

ELEUTHERIA

Published by the Institute of Speculative Philosophy

Volume XI Number 2

FALL 1999

Ottawa, Canada

Message from the President

Francis Peddle

The relationship between speculative philosophy and the organization of civil society, between philosophical economics and ecological equilibrium has not been systematically developed in modernity. Philosophers, such as Kant and Hegel, would not have imagined how a residual science such as economics, could spiral off into an unbridled Pythagoreanism or how ethics could collapse into that to which it is applied. The fragmentation of the intellectual disciplines is as much the adoption of other values, of mathematics, of hypothetico-deduction, of proof and of manipulative engineering, as it is isolation and xenophobia.

There are two recently published antidotes to these developments, Arundhati Roy's *The Cost of Living* and Dierdre McCloskey's *The Vices of Economists*. The former is an architect writing about the diabolical absurdities of big dam construction and population displacement in the Narmada Valley in India, the latter a professional economist who rails against statistical significance, blackboard proofs and social, or rather, people engineering that perversely dominate her chosen discipline. While few writers today have the historical and philosophical perspective, much less the perseverance, to elaborate a metaphysics out of their painfully won insights, these authors, in their thin volumes, manage to coalesce a world-view that shatters much conventional wisdom.

The Cost of Living, especially, combines an informed non-fictional narrative with a powerful, poetic style that intuitively applies many of the philosophical and economic principles of Henry George. Towards the end of *The Greater Common Good* (pp.80-81), in *The Cost of Living*, she intones:

Big Dams are to a nation's "development" what nuclear bombs are to its military arsenal. They're both weapons of mass destruction. They're both weapons governments use to control their own people. Both twentieth-century emblems that mark a point in time when human intelligence has outstripped its own instinct for survival. They're both malignant indications of a civilization turning upon itself. They represent the severing of the link, not just the link - the *understanding* - between human beings and the planet they live on. They scramble the intelligence that connects eggs to hens, milk to cows, food to forests, water to rivers, air to life, and the earth to human existence.

* * *

This issue of *ELEUTHERIA* contains Part IV, the final instalment, of "Metaphysic and Dialectic: Ancient and Modern" by James Lowry. It is expected that this series will be published by the Institute as a Monograph. Also in this issue are some reflections on Hegel's Concept of *Denken* by Mark Nyvlt, who is currently doing a Ph.D. in philosophy at Boston University, and working primarily in the area of the relationship between Hegel and Aristotle.

**METAPHYSIC AND DIALECTIC:
ANCIENT AND MODERN**

James Lowry

PART IV – ABSOLUTE DIALECTIC UNIFIED

The dilemma and heart of modernity reaches its apotheosis with Hegel as does that of the ancient world with Aristotle. As with Plato and Kant, so with Aristotle and Hegel - there can be no turning back, no end run, no sweet sleep. On their own ground, on their own assumptions, they cannot, like Antaeus, be thrown as long as a foot touches the earth - only the solution of Heracles will suffice - the foot of their thought must be picked up and held aloft.

Historically, and this is the irony of Hegel, the solution of Hegel is met with a dialectical opposition. Kierkegaard and Nietzsche oppose him. Hegel's effort to show human history as the process of divine self-thinking brought him to the point of ancient impersonality. He produced a rational Buddha-like protestantism in which dialectic in its inevitability is linked with time in a dance in which the feet of Krishna do not go on forever. Kierkegaard like Scotus and Occam before him reaffirms his faith by separating the natural from the supernatural. Nietzsche likewise in an opposite way substitutes for faith a natural psychology which revels in the impersonal forces of an endless but circular dance in which personality is only the facade of monotonous will. Philosophy dies a slow unhappy death as their followers one by one succumb to the siren call to turn inward but not upward. We end with a historicism turned upon itself as the marvelous Christian story is turned into mere adolescent hope and men and women give up even their longing for the supernatural. Hierarchy is traded in for atomic monotony, reason for chance, possibility for actuality.

Intellectually this whole process is a historicism disengaged from its historicity. In this process dialectic becomes lost, entangled in a chain of

chance events. This transpires either as mere willfulness or as conformist atomicity. In a sense this is an anti-historical anti-intellectual stance since rationality is squeezed out of it. Yet, and this is the ultimate paradox of modernity, it is rationality itself that does the squeezing. Psychological self-conscious historical deconstruction, endless perspectivalness are the actions of rationalism self-immolated. Looked at rationally it is the very same problematic as in more rational times occurred with a full-blown scepticism. But modern scepticism is not the pure form that it is among the ancients and so it is harder to see clearly. This is just because among the ancients there is not the same desire to cling to the rational per se. Modern scepticism is not able to disengage itself from nature to achieve (ἀταραξία) imperturbability. The modern sceptic is perturbed, and endlessly so, as long as he lives in an open-ended empiricism of his own making.

The breakdown of Hegel's synthesis into nationalism and historicism is not as his devotees would like to believe due simply to misinterpretation or willful misunderstanding. There is a dialectic involved just as with Plato, Aristotle and Neoplatonism. The transition from Christianity to modernity occurs when Christian theology cannot hold together nature and providence. Gradually but explicitly providence becomes Deism and nature a self-developing potentiality. Just as the Neoplatonists reverted to a quantitative One from which they *derived* Nous as reason, so the post-Hegelians revert to an *impersonal* form/matter from which reason simply emerges unteleologically.

