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BEING AND HISTORICAL CHANGE IN HEGEL'S *SCIENCE OF LOGIC*

DISSERTATION

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the
College of Arts and Sciences
at the University of Kentucky

By
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Lexington, Kentucky
Director: Dr. Eric C. Sanday, Professor of Philosophy
Lexington, Kentucky
2022

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ABSTRACT OF DISSERTATION

BEING AND HISTORICAL CHANGE IN HEGEL'S *SCIENCE OF LOGIC*

This dissertation, *Being and Historical Change in Hegel's Science of Logic*, examines the immanent relationship between metaphysics and history, specifically historical change, through an examination of Hegel's *Science of Logic*. It seems to me that this relationship has been under-explored both in metaphysics broadly and Hegel scholarship specifically. For instance, many authors have discussed the role of history in Hegel's philosophy and many others have focused on his metaphysics. But only a few have discussed how these two aspects immanently intersect with one another; specifically, what the examination of metaphysics can teach us about interpreting history and historical change.

My motivation for the project is therefore rooted in answering two basic, interrelated questions: What kind of metaphysics must we articulate that accounts for historical change, where historical change is understood through the lens of contingent 'ruptures' with the past such as social/political revolutions or seemingly violent fractures in nature? And second, what must 'being' be like, or what primary metaphysical principle, helps us understand such changes? These are the questions that drew me to Hegel's metaphysics in the *Science of Logic*. Specifically, I am interested in how Hegel conceives of the structured, intelligible reality of our lived experience not in terms of unity, at least not in the first place, but rather as the historical product of a dynamic tension that is inherent to reality itself. Accordingly, my thesis and contribution is that Hegel posits an element of difference and not identity/unity as the most basic metaphysical element which I further argue opens a space to interpret the conceptual structures that we use to make sense of the world as historically generated and thus open to being undermined, dissolved, and reconstituted. While many authors acknowledge a dynamic element to Hegel's metaphysics few articulate it in terms of a principle of difference and even fewer in a way that accommodates historical change.

Many authors have sought to reconcile such an antagonistic view of reality by arguing that Hegel's metaphysics contains an implicitly presupposed foundational principle of identity that continuously reasserts itself through the apparent dynamism. This typically gets expressed via Hegel's most famous category: the Concept. Examples of this include teleological accounts in which being unfolds conceptually through greater complexity in the world. Others take a more epistemic view, emphasizing a goal of developing through dialectic all the conceptual conditions regarding the unity and structure of objects in the world. My contribution is to turn this on its head, so to speak, by showing

the inherent antagonism that forms the beginning not only remains throughout the account of the Logic, but that the Concept is in fact the most articulate expression of this principle of difference. The Concept therefore becomes our best category for understanding history as open to radical change in ways that teleological descriptions of history do not.

KEYWORDS: Metaphysics, German Idealism, GWF Hegel, Poststructuralism

Jarrad Alan Felgenhauer

08/15/2022

Date

BEING AND HISTORICAL CHANGE IN HEGEL'S *SCIENCE OF LOGIC*

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08/15/2022

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DEDICATION

To my parents, Shari and Alan

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There is a wonderfully Hegelian irony lurking within clichés. Everyone knows that clichés are meaningless, banal, and hyperbolic; except when they are not. This project would not have been possible without the expertise, friendship, guidance, and kindness of so many different people. So as a Hegelian, I can say truthfully that in writing this dissertation I've stood on the shoulders of giants. I want to personally thank some of those people here.

First and foremost, I would like to thank my dissertation chair, Dr. Eric Sanday. Personally, this project was for an odyssey in many ways with many low points. I therefore cannot adequately explain how grateful I am to Dr. Sanday for his guidance at every point in the journey. This includes the endless hours spent meeting and discussing Hegel's *Logic*; his feedback and criticism on my work that challenged my preconceived views and helped this project evolve into what it is today; and his relentless support that helped me get through the points of despair. Dr. Sanday is the greatest mentor I've ever had and has become an even better friend.

Second, I would like to thank the members of my dissertation committee, especially Dr. Meg Wallace and Dr. John Russon. When I began this project, I could not have foreseen it going in the direction of a sustained study of Hegel and Analytic Metaphysics, but I am happy that it did. I could not have done any of this without Dr. Wallace's expertise and encouragement. She taught me an entirely new way of thinking and doing philosophy that I didn't think I was capable of. Dr. Russon has been a tremendous source of insight throughout this project. His work on Hegel spawned many

of the ideas presented here, especially those on history and freedom, and will continue to inspire me for years to come.

I also want to thank my first philosophy teachers, Dr. Tom Jeannot and Dr. Dan Bradley of Gonzaga University. I always tell people that my greatest strengths as a philosopher are my passion and my love for the discipline, not merely as an academic pursuit but as a way of life. I got these attributes directly from them, and they helped me realize that being a philosopher was the only thing I ever really wanted to be.

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.

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INTRODUCTION: THE PARADOX OF BEING

If a person asked me to condense the *Science of Logic*¹ into a single question, I would respond that the book asks us to rigorously consider, to a borderline extreme degree, the simple question “what does it mean to be?”² Furthermore, I would add that this question never disappears from view but remains throughout its many twists and turns. If pressed as to why I answered with such a question, I would further respond by saying that for me, this question expresses a fundamental and irreducible paradox of being that Hegel seeks to fully articulate in the *Logic*, so that when we ask about the meaning of being what we are simultaneously doing is investigating this paradox and following wherever it leads us. My intention in this introduction, therefore, is to set up this paradox, how I think we should frame it, and I what I take some of its most interesting implications to be for purposes of setting up the five chapters that follow in this dissertation.

If we start from the question, “what does it mean to be?”, simply asking it presents an initial problem in that pure being (*reines seine*)—i.e., ‘to be’ pure and simple—does not get us very far. Logically, pure being is all-encompassing. Nothing can elude it in the sense that ‘to be’ but be outside of being is always already to be within being. Being is existence of all that there is. In just this way it is pure universality, unanalyzable, and

¹ All references to the *Science of Logic* in this dissertation will be from *Wissenschaft der Logik*, Vol. I and II (*Gesammelte Werke* 5 and 6), ed. by Eva Moldenhauer and Karl Markus Michel (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1986); and *The Science of Logic*, trans. by George di Giovanni (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010). I will use in text citations when quoting directly that refer the page numbers of both the English translation (*SL*) and the *Gesammelte Werke* (*GW*).

² This idea, as a central theme of ‘what is the *Logic* about’, has been asked in some form by many thinkers with varying commitments. To cite just three, John Russon argues that the *Logic* asks the question “what is it ‘to be’?” See *Infinite Phenomenology: The Lessons of Hegel’s Science of Experience* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2016), p. 264. Stephen Houlgate argues that *Logic* is an investigation into being pure and simple, where “the bare thought of being mutates.” See *The Opening of Hegel’s Logic* (West Lafayette, IN: Purdue University Press, 2005). Lastly, Robert Pippin tells us that the *Logic* is about finding the conditions under which “all that being could intelligibly be.” See *Hegel’s Idealism: The Satisfaction of Self-Consciousness* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), p. 98.

unconceptualized. However, this means that being can never fully be present and actualized; that is, pure being cannot be particularized. It can never be a specific determinate being with features in relation to other beings. In fact, pure being cannot be in relation to anything at all. It cannot be mediated by anything, and any attempt to articulate it is in some sense to lose it. That said, this cannot be what it means 'to be,' for if the meaning of being was nothing more than infinite openness then there would be nothing at all. In or to be and have meaning at all, being must equally be expressed and actualized. That is, reality is not just fluid and indefinite but is expressed and embedded in particular conceptual unities. Further, it is only within these unified contexts that reality is intelligible to us.

What we can see from this is that the meaning of being is inherently paradoxical because there is an irreducible conflict between universal being and particular being. We can formalize this in the traditional formula for self-identity $A=A$. In the sense that being is purely universal and infinite it could only ever be a simple self-identity, being=being. However, being only ever is as expressed, particularized, and determinate. Put differently, being only is as being, and so again being=being. We can see the paradox emerge in that the two A's or two beings on either side of the equation are not the same. Or, that the equation expresses two different things simultaneously: one is the purely universal being and the other a determinate concrete being. Being both is and is not itself. Furthermore, there is a real and immanent ontological difference between infinitude and finitude, and between unanalyzable immediacy and concrete determinacy. Equally important, however, returning to the equation being=being, we can see that this immanent ontological difference is expressed dynamically as a logical activity of differentiation (i.e. of making/generating

differences). To say that being=being is to say that (pure universal) being is expressed or actualized as (concrete particular) being. Pure being primordially differentiates itself from itself, as a spontaneous expression of activity, such that the simplest conceptual unity of universal and particular, $A=A$ (or being=being), is revealed to be something generated and actualized via difference.

What I find most interesting from this is the historical dimension this paradox of being introduces to metaphysics. More straightforwardly, I see a clear connection here between metaphysics and historical determinacy—which is just to say the concrete historical nature of reality—on the basis of the paradoxical nature of being. Let me take a few moments to properly introduce this idea, as this claim forms the guiding idea of much of what follows in the proceeding five chapters. When asking the question “what does it mean to be?” from the perspective of dynamic generation it seems to me that one of the implications involved is an immanent connection between logic, metaphysics, and historical actualization such that the metaphysical features help us better understand concrete history. Concrete and determinate forms of being, the second half of the $A=A$ /being=being equation, exist within larger contexts from which it has been actualized. That is, rather than being defined by what is immediately present (e.g. qualities and quantities) what any particular thing is is defined by its reflection into what is not immediate, namely, the various webs of relations, mediations, contexts, and interactions from which particular things emerge and draw meaning. This is the ‘debt’, so to speak, that what is immediately present owes to its logical/universal past preconditions. Furthermore, we recognized this historical dimension—the present being understood and contextualized only with historical contexts—in traditional metaphysical relationships such as essence-appearance, part-

whole, universal-particular, etc. where the aspect that signifies the present (e.g., appearance) is understood within the context of what is not present or past (essence).

But by the same token, such pure universal being can only be as expressed in particular historical situations. Being is therefore always logically future oriented insofar as it must be actualized, otherwise it is a meaningless abstraction that is indistinguishable from nothingness.³ As I see it, this actualization must occur in some sense historically. As I stated above, the paradox is simply that being itself is simultaneously both the purely logical and historical dimensions, yet these dimensions are irreducibly different in kind. Every historical expression of being therefore represents a failure of being to realize itself in its purely universal form. However, this failure should not be confused with a sense in which historically expressed being is somehow not being. Rather, it is a way of saying that this failure is an expression of the logical/metaphysical difference that is immanent to being itself. Put differently, it is the actualization of this metaphysical feature of being (difference) that generates the universal historical context within which particular being is situated. If we look at things from this perspective, to ask about what it means to be, or the meaning of being, is not about investigating the pure universality or underlying essences of things.⁴ Nor is it about remaining solely within the world of concrete particularity.⁵ Rather, it is about articulating the historical generation of concepts and conceptual unities (e.g. universal and particular, part and whole) by examining the dynamic non-identity immanent to being itself and how this difference is actualized concretely. The argument

³ This irreducible dichotomy—of pure being and expressed/determinate being—is the central theme of chapter one.

⁴ This is what might have been called metaphysics in the more traditional sense throughout the history of philosophy. All I mean by this is the inquiry into either that which transcends the concrete particular world or structures it and puts it to a foundation.

⁵ What I have in mind here is what today typically goes by the name of naturalism or physicalism.

that I present in this dissertation, therefore, is that the double-sided historical dimension of being, namely, that it is both past and future oriented, is a generated actualization of the metaphysical paradox of being that I opened the Introduction with.

For me, this is what the *Science of Logic* is primarily about. Specifically, it asks what it means to be and by asking such a question we set out to interrogate the dynamic and irreducible paradox immanent to being itself, following it logically through the many ways this paradox is expressed and conceptualized. In doing so, what Hegel makes explicit in the *Logic* as we pass from determinate being, to essence, to concept is the inexhaustibility of being's inherent antagonism. That is, it emerges as the explicit feature of his metaphysics and in working this out we come to see the transformative potential inherent to our shared reality as simultaneously existing compossibilities which thus speak to possible worlds that are real but not yet actualized. Ultimately, this is what makes the *Logic* such a such a fascinating text for understanding the immanent connection of metaphysics to revolutionary historic change. One of the primary implications of this study is that, for Hegel, conceptual unities of universality and particularity that make reality intelligible to us are (1) immanently embedded in our own lifeworld and (2) not static but historically generated, open to disintegration, reconstitution, or revolutionary change. A concept brings the metaphysical and historical dimensions together, and it does so genetically on the basis of a singular activity of difference, where difference is no longer an empirical relation but a genetic, creative, and transcendental condition for the historical diversity and shapes of being. That is, in making this paradox explicit, it allows us to reimagine concepts and their generation not as articulating the 'essences of things' but rather as articulating 'events' that bring new ways of being into history.

This perspectival shift in our metaphysics, from asking about essences to asking about events, puts Hegel's Logic in connection with much of 20th century Poststructuralist metaphysics. This is particularly so with respect to the connection between concepts to difference(s) and historical generation. One thinker in particular that I'd like to highlight for the purposes of introduction is Gilles Deleuze. In his later text *What is Philosophy?* Deleuze articulates a thesis of concepts that is very Hegelian in nature, writing "the concept is not given, it is created; it is to be created. It is not formed but posits itself in itself—it is a self-positing. Creation and self-positing mutually imply each other because what is truly created...thereby enjoys a self-positing of itself, or an autopoietic characteristic by which it is recognized."⁶ Readers of Deleuze know well that the backbone of the creative autopoietic character of concepts is a metaphysical theory whose primary element is difference.⁷

To me this provides the clearest place of overlap with my argument regarding Hegel in that concepts reflect the actualization an ontological difference immanent to being itself. In other words, difference is not an empirical but logical/metaphysical relation that constitutes a genetic principle for concrete empirical. For Deleuze in *Difference and Repetition*, particularly Chapter IV,⁸ the primary argument is that this differential field, which he calls "the virtual," forms the basis for all metaphysical structures of identity, such as the concepts that our embedded in our everyday historical reality like love or justice. Unities like universal and particular, or subject and object are therefore historical products

⁶ Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *What is Philosophy*, trans. by Hugh Tomlinson and Graham Burchill (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), p. 11.

⁷ Outlining this metaphysics forms the basis of chapters one and two of Deleuze's magnum opus *Difference and Repetition*.

⁸ See "Ideas and the Synthesis of Difference" In *Difference and Repetition*, trans. by Paul Patton (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), p. 168-222.

of processes of actualization that integrate this primary difference. A term Deleuze uses for this is “individuation” and for me is very much like what is occurring in the Logic with Hegel’s attempt to articulate the irreducible paradox of being, where the conceptualization (into a unity) of the question “what does it mean to be?” are different actualized forms in history of this difference.

Formulating exactly how we should go about establishing and understanding this connection of metaphysics to history, forms the backbone of the five chapters of this dissertation. As I see it there are primary two questions to answer, which at this introductory stage may also help to serve as a guide. They questions are: under what metaphysical conditions are concrete conceptual structures historically produced, and how do the metaphysics of these conceptual structures help us understand historical change? Depending on how one answers these questions, and more importantly what metaphysical principle one employs in doing so, is quite critical. While there is (some) agreement on the motivating question(s), specifically with how they relate to the paradox of being metaphysical principle one employs is seriously debated. For many thinkers, the key aspect is radical form of negativity,⁹ where the defining feature of Hegel’s metaphysics is its open-endedness and transitoriness. Other thinkers highlight the aspect of contradiction to undermine notions of identity and unity. The idea here is that for Hegel, every determination of a being is always already other-related; its identity is constituted in

⁹ For instance, something Brady Bowman describes as a “logic of absolute negativity” which for him forms the basic metaphysical principle in the structuring of the Concept. See *Hegel and the Metaphysics of Absolute Negativity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013). Henry Somers-Hall and Gregor Moder also highlight what they take to be Hegel’s commitment negativity and logical negation in order to differentiate between Deleuzian difference and affirmation. See *Hegel and Spinoza: Substance and Negativity* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2017); and *Hegel, Deleuze, and the Critique of Representation: Dialectics of Negativity and Difference* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 2012). Other thinkers who highlight negativity as the basis of their interpretations are Mark Taylor and Jean-Luc Nancy

relation to other(ness), such that it both is and is not itself simultaneously. Contradiction is therefore embedded in concrete reality itself.¹⁰ Lastly, there are authors who highlight the ‘plasticity’ and contingency of all Hegelian conceptual schemes and structures. These authors highlight that Hegel is not a thinker of ‘totality’ or ‘the absolute’, but that these terms are always future oriented and in some way self-undermining.¹¹ My wager, and ultimately I think my contribution, is that first question establishes that we fully come grips with this paradox of being that Hegel lays out for us in the Logic as a principle of difference,¹² while the second establishes a connection of the metaphysical to the historical through the metaphysical category of concepts. With the further implication being that in order to properly account for history we require a metaphysics that makes this dynamic form of difference the most explicit feature and that Hegel’s metaphysics, and his category of the Concept in particular, does just that. This makes it a prime category for understanding the relationship between metaphysics and history.

¹⁰ The leading thinker here is Todd McGowan, who writes that “According to Hegel’s redefinition of experience, we must relate what emerges in experience to what has come before. We cannot isolate one moment from another...There are not two different noncontradictory experiences but one experience of contradiction.” See *Emancipation After Hegel: Achieving a Contradictory Revolution* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2019), pp. 225-226. Another author that is important to note is Glyn Daly, who argues that the external opposition of objective reality such as A and B are expressions of an immanent contradiction embedded in reality itself. See: *Speculation: Politics, Ideology, Event* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2019).

¹¹ Two authors worth highlighting here are Catherine Malabou and William Maker. Malabou argues that there is always a sense “of sheer randomness” that “dwells within essential being.’ A randomness that she characterizes as the ‘becoming accidental of the essential.’ See *The Future of Hegel: Plasticity, Temporality, and Dialectic*, Trans by Lisabeth During (London: Routledge, 2005). Maker makes a similar point (amongst other places) in an essay on the passage between the *Phenomenology of Spirit* and the *Science of Logic*. He argues that the point of Absolute Knowing in the *Phenomenology* and pure being in the *Logic* directly overlap such that they are self-undermining. That is, the point of Absolute Knowing is simultaneously the most indeterminate and inconsequential. See “Beginning” in *Essays on Hegel’s Logic*, Ed. by George di Giovanni (Albany: SUNY Press, 1990).

¹² Rather than negativity, contradiction, or plasticity, at least in the first instance. I no doubt agree that these categories are very important, but my view is that they are secondary to difference.

Framing the Investigation: Substance as Subject, Unity Versus Difference

That said, an immediate question that still needs to be answered in this introduction is how we should properly frame this dynamic paradox of being? Put differently, what is the interpretive stance that can serve as our guide? My preliminary answer is as a form of subjectivity with the claim being that subjectivity is what allows us to understand the paradox as a principle of difference capable of accommodating/explaining historical change. I think Hegel gives us two indicators that suggest this framing from texts that precede his study in the *Science of Logic*. The first comes from a 1796 essay fragment, still not widely read to this day, entitled “Das Älteste Systemprogramm Des Deutschen Idealismus” (The Oldest Systematic Program of German Idealism). The renowned Hegel scholar (and German Idealism more broadly) Deter Henrich describes the essay fragment as a program for agitation which as Raffaele Milani further argues is a struggle between the unification of “the self and nature.”¹³ Overall, I tend to share Milani’s conclusion primarily because we see here the same paradox as before inaugurated in a different form; namely the antagonism between self and nature that is immanent to the two—i.e. rather than an external antagonism between the self on the one hand and nature on the other—insofar as the self and nature are two necessary yet different parts of each other.

Hegel tells us this by posing a seemingly innocuous question that nevertheless provides an interesting way to frame the investigation into being of the Logic. He writes “Here I shall descend into the realm of physics; the question is this: how must a world be constituted for a moral being?”¹⁴ We see in the question the unity of self (i.e. a moral being)

¹³ Raffaele Milani, *Art of the Landscape* (McGill: Queen's University Press, 2009), p. 112.

¹⁴ GWF Hegel, “The Oldest System-Program of German Idealism” trans. by H.S. Harris in *Miscellaneous Writings of GWF Hegel*, ed. by Jon Stewart (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2002), p. 112.

and nature (i.e. a world) that Hegel seeks. What is most fascinating for us, however, is that he posits this unity by reversing the order, so to speak, that had motivated many of his modern predecessors.¹⁵ Namely, in seeking the unity of self with nature he does not ask what the self must be like in order to fit into a metaphysics; rather, he asks what must metaphysics ('the world') be like in order to generate a free self (moral beings)? Put more provocatively, it is the self, or subjectivity, that is the antagonism inherent to nature/being. Put differently, the paradoxical antagonism inherent to being is subjective in nature.

This is followed up by one of, if not the, most important of Hegel's metaphysical thesis which comes from the Preface to the *Phenomenology of Spirit*: "In my view...everything turns on grasping and expressing the True, not only as Substance, but equally as Subject." He continues, writing that "the living Substance is being which is in truth Subject, or, what is the same, is in truth actual only insofar as it is the movement of positing itself."¹⁶ In this passage, we see a direct connection to the question above. Specifically, not only is there a relationship between metaphysics (substance) and the self (subjectivity) but more strongly, that material substance is in some way immanently subjective; that is, its truth is a movement of its own self-actualization (positing).¹⁷ Furthermore, by saying that substance is subjective Hegel is marking out substance as something immanently antagonistic and paradoxical insofar as substance must differentiate

¹⁵ That is both immediate predecessors like Kant and Hume, but also his more distant predecessors in modern philosophy dating back to Descartes.

¹⁶ Hegel, *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. by AV Miller (Oxford: University of Oxford Press, 1977), pp. 9-10.

¹⁷ This particular framing of Hegel's metaphysics has gained traction in recent years through the work of thinkers like Adrian Johnston, Slavoj Žižek, and Todd McGowan. See *Prolegomena to Any Future Materialism* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2019); *Less Than Nothing: Hegel and the Shadow of Dialectical Materialism* (London: Verso, 2012); and *Emancipation After Hegel: Achieving a Contradictory Revolution* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2019).

itself from itself in order to be a movement of self-positing. Thus, an interesting way to frame the dynamic ontological paradox that we encountered above is as a kind of subjectivity immanent to being, insofar as subjectivity indicates dynamic movement.

One way to think about this ‘subjective’ aspect of the paradox of being is in terms of a unity or identity in which the paradox of being designates an intertwining of two different moments of being underscored by a foundational unity. Arguing that Hegel’s metaphysics is underlined by a primordial metaphysical unity is not something particularly new.¹⁸ However, it is with Robert Pippin’s book *Hegel’s Idealism: The Satisfaction of Self-Consciousness* where we see the dynamism of subjectivity take center stage. Pippin traces this back to Kant’s original Transcendental Unity of Apperception, which he argues that Hegel himself appropriates and makes the central feature of the subject aspect of being.¹⁹ We recall that for Kant the Transcendental Unity of Apperception is a pure spontaneous act of synthesis that unifies a manifold of given representations into one consciousness. That is, it is the active unifying factor that allows me to represent my experience to myself.²⁰ Put differently in terms of the paradox of being, it is the dynamic activity of the unity of subjectivity that makes the conceptual unity. However, Pippin’s great insight is to tie dynamism directly to subjectivity but to do so in a non-foundational way. That is, the unity of concepts is something actively generated where the incompleteness of certain

¹⁸ Two examples of this are Rolf-Peter Hortsman and Stanley Rosen. Hortsman argues that the primary feature of Hegel’s metaphysics is a relational unity that precedes any expression, or as he puts it a “primary structure.” See *Die Grenzen der Vernunft. Eine Untersuchung zu Zielen und Motiven des Deutschen Idealismus* (Frankfurt am Main: Anton Hain, 1991).

Frankfurt am Main: Anton Hain, 1991. Rosen, on the other hand, argues for what he calls a “identity within difference,” in which an *a priori* principle of identity underlies the paradox of being. See *The Idea of Hegel’s Science of Logic* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2014).

¹⁹ Pippin quotes Hegel directly on this, writing “the object...has its objectivity in the concept and this is the unity self-consciousness” See *Hegel’s Idealism: The Satisfaction of Self-Consciousness* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), p. 232.

²⁰ See *The Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. by Werner Pluhar (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1996), B132-135.

concepts creates new conditions in an internal dynamic and the internal identity of subjectivity underlies the movement.

Another thinker who privileges the aspects of unity and identity, although from a different perspective than Pippin, is James Kreines and his text *Reason in the World: Hegel's Metaphysics and its Philosophical Appeal*. Kreines' thesis is that Hegel provides a "metaphysics of reason" which is "philosophical inquiry into explanatory reasons, or reason in the world, and ultimately into their completeness."²¹ What Kreines has in mind here is a developing levels or orders of explanation, where concepts develop teleologically to deeper and more complete explanations (i.e. reason in the world). The subjective aspect comes into play insofar as Kreines argues that the immanent concept of freedom is that which provides the deepest explanatory power insofar as freedom is the concept that is most fully realized in the Logic.²² Put differently, it seems to me that the crux of Kreines' argument rests on the fact that freedom/subjectivity forms a teleologically developing foundation that grounds the other levels of explanation (e.g. law). In terms of the paradox of being, therefore, what is supposed at the outset is a conceptual unity of being that develops teleologically where the subjective aspect of being just is this teleological development.²³

A Question of Presupposition(s)

For me, though, the idea of the unity/identity of being as a way to understand the subjectivity of the paradox of being is ultimately a question about presupposition. And that

²¹ James Kreines, *Reason in the World: Hegel's Metaphysics and its Philosophical Appeal* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), p. 9.

²² Ibid., p. 23.

²³ My argument against this view forms chapters three and four of the dissertation.

is what thinkers, different and diverse as they are, who espouse a presupposed unity within the paradox of being miss is a fundamental connection between metaphysics and history. For the thinkers mentioned above, it seems to me that the notion of spontaneous activity—whether that be the unity of being or of self-consciousness—is something indexed a presupposed unity/identity that then develops forward in a linear/teleological fashion. So, that is when we pass from being to essence to concept in the Logic what we are considering is the development of an identity within the paradox of being. The unity the unity of the universal and the particular-historic expression is presupposed at the outset.

However, for me this misses something unique about the paradox from the Logic that I described in the first section of the introduction, especially as it pertains to what I take to be the fundamental connection between metaphysics and history. To be more specific, my worry is that by holding to the idea of a presupposed unity we lock ourselves into a view of history based on the dynamic unfolding of identity in the world. Here, the unity of universal being and particular being, or self-consciousness as the ground for determinate being, forms and overarching unity that remains the same as an identity through the dynamic process of its expression. That is, this universal element of identity is transcendent the historical field of lived experience, and that although things seem to change historically, in truth these changes are merely synthesized back into a universal identity as the organizing principle that re-asserts itself through each moment. What I think is missed on this view, however, is the truly creative and generative aspect of being that for me can only be fully understood if we articulate the original paradox of being as an expression of an ontological difference and thus as a differentiating rather than unifying activity. My thought is ‘radicalize’, if you will, thinkers like Pippin’s brilliant insight into

the primacy of spontaneous activity by arguing for a pure activity of difference as the primary metaphysical principle where this difference (as an activity) represents the subjective aspect of substance (being). The implication of this reading is an historic one; namely that substance/being is not a fully formed identity that unfolds in history, but rather just the processes of its own differencing and thus has the status of something incomplete and contingent. To clarify, then, my hypothesis is to reverse the order with respect to the primacy of activity. Rather than a unity that remains the same and synthesizes all of its determinate moments, here, it is the unity that is historically generated and concretized retroactively on the basis of difference. In other words, a singular activity of difference without (universal) presupposition that generates the universal ground and the particular expression as an historical unity.²⁴ ...To me, this offers a better interpretation of the paradox of being and thus makes it a better category for understanding how metaphysics can account the oftentimes radical contingency of historical change.

Chapter Outline

To that end, the dissertation project is divided into five chapters, each of which approaches the paradox of being from a different perspective, and accordingly has its own specific connection of metaphysics to history. Chapter One is dedicated to the study of

²⁴ I will come back to this passage in much greater depth and detail in chapter one, but I think it's worthy to introduce here just to give readers a better sense of what I mean by 'activity of difference' and where I'm going with it. Hegel writes in the introductory essay of the *Logic*, "With What Must the Beginning of Science be Made" that "There is only present the resolve, which can be considered as arbitrary, of considering *thinking as such*...and so there is *nothing* that is may *presuppose*, must not be mediated by anything or have a ground, ought to be rather itself the ground..." *SL* 48, *GW* 21.56. When we consider a 'resolve,' or decision, that it utterly and completely arbitrary we understand that there is nothing preceding, i.e., a universal presupposition, that such a decision can draw on. It is an utterly spontaneous activity. Yet it is also a *differentiating* activity in the sense that it does not author *from* a universal point of view; rather the activity itself generates this universality, and the universal ground and its determinate expression are concretized as a unity retroactively out of it. Establishing this point in the *Logic* forms the basis for chapter one of the dissertation.

determinate being, or what I also refer to as particularity, and is broken into two parts. Part one is arguably—along with chapters three and four—the most important section of the dissertation. Here, I examine the initial paradox of being at the beginning of the *Logic* in great depth and detail. I especially focus on the *Logic's* canonical categories of being, nothing(ness), and becoming, where my purpose is to establish for readers that the primary metaphysical feature at play is difference as a logical activity, and that only on the basis of difference (i.e., where difference is primary) is the space generated to properly address history later on in chapters three and four.

Part two of chapter one examines particularity directly. The most important discussion here is Hegel's category of infinity. The initial antagonism of difference at the beginning crops up here for the first time in the way that what something is is just as much defined by a relation to its limitation, or otherness. Things are defined by a sense of difference insofar as they both are and are not themselves. Determinate things are particular; they are finite, limited, and defined in relation to otherness. Put differently, they continuously pass over into otherness and vice versa. This is one sense of infinity, an endless flux of passing over of something into otherness, and vice versa, to infinity without any consistency or structure. This is also where we get a first account of history; namely, history characterized as infinitely contingent flux. Put more concretely, it is the view of history as a string of disconnected and contingent events, continuing one after another, and lacking any consistency or context. For example, think of a story of disconnected events with no narrative form/structure.

The failure of this view in the *Logic* precipitates a shift to a different form of metaphysics, a metaphysics of universality, and an accompanying different form of history.

This discussion takes up the bulk of chapter two. For Hegel, the category of infinity cannot be a universal that transcends beyond particular being, as this leads to the aforementioned infinite flow. Hegel argues that the true, or ‘good,’ infinite is immanent and internal consistency generated by the relation of determinate being. Put differently, it is structure and unity that obtains from the qualitative relations of particular being. This sense of immanent universality is the defining feature of what Hegel calls essence. Namely, when we realize that what takes precedence over immediate particularity is the immanent relation between them. It is the idea that what maintains itself throughout the movement of being—and what therefore give being its determinacy—is the universal structure and consistency of relation(s). This is not an abstract or static universality. Rather, essence is immanent to the dynamic movement of being as universal expression (the universal is expressed in being).

Here, we see a second pass at the category of history, but now from the opposite point of view. Before we encountered a view of history as a perpetual flux without consistency. But here we encounter history from the point of view of universality; specifically, history as the expression of a presupposed principle. In other words, although particularity may change, what is universal does not; and it is this universality that is expressed in all particularity. Hegel’s term for this is a logic of ‘reflection’, the examination of which forms the second half of the chapter.²⁵ Hegel uses the term reflection to refer to the universal because the immediacy of being, its immediate expression, is reflected back

²⁵ In this section I both drawn on and critically engage the great works of authors of Dieter Henrich and Beatrice Longuenesse, each of whom posit the logic of reflection as the primary methodological/metaphysical aspect of the *Logic*. See “Hegel’s Logik der Reflexion,” In *Hegel im Kontext mit einem Nachwort zur Neuauflage* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 2010); and Beatrice Longuenesse, *Hegel’s Critique of Metaphysics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

into the universal structure/context from which it is determined. What is most interesting for us, however, is that the difference of the initial problem of being crops again, but now in a more explicit and forceful way. Before, it was something endemic only to the surface level of immediate being, i.e., being only in its particular form without a universal aspect. Here, though, we start to see the ontological difference coming to the forefront in the form of an immanent and inherent difference the immediacy of particularity and the universality of reflection.

Put differently, there is a dynamic difference in the relation between expression and reflection that cannot be fully captured by the universal, i.e., the universal cannot fully resolve the particularity of being. The key category for discussion is ‘substance’ at the end of the Doctrine of Essence.²⁶ In Essence, substance stands for a presupposed universal cause that is expressed in particular determinate effects. However, this universal presupposition turns out to be just as subordinate to its effects, in that, without the activity or expression of the effect—without the particular effect effecting, so to speak—the universal itself is meaningless. In short, what this makes explicit is what was only implicit in the groundwork we articulated in part one of chapter one. That there is an inherent antagonism that cannot be resolved, with my argument therefore being that it is the antagonism itself is what must take ontological priority.

Chapters three and four articulate how this difference is expressed most as a theory of concepts, and that Hegel’s theory of concepts gives us the proper tools for understanding the connection to history. At this point, we have already studied aspects of particularity and universality. Specifically, we saw the manner in which difference informs the enquiry,

²⁶ Note that this is also the place where we will see emergence of the substance-as-subject doctrine.

and how aspects of particularity and universality and their relation breaks down in an attempt to resolve the initial problem of being that has framed our study in the first place. Hegel maintains that the most important aspect in the passage from essence to concept is subjectivity. The key category here is singularity, which only shows up in the concept. The primary focus of chapter three is on establishing the aspect of singularity in the concept, specifically as it relates to the aspect of difference that I am arguing is explicit in the concept.²⁷

In these two chapters I'm drawing on and engaging with a wide array of thinkers, but all of whom are motivated by similar questions as I am.²⁸ Namely, how Hegel's metaphysics in the *Logic* connects with, is a precursor to, or helps inform the 20th and 21st century shift in metaphysics away from essences/universals and towards events where the primary metaphysical element is some form of dynamic antagonism.²⁹ However, it is also in these two chapters where I think my contribution is most easily distinguished insofar as I maintain that only principle of difference, rather than other principles of antagonism, can be articulated within the parameters Hegel sets for us in the *Logic's* opening chapter; and furthermore, that this principle of difference is what best sets us up to understand history.

²⁷ It is also in these two chapters where I think my contribution is most easily distinguished in this debate insofar as I maintain that only principle of *difference*, rather than negativity or contradiction, can be articulated within the parameters Hegel sets for us in the *Logic's* opening chapter; and furthermore that this principle of difference is what best sets us up to understand history.

²⁸ Some of the authors worth mentioning here include: Rebecca Comay and Frank Ruda, *The Dash—The Other Side of Absolute Knowing* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2018); Glyn Daly, *Speculation: Politics, Ideology, Event* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2019); Markus Gabriel *Transcendental Ontology: Essays in German Idealism* (New York: Continuum, 2011); Anna Savagnargues "Hegel and Deleuze: Difference or Contradiction?" In *Hegel and Deleuze: Together Again for the First Time*, edited by Karen Houle and Jim Vernon (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2013); and Alenka Zupančič "Ontology and the Death Drive: Lacan and Deleuze," In *Subject Lessons: Hegel, Lacan, and the Future of Materialism*. Žižek, Slavoj and Sbriglia, Russell, editors (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2020).

²⁹ This is especially the case with authors like Bowman, Somers-Hall, Moder, and McGowan, each of whom argue that either negativity or contradiction is the primary metaphysical factor.

That is, given the unique way in which Hegel says we must begin doing metaphysics, with a spontaneous activity of differentiation, rules out other dynamic forms of interpretation. Furthermore, what is distinctive about my approach is my argument in these chapters (three and four) that this aspect of difference is made explicit and is what is expressed in the Concept; thus, making it the best category for understanding real historical change.³⁰

The first half of the chapter contains a re-examination of substance, but now from the perspective of singularity. In the previous study of substance, we noted that substance was not an abstract or underlying universal (substrate); rather, substance was defined by reciprocal activity. On the one hand substance just is the activity of producing effects; substance only ‘shows up’, so to speak in effects. But this forward-facing activity is simultaneously defined by a reciprocal action, namely, that substance is not a universal presupposition but in fact becomes subordinate to its effect. Ultimately, the point is that this reciprocal activity calls into question the entire notion of presupposition, such that the universal in and of itself—i.e., as a singularity—is defined by a reciprocal and irreducible antagonism. Put differently, universality (substance) is self-differentiating. It differs from itself as a singular activity (of cause-effect). This subjective activity mirrors the antagonism of being that we started with, except for now it has been made an explicit metaphysical feature. It is in this sense that we say that substance is subjective and singular, and furthermore, it is this sense that we discover the passage to the concept. The remainder of the chapter is therefore dedicated to fleshing this idea out, specifically using the frame of singularity as our guide and how this opens up a new reading of history.

³⁰ This is why I made the claim above that concepts, as metaphysical categories are best understood in terms of *events* and not essences.

After establishing the aspect of singularity on its own in Chapter Three, in Chapter Four I examine it as the primary aspect of the concept as a whole; that is, in relation to universality and particularity. The crucial argument here is to show how singularity—as the expression of difference—as a metaphysical category leads to the unity and identity of the concept as something historically generated; in other words, identities as historically generated from a foundation of difference.

I start, therefore, by examining Hegel's seemingly paradoxical view that reality is conceptually structured. On first glance, making the case that reality is conceptually structured seems like a bad form of idealism, i.e., that the initial problem of being is resolved conceptually. The key to my argument and explanation, therefore, lies in the paradoxical nature of universality (which we have seen multiple times already). Namely, that abstract conceptual universality is simultaneously a singularity; which ultimately is to say that there is an immanent, reflective self-differentiating activity that generates the conceptual structure of universality and particularity that mediates concrete reality. In other words, the difference appears as a concrete universal. Once I have established this, the critical implication is an historical one. Specifically, that for Hegel the focal point of metaphysics is an activity rooted in the problem/difference of being itself, and that this standpoint shifts our perspective away from a metaphysics of universality-particularity to one of creative generation. Being generates its own universality, and it does so because it is antagonistic from the beginning. It is this point that opens us up to a proper study of history.

The final chapter discusses what I argue is a properly Hegelian conception of history, now that we have a firmly established a metaphysical principle of difference. The is to take

the metaphysical insights from Hegel's study of being, specifically how the initial problem of being has unfolded, and to argue how this opens us to a different reading of history. I try to do this in two different ways. One is through practical examples examining the nature of historical trauma, moral conflict, and social revolution; and second through a dialogue with analytic metaphysician Graham Priest and his theory of Dialetheism, centered around the ideas of history and historical change.³¹ The key to the dialogue is the way in which Priest talks about "contradiction" and the way I am ascribing "difference" to Hegel. For Priest, the key metaphysical aspect is contradiction; specifically, that objects/concepts are dialetheitic—that is, they contain and sustain real contradictions—and these real contradictions precede metaphysical unity/identity. In other words, structures of identity are generated, providing a clear place of overlap with Hegel particularly with respect to the historical dimension to metaphysics. Even more so, two of the critical categories Priest draws on to make his argument are nothingness and singularity. This ties directly to the work I've done in part one of Chapter One, Chapter Three, and Chapter Four and thus provides a good foundation from which to proceed.

³¹ The most important text here for my purposes is *One: Being an Investigation into the Unity of Reality and of its Parts, Including the Singular Object which is Nothingness* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), however I will also draw on other Priest texts to make the connection with Hegel more explicit. In addition to Priest, I draw on a wider array of sources in this chapter including Rebecca Comay's brilliant study of Hegel's writing on the French Revolution as it pertains to revolutionary change and historical trauma. See *Mourning Sickness: Hegel and the French Revolution* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2010). I also engage a number of works from literature including T.S. Eliot's essay "Tradition and the Individual Talent" In *The Sacred Wood: Essays on Poetry and Criticism* (London: Methuen, 1920); and Sherman Alexie's *The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fist Fight in Heaven* (New York: Grove Press, 2005); each of which take up the ideas of historical trauma and historical change.

CHAPTER 1. THE PARADOX OF BEING, AND THE ANTAGONISM AT THE HEART OF REALITY

My inspiration for this project was ignited by two metaphysical paradoxes, both of which are articulated by GWF Hegel in the introductory essay and the first chapter of the *Science of Logic*.³² One comes from an attempt to answer a set of simple questions: how, where, and with what should one begin (doing metaphysics)? The second paradox is the answer Hegel gives to these questions of beginning; namely that we cannot begin from any specific starting point, or with any *thing*. Hegel instead argues that the beginning must be pure, unmediated, unanalyzable, and pre-reflective. The beginning, therefore, is an utterly indeterminate immediacy: being *pure and simple*. For Hegel, therefore, in speaking about ‘beginning’ what we are more importantly after is an explanation and an understanding of pure being in its sheer universality. We can immediately see why such an explanation is problematic. How does one capture the sheer universality of being while also saying something that is determinate and intelligible? Put differently, being itself always seems to be distilled concretely and determinately; yet it is also clear that no particular being is pure being.

If one proceeds from the sheer universality of being, this is utterly immediate and indeterminate and therefore indistinguishable with nothing. However, if one proceeds from concrete particularity, the determinate starting point serves as a clearly defined presupposition and the universality of ‘being qua being’ is lost. Herein lies the paradox of

³² All references to the *Science of Logic* in this dissertation will be from *Wissenschaft der Logik*, Vol. I and II (*Gesammelte Werke* 5 and 6), ed. by Eva Moldenhauer and Karl Markus Michel (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1986); and *The Science of Logic*, trans. by George di Giovanni (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010). I will use in text citations when quoting directly that refer the page numbers of both the English translation (*SL*) and the *Gesammelte Werke* (*GW*)

being which is expressive of an inherent *ontological difference* that is directly immanent to being itself. In one sense being as such is the most abstract universal; being is everything and thus can never be *a* being. But this point does not take us very far as. Such an indeterminate abstraction is just as likely to be pure nothingness as it is pure being. For being to have any meaning it must be actualized and conceptualized within historical and human contexts. Yet the problem still persists, as no amount of cataloguing or experiencing ‘beings’ will ever get us to being as such. Establishing this ontological difference as the most critical feature of Hegel’s metaphysics is the most important part of this dissertation as it underlies everything else that follows, particularly the discussion(s) on history. The first chapter, therefore is devoted to understanding what it is and how it works.

In what proceeds, I will show that the goal of the *Logic* is to answer to this puzzle of being, where each of the three books³³ express a different response to the puzzle. My argument is that the initial antagonistic/ontological difference not only serves as a point of departure but that it remains present throughout Hegel’s account of metaphysics. One compelling way of interpreting this antagonism is through the prism of unity/identity which serves a principle of teleological development.³⁴ I mentioned above the indistinguishable nature of pure being and nothing and therefore forms a unity/identity from the beginning that is expressed in the third category of the *Logic*, namely, becoming. On this reading, being already contains its determinations implicitly, and through becoming, the metaphysics of the *Logic* represents a process of making these

³³ The three books of the *Logic* are The Doctrine of Being, The Doctrine of Essence, and The Doctrine of the Concept.

³⁴ Authors such as Pippin, Brandom, Krienes, Stern, and Rosen all stress unity and/or some form of teleology.

determinations explicit. That is, it is a continued expression of unity and identity via a deeper and more complex teleological development of this unity.³⁵

With that said, the strong version of the thesis here is that the antagonism expressed in the introductory paradox is not meant to be resolved into a unity or serve as a principle of teleological development. Nor is it merely the methodological engine of the text. Rather, the antagonism is the key aspect of metaphysics presented in the *Logic*, and the purpose therefore is making it explicit (i.e., as the primary metaphysical feature). Exploring these assertions forms the basis for chapters two through four, with the goal of showing that for Hegel, being is inherently antagonistic and open ended, and thus can only constitute itself as a unity/identity on the basis of this antagonism. The implication being that Hegel's *Logic* is primarily a metaphysics of history and historical change and provides the basis for helping us better understand this fundamental aspect of human life.

The dissertation is thematically broken into three sections, each of which approaches the paradox from a different perspective. Each has its own specific metaphysical orientation that in return has a specific bearing on the way in which we interpret of history and freedom. Part one focuses on particularity, or the nature of determinate being. Part two corresponds to universality, or the essence and structure that is generated via determinate being. Part three is dedicated to the manner in which the initial difference is made explicit in a way that accommodates freedom and history. Chapter one is broken into two parts. Part I is dedicated to a detailed examination of the ontological

³⁵ This is a very basic outline of the 'unity' and 'teleology' position. It is one readers should flag as I will return to again and again in greater detail as I proceed into later chapters (especially chapters two through four).

difference and how it forms the basis of the metaphysics that follows. Part II is dedicated to an examination of determinate being, which I will link to Hegel's concept of particularity, as the first expression to stabilize the antagonistic nature of being. It ends with an examination of Hegel's discussion of Measure and how particularity eventually gives way to the universality of essence. The initial antagonism at the beginning is thrust to the forefront in Measure, specifically in the way in which qualitative immediacy determinates something as something and not its other, and the way in which this difference/relation is constitutive of a being as a complex of something and other. It is divided into several sections with discussions on the nature of becoming; something, otherness, and limitation, infinity, and the turn toward the structure and universality of Essence.

1.1 To Begin or Not Begin

The *Science of Logic* begins with a cryptic statement: “*Sein, reines Sein,—ohne alle weitere Bestimmung,*” or “Being, pure being,—without any further determination” (*SL* p. 59, *GW* 21.68).³⁶ One should not be fooled by the statement's simplicity, for many pressing interpretive difficulties arise from trying to understand how and why the *Logic* begins like this, and what Hegel is trying to convey. How is pure being connected to beginning (*Anfang*)? And why is it licensed as the proper place to begin? Overall, ‘pure being’ seems like a horrible place to begin. Hegel himself appears to lend credence to this view, writing that pure being is “indeterminate immediacy [*unbestimmten*

³⁶ Adrian Johnston, for instance, also points out the cryptic nature of the passage, writing that “Some were and still are tempted to mistake the undeveloped poverty of its vacuous superficiality for the accumulated wealth of profound depths of mysterious, ineffable meanings.” Johnston, *A New German Idealism: Hegel, Žižek, and Dialectical Materialism* (New York: Columbia Press, 2018), p. 39.

Unmittelbarkeit” and that “It is pure indeterminateness [*reine Unbestimmtheit*] and emptiness [*Leere*]. —There is nothing [*nichts*] to be intuited in it, if one can speak here of intuiting” (Ibid.). Perhaps the main thing we can glean from this short description is simply how vacuous and superficial pure being is. It is utterly immediate, lacking all relation to anything else, and without determination of any kind. Pure being is also empty. However, it is not empty in the sense of some *thing* being empty, like a container with nothing in it, but *pure nothingness* such that it is questionable whether one can speak or think pure being at all. Hegel makes the connection explicit, saying “Being, the indeterminate immediate is in fact nothing, and neither more nor less than nothing” (Ibid.).

Let’s try to briefly clarify this. Pure being seems to be everything; however this aspect makes it utterly abstract and indeterminate. Trying to think it or articulate it likewise makes it determinate. If we therefore try to make pure being the beginning in the sense of a linear or discursive starting point, the pure indeterminacy of it vanishes. It is thus indistinguishable from pure nothingness. We are now faced with what appears to be a total paradox: being is indistinguishable from nothing, and nothing is indistinguishable from being. That said, there is also an absolute logical and categorical difference between being and nothing. What I mean here is that being as such is everything and hence nothingness therefore stands for the absolute privation of this, hence being’s total difference. That said, as Hegel points out, nothingness is not different from being in the sense that it negates being. Nothingness does not stand as second term in opposition to being as when we say that ‘x is different from y.’ This, of course, cannot be the case because being and nothing

are utterly immediate and without relation of any kind.³⁷ Rather, being and nothing are simultaneous to one another, or put another way, they overlap completely. Yet in this very simultaneity being and nothing are utterly different. It is a purely formal and logical difference, and it is irreducible.

I will return to this theme in much greater detail later in the chapter. At this stage, however, my purpose is only to organize an introductory framework from which we may proceed with the primary takeaway being the following: that being, as simultaneous to yet purely different from nothingness, appears to be constituted on the basis of an irreducible antagonism and hence throw into question the entire notion of beginning at all. Therefore, in order to understand why the *Logic* begins with pure being, why this is important, and why this paradox/antagonism is critical for our purpose of articulating a Hegelian metaphysics,³⁸ we first need to understand the peculiar way Hegel says that we must begin a ‘science’ of logic and how this beginning is linked to pure being. This will in turn help us answer the question of what pure being means, and how it forms a crucial interpretive point of the *Logic*.

The question, therefore, of how one interprets and decides to begin the *Logic* is a matter of great importance. So much so, that how one comes to terms with the initial antagonism forms the interpretive framework for how one sees Hegel’s project. Scholars such as Gilles Marmasse, for example, have argued that the paradox one finds at the beginning of the *Logic*, and where one stands on the issue, is the central problem of the

³⁷ Hegel’s direct quote is “If any determination [*irgendeine Bestimmung*] or content [*Inhalt*] were posited in it as distinct [*unterschieden*], or if it were posited by this determination or content as distinct from an other, it would thereby fail to hold fast to its purity” (*SL* p. 59. *GW* 21.69).

³⁸ Specifically, as we will soon see, a Hegelian metaphysics rooted in the notions of freedom and historical change.

text.³⁹ Accordingly, authors have debated exactly what marks the ‘true beginning’ with respect to the central idea or insight through which we make sense of the cryptic ‘actual’ beginning. Authors like Stanley Rosen and Robert Wallace focus on *Dasein* or *Existenz* (i.e., chapter two of the Doctrine of Being) as the proper interpretive starting point.⁸ Rosen in particular highlights this, writing that “being and nothing are pure abstractions when considered separately and lead nowhere; it is their identity within difference as becoming that generates the subsequent determinations of the concept.”⁴⁰ The key metaphysical point, here is that there is a presupposed identity of being and nothing exemplified in the unified concept of becoming. Accordingly, which is the primary concept of the Doctrine of Being. Accordingly, the metaphysics in the *Logic* proceeds as an immanent step by step development of categories that logically follow from one another.

Other thinkers like Dieter Henrich argue that the logic of reflection made explicit in the Doctrine of Essence serves as the proper beginning, with the argument being that in order to properly articulate being and nothing one requires a metalogical grounding in reflection.⁴¹ That is, to make the necessary moves that the *Logic* does in fact make, there must be some unified, reflective ground that mediates them, a ground that is only made explicit in the Doctrine of Essence. Lastly, authors like Robert Pippin argue that the Doctrine of the Concept is where Hegel makes his true beginning. The argument here is rooted in Hegel’s praiseworthy remarks for the transcendental unity of apperception, the ‘I-think’ that accompanies all of our representations, found in Kant’s *Critique of Pure*

³⁹ Gilles Marmasse, *Penser le réel: Hegel, la nature et l’esprit* (Paris: Kimé, 2008), pp. 324-325.

⁴⁰ Stanley Rosen, *The Idea of Hegel’s Science of Logic* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2014), p. 48. See also: Robert Wallace, *Hegel’s Philosophy of Reality, Freedom, and God* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

⁴¹ Dieter Henrich, “Hegel’s Logik der Reflexion” in *Hegel im Kontext mit einem Nachwort zur Neuauflage* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 2010), pp. 104-105, 114-118, 124-128.

Reason. For thinkers like Pippin, this signals the *Logic* is rooted in a Kantian-esque cognizing subject and is meant to be read as a dialectical development of cognition and the subject.⁴² For readers not already initiated in the text of the *Logic* and how it unfolds, this will all become clearer as we proceed. The purpose here is to provide a very brief cartography that will develop as we proceed from chapter to chapter. That said, there is one thing that I ought to introduce now, as it forms a continuous theme throughout everything that follows. Namely, that despite the diversity of opinion regarding the thinkers just mentioned, it seems to me that something they share is the idea that the *Logic* is premised upon some form of presupposed unity (or identity) and that this presupposition forms the metaphysical seed that grows throughout the text. In opposition to this, I emphasize that the initial antagonism, discussed in the previous section, is primary. Second, I argue that this forms a basic logical difference (rather than identity) that is made more and more explicit as the metaphysics proceeds. This view will become most clear in the linkage of being, or a particular reading of being, to the idea of historical change discussed in chapters three through five.

With this preliminary work out of the way, we can turn to the twin problems of being and beginning. In the *Logic*'s introductory essay entitled "With What Must the Beginning of Science be Made?" Hegel presents us with two commonsense ways to answer this question, writing that "The beginning of philosophy must be either something mediated [*Vermitteleres*] or something immediate [*Unmittelsbares*]..." (*SL* p. 45, *GW*

⁴² The two texts that I have in mind here are *Hegel's Idealism: The Satisfaction of Self-Consciousness* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989); and *Hegel's Realm of Shadows: Logic as Metaphysics in the Science of Logic*, 2019). I will get to Pippin's thought more in depth in Chapter Three, however it is worth pointing out his thinking is not far from my own particularly with respect to his privileging the dynamic aspect of subjectivity. Where we differ over the question of whether subjectivity is a presupposed identity or something rooted in difference.

21.53).⁴³ Let's look at these two approaches. In order for our inquiry to be properly systematic, rigorous, and well-grounded, there are a couple of commonsense methodological points that are easily discernable. One is that our initial epistemic standpoint ought to be properly skeptical. We should work carefully and methodically, to set aside all of our preconceived notions and presuppositions about the matter at hand in order to approach it with the proper frame of mind. Also, we should only admit to those first principles that are shown to hold up in the face of our skeptical rigor. Only then, after we have firmly established and deduced the proper foundations, should we proceed in a step-by-step manner. Thus, through a process of mediated deduction and systematic rigor we arrive at some kind of determinate first principle from which philosophy will proceed.

In the second form of beginning, we don't start with something mediated, like a deduced first principle, but something immediate; as Hegel says like something "shot from a pistol" (Ibid.). He gives us a direct example of a beginning of this sort in the "Sense Certainty" section of the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, which details a presuppositionless form of immediacy based on the certainty of experience. Something that we cannot fail to notice is the sheer immediacy of experience; simply taking up what is present before us in the mode of pure qualitative experience as such: this, here, now, etc. Hegel says, however, that both these approaches are problematic from the standpoint of a purely logical beginning because each "runs into contradiction [*Widerlegung*]" (Ibid.).

⁴³ The key here seems to be Hegel's stress on either something *mediated* or something *immediate*—*Vermitteltes* oder *Unmittelbares* sein—where we see an initial dichotomy being drawn between pure being (*Unmittelbares* sein) and being that is in some way mediated or determinate (*Unmittelbares*). This is very important for our purposes because the choice one makes here will resonate through the entire interpretation of the *Logic*.

Let's look at this more carefully. Hegel argues that the problem with these two approaches is their reliance on presuppositions. Namely, that there is *something there* to begin with, whether that is a foundational principle, an immediate 'something' to be experienced, or a 'something' doing the experiencing. For Hegel, any foundational first principle is wrong simply by being a first principle. He writes in the *Phenomenology* that "a so-called basic proposition or principle of philosophy, if true, is also false, just because it is only a principle."⁴⁴ Returning to the statement of beginning, "Being, pure being..." it is clear that pure being cannot even be a determinate starting point, even if it is absolute. Pure being must lack all determination whatsoever and therefore cannot be presupposed as anything at all.

