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## Message from the President

*Francis Peddle*

With this issue of *ELEUTHERIA* the Institute completes its tenth year of publication. It is noteworthy that the first volume in the Spring of 1989 contained an announcement that the scholarly and philosophical work of the Institute would be accessible by members while a computer was in "host" mode on Monday evenings between 7:00 and 10:00pm. The intervening years have witnessed an unheard proliferation of journals, semi-journals, newsletters, monographs, bulletins and assorted intellectual efforts. Then in recent years the Internet, Email, electronic journals, philosophical news services and websites have supplanted much traditional publishing. Many of the well known print journals still retain their prestige and honour. Their permanency may, however, be somewhat less resilient than those wanting publication within may surmise.

Financial considerations are not the only reasons driving these developments. There is an air of democracy, of freedom and anarchic revelry on the Internet that is almost irresistible. Its blandishments are what one cares to make of them, without the coercive rot and peer group sidling that bedevils much of institutional scholastic life. As a cursory acquaintance with the history of ideas reveals, most great writing, such as Giambattista Vico's *New Science* or Henry George's *Progress and Poverty*, have been Sisyphean exercises in self-publication. Conventional wisdom dismisses vanity publishing. It is nonetheless integral to our cultural and philosophical traditions. If the Internet lightens the task of the mute Beethovens, Platos and Dantes lurking in our midst, then it is worthy of support and respect.

In the near future the Institute will have a website and join the ranks of global instantaneity and but hopefully not spontaneity – one of the Internet's more beguiling but counter-intellectual attributes. It is not yet clear if humanity has moved on to another sequence, or perhaps moment, in the articulation of absolute mind. Certainly technology as an external force and instrumentality must always remain subordinate to our moral and spiritual consciousness.

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In Volume IX, Number 2, Fall 1997 I declared our intention to produce the ten volumes of *ELEUTHERIA* in a bound edition. The Board of Directors has since then revisited this issue and has decided to reproduce selected thematic essays to be published in the *Monograph Series*. *ELEUTHERIA* has evolved over the years from its original inception as a more philosophical newsletter to a philosophical journal with the occasional reference to newsworthy items relevant to Institute activities. Issues of the *Monograph Series* will be announced herein with the usual discounts to Institute members.

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This issue of *ELEUTHERIA* contains the continuation of articles by James Lowry and myself of essays published in Volume X, Number 1, Spring, 1998 and Volume IX, Number 2, Fall, 1997 respectively. The metaphysical problem of dialectic as understood by the ancients requires the suspension of modern scientific and Christian assumptions. To confront the metaphysics of modernity through Kant and Hegel also necessitates a thorough survey of the many presuppositions associated with the concept of nothing. How one can reconcile or metaphysically integrate the ancients and the moderns, if such a reconciliation is possible, is an important undertaking of speculative philosophy.

## METAPHYSIC AND DIALECTIC: ANCIENT AND MODERN

*James Lowry*

### PART II – CHRISTIAN MEDIATION

Modern and ancient dialectic are mediated by Christianity. The triplicity of this mediation holds the key to understanding the aporiai of dialectic itself – both its historicity as human achievement and its transcendental character as divine, as absolute self-relation. The ancients knew enough to intuit that language in and of itself is not adequate to knowledge. At the same time they were unable to achieve a metaphysics which could adequately overcome this inadequacy.

### ANCIENT DILEMMAS

Aristotle in Book Beta (β) of the *Metaphysics* is the first to glimpse this problematic. In his struggle with Plato he wrestles with the dialectic of universality and being. The ambiguity of his effort shows itself forth in the unresolved dialectic of the further problems he regards as crucial for uncovering the truth. At the beginning of Book β Aristotle remarks:

It is right that philosophy should be knowledge of the truth. For the end of the theoretical knowledge is truth, while that of practical knowledge is action.<sup>1</sup>

Here in these distinctions we see the intractable dilemma for Greek philosophy, which only discloses itself in Neoplatonism once Aristotle has brought theoretical philosophy to a close. The paradox found in Aristotle is that theory only can lead him to an absolute Nous (νοῦς) in which the passive and active intellect as he understands them in the *De Anima* are self-involved in their unity. Hence the relation of the νοῦς as ultimate being and cause is of a purely passive nature as it *relates* to beings which move out of desire. Aristotle recognizes clearly that Plato was right to signify ultimate truth as universal, as ideas and even as numbers. Yet he rejects that Plato's characterization of the *being* of ideas and numbers can

be actual rather than potential. In Aristotle's language being *is not* except as *substantial* – and substance cannot be characterized as either an idea or as a number. Aristotle develops a whole theory about predication and substance to counteract Plato's esoteric teachings about the One and replaces Plato's One with the νοῦς. But this solution, as is shown in Part One of this essay, is only good when going from beings to Being, motion to rest, potential to actual. The difficulty which is obscured by our cosmological assumptions, which tend to be a mixture of Christian and scientific, is embedded in the language Aristotle himself uses to delineate the last question in Book β.

We must not only raise these questions about first principles, but also ask whether they are universal or what we call individual [τὰ καθ' ἑκάστα]. If they are universals, they will not be substances; for everything that is common indicates not a "this" but a "such"; but substance is a "this". And if we are to be allowed to lay it down that a common predicate is a "this" and a simple thing, Socrates will be several animals – himself and "man" and "animal", if each of these indicates a "this" and a single thing. If, then, the simples are universals, these results follow; if they are not universals but of the nature of individuals, they will not be knowable; for the knowledge of anything is universal. Therefore if there is to be knowledge of the principles there must be other principles prior to them, namely those that are universally predicated of them.