We have already discussed how the inward difficulties in Aristotle's philosophy led to Neoplatonism and we must now confront those in Hegel to understand how the dissolution of his synthesis is not unjustified even if consequently absurd. The dilemmas in Hegel are related to Kant's insight into modernity itself. Kant saw the nature of knowledge as subjective and experience as an amalgam of this subjectivity with sense. The "thing in itself" [Ding an

sich] is the result. This Ding an sich is the modern equivalent to Aristotle's matter [ύλη]. In Plato matter is the source of multiplicity as assumed. Aristotle as well as Plato makes this assumption but he explicitly squeezes matter *out* of the Absolute. Neoplatonism, faced with *producing* multiplicity reverts to a One beyond Nous - in Aristotelian terms actuality reverts to potentiality. The same occurs with Christianity in which the Trinity as a trio of persons with definite plans are able to overcome matter by creating it out of nothing - but this is understood in the light of *redemption* - which is the counterpoint of Aristotelian reduction to cause. As soon as the creation is looked at from *before* its creation the paradox of time must frame the idea of a revelation in which original procession is *inscrutable*. This process of thoughtfulness undermines itself and leads to the bifurcation of faith and reason which engenders modernity.

Kant in his classical way understands the dilemma and substitutes for reason intuition and imagination, practicality and aestheticism - all in the name of keeping nature from ethical independence. Morality is prior to reason. Hegel in correcting Kant reverses this and makes reason prior to morality. Hegel correctly sees the only way to correct Kant is to call on the anti-empiricism of the ancients. What he fails to do, however, as the champion of Christian theology as speculative philosophy, is to understand the difference between the Christian and Ancient cosmos. Hence in Hegel we get Christian belief superimposed on Greek cosmology. The result is an exacerbation of Kant's dilemma rather than its ultimate solution. Critics of Hegel understood piecemeal the problems, but not with a rationality other than modern. The crux of the issue is that Hegel's dialectic subverted itself in producing an antithesis in historical time. Hegel's historicity cannot defend itself against this. This is because in Hegel the primary tenet of Aristotle, that actuality must precede potentiality, is given up for *Entwicklung* [development]. The divine is historicized and comes to itself in time. The Begriff unhistoricized is pure Neoplatonic abstraction. Hence

the implausibility of rightwing degradation of Hegel's religious followers, who disengage the Absolute from its historicity. Hegel's solemn leftwing followers adopt the same abstraction in an opposite way by turning to nature as developing complexity. In both cases Hegel's sense that the Absolute must develop itself is lost and thus his synthetic ideality is lost as well.

The Christian cosmos has a plan already developed in eternity which is instantiated epiphenomenally in time. Creation and Incarnation are particular and unnecessary to divine existence and essence per se. In Hegel we have creation and incarnation not as gratuitous but as necessary to the divine actuality [the inner and outer unity of essence and existence understood from the standpoint of the Concept - of the Begriff as worked out in the Logik as development] and the divine falls into time. The stages of development are, however, not contingencies but Platonic ideas and the development takes place as if *creatio ex nihilo* did not exist. We preserve a cosmos in which the human is the centre but without reversion. Temporality preempts eternity. In Christianity the great revolution was personality and individual liberty as sacred in its individuality. The solution was achieved by *falling out* of time. In Hegel this is reversed because the dialectic which Hegel can only justify *historically* must entail a divine falling *into time* to actualize its *non-historical* possibility. The ancient cosmos in which all revolves around the Earth is in Hegel brought to an apotheosis and the human world and time take the place of a disengaged absolute. The absolute historicization of ancient philosophy and Christian faith lead not to an actual absolute but to a nihilistic impersonalism. This is the fate and the tragedy of Hegelianism. The historical result, and this is the result that *must* count for Hegelians, is a descent from the Absolute from which there is no reversal. Possibility and time become the centre of human consciousness. A failure to properly understand the cosmic assumptions into which intellectual life is entwined leads to disastrous results. Darwin, Freud and Marx disengage the

historical from the eternal and derive the actual from possibility - the philosophers Kierkegaard, Nietzsche and their followers Heidegger and Wittgenstein - suffer the psychological Angst that must follow such willful juxtaposition.

The intent of Hegel was to bring history to an end by proving that history itself is the *Self-Experience* of the divine itself as Absolute Self-Consciousness. Experience seen as the divine life need no longer be only an appearance but reality itself. But the price is too high. The consolation of Christianity must be given up. We revert to a pre-Christian cosmos. Presaged in Hegel intellectually, this has been the actual historical result of his thought and in a primordial sense a proof that his insight into dialectic is correct. The profundity of Kant and Hegel like that of Plato and Aristotle cannot be dismissed, only incorporated into a more viable speculative intellectual [spiritual in the full sense] understanding.

The above dialectical argument has brought out negatively, and Hegel preached the power of the negation - a negativity which he found not inconsequentially in Plato's *Parmenides* - the necessity to sort out the dialectic of ancient and modern, and the Christian mediation between the two. The external proof of this is that contemporary philosophy, which is really anti-rational in its historicism, aestheticism and narcissistic subjectivity, leads inevitably back to Greek rationality. This is because modern naturalism as Heidegger intuited and before which Wittgenstein is silent and from which physicists of time become Buddhists, is, intellectually, eternally a form of Presocraticism. And from this essentially pre-philosophical tune must always arise the discovery, the *anamnesis*, of reason - the self-unfolding of the Logos as Nous.

Does this inevitable reversion mean that history just will repeat as Aristotle and Plato thought or does it reveal that the Christian insight into the grace of linearity will make itself known. Simple reversion is not possible because the finitude of the stages of the dialectic is *now*

already present. If we forget this then, of course, we must redo it, but the lesson of the reduction is that we cannot *simply* revert. The solution is not expertise in a certain period on period instruments. This is entertaining but not suitable for a full life.

The dialectic of Ancient, Christian and Modern has the form of the Trinity understood as unity *as well as* diversity. The unity of this Spiritual Actuality is what we must comprehend. To do so we will have to correct Hegel not just negatively - this leads to the barbarism of the killing fields - but in the spirit of Aristotle - a spirit of which he approved; and in the spirit of Plato and Kant for whom morality transcended the intellect; and finally in the spirit of Christianity - in which God extends His happiness to his creatures.

