schein* and essence in the opposite direction.

3. In the *Encyclopedia Logic*, Hegel writes, "Now when we say further that all things have an essence, what we mean is that they are not truly what they immediately show themselves to be. A mere rushing about from one quality to another, and a mere advance from the qualitative to the quantitative and back again, is not the last word; on the contrary, there is something that abides in things, and this is, in the first instance, their essence" (EL112Z). My reconstruction of Hegel's category focuses on his minimal presentation in the section of the greater *Logic*, entitled "Identity" (book 2, section 1, chapter 2, section A). The contemporary formal notion of an object's continuity with itself is perhaps best represented in Hegel's system by the notion of pure quantity, which Hegel describes as "real being-for-self which has turned into itself and which as yet contains no determinateness: a compact, infinite unity which continues itself into itself" (WL173/SL184). In this sense Leibniz's Law gives the formula of what it is to be *one* thing, where differences between characteristics do not represent differences between things. Cf. WL176/SL187: "The *asunderness of the plurality* is still contained in this unity, but at the same time as not differentiating or *interrupting* it. In continuity, the plurality is posited as it is in itself; the many are all alike, each is the same as the other, and the plurality is, consequently, a simple, undifferentiated sameness."

4. This has the practical consequence for the interpreter that good examples of *Wesen* are likely to be good examples of *Substanz* as well, but one need not appeal to richer notions of causation, self-manifestation, or the expression of force in order to show that the examples have the structure described by *Wesen*.

5. Here I am implicitly relying on the identification of essence with "reflection," and thus the fact that identity is an articulation of the nature of reflection. I am eliding reflection here for simplicity's sake.

6. I take it that this is part of what Hegel means when he speaks of essence as "past—but timelessly past—being" (WL241/SL390). John Findlay makes a similar point in writing that the categories of the Doctrine of Essence deal with "what is *virtually, dispositionally* present" in objects, "with what *would* or *could* be in certain circumstances" in addition to what is manifest. This second formulation is more congenial to my view, since it avoids the positing of specifically dispositional properties. Essential identity is a matter of actual or possible transformation (whether temporal or nontemporal), and this need not be understood on the model of immediately present characteristics. See Findlay's *Hegel: A Re-examination* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1976), 220 (a supplementary note to the revised edition).

7. I take it that Hegel's point is not to argue for the ontological priority of either entities or processes, but to say that entities and processes are always understood in terms of each other. That the two come together is one aspect of the significance of the need to unite independence and dynamic determination (i.e., determination in terms of processes), which animates the Doctrine of Being. The task of the argument that follows Hegel's discussion of identity is to show how the elements of these processes have their independence in that process, and not as opposed to or distinct from that process.

8. The criteria for these principles are of course not to be found in Hegel's discussion of identity itself. But it is significant in this regard that the notion of identity ultimately devolves on the notion of ground, which specifies constraints on the connections between guises that could count as explanatory. The rest of the Doctrine of Essence can be read as a series of attempts to specify in more detail what kinds of connections are explanatory (e.g., between wholes and parts, forces and their expressions, substances and their causally produced accidents).

9. See EL122R, where Hegel distinguishes the emergence characteristic of ground processes from active, teleological, and productive processes. Although Hegel is not quite as cautious in the greater *Logic*, I believe that this is because in that work he is more interested in emphasizing the extent to which the category of identity represents an advance over the categories of the Doctrine of Being.

10. Frege writes, "Now Leibniz's definition [of identity] is as follows: 'Things are the same as each other, of which one can be substituted for the other without loss of truth.' This I propose to adopt as my own definition of identity." See *Foundations of Arithmetic*, trans. J. L. Austin (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1976), 76.

11. Here Hegel follows Kant in associating magnitudes with sensation and intuition but reverses Kant in claiming that this very association makes them abstract and thus not fully real.

