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## Hegel and Schelling: The Emptiness of Emptiness and the Love of the Divine

Sean B. Gleason  
*University of South Florida*

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Hegel and Schelling: The Emptiness of Emptiness and the Love of the Divine

by

Sean B. Gleason

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy  
Department of Philosophy  
College of Arts and Sciences  
University of South Florida

Major Professor: Michael Morris, Ph.D.  
Alex Levine, Ph.D.  
Joshua Rayman, Ph.D.  
Mor Segev, Ph.D.  
Joseph P. Lawrence, Ph.D.  
Bruce Matthews, Ph.D.

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~"It is love that appears as the true heart of reality (*das wahre Wesen*)."  
*F.W.J Schelling (78, WA 1811, Joseph P. Lawrence translation)*

For starters, I owe much credit for the title of my dissertation to Slavoj Žižek's chapter, "Where There is Nothing, Read That I Love You," in his book, *Less Than Nothing*. Throughout this dissertation, I reflect on the question of how God's love may be felt while dwelling in emptiness, so to speak. From a more spiritual perspective, I developed a passion for thinking about how emptiness could bring one closer to the divine both from my Christian upbringing as well as from attending Satsang online with spiritual teacher, Sri Moojibaba.

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

Throughout the text, I sometimes use abbreviations for the sake of brevity. Unless otherwise noted, read the abbreviations as follows (in addition, you may refer to the “References” page for complete bibliographic information for each of these sources):

EL                    G.W.F. Hegel, *Encyclopedia Logic*, Brinkmann and Dahlstrom Translation

PhG                  G.W.F. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, A.V. Miller Translation

(note: here PhG is an abbreviation for *Phänomenologie des Geistes*, the original German title)

SL                    G.W.F. Hegel, *Science of Logic*, A.V. Miller Translation

WA                  F.W.J. Schelling, *Ages of the World* (1811), Joseph P. Lawrence Translation

(note: here WA is an abbreviation for *Die Weltalter*, the original German title)

## ABSTRACT

In this dissertation, I argue that, all appearances to the contrary, Hegel does not attempt to achieve a *complete* systematization of reason in a self-reflexive sense in his system of philosophy. Quite the opposite, I maintain that the absolute Idea is the actuality of the *self-transcendence* of the divine. Along these lines, I argue (in agreement with Slavoj Žižek) that the absolute “Idea” is non-total and incomplete; in this sense, Hegel is neither a modern thinker nor a post-modern thinker, but rather he presents a version of thinking that is both modern and post-modern, while neither merely one nor the other considered alone.

Subsequently, I argue that both Hegel’s (of his *Science of Logic*) and Schelling’s (of his *Weltalter*) positions on the beginning are *metaphysically consistent*. I demonstrate the deep connections between the two works by delving into the beginning of Hegel’s *Science of Logic* and how it compares to the beginning of Schelling’s *Weltalter*. In these two works, both thinkers overcome a strict dichotomy between materialism and idealism.

Finally, I argue that both Hegel and Schelling state that philosophy begins as the self-transcendence of the Absolute, which they understand as the actuality of divine freedom. I agree with Žižek’s contention that Hegel and Schelling both posit similar contours with regard to the overall metaphysical movement (the two thinkers both contend that Absolute Spirit commits itself to self-sacrifice, for instance). However, my argument is novel insofar as I argue that Schelling’s account is more comprehensive, since he provides a direct (and explicit) response to the question of *why* the movement occurs in the first place: for the purpose of the divine’s revelation of itself as love qua freedom.

## INTRODUCTION

### 0.1) Introduction to My Argument

The main argumentative thrust of this dissertation is the following: all appearances to the contrary, Hegel does not attempt to achieve a *complete* systematization of reason in a self-reflexive sense in his system of philosophy. On the contrary, both Hegel and Schelling attempt to think of an Absolute that is simultaneously immanent *and* transcendent. Along these lines, I maintain that Hegel's (of his SL) and Schelling's (of his WA) positions are *metaphysically consistent* insofar as a repetition of emptiness<sup>1</sup> stands at the beginning of both of their systems of philosophy. The self-disappearing movement of divine substance represents the divine's awakening to knowledge of itself as love from out of its own emptiness. In Hegel's *Science of Logic*, God repeats its emptiness at the beginning: the notion that God's love stands at the beginning of the system is present in an implicit way. In Schelling's *Weltalter*, Schelling starts from the same insight, however in a more explicit fashion.

Although I acknowledge that my interpretation is not the classical reading of the Hegelian corpus, in order for Hegel's system of conceptual structures (as he presents it in the SL) to make sense at all, the Notion must be conceived as a contingent-necessity: *retroactively* understood as a *result*<sup>2</sup> of an original unity with empty substance in the Notion's otherness from

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<sup>1</sup> On the notion of the repetition of emptiness at the beginning of Hegel's SL, see Rebecca Comay and Frank Ruda, *The Dash—The Other Side of Absolute Knowing* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2018), 48, 84, 94.

<sup>2</sup> For more on the notion of the Absolute as a result and "retroactivity", see Slavoj Žižek, *Absolute Recoil: Towards a New Foundation of Dialectical Materialism* (London: Verso, 2014), 4, 28, 73, 74, 148, 353, 379.

itself – on the order of a doubling of an original emptiness in which thought is simultaneously identical to itself and also beyond itself qua the disappearing movement of nothingness as such. But, if this is the case, then the Notion could not possibly *completely* explain itself, since the origin of thought in the purity of empty material substance (which, according to Hegel, is divine) is inherently more profound than conceptual structures are able to fully grasp. The Notion itself is incomplete<sup>3</sup>; in fact, it is defined by its openness to otherness. The arrival of rationality on the scene therefore entails a paradox: reason arrives from out of that which never was and yet, always must be so.<sup>4</sup> Hegel’s beginning of philosophy in the SL is therefore actually consistent with Schelling’s major thesis from the WA: the nature of divine freedom is co-eternal with the self-sacrifice of the Absolute.