Such a solution understood humanly means the following:

Correct Hegel by:

- (1) restore Christian cosmology - creatio ex nihilo
- (2) restore the ethics of individuality
- (3) restore actuality over potentiality

These restorations taken together are not simply reversions but synthetic necessities which *renew*, as new taken particularly and historically, and *recollect*, taken as eternal instantiation. Historicism must *itself* be historicized. Hegel's dialectic of reconciliation is correct but the overreaching of theory (the weakness of human reason) must be corrected. As well, human history must be put into perspective. A proper appreciation of creation, of nature, must be restored in order to emphasize the *shepherding* element in Christianity and the demeaning aspect, nature as mere negation, must be de-emphasized.

The truer reconciliation is to be found in an interim ethic properly understood in the context of a drawn out period of temporality - on accepting spiritually the inability of the human and natural to be perfected. The

Kingdom of God cannot be on earth. The Holy Spirit is more than a Mensch Geist.

The crucial distinction is the microcosmic de facto character of human thinking - there is in humanity a creatio ex nihilo.

How do philosophy and theology correct each other? Well, philosophy is speculative theology. It has access to anything essentially - possibly, but not existentially, actively - hence, there is a mysticism which goes beyond, but this understood as inaccessible *without* philosophy. Thus religion as self-understanding cannot be without philosophy. Likewise philosophy has its own self-imposed limit in the relation between theoretical and practical, between creation and understanding, between love and stewardship.

There is an inscrutability to the universe but it need no longer be arbitrary will. Love, not naturally understood, but speculatively understood, does offer a final consolation, but not a finite one. The sense that mankind has always possessed that this world and this life is proximately unjust, originally sinful, unperfectible is correct. Yet this interim equally lies in its form of interimness, in its mediating quality. Ethical behaviour, stewardship, brotherly love are all only *really* possible on this understanding. If this Christian interim is not understood, we must revert to the Ancient or Modern pessicity of an infinite that is only finite or a finite that is all too finite. Both lead to aberrant behaviour - to killing fields, to inconsolable grief over the inaccessibility or

the outright loss of God. To a denial of reason and a perverse substitution of metaphor for reality - a haplessness for nectar or salvation which quenches any enthusiasm and leaves only a faceless bureaucracy which substitutes as a panacea analogous to the old gods of Egypt and Greece and Israel. Turning from Christianity as westernized to its eastern origin, to Buddhism, Hinduism or some form of theosophical physics is just another form of reversion to the ancient world. The *personality* of the divine is lost in the loss of radical Christian mediation. In actuality it is just the consequence of this loss of mediation that leads to these reversions which are themselves forms of unreconciliation.

Thus the logic of rationality, of what now can only be an anachronism, is that only the restoration of Christian mediation can fulfill the human ability to think and to love at the same time, which is to say to properly imitate or image its divine origin. That this restoration requires a *further* explication of Christian doctrine to widen it beyond a form of humanity and human history and human artifact to a more speculatively spiritual relation to all forms of life, to creation as a whole, as an end and not a mere means, a mere negation for human pleasure, should not be regarded as some form of heterodoxy. Rather it would be the foundation of a true interims ethic which both preserves and makes spiritual the awful crusade of transcendence without denigrating the wonder of creation or weakening the consolation of their twofold triadic mediation.

HEGEL'S CONCEPT OF *DENKEN*

Mark Nyvult

The purpose of this article¹ is to defend the claim that the self-referential activity of the absolute Idea is, in Hegel's Logic, an absolute identity that surpasses the Absolute's intersubjective conditions: namely, culture, history, and language, from which the Absolute emerges. The absolute Idea is the result of an arduous process of its necessary self-development into self-consciousness. It is not a separate, self-reflecting activity, influencing Nature from without, as Aristotle asserts in *Metaphysics* Λ. 7 & 9. Rather, the absolute Idea is the whole truth, which produces its particular thought-determinations, since in reality, these thought-determinations are the absolute Idea's self-production and inner differentiation. On the one hand, the absolute Idea is the apex of the lower stages of its development, but, on the other hand, it is intrinsically *involved* in the dialectical process of its self-development. This article, then, will highlight two interrelated aspects to Hegel's concept of the absolute Idea, which is expressed as pure thinking (*Denken*): its systematic character and its self-referential nature. With respect to the first aspect of thinking, the "Preliminary Conception" to the *EL* will serve as our primary text, since it is here that Hegel's reflections on the nature of thinking are most concise and explicit. Concerning the second aspect, the *Science of Logic* (*SL*), *Encyclopaedia Logic* (*EL*), and the *Phenomenology of Spirit* (*PS*) will be consulted in order to confirm the thesis that the absolute Idea is wholly self-referential.

¹ I wish to thank Professor A. Ferrarin, from Boston University, for his kind permission to cite from his forthcoming book, *Hegel and Aristotle*, and for his helpful insights, and Professor T. F. Geraets, who has kindly supported this project by providing me with his unpublished papers, from which I was granted permission to cite.