Accordingly, any form of presupposition—a starting point, first principle, the immediacy of experience—cannot serve as the beginning of logical science because such beginnings take for granted external presupposition(s) of 'something' outside of the science that are nevertheless meant to either ground the science or serve as its outcome.⁴⁵ Hegel writes "to want to clarify the nature of cognition prior to science is to demand that it should be discussed outside science, and outside science this cannot be done" (*SL* p. 46, *GW* 21.54). On the contrary, for the logical beginning "There is nothing that it may presuppose," (*SL* p. 48, *GW* 21.55) because there is no given 'thing' whatsoever that could serve as the logical basis for pure being other than being itself. Therefore, when considering pure being, what must be kept in mind is that it is marked by a different form of immanent

⁴⁴ Hegel, *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. by A.V. Miller (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), p. 13.

⁴⁵ i.e. what the science is ultimately achieve, or the point to which it is meant to reach. He writes in the *Encyclopedia Logic* that "Reason is unconditional only insofar as its character and quality are not due to an extraneous and foreign content, only insofar as it is self-characterizing...is it its own master." Hegel, *Encyclopedia Logic*, trans. by William Wallace (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975), §52

immediacy. Specifically, pure being must on the one hand be absolutely immanent and immediate to that which it begins, yet it cannot be a determinate part/principle of the system as a starting point or presupposition. It must therefore be immanent to yet different from.⁴⁶ As Rebecca Comay points out, “we must start again from scratch—literally *ex nihilo*.”⁴⁷

1.2 Being and Nothing: The Foundational Antagonism

Now that we understand the basic problem of beginning with an utterly formal, logical, and empty immediacy, we can return with fresh eyes to the paradox of pure being and nothing.⁴⁸ There is *no-thing* there to begin with, because that which would serve as its beginning has vanished. All the *Logic* can do is *assert*, rather than *start* with, this empty immediacy.⁴⁹ In my view this is what Hegel means in introducing pure being as beginning. We remember from the opening page that pure being is utterly inexhaustible, and “there is nothing that it may presuppose, must not be mediated by anything or have a ground” (*SL*

⁴⁶ James Kreines makes a similar point in what he calls Hegel’s “inflationary-deflationary” approach to metaphysics. How I interpret this is that Hegel is simultaneously works to deflate previous rationalist approaches which presuppose that there is some external “thing” (substance, god, etc.) that consciousness could be unified with to form the foundation of a metaphysical system, while simultaneously inflating antinomies, fractures, and short circuits that plague unconditioned reason in Kant’s dialectic. Kreines, *Reason in the World: Hegel’s Metaphysics and Its Philosophical Appeal* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), pp. 147-155. The outcome of this, which Kreines points out, is a thoroughgoing deconstruction of what he calls “substrate metaphysics” while likewise making the antinomies of unconditioned reason immanent to the world itself. *Ibid.*

⁴⁷ Rebecca Comay and Frank Ruda, *The Dash—The Other Side of Absolute Knowing* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2018), p. 43.

⁴⁸ It is important to clarify this so there are no misunderstandings: the overarching point is to show that the *pure* being Hegel introduces in the first sentence of the *Logic* is not *a* being (“something” in Hegel’s terminology) because for Hegel a purely logical beginning cannot begin from any determinate or mediated starting point or presupposition whatsoever. This latter point is something he aims to show us in the *Phenomenology* through the course of the repetitive deconstructions of each mediated position of consciousness that presupposes for itself a subject object identity/unification. The position of absolute knowing, therefore, is in essence the coming of disappearance insofar as it marks the complete inwardizing and disappearance of all externality. There is *nothing there* but the singularity of absolute knowing itself, all coordinates have vanished.

⁴⁹ In addition to Comay (referenced above) her co-author Frank Ruda works this idea of what having to begin with logical immediacy entails; that is, not a thought, an idea, or concept but a purely spontaneous *encounter, assertion, or decision*. See: Comay and Ruda, *The Dash*, pp. 87-91.

p. 48, *GW* 21.56). It is “unanalyzable, taken in its simple, unfilled immediacy...as complete emptiness” (*SL* p. 52, *GW* 21.62). Pure being is therefore simultaneously literal nothingness. Stephen Houlgate describes the connection of nothingness to presupposition as a pure form of “letting go” that is “moved by the minimal thought of pure being that results from letting go...”⁵⁰ Pure being cannot be ‘thought’ in a traditional way because there is simply nothing at all to be intuited.⁵¹ To think it at all in a traditional manner is to particularize it and lose it. But by the same token, there is a definite sense in which pure being must be determinate and intelligible to us, and therefore must be thought. Accordingly, there is a purely logical and irreducible difference inherent to being itself, exemplified by the presuppositionless beginning of being and nothing that must be properly articulated.⁵²

Hegel himself acknowledges this, writing that “The ordinary assumption [*meint*] is that being is the absolutely other [*schlechthin Andere*] of nothing, and that there is nothing as clear as this absolute distinction [*absoluter Unterschied*]; indeed, nothing seems easier than being able to state it” (*SL* p. 68, *GW* 21.79). However, in the very same passage, he argues that “It is just as easy to convince oneself that this is impossible, that the distinction is unsayable [*Unsagbar*]. Let those who insist on the distinction of being and nothing [*Unterschiede von Sein und Nichts*], let them just try to state in what the distinction exists” (*Ibid.*). Accordingly, what seems to make the relationship between pure being and pure

⁵⁰ Stephen Houlgate, *The Opening of Hegel’s Logic: From Being to Infinity* (West Lafayette, IN: Purdue University Press, 2005), p. 67.

⁵¹ That is, pure being is not ‘something’ that we think. As Gregor Moder points out: “The decision to think is not a clear-cut operation like the recognition of the fact that we do, in fact, think.” Moder, *Hegel and Spinoza: Substance and Negativity* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2017), p. 25.

⁵² This is especially so for my purposes, because it is this difference that formulates the basis of my interpretation in the proceeding chapters. I take my direction here from Hegel himself, who writes “From now on this unity of being and nothing will stand once and for all as foundation, as first truth, and with this constitute the element of all that follows.” *The Science of Logic*, p. 62.

nothing so paradoxical is that each is at one and the same time indistinguishable and utterly different from the other. This is the key metaphysical point. Instead of affirming the one side or the other as true what we must do instead is *assert the difference* itself as the beginning. Hegel gives us a clue here, stating that “If we concentrate on this result, what we have before us is a proposition which, on closer inspection, turns out to vanish spontaneously [*durch sich selbst zu verschwinden*]. It has movement [*Bewegung*]” (*SL* p. 66, *GW* 21.77).⁵³ The important metaphysical point, therefore, is one of difference and movement (i.e., dynamism).

With respect to movement, it is important to know that being does not pass over into nothingness. Logically, we do not start with an identity of being and then move to nothingness as if nothingness were a movement of being. being is *not* ‘something’ standing in opposition to ‘nothing,’ where nothing represents the non-being or negative of something.⁵⁴ Rather, pure being *just is* pure nothing. Cynthia Willett introduces the term “reversibility” to help think through this difficult point. She writes, “there is a difference in directionality which operates between the two...and this difference cannot be cancelled.”⁵⁵ Because being and nothing are the same—that is, simultaneous immanence

⁵³ Ibid., p. 66. Hegel’s use of “*sich selbst zu*” is important here, especially for my purposes, because it tells us that the ‘spontaneous’ vanishing of being and nothing is self-reflexive [*sich selbst*]; that is, the movement occur through (*zu*) its own differentiating activity.

⁵⁴ The movement Hegel is referring to cannot be a linear one. Hegel clearly tells us this at a number of points in the *Logic*. For example, he writes that “so *ist* (existiert) Nichts in unserem Anschauen oder Denken” (so nothing *is* (exists) in our intuiting or thinking). *Science of Logic*, p. 59, 21.69. And further “Something is however already a determinate existent that distinguishes itself from another something; consequently, the nothing which is being opposed to something is also the nothing of a certain something, a determinate nothing. Here, however, the nothing is to be taken in its indeterminate simplicity” *ibid.*, p. 60.

⁵⁵ Cynthia Willett, “The Shadow of Hegel’s Science of Logic,” in *Essays on Hegel’s Logic*, ed. by George di Giovanni (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1990), p. 85. Daniel Guerrière makes a similar point, adding “indeterminate may indifferently be called Being *or* Nothing...in an awkward but accurate term—Being/Nothing.” Guerrière, “With What Does Hegelian Science Begin,” *The Review of Metaphysics*, XX (1977), pp. 285-297. Brady Bowman is another author that aligns with this view, except the term he uses to describe the movement is “absolute negativity,” which I will return to in much greater detail in chapter

and immediacy they cannot occupy the same logical space as one another. If they did, they would not be purely indeterminate and unanalyzable. Furthermore, one cannot be given primacy over the other for this would make the second term the mere negative of the first and would institute a temporal transition between the two based on this negativity.

What we end up with, therefore, is a kind of irreducible, purely logical, interchangeability. That is, by the very nature of their sameness, being and nothing are simultaneous to one another; yet it is this very sameness that makes the one different from the other. Being and nothing are simultaneously incompatible. It is as if someone were literally saying two things at once: simply by asserting the one makes the other vanish and vice versa. But the key is that these two reverse movements, or what Willet called “directionality” does not occur temporally/linearly; rather what we are left with is a logical movement of differentiation, or pure difference itself as a movement.⁵⁶ Houlgate again helps simplify this idea, writing “being and nothing are utterly different from one another but collapse logically into one another because of the indeterminate immediacy of their difference. Since each one collapses into the other, however, each proves...to be ineliminable and irreducible.” He continues, “They do not just disappear into the other but are such disappearing.”⁵⁷ That is, the difference in being and nothing is not eliminated in their vanishing (for that would make them the negatives of each other), but rather they are the disappearing. That is, they are the differentiation as a movement. Being and nothing cannot form a unity, for due to their sameness there can be no relation whatsoever between

four. See: Bowman, *Hegel and the Metaphysics of Absolute Negativity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), pp. 49-55.

⁵⁶ To add some clarity to this, when I say “pure difference” here I mean a form of difference that is unmediated and unaffected by notions such as opposition or negativity.

⁵⁷ Houlgate, *The Opening of Hegel's Logic*, p. 265.

them (they both cannot be logical immediacy); likewise, to unify them is to instantiate the very form of presupposition, a universal starting point, the Hegel rules out. Instead, there is a movement of logical displacement and this displacement is immanent to being itself.

This is a good point to introduce a key term that will play a prominent role throughout the text: *singularity*. Here, it forms an important implication of the discussion so far because it institutes a shift in our point of view from thinking about pure being as a universal starting point to a that of a singularity. Given the antagonistic nature of pure being, that it is the same as pure nothingness, and the utter lack of presupposition or determined starting point, being is constituted as a determinate identity or unity with nothingness *after the fact* on the basis of this purely logical movement of difference. There is no ‘being and then nothing,’ as if we were dealing with a synthesis. There is only the singular activity of displacement, or differentiation, between them. This is what is primary. This point will become clearer as we proceed to greater and greater depths in the text. But for now, the point to emphasize is that there is a singular, foundational antagonism at the heart of being itself. Singular because it is immanent pure being and is not external nor presupposed. As we’ve discussed, this antagonism takes the form of an entirely logical (non-temporal, non-linear) activity of differentiation between pure being and pure nothing. And thus, as we will see, what constitutes these two terms as determinate identities opposed to one another just is this activity of differentiating.⁵⁸ As Hegel himself makes clear in a famous passage “that nowhere on heaven or on earth is there anything which does not contain both being and nothing in itself” (*SL* p. 61, *GW* 21.71). What he means by this, to foreshadow what is to come later in the chapter, is that every determinate concrete being

⁵⁸ This determinate opposition occurs in the second half of the chapter as determinate being and non-being or something and otherness.

(what Hegel calls ‘something’) existing in reality, contains both its own identity and its determinate non-identity, which is to say, its reference to otherness or its own limitation as a being. But what generates these two as a concrete structure in existence, what makes the difference, is this more primordial logical form of displacement inherent to being itself.

1.2.1 .Beginning and the Decision to Think

A helpful example in understanding the point about antagonism and activity is what Hegel describes as the pure decision, or “resolve” to begin thinking, where the analogy is made between pure being and the (pure) activity to think. One worry regarding pure being and nothing is that it creates an undecidability that paralyzes the *Logic* before it even begins.⁵⁹ Given the nature of being and nothing, perhaps there is no justification for privileging one over the other. In fact, one cannot make one the priority over the other. They are logically and metaphysically the same yet cannot occupy the same logical/metaphysical space. Nevertheless, the *Logic* must begin; or to put it differently, we have to start doing metaphysics. Hegel says, therefore, “There is only present the resolve [*Entschluß*], which can also be viewed as arbitrary, of considering thinking as such [*Denken als solches*]” (*SL* p. 48, *GW* 21.56).⁶⁰ In other words, we must arbitrarily and contingently *choose* to think. As I hinted at above, what Hegel has in mind here is not thinking in a traditional sense but thinking that is analogous to pure being. This is an utterly

⁵⁹ Willet rightly points out that vanishing, interchangeable (non)relation of being and nothing creates “undecidability” between being and nothing that “would paralyze Hegel’s system.” Willet, “The Shadow of Hegel’s Science of Logic,” p. 85. This point by Willett foreshadows an important issue we will soon raise about whether or not Hegel’s Logic has a dialectical method at all. Or, more precisely, whether or not the movement and method of the Logic operates on two different levels.

⁶⁰ Hegel, Science of Logic, p. 48. Hegel’s use of the verb *Entschluß*, which di Giovanni translates as ‘resolve,’ is revealing in that it not only evokes a qualitative sense of ‘standing resolute’ but also the much more active sense of making an active decision.

arbitrary and empty ‘thinking as such’: “pure empty intuiting itself...or it is equally only this empty thinking [*leere Denken*]” (*SL* p. 59, *GW* 21.69). Hegel ties pure empty thinking to an immanent activity or decision to think; in fact, pure thinking just is this decision. The point here is to link together ideas of differentiation and activity under the banner of a pure decision. Namely, there is a pure decision to think captures the sameness and undecidability of being and nothing in the sense that it is an activity of thinking that nevertheless does not think about anything. Yet, it simultaneously captures the differentiation in that deciding is likewise a *de-cision*; that is, an activity of making a difference.

To capture this concretely, there are several things that come to mind when thinking about what constitutes a pure empty decision that parallels pure empty thinking that might lead one to posit their connection. For example, a pure decision parallels empty thinking in that it is both immanent and undecidable. What I mean by this is that there is a kind of paralysis one faces when confronting two equal yet totally different choices. There is an analogy here with the kind of irreducible moral conflict one is faced with when having to choose between two seemingly interchangeable, yet utterly different options in the sense that are both right and at the same time both wrong.⁶¹ Likewise, the decision is an immanent one insofar as there is no objective third position, or presupposition that one can rely on. This choice is essentially empty. The only thing one can do is resolve to choose. Paradoxically, then, such decisions are in essence ‘de-scissions.’ They are inherently split between the empty act of resolving to think/to choose and the fact that it cannot decide anything. The choice does not resolve or mediate the difference or the interchangeability of the two poles.

⁶¹ That is, the choice of one over the other does not necessarily indicate that one values the one over the other, or that one is secondary to the other.

As we have seen, pure being and pure nothing are equal and yet irreducibly different from one another. Thus, one cannot instantiate a determinate beginning by thinking the one and then the other. Rather, what one must see is what Hegel called the ‘movement,’ or the irreducible difference between them. Gregor Moder point this out, writing that “Even the inceptive decision to think implies the contradiction which marks all beginnings,” and thus the pure resolve/decision to think pure being “includes a remainder of that from which it separates itself, it includes not-thinking [nothingness] as its undecided. The beginning...is only possible because—from the perspective of the result— it includes not-thinking as its not-beginning.”⁶² This is what the empty and infinitive activity to think takes up. The unanalyzable decision to think does not begin from anywhere or with anything. It is just the differentiating activity (i.e., a decision) to think pure and simple because it includes its equally pure and simple difference of non-thinking, or nothingness as that which is differentiated. It is an activity of displacement as such.

As Hegel says, “The truth is neither being nor nothing, but rather that being has passed over into nothing and nothing into being – “has passed over,” not passes over [*nicht übergeht, sondern übergegangen ist*] ...They are absolutely distinct [*absolut unterschieden*] yet equally unseparated and inseparable, and that each immediately vanishes [*verschwindet*] in its opposite” (*SL* p. 59-60, *GW* 21.59). That is, if we try to think them as determinate contents of thought where being passes over into nothing, then we are already too late. They have already passed over. This is what the empty resolve to think grasps. Which, to say the same thing, is the singular activity of difference that constitutes

⁶² Moder, *Hegel and Spinoza: Substance and Negativity*, p. 25.

them.⁶³ Pure thinking represents the immanent incompatibility of pure being(nothing), it just is the immanent obverse of the union of being and nothing “which can then only be said to be an unrest of simultaneous incompatibles [*Unruhe zugleich Unverträglich*], a movement” (*SL* p. 67, *GW* 21.78).⁶⁴ It is this movement that captures the passage in the *Logic* from pure being to existence, or determinate being.

1.3 The Role of Becoming: The Truth of Being and Nothing, and the Passage to Determinate Being

We are now in a position to analyze the third aspect of the *Logic*'s opening chapter, what Hegel calls becoming. It is through becoming that we pass from the logical displacement of pure being and nothing to concrete existence.⁶⁵ Becoming acts as a mirror to reflect pure and determinate being. The category of becoming, when thought of in concrete terms, appears to be easy enough to understand. For instance, few things seem simpler to notice than that determinate reality is not infinite but finite. One of its canonical metaphysical features is coming to be in existence and eventually passing away. Determinate things are not just ‘the way they are’ once and for all. Rather, things become what they are. They not only enter into existence and pass away from it but are also marked

⁶³ As Houlgate points out “the bare thought of being mutates,”⁶³ this empty kind of immanent yet different openness *to think*, to simply resolve to take up what purely before us (rather than thinking anything determinate or specific) is what allows us to see into the interchangeable yet irreducible vanishing that is the speculative truth of being and nothing. Houlgate, *The Opening of Hegel's Logic*, p. 266. Michael Rosen also points out something similar, calling it a vanishing movement of “non-identical indiscernibles.” Michael Rosen, *Hegel's Dialectic and Its Criticism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), p. 152.

⁶⁴ What is important here is the stress that Hegel is putting on ‘unrest’ (*Unruhe*) and incompatibly (*Unverträglich*); that is, it is meant to evoke a sense of immanent and irreducible tension and difference.

⁶⁵ Hegel calls this *Dasein*, or determinate being.

by generation and decay. On the surface, this is such a fundamental feature of our daily reality that we take it for granted.

But where does this dynamism come from, and how should we understand it? What we are first and foremost interested in is understanding becoming as the passage in the *Logic* from being to determinate being and the resulting implication for how this interpretation frames the role becoming plays in understanding determinate being. Perhaps the best way to proceed is with the enigmatic paragraph on becoming itself:

The truth is neither being nor nothing, but rather that being has passed over into nothing and nothing into being – “has passed over,” not passes over. But the truth is just as much that they are not without distinction; it is rather that they are not the same, that they are absolutely distinct yet equally unseparated and inseparable, and that each immediately vanishes in its opposite [*jedes in seinem Gegenteil verschwindet*]. Their truth is therefore this movement of the immediate vanishing of the one into the other: becoming... (*SL*, pp. 59-60, *GW* 21.69-21.70).

Let's approach this in concretely. One way to think about where the apparent movement and dynamism of becoming comes from is through the idea of teleological progression. On this view the emphasis in becoming is placed on that which becomes. Natural development is regulated by a principle of becoming in which a determinate being unfolds itself in a teleological movement of actualization. The focus is on the entity which merely becomes in actuality what it always already was potentially, as when an organism develops from conception to maturity, or on a much grander scale the evolution of a species through the growth and decay of its individual members.

It is not that this determinate notion of becoming is inaccurate; but it must be supplemented with a purely logical notion of becoming that tracks pure being and pure nothingness. Specifically, given what we've already discussed about the nature of being, nothing, and presuppositionless beginning, the initial pathway seems to be ruled out as the truth of being and nothing. That is, becoming cannot be a third term that mediates being

and nothing in the sense that the movement of becoming refers to a unity of being and nothing where being re-emerges as becoming. Hegel tells us in his Chapter One remarks that thinking becoming in this way mistakes it for *transition*, writing “Transition [*Übergehen*] is the same as becoming except that the two terms, from one of which the transition is made to the other, are represented [*vorgestellt*] in it more as at rest, outside each other, the transition occurring between them” (*SL* p. 69, *GW* 21.80), where becoming names this transition as a third mediating term in a line of progression from being to nothing. Hegel continues, writing that that this form of distinction “depends, therefore, not on them [on being and nothing], but on a third element, on intention. But intention is a form of subjectivity, and subjectivity does not belong to the present order of exposition” (*SL* p. 68, *GW* 21.79).

Let’s return to the passage from the previous page and place the emphasis on becoming *as such*. This view hinges on the of movement of purely logical difference explained above. In examining the passage more closely, we notice that Hegel refers to being and nothing in the past tense. This subtle move gives us the insight we need. For instance, we already know that pure being and nothing are utterly the same: unmediated and unanalyzable immediacy. The truth of being and nothing, i.e., becoming, cannot represent a unification of being and nothing as a collapse of one into the other; rather, it must make explicit the immanent activity of displacement between them. Becoming just is this displacement. It is the explicit assertion of this difference as such.

There are two passages from Hegel on this point that are worth quoting at length:

Becoming is the unseparatedness [*Ungetrenntheit*] of being and nothing, not the unity [*Einheit*] that abstracts from being and nothing; as the unity of being and nothing it is rather this determinate unity, or one in which being and nothing equally are. However, inasmuch as being and nothing are each unseparated from its other, each is not. In this unity, therefore, they are, but as vanishing... They sink from their initially represented self-

subsistence into moments which are still distinguished [*noch unterschiedenen*] ... Grasped as thus distinguished, each is in their distinguishedness a unity with the other. Becoming thus contains being and nothing as two such unities, each of which is itself unity of being and nothing; the one is being as immediate and as reference to nothing; the other is nothing as immediate and as reference to being... (*SL* p. 80, *GW* 21.92-21.93).

Hegel continues, adding in the next paragraph:

Becoming is in this way doubly determined [*gedoppelter Bestimmung*]. In one determination, nothing is the immediate, that is, the determination begins with nothing and this refers to being; that is to say, it passes over into it. In the other determination, being is the immediate, that is, the determination begins with being and this passes over into nothing – coming-to-be and ceasing-to-be (*Ibid.*).

Taking the two passages together, it seems to me that the critical aspect is what Hegel calls the “double determination” of becoming because it highlights the distinction and movement of difference. To clarify, to say that becoming is doubly determined is to say that it points in two directions. One is the determinate form of becoming easily recognized in our lived experience of things becoming what they are. The second is the purely logical form of becoming as the truth of being and nothing—the expression of logical differentiation as an activity— that is immanent to *yet different from* the first. This is an important point to flag here as it pertains to the relation of metaphysics to history. The first form could be called historical in a traditional sense; namely, the sense of temporal succession. But this does not answer the question of what makes history ‘happen.’ Rather, the answer to this requires an expression of purely logical differentiation as activity. And what makes the one immanent to the other is the category of becoming.

Let’s examine this further in the two passages. The first passage presents us with two unities that are differentiated from one another: the immediacy of pure being that immanently contains nothingness, and the immediacy of nothingness that contains pure being. Becoming acts as a mirror between the two marking the explicit assertion of one unity and the beginning of the other on the opposite side. Becoming, therefore, represents

both sides of this difference (the difference between unities). It acts as a conduit between the two that nevertheless maintains the difference and does not mediate it. In other words, becoming represents the activity of *difference making* or *making* differences in the metaphysical sense of a form of pure displacement. It generates a movement to what Hegel refers to in the passage as the concrete unity of distinguishing. Let's carefully clarify this, as it will make explicit what Hegel means by double determination.

One aspect of becoming is a unity highlighted by the displacement of vanishing. I stressed this point repeatedly above: by the very definition of their sameness being and nothing are simultaneously incompatible. Their difference has movement qua becoming. It is an activity of differentiation; becoming in its purely formal/logical sense. This leaves us with a 'unity' that *just is* pure differentiation or becoming in the simplest sense of the term. The critical move comes when Hegel notes that this first unity runs both ways and is thus marked by a simultaneous two-way movement of being to nothing and nothing to being, neither of which has priority because they are incompatible.⁶⁶ Accordingly, becoming represents the singular activity of incompatibility. To sum this up concretely, in a moment of pure incompatibility, something has to give. The division cannot stand such that the incompatibility is displaced and generates a new dimension through which it is expressed in a new way. This is what becoming expresses. It is a logical form of displacement that generates the passage to a second level and a different unity on the other side of becoming, a double determination.

⁶⁶ Willet helpfully points out that the two are not mediated with one another, but are *incompatible* with one another: "the two circles reflect, or mirror, one another, differing...in *direction* of movement." Willett, p. 91.

Hegel refers to this second, determinate, aspect of becoming as “distinguishedness.” On the side of distinguishedness, rather than having being/nothing and nothing/being in a form simultaneous differentiation, we have something concrete. Namely, a unity in which being and nothing are now distinguished in reference to each other. To return to the passage(s) above: “They sink from their initially represented self-subsistence into moments which are still distinguished.” In the second passage, we can see exactly what Hegel means by distinguished. On this side of becoming being and nothing are now distinguished from one another as a concrete movement of coming-to-be and ceasing-to-be. That is, rather than being defined by a purely logical difference, the displacement is expressed in a manner that distinguishes concrete determinate beings. This connects us back to the discussion at the very beginning of this section. It is a defining feature of determinate things that they both come-to-be and pass-away. Things become what they are and are distinguished through relations of mediation and negativity to otherness. Coming-to-be what one is is equally constituted by passing away from what one is, i.e., through negative relations to what one is not. However, this determinate notion of becoming is supplemented by a different yet immanent notion that, due to its peculiar nature in fact generates the first.⁶⁷ It is of critical importance to understand that, although the first unity is immanent to the second, through the double nature of becoming as mentioned by Hegel, these two unities should not be seen as mediated, synthesized, or moving in a linear development. One is marked by the incompatibility and antagonism of pure being itself; the other is the concrete expression of this and is defined by the structured relations of coming-to-be and ceasing-to-be.

⁶⁷ Namely, the peculiar nature of pure being and nothing which, as we will see, is the generative principle of the entire *Science of Logic*.

Hegel gives us a very simple and concrete idea to understand this discussion of becoming with the visual example of pure light and pure darkness. He writes that “the common practice is to imagine being, as if it were a picture of pure light, the clarity of unclouded seeing, and then nothing as the pure night – and the distinction between the two is then enshrined into this well-known sensuous difference [*sinnliche Verschiedenheit*]” (*SL* p. 69, *GW* 21.80). These point seems quite innocuous. However, I want to alert readers’ attention to it because it will play critical role in conceiving the relationship between metaphysics and history as we proceed deeper into the text. That is, he is drawing a clear distinction between the diversity [*Verschiedenheit*] of sense experience against that of purely logical difference but nevertheless trying to show how the two are immanently linked. My wager, is that the latter (logical/metaphysical difference) is the primary metaphysical feature rather than the former (concrete difference in the world), and this subsequently has a serious impact on the way we interpret history.

To see this in the example, what Hegel is describing is the common notion of becoming where the sensuous ideas of light and darkness come to be and pass away. Here the determination of lightness that constitutes it is always mediated by its external passing away into darkness. This represents a determinate, temporal idea of becoming where lightness eventually passes away into darkness and vice versa. To continue, Hegel adds peculiarly that “if this very seeing [of pure light and pure darkness] is more accurately imagined one can readily perceive that in absolute light one sees just as much and just as little as in absolute darkness; that the one seeing is just as good as the other; that pure seeing is a seeing of nothing. Pure light and pure darkness are two voids that amount to the same thing” (*Ibid.*).

We can see the two-levels of unity on each side of becoming that I stressed above. One level is mediated and negative, while the other is marked by logical incompatibility and difference. As Hegel notes, the pure seeing of pure light amounts to nothingness because it is the same as pure darkness. But it is likewise the case that by their very sameness pure light and darkness are both immediacies that mutually differentiate from each other. We could just as easily say dark/light as light/dark. These two run simultaneous to one another and are mutually exclusive. This represents the first unity of becoming, noted above. It is through this continuous differentiation of simultaneous incompatibility that generates the determinate second level as its expression and marks its movement.

Let's summarize this discussion on becoming, keeping the framing questions in mind of how it is we pass from inherent activity of tension/antagonism of being itself to determinate being; more specifically, how determinate being serves as the first expression of this antagonism. When we think about the nature of becoming and the move to determinate being in the example of pure light and pure darkness, we should withhold the temptation to think of it as a synthetic third term that logically and externally envelops the terms in a linear development. Insisting on this view presupposes the idea of becoming and the idea of synthetic unity, which is to say it presupposes that pure light and pure darkness will develop into becoming, or that the conflict between the two will be resolved in a superior identity. But this is like presupposing a solution to a problem or presupposing beforehand that every problem already contains a solution just waiting for us to discover. Our goal is to invert this equation. Using the example, the utter immediacy of pure light and pure darkness, and thus by extension their difference, is by definition irreducible to an external, synthetic third term. Their presuppositionless nature simply does not allow it.

Determinate being, therefore, is not a higher order resolution to the primordial problem but merely gives it a renewed expression. This difference is, in fact, never resolved, but is the driving principle of all determinate being.⁶⁸

1.4 Part II: Being as Particularity

What Hegel calls determinate being (*Dasein*) is defined by the immediate particularity, or the being-there, of each thing. With respect to becoming, beings are defined by the immediate fluidity of coming-to-be and passing-away from their determinate existence. To remind readers, this is what Hegel called distinguishing in the previous section. To be more specific, the immediacy of coming-to-be and passing-away defines the Doctrine of Being, both as a metaphysical principle but also how this principle is distilled into a reading of history as particularity and immediacy without any depth and that eventually requires a passage to universality and Essence.

1.5 Qualitative Immediacy: Something and Other

Hegel writes that “existence in general,” or pure existence, “proceeds from becoming,” and that “Its mediation, the becoming, lies behind it” (*SL* p. 83, *GW* 21.97).

These short statements underscore the two-sided aspect of becoming—the logical and the

⁶⁸ Richard Dien Winfield points this critical feature, writing that “what proceeds from indeterminacy is and can only be self-determination *per se*, its ordering is a self-ordering... The ordering principle or method of self-determination *per se* consists in nothing less than the “self” that is underway determining itself.” It seems to me that what Winfield is pointing out here is essentially a process of creative *difference* and expression, rather than the identity driven, synthetic view of becoming of coming to be and passing away—or better yet that coming to be and passing away *is* a process of creative differentiation. To clarify, to say that self-determination *per se* is at the very same time a self-ordering, we are stating that the ordering of the “self” does not precede the act of determination—that is, it is not a synthetic unfolding—but is constituted and reconstituted in the very differential act of individuation itself. Winfield, “The Method of Hegel’s Science of Logic,” in *Essays on Hegel’s Science of Logic*, ed. by George di Giovanni (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1990), p. 55.

determinate/temporal—explained in the previous section. This means that the truth of pure existence both “proceeds from becoming,” as the most simple, pure, and immediate form of determinacy that is logically possible, and also that existence in general is “the simple oneness [*einfache Einssein*] of being and nothing” (Ibid.).⁶⁹ Furthermore, the category of becoming is what immanently ties these two aspects together.⁷⁰ When focusing on our experiences of pure existence about the only thing that can be said of it is its immediate qualitative intensity. At this level of immediacy we aren’t speaking about this or that determinate object such as this tree or this chair; rather, it is more like *somethingness* pure and simple. Hegel writes “Determinateness thus isolated by itself, as existent determinateness, is quality—something totally simple, immediate [*Unmittelbares*]” (*SL*, p. 85, *GW* 21.98). Existence has no foothold (so to speak) as this or that object, it is simply the qualitative expression of existence as such.

It seems to me that this basic expression highlights the immanence of the primordial antagonism in Part I of this chapter. For example, there is a peculiarity involved in any attempt to isolate sheer qualitative particularity in our experience. Namely, that just as clearly as such immediacies *are*, it seems equally the case that such sheer particularity is the most fleeting of all and that it vanishes in an instant. When we attempt to point out pure *thisness* or *somethingness* to someone, or when we simply try to reflectively understand it,

⁶⁹ This is another place where I think Hegel’s word choice is interesting and worth highlighting; specifically, *Einssein*, which to me evokes a sense of ‘being-at-oneness,’ or being as a singularity. This sense of reflexive self-relation will occupy a great amount of our time and effort moving deeper into the text.

⁷⁰ As I have tried to make plain the simple oneness of being and nothing *just is* pure becoming. Or to put it differently, the *truth* of the simple sameness of being and nothing as simultaneous incompatibles, and thus an activity of differentiation inherent to being itself. Pure existence proceeds from becoming, therefore, because it is immanently tied to it. This is what we referenced above as the creatively generated new dimension. Accordingly, this form of immediacy is different from the immediacy of pure being and nothing. This immediacy is immediate *existence* or *Dasein*, “being in a certain *place*.” Hegel, *The Science of Logic*, p. 83.

the immediacy that we seek is lost to an endless succession of different particularities. In other words, there is a basic antagonism within our ordinary experience of reality between the immediate existence of something and its passing over into otherness. My addition to this picture is that this experienced concrete antagonism, the kind that drives linear/temporal becoming, is itself an expression of the purely logical antagonism located immanently to pure being itself, namely, the logical activity of difference that *makes the difference*.⁷¹

To summarize, particular qualities are determinate. They not only exist but they exist here, now, and in a particular place. As determinate qualities, they have a share in being. But these determinate qualities also have a share in nothing. Specifically, in the fact that the immediate determinations of being pass over or become other determinations of being. However, this kind of negation is not the pure nothingness of the beginning—the nothingness of the purely logical difference—rather, it is nothingness as concretely distinguished from being. Hegel writes that “In existence its determinateness has been distinguished as quality; in quality as something existing, the distinction exists – the distinction of reality and negation...Reality itself contains negation [*Die Realität enthält selbst die Negation*]...Negation for its part equally exists...as it is in itself, as existent, as

⁷¹ Hegel gives us the basis for this, writing “Determinateness [in general, i.e. quality] *has yet to detach itself from being*, nor will it ever detach itself from it...all further determinations will transpire on this basis.” Hegel, *The Science of Logic*, p. 85. As we will see in proceeding chapters, it is this difference that ‘makes’ history happen. Both Willet and Slavoj Žižek give us helpful descriptions regarding the imminence and real connection between these two antagonisms, the determinate and the logical, that are worthy of mentioning. Willet points out that the two notions of becoming “as genesis and development...and transitoriness... partially effects the vanishing of *Vergehen* in the stabilizing of becoming as *Dasein*” Willet, p. 91. What I take her point to be, which is I think is the correct one, is that something “happens” here between the two points of being and nothingness and the “stabilizing” and “limiting” effects of genesis and development that mark determinate relations of something and other. Žižek introduces the term “intensity” to describe this process, writing “Intensity presents itself paradoxically as a limit which accounts not only for creation in thought but also for the illusion of objectivity which covers it up.” Žižek, *Less Than Nothing: Hegel and the Shadow of Dialectical Materialism* (London: Verso, 2012), p. 427.

belonging to existence” (*SL* p. 88, *GW* 21.102-21.103).⁷² The important metaphysical point is the reflexive nature (*enthält selbst*) in which negation is baked into reality. That is, reality *contains* negation as a dynamic antagonism reflexively and immanently to its own nature. It is not something tacked on to reality as an addition.⁷³ What negation as a quality tells us is where the affirmative being of qualities reach their limit and pass over and/or develop into other qualities. It is that aspect of quality that allow thought to distinguish qualities from each other.⁷⁴ All qualities of experience share in affirmation and limitation. It is how we can distinguish what things are versus what they are not, the contradictory qualities that exist simultaneously in one thing, and how the qualities of some things interact with the qualities of other things.

The antagonism inherent to particular being⁷⁵ is exemplified in the categories of something and other. The metaphysical point for these categories is that sheer qualitative immediacies— ‘somethings’—are limited by others and they pass over to their others and vice versa. This kind of fluidity is what holds the particularity together. Take any ordinary quality of experience, the color red for instance. At the surface level of sheer particularity, the color red is an immediacy that exists but simultaneously is defined by its relation to all the other colors on the color spectrum. Each color, in its immediacy, passes over into the otherness of different colors. Hegel writes each immediacy “holds its own [*erhält*] while referring to others and will not give in to the alien influences posited in it by them; on the

⁷² I think the reflexive nature of the of reality and negation is important to point out here; that is, reality ‘contains’ negation as an antagonism reflexively and immanently to its own nature. It is not something tacked on to reality ‘in addition’ (so to speak).

⁷³ The reason I bring this up now is so I can to reference back to the historical point made above, namely, to start framing the idea that metaphysical difference/differentiation is the primary aspect historical change. We still have a long way to go before we address this head on, but I want to start showing readers the outline of the argument now.

⁷⁴ “... still a quality but one that counts as a lack and is further determined as limit, restriction.”

⁷⁵ Throughout this discussion I will use the terms particular and determinate interchangeably.

contrary it imposes its own determinations...” (SL p. 88, GW 21.102). In other words, these sheer qualitative immediacies are limited by their others, they pass over to their others and vice versa. It is this relation and flux that defines the color spectrum.

Accordingly, a particular being defined by its qualitative immediacy is essentially the manifestation of something (“it imposes its own determinations”). But equally, just by simply being something, every determination essentially enacts a limitation between what the determination is and what it is not. To put it another way, if something manifests itself immanently as its determinations, then by the very nature of determination it engenders an oppositional relation where it can only be what it is through the relations to what it is not.⁷⁶ This is primarily what Hegel means in the reference above that reality contains both itself (being) and the being of nothing (negation), where the latter is not merely lack or void.⁷⁷

The key insight is that particularity is defined by a relation of constant change in that every something is always already the other for another something and vice versa. Hegel writes that “The something preserves itself in its non-being; it is essentially one with it, and essentially not one with it. It therefore stands in reference to an otherness without being just this otherness. The otherness is at once contained in it and yet separated from it; it is being for other [*Sein-für-Anderes*]” (SL, p. 92, GW 21.106). Put differently, the metaphysical consistency of things is relatively vapid because things are equally defined by their negation. Their being is limited by and passes over into other things. Equally insightful is the fact that the ‘relational flux,’ so to speak, is not an external relation.

⁷⁷ As Hegel writes, if at the surface level of bare particularity, where determinate beings are simply the manifestations of their qualitative moments, then “The other moment is equally an existent, but determined as the negative of something – an *other*. As becoming, something is a transition, the moments of which are themselves something, and for that reason it is an *alteration* – a becoming that has already become *concrete*.” Hegel, *The Science of Logic*, p. 90, GW 21.104.

Something and other are not two poles of a mediation but are constitutive of every determinate entity.⁷⁸ The broader point is showing us that the expression of the logical primordial difference of pure being and nothing is the driving metaphysical principle in determinate reality. Specifically, that in order for something to constitute itself as an identity requires an immanent relation to its own non-being.⁷⁹

What this means is that in every particular determination, just by being a determination, it is already not the being that it previously was. Each something by definition engenders a reference to another particularity.⁸⁰ This is the more fundamental point we must understand: that the relation/reference of somethings to others is not one of indifferent identities but one of fundamental *self-difference*. For every something to be itself it must already be different than itself. This, for Hegel, defines the nature of determinate existence as it appears to us in basic experience. It is a multiplicity of somethings and others.

⁷⁸ That is, it is not we the readers or phenomenological observers that draw this distinction. But rather, it is a logical and ontological feature of “somethingness.”

⁷⁹ That is, the purely logical difference is expressed in this second order existential difference.

⁸⁰ Authors, such as William Maker, Brady Bowman, and Todd McGowan all argue in a similar vein—i.e. that for every something to constitute itself as something it must already contain its own otherness—but they all do so from different points of view. Maker maintains that the central aspect of this dialogue is a principle of difference, similar to the one we articulated. He argues in part that it is not enough to state that something already *contains* its reference to otherness and vice versa, but that the thing itself (i.e. the something) is itself transformed along with specific modes through which it is transformed. Maker, “Identity, Difference, and the Logic of Otherness” in *Identity and Difference: Studies in Hegel’s Logic, Philosophy of Spirit, and Politics*, ed. by Philip T. Grier (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 2007), p. 22. Both Bowman and McGowan each offer differing views. For Bowman, the key concept is negativity, while for and for McGowan it is contradiction. For Bowman, the key insight to his argument is that every of the immediate, determinate, and thus finite categories of being generated in the Doctrine of Being *fail* to capture the richness (if you will) of being in itself and thus pass over into further and further categories. He calls this the “idealism of the finite.” Bowman, *Hegel and the Metaphysics of Absolute Negativity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), pp. 111-116. McGowan writes that “Contradiction is the name for the necessary impurity of every identity—it’s inability to just be itself. Identity is incapable of being identity without introducing some form of otherness that reveals the lack of perfect self-identity.” The point being that for an identity of something to assert itself, it must already be in logical contradiction by reference to its opposite, namely, otherness. What constitutes the dialectic of something and other, therefore, is a displacement of contradiction. McGowan, *Emancipation After Hegel: Achieving a Contradictory Revolution* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2019), p. 26.

1.5.1 Limitation

I want to conclude this section with a brief discussion on limitation, which will summarize the preceding work on something and otherness as well as set up the proceeding work in the finite and the infinite. The picture we are left with in the dialectic of something and other is that the surface level of reality is a continuous relation of something(s) and other(s) in which things are not only limited qualitatively by other things determinately, but more strongly that determinate beings are by definition (i.e., logically) limited and thus contain their own limitation with respect to identity. This reflects the double-sided nature of becoming.

Hegel gives us a direct example of this theme in a passage discussing a point, a line, and a plane. This passage is worth quoting at length in order to get the full scope of what is being said:

the point is the limit of line, not because the latter just ceases at the point and has existence outside it; the line is the limit of plane, not because the plane just ceases at it... Rather, at the point the line also begins; the point is its absolute beginning, and if the line is represented as unlimited on both its two sides, or, as is said, as extended to infinity, the point still constitutes its element, just as the line constitutes the element of the plane... The other determination is the unrest of the something in its limit in which it is immanent, the contradiction that propels it beyond itself [der Widerspruch zu sein, der es über sich selbst hinaus-schickt]. Thus, the point is this dialectic of itself becoming line; the line, the dialectic of becoming plane; the plane, of becoming total space. A second definition is given of line, plane, and whole space which has the line come to be through the movement of the point; the plane through the movement of the line, and so forth... That the point, the line, the plane, are per se self-contradictory beginnings which on their own repel themselves from themselves, and consequently that the point passes over from itself into the line through its concept, moves in itself and makes the line come to be, and so on – all this lies in the concept of the limit which is immanent in the something (*SL*, p. 100, *GW* 21.115-21.116).

⁸¹

There are two ways at looking at oppositional categories like something and other that take into account the notion of limit.⁸² One way is the genetic/expressive, in Hegelian terms the

⁸² Anna Sauvagnargues emphasizes this, writing that “[Qualitative] Intensity presents itself paradoxically as a limit which accounts not only for creation in thought but also for the illusion of objectivity which

logical way,⁸³ and the other is a determinate way.⁸⁴ The former represents the primary metaphysical principle of Doctrine of Being, stemming from what we take to be the proper understanding of being and nothing, while the latter represents the points of view of determinate negativity. To clarify this connection, the latter point of view takes the categories of something and other as already individuated and thus takes the opposition between two fixed categories to be the most important factor. In the case of a something and its limit, it appears that the essence of finite somethings is the a principle of limitation by otherness

However, the most prevalent aspect of the long passage is Hegel's articulation of the category of limit as an historical and determinate expression of this metaphysical principle of generation.⁸⁵ That is, what Hegel is showing us with the example of a point, is that it is the point which *makes* the line, insofar as the point serves as its limit. The point does not presuppose the line (or vice versa) as a set of already individuated categories standing in linear contradiction/opposition to one another which pass over into one another. Rather, the point generates the line as a spontaneous and creative interruption. For the line, the category of limit qua point is not simply one quality among others of finite entities in

covers it up. This is why intensity is apprehended only as a form of representation by philosophy... Intensity produces thought under the influence of the sign [representation], but in thinking it is grasped as individuated..."⁸² Anne Sauvagnargues, "Hegel and Deleuze: Difference or Contradiction?" in *Hegel and Deleuze: Together Again for the First Time*, ed. by Karen Houle and Jim Vernon (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2013),, p. 47. What I take Sauvagnargues' main insight to be is the relation between intensity and individuation which she cashes out in terms of *representational* (or determinate) thought.

⁸³ As an aside, this is one of the reasons why, for Hegel, metaphysics is logic.

⁸⁴ What Sauvagnargues called "individuated."

⁸⁵ I have said this at several previous points in the text, but I want to point out again the *self-reflexive* nature of the movement Hegel is describing. So when Hegel says that "the point is this dialectic of itself [*Dialektik seiner selbst*] becoming line" he is referring to the logical aspect of the point self reflexively differentiating itself dynamically. That is, it generates its own *historical* space from the point of its own logical/metaphysical differentiation. It is this relationship between history and metaphysical difference that is the cornerstone of the entire investigation.

determinate existence. For the line, the category of limit qua point is not simply one quality among others of finite entities in determinate existence. Instead, limit is the existential quality par excellence of determinate things, it is therefore the quality of limitation that *retroactively* makes something what it is: “the one determination is this: that something is what it is only in its limit” (*SL* p. 100, *GW* 21.115). The line is a line only insofar as it ends in a point. The point is not just the negative perishing of the line but is its creative generative principle as exemplary of the notion of qualitative existence that we discussed above. This is what Hegel means in the passage by saying that the point is the absolute beginning of a line, that the point is “itself becoming line” and “moves in itself and makes the line come to be.”

This is what I take Hegel to mean by the strange phrase that the ‘perishing perishes.’ In its limit the finite thing perishes. It affirms and becomes what it is, namely, that all finite things perish. Likewise, it is this very quality of limitation that simultaneously *makes the difference* from what is beyond the limit: “The limit is the middle point between the two at which they leave off. They have existence beyond each other, beyond their limit... It is in accordance with this difference of the something from its limit that the line appears as line outside its limit, the point; the plane as plane outside the line” (*SL* p. 99, *GW* 21.114). The implication is in line with what Hegel means in differentiating the logical from the linear method. We are not allowed to presuppose already individuated/actualized sets of opposed categories. Reaching back to the primary difference of being and nothing, categories must be generated as wholly new qualitative expressions of this primary difference.⁸⁶

⁸⁶ Halper adds to this, writing “differentiation amounts to transformation... The process of expounding a differentia, the process of expounding what a category is and what distinguishes it from another category, adds new content to the category and so transforms it into something else.” Halper, “Hegel and the Problem of Differentia,” in *Essays on Hegel’s Logic* pp. 198-199.

Hegel therefore argues that limitation as such is the very qualitative essence of what it means to be something, “Something has a quality, and in this quality it is not only determined by delimited; it’s quality is its limit...so developed that the opposition of its existence and of the negation as the limit immanent this existence is the very in-itselfness of the something...this negation constitutes the finitude of the something.” (*SL* p. 101, *GW* 21.116). Here, the idea of limitation makes explicit the relation of something and other, namely, through the idea that the very essence something is its limitation. That is, in its becoming or passing into otherness. Edward Halper points this out, noting that the problem of the differentia of categories is not that of making the categorical differences intelligible. Instead, the question is what makes the difference. He writes that this problem persists as long as “what falls under the categories belongs to one realm and what makes them intelligible belongs to another,” that is “a different sort of thing...is either an instance of another category.”⁸⁷ This is what occurs in what we highlighted above in that the contradiction of fixed categories is resolved and passed over into a higher category at a different level, in this case from finitude to infinity.⁸⁸ Accordingly, the point to be made regarding the nature of limitation as inherent to something and other is that of a process of generation. Limitation represents a genetic principle that instantiates the determinate relations of something and other.

⁸⁷ Edward Halper, “Hegel and the Problem of Differentia,” p. 197.

⁸⁸ Žižek also notes that the implication of this is an ontology or picture of reality that is simply a linear progression of determinations, negations, and resolutions of identity, writing that “the key aspect of surprise, of the intrusion of an unexpected contingency, is lost, and we find ourselves in a boring, flat universe whose contingency is totally predictable and necessary.” Žižek, *Less Than Nothing*, pp. 368-369.

1.6 History as Bad Infinity

Coinciding directly from the point-line-plane example is the introduction of what Hegel calls the bad notion of infinity, or the dialectic of the finite and infinite, and it is where we see the first instantiation of history come forward.⁸⁹ Returning to the example of the point and the line, the conclusion drawn is that every limitation of a finite something *inherently generates* an otherness beyond it that is a continued expression of the limit. The problem, however, is that this point beyond the finite limit never ceases, it is simply pushed back to eternity. Hegel writes “The stepping in of the finite appears as an event external [*äußerliches*] to the infinite [i.e., as a negativity on the other side of limitation], and the new limit as something that does not arise out of the infinite itself [*Unendlichen selbst*] but is likewise found given” (*SL* p. 112, *GW* 21.128-21.129). What we end up with, therefore, is not a true sense of the infinite but rather an infinitization of the finite. This in turn leaves us stuck with a metaphysics of surface level particularity. Distilled into a conception of history, what we’re left with is the infinite flux of finite somethings and others lacking all consistency and structure. This is a conception of reality that Hegel famously refers to as ‘bad infinity.’ Let’s explain how we get here before making the turn toward universality chapter two with the discussion of Measure.

One of the problems with categories like finite and infinite is that they seem to share a being-for-other relationship. One cannot understand the meaning of finite without positing the opposed category of infinity, and vice versa.⁹⁰ However, if any two categories are meant to share a relationship of complete indifference and exclusion it is finitude and

⁸⁹ Or, the dialectic of finitude and infinity.

⁹⁰ We saw this in the case of something and other as well.

infinity. In fact, the indifference is inscribed into the very definition of the terms. Hegel highlights this problem in the following passage:

with the something an other is posited; with the finite, an infinite; but the finite does not bring forth the infinite, does not posit it. And the reflecting determinations of being [*reflektierenden Bestimmungen des Seins*], such as...finite and infinite, although they essentially point to one another [*aufeinander hinweisen*], or are as being-for-other, also stand on their own qualitatively; the other exists; the finite, like the infinite, is equally to be regarded as an immediate existent that stands firm on its own; the meaning of each appears complete even without its other (*SL* p. 94, *GW* 21.109).

Here, we see the core of the problem. It is difficult to fully think the finite without positing the infinite, but at the same time it cannot be the case that the finite causes the infinite (“bring forth the infinite”) because this is a contradiction in terms. Certainly, if the infinite is anything at all then it cannot be *caused* by anything, especially something finite. We see here the conception of the beyond from the last section reintroduced, but now it is made into something perpetual. Namely, that the infinite is perpetually indifferent to and beyond finite particularity.

Hegel highlights this in another long passage on the nature of the finite, stating that it:

Goes away and ceases to be. But this...is its very determination [*seine Bestimmung selbst*] ... So, in going away and ceasing to be, the finite has not ceased; it has only become momentarily an other finite which equally is, however, a going-away as a going-over into another finite, and so forth to infinity...This identity with itself, the negation of negation, is affirmative being, is thus the other of the finite which is supposed to have the first negation for its determinateness; this other is the infinite (*SL* p. 108, *GW* 21.123).

This passage makes the beyond explicit and infinite in nature. What exemplifies finite particular being is the quality of limit. Finite being’s very determination is to cease being. But since this is what it is to be finite, to perish, it does not cease in perishing. Rather, it carries over into the beyond that is just another particular finite being. This is what Hegel means in his famous but difficult phrase ‘negation of the negation.’ The negation/limit of finite being is not something external to it but is its exemplary quality and its affirmation.

When a finite being ceases to be this negation/limit is negated and carried beyond. The line is pushed back, so to speak, into another finite being.

To state the problem specifically, we do not have a true sense of infinity but rather the universalization of finitude. From the perspective of history, it is a monotonous fluidity continued to infinity.⁹¹ The implicit peak of pure, surface level particularity is the perpetual generation of continuous fluidity without consistency. It is an endless stream of coming to be and passing away. Think of our current cultural situation in the 24-hour news cycle in which events occur, burn very hot for a short amount of time, but then are just as swiftly swept aside into the dust bin of history as new things occur in the next cycle. This picture of history is of event after event that lacks any and all perspective, meaning, and depth. The only certainty and stability is that nothing is certain and stable.⁹² Accordingly, the answer to the question “What is the infinite?” is that it is the *not* of the finite. This locks us into a view of reality in which history is just the continuous interplay of finite differences with no narrative structure. The problem is that it misreads the proper understanding of infinity by smuggling in the theme of negativity as foundational and therefore misreads the antagonism of the beginning.

⁹¹ Slavoj Žižek amplifies this point, writing “the problem with such a universalization...is that it “renormalizes” the [finite] and thus turns into its opposite: if all there is are interruptions and falls, then the key aspect of surprise, of the intrusion of an unexpected contingency, is lost, and we find ourselves in a boring, flat universe whose contingency is totally predictable and necessary.”⁹¹ Slavoj Žižek, *Less Than Nothing: Hegel and the Shadow of Dialectical Materialism* (London: Verso, 2012), pp. 368-369.

⁹² Thinkers like Mark Taylor argue for this as a positive aspect of Hegel’s metaphysics, specifically the notion of infinite negativity as a way to ward off interpretations that are in which categories like the infinite are meant to exemplify a complete and integral whole. The key to Taylor’s argument is something that we hinted at above, namely that that categories like “finitude” and “infinity” *necessarily* imply and point to one another, that the meaning of the one cannot be reached without containing the other: “Then finite is not merely other than or opposed to the infinite but is actually an internal dimension of the infinite.” The wager is, therefore, that neither category can ever truly *totalize* itself into a fully enclosed system because each and every attempt is plagued by a form of displacement. Mark Taylor, “Infinite Restlessness” in *Hegel and the Infinite: Religion Politics, and Dialectic*, ed. by Slavoj Žižek, Clayton Crockett, and Creston Davis (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011), p. 94.

This can be taken one of two ways, both of which Hegel explicitly rejects. One is that we are making a specific point about the infinite itself, where every single finite entity is a negative determination of the ‘One’ infinite and therefore necessarily fails and passes into further determinations.⁹³ Another way is that we are making a specific point about the nature of the finite reality that we experience every day. Here, the infinite is not a positive ontological entity, but *just is* the transient nature of determinate things. Historically speaking, the second idea reconnects with the first in that by saying ‘the only necessity is transient contingency’ we are reinscribing a notion of infinite as the transcendent guarantor of this flux. In essence, there is nothing new under the sun.⁹⁴ This is what Hegel calls the bad form of infinity, writing “this unfulfilled reflection has before it both determinations of the true infinite [*wahrhaft Unendlichen*] ...but it fails to bring the two thoughts together. The thought of one unavoidably brings the other along but this reflection lets them only alternate” (*SL* p. 120, *GW* 21.138). The problem with this, however, is that it does not give the infinite an affirmative existence. Or, more precisely, its affirmative existence is merely just the negation of the finite.⁹⁵ In other words, when viewed as the negative beyond of the finite, the infinite therefore remains burdened with the something-other relation, and therefore the ‘other side’ beyond the finite is simply just the re-constitution of the finite.