Contemporary scholars of German Idealism, such as Manfred Frank and Andrew Bowie, tend to hold the view that the late Schelling critiques Hegel for his supposed attempt to provide a completely explicative, self-reflective account of rationality. However, even if this argument were an accurate assessment of the late Schelling’s critique of Hegel, it would not hold much weight (at least in this particular regard). This is because the metaphysical kernel of Hegel’s philosophical system is in fact similar to Schelling’s “unprethinkable being” (*das Unvordenkliche*): that which thought cannot fully get behind or before, and yet is a necessary presupposition of reason. Along these lines, Žižek argues that the roots of “dialectical

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<sup>3</sup> Slavoj Žižek, *Absolute Recoil: Towards a New Foundation of Dialectical Materialism* (London: Verso, 2014), 381.

<sup>4</sup> Comay and Ruda, *The Dash*, 23 ff.

materialism”<sup>5</sup> are to be found in Schelling’s WA.<sup>6</sup> Hegel’s genuine beginning, as we will see, is in fact “(un)dialectical.”<sup>7</sup> But, if this is the case, then Hegel is only able to claim the *necessity* of the beginning “*retroactively*”<sup>8</sup> – the necessity of the beginning is a contingent-necessity. It is only afterwards that we can “look back” and consider it as necessary: the Notion has come to be in time. Likewise, on Schelling’s account, the beginning of rationality (qua “unprethinkable being,” which makes negative philosophy possible) is contingent;<sup>9</sup> experience as such is the ground of conceptual determinations. This is to say that Hegel is not as much of a thinker of rational identity as even Schelling contends, since Hegel’s “Notion” is itself “grounded” in the emptiness of emptiness. As we will see, Schelling’s and Hegel’s positions on the beginning are therefore, in fact, quite similar. In addition, both an intuitive knowledge of the Absolute as well as Hegel’s dialectics are ultimately grounded in the same metaphysical insight: the transcendence of divine substance from out of the abyss of freedom is that which gives rise to thought as such.

## 0.2) How is Thought Related to Being?

The main, driving philosophical question of German Idealism could be stated as follows: how is thought related to being?<sup>10</sup> Upon the rejection of naïve realism (the notion that things are

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<sup>5</sup> Throughout this paper, I follow Žižek’s usage of the term “dialectical materialism” to characterize Hegel’s philosophy in a way that is similar to how Žižek employs the term in his book, *Absolute Recoil*. Although Hegel is often traditionally identified as a dialectical idealist and Marx as a dialectical materialist, I intentionally use the term in order to achieve a two-fold purpose. First off, I use the term to emphasize how Hegel overcomes the strict dichotomy between idealism and materialism. Secondly, I employ the term to remind the reader that reason is non-total on Hegel’s account.

<sup>6</sup> Kelsey Wood, *Žižek: A Reader’s Guide* (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), 119.

<sup>7</sup> See Chapter Three, section 3.4. When I use the term “(un)dialectical”, I use it in a way that is influenced by Nuzzo’s reading, but also slightly differs from how Nuzzo uses the term. When I use the term, I use it to mean that the beginning (as a movement of nothingness) is therefore both undialectical and dialectical, but in this sense it is also neither.

<sup>8</sup> Žižek, *Absolute Recoil*, 381.

<sup>9</sup> Markus Gabriel, *Transcendental Ontology: Essays in German Idealism* (New York: Continuum, 2011), 136.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, vii.

just as we perceive them) philosophy is historically led to a second position: the position of empiricist skepticism in which things are not as they seem. Subsequent to this position, Kant's transcendental idealism is an idealist position that deems knowledge as always limited by the categories of the rationalist subject that fundamentally structure all possible experience.<sup>11</sup> As is well known, on Kant's account, it is possible to know the limits and bounds of the understanding and reason respectively, but one cannot attain knowledge of noumena. On the contrary, as Andrew Bowie states, Hegel's goal is to display the unity of thought and being:

philosophy for Hegel, as it did for the other Idealists, is to show how thought and being are inseparable. This makes them 'identical' in Hegel's particular sense, so Kantian worries about knowledge being only of the way the world appears to us, rather than of things in themselves, are eliminated. The question is *how* this identity is to be revealed and what exactly is meant by the way it is revealed.<sup>12</sup>

Hegel aims to provide his unique account of the way in which thought and being are unified in order to overcome Kant's doubts about gleaning genuine knowledge of the things in themselves.

Part of the main kernel of my argument is that Hegel's response to the question of the relationship of thought to being is a paradoxical one: the repetition of the emptiness of substance (as we see in Chapter 1 of Book 1 ("The Doctrine of Being") of the SL, when Hegel begins with "Being, pure Being, --") ensures the arrival of rational thinking (in terms of judgments) on the scene, but it also simultaneously implies that there is no discursive evidence for the origin of thought – the only evidence that could possibly be supplied is "nothing" at all.<sup>13</sup> Hegel's position is therefore "circular" but in a very precise sense: it implies that thought desires to return to a beginning that always is, and yet, never was.<sup>14</sup> As Rebecca Comay and Frank Ruda point out,

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<sup>11</sup> This discussion of the particular historical shapes that consciousness passes through is Hegel's own as he presents it in the *Encyclopedia Logic*, as we will see.