THINKING'S SYSTEMATIC CHARACTER

In *EL* § 19,² Hegel declares that the subject matter of the Logic is the pure Idea, i.e., "the Idea in the abstract element of *thinking*." (*EL* § 19) More precisely, in *Additions* 1 and 2, Hegel equates Truth with the pure Idea: they both constitute the subject matter of the *Logic*. In his commentary, Hegel clearly argues that the Idea itself *is* thinking, considered "as the self-developing totality of its own peculiar determinations and laws, which thinking does not already *have* and find given within itself, *but which it gives to itself*." (*EL* § 19R, my emphasis) This latter phrase elucidates a central theme in Hegel's philosophy: that thinking *produces* its proper and particular determinations. It is for this reason that the pure (absolute) Idea is a totality, a self-developing totality. ". . . the Idea is the truth; the whole preceding exposition and development contains this proof." (*EL* § 213A)³ Its particular determinations, i.e., its thought-determinations (*Denkbestimmung*), are stages of *its own* self-development. The particular thoughts produced by thinking are the

² References to the *EL* will be as follows: The section number alone refers to the body of reflection prior to the Remarks; "R" appended to the section number indicates the "Remarks" within that section; the appended "A" followed by a numeral refers to the specific Addition within the mentioned section; alone, the "A" indicates a single Addition within the section.

³ The *Glossary* in the *Encyclopaedia Logic* defines the Idea as "Hegel's term for the Absolute inasmuch as it is the total process of the self-articulation of meaning and of what is meaningful." (G. W. F. Hegel. *The Encyclopaedia Logic*. Trans. T. F. Geraets, W. A. Suchting, H. S. Harris. (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc.), 1991, *Glossary*, p. 350, no.29). Henceforth, reference to this Glossary will be cited simply as *Glossary*.

content⁴ of this totality, and are inseparable from the form, which conditions the structure of the content. Thinking presupposes this content, i.e., the thought-determinations, and is not, therefore, an isolated activity.

Thus, if the Science of Logic considers thinking in its activity and its production (and thinking is not an activity without content, for it produces thought and Thought itself [das Denken . . . Produziert Gedanken und den Gedanken], its content is in any event the supersensible world; and to be occupied with that world is to sojourn in it Thought says farewell [to the] last element of the sensible, and is free, at home with itself; it renounces external and internal sensibility, and distances itself from all particular concerns and inclinations." (EL § 19A2)

Thinking is precisely the Subject that thinks and produces thought-determinations. This subject is given the categorical status of "I."⁵ Hegel's claim is, again, to dissolve any separation between thinking and determinate forms of thought, since the latter are the moments

(*Gestalt*) of the former's self-articulation. The I is not a separate, isolated, and particular thinking subject; rather, it is the "universal in and for itself . . ." (EL § 20R) It is essentially a "we," since everyone experiences the sensibility, representation, and thought. Each of these operations presupposes the ubiquitous activity of thinking, which is its condition for operation. Thinking, then, is not reduced to a juxtaposed activity operative alongside that of the sensible and representation. In other words, the I is the pure self-consciousness, "pure relation to itself," (EL § 20R) and an abstract universality –abstract because it supersedes sensation and representation, and is, then, "abstractly free." (EL § 20R) Thinking, therefore, is "present everywhere and pervades all . . . determinations as [their] category." (EL § 20R)⁶

In the *Addition* to § 21, Hegel demonstrates the human process of developing universal concepts from our experiences of phenomena. The phenomenal event is transient, while the cause, the universal, is what is common to all the same phenomena. This concept is attained by the act of thinking. Thus, in thinking about things, we always seek what is fixed, persisting,

⁴ In English, "Content" covers two Hegelian terms. First, it refers to *Gehalt*, which entails an "intrinsic value" or " 'import' " of something. (*Glossary*, p. 350, no.24) Secondly, it is also expressed as *Inhalt*, which refers to that which makes up a thing, i.e., its "constituents." (*Ibid*) Thus, the content as *Gehalt* must bear significance or meaning to the absolute knower. This, actually, reflects an existential perspective, since the emphasis is on the thinking's activity of the thing at hand. G. W. Cunningham has also expressed a similar view early in this century. "But the universal of the [Concept] is not a mere sum of features common to several things, confronted by a particular which enjoys an existence of its own. It is, on the contrary, self-particularizing or self-specifying, and with undimmed clearness finds itself at home in its antithesis." (G. W. Cunningham. *Thought and Reality in Hegel's System*. (New York & London: Garland Publishing, Inc.), 1984, Reprint, p. 17)

⁵ Cf. *PS*, V, p. 233, where Hegel first advances the category of the "I."

⁶ In Alfredo Ferrarin's words, the " 'I' does not refer to anything exclusive or private about me, for everybody says 'I.' And 'I' means this empty pit or night, a universality which contains everything within itself. In other words, it is self-consciousness, that is, the identity within difference between I and my thoughts, my possibility of identifying myself with whatever content is for my consciousness and at the same time of abstracting myself from it." (*Hegel and Aristotle*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 2000, p. 91, forthcoming) This comment is, of course, based upon Hegel's declaration that although thinking's truth is objectively true, it is not a private, nor individual, activity, but communal. In § 23R, Hegel writes the following: Thinking is "not a *particular* being or doing of the subject, but consists precisely in this, that consciousness conducts itself as an abstract 'I,' as freed from *all particularity* of features, states, etc., and does only what is universal, in which it is identical with all individuals." Cf. Cunningham, (*Thought and Reality*, p. 10)

and inwardly determined, and what governs the particular. This universal cannot be grasped by means of the senses, and it counts as what is essential and true. (*EL* § 21A)

While in *EL* §§ 19-23, Hegel shows how thinking produces its objects (thought-determinations), as a product of the I, in § 24R, Hegel qualifies this claim by asserting that the production of determinate thoughts is grounded by a *logical structure*, which functions as the necessary condition for development and specific determinations, i.e., the relative concepts. In other words, it is the Concept [*Begriff*] itself that operates as the pre-condition of particular determinations. The Concept is the logical subject, which is in a perpetual and dynamic "movement of self-comprehension."⁷ The Concept establishes the structure of necessity *within* the various moments of its self-development. The self-realization of the Concept is the absolute Idea itself, which is the concrete universal, since the various thought-determinations engendered by thinking are, in fact, determinations derived from the one, universal Concept. Inherent in the Concept is an internal law or necessity that is increasingly manifested in proportion to its self-development, and which culminates in the absolute Idea.⁸