⁹³ In short, this is a negative theological point.

⁹⁴ Hegel explicitly attacks such a view in his famous line from the *Phenomenology* that “To pit this single insight that *in* the Absolute everything is the same...to palm off the Absolute as the night in which, as the saying goes, all cows are black—this is cognition naively reduced to vacuity.” Hegel, *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, p. 9.

⁹⁵ Hegel gives us more context for this view, writing “Infinity is the nothing of the finite,” and so “as *existent* and at the same time as the *non-being* of an *other*...it has fallen back into the category of something with a limit,” continuing “the progress to infinity is therefore only repetitious monotony, the one and the same tedious alternation of this finite and infinite.” Hegel, *The Science of Logic*, p. 113. This is the view represented by Taylor above.

1.7 Nothingness, True Infinity, and the Generation of Universality

In shifting gears, the overall point of this previous discussion is that what Hegel calls ‘true’ infinity cannot be based a negative, external limitation. This is precisely where our principle of difference from the beginning enters the picture as a transition to the universality represented by the category of Essence. As before, the category of nothingness plays a prominent role. Specifically, pure being and nothingness are expressed in the form of particular being in the passage from beginning to determinate being. This is due to what Hegel called the double determination of becoming, where the determinate side of becoming *is* the concrete distinguishing of something and other. As I have tried to show, this idea led to a linear determination of becoming and to the metaphysical and historical position we now occupy, namely, the infinitely negative passing over of somethings and others rather than as the assertive truth of being and nothing, which is a principle of difference.

In the analysis of the *Logic’s* beginning the specific and paradoxical way in which pure being and nothing are characterized seems to rule out a relation of negativity. We cannot begin with pure being, then pass over into nothing, then mediate and unify the two in becoming only to confront nothing again in the form of determinate being, and so forth to infinity. This is precisely the view of being and nothing that leads us a metaphysics rooted in historical monotony. To me, the clue to understanding true infinity has to do with returning to the proper understanding of nothing, specifically the infinite as the immanent nothingness, rather than an external limit, of the finite.

The task, therefore, is to properly calibrate this view and how it instantiates the turn toward the universality of Essence. Hegel gives us a clue in one of his first passages on the true infinite, writing that

In saying what the infinite is, namely the negation of the finite, the finite itself is said also; it cannot be avoided in the determination of the infinite. One need only know what is being said in order to find the determination of the finite in the infinite. Regarding the finite, it is readily conceded that it is the null; this very nothingness [*Nichts*] is however the infinite from which it is inseparable (*SL* p. 114, *GW* 21.131).

It seems to me that in Hegel's description there is no such infinitization of finite particularity; rather, what is asserted is a metaphysical tension similar to being and nothing. More specifically, in the passage Hegel suggests that in merely uttering the words 'finite' or 'infinite' one is immediately uttering the other and hence its own nothingness, insofar as the finite and the infinite stand in a relation of utter indifference (i.e., nothingness). Nothingness is what brings the two into relation. It is immanent to them. The implication, therefore, is that the infinite is not the beyond of the finite.⁹⁶ Like the beginning, it is as if, in a strange way, when we say "one" we simultaneously mean "two" and vice versa.

This shift in perspective is made clear in the following statement, "the finite is not sublated by the infinite as by a power present outside it; its infinity consists rather in sublating itself [*sich selbst aufzuheben*]" (*SL* p. 116, *GW* 21.133). In other words, the true infinite of the finite consists not in the continuous alternation of finite and infinite;⁹⁷ instead, infinity is the immanent *self-differentiating movement* of the finite itself. This is the form of antagonism we are after. As Rocio Zambrana points out, this idea is still fundamentally "a becoming infinite of the finite," which on the surface appears like bad

⁹⁶ Where the principle of the immanence is difference (nothingness).

⁹⁷ This makes the infinite into something transcendent.

infinity, but this becoming is based on a change in viewpoint where we have done away “thinking infinity as an ontological notion of being that is beyond the finite.”⁹⁸

Let’s briefly go over what this immanence looks like. For one, Hegel argues that the same primordial antagonism is simultaneous to both the finite and the infinite.⁹⁹ This antagonism is “in-itself self-reference, affirmation but as turning back to itself.” But how do these two self-references not just lead us back to the dualism bad infinity? From the perspective of bad infinity, the concept of self-reference as a ‘turning back’ was based on a principle of infinite negativity. That is, the finite and the infinite each referred to themselves through the displacement of nothingness into an infinite beyond. The infinite was forever beyond the finite, and the finite was the external nothingness of infinity. Each self-reference therefore referred to two identities on opposite sides of an external dividing line: The universal infinite on one side, and the particular flux of finite reality on the other. But here, the form of self-reference is based on a fundamental self-difference, where the antagonism is not that of *an other*¹⁰⁰, but is an immanent principle of difference. Since each, both the finite and the infinite, contains this form of self-reference we in essence have the same movement but one which Hegel describes as immanently “double sided” with a “double meaning [*Doppelsinn*].¹⁰¹ (*SL* p. 118, *GW* 21.135).

Let me clarify this important idea. The double-sided nature of the movement comes from the fact that the same movement occurs from two fundamentally different starting points. From the point of view of finitude, we start with an initial notion of something and

⁹⁸ Rocio Zambrana, “Hegel’s Logic of Finitude,” *Continental Philosophy Review*, No. 45 (2012), p. 223.

⁹⁹ We referenced this in the passage above, namely that when one says “infinity” it is impossible to not simultaneously say “finitude” and vice versa.

¹⁰⁰ As, for instance, the infinite is the external “nothingness” of the finite and vice versa.

¹⁰¹ Hegel, *The Science of Logic*, p. 118.

its limit in which it is negated. The initial limit/negation of the finite engenders a second negative, or the infinite “nothingness” beyond that transcends the finite. By the definition of infinity this is essentially a simple self-relation in which a new limit comes up: the finite all over again. The difference now, though, is that rather than showing a continuous passing over, Hegel instead argues that what we have is a repetition: “What emerges is the same as that from which the departure was made, that is the finite is restored; the latter has therefore rejoined itself [*sich selbst zusammengegangen*], in its beyond has only found itself again” (SL p. 117, GW 21.134). It seems to me that this tells us two critical things. One is that what lies “beyond” the limit is not meant to be viewed as a transcendent ‘thing’ called the infinite but is simply just a reconstruction of the finite. Second, if it is the case that what we end up with is essentially a return/repetition of the same, then the principle of this movement must be immanent *self-difference* and not external negativity.

From the side of infinity, the infinite is universally beyond the finite and is thus only simple self-relation without limitation (after all, it is infinite). Yet, such a universal self-relation requires the positing of nothingness elsewhere in an other. This resurrects the notion of an external beyond of the infinite, which of course is a contradiction in terms. How there be a limitation of infinity? Thus: “by being sublated, by traversing the new limit, the infinite has not therefore advanced one jot further: it has distanced itself neither from the finite, nor from itself, for it has arrived at itself” (Ibid.). The critical aspect of the passage is the last phrase, that the infinite has arrived at itself. Here, we have the same movement as with the finite, defined by the same principle, that is nevertheless irreducibly double-sided.¹⁰² Each is a form of self-reference and therefore self-differentiation that in

¹⁰² What is the reason for the principle remaining irreducibly double sided? The simple fact that the categories of finite and infinite are mutually exclusive.

its 'beyond' comes to realize that there is nothing beyond. It merely finds itself again. In other words, the nothingness that both the finite and the infinite represent for each other is immanent to both movements.

To reiterate, the double-sided movement of finite and infinite is not externally connected, nor do they alternate one after another. Rather, it is this principle of difference that makes them both immanent to yet different from each other: "both, the finite and the infinite, are themselves moments of the progress, they are jointly the finite, and, since they are equally jointly negated in it and in the result, this result as the negation of their joint finitude is called with truth the infinite. Their distinction is thus the double meaning which they both have" (*SL* p. 118, *GW* 21.135). It seems to me that the true infinite just is this difference making move that does not externalize but connects both sides. Put differently, the infinite is the *generated* and immanent universal structuring principle of particular finite being. It is that which gives the flux and change of surface level reality its consistency. Hegel writes that the true infinite "is rather essentially only as becoming [*vielmehr wesentlich nur als Werden*]" (*SL* p. 118, *GW* 21.136). I want to highlight this short statement here because I think it shows a preliminary but explicit way in which metaphysics and history are inextricably linked. Specifically, that the infinite is nothing but the process of its own becoming. It constructs itself out of itself and thus has a determinate and historical dimension to it.¹⁰³

As I have tried to demonstrate in this discussion, the reason behind this idea is the immanent inscription of nothingness that was previously ejected that simultaneously ties

¹⁰³ This chapter represents only the first attempt at the metaphysics-history connection and is thus, like I said, only preliminary. However, I want to make sure that readers never lose sight of the relation between the two as an overall framework, which I understand can be difficult when working through these passages from the *Logic*.

the finite and infinite together and keeps them apart. This is why I insist on the notion of limitation as genetic, differential, and affirmative insofar as it is only through the notion of limit (qua nothingness) that both the infinite and the finite are affirmative concepts insofar as it is the infinite, qua becoming of the finite, that provides the finite with its immanent and generated structure.¹⁰⁴ As we will now see, a structure of universality and particularity.

1.8 Measure and Essence

The turn to the universality of essence is made explicit in the final section of the Doctrine of Being called Measure. I want to specifically focus on the final two chapters, “Real Measure” and the “Transition to Essence.” This is where we see the emergence of universality most clearly on display. To start, though, we should ask what Hegel means by measure. In plain terms, measure can initially be described as ‘being-in-relation,’ where the fundamental aspect of something’s being is not what is qualitatively immediate about it (i.e., its properties) but its ability to be measured and related to other things. To be is to exist in relations of measure. Entities are never just what they immediately are or appear to be qualitatively. Rather, each entity has an aspect of measurability to it. Entities can serve as the measure of other entities through this aspect and vice versa. They are

¹⁰⁴ John Russon also points this out in a compelling way, and I want to therefore quote him at some length. Writing of the infinite and finite: “It is just a way of saying that there is a real difference in meaning between the concept of pure being and concept of determinate being, and that this conceptual difference articulates an ontological difference...that is necessarily constitutive of reality as such and, indeed, anything that is real. Being proper (“the infinite”) is the reciprocal non-identical enabling of being as such, “pure being,” and beings, such that each is both more and less than the other, that is, each is irreducible to the other side, both drawing upon and furthering it...” John Russon, *Infinite Phenomenology: The Lessons of Hegel’s Science of Experience* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2016), p. 148.

commensurable with each other and these relations express their being, not their immediate particularity.¹⁰⁵

Accordingly, measure shifts our focal point from immediate being, *Dasein*, to the non-immediacy of relationality. This shift is critical, as the aspect of non-immediacy is what governs universality and essence. Hegel gives an example of this with the chemical compound that makes water, namely, hydrogen and oxygen. He notes that “Chemical matters... appear to be things which are immediately determined in themselves; but they are rather incomplete elements of bodies, components which in concreto do not truly exist for themselves but for which to exist is to sublimate their isolated subsistence by binding with some other substance” (*SL* p. 310, *GW* 21.354). What the example of chemical compounds shows is that entities seem to have some kind of intrinsic ‘attraction’ or affinity.¹⁰⁶ This affinity is both qualitative and quantitative, as in the example of water where two molecules of hydrogen are required to form the compound. Commensurable entities require a specific quantity in order to yield a specific qualitative expression that yields a new entity.

However, this raises a question regarding what it is that makes this relation occur. In other words, at surface level of immediate particularity (*Dasein*) there is nothing to tell us what makes the two molecules commensurable. We must look deeper to what is not immediate. We must look to the relationality itself. Hegel highlights and explicates this in the following passage, arguing that

The exponents [i.e., outputs] of these ratios are however diverse, and the independent measure consequently displays its qualitative exponent as the series [*Reihe*] of these

¹⁰⁵ This idea is hardly specific to Hegel, as thinkers like Aristotle wrestled with the same question. For example, Aristotle writes in Book V of *Nicomachean Ethics* (on justice) “Now, in truth, it is impossible for things that differ greatly from one another to become commensurable, but it is possible, to a sufficient degree, in relation to need. So there must be some one thing that serves as measure.” Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. By Robert C. Barlett and Susan D. Collins (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011), 1133b

¹⁰⁶ He will go on to call this “elective affinity.”

different amounts...a series of specific ways of relating to others... The independent measure truly differentiates itself [*unterscheidet sich*] in the characteristic series of exponents which it, taken as a unit, forms with other equally independent measures... The relation of such series among themselves now constitutes the qualitative aspect of the independent measure (*SL* p. 306, *GW* 21.349).

What constitutes this “independent measure” is the qualitative nature of something, in this instance molecules of hydrogen and oxygen, can be specified in series of different quantitative proportions and vice versa insofar as it is the specific qualitative ways of relating that makes each aspect of the series what it is. In other words, things are the relations they are involved in. For chemical molecules like hydrogen and oxygen they exist within underlying contexts of chemical measure relations that, when constituted, lead to qualitative expressions of being. What is most important are the underlying relations themselves. That is, we see a shift take place between independent ‘measures’—differential combinations of uniquely qualified entities such as hydrogen and oxygen in specific ratios such as H₂O—to the independent notion of measure itself as the primary aspect of being.

This idea of a continuous series of measures—in which qualitative ruptures/shifts are tied to quantitative ratios of measure/combination—fully ensconces us in the realm of Real Measure. Hegel writes here that “Measure is now determined as a connection of measures that make up the quality of distinct self-subsisting somethings [*selbständiger Etwas*], or, in more common language, things...that is, determinations of concrete material existence” (*SL* p. 302, *GW* 21.345). Put more clearly, things are measures because they are concrete determinations that are commensurable with other concrete determinations. In the passage, we see the important shift mentioned above, namely from the notion of isolated and independent measures to the notion of *measure-as-such*. In short, an underlying

relationality takes center stage as the measure of a things being rather than its immediate particularity.¹⁰⁷

With that under our belt, I want to add another example but this time one that builds in the specific shift in historical perspective that takes place in measure (and becomes explicit in Essence). Think about the experience of listening to music. All that is immediate to the ear in any present moment is one single note. Yet, what we actually hear is the continuous flow of the music as a whole. Each successive note harmonizes with the notes that came before in the in the past and will in turn form the past for future notes to come. The notes in the series measure one another, they exist in a relation of measure, and thus form a melody. What is important is not any one particular note or a number of successive notes strung together but the measured whole itself.

This is accompanied by a shift in historical perspective as well. Up to this point we have been operating with the notion of history as the aforementioned ‘succession of presents’ through the primary logical/metaphysical notion of simple negation and passing over; something, i.e., an immediately determinate present, necessarily contains its own limitation and passes over into another immediate present. But here, the present, for instance the present musical note, is never fully present. Rather, it exists or is expressed only within the context past which measures it. In and through every present note in the melody, or the generated historical context, is continuous with the immediacy and creates

¹⁰⁷ David Gray Carlson highlights this key point in his article “Hegel and the Becoming of Essence” writing “In real measure, every measured thing has serial being—the ability to be compared to any other serial being.” David Gray Carlson, “Hegel and the Becoming of Essence,” *Cosmos and History: The Journal of Natural and Social Philosophy* (Vol. 3, Nos. 2-3, 2007), p. 280. Compare this to, for instance, the first division of the Doctrine of Being on Quality in which entities were marked by the continuous qualitative flux of limitation and passing over into one another. Here, we have still have a form of relational ontology but our point of view has shifted to one in which things are what they are based on their commensurability (i.e. their serial relations) with other things. That is, they express their qualitative differences in and through quantitatively different series of ratios.

the (logical) space for the future unfolding. The melody is the essence that shines through each present and future note. It is the notion of real measure—as the principle of serial difference as such—that makes the difference insofar as it brings the two qualitatively different series into direct relation with one another so that relationality itself is what is important.¹⁰⁸

1.8.1 Measureless Substrate and Essence

That said, there is a form of bad infinity lurking in measure as well. Hegel calls this the *measureless substrate* and it posits a simple question. What is the measure of all things? Think about our music example again. There is a sense in which the underlying melody forms a substrate that is in some way or another detached from its expression, or exists beyond or its expression, and is thus beyond all measurement. Other examples include certain metonymic categories that stand in for and serve as a transcendent measure for a progressive series of other categories. Think, for instance, about the political category of Fascism and how it stands in for and measures a series of other categories that are themselves in series of measure relations. These categories are well known, and include nationalism, white supremacy, authoritarianism, xenophobia, toxic masculinity, violent use of state power, capitalist economics, personality cult(s), and the like.

However, at a certain point it becomes clear that we are not speaking about the categories of the series and their specific measure but *measure itself*. That which does the measuring but is not itself measured. Here, the category Fascism becomes irreducible to

¹⁰⁸ As Stavros Tombazos puts it “a principle that is able to explain these neutral [quantitative] combinations that appear as a series of proportion relations, with each [series] possessing its own quality,” where “these qualitative states can be considered as different quantitative appearances.” Stavros Tombazos, *Time in Marx: The Categories of Time in Marx’s Capital* (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2014), p. 45.

the series that it measures and in fact exceeds beyond them and more than them.¹⁰⁹ David Gray Carlson summarizes this succinctly, writing that such concepts “State what is while becoming something other...The substrate is the series of measures. Yet it is also beyond the series.”¹¹⁰

This is what the idea of a measureless substrate is meant to convey. Hegel writes that it exemplifies the “measure-relation as such,” and acquires a “self-referential” character to it that is indifferent to any specific measure: “This self-reference [*Beziehung auf sich*] of the measure relation differs from the externality and alterability which belongs to its quantitative side [the series]. In contrast to these its self-reference is an existent qualitative foundation—a permanent, material substrate” (*SL* p. 319, *GW* 21.364). The key is the idea of self-reference because it mirrors what we saw in previous forms of bad infinity. On the finite side, particular beings acquire their determination in relation to all others in the series. Again, the example of musical harmony seems appropriate here: “The proportions lying in between those nodal points yield nothing neutral, no specific existence,” where at the nodal points (i.e., the points of measured, determinate being) “bonding occurs at just these points...exhibiting essentially different qualities only at specific mixture proportions,” which is “a combination which specifically depends on a measure-relation” (*SL* p. 321, *GW* 21.367).

As these determinate points are what they are as a series, the series itself has a self-referential character to it as a qualitative foundation that is essentially unmeasurable by any determination of the series and is thus beyond any relation. Here, all measure relations “occur in one and the same substrate within the same moments of neutrality” (*SL* p. 319,

¹⁰⁹ For instance nationalism + white supremacy + authoritarianism + xenophobia = Fascism

¹¹⁰ Carlson, p. 281.

GW 21.364). Put more clearly, the diverse alterations that occur are just different expressions of one and the same substrate. The problem is that it engenders a situation of indifference seen above in bad infinity. This is the manner in which the substrate exists as a form of “infinite” (*SL* p. 323, *GW* 21.369-370). No matter how many different series of measure relations occur, they will never encapsulate—either qualitatively or quantitatively—the essence of the measureless substrate that underlies it all.

Hegel describes this as a state of *indifference*; specifically, that the two sides mutually exclude one another. On one side is the abstract substrate that persists in its singular identity and is itself measureless, and on the other is the series of determinate relations of finite reality that continuously fluctuate in quantitative progressions and diverse qualitative state changes. This is articulated, somewhat obtusely, in the following passage: “the infinite of the specification of measure posits [*setzt*] both the qualitative and the quantitative as each sublating itself into the other [*sich ineinander aufhebend*], and it thereby posits their first immediate unity, which is measure in general, as returned into itself and consequently as itself posited [*gesetzt*]” (*SL* p. 323, *GW* 21.370).¹¹¹ The critical aspect is persistence, which Hegel calls the positing of the unity of measure in general through any and all determinations. Put differently, the fluctuating determinations are simply states or expressions of what underlies them, but which the substrate itself is indifferent to. Because of this, the unity is simply the continued reuniting of measure to

¹¹¹ Again, I want to point out self-reflexive nature of Hegel’s language here insofar as it helps us understand the kind of dynamic movement I think he is describing. The qualitative and quantitative do not ‘sublate’ each other externally; rather, they are *self*-sublating [*sich aufhebend*]. Which is to say they are animated by a (logical) principle of self-differentiation, a metaphysical principle that we can trace directly back to the beginning of the *Logic* itself. My reasoning for stressing this point throughout the chapter is that I want readers to get a good sense of the role self-reflexivity and self-differentiation are playing in the discussion and how they are framing it. Because these two concepts will only grow in importance as we proceed.

itself, indifferent to any expression: “what happens is only an alteration of the magnitude determinateness...This unity which thus continues it itself in its alternating measures is the self-subsistent matter that truly persists...one and the same substantial matter which is posited as the perennial substrate of its differentiations. This detaching of being from its determinateness” (*SL* p. 324, *GW* 21.370).

Let’s summarize and put this into more concrete terms using history as our guide. The point about measure is that previously immediate particularity forms a non-immediate series of relations such that quantitative progression leads to qualitative change. Because these points are unified and measurable (comparable) they are seen as expressed aspects of the same substrate. In other words, what we are seeing is the emergence of categories like consistency, structure, and historical context that binds these relations together. Although there may be a great many surface changes in reality, the relations and contexts do not seem to change. They are still intelligible to us. The problem occurs when universality, in this case the measureless substrate, is in a relation of negative indifference insofar as it is indifferent to the series of measures and vice versa (they are beyond each other).¹¹² On one side is the finite set of measure relations. It is a form of universality that represents the “maximum amount” (so to speak) of all the states; it is the sense in which all of reality is added up, present, and accounted for in a greater relational context. Nevertheless, on the other side is the indifferent as an utterly abstract measure that provides the logical space but is indifferent.

This impasse is where essence emerges. Most importantly, we see it take shape around the problem of beginning returning with a vengeance. Let me explain. That which

¹¹² As Carlson writes “Each side...purports to be *the whole thing and its organizing other*.” Carlson, p. 284.

underlies/measures all things but is itself measureless negates “every determinateness of being...[and] mediates itself with itself to form a simple unity.”¹¹³ Being itself is measureless. It is the abstract negation of any/all determinations and is a simple unity with itself. But as we have seen throughout the Doctrine of Being, being is likewise this unity as a mediation, namely the mediation of all the fleeting determinations of being external to it. “That which has been determined as qualitative and external is only a vanishing something; as thus external with respect to being, the qualitative sphere is the opposite of itself and, as such, only the sublation of itself” (*SL* p. 326, *GW* 21. 373). This is the sense in which Being is measure and measureless. Being mediates the entire sphere of determinate being, while itself being the external negation of it (i.e., as beyond it).

We therefore have two sides divided by a negative indifference that represent a familiar problem. Namely, that no being or measured relational unity of beings can ever be being itself. Hegel calls this “an empty differentiation,” where no amount of finite beings, and no continuous cataloguing of their serial relations can ever give us the measurelessness of the substrate. It is, therefore, “precisely this empty differentiation which is the indifference itself [*Indifferenz selbst*] as result” (Ibid.). This “indifference itself” is this other side, namely the substrate that is in simple and indifferent unity with itself through the fact that it mediates any and all ‘empty’ differentiations of beings. Hegel writes “this indifference is indeed concrete, in the sense that it is self-mediated [*sich Vermittelte*] through the negation of all the determinations of being... It is precisely this externality and its vanishing which make the unity of being into an indifference” (Ibid). To now restate the point and make it clear: The measureless substrate is a simple, abstract, self-relation

¹¹³ Ibid.

(mediation); on the other side is the totality of indifferent serial states of the substrate. Each side represents an indifferent totality viz a viz the other. From the perspective of the contextualized and measured relations of beings, measureless being itself is nothing more than an indifferent abstraction that is infinitely beyond it. From the perspective of the universal substrate, it is the indifferent negation of all beings.

Hegel proposes the solution in the following passage:

What is still missing here is that this reflection should sublimate itself, that it would cease to be the external reflection of...a subjective consciousness, but that it would be rather the very determination of the difference of that unity – a unity which would then prove itself to be the absolute negativity, the unity's indifference towards itself [*Gleichgültigkeit gegen sich selbst*], towards its own indifference no less than towards otherness" (SL p. 334, GW 21.382).

What the passage highlights is that the difference of measureless being and determinate being is not a negative relation of two opposed unities imposed by us as readers. Rather, the two are sublated into an immanent logical difference—a reflexive (in)difference toward itself that mirrors the difference charted at the beginning—that holds them into an immanent unity *as different*. The key to understanding this point is what each side of the chasm shares, namely, indifference itself. Both the measureless substrate and the measured series of determinate being (being and beings) takes the other to be an indifferent negativity. Each therefore posits itself as a totality of all that there is. The manner in which they are tied together is one of indifference.¹¹⁴ This is the way each “is sublated by the other, and yet since the two are held together in the one unity which they constitute, is inseparable from it” (SL p. 327, GW 21.374).

¹¹⁴ To clarify this, each state represents a specific unity of serial relations in a specific proportion. Therefore, because they are totalities, each state is indifferent to the other states insofar as these other states represent differing quantitative ratios and totalities (this is why Hegel calls them inverse ratios).

To clarify, the manner in which the two sides are linked is the fact that both unities—the continuous states of the series and the series with the substrate—reflect the same form of indifference. Hegel highlights this specific link, writing “The substrate itself, as the indifference, is in itself likewise the unity of two qualities [i.e., states of the series]” (Ibid.). In other words, the idea of the substrate is nothing but indifference; it is by definition the relational structure of all the different expressions of determinate being that is nevertheless measureless. Indifference is therefore reflected into and connects both sides (series and substrate).¹¹⁵ Hegel writes that each side of the ontological (in)difference “have a subsistence of their own in themselves... for they are in themselves the indifference itself... Each side is thus in it the totality of the indifference” (*SL* p. 329, *GW* 21.376). On the side of determinate measures, what makes each determinate state an “in itself” indifference is the fact that, as serial being, each of these states is an indifferent relational unity of serial relations. With respect to the substrate on the other side, this idea of “indifferent unity” just is the qualitative definition of what the substrate is. Indifference itself, as a quality, “continues from one side into the other... Each quality enters inside each side in connection with the other” (Ibid.). Thus, it is indifference in itself that reflectively connects the two sides.

What indifference reveals, therefore, is difference contracted to a point of logical singularity (again, note the resonance with the beginning). Hegel writes that indifference must be “infinitely negative self-reference [*unendliche negative Beziehung auf sich*],” where the indifference is “incompatibility of itself with itself [*Unverträglichkeit ihrer mit*

¹¹⁵ Hegel verifies this for us in the next paragraph, writing “The sides, however, each containing the whole of the determinations and consequently the indifference itself, are thus at the same time posited as self-subsistent vis-à-vis each other.” *The Science of Logic*, p. 328, 21.375.

ihr selbst]”¹¹⁶ (*SL* p. 334, *GW* 21.382) The metaphysical/logical point therefore is that as a singularity in unifying with itself it simultaneously relates to and differs from itself; and it does so as an activity of differentiation. Within the context of Measure, this is what is meant by “self-repelling” indifference. Because the indifference that separates the totality of measure relations and particular being from the universal substrate is immanent to both sides of the antagonism, it thus reflects them both irreducibly in their difference. We still maintain the ontological difference between being and determinate being but now as a generative notion of difference. It is the reflective notion of indifference that they both share. One is not reduced into an identity with the other—finite beings are not “swallowed up” by infinite being—but neither is one ejected into a negative, external version of bad infinity.

The point we must take away, therefore, is that the two sides, measureless substrate and the determinate existent series of measures are not “indifferently” external to one another as if in a relation of external negativity or opposition. But rather the difference between them is immanent and connecting, such that the difference separating existence from absolute, being from beings, the series of measure from its substrate, infinite being from finite, is immanent to being itself. But rather the difference between them is immanent and connecting. That is, the idea of indifference is not a principle of external opposition but one of immanent difference such that the difference separating being from beings, the series of measure from its substrate, infinite being from finite, is immanent to being itself.

With this our point of view has shifted. We are no longer speaking about the ontological difference in the form of transcendence, for instance in which finite reality

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

simply continues to infinity but can never tell us anything about pure being; rather, we are speaking again about this ontological difference in-itself (what Hegel and I have been calling 'indifference') as a form of universality immanent to being that structures each side. As we quoted Hegel directly, the category of indifference is a singularity that repels itself from itself. It is an activity of difference, of differentiating. It makes the measureless substrate and the expression of measure relations a 'unity,' but a unity in difference. Put more concretely, the activity of logical differentiation one of generating the logical space and/or universal frame of reference within which particular (determinate) expressions of being relate. Hegel continues to develop this point, writing that "Because their quantitiveness is simply and solely of this qualitative nature, each reaches only as far as the other...The result is that they are in equilibrium." (*SL* p. 329, *GW* 21.376). The critical notion in the passage is equilibrium. Specifically, it carries with it an implication of unity and interchangeability deconstructing the infinitely measureless beyond. As I stated in some detail above in the example of musical harmony, this metaphysical point gives us the tools to make a concrete historical point. Namely, that in determinate reality these universal logical spaces likewise serve as historical contexts and/or epochs (e.g., The Enlightenment, or Antebellum America, or the Gilded Age, or the Cold War) within which history happens and within which events are measured, interpreted, and catalogued. This new emergence of history, history as universal historical context is Essence.

CHAPTER 2. ESSENCE MUST APPEAR: ESSENCE, HISTORY, UNIVERSALITY

Hegel's writing on essence is some of his most unique and complex work. The reason is that Hegel's Doctrine of Essence is, in many respects, meant to move us away from traditional ways of thinking about essence. Historically, essence has often been used analogously with universality (among other terms). That is, when we talk about the 'essences of things' we are trying to evoke something universal in nature—a quality, a concept, a principle, ground, or cause—that is not immediately apparent on the surface but is nevertheless responsible for the way things are. In this way essences are said to be more fundamentally 'real.' Treating essences like this is an everyday aspect of human experience. We do not take things immediately as they appear to be but instead search for the non-immediate, universal reasons or aspects for something being the way that it is. Take ourselves, for instance. A very plausible answer to the question of human identity is to look for that universal principle that we all share in common despite our various differences in appearance and/or expression. We reflect on the way things seem to be, and in doing so find the inner nature.

What makes Hegel's notion of essence complex is that he wants to retain the notion of essence as universality, but to do away with the notion that essence is representative of something transcendent of or underlying ordinary reality. Accordingly, Hegel has quite a paradoxical way of thinking universality. Stephen Houlgate and Beatrice Longuenesse are two thinkers on opposite ends of the interpretive spectrum that nevertheless provide concise summaries of this point. Houlgate writes "Hegel's doctrine of essence does not begin with our ordinary conception of essence as the 'inner nature' of things or their

underlying “substrate.”¹¹⁷ Longuenesse adds that “to look for the essence of appearance...is not to look for some rational principle beyond things as they appear, but to look, within appearance itself.”¹¹⁸ Hegel himself gives us the reasoning for this, writing that if we think of essence simply along the lines of universality, essence remains an abstraction “which falls on the side of a third [i.e., an external observer] and leaves undetermined what belongs to the essential [*Wesentliche*] and what belongs to the unessential [*Unwesentliche*]” (*SL* p. 342 *GW* 11.245).

When considering essence as universality, there is first a clear dichotomy between what is essential and what is inessential in being. Hegel refers to this distinction as essence and *Schein*, which I am interpreting here as immediacy or the immediate determination, expression, or show of being. I will follow Hegel in using these terms throughout. Put straightforwardly, as long as we maintain the opposition of essential and inessential, that which shows itself immediately as being can never fully capture that which is essential. There is a ‘gap’ of sorts such that the essential remains beyond the immediacy of being. That said, Hegel takes this idea regarding the immanence of essence one step further, saying that “essence must appear [*Das Wesen muß erscheinen*]” (*SL* p. 418, *GW* 11.323). At first glance, this seems plainly wrong. How can it be the case that universality (essence) is not only immanent to the particular (determinate reality), but that it also appears?¹¹⁹ It seems to me that answering this question is the most critical aspect of understanding the

¹¹⁷ Houlgate, “Essence, Reflexion, and Immediacy in Hegel’s *Science of Logic*,” in *A Companion to Hegel*, ed. by Stephen Houlgate and Michael Bauer (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2011), p. 140.

¹¹⁸ Beatrice Longuenesse, *Hegel’s Critique of Metaphysics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), p. 35.

¹¹⁹ For instance, take a very simple example such as the universality and particularity of a cup. It is easy to see how the universal intelligibility of a cup—i.e. “cupness”—provides an immanent formal and causal structure to individual cups, but that does not mean that cupness itself *appears*. For Hegel thinking about essence in this way, as immanent causal structure, is preferable to the view of essence as a transcendent realm beyond appearance.

Hegelian notion of essence for two reasons. One is that the metaphysical point about essence gives us a new way to understand history and historical activity that is different from the Doctrine of Being, namely, essence as universal history. And two, understanding the point regarding essence appearing is the best way for interpreting the transition to the concept.¹²⁰ Accordingly, my view is that the best way to approach the matter of essence appearing—which is really a story about the inherent antagonism of essence and *Schein*—is against the background of the initial difference/antagonism of being in the beginning.¹²¹

Recall that in chapter one we learned that being and nothing were not opposed categories—as if there were a realm of pure being and one of pure nothing— but that the ‘gap’ that separates them was revelatory of an inherent antagonism of being itself. My wager is that this initial paradox repeats itself in essence. Namely, that the external epistemic gap that separates *Schein* from essence, the fact that in the face of universal essence *Schein* is inherently incomplete and thus we can never fully *know* universal essence, is endemic of a more primary ontological antagonism of essence as such. That is, the essence of being is just that: the essence *of* being. It is being’s own depth and its own internal consistency. Essence *just is* the immanent self-differentiating activity of its independent manifestations. Essence refreshes itself anew through each of its concrete manifestations and is thus inherently historical in nature, opening us to the freedom of the concept. Likewise, what reveals this antagonism inherent to essence is what I take to be the central features of the Doctrine of Essence, namely, what Hegel calls the logic of reflection and the historical shift in perspective that occurs that occurs in the transition from

¹²⁰ I also want to highlight the importance of this statement for another reason: that it forms a key component of the work in chapters three and four for how we should understand the passage to, and structure of, the concept.

¹²¹ With the paradoxical beginning of being, nothing, and becoming.

Being to Essence. This is the shift from history as simple becoming without consistency to the universally embedded historical context that gives becoming its structure and identity.

2.1 Essence is not a Substrate and the Logic of Reflection

Before tackling the themes of history and reflection head on, I want to build up to them by beginning with the paradoxical view of essence left over from the introductory section. Specifically, the idea that essence is not what immediately appears but that it represents something more universal. Hegel writes that essence is “the negation of the sphere of being in general,” and “Being and essence relate to each other in this fashion as again others in general” (*SL* p. 341, *GW* 11.245). But at the same time, we have the idea that this universality that essence is meant to represent is not something that underlies immediate appearance but is within it. Hegel writes that “The truth of being is essence [*Die Wahrheit des Seines ist das Wesen*]” (*SL* p. 341, *GW* 11.245), and, that “Essence issues from being; hence it is not immediately in and for itself but is a result of that movement [*Resultat jener Bewegung*]” (*Ibid.*). Accordingly, in order to find out what essence is we should not look beyond *Schein* if for no other reason than essence is a result of that movement. This raises an important question: how can essence be universal and more than *Schein*, but at the same time issue from and be only a result of this very movement?

Initially, a simple way to approach the initial dichotomy of essence and being is through the dichotomy of immediacy and non-immediacy. Houlgate writes that for Hegel essence [*Wesen*] “is the name Hegel gives to being itself when the latter proves to be not simple immediacy...”¹²² In simple terms, we realize that it is a rather fundamental aspect

¹²² Houlgate, “Essence, Reflexion, and Immediacy in Hegel’s *Science of Logic*,” p. 140.

of human experience. Specifically, this is evident idea that simple immediate existence (*Dasein*, Existenz) is not always what it shows (*Schein*) itself to be. In thinking dynamically about the structure of immediate being (*Dasein*)—what is occurring here and now—we know that the intelligibility of this immediacy is not simply what appears to us, but that it also has contours and depth that are not immediate on the surface. Hegel writes this in the introduction to the Doctrine of Essence, stating that “knowledge does not stop at the immediate and its determinations, but penetrates beyond it on the presupposition [*Voraussetzung*] that behind this being there is still something other than being itself, and that this background [*Hintergrund*] constitutes the truth of being” (*SL* p. 337, *GW* 11.241). The background Hegel refers to is, of course, the realm of essence; that which is not immediate to appearances of things but is nevertheless responsible for them. In order to make sense of the immediacy of being (i.e., what we encountered in the Doctrine of Being), it must be in and of itself mediated by a depth and a structure that is not immediately present but past. In other words, it must be reflected¹²³ against the background of its own difference, in this case the very structure and order that gives reality its habitual consistency. In some ways this repeats the paradox of the beginning in the sense that for what is immediately present (pure being) to stand out it must be reflected against its own pure difference, namely, nothingness.

Both Houlgate and John Burbidge emphasize this point. Houlgate writes that “being is...a unity constituted by relative, non-immediate moments,”¹²⁴ and Burbidge that “essence...is to be distinguished from what is immediately present...once we look more closely, we see that the immediate qualities and quantities have shown themselves to be

¹²³ There is much more to come on reflection below, as this turns out to be the key feature of Essence.

¹²⁴ Houlgate, “Essence, Reflexion, and Immediacy in Hegel’s *Science of Logic*,” p. 140.

transient and inessential, requiring the move to something more substantial.”¹²⁵ Simply put, essence is not *Schein* and vice versa. Hegel writes of this dichotomy that “being and essence relate to each other in this fashion as against others in general which are mutually indifferent, for each has a being, an immediacy.” And thus, insofar as being relates to essence “as an other in general, essence is not essence proper but is just another existence, the essential” (*SL* p. 341, *GW* 11.245). The problem with this picture is that the essential and the inessential, or the immediate and non-immediate, form two separate realms of existence. It is precisely for this reason that we should avoid such a reading. Specifically, if we think about essence in these terms the effect is to reify essence as a ‘thing’ that stands opposed to another ‘thing,’ that is, immediate being. Hegel writes that this distinction “has made essence relapse into the sphere of existence...it [essence] is determined with respect to being an existent and therefore as an other” (*Ibid.*). We can now see the fundamental issue: for essence to be essence (i.e., what makes essence what it is) it cannot simply stand opposed to immediate being for this makes essence just another immediate being. As Hegel points out, essence becomes limited by, and related to, the very thing it is supposed to define. It is the problem of bad infinity reborn.¹²⁶

Brady Bowman helps us better understand how Hegel shifts away from the ‘dichotomy’ view of essence with his idea of the “idealism of the finite,” which is worth mentioning here. Bowman writes, “The problem with metaphysics is that it takes up the categories only to the extent that they are the forms of possible objects...Regardless of

¹²⁵ John Burbidge, *The Logic of Hegel's Logic* (Peterborough, Ontario: Broadview Press, 2006), p. 62.

¹²⁶ Hegel tells us this in no uncertain terms, writing “Essence is only a product, an artifact. External reflection, which is abstraction, only lifts the determinacies of being *out of* what is left over as essence and only deposits them, as it were, somewhere else...In this way essence is neither in itself or for itself; it is *by virtue of another*, through external abstractive reflection.” p. 338, 11.242

whether the categories are treated within logic as a set of basic concepts or predicates, or within ontology as the basic ways things themselves can be, they are conceived as essentially related to objects.”¹²⁷ What I take Bowman to be addressing is a problem that informs the Doctrine of Being that we are now trying to clarify in terms of ‘essence.’ Namely, the question is how the determinations of being seen in Book I can ground the primordial difference of pure immediate being and nothing. Metaphysically speaking, Bowman rightly points out this leads to a reification of essence as a thing in itself or an unknowable X. In this respect, all immediate finite categories are ‘ideal’ insofar as they are doomed to failure because they can never capture that which is beyond all immediacy, namely the essence of things.

2.2 Introducing Reflection

The solution to this impasse lies in the logic of reflection, which I will now turn to directly. Specifically, the solution is that essence forms the unified structure and context of being, and that it does so as a process of reflection. At the end of the Doctrine of Being, we learned that each immediate being proves to be what it is only through the mediation of the other, i.e., being measured, and thus each is dependent upon the other. Hegel therefore argues that “being in general and the being or immediacy of the different determinacies have thereby vanished [*verschwunden*]” (*SL* p. 335, *GW* 21.382). The way I read the cryptic term “vanishing” here is through the shift from the immediacy of being to the non-immediacy of essence. That is, by the end of Measure being has become defined not by its immediacy (quality, quantity, etc.) but rather its reflection into that which is not

¹²⁷ Bowman, *Hegel and the Metaphysics of Absolute Negativity*, p. 86.

immediate, namely, the contexts, orders, and structures through which immediate being(s) emerge and from which they draw meaning. Through these endless determinations, what we've come to recognize as truly essential is not any one (or many) of the determinate beings--or an abstraction from them—but rather the non-immediate process through which they are individuated in the first place.

Houlgate summarizes this by writing “Neither quality nor quantity is in truth simply and immediately what it is... being is, rather, a unity constituted by relative, non-immediate moments, each of which is not the non-immediacy that the other one is.”¹²⁸ In other words, these immediate beings are the surface expressions of a process immanent to them. Thinking about this in concrete and practical terms, we recognize that individual immediacies—whether they be entities, moments, experiences, or events—come and go. That is, importantly, the structure of such immediacies seems to be the process of their contingency, and what individuates and gives them their unity just is such a process. But what does not seem to change are the various webs of relations, mediations, contexts, and interactions that sustain each immediacy and give them meaning. That is, the process of relation and reflection through which immediacies gain and maintain their consistency persists, even though immediacies may dissipate.

Take for instance the idea of a narrative structure of a story or work of literature. The structure or plot of a story is not a ‘thing.’ The narrative is not a property within the story we can point to or externally abstract away and say, ‘This is the essence.’ On the other hand, neither does the narrative structure exist outside the contingent movement of the story. In fact, each contingent twist and turn of the story, each new determination of it,

¹²⁸ Houlgate, “Essence, Reflexion, and Immediacy in Hegel’s *Science of Logic*,” p. 140. Remember, this was the key feature of *ratio* in the section on quantity, that quantity had a *qualitative* aspect.

only serves to re-inform and in some cases change our thinking of the essence. Hegel formulated the basics of this insight in the preface to the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, which we now see in more developed form here, writing that “the living Substance [i.e., ‘essence’] is being which...is in truth actual only in so far as it is the movement of positing itself.”¹²⁹ And we further see that, “Truth is its own self-movement.”¹³⁰ To make a critical assertion for the purposes of foreshadowing, there is an immanent reciprocity here such that neither is presupposed. The narrative structure just is the movement of the story; it is the non-immediate aspect that organizes its unfolding, but by the same token must be expressed as this unfolding.¹³¹

What this represents is a movement of reflection, which Hegel describes as “movement of becoming [*Werden*] and transition [*Übergehens*]” (*SL* p. 345, *GW* 11.249) inherent to essence. He continues, “In the sphere of essence, positedness [*Gesetzsein*], is what corresponds to existence,”¹³² (*SL* p. 351, *GW* 11.255-256) where ‘positedness’ is analogous to *Schein* in that it is meant to denote an expression of essence. Hegel continues, “Positedness is equally an existence, but its ground is being as essence or as pure negativity [*reine Negativität*]; it is a determinateness or a negation, not as existent but as immediately sublated [*aufgehoben*]”¹³³ (*Ibid.*). Accordingly, it is the idea of positedness (i.e. posited or determinate existence) “which conjoins existence with essence and essence with existence”

¹²⁹ Hegel, *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, p. 10.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 28.

¹³¹ I will get to this explicitly in a moment.

¹³² I think it’s important to point out here that with the verb *Gesetzsein* Hegel making it clear to us that the being of *Schein* (sein) is ‘to-be-positd’ (*Gesetzsein*) and/or expressed. It is doubly determined in that its expression is just ‘to-be-expressed.’ More on this to come below.

¹³³ I again want to highlight to single out the term ‘pure negativity’ [*reine Negativität*], as it plays a vital role in the way we understand singularity, and more importantly the way we understand how history ‘happens.’ This will become clearer as we proceed; the idea behind pure negativity is not simple negation but of negativity reduced to (i.e., taken as) as singularity. It is thus self-reflexive and self-differentiating.

(Ibid). Taken together, these statements work to underscore the previous narrative structure example, namely, that essence as a movement that rejoins, reflects, and is expressed itself through each determination, twist, and turn of the story. Essence is expressed (appears) through determinations. The picture, then, is that of a movement of reflection, a reciprocal determination of positing and presupposing, that persists through each surface immediacy of the movement. In the case of narrative structure, in one sense the essence just is the becoming of the story; but nevertheless, each moment of the narrative reflects and provides a universal context.

2.3 Essence as History: Memory, Reflection, and Universality

At this point we can re-invoke the conception of history, and the historical shift in perspective that occurred in the transition from Being to Essence.¹³⁴ Hegel writes, that “Only inasmuch as knowledge recollects [*erinnert*] itself into itself out of immediate being, does it find essence through this mediation [*Vermittlung*] (*SL* p. 337, *GW* 11.241).¹³⁵ The passing from Measure to Essence again provides a fruitful jumping off point. The Doctrine of Being is a story defined as a movement of becoming from immediate present to immediate present, where each aspect of the story is limited and passed over into another. However, as we learned in Measure, the past elements do not disappear without a trace; in fact, as each present passes it forms the historical context and narrative structure within which the new present exists and is understood. We see this in the statement via the

¹³⁴ I want to specifically flag this entire discussion for readers on history and the timelessness of the past as I will return to it again in great detail in chapter five, although, from an entirely different perspective.

¹³⁵ I think it’s interesting to note Hegel’s use of history evoking language here. Being ‘recollects’ [*erinnert*] itself out of its immediate present and into its past. That is, it recalls, is reminded, and turns inward.

category of reflection. This category carries with it explicit historical connotations. To reflect is to recollect and remember, to put oneself into and among the past, to be non-immediate or past with respect to the present. Think again about the musical melody example. The melody is not just a linear succession of individually successive notes. Rather, each individually present note is only intelligible within the context of all the notes that came before it. To use the language of Hegel's statement the past notes, as a general historical context, reflects and recollects each immediate present back into itself; and it is this activity of reflection that gives each immediately expressed note its proper place. Essence, therefore, is not a detached or transcendent universal. Rather it is immanent in the immediate present insofar as it is defined as a movement of reflection of the immediate present into the past. Rather, we should take essence as being's own essence, the essence of being, or, to put it differently, the immanent and mediating historical context within which the immediate expression of *Schein* finds its place.

Hegel therefore writes "essence is past [*vergangene*] – but timelessly [*zeitlos*] past – being" (Ibid.). That is, if the essence of being is its being past, then immediate *Schein* therefore recollects or presupposes it (i.e., essence, past being) as a universal form of eternal memory. The present does not just hold a specific relation to the past; more strongly it is the case that what has been insists in every immediate present. The critical factor is Hegel's reference to the timelessly past. This is what makes it essential. In other words, we are not speaking about a particular event or collection of individual events of the past, but the past in general, the universal (historical) context that structures the unfolding of the present. Žižek provides clarity on this idea, writing that essence is an absolute past "where all events, including those that have sunk without trace, are stored and remembered as their

passing away.”¹³⁶ The notion that is evoked therefore of a past strangely always already contains things immediately present insofar as it informs them and provides us with the tools to make them intelligible to us. What we are doing now will have become history; it will be reflected into the past that has already informed it.

Hegel summarizes this kind of thinking in the *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*, saying “The living conserves itself, it is the beginning and the end; the product in itself is also the principle, it is always as such active.”¹³⁷ The basic idea here is that the cycles of life unfold in a linear manner, in line with the notion of the pure historical past. Essence, as universal, the pure past that informs and weighs on the present, is the unity of the relations/interplay of its subordinate immediacy. In nature, gradual transformations occur, species transform, we have processes of generation and corruption, history moves through various epochs, and in some cases, we have catastrophic events and obliterations; but the cycle itself does not change. From the perspective of presupposed, universal unity essence is simply the process of coming to be itself, so to speak. To quote Longuenesse again, Hegel’s *Logic* “is inseparably a metaphysical and a transcendental deduction of the categories of metaphysics.”¹³⁸ What is critical here is that the transcendental, or universal, serves as the guarantor of the logical unfolding of categories. It is in this sense that I tie a view of history as a process of coming to be itself.

Works of literature also provide great examples of the crucial point of our current discussion regarding the universal and historic nature of essence. Take, for instance, the

¹³⁶ Žižek, *Less Than Nothing*, p. 207.

¹³⁷ Hegel, *Vorlesungen über die Philosophie der Religion* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1970), p. 525.

¹³⁸ Longuenesse, p. 5.

famous passage from William Faulkner's *The Sound and the Fury* where the father gives his watch to his son Quentin, saying

“I give you the mausoleum of all hope and desire; it's rather excruciatingly apt that you will use it to gain the *reducto ad absurdum* of all human experience which can fit your individual needs no better than it fitted his or his father's. I give it to you not that you may remember time, but that you might forget it now and then for a moment and not spend all your breath trying to conquer it. Because no battle is ever won, he said. They are not even fought.”¹³⁹

This passage distills perhaps the major (philosophical) thematic of Faulkner's novel, namely, that you cannot break free from the past. Rather, history is a continuous mausoleum that insists and persists through all our human hopes, desires, and experiences. It is as if tomorrow had already happened, and there is nothing you can do about it. For the Compson family the southern experience in the aftermath of the American Civil War is just this sort of mausoleum. Although no member of the family ever experienced any single event of the war itself, they nevertheless live in its wake and its recollection or memory. That is, The Civil War is a universal and essential past that insists upon the present by shaping both the historical background and the subconscious memory of each character whose lives are reflected back into it as their stories unfold.

All of the Compson family embody this in some form or other. However, I think the one most worth mentioning is Quentin because he is the character most desperate to escape his southern history and heritage, specifically by going to school in Cambridge at Harvard, yet he is the one who most explicitly embodies the southern defeat in the war. On the one hand Quentin is the most intelligent of all the Compson children, and he incarnates the idyllic southern agrarian virtues of chivalry, honor, manliness, and courage. Yet Quentin is equally the most deeply cynical and alienated member of the family. He thinks

¹³⁹ William Faulkner, *The Sound and the Fury* (New York: Vintage Books, 1990), p. 76.

regularly about the downfall and destitution of the South following the war. His memory is haunted by it in the timeless sense spoken of above: The Civil War as an insistent historical context that forms the mausoleum that not only contains his sense of who he is but determines what he will become. In this respect, Quentin embodies the repressed trauma of defeat, forlornness, loss of identity and heritage, and social upheaval brought on by the war. Quentin expresses the contradiction of the war itself: an idyllic southern vision thrown into chaos by the realities of war, racism, slavery, and misogyny.

The question, then, is how should we interpret this? Should we interpret it as a presupposition, which conjures up the notion that we saw in the paradox of beginning? Or perhaps it is the case that essence and history just is the movement of these expressions? Two of the most prominent thinkers who seem to me to occupy the former view are Longuenesse and Dieter Henrich, each for whom the unity of reflection forms the central element of the *Logic* as a whole. Longuenesse writes, “Reflection therefore appears to be the engine that moves the *Logic* forward in its entirety...Reflection is the method of the *Logic* as a whole.”¹⁴⁰ She continues, writing “Essence for Hegel is nothing other than the movement of reflection in which ‘things’ find their determination.”¹⁴¹ For thinkers like Longuenesse and Henrich, the primacy of reflection has to do with a specific reading, and in my view a specific solution, to the paradox of being that begins the *Logic* that reasserts itself here in the doctrine of essence.¹⁴² Henrich perhaps goes even a step further in his interpretive stance regarding the importance of reflection. In his famous essay “Anfang und Methode der Logik”¹⁴³ Henrich writes that “the concepts at the center of the final

¹⁴⁰ Longuenesse, p. 34.

¹⁴¹ Ibid, p. 53.

¹⁴² Specifically, how can essence be immanent to yet different from immediate being?

¹⁴³ Beginning and Method of the *Logic*.

argumentation on method find their true place not here [Being], but in the chapter on the determinations of reflection [Essence].”¹⁴⁴ We saw this above in the shift from the immediate determinations of being to the determinations of essence. Specifically, we saw this where the immediate determinations of essence are in fact mediated by the movement of reflection and therefore presuppose the mediation of this movement. Henrich argues that the move from being to nothing to becoming in the Doctrine of Being requires what he calls an “external proof.”¹⁴⁵ He writes that “the logic of pure Being can only be explicated in general by a method of negativity.”¹⁴⁶

To clarify Henrich’s point, in order to even posit pure being (and likewise pure nothing) as absolute immediacy there must be a prior negation of all forms of mediation, specifically those that require the understanding of one concept in terms of another concept, as for instance one might think about pure being and pure nothing. However, Henrich notes that this move requires an *a priori* reflective move external to the logical unfolding (of pure being and pure nothing) in which immediacy can only be in relation to mediation. That is, we can only understand immediacy reflectively in its relation to mediation, “and thus is as such mediated and determined through this concept.”¹⁴⁷ It is this reflection upon pure being and pure nothing that allows the passage from one to the other, and furthermore what holds them together in mediated a totality. Accordingly, what Henrich means by “external” is the

¹⁴⁴ Dieter Henrich, “Anfang und Methode der Logik” *Hegel im Context* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1971)

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 88.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 80.

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 85.

idea that any interpretation of the *Logic* requires a presupposed unity of reflection external to its movement that can ground it.¹⁴⁸

All of this is rather obtuse; but what we should focus on is the manner in which Henrich likewise reproduces the initial paradox of essence and being in order to characterize the nature of essence (and by extension reflection). Specifically, thinking the immediacy of *Schein* requires an *a priori* non-immediate reflective movement that mediates being. Accordingly, the notion of a presupposed universal unity as a starting point appears, therefore, to be the most critical aspect. It seems to me the primary thesis here is that Hegel implicitly presupposes a reflective essence from the very beginning of the *Logic* itself with the introduction of pure being, pure nothing, and becoming. The concrete takeaway is that this reflective standpoint mediates and therefore grounds and internalizes being, so to speak, thus allowing the *Logic* to proceed as it does. In other words, it is this mediating and conditioning move that allows such determinations to be the determinations that they are (i.e., it indexes them to a system of mediation). Henrich argues that we must separate what he describes as “the science of the logic” from “the process of its logical thought determinations.”¹⁴⁹ That is, there must be some kind of synthesizing/mediating “mechanism” of sorts that unifies what has come before and allows the *Logic* to proceed to what comes next, and this presupposed conditioning mechanism is essence.¹⁵⁰

¹⁴⁸ Or, to put it differently, in order for the *Logic* to proceed in the manner that it does requires a presupposed ‘logical space’ that reflects and unifies its procession. Other authors Daniel Dahlstrom and Markus Gabriel make a similar point, although in different ways. Dahlstrom speaks about essence as the unity of the categories of being; while Gabriel makes a specific point respect to essence, necessity, and contingency that I will address in chapter four. See: Dahlstrom “Between Essence and Being,” in *Essays on Hegel’s Logic*, ed. by George di Giovanni (Albany, SUNY Press, 1990) pp. 99-102; and Gabriel, *Transcendental Ontology: Essays in German Idealism*, (London: Continuum, 2011), pp. 119-137.