Only individuals exist and only substances exist, yet predicates of substances are knowable only in so far as they are universal. How does Aristotle solve this problem? In the following way. All substances other than νοῦς are either finite and pass away – that is the difference between their subject and predicates overcomes their unity – or they are eternal but potential in that the discrepancy of subject and predicates requires a circular motion which is a desire for something outside their unity to *preserve* their unity. In Aristotle this is further underlined by his position that there are a *multiplicity* of these eternal beings. Their *end* is the unique *unmoved mover* in

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<sup>1</sup> All quotations from Aristotle are from the Ross translation.

which subject and predicates, that is subject and object as thought by the subject are without difference. Hence, in Aristotle's νοῦς substance is universal, and it is one, and it *is*. Plato's principles of one and being are predicates of a substance in which all differences are equivalences. The paradox of this solution may also be stated otherwise: the *simplicity* is not numerical but actual as the absence of potentiality. The end is the beginning. Of course, this unity of opposites cannot be *said* but only *thought* and in the thinking it, the Aristotelian Nous, is itself independent and thus free. What is negated here, of course, is matter, potentiality. This negation is intended to be a solution to the abstract metaphysical nature of Platonic metaphysics in so far as knowledge of cause is theoretical.

#### THEORETICAL AND PRACTICAL CAUSE

Once it is demanded that this theoretical knowledge be a cause as practical, that is as active, the underpinnings of Greek philosophy begin to break down. This demand only occurs, however, once Plato and Aristotle have reduced everything to the absolute principle. Only then does the question of how this absolute principle is related actively to effects become the central problem of metaphysics. It is this problematic that Neoplatonism must deal with. And its solution is to revert to Plato to a One beyond Being, to an unsayable and ultimately unthinkable principle. The Nous becomes a second hypostasis mediating between the One and Nature. Using Aristotle's own logic the Neoplatonists regard Aristotle's Nous as containing multiplicity and thus a measure of potentiality. There is indeed a certain logic to this if we remember that the idea of matter is an ultimate surd in Greek philosophy. This recollection can only be understood by linking two phenomena of Greek philosophy. The first is that in Plato and Aristotle matter serves as a kind of purse for predicates, the second that it is not possible for Greek consciousness to conceive of a void, of a nothingness pure and simple, of the negative as purely ideal. The residue of this impossibility remains right up until the twentieth century in the idea of ether. Aristotle gets around the problem by ignoring it. He simply folds matter into potentiality and banishes potentiality from Nous. The Neoplatonists make the correct logical connection in that matter becomes the ultimate *other* of the One (Proclus, *E. T. Prop. 72 Cor.*) as closest to the One. Its nature is Platonically the nature of dyadic multiplicity and then of derivative form. Yet the explanation is ultimately metaphorical. In Part One the argument shows how,

on the one hand, Aristotelian metaphysics overcome Platonic idealism and how, on the other hand, Neoplatonism subordinated Nous to the One. The conflict enclosed in these juxtapositions is not resolvable in a framework of Greek cosmology. A return to Greek religion is not truly possible after Aristotle as the emperor Julian, to the dismay of Gibbon, found out. Yet Aristotelian metaphysics is not a final solution as the Neoplatonists disclosed. The world turned to the alembic of Christianity. Understand this transition, this dialectic, and the problematic of modernity can be chiselled out of its ambiguity. Failure to fathom this transition and the ambiguity simply sinks into nothingness and despair – into the self-imposed nemesis of modernity – nihilism.

#### THE CHRISTIAN ALEMBIC

Christianity enlivens the ancient world. The electricity of Homeric religion reasserts itself in an actual personality with an overweening will whose compassionate love overcomes matter and motion with a grace giving breath – with a spirit which actively unites the finite with eternity. Greek philosophy ends with the universal effort of thought combined with ritual asceticism – a struggle to unite soul without body to an unknowable impersonality in order to fulfill a destiny longed for since the days of Achilles and Odysseus. Christianity promises eternal life – a unity of soul and body. A single act of will, a decision of faith can accomplish for everyone, for anyone, in a flash what heretofore took an esoteric life of discipline and meditation. An interim sacrament discloses that the world, which always slips inconsolably out of Greek hands, is indeed the road to Heaven, but a road to be done away with in the future in a battle that banishes its finitude forever. The arrival of Armageddon completes the circle of finite life. As the interim expands – the time *between* the birth and death of nature – and the generations between the coming and the coming again inexorably multiply, the vitality of decision making tends to bifurcate into either a kind of intellectual exegesis or theosophy, an allegorization of flesh and blood – a bacchanalia in reverse – or into a literal willfulness which denies the reality of an interim at all. To get at the transition as it actually occurred, we must be able to give up this bifurcation in the same way that we had to give up Christianity and modern cosmology to recapture the Greek. The Christian spirit that replaced the ancient world made a promise – the promise of eternal life, of the absolute continuation of *individual personality*. Out of this promise, and *this*

*promise alone*, arises the theology, the sacraments, the parousia of Christianity. A new cosmology is born which is not Greek. And it is not modern. There are elements of both, but it is unique as the promise, now mostly forgotten, is unique.