Thus, from the vantage point of the absolute Idea, the Concept precedes its manifestations and the philosophical activity of comprehending it. Historically, however, the philosopher must attain the realization of the Concept, i.e., the absolute Idea, through the many particular manifestations of the Idea, manifestations which are *determinate* or *singular universals*. Thought thinking itself is the nature of the absolute Idea, and is, thus, the τέλος of this

historical ascension of reason.⁹

Hegel continues to argue that thought-determinations, considered as objective thoughts, refer to the fact that there is "understanding, or reason, in the world," (*EL* § 24R) without which language would be impossible. "It is in language that these thought-determinations are primarily deposited." (*EL* § 24A2)¹⁰ Reason in the world closely resembles Aristotle's εἶδη, the form inherently operative in matter, since both are determinate universals, which assume the causal role of a thing.¹¹ However, while the universal can operate as a universal in-itself,

⁹ A. Ferrarin captures this insight in the following way: "Absolutely speaking, then, first is the Concept, then its manifestations, and finally the particular philosophizing subjects who reflect and appropriate the Concept. Historically speaking, first you need care for truth and trust in reason (religion is one of the paramount cases of such a trust to be made true and validated by philosophy), then you find the determinate universals thanks to observational reason or empirical sciences, then you comprehend determinate universals as particular moments of thought, and finally you comprehend the universal as one logical form, among others, of thought thinking itself. Thereby objective thought and my thought turn out to be the same identical content, apart from the fact that I have to rise to the first in itself through a series of finite steps and transformations of form." (Ferrarin, *Hegel and Aristotle*, pp. 92-3) Cf., also H. S. Harris, *Hegel: Phenomenology and System*. (Indianapolis/Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc.), 1995, pp. 18-19, 21, and *Hegel's Ladder II: The Odyssey of Spirit*. (Indianapolis: Hackett Pub.), 1997c, p. 708.

¹⁰ In relating the significance of thought-determinations in the *Logic*, Geraets comments that these thought-determinations deposited in language are "not *a priori* in an a-historical way, but have come, in the course of history, forms that condition our thinking: they are *a priori* in a transhistorical way. *Das Logische* is not so much the content of the Logic, but the very development of meaning contents that function in this way: it is what some have called the logical *gesture*." (T. F. Geraets. "The Idea: Logic, Nature and Spirit," Ottawa, 1999 (unpublished), 2)

¹¹ This insight is advanced by Ferrarin, *Hegel and Aristotle*, p. 93.

⁷ *Glossary*, p. 348, no. 5. The Glossary also adds that the "Concept is the movement of comprehension itself." (*Ibid*)

⁸ "... everywhere the *Idee* is the *Begriff* as realized, or as being realized." (*Glossary*, p. 350, no. 29)

inherently in an object, it can also operate as a universal for-itself, as a separate status only conceivable to the thinking subject: "Man thinks and is something universal, but he thinks only insofar as the universal is [present] for him. The animal is also *in-itself* something universal, but the universal as such is not [present] for it; instead only the singular is ever [there] for it." (EL § 24A1)

However, insofar as the object is not in agreement with its concept, it remains untrue or inauthentic. Philosophically, truth entails the adequate agreement of "content with itself." (EL § 24A2)¹² Only the Concept is Truth, since its object is proportionately adequate to it. This level of truth is only attained in the absolute Idea. The goal of the *Logic* and of the *Phenomenology of Spirit* is the attainment of the adequate agreement of the subject and object, such that both cohere in the absolute Idea, whereby they become an identity. This statement, however, needs qualification, which Hegel provides.

THINKING'S SELF-REFERENTIAL NATURE

How is one to understand the nature of this identity, if, in fact, it is an identity at all, as some Hegelian scholars deny?¹³ In recent years, there has been a shift in interpreting the nature of the absolute Idea. In his article, "Absolute Knowing," Simon Lumsden challenges the traditional interpretation of the closure of the *PS* as "the elimination of the opposition between thought and being, subject

and object."¹⁴ To rectify this reductive interpretation, Lumsden proposes a new interpretation that advocates a *relation*, as opposed to an elimination or an ascension towards an absolute identity, of the subject and object in the absolute Idea. Lumsden is suggesting that the knower (the subject) and the known (the object) establish a unity, but maintain their differences, nevertheless: the absolute knower is a unity-in-difference. For Lumsden, the absolute Idea necessarily presupposes the dynamic activity of culture, history, and language, i.e., of intersubjectivity.

In his article, "Absolute Knowing Revisited," Stephen Houlgate makes a significant response to Lumsden. Houlgate does not disagree with Lumsden's thesis that absolute knowing presupposes the intersubjective activity laden within language, history, and culture. Rather, Houlgate's criticism pertains to the status of the absolute Idea: contrary to Lumsden, Houlgate defends the metaphysical view that an *identity*, and not a high level of relation, which preserves the differences, between thought and its object in the absolute Idea is attained. ". . . Hegel emphasizes . . . that speculative logic involves no relation *between* thought and its object, but rather the identity *of* thought and its 'object' Absolute knowing is thus nothing but thought thinking itself."¹⁵ Ultimately, Houlgate's critique is that Lumsden thinks that the absolute Idea is merely at the stage of consciousness of its object when, according to Houlgate, the Idea has attained the highest level of self-consciousness in the absolute knower. It is precisely this level of self-consciousness that characterizes the absolute Idea's self-reflective activity.