¹⁴⁹ Henrich., pp. 92-93.

¹⁵⁰ For an additional interpretation of this view similar to my own, see: William Maker, “Beginning” in *Essays on Hegel’s Logic*, pp. 40-43.

Let's examine this further by way of an example that encapsulates the discussion thus far and allows us to bring back to the table the notion of essence as universal historical context. Take, for instance, the classical Marxist critique of freedom in capitalist society (i.e. "bourgeois" freedom). Very briefly, a key element of the critique is that the strictly formal freedom of capitalist society engenders its own immanent negation in the form of worker exploitation and alienation. That is, we start with a non-immediate presupposition of freedom which upon determination, i.e., its 'immediacy,' to use our immediate-non-immediate framework, turns out to be its own negation. Capitalist freedom does not live up to its presupposed standard and fails on its own accord. To use Hegelian terminology, it is self-negative or self-negation, and must therefore be supplemented by a higher form of freedom, namely socialist freedom, or the 'negation of the negation.' From here, we can recognize this following the pattern that Henrich posited, namely, that in order for the immediate of expressions of freedom to have any consistency—that is, freedom as it exists, relates to other things, and is expressed in various contexts—to have any consistency, it must have a presupposed essence, as a process of reflection, that recollects and totalizes these expressions and their movement together.

Looking at this historically, it is as if all present and/or new determinations of freedom are always already contained within a timelessly historical category of freedom. All of the past conceptions of freedom form an abstract universal context of 'freedom as such.' So, the passing from a capitalist conception of freedom to a socialist conception is not a break with the past but instead re-assertion of it in the sense that the socialist conception is already contained within historical context. The past serves as a necessary and presupposed prologue of the new form that reflects it back into it.

Put more abstractly at the level of determinate existence itself, being must be indexed to a presupposed universal that reflects all of its expressions. But for me, this raises an interesting dichotomy regarding Hegel's paradoxical statement at the beginning of the chapter that essence must appear. That is, is the essence of freedom simply the unfolding of its presupposed universality in its expressions? Or, more radically, is it that the very 'essence' of freedom itself is antagonistic?¹⁵¹ What is it that we should hold fast to as primary, 'freedom' or 'self-relating negation?' This heuristic of a dichotomy, through the example of freedom, is quite important for what follows here and in the remaining chapters, so let's continue to clarify it. One implication leads to a quasi-transcendental, in the Kantian sense of the term, view of essence. Specifically, that reflection serves as a grounding and synthesizing mechanism that ties being to thought. On this view the immediacy of being in the Doctrine of Being is universally grounded as being-thought, where being is all that it could intelligibly be.

More clearly, the key feature of the argument seems to be that the movement of reflection, as a movement of thought, serves as objective ground for being insofar as being has no meaning outside of being-thought. Burbidge addresses this idea that what Hegel has in mind in essence is a movement of thought that conditions and synthesizes objective determinations into a system. He states, that "Reflection has two conflicting functions. On the one hand, it actively reflects on the surface *maya* [the term Burbidge uses for appearances/*Schein*] in the course of deriving the underlying essence. On the other hand, in this process it uses fixed and persistent determinations that are unaffected by the dynamic of thought but are nonetheless its critical component. Each function requires (or

¹⁵¹ In other words, the reason why we have so many different expressions of freedom in reality is because the very essence of freedom is convoluted and differential.

is reflected in) the other...Speculative reason...brings together into a synthesis the opposing features that have emerged through dialectic.”¹⁵² However, it is Longuenesse who picks up on this thematic in particular.¹⁵³ She notes specifically, that the essences of things rely upon an implicit presupposition that each posited immediate being presupposes and is conditioned by the movement and unity of reflection.¹⁵⁴ That is, what transforms the immediacy of being into essential determinations is “always the product of a spontaneity of thought capable of constituting itself in a system,” and the “results of thought inscribing its own unity into that which is presented to it.”¹⁵⁵ There must be a starting point for any movement of reflection.¹⁵⁶

Let’s continue exploring this. It seems to me that for Longuenesse, one of the key aspects of the Doctrine of Essence is that thought itself is a movement.¹⁵⁷ She writes, “In essence, thought constitutes itself (its own determinations) only by going beyond itself, towards that which is other than itself, that is, unthought.”¹⁵⁸ She continues “This is why the becoming of essence is marked by contradictory terms, which express the confrontation between the movement of the self-determination of thought and the determinations it “finds” ...within itself.”¹⁵⁹ Here, Longuenesse is drawing an important distinction we introduced above with the idea of external reflection. Specifically, we might suppose that

¹⁵² Burbidge, pp. 63-64.

¹⁵³ And in my opinion offers the most compelling case for it.

¹⁵⁴ It is important to flag the idea of presupposition now, as it seems to me the most important aspect of the interpretation opposed to my own. Accordingly, it is an idea that I will continue to stress as we pivot to my own interpretation.

¹⁵⁵ Longuenesse, pp. 40, 42.

¹⁵⁶ I.e. the notion of freedom, or the unity of thought, etc.

¹⁵⁷ Burbidge calls this a process of *conceiving*, which is that “rational dynamic by which we [both] comprehend and understand.” Burbidge, “Conceiving” in *A Companion to Hegel*, ed. by Stephen Houlgate and Michael Baur (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2011), p. 161.

¹⁵⁸ Longuenesse, p. 41.

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 40.

essence, as a process of reflection, is one of external abstraction where we are confronted with an inessential appearance, and then through a process of abstracting reflection arrive at the true essence of things. As Longuenesse points out essence is not a movement of abstract reflection but rather an immanent one that she describes as thought within itself.

To clarify, it is not that essential, reflective thinking corresponds to immediate inessential being. As Longuenesse rightly notes, at the level of essence we are not talking about the kind of abstract, external back and forth that saw in the Doctrine of Being but instead are focused on reflection itself. Objects are now object of thought/reflection insofar as thought “posits itself over against its object...as its own as the object of thought.”¹⁶⁰ What this means is that what “confronts” reflection are not independent “givens” to be abstracted from—such as sense data, intuitions, or experience—but are determinations of reflection itself (i.e., they are thought’s own content). What they represent is thought’s own movement of unity such that this unity objectively grounds these objects. Longuenesse writes that “Hegel wants to show that indeed ‘formal’ requirements (principle of identity, of non-contradiction, of excluded middle, as principles of thought) and empirical requirements (doing justice to diversity and real opposition within objects given in sensible intuition) have one and the same origin in the process of reflection.”¹⁶¹ As such, they are not posited as ‘given’ to thought, as for example the immediate particulars of something and other in the Doctrine of Being. They therefore have nothing to do with determinations that are independent of thought. Rather, the essential determinations such as identity, difference, etc. are being-thought (i.e., reflective thought’s own objective content). They are within the movement and unity of reflection, and it is this unity that mediates and

¹⁶⁰ Ibid., p. 41.

¹⁶¹ Ibid, p. 49.

conditions their being. Longuenesse states that “Hegel’s project is to show that to think being is to articulate, within one and the same process of thought, types of objects that belong to different moments of thought.”¹⁶²

Let’s put this into the context of our just mentioned freedom example. It’s not as though there is an abstract essential freedom on one hand, a pool of particular determinations of freedom on the other, and the former somehow abstracts and reflects the essential element out of the latter. Instead, the thing itself is reflexive; that is, each determination is a (historical) movement of reflection back into the essence. Capitalist freedom fails to live up to the demands of freedom as such and so it is mediated and reflected into socialist freedom. But what allows such a move to occur in the first place is the historical unity of freedom which reflects and conditions the movement as a whole. It is this presupposition that conditions the various forms and gives them their essence (i.e. what makes “socialist freedom” socialist, and so forth). The essence of these things—their determinate instantiations as objects—is not something that is endemic to them as objects themselves but only objects of thought. Put differently, it is only that objects *as objects of reflection*, i.e., those that presuppose the totality of reflection, that provide the essences of things. Each posited being presupposes an overarching unity of reflection. So, when we think about “identity” or “being self-identical” as an essence of something, we are not speaking about an essential property of “identity” that individual things have. Rather we are thinking about an identity of thought that thinks its own identity in the object of thought and thus conditions it.¹⁶³

¹⁶² Ibid., p. 50.

¹⁶³ Longuenesse writes that “Essence” for Hegel is nothing other than the movement of reflection in which “things” find their determination...A thing has an “essence” because it is *construed* as being identical to itself, it is not identical to itself by virtue of having an individual essence.” pp. 53-54.

2.4 The Immanent Reflection of *Schein* Itself

At this point, I'd like to return the original interpretive question I posed above with how to best understand the connection of essence, universality, and history: is universal essence a presupposed unity, or perhaps is it the case that essence *just is* the movement of these expressions? We have just briefly gone over what I take to be best ideas for the former view. But I submit instead the second interpretive path is the correct one insofar as it helps us fully make sense of Hegel's provocative thesis that essence must appear; in doing so, it also helps us understand that Hegel's metaphysics is not just a metaphysics of history but also a metaphysics of historical change.¹⁶⁴ To build up to this view¹⁶⁵ and what it ultimately entails, I want to return to an idea that I mentioned in the introductory section of the chapter: that a solution we find in the Doctrine of Essence to the paradox of essence—how can the immediacies of being can fully capture what is essential—is to turn this epistemic problem into a metaphysical solution. Specifically, perhaps this 'failure' or ontological difference between essence and *Schein* is a constitutive factor of essence as such. Approaching the matter this way leads into the second interpretive path stated above.

To restate the paradox, as long as we treat essence as a universal "X" to be reached the absolute indifference separating the two, namely particular *Schein* and universal essence, remains in place. What is required, therefore, is an immanent shift in perspective from particularity to universality. In other words, we must look within and not beyond for the solution. We've just seen one way of doing this. It seems to me that this view takes the position of the unity of what Hegel calls 'positing,' or immediacy/*Schein*, and external

¹⁶⁴ That is, to restate, the idea that essence must appear is important to understanding how historical change and freedom are not only critical to Hegel's metaphysics, but metaphysics more generally.

¹⁶⁵ A view which, to foreshadow for readers, will take the remainder of this chapter and the following two to fully articulate.

reflection. This is the point at which the externality of universal reflection becomes immanent. Hegel writes that “positing is now united with external reflection,” where in this unity, external reflection “is absolute presupposing”¹⁶⁶ (*SL* p. 352, *GW* 11.256). For me, what is most critical here is whether one give ultimate weight to the notion of presupposition or the reciprocity. My argument is that it is the latter. For the former view, reflection, as the essential context for *Schein*, not only forms a unity with *Schein* (positing), but it does so as a presupposition. In other words, the presupposed unity of reflection warrants the unity of essence and *Schein*, fixed determination, or what I’ve called individuation, of ‘positedness’ (*Schein*) achieves this individuation being reflected back into the essential presupposition rather than maintaining a strict reciprocity with it. Essence already contains its expressions, either as a historical precondition, a unity of consciousness,¹⁶⁷ or a metalogical point about the method of inquiry.¹⁶⁸ To clarify, reading reflection from this way fixes a universal horizon that is immanent to the determinate fluctuation of *Schein*, such that the unfolding of essence reflects each determination back into it. In the narrative example it is as if what warrants the reciprocal movement of the story is a presupposed structure, rather than the structure itself being unfolded in the movement.

In my view, it is this misreading that precipitates that downfall of essence, through a specific misreading of history, and engenders our transition to the Concept with freedom and history proper. However, let’s circle back to the beginning of our discussion and the helpful way of thinking about Hegel’s notion of essence as rooted in mediation and non-

¹⁶⁶ Ibid., p. 352, 11.256.

¹⁶⁷ This seems to be Longuenesse’s point.

¹⁶⁸ This seems to be Henrich’s point.

immediacy. He writes, “As it issues from being, essence seems to stand over against it; this immediate being is, first, the unessential. But second, it is more than just the unessential; it is being void of essence [*es ist wesenloses Sein*]; it is *Schein*” (SL p. 341, GW 11.244). *Schein* is unsubstantial (*wesenloses*) and therefore only has the fleeting condition of immediate seeming. *Schein* is only what seems to be the case. It has no consistency; it requires grounding and mediation. What the passage is meant to show us, though, is that the essence, or grounding, and the immediate seeming of *Schein* each issue from being and are thus in some way immanently connected. However, as I have tried to show with the digressions into thinkers like Henrich and Longuenesse, the question for us was never that essence and *Schein* were connected, but how exactly to make sense of the connection in terms of Hegel’s radical proviso that essence must appear. That is, it must appear historically. This opens a space for a different view of reflection, one that takes into account central principle of logical difference that we discovered in the *Logic*’s beginning and articulated in chapter one.¹⁶⁹ On this reading, reflection takes the form of a reciprocal and differentiating movement, where the stress is placed neither on universal essence or its particular seeming as *Schein* but the movement that reflects and differentiates them.¹⁷⁰ If

¹⁶⁹ To take it one step further, the disagreement hinges on a different view of reflection that is tied to the logic of beginning. This cannot be understated because it seems to me that how we interpret reflection and essence in relation to beginning has a direct resonance with where we end up. This is especially so with how to make sense of Hegel’s statement that essence must appear.

¹⁷⁰ It’s important here to note the difference between what I am saying and what we have seen so far. That is, rather than privileging the unity of reflection as an essential-universal that warrants the reciprocal nature of essence and *Schein*, I am shifting the stress to the activity itself that differentiates these two poles, such that the universal is not maintained as a unity *through* activity, but is instead only the *process of its own construction*. On the specific point of privileging the movement of reciprocity in Essence see: Johnston, *A New German Idealism*, pp. 82-85; and Karen Ng, “Hegel’s Logic of Actuality” in *The Review of Metaphysics*, Vol. 63, No. 1 (September, 2009), pp. 139-172. For my purposes, the point is to undermine the whole idea of presupposition for the purposes of maintaining a faithful interpretation of the manner in which Hegel begins the *Logic* with a fundamental antagonism without presupposition and maintains this antagonism as both a metaphysical principle about being and a methodological principle regarding how the *Logic* as a text unfolds.

this can be shown, then we will have a new understanding of history. This will be not one of universality unfolding in the world, but one where universality is nothing but the process of unfolding (differentiating).

To put the matter provocatively, it is my view that we should take the statement that essence must appear literally in the sense that Hegel is not making a statement about the relationship of thinking to being¹⁷¹ that is, where categories of thinking provide the grounding for all that being could determinately be. Rather he is making a statement about the nature of being itself: that essence itself appears in and through its expressions.¹⁷² Accordingly, for us reflection is reciprocal to immediate being. Being is not reflected, conditioned, or determined by essence (thought), but that its own condition is that of being self-reflexive. This is what I meant above by turning an epistemic problem—how do we knowingly reach universal essence given this external gap? —into a metaphysical solution: perhaps the gap is a reflexivity that is ontologically immanent to particular being itself. That is, they reflect each other, there is an immanent reflexivity to immediate being itself.¹⁷³

Hegel lays this out for us in a long passage in his introductory remarks on essence, writing,

In this way, determinateness is still only posited in the substrate as an empty differentiation. But it is precisely this empty differentiation which is the indifference itself [*Indifferenz selbst*] as result. And this indifference is indeed concrete, in the sense that it is self-mediated [*sich Vermittelte*] through the negation of all the determinations of being. As such

¹⁷¹ Namely, that thinking and being are immanently connected due to the *essence of being* being nothing outside its conditioning by thought. (i.e. being-thought, or being-that-is-thought).

¹⁷² It seems to me that the difference in interpretation comes from confusing two senses of immediacy and mediation. One as the starting point of a process. Note that this this form of immediacy is *not* the simple immediacy of immediate appearance/being, but rather that of a presupposition. Specifically, the presupposition we discussed above: essence as the presupposed unity of reflection that precedes and therefore mediates its movement into a totality, and where the “immediacies” (i.e. the determinations of essence) are “moments” of its unified movement.

¹⁷³ This is due to the fact that both sides are the same. The “other side” of immediacy is just another immediacy, so the non-immediacy that is essence is the reflection of the two.

a mediation, it contains [*enthält*] negation and relation, and what was called “state” is a differentiation which is immanent to it and self-referring [*ist ihr immanentes, sich auf sich beziehendes Unterscheiden*]. It is precisely this externality and its vanishing which make the unity of being into an indifference: consequently, they are inside this indifference (*SL* p. 326, *GW* 21.373).

This complicated passage establishes for us the manner in which essence and determinate being are immanently connected. At the beginning we recognize the dichotomy between “determinateness” (i.e. immediacy) and “substrate” (essence): the differentiations of immediate and determinate being are empty and monotonous in the face of indifferent essence. That being said, it is from the very monotony of particularity, from its own reflexive nature (i.e. self-referring and mediating: *sich Vermittelte*), that engenders the shift to universal essence. In other words, what we realize is that there is no ‘realm’ of essence, non-immediacy, etc. beyond the realm of immediate being. Epistemically speaking, essence is ‘beyond’ the contingency of immediate being insofar as there is always another measure relation. This is what leads us to the metaphysical point about reflection, not an epistemological or metalogical/methodological one (i.e., one about presuppositions) as Henrich or Longuenesse appear to have it. As Hegel notes in the passage, what comes ‘after’ or beyond *Schein* is just another insertion of *Schein*. The two therefore overlap with one another and simultaneously reflect and differentiate from each other in the passage from one to the next. Accordingly, we notice that what precipitates the external indifference, the gulf that separates the realm of appearances from the realm of essence, just is the reflection of *Schein* itself.

What we are speaking about, therefore, is the unified context, or an immanent logical/reflective space that is generated alongside the movement of *Schein* and within which *Schein* is grounded. What this means is simply that the apparent flux and contingencies of reality—that the determinations of things are finite, and that they are

seemingly open to any number of changes—immanently reflect one another such that these reflexive relations form a universal context within which they exist. It is thus in the moment of reflection and differentiation that we recognize the universal essence that grounds the movement. Put in concrete terms, the essential non-immediacy—that which supersedes immediate being—has been hiding in plain sight the entire time. It asserts itself as the past/historical context within which immediate events of reality occur.

Houlgate and Henry Somers-Hall make similar points, with Houlgate writing “essence comes to be understood...as that which itself appears in the guise of immediate being. Illusory immediate being, or seeming, ceases thereby to be something distinct from essence and comes to be seen as essences own seeming.”¹⁷⁴ While Somers-Hall adds, “Such a moment of self-relation is therefore a moment where essence is immediately itself.”¹⁷⁵ And as Hegel himself puts it “Essence is reflection, the movement of becoming and transition that remains within itself” (*SL* p. 345, *GW* 11.249). The form of immediacy is the result of self-mediating difference. Or to put the same thing differently: the immediate seeming of being is the result of its essence, namely, immediate being’s own self-mediating difference.

I am putting a great deal of stress on this aspect of reflection, so I want to continue in more concrete detail. Given the conversation of the chapter so far, namely around the immanence of essence to *Schein*, this seems like a pretty straightforward statement. However, there is a crucial addition as to what the ‘movement’ entails here. Hegel writes that *Schein* is “self-referring negativity [*sich beziehende Negativität*] ...It is thus just as

¹⁷⁴ Houlgate, “Essence, Reflexion, and Immediacy in Hegel’s *Science of Logic*,” p. 141.

¹⁷⁵ Henry Somers-Hall, *Hegel, Deleuze, and the Critique of Representation: Dialectics of Negativity and Difference* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 2012) p. 141.

much sublated negativity as it is negativity. Or again, it is itself the negative [*selbst das Negative*] and the simple equality with itself or immediacy. It consists therefore in being itself and not being itself [*sie selbst und nicht sie selbst*], and the two in one unity” (SL p. 346, *GW* 11.250).¹⁷⁶ These two statements are critical because they work to show the immanent reciprocity and reflexivity of being and essence. This requires further explanation. Specifically, the idea that the nature of essence comes from the nature of being itself. It comes from its own self-reflexivity and is therefore not presupposed. That is, the relationality of *Schein* itself, the fact that it exists in different contexts and different series of relations that reflect one another.

The key to this reading is the relationship of *Schein* to negativity. Especially important is that *Schein* is doubly negative, and that the essence and being of *Schein* is negativity. The being of *Schein* is thoroughly negative and inessential in nature because it is nothing outside of the relations within which it is individuated. These relations are what is not immediate to the surface of things, yet they are taken to be what is essential. In simple terms, what this means is that the ‘being’ of *Schein* does not lie in its immediacy, in its *Dasein*. This is only what seems to be the case. Rather, its essential being lies in its vanishing; in movement and relations out of which it emerges. The point, therefore, is that neither the essential nor the immediate of *Schein* is presupposed. Rather what is key is the reciprocal movement of *Schein* itself. As we now know, however, there is a second side to this story. Namely, the essential does not transcend the immediacy of being/*Schein*. The essence of being is the immanent as the persistent movement immediate *Schein* itself. What makes this movement essential just is its persistence, the fact that it continues from *Schein*

¹⁷⁶ Ibid.

to *Schein*.¹⁷⁷ To make the explicit connection with history, the universal historical context does not precede the individuated events of history; rather it is generated immanently alongside them.¹⁷⁸ Therefore, just as *Schein* is in individuated within non-immediate (i.e., essential) contexts and relations, essence itself is not a presupposed unity of reflection but is itself only revealed in the reciprocal reflection of *Schein* itself.

Richard Dien Winfield amplifies this point for us in his essay “The Method of Hegel’s *Science of Logic*” by using Hegel’s well-known principle of determinate negation. Winfield states “self-thinking thought can be said to proceed by means of determinate negation. Insofar as each successive category supplants its predecessor with a non-derivative content, it negates what precedes it. Yet, to the degree that it equally incorporates its predecessors as constitutive elements of its non-derivative determination, its negation of its predecessors is determinate, in that the otherness it opposes to the former is equally determined with reference to it.”¹⁷⁹ There are two important points here with respect to the structure and method of essence, each of which pairs with essence as a principle of (historical or history-making) activity. One, is that every new determination of essence is non-derivative from what came before it. What this means is that essence is not an “inner nature” or conditioning principle but actively generates new determinations. Secondly, that every new determination, because it is constitutively non-derivative, has the effect of revealing something different about essence, i.e., that it is not a static universal and that every appearance is something new.

¹⁷⁷ Again, it is important to stress that this is just a complicated way of stating that for Hegel there is no transcendent reality. Or to reproduce Wittgenstein’s famous dictum: The world is all that is the case.

¹⁷⁸ This thesis will become much clearer in the next two chapters, but readers will do well to put a pin in it here and keep it mind as we proceed.

¹⁷⁹ Richard Dien Winfield, “The Method of Hegel’s’ *Science of Logic*,” in *Essays on Hegel’s Logic*, p. 50. Emphasis added.

However, as I noted just above by placing the emphasis on double negativity, every expressed *Schein* is just as much a return into itself insofar as the moment of reflection is a coincidence of negativity. As Winfield writes “The self-relation of the negative is, therefore, its return into itself.”¹⁸⁰ Every reality lurking behind the curtain is in essence just the same reality reflected into itself. Thus every positing, or immediate expression of being, is a negativity equal to itself and thus just as much a recollection and presupposition. Hegel amplifies this: “Reflection is the sublation of the negative of itself [*Aufheben des Negativen seiner selbst*], coincidence with itself [*Zusammengehen mit sich*]” continuing that “it therefore sublates its positing and inasmuch as it is in its positing the sublation of positing [*Aufheben des Setzens in ihrem Setzen ist*], it is presupposing” (*SL* p. 347 *GW* 11.251). I made a point of emphasizing this in chapter one, but here again I find the self-reflecting and self-relating language striking. Immediate *Schein* is both posited and mediated by its own reflexivity. *Schein* is posited as an expression of essence insofar as it is immediate and self-equal (i.e. it is an individuated identity); but likewise this immediacy is a result insofar as it always refers back to the reflexivity that generates it as its presupposition. Its immediacy is therefore not simple immediacy, as is the case with *Dasein* in the Doctrine of Being but is rather contextualized immediacy. Accordingly, reflection is, again, double-sided with these two aspects forming the essential moments, if you will, of reflection. One aspect is a generative posited expression, and the other is a presupposed essential ground, and the logic of reflection is the movement, or reflective difference that generates these two sides. This movement coincides with essence (i.e. essence just is this reflective movement).

¹⁸⁰ Ibid.

Let's now summarize the larger metaphysical point being made here. The movement of *Schein* is not just the movement of one something to another something, for every expression from *Schein* is just as equally a return to *Schein*, i.e. another immediate negativity. As Hegel mentioned in the passages above, *Schein* negatively converge, coincide, and reflect one another. In this way, as Hegel says, *Schein* is "self-relating," or self-reflecting. Or, to put it differently, in virtue of its non-immediacy essence negates whatever immediate *Schein* it expresses and reduces the latter to a mere negativity. It is thus utterly self-reflecting or self-sublating, and in this way moves from one immediate *Schein* to another, where this self-reflecting as a movement is the essence. On the one hand "it is self-equality or immediacy" (*SL* p. 347, *GW* 11.250) that immediacy reflects and returns to itself, and thus never goes outside of itself. But on the other hand, the reflection is "the self-equality of the negative [of immediacy], and hence self-negating equality [*sich selbst negierende Gleichheit*]" (*Ibid.*).

Schein is inherently double sided. Every moment of immediacy, or self-identity, is just as much its own destruction in that the essence of its being lies not in its immediacy, but rather in its non-immediate reflexive movement, which in turn is just as much a return to itself (from *Schein* to *Schein*). Each new present is simultaneously a reflection to the non-immediate past. Houlgate amplifies this point writing "The immediacy that arises in this way is not pure and simple immediacy, since it is the result of the self-negating of the negative. The name that Hegel gives to such reflexive immediacy is 'posited being' [*Gesetzsein*]." ¹⁸¹ Think of the example, for instance, of a theater stage and the reality beyond it. The former is meant to represent a staged fictional scene while what is 'really

¹⁸¹ Houlgate, "Essence, Reflexion, and Immediacy in Hegel's *Science of Logic*," pp. 144-145.

real' (i.e. essential) is what is occurs 'behind the scenes.' This is the real-life machinery at work in order to sustain the framed illusion. However in truth, we know very well that what is lying beyond our purview is not some mystical essential realm but is just the same reality that we find on stage. To think Hegelian essence in its proper element, therefore, is to understand that what generates the magical-fictional space of the stage from the essential background that sustains it is a reflexive framing (so to speak), immanent to reality itself, that demarcates the essential reality from its fictional expression (*Schein*) on stage.

I will return to this in greater detail in the next chapter when I introduce Hegel's canonical metaphysical thesis of 'substance-as-subject,' which hopefully readers can see in embryonic form here. But for now, what is most important is to highlight that neither of these aspects, posited immediacy or the presupposed context from which it arises, are external to the process of reflection. This is the position we saw in particular with Henrich, who argued for reflection as a presupposition of something independent of posited being.¹⁸² But this independence is only a second-order phenomenon. We saw this above with the overlapping immediacy and negativity. So in one respect the immediacy of *Schein* comes from its return to itself, or its essential presupposition.¹⁸³ But in another respect the immediacy of *Schein*, because it is determinate and posited, constitutes that from which the movement seems to begin. A presupposition without a determinate positing is not a presupposition of anything and is thus meaningless. The two are therefore simultaneous to each other in that the apparent starting point is negated in the movement of reflection itself. To again conjure up the thinking of history, essence is not a static historical presupposition

¹⁸² This is something we will reaffirm in our discussion of Substance and the coming of the Concept below.

¹⁸³ I.e. the context and relations within which it *becomes* what it is.

or an *a priori* presupposition about the unity of thought but a metaphysical point about how real history is made. Essence actively makes history by itself being made alongside or with determinate historical events. Interpreting things this way allows us to maintain faithfulness to the metaphysical demands Hegel places upon the nature of being from the *Logic's* opening chapter; namely, that it (and reality itself) suffers from an irreducible antagonism that cannot be unified.

2.5 The Emergence of Subjectivity as a Shift in Historical Perspective

Now that we have examined the reciprocal, differentiating movement as a candidate for interpreting essence, I turn to examining the point at which this is made explicit: Hegel's discussion of substance at the end of the Doctrine of Essence, particularly the relationship of substance, cause, and effect. This is where the incipient form of the concept on full display. For Hegel, cause and effect unfold mostly in manner similar to the discussion above. Hegel writes of substance that it "is the totality of the whole and embraces accidentality in itself, and accidentality is the whole substance itself [*Substanz selbst*]" (*SL* p. 491, *GW* 11.395). On this reading essence as substance takes the form of the cause of its effects insofar as it contains them as historical presuppositions. Its unfolding is therefore an expression of its own already potential moments. Accordingly, and because of its nature as absolute totality, substance "manifests itself through the actuality, with the content of the latter into which it translates the possible, as creative power [*schaffende Macht*], and, through the possibility to which it reduces the actual, as destructive power [*zerstörende Macht*]; the creating is destructive and the destructing creative..." (Ibid.). The language of destruction, power, and violence is striking here. The point, though, is rather simply to show us that, from the point of view of reflection as a presupposition the effects of a cause

or the accidents of an essence are purely passive, and in most cases violently so. Put another way, their relationship is entirely asymmetrical in that ‘accidents’ are predetermined in advance and reflected back into their cause.

As I have tried to stress throughout, however, the problem with this view of essence is that it does not appear; at least not in the strong sense in which Hegel intends. Essence, as reflection, is simply the presupposed logical space and historical context, in which effects happen. Hegel writes that “violence is the appearance of power [*die Erscheinung der Macht*], or power as external...To that which suffers violence, therefore, not only is it possible to do violence, but violence must be done to it; that which has dominion over another, only has its power in that of the other...” (SL p. 501, GW 11.406). Yes, it is true that essence moves as a series of effects, as the causal power of ‘effecting.’ But the point is that, from this perspective, it does so through violent imposition. Essence violently imposes upon historical ‘accidents,’ and reflects them back as only moments of its own unfolding.

Hegel argues the primary representative of this view in the history of philosophy is Spinoza’s substance. It seems to me that Hegel’s primary critique is not that Spinoza does not understand essence as activity but more so that essence does not appear. To put it differently, substance serves as a ‘starting point’ and therefore the activity is not generative and reciprocal. As we will see, this is a primary factor for understanding conceptual freedom. He writes,

Differentiation [*Unterschied*] occurs...quite empirically...” (SL p. 333, GW 21.381), continuing that “differentiation falls to the intellect... the connection of the attributes to substance and to each other says no more than that they express the whole of substance, that their content, the order of things as extended and as thoughts, is this same substance. But by the determination of substance as indifference, difference itself now becomes a topic of reflection... namely as an external and therefore, more precisely, a quantitative difference” (Ibid.).

Thus the notion of differentiation (as an activity), namely the self-repelling, self-differentiating nature of reflection will help make this move to appearance explicit.

Even though substance/essence may just be a process of determinate negation, we are still assuming it as a presupposed logical starting point (as in the case of pure past), and this manifests itself historically in that the difference that occurs between essence and its negative unfolding falls externally to essence itself. Namely, this occurs as a violent intrusion in which all contingent historical accidents are caught up in its unfolding. The difference in the relation is not specifically immanent, such that essence itself makes the difference. Instead, the difference is something that must be added externally, for instance an external observer like ourselves. So when Hegel states that difference has become a topic of reflection, he is speaking about external reflection, the kind of reflection of already constituted identities (e.g., determinate beings, somethings and others, positives and negatives, etc.), rather than essential difference which is self-reflexive and self-differentiating.¹⁸⁴ Put more clearly, the worry with this form of essence as a linear movement is that essence and appearance are viewed from the perspective of opposition, where each determination of appearance is merely the “negative” of essence, and where we are thus speaking about quantitative variations of the same thing that are posited by and reflected back into essence itself. As Hegel says, each determination doesn’t stand on its own but merely reflects the whole of essence.

However, as I started outlining in the previous section,¹⁸⁵ it is the very contingency of the accident, the effect, or the immediate *Schein* itself, that betrays this view of essence

¹⁸⁴ We have already introduced this shift in the view of reflection from external reflection to “self-differentiating” reflection in the discussion of positive, negative, and ground. We see it again here, but this time from the angle of essence qua negative linear development.

¹⁸⁵ And which will be a continued topic of importance in the next two chapters.

and opens us up to a new reading of history as Concept. To see this, let's turn directly to the discussion of cause and effect (which, again, occurs within the broader chapter on substance). Hegel writes at the outset that "cause is cause only to the extent that it produces as effect; to be cause is nothing but this determination of having an effect [*Wirkung nichts als dies, eine Ursache zu haben*]" (SL p. 494, GW 11.398). We saw this above: the notion of essence as the 'cause' of immediately posited being *can only be* through that of activity. Even an abstract cause requires an effect and is thus predicated upon a notion of activity or power.¹⁸⁶ Causality is the action of the cause pure and simple, and nothing but this action. Taking this point as primary engenders an immanent shift in our perspective. Up to this point effects were simply the posited accidents, the *Schein* of a presupposed cause. But here, the perspective shifts to the effects in that the effect the very accidental contingency of *Schein*, turns out to be just as much a presupposition as the cause. To explain this, Hegel introduces the terms 'passive' and 'active' substance: "On the one hand...the passive substance is preserved or posited by the active, namely in so far as the latter sublates itself; but, on the other hand, it is the act of the passive substance itself [*das Tun des Passiven selbst*] to rejoin itself and thus make itself into what is ordinary and cause" (SL p. 502, GW 11.406).

The active cause appears at first as a presupposed original site of power, as in a formal essence from which causality emanates. As rooted in power it must act and therefore posit the passive effect that incurs or receives its power. However, the interesting aspect of active power is that it sublates itself simply by being activity. That is, its originality as a presupposition vanishes and is displaced because it can only be expressed in that which is

¹⁸⁶ As in the way, for instance, Spinoza's substance has infinite attributes or powers to act.

totally different from it, namely in its effect. The reappearance of the cause in its effect is therefore not the activity of the original. Rather, it is the activity of the passive effect (it is the act of the passive substance itself to rejoin itself). This is what I mean when I say there is a shift in perspective: what was once only passively posited is in fact presupposed. In the logical activity from A to B the original presupposition is displaced, and the passively subordinate moment becomes cause and retroactively posits itself as its own presupposition: “causality behaves in all this as passive substance; but as we have seen, the latter becomes causal through the effect it incurs...whereby the activity which in finite causality runs into the bad infinite progression is bent around [*umgebogen*] and becomes an action that returns into itself, an infinite reciprocal action [*einem unendlichen Wechselwirken wird*]” (SL p. 503, GW 11.408).

Karen Ng helps put this in perspective, writing that the dichotomy “can no longer be opposed in actuality because actuality is the determination that essence has no determination other than actual existence, and that existence cannot be determined except for as a determination of actual reflection.”¹⁸⁷ Hegel continues, saying that cause and effect “presuppose and that condition each other; each is with respect to the other both active and passive substance.” Thus, “the coming to be of the cause, and hence originariness mediating itself with itself through its negation.”¹⁸⁸ The indication here is that the ‘posited’ effect and the ‘presupposed’ cause are not original. To be clear, effect is not external to cause or vice versa. Instead, it is as if they were staring at each other in the mirror, where the two poles are generated and differentiated out of the very process of reflective activity

¹⁸⁷ Ng, “Hegel’s Logic of Actuality,” in *The Review of Metaphysics*, p. 154

¹⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

itself.¹⁸⁹ There is no essential or historical starting point from which things unfold. Instead cause and effect overlap and immanently reflect one another. Rather, they are generated through their own negation, which is to say their own self-differentiating activity. Note the resonances here, especially with respect to the idea of active differentiation, with the passage from pure being and nothing to determinate being and from Measure to Essence. Angelica Nuzzo amplifies this point as well, writing that “causality no longer needs to presuppose a substrate in which causality inheres and is no longer mere form-determination against the identity with substance.”¹⁹⁰ What “rejoins itself” therefore is not an original cause that subordinates all posited effects. Rather what rejoins itself is nothing other than self-differentiating activity itself. Or to put it differently essence ‘appears’ as its own “self-produced determination” and “its own originality”¹⁹¹

Let’s look at an example of this to close that returns to the idea of historical narrative structure that I briefly mentioned earlier in the chapter. The famous 1992 film *A Few Good Men* starring Tom Cruise and Jack Nicholson presents a classic case of linear, straightforward narrative structure. Specifically, in that the movie begins with a single causal event—the murder of a young U.S. Marine—that forms an essential/historical context from which everything else in the film unfolds. So much so that the film proceeds in perhaps the most predictable manner possible, mirroring in many ways the ‘externally reflective’ view of history in which the pure notion of the past-in-general mediates and contains every unfolding present or ‘effect.’ Indeed, the film is so monotonous in its

¹⁸⁹ To clarify this a bit more, when I look at myself in the mirror I differentiate myself from myself. And it is this reflective-difference activity that determines the two poles. We will explain this in more detail below, as it is an immensely important point for understanding

¹⁹⁰ Angelica Nuzzo, *Approaching Hegel’s Logic, Obliquely* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 2018), p. 160.

¹⁹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 161.

predictability that the characters themselves seem to be in on the joke (in a quite Hegelian postmodern twist): The night before Tom Cruise's dramatic courtroom scene with Jack Nicholson, he tells his friends exactly how the following day will proceed. And it does, just as predicted.

However, there is one critically important reflexive twist at the end. After Nicholson's Colonel Jessup confesses to ordering the murder of the young marine, the two men charged with the crime are assured of a not-guilty verdict. However, as the verdict is read, the court nevertheless finds them guilty of conducting unbecoming a U.S. Marine, and they are ordered to be dishonorably discharged. It is at this point, that the causal chain gets thrown aside in that it is only through and because of this passive effect that the true essence is revealed: namely, that the two defendants realize that they never needed to be U.S. Marines to have honor, courage, etc., and that what they claimed to be fighting for was never really there in the first place. In this moment of realization, the essence appears: the pure historical past of the film is entirely rewritten, reorganized, and cast in a new light in that the passive effect is posited as the presupposed cause, reducing the essential/historical chain to its effect. This is what we meant above by reflexive difference, that cause-effect overlap and immanently reflect one another as moments of a differentiating process—i.e. the historical narrative structure of the film. It is on this basis that essence appears, and on this basis that we get a true sense of history as historical change in the Concept.¹⁹²

¹⁹² That is, history viewed through the lenses of freedom and subjectivity.

CHAPTER 3. THE CONCEPT AND REFLEXIVE DIFFERENCE: HOW DO WE PASS FROM ESSENCE TO THE FREEDOM OF THE CONCEPT?

The next two chapters represent a shift in perspective in the text. We could see the contours begin taking shape in the second half of chapter two and it has two different levels to it. The first level is more immediate and concrete; it involves taking what we've learned from the second half of chapter two to initiate the proper metaphysical framework for understanding the concept. In the Preface to the *Phenomenology of Spirit* Hegel famously referred to this framework as understanding 'substance as subject.' The second level is broader but more important, for it uncovers the specific connection of metaphysics to history that only a proper understanding of the concept can provide, and which will then form the basis of the following two chapters. My explicit discussion of this occurs toward the end of the chapter. Before I get there, however, I want to take a step back into the Doctrine of Essence, especially the category of reflexive difference, in order to show how we arrive at this new understanding.

My view is that the problem of substance encountered at the end of the Doctrine of Essence exemplifies the shift to a new framework for two reasons. One is that, through the reciprocal oscillation of cause and effect, substance encapsulates the high-water mark (if you will) of Essence; specifically, that in the reciprocal opposition between cause-and-effect essence itself appears. Through the form of substance, essence is no longer a detached universality or historical context but instead shows itself explicitly in its effects (i.e. the activity of producing effects). Yet, the primary problem of essence remains, summarized by the following question: How do we pass from the universality of essence

to the freedom (and subjectivity) of the concept?¹⁹³ Asking this question hearkens back to the initial paradox that we've been examining from the beginning. Namely, how to resolve the immanent and primary antagonism contained in being itself.¹⁹⁴ In Essence, various forms of presupposed unity, such as the presupposed unity of consciousness, attempted to answer this question¹⁹⁵ until we arrived at the point where essence (as substance) was understood primarily as an activity of cause and effect. Yet, the framework of activity still remained something of a presupposed unity: that of a presupposed cause operating through its effects. In the study of history this is the idea that history forms an *a priori* universal that contains, insists upon, and colonizes the present. In my view this does not resolve the primary antagonism because by presupposing a unity at the outset, even subconsciously, the *Logic* has the appearance of a dynamic but nevertheless linear unfolding. To me this still leaves the question of freedom still unanswered.

3.1 The Peculiarity of Substance: Changing the Perspective

With this in mind, it is perhaps the best strategy to continue adding to the discussion of substance in order to see for ourselves exactly what this 'perspectival shift' to the concept I mentioned above is and what it entails. Previously, we understood that substance

¹⁹³ To foreshadow this for readers, the answer lies in the recognition of *singularity*, the same notion of singularity that we saw in the beginning with pure being and pure nothing, and again with the category of measureless indifference in the passage from Being to Essence.

¹⁹⁴ Remember, this problem is exacerbated by the simultaneous notion of presupposition.

¹⁹⁵ We have seen this view before exemplified by thinkers such as Robert Pippin, who writes in more technical Hegelian language that the reflective conditions of this ground discloses "the conceptual conditions required for there to be possibly determinate objects of cognition in the first place," where the different perspectives represent these objects. See: Pippin, *Hegel's Idealism: The Satisfaction of Self-Consciousness* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), p. 177, 171, 176. We will also encounter similar views in the next chapter, however from a different perspective, with thinkers like Stanley Rosen who writes of "a totality that can be described as an identity within difference." Rosen, *The Idea of Hegel's Science of Logic* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2014), p. 9.

does not transcend its unfolding as *Schein*. The primary example of this was cause and effect. Specifically, cause did not transcend its effect. Rather, cause and effect formed a reciprocal relationship such that the originally presupposed cause turned out to be just as much dependent upon the subordinate effect, and vice versa.¹⁹⁶ This implication entailed a shift in viewpoint regarding substance and cause. Namely, that substance is not, at least in the first instance, a universal presupposition independent of its effects, but rather something that requires its effects insofar as cause must appear as its effects. This reciprocal relationship was made explicit in the fact that substance is an activity¹⁹⁷ which creates the conditions for the reciprocal sequence of cause and effect. To clarify, we discovered that the emphasis of cause was placed on its ability to produce effects, which is to say, its power, force, or activity. The form of substance, therefore, introduces a new wrinkle into the idea of essence; namely, that essence is defined explicitly by activity, where cause is simultaneously an effect and vice versa.

This is roughly the point where chapter two left off. Yet, we are still left with a problem of presupposition, namely, that a shift in the definition of essence to activity does not necessarily rule it out. For example, in the notion of cause, we could just as easily think of a universal cause as a presupposition that actively repeats itself continuously in its effects. Let's continue to examine this point. It seems to me that the clearest evidence comes from the peculiar way in which previously subordinate and contingent moment of effects turn out in fact to be just as much a necessary presupposition as the originally thought cause insofar as the notion of cause just is the activity of 'effecting', of producing

¹⁹⁶ The turn toward an irreducible reciprocity in cause and effect is an important idea to flag because it places the emphasis of the irreducible difference between the two, while at the same time framing this difference in terms of activity.

¹⁹⁷ Or what Hegel calls "power."

effects. What this reveals is the immanent antagonism we've been tracking from the beginning, now appearing within substance/cause itself. Specifically, that substance is bifurcated into what Hegel calls the 'active' substance of cause and the 'passive' substance of effect in which such causal activity appears. I discussed this briefly in the previous chapter, but it's worthwhile to give a more in-depth explanation here. The former is the 'being-for-itself' of substance—i.e. that of active expression—while the latter represents the 'being-in-itself', or powerless effect. Hegel writes that

The active substance is cause [*Ursache*]; it acts [*wirkt*]; this means that it is now a positing, just as before it was a presupposing, that power is also given the reflective shine of power, positedness also the reflective shine of positedness ... The cause brings about an effect. But it does so in another substance, and it is now power with reference to another [*in Beziehung auf ein Anderes*]; it thus appears as cause but is cause only by virtue of this appearing [*Erscheinen*] (*SL* p. 510, *GW* 12.13).

This passage highlights the reciprocal nature of cause and effect. In the cause-effect relationship cause is essential and presupposed. It is presupposed because it acts. In order for this active substance to have a constituted identity, i.e. for it to be the essential presupposition, it must act.¹⁹⁸ Its sole purpose is this activity, and the activity is the translation of the power of the cause into an effect that receives it.

But even more importantly, the active power must be expressed (i.e. it must 'show up') in its total opposite, the effect. Interestingly, therefore, power, positing, and/or activity is equally given to reflection. The active power is only constituted as presupposed identity, reflectively and after the fact. In other words, from the point of view of an effect. It is only from the reflected and opposite point of view that the activity of cause is 'cause' in the presupposed sense of the term. Because of this twist, namely that the presupposed power can in fact only be expressed as its opposite, the initial power/cause is only a presupposition

¹⁹⁸ What the passage refers to as positing.

contingently and retroactively, by virtue of appearing as a posited effect. Moving forward, the critical point is to show that every initial presupposed identity is just as equally a subordinate effect, and that what we took to be the original and necessary cause is only something contingently posited after the fact.

Accordingly, the relationship of cause and effect is actually one of irreducible reciprocity: “it is the cause that posits itself in the place of the passive substance” (Ibid.). In short, the two sides, cause and effect overlap and reflect one another; and the constitution of cause and effect as stable identities opposed to one another is only an effect of the irreducible reciprocal movement. This specific aspect of the logic of reflection, the aspect focused on the activity of differentiation, is what highlights the primordial antagonism inherent to being itself. Accordingly, the emphasis is placed neither on an original ‘essence’—in this case substance or cause—nor its subordinate moments, but on the immanent activity that differentiates them. This is where our perspective has been shifted entirely away from the idea of presupposition and the back-and-forth opposition of cause and effect to that of activity.

Hegel calls this activity “self-referring negativity [*sich auf sich beziehende Negativität*],” (SL p. 511, GW 12.13) a negativity only referred to, or related to, itself and hence a purely logical form of displacement.¹⁹⁹ In the previous chapter, I introduced the term ‘reflexive difference’ to mirror this primordial antagonism, but it is still for us to establish and to show the reader what this antagonism is. More specifically, the thesis of this chapter is that understanding the proper passage from essence to concept hinges on establishing this specific kind of differentiating or displacing activity (i.e. self-referring

¹⁹⁹ Again, I want to stress the resonance here with the form of displacement we saw with being and nothing in the first chapter of the *Logic*.

negativity and/or reflexive difference). However, my view is that doing this work also requires a rethinking of the manner in which we conceive of essence. This is a reference to the shift to a different framework mentioned in the introduction. Particularly, in highlighting the activity of ‘self-referring negativity’ or ‘reflexive difference,’ it requires us to rethink essence as it develops away from presupposition and universality and toward singularity.²⁰⁰ I argue that this occurs in essence itself, and once it is made explicit allows us to engage the structure of the concept directly. The remainder of the chapter is therefore dedicated to exploring the interrelated ideas of reflexive difference and singularity in essence (insofar the one contributes to the other) for the purposes of framing the freedom and subjectivity of the concept. Once we have established this, we can then move to a more in-depth discussion of the structure of the concept itself, and how this structure supports a unique discussion of history.

3.2 Introduction to the Concept: From Universality to Singularity and Reflexive Difference

Making the connection of substance to freedom requires that we make explicit the aspect of singularity brought by reflexive difference that occurs within the Doctrine of Essence. Specifically, that singularity introduces a sense of real historical contingency proper to the freedom of the concept. So, before diving headfirst into a discussion of substance-as-subject I think it would be a fruitful to take a few steps back in order to build up to this idea. The first thing to do is more fully articulate Hegel’s category of ‘self-referring negativity,’ what I’ve also termed ‘reflexive difference,’ that I just articulated in

²⁰⁰ Where self-referring negativity and/or reflexive difference is the key element of singularity.

substance but is something we find building throughout the Doctrine of Essence. One of the more important ideas in transitioning from essence to the concept is that there is no universal or essential presupposition, at least not in the traditional sense of the term. This is specifically the case as it pertains to the relationship between essence and *Schein*.

The question before us, then, is how freedom is related to reflexive difference. At the end of the previous chapter, we explored how by the closing of the Doctrine of Essence Hegel defined essence specifically as force or power.²⁰¹ In the preliminary discussion above, I stressed an important shift in perspective with regard to essence and reflection. Namely, that essence is not a historical progression of a presupposition that unfolds in the structure of immediate being (*Schein*). Rather, the true ‘essence of essence’ is (differentiating) activity, which, translated into the language of essence, is nothing but the activity of *Schein* itself.²⁰² That is, the hard and fast oppositions of the form essence-appearance, part-whole, cause-effect, history-actuality found in the Doctrine of Essence are not external reflections but are instead revelatory of an immanent and fundamental antagonism of essence with itself.²⁰³ Houlgate highlights this subtle shift, stating that the move entails a shift from essence’s own expression or the expression of essence itself to understanding essence as “nothing but the very process of seeming itself...it is the very process of seeming.”²⁰⁴ We saw this in the conclusion of the *A Few Good Men* example in which a subordinate, accidental ‘effect’ of the film’s essential narrative became the

²⁰¹ In the form of substance as activity.

²⁰² As Houlgate writes, “essence comes to be understood...as that which *itself* appears in the guise of immediate being. [*Schein*] immediate being, or seeming, ceases thereby to be something distinct from essence and comes to be seen as essences *own* seeming.” Houlgate, “Essence, Reflexion, and Immediacy in Hegel’s *Science of Logic*,” p. 141.

²⁰³ Readers will recall that this was what the entire discussion of substance was about.

²⁰⁴ Houlgate, “Essence, Reflexion, and Immediacy in Hegel’s *Science of Logic*,” p. 141.

essential moment and thus radically reconstituted the entire narrative. What this introduced was a fundamental asymmetry and discontinuity to essence. The implication being that there was no presupposed essence in the first place; instead, essence just was the reflective differentiation of the narrative moments.

Reflexive difference is meant to clarify and build upon this idea. What reflexive difference draws on as its motivating source is, again, the resonance to the paradox of pure being from the *Logic*'s opening chapter as a movement of purely logical difference.²⁰⁵ That is why Hegel constantly refers to it with terms like 'self-repelling' and 'self-negating.' This resonance is worth expanding upon here briefly, if only because it demonstrates the primary metaphysical point that forms the explicit characterization of the concept. Hegel writes at the beginning of the Doctrine of Essence that "Being is the absolute abstraction; this negativity is not something external to it, but being is rather being and nothing but being, only as this absolute negativity. Because of its negativity, being is only as self-sublated being and is essence. But, conversely, essence as simple self-equality is likewise being (*SL* p. 418, *GW* 11.323). This short passage makes the definitive connection between the nature of 'pure' essence and the nature of pure being. Specifically, that both are singularities.²⁰⁶ Looking at the passage, we notice that pure being and pure essence are universals contracted to a single point; they are themselves alone and nothing else and are therefore self-sublating.²⁰⁷ Like pure being, essence is a singularity that excludes all else.

²⁰⁵ To clarify, all I mean by this that determinate reality unfolds in terms of linear difference/opposition, whereas the difference here is *reflexive* and *self-repelling*. In fact, it is this reflexive difference that *freely* individuates determinate temporal differences.

²⁰⁶ Above, we discussed for several pages the singular, or singularity, aspect of the concept, and we return to that thought here with being and essence.

²⁰⁷ Put more concretely, the basic idea of a singularity is that it is an active and destructive power that negates literally everything else. Such-and-such is this and only this.

When we consider the meaning of phrases like ‘essence of the things,’ we are considering things contracted to a singular ‘essential’ point that leaves aside all else as inessential. Taken from the side of particularity, it is the universality that ties together a structured unity. But when we turn the tables to focus just on the universality itself, i.e. the ‘essence of things’, what we are considering is the essential singular point that is itself and only itself. In its singularity it contains an immanent reflexive difference. It is this singular difference that is posited and asserted as the essence that makes the difference of all particular determinations.

Accordingly, as opposed to an external and mediating negativity—such as a universal that contains and reflects its particular determinations—this negativity is self-negativity. It is a constitutive factor of singularity as such. Singularity, therefore, is self-reflexive and self-differentiating insofar as it does not relate to anything but itself and therefore differs from itself as an activity of differentiating. Essence and being represent an ‘in-itself’ difference; a purely logical activity of ‘differencing,’ of making difference(s). In more concrete terms, what we see from the passage is that pure being and essence, taken as singularities, constantly turn themselves inside out. Being is self-sublating and so it is essence, and vice versa. The implication is the logical resonance between the pure immediacy of being and pure essence, specifically around the notions of reflexivity, difference, and singularity. The more forceful assertion, therefore, is that once we come to this conclusion, we begin to understand the passage from universality to singularity through the category of reflexive difference.

A basic example of this is the universal essence of the (political) state. One way to think about it is to extract from concrete particular states the universal concept of ‘state-as-

such.’ From this point of view, each particular state is externally reflected back into the pure concept that contains them. From a certain historical perspective, each of the particular states is always already presupposed by the universal essence of ‘The state,’ such that each particular instantiation of different states throughout history is just the unfolding of this universal. The reading presented here, though, is to filter (so to speak) all of the particular states as if through a convergent lens that brings them to a single point, similar to that of a pure white light or white noise.²⁰⁸ In this case, it is the metaphor of the pure white light/noise in the example that makes the category of reflexive difference stand out because it is meant to evoke not the universality of the state but its singularity. The state contracted to a single point that excludes all else. Accordingly, it is the convergence to a single point—the pure singularity of the state—that makes the difference in each particular state stand out insofar as the reflexive difference of singularity just is this difference making activity. Each particular expression of the state fails to achieve the true universality of the State as such. It is ontologically different. But this ontological difference is not an external difference; it exists as an expression of the concepts own self-differentiation. The individual expressions of color are actualizations in succession with this continuous principle of reflexive difference.

To put the same thing in a different way, the idea of the state has the form of a problem-solution complex, where the essential-universal state takes the form of a problem that each particular state, from ancient Greek republics to absolute monarchs to Islamic theocracy to liberal democracy, attempts to solve as the highest form of the ‘state’. The interpretive twist I’m proposing is that such a structure (problem-solution) is not just a

²⁰⁸ That is, where the essential-universal ‘State-as-such’ is analogous to white light or noise.

taxonomy of states, but that each actual state retroactively redefines the problem itself, such that it is irreducible. That is, the problem is not just an epistemological question—how do we solve the problem of the state?—but is an ontological one: that reality itself is problematic. As Žižek puts it: “actual reality can only be grasped as a series of answers to a virtual problem.”²⁰⁹ Which is to say that essential-universal concept is inherently ‘problematic’ insofar as it engenders a singularity that is self-differentiating.