12. See also WL244/SL393.

13. Nonetheless, he does not think that this model is adequate—in fact, he thinks it is the very essence of contradiction itself. The first problem to note is that if the subsistence of the guises is undermined, then the subsistence of the essence seems to be undermined as well, since the essence is not something beyond its guises (on pain of indeterminacy and Platonic difficulties). The problem, then, is to try to understand the nature of the difference involved in this process in such a way that the dependence of the guise on the essence can be maintained without eliminating the subsistence of the essence itself. In the end, Hegel wants to argue that the way to do this is to understand that difference in terms of asymmetrical explanatory relations between the different guises. This self-reflective insufficiency of the category of identity is implied by the structure of the argument and is an aspect of Hegel's presentation that Reynold Siemens misses. As a result, Siemens takes Hegel's explicit discussion of identity to be his last word instead of his first. From this discussion alone it is as yet undecided what form the differences involved in identity must take—nothing in Hegel's argument rules out statements in which the different terms were different occurrences of the same thing. See Siemens, "Hegel and the Law of Identity," *Review of Metaphysics* 42 (September 1988): 103–27. Errol Harris makes this developmental point in responding to Siemens in "Hegel on Identity (A Reply to Siemens)," in *The Spirit of Hegel* (Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press, 1993), 82–92.

14. I take this to be the epistemological sense of Hegel's repeated statements that identity is equally the whole and one element of the whole (e.g., WL266/SL417). For a short review of erotetic logic, see Bas Van Fraassen, *The Scientific Image* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980), ch. 5; David Harrah, "The Logic of Questions," in *Handbook of Philosophical Logic*, vol. 2, ed. D. Gabbay and F. Guentner (Boston: Reidel, 1984).

15. The temporal order of that plurality is not intrinsically relevant to the arising of an identity question, although it may of course be involved in the significance of particular identity questions. Nor does the structure require even that the question come before the answer. Although most often it does, sometimes we are given an answer and a context, and from them we infer the question. The point is just that the conceptual structure of asking questions does not have any inherently temporal dimension, though our experience of asking and answering questions is in time (like all of our experience in the spatial world).

16. Now one might think that this is hardly saying much, since it is also obvious that Hegel has provided us with only the form of an answer. In order to determine and justify the correct answer, we would need to further understand what a thing must be like if it were to be self-identical and appear in different ways. Hegel not only recognizes this point but endorses it, and the rest of the

Logic can easily be read as a regress on the conditions for making such a positive identity claim, culminating with the requirement that one grasp objects in terms of their concept in the Hegelian sense.

17. I say it articulates the core because this practice is temporal and often social, but there is nothing inherently temporal or social in the notions of questions and answers. I can ask and answer my own questions, for example. Also, although the question usually comes before the answer, if we are given an answer and a context we can often determine the question.

18. At other points in the *Logic* Hegel does seem to invoke an erotetic test for the meaning of terms, for example, WL182/SL192 in a discussion of the meaning of 'consisting' ('Bestehen'): "To ask of what something consists is to ask for an indication of something else, the compounding of which constitutes the said something. If ink is said to consist simply of ink, the meaning of the inquiry after the something else of which it consists has been missed and the question is not answered but only repeated."

19. See Harrah, "The Logic of Questions," in *Handbook of Philosophical Logic*, Vol. II, ed. D. Gabbay and F. Guenther (Boston: Reidel, 1984), 719.

20. *Tractatus* 5.5303, emphasis.

21. *Treatise on Human Nature*, ed. P. H. Niddich (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978), 201 (book 1, part 4, section 2).

22. Siemens misses this innovative feature of Hegel's notion of identity, and this leads him to misinterpret passages in which Hegel says that the identity statement promises a "different *determination*" and a "further *character*" (emphasis added) as requiring that there be numerically different objects. Siemens considers whether Hegel might mean that the linguistic tokens used in making an identity claim are what are identified, a view that Siemens finds absurd. But this is an anachronistic projection of a later formal and linguistic model of identity back onto Hegel's thought; the semblances that Hegel identifies are real aspects of identical essences, not the linguistic forms used to make statements about those essences. See Siemens, "Hegel and the Law of Identity," particularly 110–12, and 119–20.