<sup>12</sup> Andrew Bowie, *Aesthetics and Subjectivity: from Kant to Nietzsche* (second edition) (New York: Manchester University Press, 2003), 286.

<sup>13</sup> Rebecca Comay and Frank Ruda, *The Dash—The Other Side of Absolute Knowing*, 94.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 23 ff.

Hegel refers to this in terms of a wound that is its own healing. Hegel writes, “the wounds of spirit heal...and leave no scar (PhG §669).”<sup>15</sup> This is to say that the unity of thought and being (thought that is aware of itself as being) is simultaneously a unity on the order of material substance without subjectivity<sup>16</sup>: identity, in other words, simultaneously implies difference.<sup>17</sup>

Hegel’s position on the relationship of thought and being also implies a number of unique consequences, which I will address with more consideration in further chapters. Here, I will simply state a few of the preliminary ones. First of all, Hegel contends that thought is capable of achieving genuine “knowledge” of the things in themselves because he posits neither an epistemological nor ontological divide between subject and object on the order of a conscious subject. Hegel’s position implies that thought is always already bound up with being. Thought and being are not strictly divided – rather, there is in some sense no thought “prior” to being, since the only way that we experience thinking in the first place is via a repetition of empty substance. Second, Hegel’s position also implies that thought can achieve genuine “knowledge” of the Absolute (although the specific nature of such an Absolute and the type of knowledge to be gleaned will need to be clarified), since thought has always already transcended itself in its self-constitution. Hegel’s philosophy thus implies a circular structure – thinking recollects its unity with the divine when thought passes beyond itself in its return to emptiness. Hegel’s beginning of the SL is therefore similar to Schelling’s beginning of his WA in a very precise sense: the two philosophers agree that the beginning of philosophy is one with God’s meditation on itself (as a God that is always already beyond itself).

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<sup>15</sup>G.W.F Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, §669, quoted from *ibid.*, 80.

<sup>16</sup> Slavoj Žižek, “Hegel and Shitting: The Idea’s Constipation,” in *Hegel and the Infinite: Religion, Politics and Dialectic*, eds. Slavoj Žižek, Clayton Crockett, and Creston Davis (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011), 231.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 229.

In Slavoj Žižek's book, *Absolute Recoil*, Žižek provides a concise summary (in outline) of the major contours of Hegel's EL and the historical moments that consciousness passes through in terms of its position toward objectivity. The major movements of thought as Žižek presents them there are the following: "(the first attitude): 1) naïve realist metaphysics (the second attitude): 2) empiricist skepticism 3) transcendental criticism (the third attitude): 4) direct intuitive knowing of the Absolute, 5) dialectical thinking, and 6) speculative thinking proper."<sup>18</sup>

Žižek further comments on the two main forms of the third major position or attitude of consciousness toward objectivity (the third major form of thought includes #4-6). He states:

The first form of this third attitude of thought towards objectivity is an immediate or intuitive knowing which posits a direct access to the Absolute beyond (or beneath) all discursive knowledge—Fichte's I=I, Schelling's Identity of Subject and Object, but also direct mystical intuition of God. The second form, of course, is Hegel's dialectics, which does exactly the opposite with regard to intuitive knowing: instead of asserting a direct intuitive access to the Absolute, it transposes into the Thing (Absolute) itself the gap that separates our subjectivity from it.<sup>19</sup>

In many ways, my dissertation is an engagement with, and partial defense of, Žižek's position on the third major position of thought toward objectivity. I agree with Žižek's claim that absolute substance is immanent-transcendent. In addition, I further elaborate on what Žižek has stated here about these two forms of thought under the third attitude (above identified by #4-#6). On my understanding, however, these three ways of thinking need not be conceived as fundamentally different from each other. In alignment with the main insight of dialectics, the fifth and sixth major forms of thinking may be understood as exhibiting a relation of "non-relation."<sup>20</sup> In addition, the notion of a direct intuitive knowing of the Absolute is actually the

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<sup>18</sup> Slavoj Žižek, *Absolute Recoil: Towards a New Foundation of Dialectical Materialism* (London: Verso, 2014), 16.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> As we will see in later chapters, this is also how Comay and Ruda will suggest to read the relationship between Hegel's *Phenomenology* and the *Science of Logic*. See Comay and Ruda, *The Dash*, 18, 43.



seed of dialectics – the fact that thought is able to realize that the gap between the Absolute and itself is internal to the Absolute may be read consistently with the notion of a direct experience of absolute Spirit. There is not a fundamental inconsistency between these two accounts, since thought’s remembrance of unity with the divine is consistent with an Absolute that is organic and coming to be in time. This is to say that the Absolute is constituted by the experience of itself as both same and other. Similarly, the very movement between subject and object could be said to constitute the identity of the Absolute. In other words, the notion that an experience of the emptiness of emptiness returns one to one’s divine nature is consistent with the notion that the Absolute itself is incomplete.

As we will see in the next section, Hegel’s dialectical thinking essentially leads him to his position on the Absolute as an “immanence of transcendence.”<sup>21</sup> This means that God is present *within* experience *as* that which is beyond itself. In later chapters of my dissertation, I argue that, similarly, it is possible to arrive at a genuine experience of the Absolute via direct intuition, as long as, in this experience too, thought passes beyond itself into the emptiness of “material” substance.