Now that we have an example to work with, I want to continue briefly unpacking the categories of singularity and reflexive difference. Hegel continues with his explication on the opening page of the Doctrine of Essence, stating “immediately, one is forced to the reflection that this pure being, this negation of everything finite, presupposes a recollection and a movement which has distilled immediate existence into pure being” (*SL* p. 337, *GW* 11.241). Pairing the point Hegel makes in this passage with the example of the state gives us two interesting conclusions that are simultaneous to one another. One is that, since pure being is the negation of everything finite, there is nothing ‘external’ to it insofar as a particular thing’s being (in this case, a particular instance of the state) stands for its essence and identity so that the concrete particulars are always already mediated by their essence. It is not as though there exists a transcendent state beyond the essential mediation of the state-as-such, or the state-in-itself; if there were, such a ‘state’ would not be a state at all. It would be unintelligible, similar in stature to the bad form of infinity that we discussed in chapter one.

The second conclusion I want to highlight is that this essential unity, the unity of states, is immanently and fundamentally distorted. As the passage above suggests, pure

²⁰⁹ Žižek, *Less Than Nothing*, p. 215.

being presupposes a reflective (recollection) movement. That is, as an abstracting and contracting movement. In reflecting upon the nature of something, we contract it to a single point, leaving the remainder behind as free from reflection. It becomes detached and acquires a free existence of its own apart from its conceptual mediation. As Hegel put it, it ‘distills immediate existence into pure being’. So, on one side we have the full autonomization, or ‘freedom’ of particularity. This second movement has to do with the essential-universal itself. Here is where the resonance between of pure being and essence is most explicit. Specifically, their resonance with each other as singularities through the idea of reflection (recollection).

If we take this point about reflection vis-à-vis contraction seriously, what is noticed from Hegel’s passage is the simultaneity with which recollection, which is to say reflection or essence,²¹⁰ and the sheer immediacy of being are intertwined. In fact, they directly overlap: the sheer expression of being is immanently and simultaneously reflective, or recollective. This immanent simultaneity is what I mean by reflexive difference in that by reflecting itself it must differentiate from itself. There is an inherent logical antagonism that is expressed as a logical activity: the act of differentiating. This is essentially what I mean when I say that essence is subjectivized (or free) as a singularity. It is contracted to a single essential point, its unity is that of an activity—where subjectivity and activity go together—of differentiation. To restate the conclusion of the state example, what the essence represents is not the presupposed universal feature or historical context of all states (at least not in the first instance). Rather, the historical ground is generated contingently and simultaneously to its unfolding like an activity of autopoiesis. More strongly, therefore,

²¹⁰ Recall this from the discussion in the previous chapter where we learned that essence *just is* a movement of reflection.

the failure of each particular state—or *Schein* to use the language of essence—to be the universal. All particular states are doomed to a flawed and finite existence, and thus could never be the ‘essential State as such.’ But this just is the whole point to the ‘essential’ State. It is contracted to a singular point of its own logical self-differentiating, and it is this activity that makes the essential difference between historical expressions of particular states. Catherine Malabou amplifies this point, writing “formally speaking, freedom, [is] the concept's absolute negativity or self-identity.”²¹¹

Rebecca Comay and Frank Ruda also help make this point clear to us in a passage that is worth quoting at length

Hegelian mediation has nothing to do with middle terms or intermediaries: every mediator or middle term has already vanished...Whenever there is a conflict between competing particular claims to the universal, mediation does not consist in finding a mutually agreeable arrangement whereby each side learns to understand and accommodate the other’s position. On the contrary, it is a matter of sharpening the antagonism to the point where the formal framework of the conflict shatters. This introduces a fundamental asymmetry into what would otherwise be a paralyzing impasse...In the face of an impossible decision one must opt for one side only—namely the side that forces us to completely change the parameters of the original decision.²¹²

Understanding this point, especially Comay and Ruda’s emphasis on free choice, is critical for understanding the point I am discussing in this chapter: how the freedom of the concept arises. Specifically, that in the Doctrine of Essence we encounter a fundamental asymmetry or antagonism in that what is meant to be the essential presupposition in fact turned out to be only posited expression, while what was initially the inessential effect retroactively became presupposed. The conclusion, of course, being the realization that neither the essential universal, nor the accidental particular effect (*Schein*) are fundamental. Rather,

²¹¹ Catherine Malabou, *The Future of Hegel: Plasticity, Temporality, and Dialectic* trans. by Lisabeth During (London: Routledge, 2005), p. 160.

²¹² Rebecca Comay and Frank Ruda, *The Dash—The Other Side of Absolute Knowing* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2018), pp. 12-13.

what is fundamental is the asymmetry that is inherent to this picture, what I've referred to as the reflexive difference that is immanent to essence as such, that freely expresses and individuates each side of the dichotomy. On this reading essence appears, but not as a presupposed universal that contains and reflects all particularity. Instead, it appears as an instantiation in reality of this fundamental logical asymmetry.

3.3 Reflexive Difference and the Generation of the Concept: The Movement of *Schein*

What I'd like to do now is take the major themes discussed in the chapter so far and examine them specifically as, or within, the activity of reciprocal movement of *Schein*. The purpose of this examination is to make the categories of singularity, reflective differentiation, contingency, and subjectivity explicit to the point where we can see the emerging outline of the concept, allowing us to then present the discussion of substance as subject. Put more clearly, if we can clearly see essence as represented by the immanent reflexive difference of *Schein* itself, then we can see what exactly it means to say that essence, or substance, is subjectivized.²¹³ Let's begin by examining one of Hegel's most cryptic passages. He writes that "In essence, therefore, the becoming, the reflective movement of essence, is the movement from nothing to nothing and thereby back to itself" (*SL* p. 346. *GW* 11.250). Immediately following, Hegel gives us some additional information: "the other which comes to be in this transition [movement from nothing to

²¹³ To foreshadow what is coming for readers, this is what, for me institutes the shifting in framework of metaphysics embodied by the question referenced from Hegel: What must being, or a world, be like for a free entity that I will tackle at the end of the chapter. My wager throughout has been that to answer this question required a different understanding of essence, namely substance-as-subject rooted in an activity of difference, which once we have done so means we have passed to the concept

nothing] is not the non-being of a being, but the nothingness of a nothingness, and this, to be the negation of a nothingness, constitutes being” (Ibid.).

According to all common sense, this passage represents the peak of meaningless Hegelian wordplay. However, it is critical to the current discussion because in examining what Hegel means by ‘nothing’, and how ‘nothingness’ can be a movement we equally learn about the emergence of singularity out of essence. Notice the peculiarity in Hegel’s distinction and shift from ‘being and non-being’ to ‘nothingness.’ The former is an implication of the movement in the Doctrine of Being, where being is defined by fluctuating immediacy without structure and consistency. By the time we reach essence, though, being is *Schein*; it is inessential and nothing in itself. What appears is only seems to be the case while what is ‘really real’ is what is essential. So, when Hegel talks about the movement of essence being the ‘nothingness of a nothingness’ what he means is ‘the seeming of a seeming,’ or the ‘immediacy (*Schein*) of an immediacy (*Schein*).’ The implication therefore that immediate seeming overlaps, i.e. it is the *Schein* of a *Schein*. *Schein* expressed and determined as such.

The most important point in the movement “from nothing to nothing,” is that we are speaking about a movement that is immanent to *Schein* itself, and is propelled by a purely logical principle of self-reflection and self-differentiation of *Schein* itself. Hegel writes “Being is only as the movement of nothingness to nothingness, and so it is essence; and this essence does not have this movement in itself, but the movement is rather the absolute *Schein* itself” (*SL* p. 346, *GW* 11.250). He continues, writing that “it is not that there is a *Schein* of being in essence, or a *Schein* of essence in being: the *Schein* in the essence is not the *Schein* of an other but is rather *Schein* as such, the *Schein* of essence

itself” (Ibid.). In examining these passages we can see that what constitutes the “essence of essence” (to put it clumsily) is self-reflected nothingness. Let me clarify this. The immediacy of being, reality, the world, *Schein*, etc. are the nothing of essence. That is, from the perspective of essence, *Schein* is an immediate being,²¹⁴ an appearance, or what seems to be the case. Accordingly, because it is immediate seeming, the “otherness” that is indicative of *Schein* with respect to essence is evidence of its fleeting or unsubstantial nature: “immediate non-existence...the pure determinateness of immediacy” (*SL* p. 342, *GW* 11.246).

Taken all together Hegel indicates two important attributes of *Schein* from the three passages in the previous paragraph. One is that *Schein* is pure seeming immediacy and lacks substantial existence. But the second is that *Schein* is immediacy determined as such: “it is the non-self-subsistent which exists only in its negation” (Ibid.). *Schein* therefore is not just immediate ‘seeming’ in the negative sense of the term as something utterly inconsequential. This particular idea is difficult to grasp, but breaking it down, we can see the basis of Hegel’s point. *Schein*, as immediate seeming, is “non-self-subsistent” in relation to essence. *Schein* is therefore latent with an immanent double-negativity: in one respect mere seeming is nothing. But in another respect, seeming exists only to be, or be determined as this nothingness. The existence of seeming is to be its own negation or seeming (‘nothingness’) as seeming (determined as such). What this is meant to indicate, therefore, is an immanent reflexive and differential element to *Schein*. That is, there is an immanent reflexive difference between immediate seeming and its determination as such. As Hegel explains *Schein* “is as reflected immediacy, that is, one which is only by virtue

²¹⁴ Hegel says in point blank terms: “Being is *Schein*,” *The Science of Logic*, p. 342, 11.246.

of the mediation of its negation” (Ibid.). What the notion of reflection that we’ve been exploring throughout the chapter amplifies is the structure and movement of *Schein*. Namely that *Schein*, in a manner of speaking, mirrors itself, is self-different, and it repels itself from itself.

3.3.1 Interlude: Identity and Essential Difference

Accordingly, the implication of the discussion thus far is that there is an immanent self-relation and self-reflexivity of *Schein* from itself.²¹⁵ To use a very simply analogy, it is as if *Schein* were looking at itself in the mirror and is thus both a self-mediation and a self-differentiation. The logical self-reflexivity and self-differentiation of *Schein* from itself is just the same way that the person staring back at you in the mirror is not a limitation by another (i.e. non-being) but reveals your own self-negation and differentiation. It is this immanent self-reflective differentiation of *Schein* itself that individuates immediate being. One of the best expressions of ‘logical reflexive difference,’ is found in the first and most important determinations of essence, identity and difference. Identity and difference are peculiar amongst the determinations of essence, in that they help us more clearly understand the current discussion regarding reflexive difference. Namely, how and why essence appears, and why this forms the freedom of the concept.²¹⁶ Therefore, I want to take a brief digression into these categories before and then take what we’ve learned back to the main conversation.

²¹⁵ To state this explicitly: to be the ‘*Schein* of a *Schein*’ is to be self-reflexive.

²¹⁶ To be specific about this, my idea is that identity and difference belong to what we called above the purely logical aspect of essence. Identity and difference help us understand reflection and essence proper, which *then* take the form of appearance of diversity, opposition, and contradiction. Put another way, identity and difference operate at the logical/virtual register while diversity, opposition, and contradiction operate at the level of determination.

Essence is determined in *Schein* first as identity and then as difference. Something is essentially the kind of thing that it is by being identical to itself and different from other things. Longuenesse interprets identity as the key determination of essence. Specifically, she references the “self-identity of reflection”²¹⁷ that totalizes each of the “differences” it finds within itself. On this point she quotes Hegel directly: “This identity is...reflection in its entirety” (*SL* p. 357, *GW* 11.261). As it turns out, I agree with Longuenesse’s reference here but for a different reason, as we will see. To state the question in a straightforward manner: how is it that singular, reflective difference instantiates the two most important qualities of essence, namely that determinate entities are self-identical—they ‘are what they are’—and therefore different from other things? It seems to me the best way to approach identity and difference is to continue in the manner of looking at things universally in order to show their singularity. Examples Hegel gives of universal/essential identity are propositions like “A=A,” “Everything is equal to itself,” “A cannot be A and not-A at the same time,” and “Everything has an existence” (*SL* p. 354, *GW* 11.258-259).²¹⁸ However, what is interesting about such statements is that they are universal and singular, and thus they are self-referring identities. When we say something like A is A (the law of identity) we are uttering a tautology. From the point of view of reflection, the second A is just the immediacy of the first A restated. It is simply the statement and restatement of the same thing.

Let’s give a further example. When we look at any statement of identity such as ‘the law is the law,’ nothing is distinguished on the surface. It is a statement of pure self-

²¹⁷ Longuenesse, p. 54.

²¹⁸ In some ways, this underscores what authors like Longuenesse say about essence and reflection, in which Hegel is attempting to deduce the essential unity of thinking that is meant to ground being. That is, these essential laws are what *make* something what it is.

identity. That is, for identity to be at all, to be essentially what it is and have an identity, it must at the very least it must be self-identity. For instance, we do not say “law,” as if simply stating the term gives us identity. In order to establish this identity it must be determined, which requires a repetition of ‘the law.’ But what is most intriguing from the Hegelian perspective is that by simply by doing this, this supposed self-identity reveals a reflexive difference of the law from itself that is immanent to its very structure. Put differently, in order for the essence of ‘the law’ to show itself it must be determined as a *Schein*. The essential ‘law’ must be expressed in being as the law. But in order for the expression to occur, the identity of the law must already be reflectively different from itself. In the first instance, neither side—the universal identity nor its determination—is presupposed. We do not have a presupposed essential identity that is then concretely expressed. Instead, there is an immanent antagonism and both sides—the essential and the determination—are generated from the same process.

Let me continue clarifying this. Insofar as we are speaking about a universal judgment of identity—the law is the law—the process being referred to is not the external difference of something from another, as in one law from another law. Instead we are speaking about the law itself, which reveals an immediate and reflexive difference. Hegel explains this for us in two dense passages, writing that it is a “difference that vanishes as soon as it arises, or a distinguishing by with nothing is distinguished but which immediately collapses within itself” (*SL* p. 357, *GW* 11.261). Hegel continues, writing that “distinguishing is present as self-referring...it is this repelling as immanent reflection.”²¹⁹ In taking these two statements together, the critical implication is that identity is not an *a*

²¹⁹ Ibid.

priori starting point but rather must be determined,²²⁰ or better yet, it must emerge and be individuated. In a bare statement of identity such as the ‘law is the law,’ there is an immanent distinguishing occurring here within identity. In order for the self-identity or essence of the law to be determined it must distinguish itself from itself. In other words, it must actively reflect, repel, or differentiate itself from itself, and it is on the basis of this activity that identity emerges.

Taking a step back now, the basic point is that before we can even speak about essence in terms of universal unity or identity, we must look to the prior purely reflexive difference that generates the former.²²¹ More importantly, this is not at the external level of opposition but speaks more to the shift in perspective to singularity and activity. Hegel writes that “This difference is difference in and for itself, absolute difference, the difference of essence—It is difference in and for itself, not difference through something external, but self-referring, hence simple [singular] difference” (*SL* p. 361, *GW* 11.226). Let’s look at the mirror example again that I began the section with. More specifically, the peculiar way in which looking at yourself in the mirror can effect a great perspectival shift in the way you see yourself. When I look at myself in the mirror, I do not pass over ‘beyond’ myself to an external ‘otherness.’²²² The other in the mirror is an other, the image is just a determination of me, or it is me repeated as an immediate *Schein* of myself. This expression is not an abstraction, it is an expression of myself as an expression. What occurs is merely

²²⁰ i.e. as a determination of reflection.

²²¹ This is to say, again, the reflexive difference, as essence, is a purely logical difference. The implication is that, on this reading, what we think of as what is *essential*—i.e. the necessary presupposition that structures and organizes immediate being—is something that is itself constituted with immediate being itself. It is being’s own *self*-organization, based on a principle of difference.

²²² In the same way that we noted above that substance does not pass over ‘beyond’ into subjectivity. In other words, we do not start with a presupposition of substance that then progresses into subjectivity.

a reflection of myself back upon me, like a boomerang returning in flight. What this uncovers, since both sides of the reflection are “me,” is that there is an immanent reflexive difference inherent to the immediacy. This reflexive difference has the tendency of instantiating a non-immediate and reflective perspectival shift that deconstructs my essential “self” as previously thought. Perhaps I notice in the mirror that I appear to have lost weight, or that I’ve appeared to age ten years over night, or that I realize that my hair is suddenly going grey, etc.

Hegel writes therefore that “More is entailed, therefore, in the form of the proposition expressing identity than simple, abstract identity... “A is” is a beginning that envisages a something different before it to which the “A is” would proceed; but the “A is” never gets to it. “A is . . . A” ...it constitutes the difference that seems to associate itself by accident” (*SL* p. 360, *GW* 11.265). This “more” that Hegel references just is the primordial difference that turns out to be constitutive of positive, determinate identity. In the mirror example the expression of myself is a particular determination, or an immediacy, is meant to be grounded by the essence. But what such a determination actually reveals is a reflexive difference that individuates this higher order opposition of the essence and its expression in the first place. That is, there is no substantial identity from which I start or from which I unfold; this only comes after the fact.

The point therefore is that there is an immanent and singular reflexive difference, singular in the sense that the difference is between myself and myself, that marks a perspectival shift in which my “essential” self—i.e. my presupposed self—is continuously disintegrated and reemerges.²²³ The primary stress is not placed on either side of the

²²³ Hegel writes therefore that “The immediacy that the determinateness has in *Schein* over against essence is thus none other than essence's own immediacy.” *The Science of Logic*, p. 344, 11.248.

equation: either myself as a presupposed identity, essence, or cause, of my external expression or determination. The appearance in the mirror is just that: a fleeting image on the surface. But in the same way, what we realize is that the non-immediate, presupposed essence was never really ‘there’ to begin with either. Each of these are only individuated “moments.” Instead, the stressed is placed on reflexive difference. That is, the essence appears in the moment of reflexive difference itself; the essence is in the moment of perspectival shift that instantiates the change. Hegel underscores this in the following passage, “the immediacy of reflection...in producing itself as unity, does not produce itself over again, as from another, but is a pure production, from itself and in itself, essential identity” (SL p. 356, GW 11.260). Note Hegel’s emphasis on production, specifically that production is a movement.²²⁴ It is not that the essential determinations of identity and difference stand beside one another externally as *a priori* “universal laws.”²²⁵ Nor do these essential determinations of ‘pass over’ or ‘sublate’ one another in the sense that we start from a unity of identity and then pass into a determination of difference, for this invokes a teleological aspect to reflection that is simply not there. Instead of this, the point is that these determinations are individuated by “a pure production” of logical reflexivity and differentiation.²²⁶

²²⁴ Basically, that production requires a principle of activity.

²²⁵ That is, as a self-contained law of identity next to a self-contained law of difference, as if we were making a list of *a priori* laws of thought.

²²⁶ Hegel is quite explicit about this, stating that those who insist “that identity is not difference but that the two are different. They do not see that in saying, “*Identity is different* from difference,” they have thereby already said that *identity is something different*.” (SL p. 356, GW 11.260). Identity and difference emerge and differentiate from one another as individuated determinations of a purely logical reflexive difference.

3.3.2 Logical Difference as Immanent to Temporal Reality

Let's return now to the larger conversation regarding the immanence of reflexive difference to essence and *Schein*. There are several important implications revealed from the interlude on identity and difference. One is that the activity of *Schein*, or the activity of essence, reenforces and makes explicit the same point we began the chapter with. Namely, that it shifts our metaphysical framework away from the idea of essence as a presupposed unity that either unfolds itself in history—where history is just the natural, progressive unfolding of the essences of things—or the essential feature that historically subsumes things into totalities, simply because the expressed identity of any such point is always already constituted by an immanent self-reflexive difference. The principle of logical difference is immanent to the temporal-historical unfolding, and this purely logical move is what generates the contextual space for determinate being to concretely and historically emerge.

It is this insight concerning reflexive difference as immanent to the movement of *Schein* itself that reconnects us to our point regarding substance as the final form of essence. From the perspective of essence, being just is the movement of immediacy to immediacy (or nothing to nothing). Without the reflection/distortion of the 'mere seeming' of *Schein* the essence is meaningless. Thus, the specifically Hegelian point to make here, and what the example(s) above make clear, is that it takes this first surface level distortion or 'failure' in order to render the essence visible to us. Or put differently, the distortion does not cause the essence, but without the distorted appearance then the essence is nothing. An analogy here is the auto-normalization, or self-ordering of chaos. It is not as though there is no essential structure. Rather it that this structure is constantly constituted and reconstituted

by the freely generated process of reflexive difference itself. Importantly, then, what this tells us is that the distinction between essence and being, in the form of an opposition in which essence structures being, is a result of a more primordial antagonism. Namely, a purely logical singular difference, different in kind from opposition (i.e. difference as the activity of differentiation) that freely individuates and sustains them. This circles back, again, to the primary feature of this chapter: to understand the passage from essence to the freedom of the concept we are required to re-frame our understanding of essence from universality to singularity.

Put differently, in seeing things this way the reciprocal opposition between essence and *Schein* that is sustained at the level of concrete, structured reality is generated by purely logical antagonism located at the heart of this reality that shifts the focus away from the static nature of objects in space to that of immediacies and generative processes where history is discontinuous and self-individuating (i.e. free). George Di Giovanni explains this well, writing that “We must remember that reflection is a self-becoming, or a becoming which achieves self-identity precisely inasmuch as it persists as becoming...If reflection persists indeed as a self-becoming, it persists only as an appearing.”²²⁷ Di Giovanni’s point here is an important one, particularly for the manner in which he ties the essence or identity of ‘self’ to the explicit notion of differentiation. There is no presupposed essential ‘self’, it is generated after the fact by a principle of difference. In other words, the universal or essential self only coincides with, or is individuated after, differentiating activity. As a second related point, this shifts the focus away from an opposition of universality (essence) and particularity (*Schein*). Rather, what is made explicit is the persistent activity that

²²⁷ George di Giovanni, “Reflection and Contradiction: A Commentary on Some Passages of Hegel’s *Science of Logic*,” *Hegel-Studien*, Vol. 8 (1973), p. 147.

distributes this opposition in the first place.²²⁸ To give another brief example, think of the case in physics about a photon with no mass. In distinction from an ordinary particle whose mass grows via acceleration, a photon has no mass outside of its acceleration. Its entire mass is the result of its acceleration, in a manner of speaking, its activity. In a certain sense, then, the mass of the photon is based on differential activity in that it is always already different from itself in that it reflects and repels itself from itself. It is discontinuous insofar as the mass of the photon is only presupposed after the fact.²²⁹

Let's look at one more example to conclude, one that demonstrates the kind of reciprocal, self-repelling, free activity discussed here. A classic example comes from Oscar Wilde's famous novel *The Portrait of Dorian Gray*. In the book, artist Basil Hallward is infatuated by the youth and beauty of Dorian Gray, who Hallward believes is responsible for the new artistic mood he has acquired. Hallward attempts to capture this quintessential beauty by painting a full-length portrait of Dorian. While sitting for the painting Dorian meets Lord Henry Wotton. Through listening and conversing with Wotton, Dorian becomes enthralled with his own beauty and Wotton's excessive lifestyle. He convinces himself that the only life worth living is that of the hedonistic libertine who indulges every passion and pleasure in pursuit of beauty and vitality.

As it turns out, Dorian's lifestyle is bought and paid for with a perfectly reflexive Hegelian twist. In order to pursue such a life, it is revealed that Dorian has sold his soul, so to speak, so that his beautiful may portrait age and fade while he stays young and beautiful. Thus, while Dorian satiates in every decadent fantasy, the portrait records every

²²⁸ This point will be reinforced in greater detail

²²⁹ And thus the essential 'timelessly past being' (to use Hegel's terminology) is open ended and subject to reconstitution.

sin. For us, the key to the Hegelian twist, comes in understanding the peculiar role played by the portrait. As a portrait it is merely a representation of the actual Dorian. Like the mirror example, the portrait is a repetition or a movement of an “appearance of an appearance,” to use Hegelian language. But in a different sense, the portrait does not operate at the same level as the actual Dorian. Basil’s purpose in painting it is not just to ‘repeat’ Dorian, but to capture the essential Dorian. Basil paints it because he thinks it captures Dorian’s essential youth and beauty. Since both—the portrait and Dorian himself—are “Dorian” at the level of appearance, what the repetition of the portrait reveals is reflexive difference and movement between the actual Dorian and himself. And the crucial element is that we see this reflexive difference appear and show itself in every one of Dorian’s sins. In other words, the essential Dorian is individuated and reconstituted through each of Dorian’s acts, with essential shift recorded by the painting.

On the surface, at the level of straightforward linear reality, nothing at all changes. Because he does not age, the actual Dorian is the same unchanging and beautiful Dorian through every indulgence. In fact, Dorian just is the linear unchanging of each and every one of his revelries and the incessant activity of each new determination. It is the repetition of the same identity over and over again. However, we are concerned with what individuates this self-same essential identity. For us, it is the reflexive difference revealed and appearing in the portrait. In other words, this example amplifies what Hegel means by essence being a movement of ‘nothing to nothing.’ Let’s explain how this happens. What we come learn throughout the novel is that every one of Dorian’s new transgressions—i.e. every effect—is catalogued by the portrait, which is meant to reveal Dorian as he really essentially is. As essential, the portrait therefore reflexively inscribes each of these effects

back into the cause—which is actual Dorian himself, thus disintegrating and producing new Dorian Gray each and every time.

In this example we see how this structure moves and/or becomes, which is to say, how essence freely determines itself, the point at which we are invited to pass into the concept. Hegel writes that reflection “differentiates itself from itself,” it continuously “posits itself over against itself” (*SL* p. 338, *GW* 11.242). As we have detailed throughout, the stress is placed on reflexive difference. The portrait of Dorian Gray is self-reflexive and differentiating; it distributes the two opposed poles. The essence therefore is revealed or appears in the moment of reflexive difference itself. That is, it appears in the moment of perspectival shift that instantiates the change in the movement of appearances themselves. Hegel continues, writing “The immediacy of the determinateness in *Schein* over against essence is consequently nothing other than essence's own immediacy” (*SL* p. 344, *GW* 11.248). To put this within the context of our example, every new mark on the painting engenders a reflexive shift between the actual Dorian (cause) and his actual deeds (effects) which totally reorganizes what came before. What the portrait shows us, therefore, is that there is no “essential” Dorian Gray because the “essence” that is reflectively returned to is different each and every time.

What we see from the example, therefore, is that essence hinges on its own immanent antagonism. Essence is immanently different from itself and is therefore antagonistically “split” into two simultaneous sides. Namely, it is split into a side that is immediate and one that is reflective, or non-immediate. These sides are represented in the dichotomy of essence and *Schein* that defines the entire Doctrine of Essence. This represents, in a nutshell, why essence is directly tied to appearances, why essence must

appear, and why essence must appear as a process of reflexive difference. Zupančič helpfully describes this reciprocity of essence and appearance, writing “not only does that which is repeated [essence] exist only through the masks with which it is repeated, but these masks themselves [*Schein*] exist only (and literally) through what they repeat [i.e. as the appearances of essence].”²³⁰ Essence is, in a sense ‘nothing’ without its appearance. It must appear in and as an appearance. But the reverse is also true, the appearance exists only as what they repeat, namely essence. There is a reflexive difference immanent to essence and appearance and is this reflexivity that generates the back-and-forth movement.

With respect to the concept, in terms of freedom and history, this represents a departure from our first discussion(s) of ideas in the previous chapter. Specifically, it is a rejection of standard teleological and progressive notions of history and freedom. From this perspective, people or things ‘become what they are’ by following a pre-established ‘essential’ plan in advance, and where *Schein* (immediately determinate being) merely actualize this pre-existing historical conceptual structure. Rather, as the example of Dorian Gray introduces, history is made and re-written—hence the emphasis on freedom—because of reflexive difference. I will dedicate an entire chapter to examining this thesis. However, to use Dorian Gray as a lens, the basic idea is that there is no essential/presupposed ‘Dorian.’ Each new instantiation of Dorian ‘rewrites the past’ and retroactively delegitimizes the previous as unessential. The essential Dorian is continuously written and re-written from a free generative process. Put straightforwardly, the essential historical necessity does not pre-exist the contingent *Schein* of its unfolding.²³¹

²³⁰ Zupančič, p. 150.

²³¹ As Glyn Daly points “this type of external opposition is already part of the determination of A itself...it is entirely inherent and results from the incompletable condition of A itself—the absolute difference between A and its own (constitutive) void.” See: *Speculation: Politics, Ideology, Event* (Evanston, IL:

3.4 Framing the Concept: ‘Not Only as Substance, but Also as Subject

Now that we have had a long discussion regarding the category of reflexive difference, its immanence to the movement of and structuring *Schein*, and the manner in which it helps understand this shift that occurs from universality to singularity, we are finally in a position to discuss what I take to be the proper framework of the concept itself. Hegel announces his motivation in one of his earliest essays: “Here I shall descend into the realm of physics; the question is this: how must a world be constituted for a moral being?”²³² By asking this question, Hegel is announcing a clear break with the metaphysical questions that had motivated many of his predecessors.²³³ Instead of investigating what subjectivity (i.e., a moral being) must be like in order to fit into a metaphysics (i.e., a ‘world’) based on modern physics, Hegel reverses the question by asking what must metaphysics be like in order to generate or have free subjectivity (in Hegelian terms, to be conceptual)? In other words, using the terminology of the present discussion, there must be a revision of the metaphysical status of essence/universality, such that it accommodates a free moral being. Only a full understanding of the concept can appreciate this accommodation. But for our present purposes, the proper framework (if you will) of the concept already starts emerging with substance.

This is why I place so much stress on the idea of self-referring negativity. Specifically, in order for what Hegel calls here a ‘moral being’ to have a free independence

Northwestern University Press, 2019), p. 83. Accordingly, what this means for us going forward, is that the opposition of ‘essential’ universal or particular *Schein do not precede* reflection. Instead, they are individuated moments of the free process of self-differentiating and self-constituting reflection.

²³² Hegel, “The Earliest System-Program of German Idealism” trans. by H.S. Harris in *Miscellaneous Writings of GWF Hegel*, ed. by Jon Stewart (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2002), p. 112.

²³³ That is both immediate predecessors like Kant and Fichte, but also his more distant predecessors in modern philosophy dating back to Descartes.

there must be a ‘subjective moment’ of sorts, which is to say a contingent rupturing of any presupposed metaphysical identity of being itself, and that this rupturing must be endemic to being itself. Adrian Johnston makes a similar point, arguing that in order for subjectivity to appear within ‘objective’ substance (i.e. being, essence, etc.) there must be a “discontinuity immanently arising out of [objective] continuity...In other words the subject separating from substance...rupturing whatever presupposed unified identity that substance enjoyed with itself...is a splitting off from the substantial objectivity of nature generated within the very same natural substance itself.”²³⁴ As we begin discussing the framing of the concept, I should highlight that this problem of substance and subject is what the concept is meant to address.²³⁵

Framing substance in this way leads us to one of Hegel’s most important statements of metaphysics, found in the Preface to the *Phenomenology of Spirit*: “In my view...everything turns on grasping and expressing the True, not only as Substance, but equally as Subject.” He continues “the living Substance is being which is in truth Subject, or what is the same, is in truth actual only insofar as it is the movement of positing itself.”²³⁶ What exactly Hegel means by saying ‘substance is equally subject’ will become more and more apparent in the next chapter on conceptual structure. That being said, there are some preliminary claims I want to introduce for the purposes of framing that will continue to come up as we proceed. One is that Hegel does not take up the idea of ‘substance equally

²³⁴ Adrian Johnston, *Prolegomena to Any Future Materialism, Volume II: A Weak Nature Alone* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2019), p. 25-26. As we will see, Johnston and myself are not alone when it comes to holding the view that contingency is primary for a properly Hegelian reading of metaphysics. See, for example: Maker, Moder (2018), Dolar (2018), Burbidge (2006), Gabriel (2011), and Houlgate (1995).

²³⁵ Johnston likewise asks a similar question as the staple of Hegelian ontology: “What must natural substance be like in order to generate, accommodate, and contain within itself spiritual subjectivity?” See: Johnston, *Prolegomena to Any Future Materialism*, p. 25.

²³⁶ Hegel, *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, pp. 9-10.

as subject' in a subject-predicate form, where the relation of substance to subject is an external one between subjects and predicates (as in propositions, for instance). Subjectivity is not a property of a presupposed substance. Nor is subjectivity a subordinate 'moment' or effect of substance; that is, subjectivity is not something posited by a unified, presupposed substance only to be re-enveloped as in the case of a necessary teleological unfolding.²³⁷

Thinking about substance as subject in this way is similar to that of an organic unity or evolution, in which organic processes or natural developments are regulated by an essential principle that remains what it is throughout its unfolding, i.e. its process of actualization. For example, the continuity of a species through the coming to be and passing away of any particular members. On the other side, however, neither should we equate substance and subject in a one-to-one identity as if one were reducible to the other. We saw this view distilled in the universal idea of history from the previous chapter. On this reading, substance takes the form of an *a priori* universal that subordinates and reflects its various forms of actuality—i.e. how this universal unfolds in history—into a totality. Here, things become what they always already essentially were (i.e. historically) in the sense that their activity as *Schein*, as a determinate historical actuality, is already part of an atemporal universality.

I think the best way to gain a preliminary understanding of singularity (viz universality) is to stress the aspects of freedom and contingency that are invoked in the

²³⁷ The idea of teleological development is an important one, specifically when we discuss the structure of the concept in the next chapter. To foreshadow this move, I think that the most simple example is, again, that of the unfolding of nature as such, where the events and moments that occur within nature are merely the effects of the totality's necessary historical progression.

concept.²³⁸ Take a simple and famous example from history: Caesar crossing the Rubicon. When Caesar crosses the Rubicon, does he simply become what he already was in advance? Or is there a fundamental, historical rupture of presupposed identity? One way to read this is that when Caesar crosses the Rubicon he does not alter or change anything in history, he merely becomes himself by instantiating what he always was meant to be within a presupposed historical framework,²³⁹ namely, that the ‘subjective’ aspect of substance is nothing other than its determinate unfolding in reality. But a different reading is that, perhaps, Caesar crossing the Rubicon represents something entirely new. Perhaps the universal historical structure is itself the result of something that is contingent and singular. Caesar’s decision to cross the Rubicon, where this contingent singularity is a metaphysical aspect of being itself, i.e., that being itself is incomplete and contains within in it aspects of contingent singularity.²⁴⁰ In crossing the Rubicon, Caesar rewrites his own history such that this singular moment, encapsulated by the singular decision, retroactively becomes the principle through which the universal structure emerges.

This latter interpretation of the example hinges on viewing substance through the lens of singularity (as opposing to universality); specifically, as ‘self-referring negativity’ or self-differentiating activity. We can see this explicitly in the way Hegel directly ties substance to the emergence of concept in the introduction to the Doctrine of the Concept through a continued discussion of substance that we saw at the end of Essence. Hegel writes that “Substance is implicitly what the concept is explicitly...The concept is the truth of

²³⁸ I want to stress that this is just a brief preliminary sketch. The connection of freedom, contingency, and singularity will be returned to in much greater detail below.

²³⁹ We saw this above with a certain reading of cause and effect.

²⁴⁰ I think that this is the primary metaphysical implication, if you will, for primary and inherent antagonism of being itself that we encountered in chapter one. It is this metaphysical implication that will ultimately be distilled into a particular understanding of history in chapters four and five.

substance, and since necessity is the determining relational mode of substance, freedom reveals itself to be the truth of necessity and the relational mode of the concept” (*SL* p. 509, *GW* 12.12). Although we have only discussed it obliquely, the idea of necessity is representative of a certain kind of essence coupled with a certain notion of history, namely, universality where present determinations of being are merely just the effects of the past, predetermined causes. Think of, for instance, the vulgar notion of communism as the necessary unfolding of history, where the actually existing revolutionary is nothing more than the one who understands this historical necessity and is posited as the instrument of its implementation. However, it seems to me that it is exactly this reading of history that the concept is meant to undermine through the category of self-referring, reflexive difference.

Accordingly, my wager is that the concept is subjective in a much more radical sense, namely, that the concept is subjective because its most important metaphysical aspect is logical, reflexive difference.²⁴¹ From this perspective, the concept is not subjective in the sense that subjects ‘have’ them, or that concepts are sutured together by a subject. Rather, on this reading the subject is itself as a pure concept; in other words, it is a singularity motivated by reflexive difference. Hegel writes that the concept is “the reflection of the concept out of its determinateness into itself...whereby the concept has reinstated itself as self-identical, but in the determination of absolute negativity” (*SL* p. 546, *GW* 12.49). Here, the concept is itself only in the form of absolute negativity. It is contracted to a single point and not being mediated or related to anything else. In being absolute, the concept as a singularity is related only to itself. As such, it is self-repelling

²⁴¹ This claim will be demonstrated in chapter four. For now, I mean only to introduce it and frame it for readers based on the discussion we’ve had up to this point in chapter three.

and self-differentiating. The immanent logical relation of absolute negativity and singularity leads us to posit that the concept is not a stable foundation but an unstable self-differentiating activity. Antonio Wolf highlights this point, writing “For Hegel it is not at first the Self of consciousness which self-posit, but what he calls ‘the Concept,’ which is the subject as such, the pure Self not of mere consciousness but of being...itself.”²⁴² The focus on activity is critical; it opens the space for the free activity of subjectivity. Notice how this clearly mirrors the final standpoint of substance above: that of an activity self-referring negativity immanent to the reciprocal opposition of cause and effect. To clarify, substance as self-relation implies that it is a singularity, related only to itself, and thus self-negating as an activity of purely logical displacement.

3.4.1 Substance as Subject: Making the Beginning Explicit

What is compelling about this line of reasoning is that we can draw a clear line from the structure of substance and subject, interpreted this way, to the initial paradox and difference of the beginning. Put more strongly, it is in the metaphysical principle of substance as subject that the initial paradox of the beginning is made explicit, which is ultimately why I take it to be a worthy candidate for understanding the structure of the concept. To clarify this, in the concept the initial paradox and difference from which we began is made the explicit feature of our metaphysics. This is the way the concept makes room for freedom and historical change. Remember, in the initial paradox we begin with

²⁴² Antonio Wolf, “Fichte and Hegel on the Definition of Concepts”, *Epoche Magazine* (Issue #40, May 2021) <http://epochemagazine.org/40/fichte-and-hegel-on-the-definition-of-concepts/?fbclid=IwAR1pHIHy2GYpGRXOeOp1hYK0DejVGXfq1I5B7b0jw3mn8Fh1BnOeu2s6rFM>.

Žižek likewise assists us on this point, writing that “At its most elementary, the Real [substance, essence] is non-identity itself: the impossibility for X to be(come) “fully itself.” The Real is not the external intruder or obstacle preventing the realization of X's identity with itself: but the absolutely immanent impossibility of this identity.” See: Žižek, *Less Than Nothing*, pp. 380-381.

the pure, unmediated, and unanalyzable thought of being. Pure being is completely empty and immediate, and there is nothing at all external to it because there is nothing at all that could be related to pure being. However, we can only think about something, but doing this turns pure being into something which it is not, namely something discursive, analyzable, and mediated. That is, we cannot simply think ‘about’ pure being, as if we were holding it out before us, externally, as an object of thought or experience. For pure being is simply not a ‘thing’, an ‘object’, or anything like that at all. This immediately presents us with a problem, for what can we determine from the pure is of being? How can we determinate the utterly indeterminate from within? The answer, of course, is that we can’t. There is nothing to determine. And so what *is* with regard to pure being is just the same as pure nothing. In fact, pure being just is pure nothing.

I covered this territory in detail in chapter one; but to restate the basic point for our current purposes: pure being and pure nothing form something of an irreducible paradox. In one respect, pure being and pure nothing are the same, and in this sense simultaneous to one other. Both are purely immediate and unanalyzable; we do not start with the thought of pure being and then progress to pure nothing. Thinking about being and nothing in this way mirrors the reading of essence (substance) spoken about on the previous page that we want to avoid. We do not start with a presupposed ‘something’ called ‘being’ that is an initial presupposed unity/identity which unfolds in a linear fashion to nothing, with being therefore serving as a mediator. However, the unanalyzable immediacy of both being and nothing rule this out, as if we, the thinker, were an external observer comparing two opposed things. In a different respect, though, pure being and pure nothing are utterly different from one another. There is nothing more logically different than being and

nothing. In order for pure being to be—i.e. as unmediated and unanalyzable—it must exclude all else, most of all that which is utterly different from it.

The same is true for pure nothingness, each by definition excludes the other permanently. Accordingly, it is the activity of thinking pure being—that is, in the activity itself—that generates the difference of pure nothing and vice versa. It is in this respect that pure being and pure nothing vanish into one another. More specifically, being and nothing are sustained as opposite poles by an irreducible logical difference: namely, the activity of differentiating, is what unites them. This differentiating activity is what Hegel calls becoming. Becoming does not mediated being and nothing; it is there truth as self-differentiating activity.²⁴³ As Wolf writes “Nowhere here do we appeal to determinate concepts or even the concept of determinacy to start the process of determination which allows us to define Being and Nothing.”²⁴⁴

The the concept *is* this activity. The beginning is not a beginning in terms of a universal or conceptual presupposition. Rather it is differentiation itself, a process by which determinacy is historically generated. The point here, and this is perhaps the point of the entire dissertation itself, is that the logical, the metaphysical, and the historical are immanently linked. The former is what makes the difference in history happen. Substance is subjective and free insofar as it is a purely logical self-differentiating activity that makes the difference, or generates, the concrete processes of determination that we experience.

²⁴³ The choice of the term ‘activity’ can seem out of place here, but it is merely meant to denote the instability of the terms. Being and nothing are not stable terms opposing one another. Rather they vanish into each other: the thinking, as an activity, of pure being generates the difference of pure nothing. It generates its own exclusion, and the same is true of pure nothingness. The truth therefore is neither being nor nothing but differentiating activity, or becoming.

²⁴⁴ Wolf, “Fichte and Hegel on the Definition of Concepts” <http://epochemagazine.org/40/fichte-and-hegel-on-the-definition-of-concepts/?fbclid=IwAR1pHIHy2GYpGRXOeOp1hYK0DejVGXfq1I5B7b0jw3mn8Fh1BnOeu2s6rFM>

For me, this is what need to be understood for discussing the concept. What sets this apart from previous reading of substance as subject is the notion of presupposition. Recall the example of an organic process. We can think of an organic/natural process as ‘differentiating’, in a sense, in that an organism develops through different stages. But it is still dominated by a presupposed principle of identity that unifies this process. But with respect to substance as subject, as Žižek puts it, “predicate passes into subject: substance does not return to itself it is re-totalized by what was originally its predicate, its subordinated moment.”²⁴⁵ In other words, the notion of presupposition is constantly called into question and undermined, specifically because it is based on a principle of self-reflexive difference. It constitutes itself only after the fact (via difference).

To make sure that this is clear, let’s return to the example of *A Few Good Men*. The point of the film is that its narrative unfolds within an entirely predetermined conceptual framework, and in this sense each scene is entirely predictable as an effect of the universal causal structure.²⁴⁶ In terms of character development, each of the characters fulfill their roles, in the sense that we clearly see them becoming/fulfilling what we already know them to be (based on the conceptual framework). This is especially true of the two U.S. Marines on trial, each of whom understands their identities as completely invested within the conceptual universe of ‘being U.S. Marines.’²⁴⁷ That is, their particularity is completely mediated by this conceptual universal, and their narrative unfolds fully within this framework. This is why, when presented with a very favorable plea agreement, they insist

²⁴⁵ Žižek, *Less Than Nothing*, p. 233.

²⁴⁶ As I said in the initial discussion of the film, the Tom Cruise character tells us in advance exactly how the climatic courtroom scene with Jack Nicholson will unfold, and every goes according to plan.

²⁴⁷ That is, they fully believe that the *essential* properties of honor, courage, valor, self-sacrifice, etc. (i.e. what makes them themselves in the first place) are only realizable by being Marines.

on rejecting it because they cannot see themselves (i.e. their particularity) as existing apart from their conceptual grounding.

However, it is Hegel's writing on substance-as-subject, viewed through the lens the beginning of the *Logic*, that undermines this organic process view. Specifically, the notions of substance and/or being are not universals in the traditional sense of a presupposition but are instead nothing but their own activity/expression. As we saw with being and nothing, there is a reciprocal difference between the two that is irreducible, such that what is primary is the logical differentiating activity, while any determined presupposition can only be posited after the fact. To clarify, out of this activity the two poles simultaneously reflect and differentiate from one another, and it was this continuous activity that generates the two poles. It is this effect that the narrative shift in *A Few Good Men* is supposed to exhibit. After Jack Nicholson's dramatic courtroom confession on the witness stand, the audience is fully meant to predict that justice will be served and the defendants will be found not guilty, given that we as viewers are also operating within the same conceptual frame. But when the defendants are found guilty of conduct unbecoming a U.S. Marine and sentenced to a dishonorable discharge the entire picture changes dramatically. The two marines realized that they never needed to be Marines to have courage, honor, valor, a sense of duty and sacrifice, etc. In other words, in this singular moment they realize two things: that their own presupposed identity was never there to begin with—i.e. that their identity is never presupposed or fixed but is open to continuous and sometimes radical reinterpretation—

and second the presupposed universal from which their identity was grounded likewise is open to radical reinterpretation.²⁴⁸

Hegel highlights this in the substance-as-subject passage from the *Phenomenology*: “This Substance, as Subject, is pure, simple negativity, and is for this very reason the bifurcation of the simple; it is the doubling which sets up opposition, and then again the negation of this indifferent diversity and of its antithesis [the immediate simplicity].”²⁴⁹ Let’s examine this passage carefully, using the example as a guide as we do. Hegel states that substance in its subjective mode, so to speak, is pure simple negativity. As we have now explored in detail what this simple negativity entails is neither substance in its universality nor its particularity, for instance the universal historical context or ‘world’ of the film and the particularized scenes, moments, and characters that unfold the narrative structure, but rather its singularity. It is a simple and singular negativity that is itself and nothing else. It excludes all mediation and reference to otherness. Hegel is telling us that this is the critical metaphysical aspect to grasp on to: substance is a pure and simple negativity. It is therefore self-reflective and repels itself from itself as a form of self-activity as a purely logical phenomenon. Repelling and reflection are meant to evoke same sense logical differentiation as seen in being and nothing. This is what I mean when I say that substance is not presupposition, but activity rooted in difference. It is this “bifurcation of the simple,” as Hegel put it, that sets up the opposition in judgment substance equally as subject.

²⁴⁸ It is for this reason that I constantly use the terms activity and difference to explain this point, because what is most important is neither of the fixed terms but the difference, which is an activity, that individuates them.

²⁴⁹ Hegel, *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, p. 10.

It is this specific reason that the film example is meant to address, specifically the moment of perspectival shift, which I have described as a movement and activity because it based on a (logical) self-difference. In the moment of realization (if you will) for the two marines, the universal coordinates that had previously mediated the entire ‘particularity’ of the film—that is, its narrative structure embodied in particular events and people—is reduced to a singularity that appears in the persons of the two defendants. Put differently, in the singular moment of realization, the two marine defendants are not particular objects or identities mediated by universal conceptual coordinates. Their radical shift in perspective—the fact that their presupposed particular identities within the universal structure have entirely broken down and been excluded—is evidence of this fact. Instead, as Hegel puts it, they embody “pure simple negativity.” Or as I put it: self-relating and self-differentiating activity. It is in this singular moment of subjectivity that in effect, re-writes the entire history of the film’s narrative. The critical point to takeaway, therefore, is that this self-reflexive moment of singularity and subjectivity is not reducible to individual consciousnesses but is immanent to the thing itself (i.e. to being or substance itself).

3.5 Substance and Historical Contingency

Before turning to chapter four, I want to close chapter three by first examining Hegel’s discussion of possibility, contingency, and actuality because in my opinion it sets up for us in the clearest way possible the connection of subjectivity to singularity to history that I am discussing in chapter four. Which will, in turn, put us in the best frame of mind for studying the structure of the concept and the theory of history that comes with it. One of the most noteworthy aspects of Hegel’s entire discussion of possibility and actuality, or contingency and necessity, is the manner in which he distinguishes it from other more

traditional forms. For instance, Hegel writes in the *Encyclopedia Logic* “actuality is the unity, become immediate (unmittelbar), of essence and existence, or of what is inner and what is outer.”²⁵⁰ He accentuates this point further in the *Logic* itself, stating “It [actuality] immediately contains in-itselfness or possibility. What is actual is possible” (*SL* p. 478, *GW* 11.381-382).

What Hegel is doing here is undermining a certain dualistic sense of possibility and actuality where each is held in separation from one another. For instance, as Kant indexed modal categories such as possibility and actuality to transcendental subjectivity under the heading Transcendental Analytic as opposed to the *Existenz* of empirical appearances. Instead, Hegel argues that the category of actuality involves a sublation of this opposition such that the “actual is possible” and vice versa. That is, within the category of actuality both the actual and the possible are co-emergent, immanent, and equally real aspects. John Burbidge highlights this point, with an additional implication, writing “Starting from this sense of “actual” we find that we need to adjust our sense of “possible.” For the possible that underlies a particular determination is its real possibility—the condition that enables it to become actual... Each condition starts out simply as one given actuality; but it become a possibility once it conspires with others to produce a new actual.”²⁵¹ What’s most interesting here is what Burbidge has to say in the second part of the quotation, after the ellipsis, namely, that possibility generates new actualities, but it does not precede them.²⁵²

²⁵⁰ Hegel, *The Encyclopedia Logic*, p. 213.

²⁵¹ Burbidge, *The Logic of Hegel's Logic*, p. 76.

²⁵² Several other authors make similar point(s), including: Markus Gabriel, *Transcendental Ontology: Essays in German Idealism* (New York: Continuum, 2011), pp. 131-134; Adrian Johnston, *A New German Idealism: Hegel, Žižek, and Dialectical Materialism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2018), p. 85; Gregor Moder *Hegel and Spinoza: Substance and Negativity* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2017), p. 133.

Instead, the real possibility—that which was actualized—emerges simultaneously with the new actuality. And as Burbidge further points out, this emergence, or generation, is the result of activity; as he puts it, possibilities ‘conspiring’ with others to produce new actuality.

Hegel underscores this view in the following passage, stating “The actual is therefore manifestation...It just manifests itself, and this means that in its externality [i.e. possibility], and only in it, it is itself, that is to say, only as a self-differentiating and self-determining movement” (*SL* p. 478, *GW* 11.381). Actuality is an external manifestation but not of a presupposed or predetermined possibility. As Hegel says, in its otherness it is itself. The critical idea, therefore, that the real difference between possibility and actuality is immanent to actuality itself. A current actuality becomes an actuality, i.e. an active manifestation in the future, by becoming/transitioning into one of the real possibilities; and the reverse is simultaneously true: possibilities become actual through this ceaseless movement of transition. In short, they co-emerge as the result of what Hegel says is a contingent self-differentiating movement, where contingency here is analogous to subjectivity insofar as subjectivity is free, open-ended, and contingent. Just as importantly, my wager is that this shift in perspective rules out a view that Hegel’s comment that possibility and actuality form a ‘self-differentiating movement’ represents a teleological movement.²⁵³ This will have a great impact on the way in which we understand history.

One way to think about an actualized possibility is through a limitation.

Let’s return to the Caesar example again to see what I mean by this. When Caesar stands at the banks of the Rubicon there a number of possible variations of what may

²⁵³ This specific relationship between teleology and the activity of the concept is discussed in greater detail in chapter four; however, it is still worth diving into here in order to get a sense of what is at stake.

happen, yet only one of them will actually happen, and thus the one that is actualized involves a limitation. From the other side, actuality involves a clear resemblance (rather than a difference) with possibility. Specifically, the possible resembles the actual insofar as it involves a projection, from the point of view of the present, into the past set of possibilities to be actualized. Accordingly, we can see the reciprocal movement between actual and possible—i.e. ‘self-differentiating’—that occurs immanently to every actuality; but the problem for us is that this movement occurs still within a presupposed set of possibilities. Markus Gabriel represents something similar to this view, particularly from the standpoint of the presupposed structure of reflection that we say in chapter two.²⁵⁴ Gabriel writes “Logical space is, according to Hegel, a nontranscendent or immanent hanging together, and as such it is (and here is the crux) a mere aspect or moment of an absolute reflection which encompasses it.”²⁵⁵

As I read it, Gabriel’s point is that the term ‘logical space’ represents the actualization of an intelligible world, as a unity that is constituted from the point of view of reflection. A unity of reflection, or a logical space, is presupposed in that it is only through reflection that the actuality is constituted. Gabriel continues “Reflection on the constitution of logical space retroactively creates its own starting point, and this starting point is thereby always already related to what follows from it.”²⁵⁶ In this sense then, the unity of reflection represents the reciprocal movement just seen: a presupposed set of possibilities limited in actualization, and from reverse side—from the unity of the world—it is presupposed set that resembles this unity in its actualization.

²⁵⁴ That is, the presupposed structure of reflection represents a presupposed framework of possibilities to be actualized in its logical unfolding.

²⁵⁵ Gabriel, *Transcendental Ontology: Essays in German Idealism*, p. 133

²⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

Let's take this view and return to substance as subject. From this perspective the idea is that substance represents a subjectivization of just this sort of presupposed, reflective logical space where the dynamic and/or differentiating movement is one of actualizing possibilities; or, to put it differently, where things live up to what they already were in potential. So, when Caesar crosses the Rubicon there is no radical alteration of the identity/unity of the world and there is no world-historic event that fundamentally changed himself or the world. The contingency of the decision is just 'moment' in the actualization or expression of an already presupposed set of possibilities. The juxtaposition between this view and mine is that I take the category of reflexive difference literally, which is to say metaphysically and not just methodologically, as the key metaphysical feature of substance itself.

To again restate what this position entails is that the differentiating movement that defines substance (i.e., its subjectivity) is not one of teleologically²⁵⁷ actualizing presupposed possibilities (along the order of reciprocal resemblance) but one that involves a differential change in a creative activity. It seems to me that this is the only way to understand why Hegel views substance as the proper framework from which to understand the real historical freedom of the concept. The most important takeaway from our discussion of substance as cause and effect is that the two are reciprocally immanent to one another and that in this reciprocity they maintain their difference from one another. That is, the differentiation of cause and effect is immanent to each, and thus they do not resemble

²⁵⁷ I want to flag the term teleology here for readers because I have not yet discussed it at any length. This discussion occurs in chapter four. However, the discussion here, and in chapter three as a whole, should give readers some framework for how intend to discuss it in the next chapter.

one another in the manner of the interpretation just described.²⁵⁸ Cause is not a presupposed unity of possibilities that produces an actualized effect, and effect is not an actualization the reflective instantiates a presupposed cause. Rather, the process is a differentiation of a different sort.

I argue that this has to do with the way in which Hegel conceives of possibility itself. He writes that saying, “A is possible says no more that A is A. Left undeveloped, this content has the form of simplicity; only after being resolved into its determinations, does difference emerge” (*SL* p. 479, *GW* 11.382). The very next passage is quite important, so I want to quote it at length:

As possible, this content [A is A] is an in-itself in-itself which is at the same time something sublated or an otherness. But because this content is only a possible, an other opposite to it is equally possible. “A is A”; then, too, “–A is –A.” These two statements each express the possibility of its content determination. But, as identical statements, they are indifferent to each other; that the other is also added, is not posited in either. Possibility is the connection comparing the two; as a reflection of the totality, it implies that the opposite also is possible. It is therefore the ground for drawing the connection that, because A equals A, –A also equals –A; entailed in the possible A there is also the possible not-A, and it is this reference itself connecting them which determines both as possible. (*SL* p. 479, *GW* 11.382).