23. On my view, it is the *significance* of identity statements that is at issue in Hegel's rejection of such statements as 'A plant is—a plant.' Siemens takes Hegel to think that such statements say nothing because they are tautologies, but even a tautology such as 'A bachelor is an unmarried man' has the requisite difference between subject and predicate to allow it to say something. Hegel's point is about the significance, meaningfulness, and motivation of the claim—thus his complaints of boredom in the face of tedious identity statements. See Siemens, 110–11.

24. See his *Logical Properties* (Oxford: Clarendon, 2000), 1–14.

25. *Ibid.*, 2. The first thing to note is this characterization's vulnerability to Hegel's argument that if identity just is a difference from difference, then its nature is defined by difference, and then the whole characterization threatens to collapse: "[Those who say that identity is not difference] do not see that they are themselves

saying that *identity is different*; for they are saying that *identity is different* from difference; since this must at the same time be admitted to be the nature of identity, their assertion implies that identity, not externally, but in its own self, in its very nature, is this, to be different" (WL262/SL413, emphasis in original). There is a strange and perhaps perverse literalism in this argument, but this can be in part explained as Hegel's pragmatism with respect to even abstract notions, which entails an attentiveness to what we are actually thinking when we consider or employ abstract categories. It also is a kind of unwinding of the definition offered to show its consequences. Of course, McGinn does not offer it as a definition, but I take it that Hegel would be unimpressed by this scruple.

26. I should note that reconstructing this practice is not McGinn's aim, although he does claim to show that identity has a fundamental role in our thought and practice. I am primarily interested in McGinn's view as representative of standard views and in showing that their difference from Hegel is fatal to the project of the erotetic reconstruction of our practice of individuation. My own pragmatism is that I take it that a conception that cannot support such a reconstruction is an unhelpful understanding of the notion of identity.

27. *Ibid.*, 10.

28. *Ibid.*, 13, emphasis in original.

29. *Treatise*, 201.

30. Here again I am abstracting away from the fact that Hume thinks that he has good reason to reject our everyday practice, since I am only interested in showing that the specific characteristics of Hegel's category are needed to model this practice.

31. This is what Wiggins refers to as the thesis of the sortal dependency of individuation. See Wiggins, *Sameness and Substance Renewed* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 21–24. One difference with respect to Wiggins is that Hegel does not explicitly think of an essence as a continuant—because there is officially no notion of temporality in the *Logic*. For Wiggins, however, the subject of individuation seems to be essentially a continuant. Because temporality does not play a role in either view, however, this distinction does not preclude comparison of the two views.

32. For Wiggins's discussion of the relation between ontological and conceptual questions, see *ibid.*, xii.

33. Wiggins, *Sameness and Substance Renewed*, 5.

34. *Ibid.*, xii.

35. See his discussion of relative identity at 24–28 and also his discussion of the "only a and b" rule at 97–98.

36. *Ibid.*, 159.

37. *Ibid.*, 105.

38. *Ibid.*, 125–26.

39. Ingram takes Hegel to endorse the doctrine of the identity of indiscernibles, but Hegel's discussion of Leibniz suggests that he endorses it only in the

peculiar form shown in this passage. He does not endorse the doctrine in the current sense in which the two qualitatively identical spheres are taken to be a counterexample, since he says that "To such sensuous things the maxim has no application, it is *prima facie* indifferent whether there are things which are alike or not; there may also be always a difference of space" (VGP458/LHP333). As I argue later, however, Hegel's position allows him to avoid Wiggins's counter-intuitive result of having two things in the same place at the same time without abandoning the other, more reasonable version of Leibniz's Law, namely, the indiscernibility of identicals.

40. Another potential Hegelian argument against Wiggins is found in Hegel's claim that his view is required to account for activity as such. Since Wiggins's view depends on the category of activity, Hegel's claim would show Wiggins's view to be parasitic on his own. Specifically, Hegel claims that a rudimentary self-establishment of unity through self-differentiation is a prerequisite for activity.