Hegel’s fundamental position implies an ontology of movement—our knowledge of the Absolute is never complete when it is garnished from one-side of the dialectic. Hegel’s philosophy encourages the thinker to think from the standpoint of both Reason and the Understanding, but never to utilize merely one or the other. According to Hegel, Reason is a

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<sup>21</sup> Slavoj Žižek, *Less Than Nothing* (London: Verso, 2012), 7. See also Adrian Johnston, *Žižek’s Ontology: A Transcendental Materialist Theory of Subjectivity* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2008), 125 ff.

capacity primarily responsible for synthesis and the Understanding is a capacity on the order of determinative cognition in terms of fixed determinations of thought.<sup>22</sup>

That said, Hegel does not conceive of the relationship between the Understanding and Reason as a strict or one-sided dichotomy. On the contrary, as Adrian Johnston points out:

Counterintuitively, the determinations of the understanding sublationally (*als Aufhebung*) pass over or are transubstantiated into the fluidity of the moments of reason precisely at the (tipping) point of their maximum degree of ‘fixity’ or ‘rigidity’ (that is, nonfluidity). In a coincidence of opposites, fixed/rigid *Verstand* transitions into fluid or supple *Vernunft* specifically at the very height of its fixity/rigidity; the understanding comes closest to reason exactly when the former appears to be at the greatest distance from the latter, when *Verstand* contracts into the most extreme, exaggerated versions of its (seemingly) subrational (qua neither dialectical nor speculative) defining characteristics (such as the understanding’s insistence on the absoluteness of classical bivalent logic).<sup>23</sup>

Indeed, Hegel states that the “usual practice of separating understanding and reason is, from every point of view, to be rejected.”<sup>24</sup> As Angelica Nuzzo notes, “Hegel transforms ‘understanding’ and ‘reason’ from subjective mental ‘faculties’ to formal ‘moments’ of ‘objective thinking’.”<sup>25</sup> This is to say that Reason and Understanding exhibit a dialectical relationship. The fulfillment or culmination of the Understanding (as its sublation) is Reason<sup>26</sup>, which I explore in more detail in later chapters. One important point to note here is that although the Absolute inherently limits itself, it simultaneously strives to arrive at a deeper knowledge of

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<sup>22</sup> G.W.F. Hegel, *Science of Logic*, trans. A.V. Miller, ed. H.D. Lewis (London: Allen & Unwin, 1969), 610-611. Henceforth, *Science of Logic*, unless otherwise noted (in the case of the usage of a different translation, I will note specifically).

<sup>23</sup> Adrian Johnston, *A New German Idealism: Hegel, Žižek, and Dialectical Materialism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2018), xviii-xix ff. For more on Hegel’s conception of the relationship between the Understanding and Reason see Johnston, *A New German Idealism*, xviii ff.

<sup>24</sup> G.W.F. Hegel, *Science of Logic*, 612. For more on the understanding and reason, see also 610-612.

<sup>25</sup> Angelica Nuzzo, “Dialectic, Understanding, and Reason: How does Hegel’s *Logic* Begin?,” in *The Dimensions of Hegel’s Dialectic*, ed. Nectarios G. Limnatis (New York: Continuum, 2010), 12.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 16. See also Adrian Johnston, *A New German Idealism: Hegel, Žižek, and Dialectical Materialism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2018), xviii ff.

itself. Indeed, as we will see, self-limitation is what drives the whole process forward in the constitution of the Absolute.

### 0.3) The Fundamental Movement at Work in Hegel's Metaphysics

The fundamental and primordial ontological movement at work from the beginning of Hegel's metaphysics (as evinced by the "Doctrine of Being" in the *Science of Logic*) is the "negation of negation." This movement implies major consequences for how we are to understand Hegel's thought and it is the primary interpretive framework that I will utilize throughout this dissertation in order to think along with Hegel. As we will see, on Hegel's account, everything in existence is defined by its negation. In fact, in the beginning, pure negativity repeats itself and Hegel identifies this movement as the Absolute.

With regard to the notion that every determinate thing is defined by negation, in section 91 of Hegel's EL, Hegel makes a specific reference to Spinoza. He writes there, "the foundation for every determinacy is negation (*omnis determinatio est negatio* [all determination is negation] as Spinoza says."<sup>27,28</sup> Hegel's own example from section 81 of the EL is the basic example of considering human beings as "mortal."<sup>29</sup> In the format in which the Understanding functions, to call a human being "mortal" is to apply a universal term of identity and categorization. All mortal things are living, of course. To identify a living being as a mortal (in terms of the Understanding) is then to group all living beings together under the term "mortal." The problem is that, for the Understanding, "dying is then regarded as something that has its cause in

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<sup>27</sup> G.W.F. Hegel, *Encyclopedia of the Philosophical Sciences in Basic Outline: Part I: Science of Logic*, trans. and ed. by Klaus Brinkmann and Daniel O. Dahlstrom (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 147. Henceforth, *Encyclopedia*.

<sup>28</sup> For more on the genealogy of Hegel's notion of negation, see Russell Newstadt, "Omnis Determinatio est Negatio: A Genealogy and Defense of the Hegelian Conception of Negation," (Doctoral Dissertation: Loyola University Chicago, 2015), [https://ecommons.luc.edu/luc\\_diss/1481](https://ecommons.luc.edu/luc_diss/1481).

<sup>29</sup> Hegel, *Encyclopedia*, 129.

extraneous circumstances only.”<sup>30</sup> Hegel’s point here is that internal to the universal term applied by the Understanding is actually its opposite. It is not that there are merely two different properties at play here. Rather, internal to the concept of life as such is death. As Hegel continues, “The true way to construe the matter, however, is that life as such carries within itself the germ of death and that, generally speaking, the finite contradicts itself in itself and for that reason sublates itself.”<sup>31</sup> Lastly, in the final stage of Logic, Reason comes to the third stage in which there is a grasping of a unity of the two prior stages – a unity of identity as well as one of difference. However, and this point is crucial to my entire dissertation – even such a unity must not remain an abstract unity conceived on the order of the mere Understanding alone.