It seems to me that Hegel’s idea here is that because the content or actualization (of the form of resemblance) of ‘A’ is only possible, it immediately implies not a simplistic form of identity but one of real difference instead. Namely, that the impossibility of A, ‘not-A is not-A’, is just as equally possible. This passage therefore refers to the point Burbidge made above by describing the ‘conspiring’ together of possibilities that are productive of actuality. The two statements of identity above are utterly different from one another and mutually exclusive, yet both are simultaneously possible. They are real but mutually exclusive possibilities, and it is this mutually exclusive difference qua possibility that

²⁵⁸ To reclarify this point: instead of saying that cause and effect resemble one another, and that this forms the basis of their reciprocity; I instead reject this presupposed unity in favor of asserting the reciprocal and differentiating activity that generates the two poles to begin with.

draws them together. As Hegel says, entailed in the possibility of A is the utterly different possibility not-A and vice versa. What is noticeable, therefore, is a very strange scenario where neither is fully possible in the strict sense of the term—i.e. as something which is actualizable, something that effects actualization—because each is just as much an impossibility; it is simultaneously excluded by a primordial difference. Accordingly, in order for a possibility to be a possibility, for a possibility to emerge as a possibility that was actualized in the manner a of linear temporal development there is first a mutually exclusive activity of differentiation and displacement. And further it only on the basis of this purely logical activity of differentiation/displacement do possibilities become possibilities (i.e. potential things to be actualized) as such.

Hegel affirms this, stating “This connection in which the one possible also contains its other [its own impossibility], is as such a contradiction that sublates itself...it is also therefore an immediate and it consequently becomes actuality” (*SL* p. 480, *GW* 11.383). This passage hopefully reveals the distinction in interpretation from what was discussed above. Instead of a movement of substance as subject being one of continued actualization of an immanent but presupposed unity of possibilities, here we see actualization as based on a creative act of differentiation in which a possibility is actualized as such, i.e. actualized as a possibility only from an activity of difference. Put differently, the moment of actualization is a point of singularity in which all co-impossibilities are of the ‘essential’ metaphysical framework are present and distilled to a singular point, in this case the contingent subjective decision of Caesar to cross the Rubicon. Such co-impossibilities are contradictory; they cannot ‘hold’ together in a singular unity. What occurs is an act of differentiation and displacement. Accordingly, it becomes a world-historical event in that

through this contingent singular point then universal framework is historically dissolved and retroactively reconstituted around a new essential point with a new essential framework.

Understanding this point from the previous two paragraphs serves as a crucial bridge between chapters three and four because it provides a metaphysical framework for a reading of history rooted in contingent historical change. In other words, the metaphysical question that we are now asking is, under what conditions is something genuinely and creatively new produced? Accordingly, let me re-state and clarify the point to close the chapter. The key is spelled out in the final passage: a possibility which is just as much an impossibility and vice versa cannot stand, there is an inherent and immanent divergence and displacement, and it is this displacement that generates the actualization. Matt Bluemink helps clarify this for us, writing “we can understand creation as the resolution of a problematic between two states which are different in nature from one another yet are connected through their disparation.”²⁵⁹

The difference in viewpoint is reflected in the example. That is to say, that when Caesar crosses the Rubicon, he is not simply becoming what he always already was and in doing so fulfilling the destiny of his essential ‘Caesarness’ by way of teleologically enacting one of a presupposed set of possibilities. Rather, the assertion is that the linear development of structured reality from possibility to actuality is generated by an immanent line of creative differentiation that is different in kind. It is very important to note that when I use phrases like ‘different in kind,’ I am not meaning to imply any sort of dualism. Everything that takes place is immanent to reality itself, which is to say that within to the

²⁵⁹ Matt Bluemink, “On Virtuality: Deleuze, Bergson, Simondon” *Epoche Magazine*, Issue #36, [December 2020](https://epochemagazine.org/36/on-virtuality-deleuze-bergson-simondon/), <https://epochemagazine.org/36/on-virtuality-deleuze-bergson-simondon/>. Emphasis mine.

unfolding of difference from possibility to actuality, cause and effect, etc. that occurs linearly in reality there is a purely logical difference, different in kind, that makes this difference. This is similar to what Bluemink means when he says, “two states which are different in nature from one another yet are connected through their disparation.”²⁶⁰ This assertion is embodied in the activity of Caesar’s decision. The entire point of his decision to cross the Rubicon, i.e., the reason why it is such a monumental decision, is to imply to us that it literally changes the course of history. As Caesar stands at the river, he realizes that his entire conceptual framework has broken down. There are no presupposed possibilities that can tell him what to do; specifically, because Caesar is not permitted to do the very thing he feels he must do (i.e. cross the Rubicon).

From the point of view of the world within which his choice is made it is an impossibility. His decision is therefore a genuinely creative act of differentiation: it is a decision in the sense that it generates an entirely different possibility, or substantial framework, that is actualized in the straightforward linear unfolding of the activity of crossing the river. These two—the activity of differentiation and the linear actualization—operate on two different levels. One is purely logical difference while the other is a temporal difference. Yet they are immanent on the basis of the creative acts of divergence. At the singular point of the decision something had to give, and there is a genuine displacement in the world. This is what ultimately mean by substance being subjective in the sense that substance does not just continually actualize itself but is also open to radical disintegration and change. Put more clearly, as its substance actualizes itself it is likewise fundamentally altered at the level of being radically different. It is here where we start to

²⁶⁰ Ibid.

see the outlines of a different sense of history emerge, and it is this sense that drive the discussion as we move forward.

CHAPTER 4. CAN HEGEL'S CONCEPT HELP US UNDERSTAND HISTORICAL CHANGE?

The purpose of this chapter is to examine the structure of the concept as a whole. First, let's recap where we are at this point. For Hegel, the concept takes three forms: universal, particular, and singular. In the first three chapters I explored each of these aspects on their own while giving a sense of what each means and how it works. In chapters one and two, through inquiries of the Doctrine of Being and the Doctrine of Essence, we discussed the forms of particularity and universality, the sense of history that each evokes, the tension between the two, and their ultimate failure to adequately account for what I take to be the properly Hegelian conceptions of freedom and history. In chapter three I stated that this move, the move to freedom, only comes with the passage from essence to the concept proper, which I argue ought to be understood through the prism of singularity. My reasoning here is that outside of the very first chapter, where we are introduced to pure being and nothing, we do not get a full sense of what Hegel means by singularity until the opening chapter of the Doctrine of the Concept and until we turn our interpretive framework to 'substance as subject.'

Accordingly, I maintain that the aspect of singularity in the concept represents the high point for the implicit problem of being we've been discussing throughout; this is not, however, in the sense that it represents a resolution to this problem but rather that it is the explicit expression of it. As I outlined in the previous chapter, this represents a 180 degree turn in our thinking. In Being and Essence we were seeking a resolution or a unification of the problem of beginning with pure being. Being and Essence represent a more traditional picture of metaphysical inquiry, where the task, as Robert Pippin puts it, "is to determine

what must be true of anything at all, such that what it is in particular can be determined.”²⁶¹ But now, instead of resolving the paradox encountered at the beginning we are asserting it as the primary metaphysical element. In order to build up to this assertion, I referenced a question in the previous chapter posed by Hegel in one of his earliest works,²⁶² in which he asked, “How must a world be constituted for a moral entity?” By asking this question, I argued that Hegel makes a definitive turn from his predecessors with regard to metaphysics, which we can also discern in his famous metaphysical formulation that we should consider being not only as substance, but also as subject. Rather than focusing on the nature of subjectivity vis-à-vis being, Hegel reverses this by asking what being itself must be like in order to generate a moral entity (i.e. a free subject). In other words, we must understand being itself not only as substance but also as subject. As I discussed at length in the previous chapter, this formulation is not a dichotomy of substance vs. subject, but instead is an immanent difference native to substance itself.²⁶³ In doing so, our metaphysical inquiry has shifted to a perspective of investigating the conditions under which something historically new is generated.

Accordingly, the thesis is that the answer to Hegel’s question is that there are no presupposed universal essences, at least not in the traditional sense of the term, because substance is a singularity and thus self-reflexive and motivated (if you will) by a purely logical category of difference (i.e., the activity of difference, of ‘differencing’). Put more clearly, as a difference immanent to substance itself, substance differentiates itself only

²⁶¹ Robert Pippin, *Hegel’s Realm of Shadows: Logic as Metaphysics in the Science of Logic* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2019). As we saw in the previous chapter and as we will see in what follows, the difference between authors like Pippin and I is that he accepts this as an aspect of what Hegel’s project is also up to, whereas I take it as a point of departure for a different interpretation.

²⁶² The 1796 essay “The Earliest System-Program of German Idealism.”

²⁶³ It is this insight that led us to the discussion of singularity.

from itself and is thus a singularity. Substance does not oppose subjectivity; rather, substance is subjective because of this active difference. Any universal essence is therefore the generated result of its own active self-difference. Hegel has accordingly shifted our understanding of substance as such²⁶⁴ to that of difference, self-determining activity, and freedom. By interjecting elements of freedom and subjectivity into the core of how we think about being, it seems to me that what he is in fact doing is simultaneously interjecting elements of incompleteness, non-identity, and dis-unity into the core of being as well.²⁶⁵ In short, all those elements we found in simple form at the beginning, are now made explicit in the concept.

One author who takes a similar path is Adrian Johnston, who provides additional context to this line of thinking, Johnston writes that Hegel's metaphysics involves a "rethinking of natural substance...furnished by the fact that this self-sundering substance just so happens to have produced out of itself denaturalized, reflective/reflexive subjects."²⁶⁶ Johnston highlights that the focus is on neither substance nor subject but the aspect of what he calls "self-sundering," or what I referred to above as reflexive difference. This is to say that, to understand what Hegel is up to here in the Concept requires a rethinking beforehand—specifically by the end of the Doctrine of Essence—of substance (the last term in Essence) from presupposed unity to self-differentiating activity. My further addition is that unity is something generated.²⁶⁷ The self-sundering, or immanent

²⁶⁴ At the end of the Doctrine of Essence.

²⁶⁵ That is, insofar as we should think of terms like freedom and incompleteness as by definition synonymous to one another.

²⁶⁶ Johnston, *Prolegomena to Any Future Materialism*, p. 20.

²⁶⁷ Other Hegel scholars such as Bowman make a similar point in his book *Hegel and the Metaphysics of Absolute Negativity* (2013). I take Bowman's point to be specifically about the structure of the concept itself, which I will therefore reference as I proceed in this chapter.

difference, is subjective insofar as it points to the incompleteness, contingency, and freedom that comes with subjectivity. We already have an elementary understanding of what this looks like via our discussion of singularity, reflection, and difference (from the previous chapter), as these were meant to serve as the principles for understanding the structure of the concept. Furthermore, it is my view that this immanent difference that is what the concept itself is meant to speak to, insofar as the concept represents for Hegel the realms of free subjectivity and history.

4.1 Structure of the Concept: Universal, Particular, Singular

The task now is to explore the structure of the concept. Specifically, I want to show how this structure makes explicit the framework I summarized (from the explanation in chapter three) in the previous section, and therefore how the total structure of the concept exemplifies the freedom needed to understand historical change. Now that we've traversed through Hegel's conception of essence over the previous two chapters, my hope is that it is straightforward to see how universality and particularity are co-present in every concept, or at least how universality and particularity are immanently two aspects of one and the same concept. For instance, one way to consider the concept of a human being is the universal dimension that is expressed, unfolds, and mediates all particular human beings. On the other hand, by nature of its universality, the concept is fixed and determinate. That is, it designates the particular feature meant to mediate all the features of a human being. In this sense, then, the universal is also particular: the universal expresses a particular determinate feature that mediates and is continually expressed in all the others.

Let's continue to clarify this duality by taking a step back and slowly narrowing our field of discourse. One of the most enduring arguments against Hegel within the history

of philosophy is that he makes being conceptual, which is to say that he reduces reality to a series of concepts or ‘subjective’ conceptual determinations.²⁶⁸ This argument is not entirely without merit. For instance, in the *Encyclopedia Logic* Hegel writes, “In general the whole progression in philosophizing (insofar as it is a methodical, i.e., a necessary progression) is nothing other than merely the positing of what is already contained in a concept.”²⁶⁹ And again in the *Science of Logic*: “the specific essence, that which it truly substantial in the manifold and accidentality of appearance and fleeting externalization is the concept of the thing, the universal which is present in it” (*SL* p. 516, *GW* 21.15). As we saw in the previous chapter and as we will see below thinkers like Robert Pippin take such passages as the cornerstone of Hegel’s metaphysics, where the concept stands for the presupposed identity and “truth of self-consciousness” that accounts for “the various modalities of the possibility of object determinacy.”²⁷⁰ Other thinkers like Stanley Rosen point out that taking Hegel literally in these specific passages is altogether misleading. When Hegel says that substance, reality, or the world is conceptual he does not mean that the whole wealth of reality is grounded by the unity of self-consciousness. Rosen writes that “subject...does not mean that the apparently substantial character of the world is ‘merely subjective.’ Hegel entirely repudiates this view, which he associates with subjective idealism, and so with Kant as well as Fichte. That is, the world is not “merely

²⁶⁸ After all, Volume II of the *Science of Logic* is subtitled “Subjective Logic.”

²⁶⁹ Hegel, *Encyclopedia of the Philosophical Sciences in Basic Outline, Part I: Science of Logic*, trans. by Klaus Brinkman and Daniel O. Dahlstrom (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), § 88

²⁷⁰ Pippin, *Hegel’s Realm of Shadows*, p. 59. To give some more context to this point, Pippin continues “Metaphysics’ task is to determine what must be true of anything at all, such that what it is in particular can be determined” (p. 60), where for him the concept—which is the unity of self-consciousness—is the presupposed condition that allows us to determine such objective conditions.

subjective in the sense that it is a product or posit of the thinking of a transcendental or absolute ego.”²⁷¹

With that said, what should we take Hegel to mean by these seemingly odd claims about the world being conceptual? Let’s consider a simple but powerful example from the *Phenomenology of Spirit* and the dialectic of the ‘here’ and ‘now.’ The insight of the example is to take that which seems most clearly to escape any form of conceptual mediation—the sheer experience of ‘hereness’ and ‘nowness’—and show how even this contains a structure of intelligibility. Very briefly, the sheer immediacy of what is right here and right now can only be understood as passing in relation to what came before and the immediacy that follows. I try to grasp the moment here and now in its isolated singularity, but in doing so it is already gone. It was here and now, but now it is past and replaced by a new that is different from the previous. Nevertheless, this movement is intelligible, not merely to an external observer but in-itself because each particular immediacy is immanently defined in relation to the former and to the immediacy that will follow.

Translated into the language of the concept, what we notice here at the foundation of human experience is a dialectic of particularity and universality. The here and now is simultaneously a sheer singularity, a series of particular instances, and a universal that endures through which the current can be connected to the past and to the future insofar as the terms here and now apply to ‘all’ here’s and now’s. In a paradoxical sense, then, the most basic aspect of experiential reality, what is immediately right here and right now, is also the most universal. For our purposes, the specific point of note in the example is the

²⁷¹ Stanley Rosen, *The Idea of Hegel’s Science of Logic* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013), p. 392.

peculiar way in which sheer singularity contains or generates the intelligible structure of universality and particularity. It is this peculiarity that forms the basis of what follows.

Hegel writes of the universal concept that it is, in the first instance, a pure and simple abstraction: “Universality seems incapable of explanation, because it is the simplest of determinations...” He continues, “First, therefore, it is simple self-reference [*einfache Beziehung auf sich selbst*]; it is only in itself [*ist nur in sich*]. But second, this identity in in itself absolute mediation but not anything mediated [*absolute Vermittlung, nicht aber ein Vermitteltes.*] (SL p. 530-531, GW 12.33-12.34). In order to simplify this, let’s use the previous example of the sheer immediacy of here and now as a guide. As Hegel notes, pure universality is indefinite abstraction as such, it can only be thought of in terms of self-relation. In the case of the here and now, in addition to its sheer immediacy, there is a sense in which (because of its immediacy) it is also a complete abstraction. ‘Hereness’ and ‘nowness’ do not pick out anything determinate. They are pure universality in the way Hegel describes in the passage, namely, a simple self-reference and “absolute self-identity”²⁷² that is lost in the very attempt to determinate it. Or, to state it differently, *it is as* mediation as such but without anything mediated. This is to say that its relation, or mediation, is only to itself and it is therefore not defined in terms of anything else. Given its definition as abstraction it is not mediated by anything else.²⁷³ The interesting implication, therefore, is that there appears to be a distinct overlap of universal and singularity. The indefinite abstractness of pure universality likewise makes it a singularity.

²⁷² Ibid.

²⁷³ On the surface this idea seems difficult to grasp, but it is actually rather simple. If something, has only an absolute self-identity, as Hegel describes the pure universal concept, it can only be self-related. It is, then, mediation (as such) but without itself being mediated by anything in the sense that it bears any relation.

Taking this one step forward, Hegel writes that universality “is absolute determinateness [*absolute Bestimmtheit*], that is, singularity [*Einzelheit*] and concreteness” (*SL* p. 532, *GW* 12.35). On the surface this is a peculiar move because he seems to be relating the overlap of universality and singularity, which we just took to be utter abstraction, to notions of determinateness and concreteness. But how can that which is the most abstract also be concrete? However, the insight here just is paradoxical. In that way it gives us a clue for moving forward, namely, that the sheer abstractness of the universality is what concretizes it as singular. Let me rephrase; the form of determination of that which is abstracted from all else—i.e., pure universality—is singularity. Hegel makes clear reference to this by stating “that in order to obtain it there is required the leaving aside [*wegzulassen*] of other determinations of the concrete” (*SL* p. 531, *GW* 12.34). Accordingly, what I think Hegel is trying to convey in this statement is quite important for the thesis of the chapter and will therefore be returned to and fleshed out as we proceed. Specifically, he means that in order for universality to achieve the purest sense of its concept it must leave aside all other forms of particular determination and expression. Think again about the universal concept of human being. Every particular determination of a human being is not the purely universal human being as such. We may be a human being, but none of us are the human being. Universality of the concept is, in the first instance, not the structural unity or ‘essence’ that unites us but what marks our own incompleteness. It does not unite us, as in a part-whole relationship; instead, it makes the difference between us.

Hegel therefore concludes that there is an immanent “double negation [*gedoppelte Negation*]” (*Ibid.*) inherent to universality. However, he adds a key caveat to this, saying

that “this double negation comes to be represented as if it were external to it...and as if this operation of leaving some aside while retaining the rest went on outside them” (Ibid). It is in this sense of externality that the concept is also particular, that is, externality in the form of an opposition between two particular concepts, or a universal and particular. To explain this concretely, let’s take the idea of double negation and see how externality fits in. The claim is this: what Hegel calls double negation is a factor immanent to the concept itself, and that it comes to appear external, i.e., as an external conceptual structure of the form universal-particular, because this form is generated as a result. The first form of double negation is just the pure abstract nature of the universal as such. The universal human being is the human being as such. It is inexhaustible and no particular human being can either be the pure human being or live up to its conceptual universal definition. In this sense, pure abstraction, the universal, represents an external opposition to particularity but as a negative unity that mediates all particular human beings.

This is the first sense of double negation. However, the second sense stands for the activity of leaving aside these other determinations. Put another way, it is the activity of abstraction and (hyper) formalization. What needs to be stressed, however, is that this activity is not negativity in the sense of universality (like the first). Rather it is singularity, the activity of contracting to a single and purely formal point; or, what amounts to the same thing, pure universality. This second aspect of negativity is a singular point of self-relation and differentiating activity as such. Comay and Ruda write that “it is the epitome of self-relation...and yet by virtue of this autoreferentiality it must yield to an intrinsic exteriority.”²⁷⁴ It must differentiate itself from itself as an activity. In other words, it makes

²⁷⁴ Comay and Ruda, p. 22.

the difference. To use a pair of analogies, one becomes two, or this form of universal-singular turns itself inside out where what is constituted is an external structured unity. What is critical is neither the one or the other side of the unity (as constituted identities) but the making or activity of difference itself.

Bowman also provides insight into this discussion of ‘double-negation’ in what he refers to as the “self-referential” and/or “autonomous”²⁷⁵ negation as the primary logical/metaphysical aspect to the concept. Bowman writes,

the relation of autonomous negation to affirmation/being/immediacy must be integrated into autonomous negation qua pure relation-to-self. That is, relation-to-other must be redescribed as (a moment of) relation-to-self...the relation-to-other that emerges as an analytic implication of autonomous negation has to be interpreted as, in truth, the relation of autonomous negation to itself.²⁷⁶

This passage amplifies the crucial point regarding the structure of the concept we’ve been discussing, namely, that baked in to the universality of the concept is two levels of relations of negativity, what Hegel called double negation, that are different in kind from one another but nevertheless immanent to each other.²⁷⁷ As I explained in the previous paragraph and as Bowman points out here, one level of negativity is the determinate relation-to-other or negative unity of pure universal and particular concept such as the universal human being that negatively mediates particular human beings into a unity. The second level is a logical activity of self-differentiation that generates this unity of universal and particular and makes the difference between the two. The two fields overlap and are immanent to one another, specifically that the former is concrete actualization of the latter. Yet, they are

²⁷⁵ Bowman, *Hegel and the Metaphysics of Absolute Negativity*, p. 51.

²⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 52.

²⁷⁷ That is, the activity of universalization is at one and the same time an activity of differentiating, even those these two ‘negativities’ are different in kind.

different in kind in that one is a field of structure, unity, and identity; while the other is a pre-structured field of logical differentiation.²⁷⁸

This line of thinking is very important for how I understand the nature of the concept. Hegel himself seems to lend credence to it in a lengthy passage that I quote in total for the purposes of context

In so far as the universal possesses determinateness, this determinateness is not only the first negation but also the reflection of this negation into itself. According to that first negation, taken by itself, the universal is a particular [*Besonderes*], and in this guise we shall consider it in a moment. In the other determinateness, however, the universal is still essentially universal. – For this determinateness, as it is in the concept, is the total reflection [*totale Reflexion*] – a doubly reflective shine [*der Doppelschein*], both outwards [*nach außen*], as reflection into the other, and inwards [*nach innen*], as reflection into itself [*die Reflexion-in-sich*]. The outward shining establishes a distinction [*Unterscheid*] with respect to an other; the universal accordingly takes on a particularity [*das Allgemeine hat hiernach eine Besonderheit*] which is resolved in a higher universality [*höheren Allgemeinen*] (*SL* p. 532-533, *GW* 12.35).

Here, Hegel summarizes our discussion so far while adding further insight to the exact structure of the universal-and-particular relation. We expressly see the idea of double negativity in universality in the term “doubly reflective *Schein*.” The universal taken by itself as a singularity is defined by abstraction and exclusion. As I discussed above, this is the way in which a universal is determined as a universal. It therefore contains a negative relation to other. It establishes a distinction to an other (particularity). This distinction is the way in which the universal is particular (i.e. the way it is particularized or determined) and it appears as an outward facing or external distinction.

However, this distinction that Hegel draws with respect to the universal concept is in the first instance immanent and not external and is thus a self-reflection. To make this point

²⁷⁸ Bowman again provides good insight here, writing “The immediate product of autonomous negation is identity. On the other hand, the negation of negation presupposes that a difference must already have arisen between negation as self-negating and negation as what is negated” (p. 51). The primary difference between Bowman and I is that it seems to me Bowman tends to (implicitly or otherwise) privilege the structure or identity side of things whereas I privilege the side of difference and activity when it comes to the ‘true’ nature of the concept.

clear, the opposition between the universal and particular concept, is immanent to universality itself. The mediated opposition is generated from the inner self-relation and differentiation of pure abstract universality with itself. This is what Hegel means when he says that the universal ‘takes on’ a particularity that is resolved in a higher universality. The relation of the universal that mediates amongst particulars is an expression or determination of the universal-singular’s initial self-relation. Hegel writes that “because of this original unity [*ursprünglichen Einheit*], the first negative, or the determination [i.e. the external negative and determinate relation of universal and particular], is not, to begin with, a restriction for the universal; rather, the latter maintains itself in it [*erhält sich darin*] ...” (*SL* p. 531 *GW* 12.34). That is, the universal maintains itself dynamically in the concrete unfolding of particulars in reality. Each new moment retroactively completes and reconfigures the whole. This is what ties the logical/metaphysical principle of difference to history, the universal, as the structuring element, is continuous with (and therefore not a static element in) the universal-particular relation and is thus self-determining. We saw this in the first example of the here-and-now of immediate experience, where each successive particular moment ‘here and now’ is a continuation of the universal ‘here and now’.

4.2 Structure of the Concept: What does Hegel Mean by Original Unity

This raises an important question: what exactly does Hegel mean when he says the “original unity” of the universal concept, as he did in the previous statement? How we interpret this has very important implications. In the example of the universality of the immediate here-and-now, it could be the case that the idea of an original unity means that the universal concept acts as a presupposed structural identity that precedes all determinate particular relations, such as between the universal and particular. And further, it is just this

kind of presupposed identity that determines how the concept unfolds, so that when Hegel makes statements referring to the universal as an original unity that maintains itself and does not lose itself in particularity he is speaking about an immanent principle of identity that is further and further developed as it unfolds in the world. Let's briefly examine what this looks like, before making the turn to my own differing view.

This interpretation takes different forms. James Kreines has referred to two of these as “traditionalists” and “non-traditionalists.”²⁷⁹ I have discussed both of these forms at different points throughout the text as a whole, but the basic idea is that the concept forms a holistic organizing principle that governs both natural and mental phenomena. What sets it apart from essence, is that it is not a static principle but a self-realizing one immanent to the concrete movement of reality itself.²⁸⁰ However, what is crucial for our purposes is that the presupposed identity of the principle remains just that, a principle of identity. To borrow a phrase I have used before, it merely becomes itself explicitly what it already was implicitly.²⁸¹ The non-traditionalist view is motivated by a specific reading of Hegelian subjectivity as interpreted through the lens of Kant's transcendental unity of apperception.²⁸² The original unity, therefore, is the unity of apperception, and that the

²⁷⁹ For complete breakdown of the landscape and the questions that arise see: Kreines, “Hegel's Metaphysics: Changing the Debate,” *Philosophy Compass*, No. 5 (2006), pp. 466-480.

²⁸⁰ Two of the many thinkers who argue for this view are Rolf Horstmann and Frederick Beiser, with Horstmann using the phrase “primary structure” to refer to it. See: Hortsman, *Die Grenzen der Vernunft. Eine Untersuchung zu Zielen und Motiven des Deutschen Idealismus* (Frankfurt am Main: Anton Hain, 1991), pp. 177-182.

²⁸¹ Recall, for instance, the example I gave in the previous chapter regarding Julius Caesar crossing the Rubicon.

²⁸² This includes thinkers we have encountered before such as Longuenesse and Pippin. For example, Pippin writes that that the original unity of the concept determines what “a subject could take itself to be in relation to objects,” where these conceptual conditions “are required for there to be possibly determinate objects of cognition in the first place” (Pippin, *Hegel's Idealism*, p. 176.). The point therefore, is that the original unity is as a subject coming to a process of self-consciousness about the conceptual conditions for determinate objectivity. In a different way, in *Hegel's Idea of Hegel's Science of Logic*, Rosen takes the original unity to be making a metaphysical point about being itself. Rosen uses the phrase “identity in difference” to argue that within conceptual relations, such as between universals and particulars there is an

continuation and development of the concept is to provide the unity for what Hartsmann calls a “hermeneutic of categories”²⁸³ or a dialectically developing forms of thought where these forms progressively and more deeply determine “what it is to be real.”²⁸⁴ However, what both these sides seem to take for granted is the notion of a presupposed unity or identity of being/concept. My position is that if we interpret what Hegel calls original unity in this way, from the side of universality, it raises a question regarding history, specifically, the way in which history ‘happens’ (or, in fact, does not happen).

4.2.1 Returning to Problems-Solutions and Singularity

Earlier in the text, I briefly referenced a way of thinking about the nature of Hegelian concepts as a complex of problems and solutions. I’d like to return to that example here because it provides a concrete and clear way to think about this interpretation of conceptual structure as original unity, while also providing a clear point of departure. Matthieu Queloz presents a problem-solution structure for thinking about concepts complex in “Ideas That Work”²⁸⁵ that on the surface seems rather Hegelian. In the article, Queloz argues that our most well entrenched metaphysical concepts that structure our sense of reality arise as universal solutions to the practical-particular problems of everyday life

original, presupposed identity of being that encompasses these relational differences as they unfold in determinate reality. For my purposes, however, the key ideas are those of identity and presupposition; specifically, the idea that determinate differences and relations in reality presuppose an original universal unity that therefore *contains* and *mediates* these differences. Thus, when reality itself unfolds historically, this ‘history’ is simply the playing out of this already presupposed identity.

²⁸³ Hartsmann, pp. 177-182.

²⁸⁴ Pippin, *Hegel’s Idealism*, p. 83.

²⁸⁵ Matthieu Queloz, “Ideas That Work,” Aeon, accessed August 8, 2021, <https://aeon.co/essays/our-most-abstract-concepts-emerged-as-solutions-to-our-needs>

just in the way that concepts like air, food, and water “allow us to think about the everyday resources we need to survive.”²⁸⁶

Queloz grounds the nature of concepts in activity through an idea he calls “pragmatic genealogy.” He writes that the pragmatic genealogist takes an idea of which the “practical value is in doubt, or elusive, and try to reverse-engineer the idea’s function in human affairs by figuring out what practical concerns, if any, it answers to.”²⁸⁷ So for example, we consider a community of human beings in which a concept is lacking, such as a concept of justice for instance, and then explore the concrete, practical relations through which this community is driven to invent it. Such concepts are universal solutions in that they immanently structure concrete particular reality without being reducible to it. The concept of justice emerges to fill practical needs but is by no means reducible to these needs because it has the effect of uncovering the intelligibility of such reality itself.²⁸⁸ Solutions thus form something analogous to the original presupposed identity/unity that we detailed above. Although the concept/solution seems to arise, we nevertheless presuppose from the outset that there is a solution to be found and particular problems are identified within the original unity of a universal solution.

Let’s take a brief example of this problem-solution complex for conceptual structure in order to clarify what I mean. One that I have in mind is the way in which the sport of basketball has changed dramatically in the 75 years since the founding of the NBA.

²⁸⁶ Queloz, “Ideas That Work”

²⁸⁷ Ibid.

²⁸⁸ For example, on the concept of knowledge, Queloz writes, “the concept of knowledge emerges to fill a need. It serves to flag good informants. This is no mean feat, because the property of being a good informant is not immediately observable like the property of being tall or dark-haired... The concept of knowledge therefore needs to track a variety of indicator properties... that correlate well with and hence indicate the property of being a good informant on a given issue” (Queloz, “Ideas That Work”).

This change has been reflected both in terms of style of play and the statistical concepts meant to re-examine how valuable players are given these changes in style. For roughly the first 60 years of NBA basketball (until about 2005), a number of traditional statistical concepts were used in order to effectively evaluate players and track them on the court. These are the traditional statistics a person sees if she looks at the back of a basketball card: points, rebound, assists, steal, blocks, and shooting percentage, just to name a few. These concepts were the benchmark for answering the simple questions of ‘how good is player x?’ ‘How much value does she create for her team?’ ‘How much does she contribute to winning?’ In short, they were meant to accurately capture the play that was expressed on the floor.

However, around 2005, a revolution of sorts occurred in the style and strategy of play to where these traditional concepts no longer told us the story of what a players true contribution to her team was. In fact, they became a detriment.²⁸⁹ What this strategic revolution entailed was a total sea change in the spacing and geometry of the floor brought about by an exponential rise in three point shooting, a significant increase in pace of play, a much greater emphasis on passing and player movement (i.e. screening, cutting, generating more and more passing angles), and a deemphasis on post and isolation play. As this revolution has become both more sedimented and more granular, better concepts and statistics are needed to capture what happens on the floor and what exactly contributes most to winning basketball. For instance, instead of using traditional shooting percentage analysts now use true shooting percentage, which accounts for the increased rate of three-pointers; additionally, analysts have tracking statistics that tell us what percentage of

²⁸⁹ For those interested, the team that is often cited as beginning this revolution was the 2005 Phoenix Suns, who played a style now known as ‘Seven Seconds or Less.’

different play types a team uses, what their points per possession are for given play types, how many assists they generate, and so forth. The point is that, from a certain perspective, these concepts arose practically as universal solutions to particular problems. Hegel states that the two (universal and particular) are therefore “coordinated” in this way, writing that “the concept sets itself on one side as the immediate, indeterminate universality [*unbestimmte Allgemeinheit*]; it is this very indeterminateness that makes its determinateness [*Unbestimmte macht seine Bestimmtheit*], or that it is a particular” (*SL* p. 535, *GW* 12.38). Translating this back into the problem-solution dynamic, the idea is that the universal solution is something indeterminate but nevertheless still presupposed. That is, if we take the concept from the point of view of universality, we are presupposing that a solution is there to be found, it just requires a specific problem to bring it about.

It seems to me that one of the primary outcomes of this line of thinking is to establish the concept as something that is self-determinate, but specifically in the form of a teleological unfolding in/of reality. Concepts represent universal ‘solutions’ that are teleologically concretized and unfold as particulars in the world because they give metaphysically explanatory import to these particular problems. As we saw above in our initial description of the concept’s structure, the universal-particular relation is already contained in the original unity of the universal; it is just a matter of making these explicit. For example, Kreines argues that the concept, as universal, preserves itself through its different particular instances, and it does so through a reciprocal process of universal and existing individual instances. He writes that there is “a reciprocal process of concept and individual instances sufficient to establish the inner purposiveness of an end, and to

establish the concept as the substance of an individual.”²⁹⁰ The point is that the concept has its own end and its own explanatory import that is made more and more explicit as it unfolds.²⁹¹ Viewing concepts in this way, to me, takes the standpoint of the universal. Although to be clear this is not the universal as a foundation, which is something we saw in essence, but instead as an organic evolution where a principle of identity becomes more and more clearly defined.

Put differently, the universal solutions are already contained potentially in the concept they just need to be brought to actuality through a process of development in particular reality. That said, the question to my mind is still one of presupposition. Specifically, if we take the standpoint of the conceptual universal it seems to me that we do not move much further beyond the notion of essence we acquired in chapter two.²⁹² If we follow Queloz’s practical reverse engineering, it may seem that universal concepts come second in order as solutions to fill primary practical voids. But, in fact, the reverse is occurring: if we take the concept as a solution, we are presupposing at the outset that a universal is there to fill the particular/practical void, and all that is needed is for this universal to be ‘activated’, so to speak, by one of its particular instantiations. In the

²⁹⁰ James Kreines, *Reason in the World: Hegel’s Metaphysics and its Philosophical Appeal* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), p. 200

²⁹¹ Kreines describes himself as a “conceptual realist” (p. 22), and on this point and falls into a loose group with other thinkers such as Westphal (1989), Stern (1990), deVries (1988), and Burbidge (2006). See: Westphal “Hegel’s Attitude toward Jacobi in the ‘Third Attitude of Thought toward Objectivity’.” *Southern Journal of Philosophy* 27 (1989): 135–56; Stern, *Hegel, Kant and the Structure of the Object*. (London: Routledge, 1990); deVries, *Hegel’s Theory of Mental Activity* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1988); and Burbidge, *The Logic of Hegel’s Logic*. That being said, his conclusions are quite different than each of these people. Frederick Beiser is another thinker who makes a similar point to this teleological and reciprocity idea by arguing that the universal form of the concept is first in explanatory import but last in the order of existence. In other words, there is an immanent reciprocal and expressive relationship of universal and particular such that the universal can only ‘be’ as a solution/expression to particularity but by the same token ‘is’ the primary metaphysical aspect. See: Beiser, *Hegel* (New York, Routledge, 2005).

²⁹² The difference being that instead of a presupposed universal ground (as in Essence), we now have the teleological unfolding of a process in which the universal constructs itself, but it does so out of potentialities that were already ‘there’, so to speak.

basketball example, certain problems began to arise within the universal framework of ‘basketball’ for which we did not have concepts. However, if we maintain that concepts are universal solutions, then we are implicitly presupposing that such solutions are likewise already there to be found; we just need to look hard enough for them and/or that the problems are merely the occasion for further expressions of such universal solutions. So, in the case of basketball, for instance, it is not as though there is something inherently problematic or antagonistic in the concept of basketball; rather, this universal solution simply reasserts itself as a totality each time.²⁹³ The game itself does not change; it just gains further levels of determinacy and totality by actualizing itself in reality as if it were a presupposed teleology.

But to me, this still raises an important question concerning how we should think about history; specifically, the idea that history takes the form of a universal, *a priori* pure past that grounds particular determinations, and where these determinations represent the teleological unfolding of universal concept(s) in the world. Even with the additional shift away from substance to activity that comes in the transition from essence to concept, history still appears indebted to an *a priori* presupposition that I do not think represents a clear break from the view that we discussed with essence in chapter two.²⁹⁴ To draw again upon the structure of problems and solutions, this sets us on a path in which we implicitly

²⁹³ Along these lines, see also Stanley Rosen: “The Concept is the manifestation of what substance is in itself...” Rosen, *The Idea of Hegel’s Science of Logic*, p. 401. That is, the universal is not an empty presupposition but rather develops and becomes its own end by being a posited and determinate particular (i.e. particular concepts of knowledge, justice, and the like).

²⁹⁴ To reiterate, the idea is that particular determinate problems ‘activate’ presupposed solutions so that the concept becomes more and more defined but does not change. For instance, when our concept of justice runs into a concrete particular problem, we’ve already (perhaps unknowingly) presupposed that this particular is already contained in the universal conception of justice due to the fact that we use that same concept as the solution. It is just that such a solution needs to be teleologically activated. Accordingly, the concept of justice does not change in the radically historical sense, but rather re-unifies itself in each determinate moment.

take for granted (i.e., presuppose) that a universal conceptual solution will be found and where the concept therefore merely unfolds as an implicit universal in different particular forms. Rosen quotes Hegel directly on this point, where Hegel says that “the concept is the truth of substance, and insofar as necessity is the mode of relation of substance, freedom points itself out as the truth of necessity and as the mode of relation of the Concept” (*SL* p. 509, *GW* 12.12). Rosen interprets this from the side of universal totality. Specifically, the concept represents a teleological unfolding in concrete reality. Put differently, through the inherent reciprocal relationship between universal essence on the one hand and particular determinate being on the other—where universality is nothing more than an abstraction without its particular expression—the concept becomes explicitly what the universal already was implicitly by actively unfolding and structuring reality. This leads Rosen to write that “the second half [of the passage] expresses Hegel’s Spinozism with respect to the identification of freedom as knowledge of necessity.”²⁹⁵

Interpreting the concept from the perspective of universality thus raises a specific objection regarding the natures of freedom and history.²⁹⁶ William Desmond raises a similar objection, writing, “The logic of dialectical self-mediation includes a reference to what is other, but also always ends by including that other as a subordinate moment within a more encompassing self-mediating whole.”²⁹⁷ The self-mediation that Desmond is referring to here is the original presupposed unity of the universal concept that incorporates

²⁹⁵ Rosen, p. 402.

²⁹⁶ Guha and Laclau raise specific objections to this point. Guha writes that conceptual universality “emerges... hierarchically as the highest in which all the others are dissolved and affirmed at the same time” Ranajit Guha, *History at the Limit of World-History* (New York: Columbia University, 2002) p. 3. Laclau adds “Opposition A-B will never fully become A-not A. The B-ness of B will be ultimately non-Dialectizable” Laclau, *On Populist Reason*, (London: Verso, 2007), p. 52. The implication being that freedom and the kind of universality they attribute to Hegel are incompatible.

²⁹⁷ William Desmond, *Beyond Hegel and Dialectic* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1992), p. 2.

and resolves within it the difference/antagonism of universal and particular that Hegel seems to reference in his initial chapter on the structure of the concept. His thesis here, therefore, is that Hegel's dialectic of the concept, although it appears to embrace difference and otherness, always carries with it an implicit self-same universality (a "self-mediating whole") that undermines it. That is, the difference is merely a teleological expression of the whole. Accordingly, the historical freedom and/or determinacy of these moments is called into question such that they are simply expressions of the universal that is mediating them. Thus, for Desmond, Hegel fails to do proper justice to difference/otherness; or to consider a metaphysics that is irreducibly plural insofar as it stands for the basis of genuine contingency and freedom.²⁹⁸

4.3 4.3 Original Unity, Singularity, and the Historical Generation of Structure

It seems to me that Desmond's critiques are warranted if one insists on a view that embraces conceptual universality. My question, however, is a rather simple one. What if we keep the problem-solutions framework Queloz describes but reverse the order and say the concept itself bears an inherently problematic structure, where the stable conceptual unities of reality, for instance of the form universal-particular, are historically generated solutions to this inherently ontological problem? Earlier in the chapter I gave an initial examination of the structure of the concept that hinged significantly on what Hegel called

²⁹⁸ Robert Williams calls this phenomenon "dialectical monism." See: Williams, "Double Transition, Dialectic, and Recognition" in *Identity and Difference: Studies in Hegel's Logic, Philosophy of Spirit and Politics*, ed. by Philip T. Grier (Albany: SUNY Press, 2007), p. 35. Desmond is explicit on this point writing that Hegel interprets "all mediation primarily in terms of self-mediation. The togetherness of self and the other and their intermediation is, in the end, seen in the light of a certain privileging of self-mediation..." Desmond, *Beyond Hegel*, p. 7.

the double negation inherent to the pure universality of the concept itself. This led into the current discussion concerning the “original unity” of the concept, and how to interpret it.

Now that we have a better understanding of what is at stake, I want to return to the idea of double negation to close out the chapter. Specifically, I want to embrace what Desmond calls the problem of self-mediation, but from the viewpoint of conceptual singularity.²⁹⁹ In other words, I want to (re)assert the interpretation of the concept as substance-as-subject as rooted in self-reflexive difference. On this view, the concept is taken as an immanently self-differentiating activity that is the genetic element of structure.³⁰⁰ In order to show this, let’s briefly return to the manner in which Hegel describes the universal concept. At the beginning of the chapter, we examined how the universal concept is also singular. Specifically, the pure abstractness of universality determines it as an original unity. But this unity is not with anything. To use Desmond’s term it is self-mediating. Accordingly, it seems to me that the critical aspect of the original unity has been forgotten, namely, that the pure universality of the concept, and hence its singular self-relation, is what determinates it as universal. In short, then, the original presupposed unity is not an overarching or structural unity of mediation, as is the case of a mediation between universality and particularity, but comes from singularity.

²⁹⁹ McGowan is also quite helpful in drawing this distinction, between embracing universality and singularity, arguing, “The absolute, for Hegel, is not the assertion of an abstract universality but the point at which authentic singularity can exist,” McGowan, *Emancipation After Hegel: Achieving a Contradictory Revolution* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2019), p. 338. Moss also makes a similar point, which I will address directly in the next chapter. See: *Hegel’s Foundation Free Metaphysics: The Logic of Singularity* (London: Routledge, 2020).

³⁰⁰ This is important because I am essentially attempting to turn the previous view on its head; namely, it is not structure—the stable unfolding of universality and particularity—that is presupposed, but structure that is *generated*. As is the case with Rosen, my reason for this is contained in the passage he cited from Hegel above, that “the concept is the truth of substance, and insofar as necessity is the mode of relation of substance, freedom points itself out as the truth of necessity and as the mode of relation of the Concept.”

So, yes, it is true that Hegel argues the concept is a unity and an “absolute self-identity [*absolute Identität mit sich*]” (SL p. 530, GW 12.33). But given the investigation thus far, what exactly does this mean? Again, Hegel gives us the clue of singularity, stating that “the concept is absolute self-identity by being first just this, the negation of negation or the infinite unity of negativity with itself [*Einheit der Negativität mit sich selbst*]. This pure self-reference of the concept [*reine Beziehung des Begriffs auf sich*], which is such by positing itself through the negativity [*durch die Negativität sich setzend*], is the universality of the concept” (Ibid.). This passage serves as an explicit example located within the concept of the interpretive framework that I outlined in the previous chapter.³⁰¹ Specifically, the unity and structure we originally took as a presupposition, is in fact not presupposed but generated by an activity of difference. In the passage the pure universality of the concept is, because of its universality, the negation of every and all particular determination.

Remember the example of universal versus particular human beings: the universal human being is the human being and is thus the negation of all particular human beings insofar as every particular human being is a human being but can ever be the human being. The universal human being is not just a conceptual universal unity that contains or expresses all particular instances as in a part-whole relationship. In a much different sense, rather, it is the singular human being, human being as such. This is what Hegel means in the passage by saying that the concept is, in the first instance, the unity of negativity with itself. It is not a unity or identity because as the universal human being, the universal negates all particulars and can therefore only be unified with this very negativity. It is a

³⁰¹ In the discussion of substance-as-subject as the proper framing of the concept.

singularity. The unity or immanent identity of the concept referred to, therefore, is thus self-relating negativity, or, what amounts to the same thing, an activity of self-differentiation.

Coming to this realization radically alters our perspective because it means that the stability of identity that structures determinate reality and holds it together is not presupposed but is logically generated by a principle of differentiating activity and expressed historically in concrete reality. This is what I mean by the concepts being problematic in nature. They are contingent and open to revolutionary change. There is first an irreducible difference (i.e., self-relating negativity) expressed as an activity that is immanent to this conceptual structure. We see the connection of metaphysics to history in the following passage: “Abstraction, which is the soul of singularity [*Seele der Einzelheit*] and so the self-reference of the negative, is, as we have seen, nothing external [*nichts Äußerliches*] to the universal and the particular but is immanent in them [*sondern immanent*], and these are concreted through it, they become a content...” (SL p. 548, *GW* 12.51).

Again, I think the critical element here is the connection Hegel draws between the immanence of singular difference and its expression as the concrete and stable conceptual structure of universal and particular that we experience as historically embedded beings.³⁰² This structure is an expression of a more profound difference/antagonism that is different in kind; it operates on a purely logical level as in the sense of double negation we discussed above. The singular is not a third term that is immanent to two other terms, universality

³⁰² This idea can also extend to other traditional forms of metaphysical dichotomy such as part-whole, content-form, essence-appearance, or any kind of dichotomy that we use in order to the structural integrity of reality.

and particularity, and that these stabilize into a unity. Understanding them in this way would treat them as analogous to parts of a whole, where the whole is the presupposed unity of the concept. Instead, what we have seen is that the concept as such is the self-reference of the negative.

Anne Sauvagnargues helpfully amplifies this point for us in an idea she calls “disparation.”³⁰³ Sauvagnargues writes that “this new dimension does not make the fundamental conflict between the two...disappear. Rather, it incorporates that conflict in a new system...There is no dialectical synthesis of opposites that absorbs disparity in some higher unity. What is at stake is an entirely different operation, an inventive construction that adds a new dimension...that is genuinely novel...”³⁰⁴ Pairing Sauvagnargues’ point with Hegel’s transforms the critical element of the concept. Namely, the concept forms an un-synthesizable disparity that thus generates a creative and totally novel dimension. This point is very important for us to understand, so I want to call to mind once again the basketball example from above. Based on what I’ve just said, it is not the case that the different historical particular concepts of basketball are encompassed by the prior universal unity of basketball as such with itself, so that the varying historical concepts are teleological expressions of a universal identity. On this view nothing historically changes, the pure conceptual being of basketball already contains as a unity all its particular determinations, and history is only a matter of progressively expressing these.

My opposed reading is that the pure being, or conceptual universality, of basketball as such cannot fully identify with itself. A cannot fully become A because it is always

³⁰³ Anne Sauvagnargues, “Hegel and Deleuze: Difference or Contradiction?” in *Hegel and Deleuze: Together Again for the First Time*, ed. by Karen Houle and Jim Vernon (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2013), p. 40.

³⁰⁴ Sauvagnargues, p. 40.

already different from itself as an activity of self-differentiation.³⁰⁵ The pure concept of basketball, therefore, is not a unity but something the unity of which is always already undermined insofar as the concept at its core is motivated by an activity of differentiation. Hegel writes that “as this negativity, singularity is the determinate determinateness, differentiation as such [*das Unterscheiden als solches*], and through this reflection of the difference into itself, the difference becomes fixed [*durch diese Reflexion des Unterschiedes in sich wird er ein fester*]” (*SL* p. 548, *GW* 12.51). We see again here the connection between pure logical difference and historical concretization; it takes us from the point of self-differentiation to what is generated from it, namely, the concrete and stable unity of reality. More concretely, it is due to the reflection of difference into itself—which is just another way of saying the singularity of the concept—that determinate differences become fixed as a unified structure. Thus, we move from differentiation as such, to the fixed differences that mark determinate reality.

In terms of the basketball example, the pure universal concept is self-differentiating activity (i.e. a singularity). It is inherently self-undermining and the new form is generated as a totally new particular expression of this immanent difference. The new form retroactively re-writes what had been universally presupposed. Difference is expressed and concretized—or as Hegel says “fixed [*ein fester*]”—in a new unity of universal and particular in reality, where the new particular expression is mediated by a universal. But to restate the crucial point, because the pure universal concept is self-undermining the activity of generation and stabilization has the effect of radically reorganizing the being of the universal. So for instance, basketball as such was fundamentally different after 2005 in the

³⁰⁵ Hegel writes that “it is precisely of the nature of the universal to be a simple that, by virtue of absolute negativity, contains difference and determinateness in itself in the highest degree” p. 530.

sense that every new determination radically alters the universal/conceptual being because this universal is inherently only the product of its own differentiating activity.

The historical sense always has the status of something incomplete insofar as every new particularization is a new way of expressing this fundamental difference that radically rewrites the history that had previously been its presupposition. This idea, that the structure and intelligibility of being/reality is something that is generated from activity, is an outgrowth of the initial problem of being that we discussed from the beginning of the *Logic* where the self-mediation of pure being (and nothing) just is irreducible difference. In order for there to be a stable conceptual universality at all there is first an activity of difference that generates this structure.³⁰⁶ The critical implication is that the original unity we've been discussing is something posited after the fact. The concrete conceptual structure of universal-particular that mediates reality becomes sedimented only in the activity of sedimentation. This has significant ramifications for how we think about history because it undermines the idea of a presupposed universality, because universality is itself a product of activity. From the point of view of conceptual singularity, self-mediation does not represent an implicit and overarching totality that mediates particularity, but in the first place represents self-differentiation.

As I argued previously, the idea of self-mediation is best expressed as a singularity; that is, as being only in relation to oneself, which implies an irreducible difference. Put in terms of the structure of the concept, the argument is that universality and singularity form an irreducible antagonism that is expressed as activity in determinate particularity.³⁰⁷ What

³⁰⁶ As, for example, in the case of a universal concept that provides structure and mediation for all particular expressions.

³⁰⁷ I have already attempted to initiate the reader into this line of thinking in the previous chapter's discussion of substance-as-subject as the proper framing of the concept. But to reiterate: the argument here

we think of traditionally as conceptual universality, namely the structure, unity, and order of determinate reality³⁰⁸ is posited retroactively. In other words, structured universality is not something presupposed that teleologically unfolds, but rather it emerges secondarily from the process of free, differentiating activity.³⁰⁹ There is no original unity, and universal structure is therefore constantly undermined and restructured.

4.4 The Example of Abstract Labor: How do we Pass from Difference to Structure?

In this section I want to continue with same basic thread as above, namely, how the different forms of conceptual reality are generated historically, and how they become sedimented as structures of reality. However, here I wish to examine the matter through a concrete example: Marx's concept of abstract labor in *Capital: Vol I*. The concept of abstract labor is universal. It stands for labor pure and simple, ignoring any and every particular manner of working. What is peculiar about abstract labor, however, is that it is only appears under certain historical conditions, namely, the conditions of capitalist commodity exchange. For Marx, it is meant to answer the question of value. Specifically, how is it that commodities of very different material qualities and equally incommensurable labor qualities happen to exchange for one another? How are the values

is that what is expressed and repeated is not an unfolding unity—that is a principle of conceptual universality that unites its particular expressions, but an irreducible (self) difference that denote each particular expression as something genuinely new. It is this 'newness' that opens the path to freedom.

³⁰⁸ The kind of universality argued for by Rosen and Kreines.

³⁰⁹ I will explain this in more detail as I go along, but what this effectively does is reverse problem-solution dynamic. Previously, we examined concepts as universal solutions that arise from concrete practical problems. But on my reading, it is universality that is itself inherently problematic (i.e. differential, antagonistic) and therefore solutions represent particular—and most importantly, creatively new—solutions to this primordial problem.

of linen and coats³¹⁰ made commensurate given their very different qualities as objects, but also the irresolvable difference between the activity of weaving and the activity of tailoring? Marx's answer is that every commodity is a quantitative embodiment of pure, abstract human labor without any specific regard to the quality of that labor. In other words, once a commodity becomes a commodity, that is, once it enters the market for exchange, the particular qualitative labor that went into making it becomes utterly meaningless. All that counts is the sheer abstract amount of labor as such, labor as sheer universality. For Marx, this is the way in which one commodity is measured against another, as amounts of abstract labor.

However, what makes this example so interesting is the way in which such an abstract universal concept can at the same time have such a profound concrete, practical, effect on society. Put more strongly, the concept of abstract labor is a socio-historical and existential fact of life under capitalism. The reasoning here is that, under capitalism, our shared personal and social relations are filtered through the prism of market exchange and economic exchange value. In capitalism, I am forced to present my purely universal ability to labor (i.e., abstract labor) as a commodity to be exchanged for money and other commodities, themselves embodiments of sheer abstract labor. Think about, for instance, the relationship between a professor and her students. Obviously, much more goes on in the classroom that is not reducible to brute economic transaction. But, in the final analysis, it still forms the foundation of their being and relating together in the classroom because students are paying to be there while the professor is being paid to do likewise. These

³¹⁰ Linen and coats are the two examples Marx gives in the text. For Marx's complete discussion of this see chapter one of *Capital*. Marx, *Capital Volume I*, trans. by Ben Fowkes (London: Penguin, 1976), pp. 125-177.

people would have no social interaction were it not filtered through an economic exchange relation. Abstract labor becomes the very lens through which particular objects and individuals relate to one another. In the marketplace, producers and consumers relate to one another socially by the means of the money and goods they exchange. The pure universality of economic value, produced by abstract labor, filters and structures these relations; in other words, the abstract universal concept appears as a socio-historical fact (i.e., the fact of market relations). It structures the very form in which reality is intelligible to us—i.e., a capitalist and ‘free-market’ society—insofar as we relate to each other as particular expressions of it. Thus, the critical question is: how is it that abstract universality itself becomes a fact of social life?