### THE PROMISE OF CHRISTIANITY

The newness of this Christian cosmology is palpable if we put ourselves among the ancients without hope of consolation, without intellectual access to a solution of the relation between ultimate cause and effects. The Christian promise is made in the following context: the principle is a personality; the world has a purpose; matter is not an ultimate principle. To understand these theorems has been the labour of many centuries, and becomes ever more poignant as time passes, until finally we come to the anguish of our own century. But early Christians felt no such Angst. For them the nothingness of the finite is swept up in the grace of God. Intellectually theology is born and becomes independent of philosophy; religiously the sacraments are reduced in number and take precedence over thought. The Greek problematic is solved very simply: *creatio ex nihilo*. We can follow at length the history of this doctrine, but we are none the wiser if we do not understand that this doctrine is what underlies in the end the whole edifice of universal faith.

### THE PARADOX OF CHRISTIAN NOTHINGNESS

The physical world *is* nothing. In itself it is not. To hold on to it in anyway – to family, to body, to power – is to lose soul and *paradoxically* also body. Everything must be done *twice* – we must be born again, we must lose our life to save it, the Saviour must come again. There is an undeniable denial of nature in Christianity. The creation is good *but* in itself it is not – without *grace* it is the root of all evil. Put more intellectually the world has no inherent independence – it is not anything in itself. When Christianity tried to understand these paradoxes – which are the forms of the sayings of Jesus – paralleling in words the acts of his life – they inevitably come up with linguistic formulations which to ordinary logic are absurd. Christian doctrines are all in the form of unified oppositions. They are all *super-* or *supra-* natural. The Incarnation – the Trinity in which the *Spirit is a Person*; the virgin birth; even if we move anachronistically, papal infallibility. And the most important of all is *creatio ex nihilo*, because in this doctrine is summed up the basis of the others and the unique break with the ancient world. Put simply God creates the world

from nothing – not from Himself (pantheism) and not from pre-existing matter (dualism). This is not an empirical doctrine but the very basis of empiricism itself. This is a doctrine that can only be revealed. Yet it is only revealed through thought, through reflection on the implications of the events and statements in the gospels.

Forgetting how doctrine arises is natural. Plato's idea of recollection – the theoretical equivalent to reincarnation as practical action attests to the universality of such sleep. But sleep like negation only comes after activity and must be regarded as a transition for renewal; otherwise sleep becomes an end in itself and leads to evil. Sleep is to further wakefulness. The best forgetting is specific. Using Aristotelian language we may say that forgetting should aid in renewing substance by giving us the strength to distinguish between substance and accidents. Using Platonic language we may say that it is to make possible the process of sorting out ideality from sophistry. Using Christian language we may say that sin can only be overcome through prayer acted upon. Christian doctrines, of course, have a history, but they are also the result of reflection on the idea of eternity, on the idea that Christianity has overcome time and place. Here again as in Plato and Aristotle and Neoplatonism we find linguistic formulation that formulated what cannot be said but can only be thought and in some sense felt, before *and* after it is thought. The best formulation of this logical implication latent in Christian doctrine does not occur in time until about a thousand years after the life of Jesus, when the remarkable Anselm struggled to *understand his faith (fides quaerens intellectum)*. Anselm is the first to have the insight that the *idea* of God entails being; that thought itself cannot be without being.

### UNDERSTANDING CHRISTIAN FAITH

Anselm's formulation helps as does no other, to understand the uniqueness of the Christian cosmos. Anselm *begins* with God, not with the world. This is unique. All other proofs of the being of God *begin* with the world. In other words all other proofs are *within* the context of Greek cosmology in which beings in their hierarchy just *are*. When Parmenides begins philosophy, begins the discovery of mind, of Nous as self-thinking, he *denies* not-being. Contrast this to the Thomistic explanation of *creatio ex nihilo* (Q.45, Art.1) as creation from not-being. Plato as Aristotle points out realized he had to grapple with Parmenides assertion in order to avoid negating the world. Plato does so by refuting dialectically the

nothingness of not-being. Not-being becomes "otherness" in Plato and dyadic existence is saved. Parmenides negation is in the *Parmenides* dialogue made positive. Aristotle corrects Plato's solution, but accepts the dilemma to be solved as the crucial one. In Christianity the problematic is deepened and the Parmenidean assertion is rejected *and* accepted. Creation is from not-being. There is no pre-existent matter; no unexplained emanation of multiplicity. A supreme *personality*, which does not need a world, gratuitously, willfully, inscrutably creates heaven and earth and time itself from not-being! The implication of this, which is formulated by Aquinas quite clearly, cannot really be explicated until Anselm formulates his proof. The fact that Aquinas does not realize the implication himself in his rejection of Anselm's proof shows as well as anything can the problematic of the Christian position. Anselm's proof taken to its logical conclusion indicates that Christian theology is revealed only *in so far as it is thought*. It is literally faith understood. The paradox of the position is that since something cannot both be known and believed at the same time revelation would be reduced to philosophy. This in turn would do away with divine will as inscrutable and mean that human philosophy and divine thinking could be one. Thomas does not draw out this implication, but believes Anselm has treated existence as a predicate of thought. His objection is a logical one which fails to realize the insight of Anselm that any cosmological argument depends on the assumption that the world can be as a starting point. But since the world is not necessary but contingent being, it must follow that we cannot start with the contingent in a proof. This is the same circularity which Thomas blames in Anselm's definition of God as "that than which nothing greater can be thought." Thomas unwittingly is really sticking to the old Greek cosmology. In so doing he does not see the incompatibility of regarding matter