This is to say that for Logic to truly reach the third stage, both the Understanding and Reason must pass beyond themselves into each other. When Reason and the Understanding reach a harmony, they in fact achieve a concrete unity – this is a unity on the order of “concrete universality.” And, in fact, Hegel himself tells us that this is the case. Hegel writes in the EL, “If we say, for instance, ‘the absolute is the unity of subjective and objective,’ this is, to be sure, correct but one-sided insofar as only the *unity* is expressed here and emphasis is placed on it alone, whereas in fact the subjective and the objective are indeed not only identical but also distinct.”<sup>32</sup> Hegel’s point here is crucial to the entire argument of my dissertation. Hegel attempts to demonstrate how in a concrete unity, each term of the union is simultaneously one but also different. Slavoj Žižek elaborates on this notion, stating: “[Hegel’s] point...is not only that identity is always the identity of identity and difference, but that difference itself is also always the difference between itself and identity.”<sup>33</sup> This is significant, since it implies that Hegel is

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 133.

<sup>33</sup> Slavoj Žižek, “Hegel and Shitting: The Idea’s Constipation,”

always a thinker of the “both and...”<sup>34</sup> Significantly, Hegel does not remain a thinker on the order of a unity that is static or provide a conception of identity that either the Understanding or Reason could reach of its own accord. Rather, on Hegel’s account, the Understanding and Reason only achieve a true harmony of an ontological type via a process of sublation – a process in which the culmination of the Understanding is its sublation into Reason.<sup>35</sup> But, since the whole movement is one of the Absolute, this means that God’s nature is one of self-transcendence.

#### 0.4) Hegel’s Metaphysics of “Transcendence-In-Immanence”<sup>36</sup>

On my account, Hegel is a mystic philosopher in the sense that he shows how the inaccessible as such is actually internal to genuine knowledge. Again, Hegel himself explains how this is the case in his EL.<sup>37</sup> He writes there:

As regards the significance of the speculative, it bears mentioning here that the same thing is to be understood by it as formerly used to be called the *mystical*, especially when referring to religious consciousness and its content. When one speaks of the mystical today, it is normally taken to be synonymous with the mysterious and the incomprehensible, and the mysterious and incomprehensible are then – depending on the respective educational background and mindset – regarded by some as something genuine and true, but by others as belonging to superstition and deception. In this regard, it should be noted first that the mystical is indeed something mysterious, but only for the understanding, whereas the mystical (taken as synonymous with the speculative) is the

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in *Hegel and the Infinite: Religion, Politics and Dialectic*, eds. Slavoj Žižek, Clayton Crockett, and Creston Davis (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011), 229.

<sup>34</sup> Gavin Hyman, “The ‘New Hegel’ and the Question of God,” *Journal for Cultural and Religious Theory* 19, no. 2 (2020): 279, <https://jcrt.org/archives/19.2/Hyman.pdf>.

<sup>35</sup> Adrian Johnston, *A New German Idealism: Hegel, Žižek, and Dialectical Materialism*, xviii-xix ff.

<sup>36</sup> Adrian Johnston, *Adventures in Transcendental Materialism: Dialogues with Contemporary Thinkers* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2014), 33 ff.

<sup>37</sup> Throughout this Introductory section, I sometimes refer to certain passages from the EL that I consider helpful in order to illustrate certain points. That said, throughout this dissertation, I generally follow Comay and Ruda’s suggestion that that the EL and the SL are of a philosophically distinct nature and that the former reads more like a finished product than the latter. See Comay and Ruda, *The Dash*, 32.

concrete unity of those determinations that count as true for the understanding only in their separation and opposition.<sup>38,39</sup>

According to Hegel, a complete account of knowledge must allow for incompleteness on the order of the Understanding. If the Understanding and Reason are fundamentally bound together in the way in which Hegel explains, then neither the Understanding nor Reason alone is able to provide a coherent view of the whole. On Hegel's account, both the Understanding and Reason must participate in the concrete (substance, material), in which a genuine unity exists *beyond* the mere subjective order. But if what is mystical is rational according to Hegel (if the inaccessible is made accessible) it is so only via a repetition of emptiness – in other words, the mystical is only made rational to the extent that the subjective ego itself must undergo the possibility of its own non-existence.

Along these lines, Hegel's metaphysical position regarding the fact that each and every thing in existence ultimately contains its opposite latent within it, also applies to his conception of the Absolute. The most elegant way to think of the Absolute is in terms of a transcendent-immanent, since for Hegel, in order to truly understand God, we cannot think of God as either merely transcendent or immanent. God must in some ways be both transcendent and immanent. In fact, it is God's otherness itself that is present on Hegel's account.

However, it is my contention that Hegel's point is not just that God is *as* the transcendent Other. Rather, due to Hegel's conception of the concrete universal, Hegel also thinks that God is present in all of experience. For a person to arrive at genuine knowledge of the Absolute would mean that reason passes through a genuine experience (a concrete participation) in a transcendent

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<sup>38</sup> Hegel, *Encyclopedia*, 133.

<sup>39</sup> For more on how Hegel conceives of the notion of *Aufhebung* as four-fold, see Ryan Krahn, "The Sublation of Dialectics: Hegel and the Logic of 'Aufhebung'," (Doctoral Dissertation: The University of Guelph, 2014) Retrieved from <https://atrium.lib.uoguelph.ca/xmlui/handle/10214/8222>.

substance. However, this simultaneously implies an incompleteness of the sort of knowledge that could possibly be gleaned of the absolute when it comes to conscious, subjective rationality (if rationality is conceived as the rationality of a conscious subject).