Although Houlgate does not deny this intersubjective necessity to the Idea's self-development, he asserts that intersubjectivity is to be grounded in the very idea of *Being*

¹² The philosophical significance of Truth is, according to Hegel, also found in our common linguistic usage of it. For example, we speak of true art or a true friend. This entails an adequate correlation between the object and the concept. A true friend is "one whose way of acting conforms with the concept of friendship." (EL § 24A2)

¹³ Present in the Fall issue of *The Owl of Minerva* 30:1 (1998) was a series of debates on the theme of Absolute Knowing.

¹⁴ S. Lumsden, "Absolute Knowing," *Ibid.*, 5.

¹⁵ S. Houlgate, "Absolute Knowing Revisited," *Ibid.*, 56-7.

itself, the ultimate counterpart of Thought. It is precisely Thought's apprehension of Being that renders Hegel's philosophy ontological, a claim that is undeniably rejected by Lumsden, who argues that absolute knowing is consciousness operative in human intersubjectivity. Thus, for Lumsden, consciousness and self-consciousness maintain their distinction in absolute knowing, whereas, for Houlgate, as with the traditional metaphysical interpretation, the distinction is overcome by the absolute identity of the known and the knower: consciousness is sublated and what emerges is self-consciousness of the absolute knower, i.e., the philosopher. Houlgate justifies this claim by referring to Hegel's passage in the *SL*: "[T]his objectifying act, in its freedom from the opposition of consciousness, is more precisely (*näher*) what may be taken simply for *thought* [*Denken*] as such. But this act should no longer be called consciousness [*Bewußstein*]; consciousness embraces within itself the opposition of the ego [*Ich*] and its object which is not present in that original act. The name 'consciousness' gives it a semblance of subjectivity even more than does the *thought*, which here, however, is to be taken simply in the absolute sense as *infinite* thought untainted by the finitude of consciousness, in short, *thought as such*."¹⁶

Thus, is one to accept the view that the nature of absolute knowing does not entail the identity of the absolute knower with itself as a self-conscious act, but is, rather, a mere conscious *relation* of its intersubjective conditions (culture, history, and language) from which it emerges? It seems clear from what Hegel has written concerning the status of absolute knowing that it is a self-conscious activity, in which the gap between the subject and object in the lower stages is overcome.

However, the uninterrupted continuum of stages culminating in absolute knowing presupposes that the absolute is, in part, indebted to

¹⁶ *SL.*, trans. A. V. Miller. (London: George Allen & Unwin LTD.), 1969, pp. 62-3, translation modified by Houlgate.

culture, history, and language. Otherwise, Hegel would inevitably be required to postulate a separate activity to thinking, to the absolute. Although the intersubjective conditions are conditions for the absolute's self-development, i.e., its self-realization, they have a *relative* validity, since the absolute cannot be reduced to this stage of objective spirit. The absolute is not merely conscious of its object, but is self-conscious, in that it thinks its own nature. Hegel expresses this in the first Preface of the *SL*.

Consciousness, as spirit in its manifestation which in its progress frees itself from its immediacy and external concretion, attains to the pure knowing which takes as its object those same pure essentialities [categories] as they are in and for themselves. They are pure thought, spirit thinking its own essential nature." (*SL*: 28)¹⁷

Thus, the absolute is not conscious merely of its intersubjective conditions, but of itself, which logically renders it self-conscious.

This is further confirmed later in the second Preface to the *SL*, where Hegel says that thinking, as the pure science, entails the "liberation from the opposition of consciousness." (*SL*: 49) Again, Hegel reiterates the dissolution or overcoming of the *separation* of thought and its object. Pure thought (thinking) is the Truth itself, and the Truth is self-consciousness. The pure science "contains *thought in so far as this is just as much the object in its own self, or the object in its own self in so far as it is equally pure thought*. As science, truth is pure self-consciousness in its self-development and has the shape of the self, so that the absolute truth of being is the known Concept and the

¹⁷ All references to the *Science of Logic* are taken from A. V. Miller's translation. (London: George Allen & Unwin LTD.), 1969. Henceforth, all pagination to this text will follow the abbreviation *SL*. However, we will substitute Concept for Notion.

Concept as such is the absolute truth of being." (SL: 49) Thus, this overcoming (*aufgelöst*) of the *relation* between thought and its object entails their *identity*. Another passage from Hegel confirms this:

What we are dealing with in logic is not a thinking *about* something which exists independently as a base for our thinking and apart from it . . . ; on the contrary, the necessary forms and self-determinations [i.e., thought determinations produced by thinking] of thought are the content and the ultimate truth itself. (SL: 50)

What is essential to recognize for the purposes of this thesis is that pure thinking's self-reflecting activity does not exclude its particular expressions, i.e., thought-determinations, but *includes* them, and is the free result of the necessary development of thinking. Only at this level has thinking attained Truth.

Truth is the adequate proportion between the concept of an object and the object in itself. In the case of thinking (absolute knowing), the concept of the object is in exact proportion to, and is a perfect *adequatio* of, the object itself. "God alone is the genuine agreement between Concept and reality; all finite things, however, are affected with untruth; they have a concept, but their existence is not adequate to it. For this reason they must go to the ground, and this manifests the inadequacy between their concept and their existence." (EL § 24A2) The *adequatio* of both terms is the whole Truth and is the elimination of the chasm between subject and object throughout the various phases of thinking's self-development. The elimination of this gap merely asserts the inclusive character of the absolute. As the result of the preceding levels of relations between subject and object, it must include these levels as modes of consciousness, modes of itself. However, whereas the lower levels are stages of consciousness, absolute knowing has attained the stage of self-consciousness in the eminent sense, the Truth itself.