as the principle of individuation. This becomes clear when he struggles to formulate the being of angels, who become like Proclean henads – as each being a separate species – as wraith-like Platonic forms in imitation of the abstract existence of Aristotle's eternal movers. The paradoxical character of Aquinas' thought is also evident in his use of a Neoplatonic framework of procession and return to explain creation together with an Aristotelian formulation of *Nous* as the nature of the absolute principle. In Christianity it is the individual as personality, and the personality as the image of God that lies at the heart of its promise. And personality cannot be attributed to matter in an Aristotelian way since in Aristotle it

is a negative principle. Further, if it is clear as Aquinas states that angelic nature is closer to God than human and that the human as persons rather than as kind are what is saved then we cannot accept the idea that matter is our uniqueness. There is a kind of passive dialectic in Aquinas that is easy to overlook at first glance because in him Christian cosmology and Greek cosmology are not fully differentiated. The Thomistic synthesis exacerbates the dilemmas of Greek philosophy by bringing them into Christian theology without resolution. Aquinas can argue as his defenders in these matters would, that he has distinguished between natural reason and revelation. Yet if we look at the section of the *Summa Theologiae* on God's knowledge we find a very speculative explanation, which, as does all speculative philosophy, borders on pantheism. Here Aquinas describes God's knowledge as knowledge of Himself (Q.14, Art.2, 3). He understands this self-knowledge as God's being and substance (4) and that this knowledge is not discursive (7). Most significantly Thomas goes on to say that "the knowledge of God is the cause of things." When Aquinas actually describes creation he does not use Aristotelian but Neoplatonic language. (Q.44, Art.1) "All beings apart from God are not their own being, but are beings by participation." Despite Thomas' use of Aristotle he has no hesitation in using Platonic language which he received from Neoplatonic sources. Creation is characterized by Aquinas as an "emanation". We "must consider not only the emanation of a particular being from a particular agent, but also the emanation of all being from the universal cause, which is God; and this emanation we designate by the name of creation." (Q.45, Art.1)

#### THE CHRISTIAN REVOLUTION

Christian doctrine takes the place of Greek metaphysics just as the Christian promise and sainthood through faith and prayer take the place of ancient wisdom and meditation. What should not escape our notice is that in Christianity Aristotle and Plato are equalized but in a religious rather than a philosophical context. This brings into view in a certain way the transcendental variations of ancient philosophy and Christian theology. First Parmenides formulates a philosophical thinking principle, which cannot allow for beings while holding to being. Then Plato seeks to correct the statement of Parmenides by allowing for not-Being. Aristotle in turn seeks to correct Plato by re-establishing thought as ultimate being while allowing for the reality of beings which

he thinks Plato does away with. Neoplatonism, faced with the problem of procession and return, then corrects Aristotle as having only solved the question of Being but not the question of Unity. Neoplatonists revert to a religious outlook through philosophy and return to and expand Platonic metaphor in order to account for causation as processive. Yet, they as does Aristotle, retain a cosmology which regards matter and beings as *always existing alongside of Being*. The various lacunae in this Neoplatonic effort to explain causation and keep Greek cosmology are swept away by Christianity which first enunciates an ultimate principle which as explicit personality is much more easily characterized in Aristotelian language than in Platonic. At the same time the idea of Nous is at the

top of an hierarchy which is Neoplatonic and not Aristotelian! Beings are now enfolded into divine thinking while thinking cannot be explained in Aristotelian conceptions. Rather Neoplatonic conceptions are used. The old original question of not-being is solved by disengaging it from matter and calling it nothing.

The Christian resolution to the problematic of the ancient world is also a revolution and a break which demands and assumes a different cosmology. How this revolution is related as mediation to that of modernity will be the subject of *Part Three* of this essay on *Metaphysic and Dialectic*.

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## HEGEL'S CONCEPT OF PURE NOTHING

*Francis Peddle*

Previously we considered the importance for Kant of the concept of nothing in the first division of transcendental philosophy [Vol.12, No.2, Fall, 1997, 6-12]. Concepts of reflection, such as the comparative concepts of identity and difference, do not have a constitutive employment like the pure concepts of the understanding. These determinate reflections are logical presuppositions or categorial formations which necessarily precede any statement. It is clear that the mathematical concepts of reflection assume the Hegelian logical category of "determinate being." Sameness and agreement may be thoroughly noumenal but their "comparability" with difference and conflict assumes the utter determinateness of the latter. Nothing as such is free of conflict – a realm of insouciance and tranquillity.

In the reflective concept of relations, loosely allied with the dynamic class of categories, understood as the intrinsic and the extrinsic, Kant seeks the transcendental sources of the transition, if there is indeed a transparent one, from the judgments of the Transcendental Analytic to the syllogistic speculations of the Transcendental Dialectic. A transcendental object is thought primarily in the negative, i.e. it is something about which we can say it is *neither possible nor impossible*. From the standpoint of the understanding, a transcendental object contains nothing which can be absolutely affirmed or denied.

Even Kant's negative nothing assumes a correlativity of sorts, and thus a determinateness, for it presupposes the *contradictory* juxtaposition of two utterly incommensurable determinations, like a square circle. An absurdity is a long way from absolute nothingness *per se* which is the intended thought direction of the fourth division in the table on the concept of nothing in "The Amphiboly of the Concepts of Reflection." It appears then that Kant simply and abstractly coextends absolute nothing or the negative nothing and the more fluid, but determinately identifiable, nothings of the *ens imaginarium*, the ghostly figures of the *nihil privativum* and the conceptually exciting, but nonexperiential, thoughts of the *ens rationis* which are decidedly noumenal but have a "nothing" quality about them because they are without objects.