### **0.5) A Brief Review of Some Traditional Interpretations of Hegel**

To begin with, it is important to remember that Hegel is not a thinker of the mere Understanding alone. Indeed, Hegel reminds us over and over again that we cannot think the genuine Absolute from the standpoint of the mere Understanding. Bowie puts it well, then, when he comments on the “labyrinthine nature of [Hegel’s] texts, the huge divergences between his interpreters from his own time until today, and the fact that some of the philosophers who now invoke him come from an analytical tradition noted for its insistence on a clarity not always encountered in Hegel himself.”<sup>40</sup> My point is that Hegel’s philosophy implies a movement between the Understanding and Reason, not a one-sided position.

In my review of some of the traditional interpretations of Hegel’s philosophy, I will use the following question to guide my own system of comparison: does Hegel think that reason is able to achieve full explicative power of its origin? Why or why not? I will refer to the first set of thinkers as those who categorize Hegel as a thinker of identity (they respond to the first question in the affirmative). These thinkers generally espouse the view of Hegel as a thinker who believes that reason is capable of a complete reconciliation as well as a self-reflexive *explanation*, in the sense that reason is able to explain its own coming to be in a system. The latter are those philosophers who would inherently rule out this possibility, since they would categorize Hegel as primarily a “thinker of difference.” There is something definitely correct about this

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<sup>40</sup> Andrew Bowie, *Aesthetics and Subjectivity: from Kant to Nietzsche* (second edition) (New York: Manchester, 2003), 140.

interpretation, in that I agree that reason in principle cannot be fully explicative on Hegel's account, as evinced by the fact that the *Logic* itself begins in the emptiness of substance. That said, there is something missing from this account in terms of the nature of dialectical materialism.

On the classical reading (as suggested by thinkers such as Manfred Frank or Andrew Bowie), Hegel is typically presented as a rationalist, idealist philosopher who propounds an identity philosophy on the order of the *Begriff* ("Concept"). Ultimately, the Concept comes to know itself in its otherness from itself – there is in some sense only the Concept and "nothing" besides. I concede that there is something definitely correct about this reading in the sense that there is "nothing" besides the Concept. However, where we disagree is with regard to the importance of this "nothing" to Hegel's system. On my reading, the "nothing" (what I often refer to as emptiness) itself becomes fundamentally constitutive of the entire absolute subject. For this reason, claims to self-reflexive completeness are inherently flawed, since the Concept itself is inherently constituted by its own passage through nothingness. As Ruda and Comay note, Hegel's style throughout the *Logic* further evinces this point along the lines of a repetition of emptiness at the beginning of the system itself.<sup>41</sup> Furthermore, I agree with Žižek that Hegel's philosophy is a type of "dialectical materialism."<sup>42</sup> On this interpretation, Hegel's beginning is both material and ideal, but it is only known as such after the fact. At the beginning of Hegel's entire metaphysical system stands a repetition of empty substance. A repetition of empty substance results in a division of that which subsequently demonstrates itself as that which must

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<sup>41</sup> Comay and Ruda, *The Dash*, 94.

<sup>42</sup> As Žižek writes "...dialectical materialism is the only true philosophical inheritor of what Hegel designates as the speculative attitude of thought towards objectivity." Slavoj Žižek, *Absolute Recoil: Towards a New Foundation of Dialectical Materialism* (London: Verso, 2014), 4. See also Žižek, *Less Than Nothing*.



have always already been unified at the start (qua nothing), as the difference between the two elements is simultaneously preserved and overcome (via sublation). I argue that, for this reason, the deepest kernel of Hegel's spirit is actually not that of a scientist at all – but rather that of a sage.

On my interpretation, as we will see, Hegel is a thinker of both identity and difference. On Hegel's account, reason is only able to claim the *necessity* of its coming to be *retroactively* and therefore, its coming to be is never fully *explained* by (nor reduced to) the system as such. In this sense, Hegel's position on the beginning is actually similar to Schelling's position at the beginning of the *Weltalter* (this fact also crucially entails that Hegel must acknowledge the primordial and fundamental importance of both identity and difference at the same time).

### **0.5.1) Hegel as Primarily a Thinker of Identity (or System)**

The first traditional reading of Hegel that I will consider presents Hegel as primarily a thinker who provides a system of explicative reason. In this reading, philosophers (consider as one example, for instance, Charles Taylor) categorize Hegel primarily as a thinker of rational identity. Under this conception of Hegel, Hegel's primary aim is to provide an ultimately rational (and complete) account of metaphysics in which the system itself is capable of achieving full transparency to itself. As Andrew Bowie writes, “most histories of German Idealism see Hegel as making the vital steps towards a complete systematic philosophy which goes beyond the limitations of Fichte and Schelling (for example, Kroner 1924).”<sup>43</sup> Philosophers who read Hegel in this way ultimately aim to demonstrate Hegel as a philosopher who aims to display rationality's internal coherence with itself.