As we saw above, the answer has to do with the specific peculiarity of abstract universality in-itself, namely, abstract universality is in itself simultaneously singularity. The key feature of abstract labor is, unsurprisingly, its utter abstract universality. Abstract labor is therefore not the ‘essence’ of labor that ties all particular kinds of labor together into a larger unity. Reading things this way would presuppose it as a unified solution that unfolds teleologically in particular iterations. Instead, abstract labor is the obliteration of all these particular forms of labor. Labor reduced to a singular abstract point for the purposes of economic exchange value (i.e., labor pure and simple). It is only self-relating, what Hegel called above absolute negativity, and thus self-differentiating. As we now know self-differentiation is an irreducible activity: the activity of differentiating. It inherently points beyond itself as an activity, as if one were already two. The point therefore is that the universal, insofar as we are speaking of a structural unity, mediates concrete particular(s) rather than abstract singularity, is generated historically. It emerges

as something new from the perspective of a universal structure that mediates concrete particular(s) rather than abstract singularity. It is generated historically. It emerges as something new from the activity of creative difference, where one side represents the universal structure and the other side is mediated particularity.³¹¹ With respect to abstract labor, this is the case insofar as abstract labor is something that appears as a universal structure only in the particular historical conditions of capitalism.

Let me continue to clarify this. It seems to me that Hegel indicates this point, writing that

The subject likewise contains these two moments in immediate unity as fact. The truth of the latter, however, is that it is internally fractured into its ought and its being... That this original partition, which is the omnipotence of the concept, is equally a turning back into the concept's unity and the absolute connection of 'ought' and 'being' to each other, is what makes the actual into a fact... (SL p. 586, GW 12.88).

The key here is the relationship that Hegel draws between what he calls the internal fracturing and original partition of the constituted fact,³¹² that is, the universal concept that appears as a concrete fact of reality. Hegel says that this concrete fact is internally partitioned, or separated between its universal ground, or 'ought,' on the one hand, and its particular concrete actuality, or 'being,' on the other. This is an external partitioning, or opposition within the fact.³¹³

But as Hegel says, and this is the crucial move, this partition of the fact is itself a reflection into the concept's unity. Angelica Nuzzo helps us think this through, writing

³¹¹ That is, a traditional, so to speak, metaphysical unity of universality and particularity that structures concrete reality.

³¹² It is also important to point out that the German word Hegel uses here is *Urteil*, or judgment which also has the connotation(s) of partitioning, fracturing, or separating, in the sense that to judge is to divide and separate.

³¹³ Hegel further informs us of this in the next paragraph: "The genus is the *universal existing in and for itself* which, to that extent, appears as unconnected; the determinateness, however, is that which in that universality is reflected *into itself* but at the same time *into an other*" SL p. 586, GW 12.88.

“The concept, by contrast, advances ‘in-itself’ (and within itself)—it advances by...splitting itself, and thereby acquiring a more original dimension that is still it itself.”³¹⁴ The ‘fracturing,’ so to speak, is immanent to the unity of the concept as such. As we have come to learn, this is a singularity, a self-reflection or irreducible differentiation; and it is this inner connection that constitutes the fact as a concrete structure. Hegel states that “we now have the determinate and accomplished copula which hitherto consisted in the abstract ‘is’ [i.e. the singularity of pure universality] but has now further developed into ground in general” (*SL* p. 586, *GW* 12.88). To put this more concretely, the universal in-itself is inexhaustible in that it is exemplified by a singular activity of difference, it creates itself as concrete through its own expression; that is, the ground (i.e. ought) is created and stabilized simultaneously with its expression as a concrete fact. Thus, every concrete expression is an historically new way of stabilizing this inexhaustible difference.³¹⁵

So in the case of abstract labor, it is a conceptual reality as an ontological fact of life in that it structures our horizon of being and our particular identities such that we must relate to each other through the prism of market exchange. But it does so specifically because this conceptual structure overlaps directly with the concept as an abstract

³¹⁴ Angelica Nuzzo, *Approaching Hegel’s Logic, Obliquely*, p. 195.

³¹⁵ Zupančič also picks up on this idea, writing that “With every empirical concrete repetition something else is at stake (and repeated) as well, namely, difference as such, *pure difference*. Repetition does not only repeat something (an object), it also repeats difference as such. Pure difference repeats itself with every individual difference, and it is only through and in relation to this repetition as pure difference that the things exist which we can describe as different, similar, or the same” (p. 148). Zupančič’s use of the term “repetition” here is very interesting for me, because it draws a direct comparison between the argument I am making here regarding the concept—namely that its identity, unity, or intelligible structure is an expression of difference—and the distinction between the Virtual and Actual made by Gilles Deleuze in *Difference and Repetition*. I do not have to the time and space to explore this connection thoroughly in this chapter, or the document as a whole. But it does raise an interesting question for my future project(s), namely, in what respect does Hegel influence 20th century metaphysics? A question with a direct connection to my project here: How can Hegel’s metaphysics help us better understand freedom as historical change? Bluemink (2020) also makes an implicit (not explicit) move from Deleuze back toward Hegel with his idea of “creative individuation.”

singularity: as the obliteration of all forms of particular labor and particular identities. As Žižek writes, the universality of a concept as structure “arises for itself only through or at the site of a thwarted particularity.”³¹⁶ Let me conclude this chapter by briefly explaining this. Under the socio-historical reality of capitalism the particular identity of a person—her social or cultural background, ethnicity, national origin, or even her particular profession—is something that is merely contingent. This is because in the last instance these aspects of personal identity that we often take to be fundamental are in fact merely arbitrary and negated in favor of her abstract ability to work. In the final analysis, the market does not care how she sees herself or what her particular identity is; and this is how we relate to each other: on the market. The market is the staging ground for our relations. The idea, therefore, is that her ‘particularity’ is alienated, but from within. She cannot achieve full self-realization—her particular identity—insofar as her life is mediated by market exchange. To put it more formally, the concrete social experience of alienation, the feeling of not knowing one’s place/identity in the order of things, is conceptually structured via universal medium of abstract labor.

The key, therefore, is that the historical fact of capitalism overlaps directly with the universality contracted to a singularity. What I mean by this is that the entire point of the universal market relations of abstract labor is to corrode all particular identities, cultures, traditions, and norms to a singular universal point: the point of self-relation and self-differentiation. Thus, it is at this specific point that I most consciously experience my alienated self-identity—that reality is conceptually structured and mediated by the abstract universal—as a historical fact. In other words, the universal itself appears to me in reality

³¹⁶ Žižek, *Less Than Nothing*, p. 362.

as a fact of life. As has been the case throughout, for me the universal concept in itself just is this singular difference; and thus the critical element is that what is primary is the singular activity of difference (i.e. the concept as such) while what is generated is the particular concrete structure. The practical effect of this is that through the differentiation of the concept in-itself—the fact that abstract universality is simultaneously singularity—the concept is also for-itself in that this singular activity generates a new concrete particular structure. The universal only appears, or only is as a unifying structure, within a concrete historical context.

CHAPTER 5. CAN HISTORY BE REWRITTEN?

This chapter has two interrelated purposes, one broad and one more specific. The broad purpose is to continue examining the relationship of metaphysics to history and historical change but to do so in a more concrete way through some examples in the last third of the chapter. The more specific is to continue the historical/metaphysical examination with, or alongside a comparison of Hegel's metaphysics with certain aspects of analytic metaphysics in the form of philosopher Graham Priest. The purpose here is to spend some time fleshing out specific points of overlap in Priest's metaphysics that can lead to a larger dialogue in the future. These overlapping points include: Priest's extensive writing on the metaphysics of 'nothingness,' including making nothingness the key aspect of his system; Priest's conception of unity and identity; and how he understands these metaphysical terms not as presuppositions but generated from more primordial aspects such as difference or contradiction. As we have seen in the previous four chapters, these ideas all occupy a significant place in Hegel's metaphysics. However, the most interesting thing here is seeing how aspects of Priest's metaphysics better help us understand the relationship of metaphysics to the theme of historical change that we have been developing.

5.1 Returning to the Pure Past

In the long discussion of essence from chapter two, I introduced Hegel's comparison of essence to the pure or timeless past. The purpose there was to discuss a way of considering history from the viewpoint of universality, history as the unfolding of universality. However, there is another way to interpret Hegel's analogy, one that is in line

with arguments presented in chapters three and four. I want to return now to Hegel's writing on the pure and timeless past but now in greater detail to begin this chapter, both for the purposes of summarizing the preceding conceptions of history and to outline how the chapter will unfold.

Hegel wrote on the opening page of the Doctrine of Essence³¹⁷ that "Being is the immediate" but that "essence is past – but timelessly [*zeitlos*] past – being" (*SL* p. 337, *GW* 11.241). He's relying here on the specific way in which the German word for essence (*Wesen*) is contained within the past participle (*gewesen*) of the infinitive of the verb to be (*sein*). Essence is thus being that has been, not in a sense that designates any concrete particular moment of the past, but rather the past, or *pastness*, pure and simple (hence timeless). To understand how the phenomena of the 'pure' and 'timeless' past factors into the current discussion I should briefly return to an insight from the summary of the first two senses of history that I outlined in the Doctrine of Being and the Doctrine of Essence. There, I introduced the terms immediacy, non-immediacy, particularity, and universality, all of which are worth briefly re-engaging here.

In the Doctrine of Being the predominant metaphysical aspect is qualitative immediacy, or *Dasein*; put in temporal/historical terms, it is the qualitatively immediate present. The relation that exemplified this type of historical framework was the relationship of something to otherness. Recall that the critical element was that the immediate quality of something—that which makes it a 'something' in the first place—always already contains a relation to an other to which it passes (i.e., passes into the past). Hegel writes "If of two beings we call the one A and the other B, the B is the one which is first determined

³¹⁷ I previously referenced these sections of the text in chapter two, but it is helpful to bring them back to surface here as well.

as other. But A is just as much the other of B. Both are other in the same way” (SL p. 91, GW 21.105). Accordingly, “the something preserves itself in its non-being; it is essentially one with it, and essentially not one with it...The otherness is at once contained in it and yet separated [*getrennt*] from it; it is being-for-other [*Sein-für-Anderes*]” (SL p. 92, GW 21.106).

Translated into historical terms, the idea is that at the surface level of qualitative immediacy, every present something passes over into its otherness which is itself an immediacy. The picture painted here is what some thinkers³¹⁸ have positively described as infinite restlessness, or the infinite restlessness of negativity. Here, the infinite is cast as the immanent transitoriness of the finite. The defining feature is that immediate beings (somethings) constantly pass into other things—or where the relation something to other is one of passing—so that no structure is stable. History is seen through the prism of fluctuation, and the primacy of immediacy implies a certain relation of present to past.³¹⁹ Here, pastness is viewed as less than the immediate present because it involves as a mere negation and projection of the present into a past in which it did not exist, only to be replaced by another immediacy.

This marked the first turning point in our examination, where the metaphysical point of qualitative immediacy brought about by a couple of specific questions. Namely, considering the immanent relationship of something and other, how is it that a new

³¹⁸ In chapter one I discussed thinkers like Marc Taylor and Todd McGowan, but this also includes authors like Jean-Luc Nancy and Raya Dunayevskaya. See: Nancy, *The Restlessness of The Negative*, trans. by Jason Smith and Steven Miller (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002) and Dunayevskaya, *The Power of Negativity: Selected Writings on the Dialectic in Hegel and Marx*, ed. by Peter Hudis and Kevin B. Anderson (Washington: Lexington Book, 2002).

³¹⁹ Gregor Moder makes a similar point, writing “What I mean are the stories that simply do not end and are even imprudent enough to parade this obvious flaw as their point, as if saying with a benevolent didactic tone: we wanted the recipient to write their own ending.” Moder, p. 79

immediate present is generated (in this case ‘otherness’) if that which was present (something) did not pass at the same time as its being present? In other words, how could any present pass, historically speaking, if it did not always already bear a specific relation to the past that is not merely the negation of immediacy?³²⁰ Let’s return briefly to the passage from Hegel on the previous page. The sheer immediacy of ‘something’ immanently contains within it a relation to otherness. A is just as much the other to B as B is to A: both are something and other. A, therefore, passes (i.e. moves into the past) into B due to its immanent relation to B (otherness). A therefore always already contains a relation to the past at the same time as it is immediately present such that the new present, B, bears a relation to A as its past.

Looking at this historical relation of something to other is what Hegel means in the passage by saying that “something preserves itself in its non-being” in the sense that past being (*Wesen*) preserves present being. It passes to otherness, and the hallmark of being something is that it is experienced as passing into the past. What was immediately ‘something’ right here and right now has passed. It is a movement into the past and into otherness as something new and different than what was. In short, what the relation of something and other reveals is not a history based on discontinuous immediate moments but a temporal whole in which the immediate something is simultaneously present and past. The past, or history, and present are not defined by a succession of present moments. The past does not merely follow on after the present and it is not simply a projection of the present into the past. Instead, the past and present form two contemporaneous ontological elements insofar as every present something is defined by its relation to the past. That is, it

³²⁰ These questions reaffirm the guiding metaphysical question of the first four chapters as a whole; namely, under what conditions is something new *produced*? Or, how are conceptual identities *generated*?

is defined *as passing*. This sense of past is not meant to evoke any particular past event or experience but is rather the kind I spoke about at the beginning of the chapter, namely, *pastness* in general. That is, a pure form of past that conditions and structures every present something.

In chapters two and three I discussed this as the process of reflection, or recollection [*Erinnerung*]. It is based on this that Hegel writes “this course is the movement of being itself. That it is being’s nature to recollect [*Erinnerung*] itself, and that it becomes essence by virtue of this interiorizing” (*SL* p. 337, *GW* 11.241). This reaches its apogee in the shift from Being to Essence, where what is most metaphysically important is not the immediate presence of something on the surface but on the non-immediate (i.e. reflexive or past) process(es) of recollection that structure and contextualize things.³²¹ There is still a question, however, as to why being’s reflective nature is related to history and the past. Hegel’s use of *Erinnerung* gives us a clue. In addition to recollection, *Erinnerung* is also used to refer to memory and remembering. *Erinnerung*, therefore, is to recollect, but in the sense of memory and/or remembering the past. To say that a present determination of being is defined by *Erinnerung* is to say that it is based on a sense of the past (memory), or that it is conditioned by the past. Being recollects itself out of its immediate determinations and insofar as determinate being is defined by its reflection or relation into the past by passing into otherness. This is the general reflective element of being itself. The fact that immediate beings reflect and relate to each other, and that this non-immediate or past/historical element is what constitutes their being.³²²

³²² Hegel writes “Only inasmuch as knowledge recollects itself into itself out of immediate being, does it find essence through this mediation.” *SL* 337, *GW* 11.241

There are several examples from literature that help us understand this point. For example, William Faulkner's famous dictum that the past is never dead, it isn't even past; or James Joyce saying that history is nightmare from which he is yet to awake. One of the best is George Orwell's famous idea from *Nineteen-Eighty Four* that whomever who controls the past, controls the future. This line in the book comes from Winston Smith, and with good reason, for as we know it is Winston's job at the ministry of truth to translate present events into the past or present them in terms of the past so that contemporary political events can be structured and ordered by The Party. In this way, The Party does not stand for any specific past but for history in general that is contemporaneous with particular present events. All political, cultural, and social events, such as those between the governments of Oceania and Eurasia, must be *Erinnerung* and translated—in other words, they must pass—into The Party. All public and historical records, from newspapers to academic works of history to television and cinema, serve as a general form of the past as a whole into which present events can fit it and be made intelligible.

The thesis now is to argue how and why this pure past is not just a universal that continually imposes itself on the present and sets the terms and conditions for the future but can actually itself be re-written. This is to say, there are accidental occurrences and events that are genuinely and historically new that deconstruct and/or dissolve the essential parameters of the past and radically reorganize them around new and different principles. I have already laid the metaphysical groundwork for this in the long discussions of reflection and the concept in chapters three and four, but now it is time to continue exploring the historical implications.

5.1.1 Beginning and Ending: The Pure Past, Being and Absolute Idea

In chapters two and four we discussed universality as a prominent way of understanding the pure past.³²³ Something that I've tried to make explicit is that this view shares in common some form of evolutionary and/or teleological understanding of history that is based upon a presupposed identity of being. The idea is that the universal past forms a presupposed identity with the immediate present (i.e. particularity). The universality of the past determines the structure of the present (and future) insofar as the latter are always mediated by and contained within scope of the past. The reading of history is teleological insofar as the present and the potentiality of the future are meant to serve as expressions of the movement and continuity of universality.

A helpful example to consider here is habit, which Catherine Malabou describes as “the becoming essential of the accident.”³²⁴ The key to the example is the manner in which our habits reflectively form an historical yet presupposed and universal framework that informs our both present and future activity. As we know, this historical-universal framework is immanently embedded in our experience of reality itself so deeply that we often do not realize we are doing it. The point is that there is a definite sense in which the historical and universal nature of our habitual framework(s) always already mediate and contain our future possibilities/activities insofar as these possibilities are expressions of the historical habits we draw on in order to make sense of the world. The pure past is simultaneous to the present as its immanent structure and at the same time constitutes our experience by making each present moment intelligible and relatable to other present

³²³ The skeleton of this Hegel constructs in the Doctrine of Essence and then makes explicit in the Doctrine of the Concept.

³²⁴ Malabou, *The Future of Hegel*, p. 178.

moments. We define the present in terms of the past, and we therefore implicitly interpret the present as an unfolding expression of the past.

The historical implication of this metaphysical point is a teleological one rooted in the fact that there is an implicit yet presupposed unity of universality and particularity from the beginning such that the apparent dynamic nature of reality is expressive of this (universal) unity. James Kreines is a thinker who exemplified the metaphysical aspect for us in chapter four and is therefore noteworthy to mention for the historical point as well. He writes that “the concept and ultimately the idea explain the persistence of substance through development, or the unity of a substance with itself through a change between contrary qualities.”³²⁵ He continues, stating that the purpose of this framework is of “seeing that we need genuinely inner purposiveness if the concept is to do the work of explaining the possibility of change.”³²⁶ Here we see the metaphysical and historical working hand in hand. Specifically, that the identity of being persists through different historical changes, and thus these historical changes form the basis of an inner telos of being realizing its presuppositions in the world.³²⁷ From a certain perspective, this *just is* what history and historical change is. It is the persistent unfolding and expression universal unity, so that when what we take to be new things come about, what these express are deeper and further explanations of this unity. Kreines calls it “freedom for life’s immanent end [telos]” and “freedom as immanent purpose.”³²⁸ He therefore does a good job setting up this historical

³²⁵ Kreines, *Reason in the World*, p. 216.

³²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 217.

³²⁷ This is why, on my reading, Kreines calls his thesis “reason in the world,” as the concept is meant to stand for the further complexity of reason unfolding in the world.

³²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 220. Robert Brandom makes a similar point with respect to history and freedom in that it marks a “shift from ontological questions...to deontological ones.” Brandom, “Some Pragmatist Themes in Hegel’s Idealism,” *European Journal of Philosophy*, 7 (1999), p. 165.

problem here in chapter five as he did for the metaphysical problem in chapter four. Namely, it is the idea of history as the unfolding of ‘inner purposiveness’ against the idea of history as a genuine rupture in which history can actually be ‘re-written.’

It seems to me that both of these positions take their cue from the articulation of the pure past. But it is also the case that only one of these views interprets the sense of history through the proper metaphysical lens.³²⁹ One way we can see this is via the connection of the beginning of the *Logic* to the ending. Authors who uphold the universal view sometimes point to the circularity with which *Logic* ends as an endorsement. In other words, the final result(s) of the *Logic* mark a return to the beginning such that the ending was always already there, and that it was just the case that this ending had to dynamically express itself. For example, Robert Pippin argues that the concept is a “subjective activity” that marks a “process of thought’s autonomous development,”³³⁰ which is a development that presupposes a transcendental unity of thought.

However, it is the connection of beginnings to endings that I take as the point of departure for another way of interpreting Hegel’s category of timelessly pure past. Above, I mentioned Malabou’s insight regarding the becoming essential of the accident. This is a nod to the timelessness of essence. The part of what makes the present reality intelligible to us is that this timeless historical past provides the immanent structure and order within which the present exists and from which the future will emerge as structured and intelligible to us. But Malabou also points out that there is a second side to this movement

³²⁹ This, again, is what much of chapters three and four were about. That being said, it is also worthwhile to bring some of that material to bear in this chapter as well, which is what I will do in what follows.

³³⁰ Pippin, *Hegel’s Idealism: The Satisfaction of Self-Consciousness*, pp. 224-225, 232-234. Another thinker of vastly different orientation, but who reaches a similar conclusion regarding the presupposed unity is Louis Althusser, who argues that Hegel’s concept is an “expressive totality” that contains its entire history as a unity and presupposition.

that is often left out. Namely, that it is not simply the manner in which the present ‘accident’ is mediated by the essential but likewise the oppositional movement of “the becoming accidental of the essential.”³³¹ The task now is to think these two movements together. If I can accomplish this, the implication the implication is that history can be rewritten, and the essential can become accidental.

I want to start in a seemingly peculiar place: with an insight from 20th century poet T.S. Eliot in his essay “Tradition and the Individual Talent.” Specifically, because it is Eliot who distills this double-sided historical movement in a concrete example of what he calls the ‘historical sense.’ He writes

The historical sense involves a perception, not only of the pastness of the past, but of its presence; the historical sense compels a man to write not merely with his own generation in his bones, but with a feeling that the whole of the literature of Europe from Homer and within it the whole of the literature of his own country has a simultaneous existence and composes a simultaneous order. This historical sense, which is a sense of the timeless as well as of the temporal and of the timeless and of the temporal together, is what makes a writer traditional. And it is at the same time what makes a writer most acutely conscious of his place in time, of his contemporaneity.³³²

This passage clearly demarcates the first movement of the becoming accidental becoming essential. That is, when a person produces a genuinely new work of art, music, literature, etc. she does so only in the sense that she emerges from and is mediated by the memory and timelessness of the tradition in its entirety. This history is not transcendent to the author/artist but is immanent and simultaneous to her; it is present with her in the acute sense that it makes her work intelligible as an exemplification of the historical canon. The essential speaks through the accident.

That said there is also the second half of the story, as Eliot continues

³³¹ Malabou, *The Future of Hegel*, p. 188.

³³² T.S. Eliot, “Tradition and the Individual Talent,” *The Sacred Wood: Essays on Poetry and Criticism* (London: Methuen, 1920), pp. 43-44.

What happens when a new work of art is created, is something that happens simultaneously to all the works of art which preceded it. The existing monuments form an ideal order among themselves, which is modified by the introduction of the new (the really new) work of art among them. The existing order is complete before the new work arrives; for order to persist after the supervention of novelty, the whole existing order must be, if ever so slightly, altered; and so the relations, proportions, values of each work of art toward the whole are readjusted; and this is conformity between the old and the new.³³³

What the genuinely new work of art reveals is just that: that it is genuinely new. It is not a teleological continuation of the universal order within which it emerged, it is a complete break and rupture with it. The pure past forms a historical and essential order that is complete and structured in itself in the sense that it mediates, situates, and provides the context for all the particular works within it. Yet when something or someone radically new emerges within this universal horizon—for instance a Shakespeare, a Rembrandt, or a Morrison—in order for the structure to maintain continuity such groundbreaking works cannot merely be absorbed into the fold like an amoeba or added to an infinitely continuous list. Rather, the new work makes that which was historically essential accidental by retroactively rewriting, reordering, and reorganizing the structure such that its meaning and history have totally changed into something different. To use Hegelian language, what the authentically new work does is posit its own universal presupposition in the sense that it emerges as historically rewritten simultaneously to that which is radically new. The teleological end of the story and the beginning overlap, so that the end posits its own new and utterly different beginning again.

This is what Hegel's Absolute Idea, the literal end point of the *Logic*, represents.

Hegel writes in the closing passage(s) of the *Logic* that

The idea, namely, in positing itself as the absolute unity of the pure concept and its reality and thus collecting itself in the immediacy of being, is in this form as totality – nature. – This determination, however, is nothing that has become [*Gewordensein*], is not a transition [*Übergang*]...The pure idea [*reine Idee*] into which the determinateness or reality of the concept is itself raised into concept is rather an absolute liberation [*Befreiung*]

³³³ Ibid. Emphasis mine.

for which there is no longer an immediate determination which is not equally posited and is not concept; in this freedom, therefore, there is no transition that takes place; the simple being to which the idea determines itself remains perfectly transparent to it: it is the idea that in its determination remains with itself [*Bestimmung bei sich selbst bleibende Begriff*] (*SL 752, GW 12.253*).

Several facets of this passage are worth discussing, but I want to draw specific attention to Hegel's coupling of the Absolute Idea to a free release without any form of transition or becoming. The Absolute Idea stands for the logical endpoint in the sense that it does not develop any further. Rather, the Absolute Idea contracts all the previous forms of development to single point. This is the sense in which the *Logic* is circular. The Absolute Idea does not represent the end in the sense of a temporal linear development. Rather, through contraction, the determination of the Absolute Idea is pure simple immediacy that is perfectly transparent with itself. It thus rejoins in a circular fashion the immediate transparency of pure being (i.e. beginning) without transitioning to it. I will return to this analogy in greater detail below, but for now in order to better understand the notion of transparency without transition think of the structure of a circle. Specifically, consider the way the beginning and end of a circle are completely transparent to one another. In fact, the beginning and ending overlap directly in a single point and there is no transition between them. There is only a simple immediacy.

Yet the question is immediately raised, how does the rejoining of beginning and ending—absolute idea in the form of pure being—not represent just the form of teleological development discussed throughout chapters three and four? Isn't this the principle of presupposed unity/identity, where all the forms developed in the *Logic's* linear unfolding express this unity? The answer hinges on the categories of contraction and singularity. Let's return briefly to the passage. Hegel describes contraction as a unity of the pure concept as form and the concrete reality of its movement as concept in which the form

develops itself through its content.³³⁴ Malabou points out that this is a simultaneous movement of “suppression and preservation.”³³⁵ Accordingly, the idea of contraction is peculiarly double sided. In one respect, the Absolute Idea stands for the entire linear logical development contracted and condensed into a singular concept. From this point of view, the Absolute Idea is the becoming essential of the accidental in that each new determination is contracted back into the concept as a particular expression of its own development. In this way, the Absolute Idea is analogous to the teleological development discussed above because all previous moments of particularity are contracted into a singularity. They are only momentary expressions of the Absolute Idea’s making explicit in history that which was presupposed implicitly from the beginning in the unity and identity of being. The Absolute Idea thus returns to itself (the beginning).

However, the second half of the story is that by suppressing all particularity there is also a sense in which the Absolute Idea preserves the differentiation by internalizing and reducing the historical unfolding of linear development to a point of singular and circular *self-differentiation*, evoking both a sense of closure and displacement. This is what I mean by saying the essential becomes accidental. The category of Absolute Idea is the end of the line. It condenses everything to a single point and thus closes in on itself, bringing the story to completion. But the key here is to recognize that the completion of a story is a singularity, which as we have learned means a form of self-reflexivity, self-differentiation, and therefore displacement. Consider again the structure of a circle. When a circle closes

³³⁴ Edward Halper also picks up on this idea, writing that “In Hegel’s terminology the content of the absolute idea is the “method” of its conceptual transformations, but the totality of this “method” is also the distinctive character of absolute idea, its form; hence, absolute idea’s content is identical with its form.” Halper, “The Logic of Hegel’s Philosophy of Nature: Nature, Space, and Time,” in *Hegel and the Philosophy of Nature* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1998), p. 31.

³³⁵ Malabou, *The Future of Hegel*, p. 159.

the ending overlaps directly with the beginning and it closes in on itself. Beginning and ending are simultaneous to one another, and they are simultaneous in a singular point. It is this point that contracts the entire unfolding movement from the beginning of the circle to the end, and it does so *as* a single point of self-reflexive difference insofar as it is the point that is both beginning *and* ending.

The point of historical closure in which the end becomes what it already was is thus always a form self-displacement³³⁶ without “transition” or “a process of becoming” into something historically new. Hegel explains this well, writing in the *Philosophy of Nature* that “A point occurs at which the continuity of mediation, a gradual progression...suddenly breaks off and becomes impossible. This point is everywhere and penetrates everything.”³³⁷ Put differently, the ending that is meant to constitute the final mark of the system, here represented by the circle in which every aspect has its proper place, can only constitute itself as a unity *through* an immanent self-difference of the circle from itself.

This is the sense in which the ending overlaps with the beginning—Absolute Idea with pure being—and is thus circular. Not in the sense of an achieved teleological totality but in the sense of an absolute liberation or rupture. What else is the pure immediate being that this singular and circular self-differentiation? As readers know, this has been a fundamental aspect of my entire presentation. Pure being, as sheer unanalyzable immediacy is indistinguishable from pure nothingness and vice versa. Pure being and pure nothing represents therefore a purely logical form of difference or displacement without transition. Pure being does not become nothing, or vice versa. They are simultaneous to

³³⁶ Why? Because the difference in beginning and ending overlap immanently and simultaneously, they displace one another.

³³⁷ Hegel, *Encyclopedia Philosophy of Nature*, §345

each other and thus represent a pure difference/displacement as such. As Moder writes “It is precisely the nothingness of nothingness that keeps trying to get expressed in history, with the initial contradiction acquiring more and more complex form.”³³⁸

This idea forms the basis for the different reading of history I am presenting here. It is exemplified by T.S. Eliot’s example of the genuinely historical work of art and the genuinely unique artist. Like the artist producing a new work of art, the absolute idea sharpens the entirety of the universal past to a point of singularity. As Eliot pointed out, when the artist works the entire past is with her as the context within which she works. It is this universal past that orders her work, gives it its place, and makes it intelligible. However, and this is what Hegel is trying to help us understand, the artist’s/author’s work—if it is genuinely new—is not just another name added to a universal but dead list. Instead, what the artist does while she works is distill this entire history, and most importantly the differences between these works, to a singularity represented by her newly produced work. Through the singularity of her work the artist brings a new sense of closure to the historical tradition that is simultaneously a displacement and disintegration of it.

Let’s translate this into Hegelian terminology. What the singularity of the concept, in this case the Absolute Idea or the unique works of art, reveals is the immanent self-reflexive differentiation of the structure from itself such that its identity can only be constituted on the basis of this difference. It is always under the threat of being historically rewritten. This is the circular connection of absolute ending with absolute beginning: that universal totality or closure, through the immanent self-differentiation of singularity, is immediately and without teleological transition thrown back to the pure un-analyzability

³³⁸ Moder, p. 76.

of beginning. In the new work of art or literature, if the universal history of the tradition as a concept (i.e., history itself) is to be maintained then history itself must be disintegrated, thrown back to the beginning, and reconstituted in order for its intelligibility to remain. That which is genuinely new is therefore and expression of this primary difference.

In short, the essential becomes accidental because the accidental because the accidental represents a historical break with the past such that the structure of the past is now reordered around it (i.e., with the new as the essential point of reference). Hegel states “The transition is to be grasped, therefore, in the sense that the idea freely discharges [*frei entläßt*] itself (*SL* p. 753, *GW* 12.253). Beginning and ending historically coincide, and the point is that the universal structure itself is not a presupposed unity that unfolds teleologically but is in fact written and re-written only through points genuine (historical) difference and rupture. This is the sense in which history is ‘made.’³³⁹

5.2 Hegel, Difference, Analytic Metaphysics: Establishing a Foundation for Future

Dialogue

What I have in mind for this section is to engage the work of analytic metaphysicians who, on the surface, seemingly have no thematic or stylistic connection to Hegel. However, I think that such a surface level view is precisely that. In fact, there are several areas of engagement that have been discussed just in the first section of this chapter, including: circularity, overlap (i.e., as it pertains to mereology), (self)-reflexivity, logical difference,

³³⁹ Both Malabou and Johnston make similar points. Malabou writes “Hegel is showing here that there is a contradiction inherent to every ground in so far as the ground is ‘relative’ to what it grounds. To ground or to cause oneself creates a relation in which one element *repels* the other, causing one to be an active self and one a passive.” Thus “a point of sheer randomness dwells within essential being.” Malabou, pp. 161-162. While Johnston writes that Hegel “underlines Nature’s tendency toward being auto-negating and self-sundering/sublating, prone to dividing itself into itself and its Other.” Johnston, *Prolegomena to Any Future Materialism*, p. 52.

contradiction, and displacement. One purpose of this section, therefore, is to gather a deeper, more comparative understanding of the results of our inquiry up to this point through philosophical engagement with others. The second is to give more voices to the specific task of this chapter, namely, the continued examination of the connection between metaphysics and historical change. One thinker who I think fulfills both of my purposes is the analytic metaphysician Graham Priest, specifically his text *One: Being an Investigation into the Unity of Reality and of its Parts, Including the Singular Object which is Nothingness*. Although both Priest and Hegel have very different orientations and work from different starting points, I think there are some critical points of overlap that make an engagement possible, particularly with respect to the analysis of history presented in this chapter. The major thematic overlap is the manner in which Priest conceives of unity/identity which I think bear some very interesting Hegelian markings specifically with respect to the secondary themes of singularity, nothingness, contradiction, and difference. Themes which, as readers are well aware of by this point, occupy critical places within Hegel's metaphysics.

Before embarking on our discussion, please note that this conversation is not meant to be exhaustive, in particular with the complex logical and technical apparatus Priest employs to demonstrate his arguments. Engaging in that level of compare-contrast with Priest and Hegel is a dissertation unto itself. My aim, however, is to outline what such a future project might look like while at the same time exploring how the overlapping themes between Hegel, Priest, and analytic metaphysics more generally can better help us understand the concrete historical analysis of the chapter. With that said, it may appear at first that this middle section of the chapter marks a complete break with the first section.

However, I will remedy this appearance in the final section when we return to the metaphysics-history discussion with a broader understanding.

5.2.1 Hegel, Priest, and Dialetheism

The first thing to do is establish some form of gestalt to serve as the parameters for the discussion. Dialetheism is a prime candidate for this, specifically because it is a topic where Priest engages Hegel directly. Priest declares this supposed connection explicitly in his essay “Kant’s Excessive Tenderness for Things in the World, and Hegel’s Dialetheism” writing that “First of all, let us be clear that Hegel was a dialetheist. Hegel explicitly claims that reality may be contradictory.”³⁴⁰ I will address this statement directly in a moment; but first, let’s say a few things about what dialetheism is.³⁴¹ Dialetheism is a view in logic that some contradictions are true. More precisely, it is the belief that there can be a true statement where the negation of that statement is also true (or can be); thus, there are statements that are both true and false. In this sense dialetheism is a form of paraconsistent logic. However, there is a crucial distinction that needs to be established.³⁴² Dialetheism is a *metaphysical* view that there are actual situations, and not merely hypothetical situations, where some contradictions are true (i.e., true and false overlap).

Formally, there are sentences such that A and $not-A$ are both true so that there are some A ’s which are both true and false. Paraconsistency, on the other hand, is a property

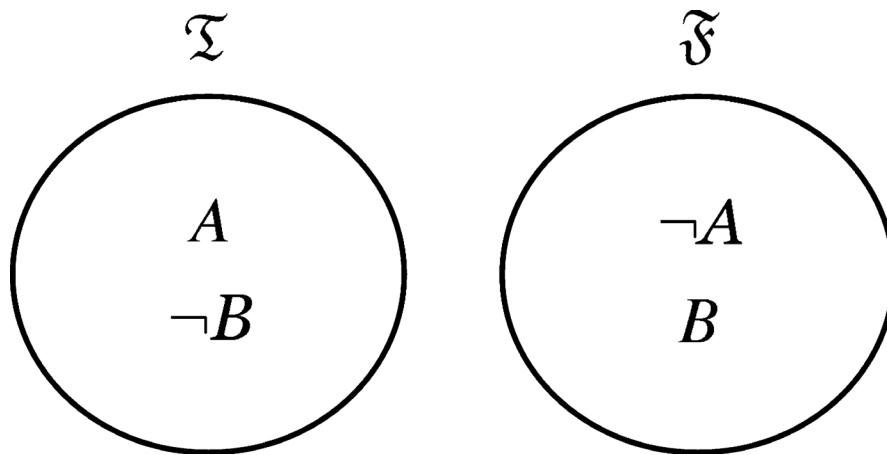
³⁴⁰ Graham Priest, “Kant’s Excessive Tenderness for Things in the World, and Hegel’s Dialetheism,” in *Logic from Kant to Russell: Laying the Foundations for Analytic Philosophy*, ed. by Sandra Lapointe (London: Routledge, 2019), p. 56.

³⁴¹ To be clear, this is not meant to be an in-depth logical analysis of the debates regarding the truth or validity of dialetheism as something that is philosophically meaningful. All I’m trying to do here is provide some basis for exploring how/why Hegel and Priest overlap on the subject.

³⁴² See Priest, *One*, pp. xviii-xix for a more in-depth discussion of the difference between dialetheism and paraconsistency.

relation of logical consequence that is meant to counter logical explosion, or triviality, according to which any contradiction implies that one must accept anything and everything. So, for example, a logical consequence is explosive for all B and C if and only if (iff) $\{A, \neg A\} \vdash B$. For this consequence to be paraconsistent, it cannot be explosive. Thus, for a dialetheist, paraconsistency must be the proper logical consequence. Accordingly, dialetheism is a repudiation of the Law of Non-Contradiction famously introduced by Aristotle in Book Γ of the *Metaphysics*.

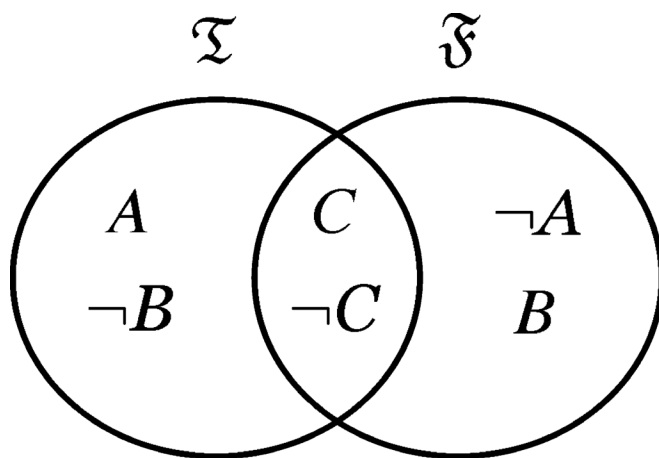
Now that we have this in our toolbox, let's take a closer look at dialetheism. Classical logic designates truth bearing propositions into true and false classes, represented by the diagram below.³⁴³



As can be seen, the two groups are mutually exclusive and exhaustive. A proposition is in T iff its negation is in F and vice versa. Accordingly, there is no situation in which A and not- A are both true and B is not true. On the classical reading, then, contradiction leads to

³⁴³ This and the following diagram are reproduced from Priest, *One*, p. xix.

explosion. But what if the two groups sometimes overlap?³⁴⁴ This is shown in the following diagram. Assuming negation works in the same way, we can say that if C is in the overlap then so is not-C. In this case both C and not-C are true—in other words, there is a true contradiction—but equally important is that B is false and thus there is no explosion. Metaphysically speaking, it is the dialethic nature of C that holds the unity together. More to come on this below.



Examples of dialetheism include paradoxes of self-reference, or enclosure paradoxes, such as the Liar’s Paradox and Russell’s Paradox.³⁴⁵ Here’s the classical form of the Liar’s Paradox:

(1): (1) is false.

(1) is self-referential because it tells us something about itself. So, suppose that (1) is true. Then what it says is the truth, and so it is false. Next, suppose that (1) is false. However, this is exactly what it claims to be and so it is true. Both alternatives lead to a

³⁴⁴ I stress the word ‘sometimes’ to indicate that one need not hold the position that there are true contradictions in any and all situations, only in certain situations. As we will see when we return to the discussion of history these situations arise at points of historical rupture.

³⁴⁵ Graham Priest, *One: Being an Investigation into the Unity of Reality and of its Parts, Including the Singular Object which is Nothingness* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), pp. xx-xxi.

contradiction.³⁴⁶ The paradox, therefore, is an example of the overlapping diagram above. As Priest writes, it is “a particular twisted construction which forces a sentence, if it is in the bona fide truths, to be in the Rest (too); conversely, if it is in the Rest, it is in the bona fide truths,”³⁴⁷ where ‘the Rest’ refers to the set of false propositions.

One potential cause for such paradoxes is their self-referential nature, or to put it differently, the fact they arise from semantic closure.³⁴⁸ What I mean by semantic closure is that the language, in this case English, is semantically complete and thus can only deal with the paradox (so to speak) self-referentially (i.e. by reference to the language itself). From the dialetheist’s perspective the conclusion is paraconsistent, namely, that a language that is semantically closed and not stratified will inherently be inconsistent. The liar’s sentence both *is* and *is not* a part of the language, and thus can only be explained self-referentially, i.e., by referring to language itself.³⁴⁹ Here, we can see explicit use of the idea of self-reference that we saw in the Absolute Idea above.

The dialetheist’s conclusion is (perhaps surprisingly) quite Hegelian, as summarized by Shapiro that the dialetheist need not “keep running through richer and richer meta-languages in order to chase our semantic tails...We embrace some contradictions in the semantics and get it all from the start.”³⁵⁰ In other words, that there are true metaphysical contradictions, or that contradictions are true features of reality. For the Hegelian, reading this mirrors the idea of bad infinity discussed in chapter one in the

³⁴⁶ For deeper analysis on this, I encourage readers to read Priest’s Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy article “Dialetheism.” See: Priest, Berto, and Weber, “Dialetheism”, *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Fall 2018 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL = <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2018/entries/dialetheism/>.

³⁴⁷ Priest, *In Contradiction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), p. 23.

³⁴⁸ That is, they satisfy Tarski’s T-Schema.

³⁴⁹ This is what is referred to as the ‘strengthened’ Liars paradox.

³⁵⁰ Shapiro, S., “Incompleteness and Inconsistency”, *Mind* 111 (2002), pp. 817–32.

passing from Being to Essence. In the context of the Liar's Paradox there is no 'transcendent' metalanguage to appeal to in order to solve the problem because the paradox is such that the problem would simply be displaced into a monotonous bad infinity of metalanguages. The problem of bad infinity can only be addressed self referentially and is why Hegel describes essence as 'being with itself [*Sein mit sich*]'³⁵¹

Let's continue the conversation by returning to Priest's direct engagement with Hegel. Priest quotes the *Logic* directly on the point of metaphysical contradiction: "ordinary experience itself declares that at least there are a number of contradictory things about, contradictory arrangements, and so forth, the contradiction being present in them, and not merely in an external reflection."³⁵² This passage is taken from a remark (Remark 3) titled "The Essentialities of Reflection" in the Doctrine of Essence. Overall, I think Priest is on the right track in highlighting this statement. The reference to external reflection is the key. By now, we know that Hegel speaks about external reflection in two related senses. One is a formal and logical category that has to do with being's own self-reflexive nature, while the other is a more ordinary sense of an individual reflecting upon a particular given situation. Here in the passage Hegel is featuring these two by telling us that the contradictions of lived experience are real and concrete and do not just exist in the reflective minds of individuals.

In addition, Hegel provides important context to these dialetheitic notions in a passage on Kant's antinomies from the *Encyclopedia Logic*

true and positive meaning of the antinomies is this: that every actual thing involves a coexistence of opposed elements. Consequently to know, or, in other words, to comprehend

³⁵¹ Hegel writes "We have already remarked this much earlier on in connection with the infinite, which is contradiction as displayed in the sphere of being." *The Science of Logic*, p. 382, 11.287.

³⁵² Priest, "Kant's Excessive Tenderness for Things in the World, and Hegel's Dialetheism," p. 57. The Hegel quote comes from: Hegel, *The Science of Logic*, p. 382, *GW* 11.287.

an object is equivalent to being conscious of it as a concrete unity of opposed determinations. The old metaphysic, as we have already seen, when it studied the objects of which it sought a metaphysical knowledge, went to work by applying categories abstractly and to the exclusion of their opposites.³⁵³

In addition to the straightforward dialetheist claim Hegel makes an important metaphysical addition in this passage³⁵⁴: that the logic of dialetheism is not ‘merely’ logical but ontological; it speaks directly to the concrete existence of life. Recall the example of the nation-state from a previous chapter. The concept of the state is a universal that we all have genuine lived experience of, not just in political but cultural, social, and economic forms as well. In the passage, Hegel tells us a determination of universal essence (the universal aspect of the concept) must be experienced as such, otherwise such a universal is just a meaningless abstract identity. For instance, we experience ourselves as being American, or German, or French, and likewise it is through this universal conceptual lens that our experience is structured.

In this way, the state is meant to express the universal will, or the universality of the people. As we saw in the case of the Liar’s paradox it is general and complete. As a universal there is nothing ‘beyond’ it. But the state is also particular and determinate in the way that it legitimately determines and structures the experience of people in their daily lives. Just as the completeness (universality) of the semantic language must be distilled into particular propositions such as the liar’s statements for it to have any meaning. Yet, every particular determination of the state is just that: only a particular version of it, or a part to use Priest’s language, and hence not the state *as such*. Thus, the paradox (or contradiction): the purely universal state by definition excludes all particular parts. It is a simple, complete,

³⁵³ Hegel, *The Encyclopedia Logic*, § 48

³⁵⁴ That is, that dialetheist claims have concrete metaphysical import for the way in which we interpret and understand the world around us.

self-reflexive identity. However, this definition is equally its form of determination as a particular state (i.e., it stands for the general will of the people).

The paradox, therefore, is that the state both *is* and *is not* universal. It executes and expresses the universal will but only from a singular point and can thus only be experienced as a specific order or faction. For instance, in the form of a political party. Like the Liar's Paradox with semantic completeness, the abstract self-identity of the state generates its own exception—or dialethic conclusion—and it does so self-reflexively; that is, not from without but by its own terms and conditions. But we must also highlight the critical addition: This exception, as a metaphysical feature, is something that is experienced historically. As Hegel says it has life and movement and is experienced in the form of historical change as when a state generates its own contradiction and revolutionary overthrow. This example gives us an insight into the historical aspect, which I will return to a bit later. For now, let's use the shared foundational of dialetheism in Priest and Hegel as a point of departure for deeper analysis.

5.2.2 Being, Nothingness, and Identity

As I remarked in the first paragraph, I think the most important point of departure is the manner in which Priest approaches the question of unity, identity, or 'oneness.' More to the point, it's not just that each thinker is interested in the theme of unity—a fact which on its own might be uninspiring—but that each seems to view unity(s), identities, structures, and the like as something *generated*. In other words, neither thinker presupposes identity as the foundational aspect of their metaphysics. This leads directly a second key point over overlap: Instead of unity/identity each thinker substitutes a principle of difference (Hegel) or contradiction (Priest) as the critical element that produces unity. One

reason for suggesting this is the importance Priest places on pure being, or what he ultimately calls “everything,” and “nothing(ness),” two categories which we know Hegel takes very seriously. Priest writes “Everything could not be what it is unless it had every other object as its part. Perhaps the most important one of these is nothing. Everything is, by definition, the complement of nothing. Each is what it is, in virtue of the other.”³⁵⁵ On the surface, this is a surprisingly Hegelian statement for two inter-related reasons. One is the idea that a ‘thing’ (i.e. an object) can only constitute itself as a unity/identity against the backdrop of nothingness or the interplay of everything/being and nothingness.

A second, broader, and more provocative reason is that in announcing his focus on being (everything) and nothing, there is room to interpret Priest as signaling to the Hegelian that he is making a subtle shift from the level of the particular (i.e. particular objects) to the level of the concept. What I mean by this is that although terms like everything and nothing inter-relate with all things—in a sense everything just is all the things, while the present being of something can only be understood in relation to its non-being (i.e. nothing)—these terms themselves are not things. They are not particular determinate objects. Instead, they are purely logical/conceptual. Thus when Priest is speaking about the unity of objects he does not seem to be speaking about *this* particular object—i.e. this chair or this human being—but objects *in general*, which I read as a conceptual move.

This second reason will become clearer with each step we take. For now, let’s dig a little deeper into what exactly Priest means by everything and nothing. He writes that everything “has all the properties of any part (object). It is therefore red, not red, in Melbourne, not in Melbourne, existent and non-existent. It is close, in fact, to the trivial

³⁵⁵ Priest, *One*, p. 171.

object—the object which has all properties.”³⁵⁶ What is most noticeable here is the way in which Priest describes everything as simultaneously existent, non-existent, and trivial. These three aspects coincide in many ways with the way Hegel speaks about pure being. In one sense pure being exists for the simple fact that we are right now thinking about it and speaking about it in a determinate way. Pure being *is*. But in a different sense the *is*-ness of pure being is at the same time utterly trivial. Pure being is literally everything, to the point of being trivial, empty, and unanalyzable. It is in this sense that I take Priest to mean that nothingness is the complement of everything, that it is “the absence of everything.”³⁵⁷ In other words, the notion of everything does not refer to every ‘thing’ in the sense of a collection of all things added together. Rather, Priest refers to everything as “the universal set,”³⁵⁸ or a set of all the individuated sets, which in Hegel-speak is the purely conceptual sense of being so abstract as to be simultaneously nothing. To think it or isolate it is to lose it in an instant. Just like everything, we speak and think about nothingness as if it were a thing. So there is the impression that nothingness is itself an object or thing. But, also just like everything, it is utterly spurious and gone in an instant: “By nothing, I mean absolutely nothing... it is the absence of all things too; so nothing is nothing.”³⁵⁹

Everything and nothing not only complement each other, but the manner in which they complement each other is what is most important. That is, they displace each other in a purely logical form of difference (contradiction in Priest’s language) in just the way detailed in chapter one. Everything and nothing are logically incompatible with each other, and it is through this incompatibility that they constitute themselves as opposite poles of

³⁵⁶ Ibid., p. 55.

³⁵⁷ Ibid.

³⁵⁸ Ibid.

³⁵⁹ Ibid.

an objective dichotomy: “Everything and nothing are like north and south. Each could not be what it is unless the other was what it is. Everything and nothing then interpenetrate. And since any ‘thing’ interpenetrates with nothing, it interpenetrates with everything.”³⁶⁰ The metaphysical point therefore is that everything and nothing represent a pure form of logical displacement, or what Priest calls “contradictory objects,” and it is through this displacement that unities/identities are generated.

To make this case Priest appeals to paraconsistent logic and set theory. He writes that “in paraconsistent theory, there is a set of all sets. It is contradictory, but not explosive...Indeed, we should expect everything [i.e. everything qua pure being] to be contradictory.”³⁶¹ Here, the set of all sets represents the notion of everything or what Priest referenced above as the universal set. As before, what makes it peculiar is that the set of all sets is not just ‘all of the sets’ but is itself a set. Since for Priest, the notion of everything is analogous to being (in that the notion of everything is contained in the notion of being) it has the determination of an object/thing because being is a part of everything. It is what makes that thing a thing. In Hegelian terms, it makes it *something*. However, the set of all sets is not itself *part* of all the sets, and thus “is not an object, and so is not a part of it.”³⁶²

There is a distinct overlap here between everything and nothing. Or, to put it in different terms, the universal set of all sets and the empty set. There is nothing in the empty set. It is the absence of everything. However, there is a peculiarity hidden here because there is a sense in which nothing is the *thing* of the empty set and thus it (the empty set) is a part of itself. Therefore, the universal and empty sets are the obverse of the same

³⁶⁰ Ibid., p. 181.

³⁶¹ Ibid., p. 54.

³⁶² Ibid.

difference/contradiction in that both are/are not objects or parts. And it is against the background of this displacement that we have ones. In short, there is no sense of unity or oneness that precedes individuation. The one of individuation, i.e., what *counts* as one, can only come from the pure displacement of everything and nothingness which is repeated in and with any countable one. Priest states that nothingness is “the fusion of the empty set...Nothing is what you get when you fuse no things.”³⁶³ All there is is logical displacement. Or to be more technical, the conclusion is a dialetheist one: everything and nothing both *are* and *are not* themselves.

This line of thought gives us an initial insight into what I meant above about Priest’s shift from object to conceptual analysis; specifically, that the contradictoriness of the latter is what provides the unity for the former. Hegel returns to this topic within the context of being and nothing in the last page of the Doctrine of Being. He writes that in one sense being is ‘everything’ as the “the totality in which all the determinations of being are sublated [*aufgehoben*] and contained [*enthalten*]” (*SL* p. 334, *GW* 21.382). In Hegelian terms, the set of all determinate sets (everything, pure being) as a determination is a particular part of every object insofar as everything is an aggregate of all things. But this is only a one-sided view. Pure being is not itself an object or a part of anything because it is utterly indeterminate, empty, and unanalyzable. Thus, there is a “contradiction of itself [*Widerspruch ihrer selbst*] and its determinateness [*Bestimmtheits*], of its implicitly existent determination and of its posited determinateness” (*Ibid.*)³⁶⁴ in the sense that being/everything is and is not a part and/or determinate object.

³⁶³ *Ibid.*

³⁶⁴ I have mentioned di Giovanni’s translation of *Bestimmtheits* as ‘determinateness’ on previous occasions but since the current conversation is a comparative analysis it might be worth mentioning again within the context of Priest’s understanding of ‘everything.’ It seems to me that *Bestimmtheits* is meant to evoke not

In this way, by not being itself a part, an object, or a determination, it is a purely conceptual form of singularity; it is reflexive and only self-related. However, this relation, as an utterly indeterminate emptiness is indistinguishable from nothingness which is its complete contradiction. Everything and nothing logically coexist simultaneously in the sense that there is a clear contradiction immanent to everything itself as “simple and infinitely negative self-reference [*unendliche negative Beziehung auf sich*], the incompatibility of itself with itself [*Unverträglichkeit ihrer mit ihr selbst*]” (Ibid.). Let’s try to clarify Hegel’s language here in terms of Priest’s notion of everything as the universal or empty set. In order for everything to be concretely determined and constituted as a set, such that it is a part of all things, it must first be individuated and unified dynamically via a contradictory displacement. It is not as though we have first the determinate empty set that counts as a unified ‘one’, followed by a set with one element, a set with two elements, and so forth in a chain of countable different ‘ones’ with parts. Rather, the empty set only appears as a set, as a unified countable one, through the self-contradictory nature and displacement of the concepts everything and nothing. Put differently, the determinate emptiness does not exist without being unified as a one (as an object), but on the other hand this unity only arises from a form of logical displacement.

Priest gives a highly technical explanation for this, which I will try my best to summarize in the following paragraphs.³⁶⁵ The overarching point, as Priest describes it, is

merely a sense of determination but *being determined* as such. That is, being’s form as determination—to be determined—which of course is in contradiction with the total indeterminacy of pure being. This is reflected in Priest’s notion of everything, which both is and is not an object, is and is not determined.

³⁶⁵ Please note again that my purpose in doing this is not to give a blow-by-blow of Priest’s formal-technical argument as I do not have to expertise to do that. Rather, my goal is to simply present some of the conclusions that I find most interesting to move the conversation forward.

to “how best to formulate mereology with the empty fusion.”³⁶⁶ Put differently, what is the relationship between mereology and the empty set where we get to the dialetheist conclusion of the previous paragraph that everything and nothing both are and are not objects and/or themselves?³⁶⁷ First, however, we need some background information on terminology. As just noted, nothingness is the fusion of the empty set, what you get when you fuse no-things.³⁶⁸ It is symbolized $\oplus\emptyset$. For simplicity, let’s substitute the letter n for the fusion of the empty set ($\oplus\emptyset$) and take a mereological formula like $x \leq y$. What this states is that ‘ x is a part of y ,’ but only in the most general sense, which is to say that it may be a proper or improper part, such that $x < y \vee x = y$. The second half of the disjunction is what is most interesting because it indicates that y is a part of itself ($y \leq y$). Thus, it mirrors n in the sense that n , as the empty set, can only be a part of itself (i.e., it is an improper part) and therefore draws a direct connection to the self-reflexive nature of everything and nothingness discussed in the previous paragraphs. This connection should be kept in mind in our next steps.