How does Hegel bridge the difficult conceptual gap between pure indeterminate nothing, which he says is the same as pure being, and determinate being which is the realm of the qualitative, the real, the alterable and the finite? The following comments are restricted primarily to the opening sections of Hegel's *Wissenschaft der Logik* (1812), translated by A.V. Miller as *The Science of Logic* (London, 1969), commonly referred to as the larger logic.

For Hegel logic is the system of pure reason, the

realm of the truth as such or "the exposition of God as he is in his eternal essence before the creation of nature and finite mind" (p.50). Taken literally this statement is theistic, but there is little in Hegelian philosophy that should be taken as such. Thinking and the logical cannot be disentangled for they are one and the same. As Hans-Georg Gadamer states there is a "panmethodism" in this identification of thinking and the logical. If the logical deals with the truth as such then it is both all-encompassing and in a certain sense abstract or removed from the characteristically non-logical brittleness of natural externality and the often shifting and impure sands of finite mind.

Unlike Kant, who seems to have stumbled upon absolute nothing in his transcendental consideration of the concepts of reflection, Hegel goes to tortuous lengths in the larger logic to justify beginning the system of logic, and indeed the system of thinking *qua* thinking, with pure nothing, which is indistinguishable from pure being. The emphasis is on pure nothing since pure being, which is abstract being *qua* being has no "specification and filling" (p.69). Pure being is thus more of the nature of pure nothing than of pure being. The latter characterization lends itself to a degree of negligent misrepresentation since "being" in common language always has some element of thereness (Dasein) (dangerously Heideggerian), some degree of opaque fullness or even a corporeal weightiness all of which is inimical to the indeterminate immediacy of pure being. Hegel is extremely careful to distinguish pure being (reines Sein) from determinate being (Dasein ist bestimmtes Sein).

Kant analyzed the transcendentalness of the concepts of reflection to the point where he came upon the reflectionless (and relationless) thought of an absolute nothing. He saw that systematic philosophy must confront the possibility/impossibility of the ineffably unqualified nothing as a transcendental insight from which all other transcendental considerations and phenomenal realities somehow must arise. The absence of logical and developmental linearity in the *Critique of Pure Reason* puts the concept of nothing at the end of the Transcendental Analytic and the beginning of the Transcendental Dialectic – a calm demilitarized zone between the understanding and the higher cognitive powers of pure reason. The concept of nothing is, however, ultimately sourced in the system of transcendental ideas where it lurks ominously in the backstaging of the non-constitutive concepts of pure reason. Only

the higher cognitive and inferential powers of pure reason can abstract from all relation and modality and arrive at absolutely nothing.

Should Hegel, then, have commenced the logic with pure nothing? There is a sense in which he did. The thought-predicates of pure being are numerous. It is an indeterminate and simple immediacy, lacking all quality or diversity. It is pure emptiness, the absolutely abstract, relationless and undifferentiated. It contains no reference outwards. The beginning must be abstract, i.e. it must not presuppose anything. By not presupposing anything Hegel means that it ought not to be mediated or have a ground (p.70). All determination and interrelation of distinct moments presupposes mediation. Hegel is much more concerned with logical and metaphysical circularity than with the beginning as a pure immediacy (p.71). Beginning, as a thought-orientation, necessitates abstraction and an absolute beginning, unlike the derivative beginnings so redolent throughout the history of philosophy, requires an unmitigated indeterminacy. Anything short of this would either make the beginning an end or something in between absolute beginning and absolute end. As either it is a result and not a beginning. How can pure being/nothing be both a beginning and an end?

Linearly, the Absolute Idea is the end of the system of thinking. It is the most mediated of all results. Logically thought can move, and normally does, from the unseparatedness of immediacy and mediation to pure being/nothing or immediacy as such. This is an exercise in abstraction or the de-determinizing of all determinateness. It should be emphasized that such an exercise, which is an integral feature of all negative theology and world-negating religions, is only at rest non-referentially since a reference to determinateness requires an act of re-affirming the immediacy of the abstract beginning of logic as pure nothing. I will speak later about the inherent inability of pure being/nothing to sustain a complete non-referentiality or absolute non-reference to determinateness.

It appears that Hegel must conclude that pure nothing can only be thought within the context of logical, developmental linearity and that concrete, not pure logical, science is irreducibly circular and strictly opposed to an absolute beginning, pure being/-nothing, or indeterminate immediacy. Everything concrete is opposed to absolute indeterminacy. Pure nothing is then decidedly, and obviously, a non-

existent and Hegel's system must abhor it as much as the ancients abhorred indeterminateness and the empty [τὸ κενός]. Hegel is, however, adamant that nothing "is" in our thinking, imagination and speech (p.101). It is, in these senses, being or something that is there present to our minds and consciousness. It is not something, or a quasi-particularized this or that, which is more appropriately situated in the thought of determinate being. Modern logicians cringe at the thought of nothing because they tend to think of it in terms of a something or other, which is an obvious absurdity. Nothing is not *nothing* as annihilatory of our thought of nothing, but it also is *not* being in the sense that it is something "out there." It *is* only as an "existent" for our thoughts and imaginations.