Absolute knowing is the *truth* of every mode of consciousness because, as the course of the *Phenomenology* showed, it is only in absolute knowing that the separation of the *object* from the *certainty of itself* is completely eliminated: truth is now equated with certainty and this certainty with truth [And] truth is pure self-development (SL: 49)

This continuity further entails the *presupposition* of thinking's activity on intersubjectivity (culture, language, and history), but it cannot, as Houlgate says, be reduced to consciousness "of its intersubjective conditions"; it must be conscious of itself "as inherently intersubjective":¹⁸ thinking must be self-referential.

This surpassing or overcoming of the subject-object distinction is also expressed in the *PS*. The Spirit, as absolute Subject, "has made its existence identical with its essence; it has its object just as it is, and the abstract element of immediacy, and of the separation of knowing and the truth, is overcome."¹⁹ The overcoming of this duality is, in fact, the surpassing of Spirit

¹⁸ Houlgate, "Absolute Knowing . . . ," 61.

¹⁹ *PS*, p. 21. Cunningham elucidates a central theme in Hegel's philosophy of absolute knowing. Basing his reflections of the *PS*, Cunningham emphasizes "our common knowing experience," as the condition for attaining absolute knowledge. (*Thought and Reality*, p. 3) This implies, for Cunningham, that the *PS* constantly refers to the various attitudes of consciousness of the subject's relation to its object. Thus, absolute knowledge is the highest mode of consciousness of its object. "In other words," writes Cunningham, "the standpoint of absolute knowing is involved in every, even the simplest, phase of consciousness; it is implied in every act of knowledge, in every subject-object relation,—which is tantamount to saying that it is conterminous with experience itself." (*Ibid.*, p. 4) Absolute knowing, then, is necessarily grounded in concrete, existential matters.

as substance to Spirit as subject.²⁰

However, having made this claim in the *PS*, Hegel, in the *EL* § 82, seems to relativize this identity of subject and object in the absolute Idea, and, consequently, to preserve in the unity of the absolute the *distinction* of the two terms.

If . . . we say that 'the Absolute is the unity of the subjective and the objective,' that is certainly correct; but it is still one-sided, in that it expresses only the aspect of *unity* and puts the emphasis on that, whereas in fact, of course, the subjective and the objective are not only identical but also distinct. (*EL* § 82A)

However, the notion of identity that Hegel opposes here is a *formal*, abstract identity of the subject and object. Hegel, rather, understands the absolute Idea as a *concrete* unity of both terms, an identity-in-difference, since its thought-determinations are included in the totality of thinking's self-reflecting activity. The concrete unity, therefore, implies that the absolute is *identity-in-difference*, unlike Schelling's undifferentiated, abstract identity.

Only the most perfect mode of cognition is able to attain and grasp this pure form of thinking, and it is this mode of cognition that renders the human *free* from necessity, since this form of thinking is the "absolute one," within which the Truth in and for itself becomes transparent. Thus, this form of thinking is infinite compared to the finite thought-determinations.

²⁰ Harris captures this passage very well: ". . . 'substance' must itself perish into *true* subjectivity—not the *imagined* subjectivity of an *independent* substance but the subjectivity of spirit, or of a *process* of free communication." (Harris, H. S. " 'And the darkness comprehended it not': The Origin and Significance of Hegel's Concept of Absolute Spirit," in *Hegel: Absolute Spirit*. Ed. T. F. Geraets. (Ottawa: University of Ottawa Press), 1984, p. 29)

The infinite mode of thinking is, then, the speculative side of the *Logic* (*EL* § 79), whereas the finite thought-determinations remain within the level of understanding (*Verstand*).²¹ Only *Verstand* attempts to seize and fix its object in abstract form, but speculative thinking discloses the fluidity and transiency of these seemingly fixed "truths" through the dialectical process. "The dialectic," says Hegel, "is the self-sublation of these finite [thought-]determinations . . ." (*EL* § 81). The dialectic negates the finite thought-determination of *Verstand*, and enables the apparently fixed thought to be raised to further complex thoughts. These thought-determinations remain necessary moments in the absolute Idea's self-comprehension. Dialectic is the impulse of every thought-determination to ascend towards higher, more complex thought-determinations, and, thus, the dialectic, by revealing contradictory concepts, incites movement towards a reconciliation, i.e., a new concept. However, since each relative concept cannot exhaust the whole, it remains incomplete, and, therefore, untrue or inauthentic. The goal of the dialectic, in Ferrarin's words, is to destroy every finite determination's "pretence to absolute validity."²² Speculative thinking, thus, presupposes *Verstand* and the dialectic. The absolute Idea is the *result* of this necessary and teleological dialectic, and, in fact, *is* itself the process. The absolute Idea's identity is

free identity of the Concept, because this identity is the absolute negativity and hence dialectical. The Idea is the course in which the Concept (as the universality that is singularity) determines itself both

²¹ In fact, it is Ferrarin's contention that the "Preliminary Conception" in the *EL* is not a critique of traditional metaphysics *per se*, but of the metaphysics of *Verstand*. Hegel's critique is of Kant's philosophy, and, *a fortiori*, of Wolff's metaphysics. According to Ferrarin, Hegel, in his " 'Preliminary Conception,' criticizes the metaphysics of the understanding, not classical metaphysics." (Ferrarin, *Hegel and Aristotle*, p. 101)

²² Ferrarin, *Hegel and Aristotle*, p. 94.

to objectivity and to the antithesis against it, and in which this externality, which the Concept has with regard to its substance, leads itself back again, through its immanent dialectic, into *subjectivity*. (EL § 215)

The absolute Idea, as the *result* of the three moments of the Idea's self-development, is the final stage, which has a double significance: 1) it is on the one hand *what is first through the entire process of the Idea's self-development*, and 2) it alone is what is in and for itself, since at this level of speculative thinking, contradictions and oppositions of terms are overcome. Thus, whereas at every moment of the dialectic, each finite thought-determination contradicts the other, only in the infinite activity of the absolute Idea are the terms in agreement, i.e., are "identical," while maintaining their differences.