Accordingly, we can equally say that $n \leq n$: the fusion of the empty set is a part of itself. Thus, we can write ‘ x is a part of y (properly or improperly) as $x \leq_n y$, which, using the previously stated definition ($x < y \vee x = y$) reads $x = n \vee x \leq y$ where for any y the empty set is a part.³⁶⁹ The conclusion Priest is trying to show here is that nothing is not a proper part of anything yet is a part of everything. Now that we have this, let’s move to overlap ($x \circ y$) and fusion. Two things overlap when they have a part in common. So, we

³⁶⁶ Priest, *One*, p. 98.

³⁶⁷ Ibid. That is, in terms of parts when the only ‘part’ is nothingness.

³⁶⁸ It seems to me that everything could also fit the bill for the fusion of the empty set given that everything is itself not a thing, and thus a fusion of no things.

³⁶⁹ Ibid.

can define $x \circ y$ as $\exists z (z \leq x \wedge z \leq y)$ such that there is some z that is a part of x and y . Because of this definition we can also say the same thing about n . Given that $n \leq n$ it follows that $n \circ n$. For fusion we have the following: $\forall x(x \circ \oplus \Sigma \leftrightarrow \exists(y \in \Sigma \wedge x \circ y))$. As we can see from the formula, the definition of fusion involves overlap (\circ). And, as we know, if two things have a part in common, they overlap. So if we look at the formula, all x overlaps with the fusion of a set if and only if (iff) there is some y that is a member of the set such that x overlaps with y , because as we know previously that x overlaps with y .³⁷⁰

Now is where things get tricky, when we see how these definitions go together with the nothingness of the empty set. As predicted, the outcome is a dialetheist one. Given what we know about the empty set (\emptyset), it makes sense that $\neg \exists y y \in \emptyset$; there is no y such that y is a member of the empty set. Therefore, it also follows from the definition of n that $\forall x \neg x \circ n$; that is, no x overlaps with n because there is no proper part that they share (because n has no parts). Now, we remember from the previous paragraph that $x \leq n y$ was defined as $x = n \vee x \leq y$ in the sense that $x = n$ and the fact that neither x nor n by this definition is a proper part of y . What this is meant to show is that the empty fusion (n) was a part of everything but is not a proper part of anything simply because the empty set has no proper parts. However, this does *not* mean that x and n overlap as from $\forall x \neg x \circ n$, which reads that there is no proper part that x and n share. we can therefore say that $\neg n \circ n$. Again, because n is empty it cannot overlap with itself because there is no proper part to overlap with. By the definition of overlap, then, $\neg n \leq n$; and since $\neg n \leq n$ we get a point where $n \neq n$.³⁷¹ By this point we can see the contradictory outcome. But that, of course, is the entire

³⁷⁰ Ibid.

³⁷¹ Ibid.

point. That nothing both *is* and *is not* an object and that it is this self-contradictory nature— to use Hegelian terms, as a singularity that is always differentiated from itself—that allows it to bind together x,y,z into a unity.

Let's reconnect this to what I see as the larger metaphysical narrative at hand, namely, that the contradictory nature of nothingness (and everything) as the empty set can only be constituted from this basis. As I said before we began discussing Priest's technical arguments, it is not as though we have an empty set that constitutes a unified thing with no elements, and then a linear succession of sets with one, two, three elements and so forth. Rather, as Priest shows in the logical structure, the empty set appears as something countable, i.e. a one, only on the basis of the contradictoriness of nothingness. The 'countability' comes from the fusion itself. In Hegelian terms, everything and nothing overlap with each other in that they are indistinguishable yet self-contradictory. As in the Liar's paradox, there is a logical self-reflexivity or what Hegel calls 'self-repelling.' Thus, Priest concludes in a strikingly Hegelian way that "nothing is a precondition of the possibility of anything at all being an object; that is, nothing is a precondition for the possibility of objects."³⁷²

5.2.3 Gluons and Syllogisms

A question still remains for us to resolve: how is it that identity is expressed concretely (i.e. in concrete historical reality)? How does it appear against the background of logical displacement? These questions form the basis of this section. To answer them, Priest introduces the neologisms "gluon" and "gluon theory." The very short version on

³⁷² Ibid., p. 208.

gluons is that they are the things which ‘glue’ an object together.³⁷³ Every object with parts is both one and many. But how do the parts collude to make a unity? Something must make it so. However, as Priest notes “when one starts to examine this matter, that thing appears to have contradictory properties.”³⁷⁴ That which binds objects together must be dialetheitical; it must have contradictory properties. Priest writes gluons are “expected to have contradictory properties” that “bind the parts (including itself) [of an object] into a whole.”³⁷⁵ It is against this backdrop that objects become what they are. This overlaps with Hegel in many respects, for example his chapter on “Syllogism” from the Doctrine of the Concept. More on this comparison in a moment.

Priest continues “Given a partite object, x , a gluon for x is an object which is identical to all and only the parts of x . By being identical to each of the parts and to only those, it unifies them into one whole.” Also, we should note “that a gluon is identical to itself; it follows that it is a part of x .”³⁷⁶ That is, it is self-referential, and to use a Hegelian term, it is a singularity. For instance, suppose that object x has parts a, b, c , and g , where g is the gluon. Furthermore, these parts have the properties P1, P2, and P3. This is expressed in the following table. The ‘+’ indicates that the part is in the extension of the property, ‘-’ indicates that the anti-extension holds, and \pm indicates both:

	P1	P2	P3
a	+	+	-
g	\pm	\pm	+

³⁷³ The term ‘thing’ must very much be taken in quotation marks because as we will see gluons both are and are not things.

³⁷⁴ Priest, *One*, p. xvi.

³⁷⁵ Ibid., p. 16.

³⁷⁶ Ibid., p. 20.

b - + +

c ++ -

In the table g is extensive with and equivalent to the parts, such that for a property (X), a and b are equivalent to g ($UX(Xa=Xg)$). What Priest shows³⁷⁷ is that $a = g$, $g = g$, and $g = b$, but also importantly that a and b are not in extension with each other. They express different properties and only relate to one another through g . The reason for this importance is that we notice from the table that g , via the \pm is indicated as both being and not being a and b . The gluon is both a part and not a part of the object. It is self-contradictory in that it contains within it contradictory parts while at the same time being what binds them together as an object. Hence, $\neg (PIg \equiv PIg)$. This shows that the property (PI) is not reducible to g because g is contradictory (hence the \pm in the table). In other words, g both *is* and *is not* an expression of $P1$, depending on whether or not we are speaking about the different parts b or c . Accordingly, it is the case that $EX(Xg \wedge \neg Xg)$ and $\neg UX(Xg \equiv Xg)$. This shows that g is not equal to itself and, taken together with the table, shows that it both is and is not itself.³⁷⁸ The important conclusion for our purposes is this last bit of information. The gluon of an object is self-contradictory such that it expresses contradictory properties ($Xg \wedge \neg Xg$), and this is because the gluon both is and is not itself: “that is, g does not equal g .”³⁷⁹

³⁷⁷ See Priest, pp. 20-21.

³⁷⁸ For the entire technical breakdown of this, see Priest, p. 21. I mentioned this at the beginning, but it is worth repeating here. My purpose in this chapter is not evaluate or analyze the technical aspects of Priest’s argument, i.e. whether or not the paraconsistent logic he is presenting with Gluon Theory does in fact do the work Priest asserts that it does. That work is a topic for future projects. All I am trying to do here is explain/evaluate how some of the conclusions he reaches have Hegelian overlap for the purposes of establish a foothold for future dialogue (which would include, of course, the technical analysis I am putting off at the moment).

³⁷⁹ Priest, p. 20. Priest goes on to say that “...the being of an object is its gluon. And gluons (at least, proper gluons), we know, are not objects.” And “The gluon of a partite object is and is not an object.” Priest, p. 52.

This last part is critical because it reveals that gluons operate on the level of pure displacement, as in the case of pure nothingness above, which is to say that the expression of their identity is constituted on the bases of logical displacement. Most importantly, it is on this very basis that gluons also form the structure and unity of an object, thus making that object what it is. Priest states “...the being of an object is its gluon. And gluons (at least, proper gluons), we know, are not objects.” And that “The gluon of a partite object is and is not an object.”³⁸⁰ Accordingly, albeit with different terminology, these gluons mirror in some respects what Hegel describes as the pure past—which forms the universal aspect of the concept—in that gluons provide the essential structure for the historical continuity of various concrete objects, for example political states or the universal moral horizon of the community. What is most important to flag here, however, is that the contradictory nature of the gluon—i.e. the fact that it is based on nothingness and displacement—is what leaves it open as a candidate to help us explain the kind of historical change articulated in the final section of the chapter.

Moving forward, it seems to me that Priest’s Gluon Theory resembles my thesis that, although it focuses primarily on the unity of determinate objects, the specific reason why it works (i.e. why it has a dialetheist nature to it) is because Priest distills this unity through a conceptual lens insofar as it is the gluon that makes it a unity.³⁸¹ That is, gluons are purely conceptual. As we just saw, the parts are materially equivalent to the gluon; but crucially, they are not the equivalents of each other, nor is the gluon itself reducible to them. It is the gluon that *makes* the difference in the object. Like the concept, gluons

³⁸⁰ Ibid., p. 52.

³⁸¹ This references back to a claim I made at that beginning of this section that is now more explicit; namely, that when expounding upon the oneness of objects it is clear that Priest is not talking about any particular object, but objecthood *as such*. That is, the *concept* of an object.

maintain the contradictory overlap of universality, particularity, and singularity. In the Hegelian sense, gluons hold the parts of an object together in a negative unity. Each aspect (part, property) of the object is a particular expression or objective determination of the concept, but it is not itself the concept. This is the sense in which the gluon, from the Hegelian perspective, mirrors the pure universal past in that each particular expression is determined as passing into its other. In short, they are not the gluon. These parts are not what make the object what it is or gives it its unity. Thus they are determined to pass into the non-immediate aspect. Universality and particularity overlap in the gluon. Particular because it is expressed as a particular part/determination of the object without being reducible to them. Universal because it holds these expressions in negative unity: each particular part falls short of being the ‘thing itself’ and it is the gluon that makes this difference in the particular parts and binds them together.

However, this is also how it is a singularity, specifically, the idea of negative unity. As we saw above the gluon is not a container filled with properties or parts.³⁸² Rather, its universality is negative: none of the parts can ever fully express it. Only the gluon itself, as a singularity, can do that. The idea, therefore, is that the gluon contracts (as a negative unity) and therefore contains the differences between the parts and itself and between the parts themselves to a singular point of self-relation and reflexivity in the way that singularities are and can only related to themselves reflexively. In other words, in order for the gluon to constitute itself as a unity, as $g=g$, it must always already be reflexively different/contradictory with itself, at odds with itself, or displace itself (this is simply revealed by the fact that there are two g 's on either side of the equation). This is what Priest

³⁸² Note as well this this draws on the wrong sense in which Priest and Hegel consider the category of everything discussed above. That is, for them everything is not an aggregate or container of all the things.

showed in the chart above and what Hegel shows in the singularity of the concept, that *g* both is and is not itself. The gluon can hold the contradictory parts of an object together in a unified coexistence, because it itself is logically self-contradictory and the objects themselves are expressed against the background of this difference. It is this purely logical form of displacement that underpins the different properties and binds them together.

Hegel makes a similar point in his discussion of the disjunctive syllogism in the Doctrine of the Concept. For Hegel, the disjunctive syllogism represents the highest form of a syllogism because it is distilled into objectivity. Hegel writes that “The mediation of the syllogism has thereby determined itself as singularity [*Einzelheit*], immediacy, and self-referring negativity [*sich auf sich beziehende Negativität*], or as a differentiating identity [*unterscheidende*] that retrieves itself into itself out of this differentiation – as absolute form, and for that very reason as objective universality” (*SL* p. 622, *GW* 12.124). When Hegel refers to the mediation of the syllogism, he is referring to the logical connection of its desperate parts. However, the difference is that for him this mediation is an *activity* that he calls “translation.”³⁸³ The mediation translates the parts into each other and binds them into a whole. As Hegel notes in the passage, this reflects the differentiation of the syllogism, i.e., from part-to-part or statement-to-statement, out of an external opposition into itself as a unity. The key metaphysical point is that the differences are not external to the whole but in fact are constitutive of its identity. The syllogism is determined itself as a “singularity” and “self-referring negativity.” Because the singular aspect of the syllogism—which is

³⁸³ For context, the full passage is: “But necessity merges with the necessary; the form-activity of translating the conditioning actuality into the conditioned is in itself the unity into which the determinacies of the oppositions previously let free into indifferent existence are sublated, and where the difference of A and B is an empty name. The unity is therefore a unity reflected into itself...” Hegel, *The Science of Logic*, p. 622, *GW* 12.124.

what mediates the entire form into a totality—can only constitute its own identity on the basis self-referring negativity, this displacement is what is expressed objectively throughout the whole and binds it together.

Hegel gives the following examples:

“A is either B or C or D,

But A is B,

Therefore A is neither C nor D.

Or also:

A is either B or C or D,

But A is neither C nor D,

Therefore A is B” (*SL* p. 622-623, *GW* 12.124).

It seems to me that the essential takeaway is the simultaneity of inclusion and exclusion.

As we saw above, A is the ‘gluon’ here because it represents the element that binds the whole together, but it does so as a particular. That is, where B, C, and D are equal to it.

Hegel writes “an A which is B as well as C and D. But particularization is differentiation and as such equally the either-or of B, C, D – negative unity, the reciprocal exclusion of the determinations” (*Ibid.*). Here we see the other side: exclusion. In the first premise A is universal in the sense of being particularized in the totality of parts B, C, and D. But in the second premise it is equally/simultaneously determinate. This is the sense of universality as negative unity that both is and is not the varying aspects of the whole. It makes the difference *as itself* and nothing else, i.e., as a singularity, A always already includes as the primary factor of its identity the displacement/differentiation of B, C, and D.

In the conclusion A internalizes and immanentizes the two different premises into itself as a singular. Or, to put it differently, it sharpens the different layers/spheres to a point of purely logical displacement (in which the contradictory spheres are already contained). It is this displacement that allow it to hold the whole together objectively and concretely: “in the conclusion it is posited as the excluding [*ausschließende*], singular determinateness. – Or again, in the minor it is already exclusive singularity [*ausschließende Einzelheit*], and in the conclusion it is positively posited as the determinate that it is” (*SL* p. 623, *GW* 12.124).³⁸⁴ It is in this way that Hegel’s form of conceptual singularity behaves like Priest’s gluon.

5.2.4 Singularity vs. Metaphysical Simples

In the interest of context, it is important to note the difference between the way in which Hegel and Priest characterize singularity from the way in which other authors such as Peter van Inwagen draw on the category.³⁸⁵ This distinction helps transition to the final section of the chapter, where we rejoin the explicit discussion of historical change. Although van Inwagen does not explicitly use the terms singularity or singular, his metaphysics does draws on a certain aspect of singularity in the form of what he calls metaphysical “simples.”³⁸⁶ For van Inwagen, there are no composite object in existence except for “men and women and cats and other living organisms.”³⁸⁷ Every other physical

³⁸⁴ The full clause here reads “im Schlußsatz ist es als die ausschließende, *einzelne* Bestimmtheit gesetzt,” which I think is important because it indicates excluding as an *activity* of positing; an activity that generates a unity which is analogous to the way I’m interpreting the work done by Priest’s Gluon.

³⁸⁵ I am primarily relying on van Inwagen’s text *Material Beings*, but he also makes similar arguments elsewhere, for instance his article “When are Objects Parts?” See: *Material Beings* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1990), and “When are Objects Parts?” *Philosophical Perspectives*, 1 (1987): 21–47

³⁸⁶ Van Inwagen, *Material Beings*, p. 98, 108.

³⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 18

thing of a non-organic nature “are facts about the arrangement of simples.”³⁸⁸ van Inwagen uses the example of a swarm of bees to illustrate this point, where each individual bee is a ‘thing’ analogous to a part-less metaphysical simple which are spatially arranged in just such a way as to make a swarm. The point is that one would hardly call such a spatially arranged swarm an object with parts. Thus, van Inwagen writes that whether certain objects “compose some larger object does not depend on anything besides the spatial and causal relations they bear to one another.”³⁸⁹ From this perspective, outside of the aforementioned exceptions for living organisms, the notion of singularity is reducible to and expressed by part-less metaphysical simples that form ‘objects’ just insofar as they are arranged in certain ways.³⁹⁰

It seems to me the difference between positions on singularity such as van Inwagen, which trends towards a form of atomism, and Priest and Hegel is that the latter two raise the category to the conceptual level which makes room for dialetheist conclusions. The example of musical harmony from chapter two is worthy of reengaging here because it explains why certain determinations of being resonate and/or have affinity (*Wahlverwandtschaft*) with each other. Hegel writes that “the meaning of a single note also depends on its relation to, and combination with, another note and a series of notes...The single note is the keynote of a system, but at the same time also one member in the system of every other note. The harmonies are exclusive elective affinities [*Wahlverwandtschaft*] whose characteristic quality, however, equally dissolves again in the externality of a mere

³⁸⁸ Ibid., p. 108.

³⁸⁹ Ibid., p. 12.

³⁹⁰ As D.L.M. Baxter puts it, objects are just sums of parts “taken together”; and/or a multitude that are “counted loosely” together. See: D.L.M. Baxter “Many–One Identity”, *Philosophical Papers*, 17 (1988), pp. 193–216; and “Identity in the Loose and Popular Sense”, *Mind*, 97 (1988) pp 575–582.

quantitative progression” (*SL* p. 308-309, *GW* 21.352-21.353). In a certain respect, it is easy to think of the notes of a musical composition as an aggregate of metaphysical simples; but the issue Hegel raises is that such a view does not (and cannot) explain the harmony of the composition. There is a purely qualitative aspect to musical harmony that is not reducible to a swarm of simples and therefore must be thought of a different way.

The most important aspect of the passage is what Hegel calls the keynote: what makes the aggregate into a musical harmony. As a single note in the harmony, the keynote immanently reflects and contracts all the notes into a singularity, i.e., into the keynote itself (insofar as the keynote stands for the composition itself). The keynote both is/is not a part of the harmony because it resonates through each and every aspect of the composition. It stands for the harmony of the composition as such and is thus raised to the level of conceptual singularity instead of a metaphysical simple. The keynote is thus immanently self-contradictory, it reflects all the different aspects of the harmony simultaneously, and it is this dynamic displacement that resonates from note to note and makes them harmonize.

Priest likewise gives a similar example, although on a much larger scale, with the Net of Indra. This example comes from the Huayan Buddhist tradition and tells the story of a net stretched infinitely in all directions with an infinite number of glittering jewels placed at the nodes of each net. The key to story is one of reflection and resonance, for if a person were to arbitrarily select any one of the jewels she would notice it reflects every other jewel (infinite in number) in the net within itself. And, on the other side, she would notice that this singular jewel resonates with all the others. Like Hegel’s keynote, then, there is a definite sense in which this jewel both is and is not a part—reflecting the primary ontological starting point of the contradiction between everything and nothing—because it

resonates with each jewel while at the same time contracting the entirety of the net to a self-contradictory singularity (it is both everything and nothing).

Priest has a technical explanation for this, which draws on the dialetheist conclusions we introduced above.³⁹¹ One of those conclusions was, obviously, that gluons both are and are not objects and thus have a relation to nothingness. So, it is the case that $\neg Gx x=N$ and $Ux x\neq N$; thus for any particular object such as a , $a \neq N$.³⁹² This is so because no gluon, insofar as it is an object, equates to nothing, so no objects are nothing. However, Priest quickly points out that “the relationship between a and nothing is tighter than mere difference. Part of the quiddity of a is to be an object. (It could not be a unless it were at least an object.) And it could not be this, unless it stood out, as it were, against nothing. It’s not being nothing makes it possible to be (an object).”³⁹³ What is critical here is the distinction Priest makes between ‘mere difference’ and the tighter form of logical difference understood by Hegel. Specifically, that nothing interpenetrates with all objects.³⁹⁴ Think about the Net of Indra again. Because each jewel/node reflects and resonates with every other, they also reduce and contract the mere differences between them immanently to a singular point of self-reflexivity. That is, the identity of each jewel is always already different from itself and self-contradictory. It differs from itself as a logical act of differentiation (this is why Hegel uses the term *self-repelling*), as if one were already two and vice versa. It is this logical dynamic difference that generates the background against which objects emerge.

³⁹¹ See: pp. 200-205 above

³⁹² Priest, *One*, p. 180. In his example Priest uses a symbol from the Chinese alphabet to denote nothingness. I cannot reproduce this symbol on my word processor so I have substituted a capitalized and italicized N .

³⁹³ Ibid.

³⁹⁴ Priest writes “Any object and nothing are, then, like the magnetic n and s ” (p. 180).

As I noted with Hegel, a key dialectic conclusion is that reality is not aggregates of a static swarm, but dynamic and interpenetrating. These twin themes raise a final point that allows us to transition back to the conversation regarding metaphysics and history. For Priest and Hegel there is an immanent connection between that which is seemingly only logical and that which is concretely in the world. Earlier I referenced a passage that Priest quoted directly from the *Logic* where Hegel directly links contradiction to concrete human experience.³⁹⁵ Later on in the chapter on “Life” from the Doctrine of the Concept, Hegel puts this more forcefully, writing “It is said that contradiction cannot be thought; but in the pain of the living being it is even an actual, concrete existence” (*SL* p. 684, *GW* 12.188).

One clear take away from this passage is that Hegel views contradiction not only as a principle of logic but something that has legitimate ontological import. It is a principle of concrete human life. In other words, that life has a certain dynamic and/or vitalist impulse to it and that this impulse is rooted in logical displacement. Priest argues similarly, “I take it that disquiet in others does affect us, even if we are not conscious of this. Deep in the unconscious, it plants the seeds of unease—if only because we know that things of the kind that have happened to others to disquiet them can equally happen to us—much as we might want to repress this thought with an act of bad faith.”³⁹⁶ The point is that the world itself is disquieting. It is full of mutually exclusive but simultaneously coexisting parts. Anyone involved in politics knows this. For example, the simultaneous existence of democratic and fascist movements that we ourselves, as historic beings, express and reflect, and which we cannot run away from except in an act of bad faith. This will become apparent in turning now to the final section of the chapter.

³⁹⁵ See: p. 193 above.

³⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 223.

5.3 History: Memory, Trauma, Revolution

This final section of the chapter turns our attention to some specific historical examples in order to connect the two previous discussions together. They are the ideas of the pure past and the interlude into Graham Priest for the purposes of showing historical change. The first example to tackle is that of moral conflict, specifically, the apparent contradictions embedded in moral life and how our moral frameworks seem to undergo such radical change. In previous section I attempted to draw a comparison between Hegel's thinking regarding conceptual structure (in the form of syllogism) and Priest's Gluon Theory. The comparison centered around the idea that each theory generates a universal conceptual space within which contradictory expressions can coexist. The reason for this was because the universal space itself was self-contradictory and therefore open to radical forms of (historical) displacement. This comparison provides a good analogue for our return to the discussion of history, especially the idea of the pure universal past, insofar as it is this concept (pure past) that expresses the primary metaphysical point. Let's begin by exploring this connection some more.

In his writing on the disjunctive syllogism, Hegel wrote that it has the form "S-U-P" in which the middle term is universality as well as particularity and singularity. As that universality, it is in the first place the substantial identity of the genus, but this identity is secondly one in which particularity is included, but again, included as equal to it – therefore as a universal sphere that contains its total particularity, the genus sorted out in its species, an A which is B as well as C and D (*SL* p. 622, *GW* 12.124). This passage lays out in more detail one of the major aspects discussed above, namely, that there is an aspect of universality that binds the whole into a unity. The universal, as the mediating term of the

syllogism, binds together as a presupposition A, B, C, and D as particulars. Markus Gabriel refers to this aspect of the concept as the “logical space,” writing that “As soon as something stateable exists, a sphere of intelligibility is established: in precisely this moment...logical space falls into the background.”³⁹⁷

Building off Hegel’s passage, and the insight from Gabriel, this sounds eerily similar to two ideas I discussed in detail: the pure historical past and habit. For the first, this aspect of the concept and the gluon operates as the essential, necessary, and therefore presupposed historical background/context within which different particular expressions co-exist simultaneously to one another, and as we will see, come into conflict with one another. In the case of morality our moral culture is passed on to us, often as a subconscious presupposition behind our backs, and thus forms a universal context within which we not only live and make moral choices but more importantly, it forms the context within we understand something to be moral in the first place. Put differently, we grow up in these moral traditions of what is allowed to count as a properly moral act. They inform the ways in which the world appears to us, how we live, and how we act (morally). As John Russon puts it, “these become the very substance of our lives,”³⁹⁸ in the ontological sense of the fact that—like the pure past—our lives and our actions are particular concrete expressions of this universal historical background that mediates us to it.

It is in this way that the pure historical past becomes what Hegel calls “habitual” and “necessary” in the manner referenced by Catherine Malabou above: as the becoming essential of the accident. Hegel writes in the *Philosophy of Right* that “Habit appears as a second nature which takes the place of the original and purely natural will and is the all-

³⁹⁷ Gabriel, p. 127.

³⁹⁸ Russon, p. 153.

pervading soul, significance, and actuality of individual existence.”³⁹⁹ Hegel’s use here of the language of an “all-pervading” “second nature” is not meant to be hyperbolic but is meant to underscore a primary ontological phenomenon that we experience the pure historical past as a necessary given, or as second nature, to us that is woven into the fabric of reality which we constantly reflect upon to inform our choices as we live and act. Hegel writes about this form of reflection in the Doctrine of Essence, stating that “Reflection is the sublation of the negative of itself [*Aufheben des Negativen seiner selbst*], coincidence with itself [*sie ist Zusammengehen mit sich*]; it therefore sublates its positing [*Setzen*], and inasmuch as it is in its positing the sublation of positing, it is presupposing [*Voraussetzen*]” (*SL*, p. 347, *GW* 11.251).

This short passage highlights the theme of the current discussion.⁴⁰⁰ When we reflect upon something, in order for this reflection to occur there must be something presupposed to reflect upon. But by the same token, when reflection occurs it has the effect of making such a presupposition its own; that is, it reduces the presupposition to an activity of reflection. This is what Hegel means by reflection ‘sublating’ its negative and coinciding with itself: reflection sublates what is originally posited, which is the given presupposition, in order to posit its own activity. But in doing so, reflection sublates positing as such—it sublates itself—and thus re-instantiates the presupposition.

³⁹⁹ Hegel, *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, ed. by Allen W. Wood and trans. by H.B. Nisbet (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), p. 195.

⁴⁰⁰ It also makes an important point between the relationship of positing (*Setzen*) and presupposing (*Voraussetzen*) that I will return to below. Namely, that they are not static terms (i.e., like a grounded/ground relationship) but are dynamic. Reflection can only become *Voraussetzen* through an activity of its own expression or positing (*Setzen*). This is what Hegel means by reflection coinciding with itself (*Zusammengehen mit sich*) in negativity. It is only out of this negative self-relation that the posited expression and its presupposition become concretized.

I will return to this back-and-forth aspect of reflection and presupposition in more detail shortly, but the point to be grasped right now is that historical presuppositions operate in a peculiar way, namely, by suspending the fact that they are historically posited in the first place. That is, their universality appears as necessary. In the example of morality, it is the historical conceptual framework that forms the very parameters and establishes the meaning and sense of what counts as a properly moral law and a properly moral action. We construe them as having independent moral value which we then reflect upon and interpret when making our own choices.⁴⁰¹ Moral habit, therefore, involves a relationship not just to the historical past but also to the future, in that the pure past can (and in most cases will) prescribe how I will react to a future event. We saw this above in the way that the pure past is never truly past but continuously insists upon and mediates the future by providing the conceptual framework within which future choices/events will occur. This is the manner in which history can appear teleological as the unfolding, progress, and/or ‘living up to’ a presupposed identity.

What is interesting about genuine moral conflict, as we now turn the tables on this picture, is the manner in which these historical presuppositions break down and are prone to radical historical shifts/changes, oftentimes through the singularity of a moral choice. Here is where the appeal to Priest’s gluons and Hegel’s concept can provide insight. In the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, Hegel writes that the “community, however, can only maintain itself by suppressing the spirit of singularity, and, because it is an essential moment, all the same creates it and, moreover, creates it by its repressive attitude towards it as a hostile

⁴⁰¹ As Russon writes “they are metaphysically self-sufficient both to hold themselves in being and to be causally forceful on agents.” Russon, p. 155.

principle.”⁴⁰² Here, the paradox of moral conflict is distilled for us in a basic form: the universality of the moral order must be embodied in the singularity of concrete moral activity. However, by the same token, it is this very universality that suppresses the true revolutionary potential of singularity by fixing the parameters so that agents cannot possibly see beyond them. Hegel cites the story of Antigone as a canonical example of this moral paradox. In one definite sense, Antigone embodies the sense of the universal historical-moral framework. In the story, she comes to recognize herself through a divine sense of duty to the universal moral law. She experience’s herself as a subject within this framework as the inexplicable givenness as a set of ethical imperatives that frame choices. More importantly, they appear to her as presuppositions that she literally cannot see beyond. They form the ontological horizon of her present being and the future of what she will be.⁴⁰³

However, the paradox enters through a second and simultaneous conceptual moral structure in the form of the political and civil law of Creon who forbids denies Antigone’s brother Polynices a proper and honorable burial for the crime of treason. The character of Creon, therefore, represents a contradictory moral framework occurring within the very same universal/historical horizon. Creon views the political laws and the decrees of the state as the universal guarantors of happiness and, more importantly, establishing what it means to be a subject and citizen in the first place. Like Antigone, Creon experiences

⁴⁰² Hegel, *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, p. 288.

⁴⁰³ As an aside, this idea might seem hyperbolic, however, I think it is actually pretty straight forward. Namely, the universal can only *be*—i.e. can only have meaning as a universal in concrete particular situations—and therefore there is no god’s eye that Antigone can take in order to ‘see the truth.’ That is because the universal is always indexed to her particular situation as the concrete structures of her lifeworld. And thus to ask her to step outside of herself is in essence a useless task because such an activity would have no meaning at all for her.

himself as consistent with the universal will of the Gods, yet with exactly contradictory outcomes.

What these two contradictory aspects—or properties as Priest might put it—of the universal moral framework reveal is a second point of view from which we can recognize that the universal framework breaks down and we see the reemergence of suppressed singularity. If we use the Priest-Hegel comparison as our interpretive key, we see that a critical aspect of the universal (moral) framework is that it binds together contradictory levels or logical spaces, namely, the universal framework represented by Creon and the universal framework represented by Antigone, both of which co-exist as particular but contradictory expressions of the universal framework. Because of this, there is no objective third position that Antigone can appeal to in order to help her decide simply because the differentiated layers displace one another. The Hegelian point is that she cannot abstract herself from the situation or abdicate her choice.

She (and she alone) must choose between these two contradictory frameworks, the natural law and the civil law, which are distilled in the same concrete situation. Both options are seemingly interchangeable: each is in some way ‘right’ and ‘wrong’ insofar as they express the universal order. This form of universal antagonism—what I’ve been calling difference throughout the text— in which something must give is reflected into the singularity of Antigone’s choice. It is at these precisely singular moments that the entire historical-moral order breaks down entirely. Put differently, the contradictory concrete expressions of universality co-exist as an historical unity because the universal element itself is contradictory. This is reflected in Antigone’s choice. In having to choose, the entirety of the (Antigone’s) moral conflict is contracted to a singular point of self-

contradiction in that both aspects are contained in the single moment. Accordingly, Antigone's decision represents a form of purely logical differentiation/displacement that we discussed above. In Priest's terms, it is the gluon that holds the contradictory aspects of the unity together. To clarify this, in the moment of her decision Antigone has no conceptual framework to appeal because it has broken down. More specifically, it has been sharpened to a singular point of self-contradiction and differentiation. All she is left with is the inherent resolve to act. Her moral act, therefore, is a form of pure displacement in which an old historical order collapses and new one emerges. Put differently, Antigone's free choice posits her own presupposition, and a new universal emerges simultaneously with the free singular choice.

Hegel explains in the *Phenomenology* that "the community is a nation, is itself an individuality."⁴⁰⁴ The community represents a universal 'second nature' through which particular moral actors exist. But, and most importantly, we must always remember the other half of the story in which the essential becomes accidental. Which is to say that the universal framework can only sustain itself and "essentially is only such for itself by other individualities being for it."⁴⁰⁵ In other words, the universal-historical frameworks can only *be qua* unity insofar as human beings continue to express them. That is, if they are actualized in the real contingency of free agents who experience themselves as being beholden to their universal nature. As Russon writes "It is only in and as experienced and enacted by living actual subjects that 'there is' any law, any ethical substantiality, at all."⁴⁰⁶ Analogously, recall the manner in which Priest spoke about nothingness and the empty set

⁴⁰⁴ Hegel, *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, p. 288.

⁴⁰⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁰⁶ Russon, p. 155.

(vis-à-vis gluons). In order for the empty set to even be constituted as a set, i.e., as an identity with itself as a part, this constitution must be first be founded on a singular and logical displacement of what Priest calls “the paradox of nothingness.”⁴⁰⁷ Priest provides more context as to what exactly this means, writing that “the paradoxical thing we seek will be something which concerns the very possibility of representation in general.”⁴⁰⁸ As I read this, the basic idea (which is a quite Hegelian one) is that, given the relationship Priest draws between gluons and nothingness, the primary reason we have unities of representations in general is because of the self-paradoxical nature of that which binds them. This is what is meant in the Hegelian terminology of ‘positing one’s own universal presuppositions.’ In the case of moral conflict, the singular and free decision of Antigone represents the self-paradoxical gluon that binds together the universal field. In choosing, she chooses for herself and essentially re-writes the entire historical field. The unity of which—i.e. the universal presupposition or moral framework—emerges retroactively as a result of her choice.

5.3.1 Revolution and Historical Trauma

Social revolution and historical trauma is another example where we can see some of the overlapping points of Priest and Hegel, specifically those related to dialetheism and nothingness. This example mirrors the previous one of moral conflict in some ways, particular with respect to how history happens. But here we also have the added experiences of historical trauma and its repetition. Hegel gives a wonderfully detailed passage in the *Phenomenology* regarding the contradictory nature of the universal in

⁴⁰⁷ Priest, p. 208.

⁴⁰⁸ Ibid.

political and cultural life that reflects the same kind of contradictory universality in ethical life. It is worth quoting in total as it sets the stage for the kind of historical rupture entailed by revolution

The government is itself nothing else but the self-established focus, or the individuality, of the universal will. The government, which wills and executes its will from a single point, at the same time wins and executes a specific order and action. On the one/hand, it excludes all other individuals from its act, and on the other hand; it thereby constitutes itself a government that is a specific will, and so stands opposed to the universal will; consequently, it is absolutely impossible for it to exhibit itself as anything else but a faction. What is called government is merely the victorious faction, and in the very fact or its being a faction lies the direct necessity of its overthrow; and its being government makes it, conversely, into a faction, and [so] guilty.⁴⁰⁹

The most important thing here is the manner in which the universal concept of the state appears in a dialectic form. It generates its own opposition—which is to say its own contradictory unity—and therefore its own disintegration and displacement.

Let's briefly examine this within the context of the whole passage. Something noticeable is the peculiar way in which the determinate nature of the state's universality, in this case the universal will, embodies exclusion rather than inclusion. The power of the state emanates from a single point and its activities are therefore described as the universal will of the people. It is, therefore, a universal-singular that excludes any and all other particulars as nothing. The universal will therefore generate its own nothingness, its own opposition. The state does this through its own activity of being a concrete universal expressed and experienced by particular individuals in concrete historical situations. As, for example, the way in contemporary American politics people experience themselves as expressions of Democratic Party liberalism or Republican Party conservatism. More importantly, is the manner in which people cannot see beyond these parameters because

⁴⁰⁹ Hegel, *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, p. 360.

they form the general-universal that in its expression excludes the intelligibility and viability of anything else.

This framework embodies the pure-universal notion of the past discussed at the opening of the chapter. Specifically, that the concrete universality of the state forms a universal historical context within which people understand and experience their identity. The best example of this is something like a national or social memory. This does not represent an individual memory of any specific event, nor does it represent a collection individual of events added together. Rather, it describes the way in which history/historical events are timelessly memorialized, canonized, and thus exist independently of any individual person's thinking about them. They are preserved universally as symbolic historical markers that insist upon the present through distillation in various forms such as music, film, literature, architecture, art, oral traditions, educational institutions, and the like.

Returning to the passage, it is this very form of universality that lends itself to a dialectic critique. In order for the universal structure *to be* universal at all it must be expressed in particular and concrete contexts. For the universal will of the state, it is this very form of universality—i.e. that of exclusion—that *is* its particular determination. In other words, it is at one and the same time universal *and* particular.⁴¹⁰ The state is expressed as a particular faction set against and excluding other contradictory factions. In expressing itself as the general will that excludes all else, the universal generates its own set of contradictory oppositions where the claim to universality is merely the one who emerges victorious. Accordingly, the universal political will is, by definition, a contradictory unity.

⁴¹⁰ Readers will remember this phenomenon from the chapter four discussion regarding the structure of the Concept.

It immanently contains its own self-displacement. This antagonism is inherent to the political field itself. For example, it is expressed in the way that immanently contradictory parties (i.e., communist, fascist, liberal, conservative, social democratic, theocratic, etc.) can co-exist within the same political field, each claiming expressing the universal will.

Hegel summarizes this for us, writing that in itself the universal will is “just this abstract self-consciousness, which effaces all distinction and all continuance of distinction within it.” However, in activity “as pure self-identity of the universal will has thus within it negation; but this means that it contains difference in general, and this again it develops as an actual difference.”⁴¹¹ In other words, in effacing distinction the general and universal will in fact creates it. This is due to the fact that it contains difference in general, which is to say the form of pure logical displacement discussed above, as a factor of its existence. Put in political terms, in attempting to efface (contradictory) political distinctions in the name of the universal will this universality actively engenders them. It is this specific point that generates a site for potential revolution and historical change.

From the perspective of universal negative unity, what holds it together is the appearance and experience of ‘organic’ unity. This is similar to the example of moral conflict. Contradictory particular expressions co-exist insofar as individuals experience their identity as something tied to the system itself. Hegel writes within the social/cultural/political sphere “its [i.e. individuals] negation is filled with a content, either honor or wealth, which it gains in place of the self that it has alienated from itself.”⁴¹² In short, insofar as individuals are immersed in the complexities of social-political life they identify themselves, their place, and their occupation within the larger social-political

⁴¹¹ Ibid., p. 361.

⁴¹² Ibid., p. 362.

framework, and their identity is grounded within it. As Hegel puts it, they get something back from it—wealth, honor, privilege, power—so that they come to identify with and experience their specific place in the order, and which in this case holds the contradictory order in place. This, again, harkens back to trans-individual sense of memory and the pure past. Think, for instance, in the way universal political concepts such as American patriotism, democracy, freedom, or capitalism hold together mutually exclusive and contradictory particular layers of society together through the ways in which people identify themselves as an ‘American’ and how the way in which these concepts are remembered and memorialized grounds this identity.

However, there are particular aspects of the sociopolitical field that are not expressions of a contradictory unity, but rather that unity’s—taken as a singularity—own self-contradiction, on the basis of which they express something entirely different. Thus, what engenders the passage to the displacement of revolution is *that* particular expression in the political field that is not only antagonistic or contradictory to the whole, but which represents the nothingness of the whole. This is where resonances with how Priest describes gluons—as the self-contradictory element of a unity that can both hold it together or disintegrate it—re-enters the scene. Hegel writes that this faction’s (the one representing self-contradiction) “negation is the death that is without meaning, the sheer terror of the negative that contains nothing positive, nothing that fills it with a content.”⁴¹³

Let’s compare this statement with the passage in the previous paragraph. There we referenced how the history of concepts like American patriotism, liberty, individualism, capitalism, etc., and the embodiments of these concepts in our social/cultural artifacts like

⁴¹³ Ibid.

literature, stories, art, media (TV, movies), poetry, political speeches, and monuments, and architecture, form together a memorialized catalogue that hold together a contradictory unity. We collectively remember ourselves as inheritors of this tradition and identify ourselves as the current embodiments of it.⁴¹⁴ Let me be clear about what I mean by this. Think just briefly about the mass social and cultural disruption occurring in the United States since 2016 and increasing since 2020. There are battles over white nationalism, social justice, racism and civil rights, the 2020 presidential election, and the very meaning of what ‘America’ even is. Yet, for the most part, all sides the political/ideological perspective collectively conjure up and express the memory and artifacts of the past—the figures, ideals, slogans, words, and texts—within which we all exist in order to present themselves as representing true nature of what it means to be an American.

However, the short passage just referenced is decidedly different in tone. It refers to the particular expression within the social-political field that does not stand for a particular identity within it. To speak in Priest’s terms, it is a part that both *is* and *is not* part of the unity. And as Hegel says it has no content, which is to say that it is within the order of the past, but it finds no place in it. It does not identify with it and gets nothing in return: neither wealth, honor, political power, etc. “All these determinations have vanished...it is the universal will which in this its ultimate abstraction has nothing positive and therefore can give nothing in return.”⁴¹⁵ Accordingly, this faction does not express itself as a form of the universal will because although it occupies a place in the unity it is entirely empty and without identity. Rather, what this faction represents is the distillation

⁴¹⁴ This is easily recognizable in our political, artistic, and literary artifacts many of which are meant to serve as incarnations of these universal categories that we can easily recollect, point to, and identify with, thus continuously forming the catalogue of the pure past.

⁴¹⁵ *Ibid.*

of the social-political field's inherent self-contradiction as contracted to a singular point. Which, to say the same thing, is its own inherent nothingness and potential disintegration.

I now want to give a specific historical example that can hopefully make this point clear. Take the 2015-2016 protests by the Lakota people at the Standing Rock Reservation in North Dakota. It seems to me the example that represents this aspect in contemporary American life is the Native American people. What is most interesting about this from our perspective is that although these protests took place as clearly part of and within the unified object 'American socio-political field' they nevertheless did not represent any aspect of it; rather the expression of the protests was decidedly non-American. They spoke from entirely different ontological plane: the Lakota way of being that had been obliterated by American genocide well over a century prior. Or put differently, the people and their protest spoke from the point of view of the nothingness, the exclusion, of the field itself. I think this feature makes it a key candidate for being the gluon of the field.

The Lakota struggle was a thus a struggle for nothing in a double-sided, reflexive manner. In one sense, the Lakota were representing something totally and traumatically lost to them, namely, a way of life that has been genocidally erased without a trace, so much so that many of the people themselves have no real conceptualized memory of it.⁴¹⁶ Speaking in terms of the pure past, they have no past to conjure up because this past itself was erased through the historical trauma of genocide and forced assimilation. It has no content, it has nothing positive, and can give nothing in return. It is sheer negativity in and for itself. What is repeated, therefore, is the trauma itself. The other side is the fact that the

⁴¹⁶ We see this most hauntingly in the loss of language. Many Native American peoples can no longer speak their own language, and in this specific way have been totally assimilated to 'think' like American whites to a point which their traditions are no longer intelligible to them.

Lakota point of view is completely unintelligible to the American gaze or sense of identity. It both *is* and *is not* a part of it. It is in the sense that it's occurring within the American context and for an American gaze; but it is not a part in the sense that the primary source of the conflict was not a utilitarian discourse over the proper use of natural resources, or a legal battle over water rights. This, of course, was merely the way it appeared and was distilled in the American mind. Rather, the struggle was about something much more profound, such as the sacredness of the land, the ancient burial grounds, and the existential rootedness of a people to these specific lands.⁴¹⁷

The notion of historical trauma is an important aspect of the metaphysical point I'm trying to make, particularly as it applies to the application of metaphysics to history and historiography. Let me explain how this connects with the historical example of the Lakota people. In the previous paragraph I linked historical trauma to repetition by claiming that what is repeated in the Lakota is not the pure past, but historical trauma as such. It is this kind of repetition, I claim, that allows us to see how the past can be re-written.⁴¹⁸ One possible way to think about historical trauma is as the repetition of a traumatic event or experience.

Repetition appears continuously as a repressed original, concrete traumatic event or experience that can be pointed back to. Then there is a more peculiar sense of historical trauma where that which is repeated is not something traumatic (like an event) but trauma itself outside the horizon of the concrete, experiential sense it. In other words, where

⁴¹⁷ That is, the Lakota in many respects regard these geographical locations as their *place* in the world. Their being itself is tied to the land.

⁴¹⁸ To remind readers, this represents is the historical form of the metaphysical analysis of the concept in chapter four, as well as the comparison with Priest in this chapter. In other words, we are now seeing how the metaphysics has application for historical analysis.

historical trauma represents a form of erasure and what is repeated is the nothingness of what has been erased. Zupančič summarizes this, writing that the traumatic experience “is precisely not an experience, but rather something (a negativity or “scar”) that comes, so to speak, as built into the very conditions of our experience and constitutes the condition of our consequently experiencing something as “traumatic” (in the strong sense of the word).”⁴¹⁹ The critical distinction in the two forms of trauma, therefore, is that for the latter form the trauma is real, but not experienced. The traumatic loss is primordial. It does not harken back to an original experience simply because the original experience cannot be collectively remembered. It was erased, and what is repeated is ‘empty’ trauma as such.⁴²⁰ It is this precise way that ties trauma to the sense of nothingness we’ve been discussing and is what makes it ontological and not psychological.

Works of Native American literature provide great examples in demonstrating this second sense of historical trauma. One such example is Sherman Alexie’s *The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fist Fight in Heaven*. One of the critical ways this phenomenon is highlighted in Alexie’s work is the way in which the very real historical trauma of the Native American people can only be experienced and remembered vicariously, for instance in dreams, in visions, or at sites of potential historical rupture. The chapter “A Drug Called Tradition” presents an example of this. The chapter tells a short story of three friends (Victor, Junior, and Thomas), their lives on the Spokane Indian Reservation, and their experiences of the ancient tribal traditions. The twist Alexie adds to the story is that none of the three friends have direct access to these traditions either epistemically or recollectively. Due to centuries of forced assimilation they do not know the ancient traditions in the ways their ancestors

⁴¹⁹ Zupančič, p. 144.

⁴²⁰ In other words, a trauma that is not teleological or linear in nature.

did because they do think like they did. They do not have their language and they do not have their concepts. They cannot remember these traditions in the manner they are meant to be remembered and passed down.

The only 'access' they have to them is vicariously through visions under the influences of psychedelic drugs. "I [Victor] looked at Junior and he nodded his head. 'Hey,' I said [to Thomas]. 'Jump in with us. We're going out to Benjamin Lake to do this new drug I got. It'll be very fucking Indian. Spiritual shit, you know?'"⁴²¹ The implication is that Victor, Junior, and Thomas can only experience their ancient traditions under the influence of psychedelic drugs and at ancient spiritual places such as Benjamin Lake. The three friends describe their visions:

They're all gone, my tribe is gone. Those blankets they gave us, infected with smallpox, have killed us. I'm the last, the very last, and I'm sick too. So very sick. Hot. My fever burning so hot. I have to take off my clothes, feel the cold air, splash the water across my bare skin. And dance. I'll dance a Ghost Dance. I'll bring them back. Can you hear the drums? I can hear them, and it's my grandfather and my grandmother singing. Can you hear them? ... The boys sit by the fire and breathe, their visions arrive. They are all carried away to the past, to the moment before any of them took their first drink of alcohol.⁴²²

What is the reasoning behind this swerve? Why is it that Thomas, Victor, and Junior are 'carried away to the past... before any of them took their first drink of alcohol' only via visions and dreams? To put the question differently, why is it that the three friends can only remember their people's sacred traditions indirectly? One possible answer is to try understanding it as the second form of historical trauma discussed above. Centuries of careful, calculated, and consistent genocide, which includes everything from the systematic erasure of religions, languages, methods of learning, art, architecture, agriculture, to outright murder, have produced two effects. One effect is the eradication of these traditions.

⁴²¹ Sherman Alexie, *The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven* (New York: Grove Press, 2005), p. 14.

⁴²² *Ibid.*, pp. 18, 21.

The historical traditions do not exist in the manner in which they did for their ancestors before the trauma, and in some instances do not exist at all. The second effect is on the people themselves, that their fundamental ontological-conceptual framework—i.e., the conceptual framework through which a world becomes concrete and intelligible to a people—has likewise been eradicated and replaced by a white American framework.

Due to the historical trauma of genocide and the forced assimilation into white culture (e.g., the boarding school system, the reservation system, reallocation of land for farming) there is no original experience or remembrance of the sacred ancient traditions because they do not exist in their proper place and context. What this original experience would refer to has been erased. Likewise Junior, Victor, and Thomas do not and cannot experience themselves as being as embedded within the original conceptual framework that exemplifies the true meaning of these sacred cultural traditions because it too has been erased. This is embodied by Junior's comedic remark of trying to experience some 'real spiritual Indian shit.' Alexie speaks to this phenomenon in the alienating experience of how whites measure time: "At the Tribal Council meeting last night, Judas Wild Shoe gave a watch he found to the tribal chairman. 'A white man's artifact, a sin,' the chairman said, put the watch in his pocket. I remember watches, they measure time in seconds, minutes, hours. They measure time exactly, coldly."⁴²³ Following Alexie, for Native American people there is something totally alienating about the cold, linear unfolding of time. But this 'something', the memory of Native American 'time before time,' cannot be experienced because the people *can no longer be* (and I mean in this in completely

⁴²³ Alexie, p. 109.

ontological terms) in this framework. They have no memory or experience of it; it has been erased without a trace.

Now, let's think about this particular notion of historical trauma in connection with the protests and violence at the Standing Rock Reservation. To me, this is a concrete historical expression of the dialectic conclusions of Priest and Hegel's addition that these metaphysical conclusions prove to be sites of genuine historical displacement and rupture because they generate an opportunity to rewrite history. Let me clarify this. The Lakota protests at Standing Rock were something that occurred within and a part of the unified object "American political field." However, it was equally that part that condensed and captured the contradictory nature of that object into a singular point/part. That is, the Standing Rock protests were not about anything within the American political field (the pure past of the field) such as utilitarian resource allocation, fossil fuel extraction, or a discourse on western ideas of 'rights.' It was not about an original event/experience of historical trauma (rather than historical trauma as such) that can be located within the paradigmatic white American framework, which is ontological because it bears on the unity of reality itself. Rather, what the Lakota people were expressing is an entire way of being that no longer properly exists, nor can properly exist for them in the manner that it did for their ancestors. In expressing this historical trauma, the Lakota stand for the nothingness of the object in the similar way that the Liar's paradox both is and is not encapsulated by the semantic completeness of the language.

Or, put differently, they represent its displacement. Rebecca Comay describes that historical trauma

brings memory itself to a point beyond its own beginning. To forget, to undo the past, to make it all "un-happen," is precisely to remember a moment before it all happened, to undo the inexorability of fate by restaging the beginning, even if only in imagination and in

proxy...the compulsion to repeat expresses a desire for inanimate existence and ultimately for nonexistence: it is the desire to return to a time before the beginning...This desire for repetition is essentially the desire for difference.⁴²⁴

Comay articulates a similar idea to the one I've been describing by making an explicit connection with historical trauma. In repeating a historical trauma without a beginning event, in the case of the Lakota an extinct way of being that the people themselves have no proper memory of (due to the genocide of forced assimilation), it brings the conceptual unity of reality to a point beyond its own beginning and to a point of its own undoing, specifically because it speaks from a position that is altogether different. To say that the Lakota people's protest at Standing Rock exudes an historical trauma that seeks to return, i.e., repeat, a time before beginning is equally to say that this repetition is the creation of something (historically) new. Hegel himself says something similar regarding reflection and memory in the *Logic* "Reflection thus finds an immediate before it which it transcends and from which it is the turning back. But this turning back is only the presupposing of what was antecedently found. This antecedent comes to be only by being left behind; its immediacy is sublated immediacy" (*SL* p. 348. *GW* 11.252). What reflection (or memory) returns to is not an immediate given, or something given in return, but is a new beginning. What is posited as the presupposition of reflection—i.e., that which is being remembered—is itself generated in the process as something different. It is this form of historical trauma, therefore, that is properly historical because it opens a space for a new and different way of being, and thus for legitimate historical change.

It is in this manner that the Lakota people stand for the 'faction,' as Hegel would call it, insofar as they represent the nothingness of the field itself and thus contract the

⁴²⁴ Rebecca Comay, *Mourning Sickness: Hegel and the French Revolution* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2010), p. 148.

contradiction of the entire political field into a singular point. They are an assimilated aspect of within the field—they are an expression of it—but they simultaneously represent that which is wholly non-American. Put differently, the Lakota people were a part of the object/field, but they represented that specific part that is the contradiction and displacement of the object/field itself. Their struggle does not stand for merely another iteration of the American socio-political aspect but the nothingness of it, its disintegration, and potential displacement into something entirely different and new. As Hegel writes “But for that very reason it is immediately one with self-consciousness [i.e. self-reflexivity], or it is the pure positive, because it is the pure negative; and the meaningless death, the unfilled negativity of the self, changes round in its inner Notion into absolute positivity.”⁴²⁵ In other words, there is a point of revolutionary rupture, that generates its own content; or to use the Hegelian phrase ‘posits its own presupposition.’ This is the same kind of logical, self-reflexive difference that we have been discussing since the beginning with pure being and pure nothing that concentrates the specific difference to a single point and simultaneously displaces it into an entirely new form.

To use Priest’s language of the *gluon*, the Lakota people are both a part and not a part of the object in question. Recall how the *gluon* is related is related to the idea of nothingness. What makes the *gluon* the *gluon* is that it contracts the contradictory parts of the whole into a singular point of unity. The *gluon* is this immanent self-contradictory. It is a form of pure logical displacement, and it is because of its own immanent displacement that it can hold the contradictory and displaces parts of the whole into a unity. Priest writes “Consider any object, *a*. This relates to nothing (that *gluon*) in a very particular way... Part

⁴²⁵ Hegel, *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, p. 362.

of the quiddity of a is to be an object. (It could not be a unless it were at least an object.)

And it could not be this, unless it stood out, as it were, against nothing. Its not being nothing makes it possible to be (an object)... Conversely, nothing is what it is in virtue of being the ontological backdrop of every object, ...Any object and nothing are, then, like the magnetic n and s. That is, they interpenetrate.”⁴²⁶ I find the notion of interpenetration crucial, because for me it speaks the Hegelian language of historical displacement. The objects can only be what they are—which is to say unified things with identities—against the backdrop of purely logical difference, i.e., nothingness. In other words, such unities are generated historically, they emerge from their gluons which stand for self-contradictory displacement as such. Thinking historically then, one could say that the Lakota protest at Standing rock, and the Lakota people themselves, represent the gluon of sorts for the American historical-political landscape. They represent the sheer nothingness against which it maintains its identity. And, in a similar fashion, by symbolizing the singular self-contradiction of the whole, they stand for that part that is the objects own historical nothingness and dissolution.

⁴²⁶ Priest, p. 180-181.

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