Certainly for the nineteenth century Russian nihilists being existed as an oppressive, deadweight existent that hardly lightened the encounter between consciousness and reality. This could be taken as a onesided subjectivity which has turned completely in on itself and in the process annihilates all institutions, external realities and substantive regulating principles. On the other hand, it could also be a self-absolutizing subjectivity that is so confident of itself that it treats external reality as nothing and wholly insubstantial, for only in consciousness is to be found stability, certainty and order.

The question remains is nothing also a non-thinkable? Does the beginning of the system of thinking in pure being/nothing somehow dirempt the standpoint of self-consciousness, wherein thought and reality are understood as essentially one and the same, and thus throw us once again back into the problematic of the phenomenology of consciousness? Is the thought of nothing a thought-orientation and nothing else, unlike being, which though ultimately non-diremptible from thought is not completely dependent upon it as well?

Kant's non-thinkables in the table on the concept of nothing are not concepts at all. They are the negative nothings of strict contradiction or impossibility *per se* – one side of the possible/ impossible thinkables coming immediately after the concept of nothing. Kant's non-thinkables are determinate insofar as they attempt to conjoin strictly alien and non-joinable determinations or determinations which conceptually require the preempting of other determinations.

Hegel's nothing, insofar as it is intuited or thought, is empty intuition (Anschauung) or thought (Denken). Kant's table on nothing contains no such

identification. He has an empty concept (Begriff), which for Hegel is an oxymoron, an empty object (Gegenstand), likewise a conceptual travesty, and an empty intuition (Anschauung). But even with the latter Hegel is reluctant to go very far because of the contentless nature of pure nothing. Putting the adjective "empty" (leer) in front of concept or object is not sufficient to nullify the determinate character of these thought formations. One can think oneself into utter indeterminateness but it is a metaphysical transgression to graft indiscriminately that indeterminateness on to one and everything or on to something which is already a this or that.

That the higher cognitive powers ineluctably engage reason in inherent contradictions or antinomies is, of course, a fundamental insight of Kantian philosophy; not an insight elaborated from Zeno, Parmenides, Plato and Aristotle, but arrived at through a ratiocinative transcendental analysis that

is ahistorically typical of the Enlightenment. By artificially separating pure being and pure nothing Kant could conclude, according to Hegel (pp.103-105), that the beginning is incomprehensible because one can equally assert the world has *and* has not a beginning in time. To avow either is to engage in transcendental illusions on the principles laid down in Kant's Transcendental Dialectic. In this sense the Amphiboly is no different than the Transcendental Dialectic insofar as incomprehensibles and non-thinkables are generated on the basis of holding being and nothing in separation or maintaining the principles of contradiction and identity as themselves fundamentally contradictory.

Hegel's "pure nothing" is a thought-determination (Denkbestimmung). It is a thinkable absolute immediacy. The logical, as a pure science of truth, requires the greatest distance from truth, which is pure nothing, in order to begin the odyssey to the Absolute Idea or absolute truth as the logical. The beginning as pure being/nothing is, however, much easier to conceptualize as a reverse logical linearity than as a leap from pure indeterminateness to determinate, qualitative being. In this sense the logic does not begin until determinate, qualitative being is posited, but Hegel is insistent that pure being, although undeniably nothing, is nonetheless *being*, or being vanishing in nothing and nothing in being. It is therefore in some sense a movement – Becoming (Werden).

The argument from the progressive linearity of the



logic, as initially the doctrine of being (progressive intensity of determinateness and mediation) must now focus on "becoming" as the transitional thought-determination between pure nothing and determinate being. Hegel limns Becoming into the "moments" of the (1) "Unity of Being and Nothing" to which there are added lengthy Remarks, (2) "Coming-to-be and Ceasing-to-be" and the (3) "Sublation of Becoming" which also has an explanatory Remark on the expression "to sublimate (Aufheben)." These are undoubtedly the most well known and controversial passages in the logic. There are leaps of faith and high jumps of inference in the succinct text of the logical thought determinations which give the dialectical peaks and troughs of the remainder of the work a distinctive gentility.

It is in the "purity" of being and nothing that their identity is to be immediately found. By conjoining unqualified indeterminateness to both being and nothing Hegel is able to characterize both as a neither/nor contrariety and an either/or contrariety. Determinate concepts of reflection are therefore necessarily operative even at the very initial stages of logic. This is not surprising given the post-phenomenological level of consciousness presupposed by the system of thinking. If being cannot be nothing, nor vice versa, and if neither being nor nothing can stand or be in themselves in some sense, then they both must be in a third, becoming, which is the unity of being and nothing. Does becoming involve a determinateness?

The first determinate-like phrase in Hegel's text is "vanishing" (verschwinden). The immediate vanishing of pure being in nothing and conversely nothing in being is the vanishing of determinateness and distinguishability. One does not in the thought of vanishing necessarily espy any hint of fleeting determinateness, but it does give us the whiff of alteration, variance, modification, mutation, perhaps transfiguration and alas there is change and with change we have movement, even if it is the desiccated movement of a complete vanishing and disappearance in the other. When we have movement we have becoming and with becoming we have the possibility of a system of philosophy. Becoming introduces difference into the system of thinking for without difference it is impossible to think oneself into absolute abstraction. Indeterminateness is as inseparable from determinateness as the principle of identity from contradiction.