At the end of his *EL* (§ 236A), Hegel draws a parallel between the absolute Idea and Aristotle's νοήσις νοησέως in *Meta.* Λ.9. The parallel expresses the absolute Idea's self-reflective activity, whereby the seemingly distinct subject and object are united in one absolute activity, and which is wholly captured as the absolute Truth. "This unity, therefore, is the *absolute truth and all truth*, it is the *Idea that thinks itself*, and at this stage, moreover, it is [present] as thinking, i.e., as *logical Idea*." (EL § 236A) The two preceding stages of the development of the Idea (Life and Cognition) remain incomplete as expressions of the absolute Idea. Whereas Life is "still only the Idea *in-itself*," cognition is the Idea "only as it is *for-itself*, in the same one-sided way." (EL § 236A) It is precisely the unity of Life and Cognition that characterizes the Idea as absolute. As with Aristotle's Thought, the subject and object of the Idea are unified.

The unity and the truth of these two is the Idea that is *in* and *for itself*, and hence *absolute*.—Up to this point the Idea in its development through its various stages has been *our* object; but from now on, the Idea is its own object. This is the *noēsis noēseōs*, which was already called

the highest form of the Idea by Aristotle. (EL § 236A)²³

For Hegel, in contrast to Aristotle, the absolute Idea is *not* a separate, transcendent activity. The various stages of the Idea's self-development form the content of the absolute Idea: "[I]ts true content is nothing but the entire system, the development of which we have been considering so far [T]he content of the absolute Idea is the whole display [*Ausbreitung*] that has passed before us up to this point. The last step is the insight that it is the whole unfolding that constitutes its content and its interest." (EL § 237A) Each stage of absolute Idea is a reflection of itself, but a reflection in a limited, finite, relative way.

In the *SL*, Hegel comments that each "new stage of *forthgoing*, that is, of *further determination*, is also a withdrawal inwards, and the greater *extension* is equally a *higher intensity*." (*SL*: 840-41) Hegel attempts to preserve the continuity of the absolute Idea's self-development in a single system. Whereas Aristotle's Thought does *not* presuppose the lower powers of Nature, Hegel's absolute Idea does, and, consequently, is the *result* of the living development of the Idea. The absolute Idea, as now *Subject*, is also its own object: its object is no longer a proximate distance from itself.²⁴

²³ Geraets, Suchting, and Harris recognize the importance of this reference to Aristotle. They write the following: "What Aristotle actually defines as νοήσις νοησέως is God's own νοήσις Hegel, on the other hand, is clearly claiming that *our* thinking has at this stage become 'divine.'" (*EL*, Notes, p. 335 no. 50)

²⁴ In the Preface of the *PS*, Hegel asserts the self-identical nature of the absolute Spirit, no longer considered as just substance, but as subject. Thus, "what seems to happen outside of it, to be an activity directed against it, is really its own doing, and Substance shows itself to be essentially Subject. When it has shown this completely, Spirit has made its existence identical with its essence; *it has itself for its object* just as it is, and the abstract element of immediacy, *and of the separation of knowing and truth, is overcome*." (*PS*, Preface, p. 21, my emphasis) This insight of the self-identical nature

Thus, its activity is an absolute, or pure, knowing, i.e., a "pure self-consciousness in its self-development." (*SL*: 49) This is precisely why only the absolute Idea is the Truth: it alone corresponds with its concept. In this perfect *adequatio*, therefore, Hegel has overcome the Aristotelian chasm between Thought and Nature, between form and matter. In Aristotelian terms, Hegel's Absolute Idea is the final *and formal* cause, since it has now reached its *ἐντελέχεια*: the circle has now come to a close. That is, absolute Spirit as this ultimate form of self-consciousness is a significant advance beyond Aristotle, since the absolute is not the separate self-reflecting substance, but is the human community in perpetual interaction, which raises the memories of its cultural traditions, as Harris says, "into reflective (and finally self-conceptual) consciousness; and we do this by organizing it logically so that its shape and significance can be seen."²⁵ The objectivity of the Spirit is the realm of human institutions, but it cannot be reduced or iden-

tified with Absolute Knowing *in se*. The latter, nevertheless, emerges from Objective Spirit, as mentioned above, and, thus, subsumes it in its self-conscious activity. Every human is the subject, or the self, of the Absolute Knower. One comes to see the importance of dialogue as the Spirit's process of self-comprehension and self-realization. Comprehension of the whole, or of totality, is, in the end, the *τέλος* of the human's struggle for self-realization. The transcendent God, i.e., thought (*νοῦς*), no longer governs or animates the world, since only Reason immanently operative in the human spirit is now the propelling force that leads the human to self-consciousness within the disparate social, historical, and linguistic conditions. The uninterrupted ascension of the ubiquitous activity of thinking enables Hegel to overcome the Aristotelian problem of the separation of Thought, while retaining the self-referential activity of Thought created.

of the absolute Spirit is maintained and elaborated in Hegel's *SL* and the *EL*, concerning the absolute Idea.

²⁵ Harris, *The Odyssey of Spirit*, p. 748.

ELEUTHERIA ISSN 0843-8064. Published semi-annually in the Spring and Fall by the **INSTITUTE OF SPECULATIVE PHILOSOPHY**: P.O. Box 913, Station B, Ottawa, CANADA K1P 5P9 Tel: (613) 594-5881. Fax: (613) 594-3952. Charitable Reg. No. 07799841-20. Available to all members. Subscription rates and the availability of back issues and of volumes in the **INSTITUTE'S MONOGRAPH SERIES** will be supplied upon request.