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<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

There have indeed been many philosophers who have interpreted Hegel in this way throughout the history of philosophy. As Wendell Kisner observes, “the criticism launched at Hegel for allegedly subsuming difference and otherness under an all-encompassing absolute spirit... goes back at least to Heidegger’s lecture course on Hegel and is no doubt exacerbated by the interpretations put forward by Bradley and McTaggart (and later by Charles Taylor and David Inwood.)”<sup>44</sup> In fact, Rebecca Comay and Frank Ruda further note how this line of critique of Hegel goes as far back as Kierkegaard. They write:

Hegel’s critics from Kierkegaard onward, have never stopped reviling Hegel’s absolute idealism as a philosophy of identity (or of narcissism, if you wish): it swallows contingencies, it smothers singularities, it cancels out time, it consigns historical suffering to the slaughter bench of history.<sup>45</sup>

Tracing this historical line of critique even further back, Stephen Houlgate comments on the historical impact of Schelling’s critical reception of Hegel’s philosophy:

The claim that Schelling’s critique of Hegel has exercised considerable influence on subsequent generations of philosophers is undeniably true. Kierkegaard, Feuerbach, and Engels all heard Schelling lecture in the years after Hegel’s death in 1831 and were receptive to his critique of the Hegelian system.<sup>46</sup>

Indeed, many of Hegel’s contemporaries were influenced by Schelling’s 1827 critique of Hegel. Schelling’s rejection of the beginning of the Hegelian system had a lasting historical influence. Many of the later philosophers who reject Hegel’s system on similar grounds could be considered historical inheritors of Schelling’s critical position in his 1827 critique of Hegel (which I address in Chapter Five).

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<sup>44</sup> Wendell Kisner, “The Concrete Universal in Žižek and Hegel,” *International Journal of Žižek Studies* 2, no. 2 (2008): 1, <http://zizekstudies.org/index.php/IJZS/article/view/60/57>.

<sup>45</sup> Rebecca Comay and Frank Ruda, *The Dash—The Other Side of Absolute Knowing* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2018), 1.

<sup>46</sup> Stephen Houlgate, “Schelling’s Critique of Hegel’s *Science of Logic*,” *The Review of Metaphysics* 53, no. 1 (Sept. 1999): 99.

Let us now examine Charles Taylor's view of Hegel in more detail.<sup>47</sup> Taylor's view is essentially one of a cosmic *Geist* that posits itself in order to come to know itself in finite human subjects. Taylor's interpretation of Hegel is that, eventually, contingency is overcome by the higher-order unity of rational necessity that is, most fundamentally speaking, that of *Geist's* self-positing. As Taylor writes:

Hence we get beyond the problem of a contingent or merely given starting point by rising above it to a vision of ontological necessity which englobes it. We rise to a vision of seamless necessity, and from this vantage point we see that our original starting point, along with everything which is, is part of the same web. So that nothing is left outside, nothing is merely given; and *Geist* as wholly self-positing is truly free, truly infinite, in an absolute sense that has no parallel with finite spirits.<sup>48</sup>

Taylor's interpretation is that Hegel ultimately aims to display the *necessity* of *Geist* in a conceptual, ontological sense. Although there is certainly something right about Taylor's view – for instance, that Spirit comes to be in time and that Spirit is not fully aware of itself in the beginning as itself, etc., Taylor's view is also incomplete. The irony is that Taylor's view is incomplete insofar as he does not sufficiently emphasize<sup>49</sup> the incompleteness of *Geist* itself.

We see this perhaps most clearly in Taylor's discussion of contingency in Hegel's system. Taylor admits that there is space for contingency in Hegel's system, but that this contingency must ultimately be derived from higher-order necessity. Taylor writes, "but this play of interstitial contingency, as it were, does not introduce an element of the simply given, which *Geist* has not derived from himself. On the contrary, contingency and its place in the universe is

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<sup>47</sup> Admittedly, a comprehensive discussion of Taylor's interpretation of the Hegelian corpus is beyond the scope of this dissertation, but I will aim for a representation of his account that should serve to contrast in essential ways with my interpretation.

<sup>48</sup> Charles Taylor, *Hegel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975), 100.

<sup>49</sup> Žižek's refrain is often that "so and so" is not "radical enough." See, for example Žižek, *Absolute Recoil*, 31 where he describes how Hegel is "not *idealist enough*." See also, Comay and Ruda, *The Dash*, 21. Here, they argue that "Kant is not formalist enough."

itself derived by necessity from the requirements of absolute subjectivity.”<sup>50</sup> Here, however, Taylor fails to acknowledge the fact that necessity itself is ontologically bound up with contingency on Hegel’s view. My point (and here I am in agreement with Žižek, Comay, and Ruda) is that it is not only that contingency is derived from higher-order necessity, but that an “experience of the impossibility of experience”<sup>51</sup> stands at the basis of necessity as such.

The general inadequacy, so to speak, with “identity” readings of Hegel, then, is the fundamental claim that Hegel ontologically prioritizes identity over difference. On my understanding of Hegel’s position, identity and difference are co-primordial. The issue with these readings, then, is that they are incomplete insofar as the role of incompleteness to the overall system is not sufficiently conceptualized in its profundity. These thinkers tend to claim (or at the very least their interpretation could lend itself to the view) that Hegel’s position is that reason is ultimately able to *explain* its own origin. I disagree with this interpretation of Hegel. On my understanding, Hegel is actually a dialectical thinker of the “both...and...”<sup>52</sup> In fact, Hegel himself reminds us repeatedly that one-sided views of the dialectic are partial. In other words, Hegel is not a thinker of mere identity or difference. Rather, he is a thinker of both identity and difference simultaneous with neither mere identity nor difference considered alone.

Another reason why I argue against the interpretation of Hegel as an identity philosopher (of this specific type) is that Hegel himself explains that the only way in which reason is fully unified is in terms of the concrete universal (the unity of reason with material substance) – however, in such a unity, thought actually passes beyond itself in its union with its opposite. This

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<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, 94.

<sup>51</sup> Comay and Ruda, *The Dash*, 4, see also 105.

<sup>52</sup> Here again, I am echoing thinkers such as Gavin Hyman. As Hyman writes, “a (new) Hegelian conceiving of God reveals once again the necessity of the logic of the *both...and.*” Gavin Hyman, “The ‘New Hegel’ and the Question of God,” *Journal for Cultural and Religious Theory* 19, no. 2 (2020): 279, <https://jcr.org/archives/19.2/Hyman.pdf>.

means that a philosophy of identity must be careful not to prioritize identity on the order of thought over an identity on the order of the unity of thought with being (which implies both identity and difference and neither merely one nor the other considered alone). In other words, a genuine identity is achieved when both thought and being are unified, but this simultaneously implies their difference from each other.