Hegel is very concerned to depart from the

philosophical tradition and show how determinateness internally breaks out of pure being/nothing as a non-extraneous and wholly self-unfolding dialectic. In the third Remark in the section on "Becoming," which Miller entitles "The Isolating of These Abstractions," Hegel intones that hitherto, as in Parmenides and Spinoza, philosophy always broke out of its first principle or absolute beginning by adding something extraneous or outside of it which had the effect of creating a subprime beginning in order to get the system of philosophy into gear. The tradition therefore always brought difference, plurality and heterogeneity into its first principles through a process of external reflection. In this sense there were always multiple beginnings to the "system of philosophy." How to begin remained mired in shallow controversy as well as deep philosophical dispute. The result is more often than not a commonsense empiricism which espouses beginning with what we obviously have at hand or a thorough-going nihilism which maintains that nothing can break out of the nothing.

The textbook definition of "nihilism" as a deep, and not simply moral, scepticism about the stark emptiness of human existence; its pervasive absence of meaning, of ordering principles, of non-trivial norms and defensible rules, is rooted in the onesidedly negative dissolution of determinateness into indeterminateness. Philosophical nihilism is not simply a Nietzschean exposure and re-interpretation of traditional values and moribund thought-systems in order to overcome nihilism as such but a recognition that a metaphysical collapse into total indeterminateness – a folding of what already has been unfolded back into a radical indeterminateness and slothful immediacy – is always an intellectual and moral mishap waiting to happen. The primary counterweight to such an abyss is the acknowledgment that being is fundamentally determinate being and not nothing.

Hegel is laudatory of F.H. Jacobi's eloquence in criticizing the Kantian effort to elicit a pure manifold out of the original *a priori* synthetic unity of self-consciousness. Jacobi is unmerciful in taking Kant to task for his inability to get oscillation out of pure spontaneity (ego), the consonant out of the vowel and the manifold and the many out of a dull and empty consciousness. It is during the discussion of Jacobi's difficulties with Kant's juxtaposition of the manifold and the *a priori*, original synthetic unity of apperception, that Hegel makes the following remarkable declaration:

But it is this very *indeterminateness* which constitutes its determinateness; for indeterminateness is opposed to determinateness; hence as so opposed it is itself determinate or the negative, and the pure, quite abstract negative (p.99).

The matter is revisited again later in the subjective logic or the doctrine of the concept:

Even the supreme being, the pure abstraction, has, as already remarked, the determinateness of indeterminateness; but indeterminateness is a determinateness, because it is supposed to stand *opposed* to the determinate (p.609).

If abstraction is made from everything, then obviously nothing is left over. The beginning is therefore not an affirmative but an absolute negative. As a reverse logical linearity nothing is thus the end of logic. Nothing cannot, however, be absolutely separated from being. The declaration that nothing is simply existent in thought and imagination and being is somehow "out there" is a pseudo-dualism. Nothing is ineliminably *related* to being and thus the "thought" of being and nothing is equally the substantial and existent interrelation of the two.

It is notable that at this point in the dialectic, that is, the recognition of the determinateness of indeterminateness, Hegel speaks of the necessary connection of nothing with "a being," that is, determinate being (Dasein). It is clear that Hegel is not thinking here of determinate negations (bestimmte Negationen) or a negative nothing (negatives Nichts), which is itself something affirmative. For Hegel, determinate negations contain a deeper indwelling tendency toward absolute indeterminateness. If absolute pure nothing is the end of thought and possibly of existence as well, then is not Hegel really talking about what eventually became known in physics as the second law of thermodynamics or entropy – the movement of the universe toward the universal temperature equilibrium? Is determinate being always at risk of dissolving itself into indeterminateness? And is this the ultimate source of the deep *nisus* in modernity towards nihilism? It is only determinateness as such, which is not a particular but a much more universal term encompassing quantity and measure as the unity of quality and quantity, that sustains and holds distinct in opposition the existent for thought and being of indeterminateness.

Hegel is hesitant to think of the distinction between determinateness and indeterminateness as an *opposition* since this term imparts to the relationship between the two the character of external reflection. Indeterminateness, insofar as it can be thought and posited, is a determinateness and likewise determinateness contains the ineliminably negative – an inner reference beyond itself, propelled by the negative, to the indeterminate. How does this set us up for the introduction of determinateness into becoming as the unity of being and nothing?

After the propositionally dogmatic statement, and equivocation, that becoming is the unity of being and nothing, Hegel develops an important double determination in the moments of "coming-to-be" (Entstehen) and "ceasing-to-be" (Vergehen). The two determinations of which Hegel speaks are in fact two identifiable unities. Being as immediate and as related to nothing is a unity, or as Hegel says, an imagined self-subsistence (vorgestellte Selbständigkeit), not a moment. Conversely, nothing as immediate and as related to being is a unity, but not a moment. Hegel infuses change into this scenario and declares that nothing "changing" into being is coming-to-be or origination and being changing into nothing is ceasing-to-be or annihilation. We now seem to have further advanced in the dialectic than the simple vanishing which made its appearance at the very outset of the identification of the category of becoming.

Differentiation enters into the dialectic in the form of thought *direction*. Hegel states that this is not a matter of "reciprocal sublation" (p.106) but a matter of each sublating itself in itself. How are we to think the bidirectionality embedded in the category of becoming? It seems that coming-to-be is somehow a movement out of primordial indeterminateness into beingness *per se* – an undifferentiated quality/quantity beingness that is nonetheless determinateness in the broadest possible sense of being without being nothing. Contrariwise, ceasing-to-be is the passing away of unparticularized determinateness, of quality/quantity as such, into the immediacy of pure nothing. We are therefore moving from the layered mediacies of determinate being to the unstratified emptiness of pure being/nothing and vice versa in full acknowledgment of the impossibility of thinking indeterminateness apart from determinateness – non-existence as coterminous with existence.