Hegel writes, "Difference is the whole and its own moment, just as identity equally is its whole and its moment. This is to be considered as the essential nature of reflection and as the specific, original ground of all activity and self-movement" (WL266/SL417). The metaphysical meaning of this claim is that it is of the very nature of the self-identical to differentiate itself, and vice versa. Without this, there would be no activity proper. Although Hegel does not go on to offer an explicit argument for this last claim, I think that his idea is that the notion of activity involves that of a change in an object, which change is in some sense internally determined (since a change due to some outside force would be passivity). The first aspect of activity (change in an object) requires that there be identity across this change, that is, that the object that appears at first is the same that appears after the change (where this 'first' and 'after' need not be given a temporal interpretation). But the second aspect (internal determination) requires that it be in the nature of that self-identical essence to differentiate itself in the way that the change represents.

In his discussion of Leibniz, Hegel says of the active monad, "Activity is to be different, and yet to be one, and this is the only true difference. The monad not only represents, it also changes; but in doing so, it yet remains in itself absolutely what it is. This variation is based on activity" (VGP459/LHP335). Of course, it can be in the nature of something to be passively changed in certain ways. Activity proper requires more robust self-determination than mere identity. The self-determination of identity is that change must be due to the nature of the semblances involved. The self-determination of activity requires that one of the semblances initiate the change. The richer form of self-determination depends on the more abstract self-determination of identity, but it does not supervene on the latter, since the richer form is not exhaustively determined by the more abstract. Although Hegel's claim is intriguing, making it into a plausible argument against Wiggins would require more space than I can devote to it in this chapter.

41. See Wiggins, "On Being in the Same Place at the Same Time," in *Material Constitution*, ed. Michael Rea (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 1997), 3–9.

42. Again, it is not the temporality of the order of the trees' transformations that matters but rather the basic pattern of the successive dependence of certain collections of cells on each other.

43. Wiggins, "On Being," 4.

44. I do not want to overemphasize the difference between Hegel and Wiggins. Many things he says suggest that his ontology is quite similar to Hegel's. Consider the following: "Essences of natural things, as we have them here, are not fancified vacuities parading themselves in the shadow of familiar things as the ultimate explanation of everything that happens in the world. They are natures whose possession by their owners is the precondition of their owners being divided from the rest of the reality as anything at all. These natures are delimited by reference to causal or explanatory principles and purposes that are low level perhaps; but they are fully demanding enough for something to count as their being disappointed or frustrated" (Wiggins, *Sameness and Substance Renewed*, 143). Furthermore, I take my constructed Hegelian response to the tree/collection of cells problem to be similar to Wiggins's rejection of Geach's puzzle of Tibbles the cat on the basis that one cannot arbitrarily define objects into existence (173–76). Also, Hegel glosses necessity of the objective distinctness of identicals as "What is not distinguished *in thought* is not distinguished" (VGP/LHP338, emphasis added). If Wiggins's "nature" is taken to correspond to what Hegel views as perceptions or "sensuous things" (see n. 38), then the two views are much closer than I have represented them. My basic point, however, is that the strange features of Hegel's category of identity are in fact required to account for our practice of identifying objects, and I take Wiggins's acceptance of two objects in the same place at the same time to be at odds with that practice.

45. As Ingram puts it, Hegel's treatment of identity "is the first major attempt to explain identity in a way which accords with our actual experience while yet satisfying the demands of reason for justification" (Ingram, "Hegel on Leibniz and Individuation" in *Kant Studien* 76: 420–35, 1985).

46. "According to this positive side, in which the self-subsistence in opposition, as the excluding reflection, converts itself into a positedness which it no less supersedes, opposition is not only *destroyed [zugrunde gegangen]* but has withdrawn *into its ground*" (WL281-2/SL4334, translation modified, emphasis in original).

47. See EL158–60 and §7 of the introduction to the *Philosophy of Right* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991).