Hegel appears then to be no further ahead than the Kantian position in the "Amphiboly" that after

absolute nothing the first division of philosophy is into possibility/impossibility. If indeterminateness is necessarily determinate because the one cannot be thought without the other, that is, the possibility of either is mutually dependent on the possibility of the other, and thus exclusive of the impossibility of nothing as a non-existent, then Hegel is presupposing the modal categories of the understanding and in addition presupposing the substantial presence of a contradiction that is reflective of reality and not simply a Kantian problematic concept of which we can say it is neither possible nor impossible without contradicting ourselves. Introducing a dialectical bidirectionality into the Kantian dynamic modal categories is, of course, for Hegel in itself a necessity, but it is also necessary that the concepts of reflection for either philosopher not be directly constitutive of objects in possible experience. The logical for Hegel is a "kingdom of shadows" dirempted from all sensuous concretion.

Again we seem to be back at the original conundrum of not being able to conceive of encountering nothing in actual experience but certainly we are able to think of nothing as a total and unqualified indeterminateness and in this sense as "something," not a this or that, which is there for us. Christian *creatio ex nihilo* as a fundamental disruption of the ancient Greek plenary determinate being must therefore be surveyed in terms of the dialectical speculative bidirectionality inherent in becoming. This is not a bidirectionality of something and the void or of limited determinate being as an always existing world whose sempiternity is unquestioned, but of an original, creative and ultimately mysterious act in which determinateness, the fullness of being in all its wondrous plenitude and differentiation arises out of the utterly indeterminate – the absolute nothing. Only God can be thought as a being which creates being when it thinks being. And God in his eternal essence is anything but a shadow world of insubstantial forms and preternatural ideations.

Becoming is the distinguishing dissolution of being into nothing and nothing into being. It is therefore inherently unstable, but it is an instability that falls primarily on the side of beingness. In other words, it *is* through the bidirectional vanishing of its two moments into each other. Hegel describes this as the "vanishing of the vanishing" and declares that "becoming is an unstable unrest which settles into a stable result" (p.106). In the vanishing or sublation of becoming we do not have a relapse into nothing or utter indeterminateness. Instead there is a result,

which has the "form of being" and which is the mediated immediacy of determinate being (Dasein).

At this point Hegel comments on the importance of the phrases "to sublimate" (Aufheben) and "the sublated" (das Aufgehobene). It is introduced at this point in the text primarily to dispel its interpretation in onesidedly negative terms. What is sublated is not reduced to nothing. Being and nothing as sublated moments in the unity of becoming result in something positive or the universal determinateness of determinate being as such. These moments are preserved in the result. There cannot therefore be a collapse into nothing. Sublation refers to preservation *and* ceasing to be. The two opposite meanings are encapsulated in the one word. This, for Hegel, is the sometimes wondrous character of speculative thought and language, which are closely aligned in the system of logic.

It is perhaps appropriate that the speculatively difficult insight captured by the term "sublation" be commented on by Hegel after the first dialectical exercise in sublation has occurred in the logic, that is, the sublation of being and nothing in becoming. Becoming itself goes over, or is itself the transition, into the unity of being and nothing. Equally, it is the transition, or the speculatively unstable stability, that makes possible, or facilitates, or mediates, the movement from indeterminateness as such, the absolute nothing, to substantially determinate being. It is therefore not surprising, but slightly maddening, that the most mysterious term in the Hegelian lexicon should first appear at one of the two most difficult transitions in the system of thinking and indeed in the system of the philosophical sciences – the transition from being/nothing/becoming to determinate being and secondly the transition from logic to nature.

Hegel's dialectical analysis of the being, nothing and becoming triad is incisive and irrefutable on its own terms. Any criticism can be deflected back to logically *prior* grounds in later moments and categories in the development of logical science and any isolated statement or proposition about any thought-predicate in the triad can be immediately equivocated. For example, becoming is preserved in its sublation as a moment in the initial appearance of qualitative being and in another sense it ceases to be as simply becoming, which is redolent with indeterminateness and nothing. Hence each moment in the triad is interchangeable from the more mediated and developed standpoint of qualitative determinate

being. Being has at that point come out of itself to a certain degree. It has become somewhat less solely being-in-itself and has evolved into the realm of relation and reference outwards. It has started down the road to the standpoint of being-for-itself and eventually in the explicit conceptual context of the subject in subjective logic it will attain the finality of being-in-and-for-itself.

Qualitative being, reality and finitude are all imbued with the negative. We are now clearly dealing with the this or that which consumed much reflection in Aristotelian metaphysics. Objective logic, or the doctrines of being and essence are Hegel's unique dialectico-speculative re-articulation of the categories of traditional metaphysics and ontology. Subjective logic, or the doctrine of the concept, is the logical science of modernity and as such it is the cumulative

end of metaphysics. The unification in the absolute idea of judgmental and syllogistic subjectivity and cosmological objectivity is the ultimate ground of logical science and as such it is the final bulwark against nothing and a nihilistic indeterminateness. The collapse of Hegelian metaphysics at around the middle of the nineteenth century was in part the result of a view which said subjective logic was now possible without a logic of objectivity. Thought thus became elevated above being and all respect was lost for non-human creation. Infused with an unbridled power thought could maintain that being is essentially nothing. Humans could now totally abstract from anything and do anything to being with impunity. Herein begins the post-Hegelian confrontation with the abyss.

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