One other way in which those who argue in favor of Hegel as a thinker of identity (who attempts to explain reason in a completely self-reflexive way) might support their argument could be to point to the way in which Hegel refers to Aristotle at the end of his *Philosophy of Spirit* (from the EL). In his paper, “Hegel’s Philosophy of Religion,” Paul Redding explains how Hegel refers to Aristotle at the end of that work. Redding astutely observes:

Crucially, Hegel’s *Philosophy of Spirit* concludes with a quote from Aristotle’s account of divine thinking in *Metaphysics* Λ.9 (Hegel 1971: §577) in which ‘*theos*’ is characterized as a process of pure thinking that is directed to no object independent of itself, but which is, somehow, its *own* content (see Vol. 1, Ch. 5). Divine thinking is just the thinking of thinking itself: ‘*noesis noeseos noesis*’ (Aristotle 1935: Λ.9 1074b 33-35).<sup>53</sup>

On my interpretation, however, this quote is not further evidence in favor of the interpretation of Hegel as a *totalizing* thinker. Although I acknowledge Hegel’s reference to Aristotle here and Aristotle’s notion of divine thinking as “the thinking of thinking itself,” on my interpretation, this quote is actually further evidence of the way in which Hegel conceives of a primordial unity of thought and being. This is because on my understanding, when Aristotle refers to *nous* thinking itself, there Aristotle refers to thought’s unity with being – a sort of meditative self-reflection that need not imply a reflection of a *totalizing* nature. To give the full context of the passage from Aristotle’s *Metaphysics* (*Metaphysics* 1072b), Aristotle writes there:

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<sup>53</sup> Paul Redding, “Hegel’s Philosophy of Religion,” in *The History of Western Philosophy of Religion, Volume IV: Nineteenth Century Philosophy & Religion*, eds. Graham Oppy and Nick Trakakis (Chesam: Acumen, 2007), 58.

And thought thinks itself because it shares the nature of the object of thought; for it becomes an object of thought in coming into contact with and thinking its objects, so that thought and object of thought are the same. For that which is *capable* of receiving the object of thought, i.e. the substance, is thought. And it is *active* when it *possesses* this object...and the act of contemplation is what is most pleasant and best.<sup>54</sup>

On my interpretation of this passage, here Aristotle refers to thought's awareness of itself in its union with being – when thought empties itself out to take on the object of intelligible actuality as such. In other words, thought's contemplation of itself (in its unity with being) need not imply that rationality is completely self-reflexive.

My interpretation of this passage is further supported by my reading of Aristotle's *De Anima* III.5. There, divine nous, insofar as it is actual, is the divine counterpart to the *active nous* (*νοῦς ποιητικός*) in the human soul. To put it briefly, the meditation of divine *nous* on itself in actuality is a meditation on the order of *both* thought and being, not a meditation merely on the order of thought.<sup>55</sup>

In the context of a discussion about different religious attitudes, Redding further notes how “Hegel was confident that his *logic* provided a framework within which such disparate elements could be ultimately reconciled.”<sup>56</sup> However, my point is that a reconciliation of disparate elements (in the way in which Hegel conceived of reconciliation, specifically) need not imply a complete explanation or reduction. In fact, on Hegel's account, it could not possibly imply such an explanation. Furthermore, even if we concede Redding's point that “Hegel was consistently opposed to any such attempts to base a religious or any other orientation on the

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<sup>54</sup> Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, in *The Complete Works of Aristotle: The Revised Oxford Translation*, ed. Jonathan Barnes (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984), 1695.

<sup>55</sup> On the distinction between active and passive *nous*, see Aristotle's *De Anima* III.5. Although an in-depth discussion of Aristotle's *De Anima* III.5 is beyond the scope of this dissertation, it is also noteworthy that Schelling himself comments on the passage in his *Einleitung in die Philosophie der Mythologie* (“Introduction to the Philosophy of Mythology.”)

<sup>56</sup> Paul Redding, “Hegel's Philosophy of Religion,” 55.

feelings of the ‘heart’ rather than on the conceptuality of reason,”<sup>57</sup> it is also true that from the standpoint of his own conceptual system, Hegel must acknowledge the emptiness of divinity as ontologically fundamental to the conceptuality of a developed reason. Thus, the ultimate irony is that if Hegel is the thinker at the extreme when it comes to the development of conceptual rationality, his conceptual system is actually grounded in a similar insight as Schelling’s system (the thinker who is more traditionally acknowledged as the one who thinks beyond idealism). This is to say that the abyss at the base of reason is concurrent with the abyss at the base of freedom, even if the two thinkers approach metaphysics from a fundamentally different conception (here I am specifically thinking in terms of style). Schelling (especially in his *Freiheitsschrift* and onward) consciously starts from the standpoint of the heart, whereas Hegel begins from the standpoint of reason (which in fact, ironically, takes him back to the depths of the heart in its union with divine substance).

### **0.5.2) Hegel as Primarily a Thinker of Difference (or Freedom)**

The second position that I consider is the notion of Hegel as most fundamentally a thinker of difference. For instance, on this reading, one could characterize Hegel as a post-modern thinker. One might contend, for example, that Hegel attempts to think of difference itself as the primary ontological feature of metaphysics. However, this, too, would be to misconstrue Hegel’s view. Rather, Hegel hopes to show how both difference and identity are internal to the Absolute at the same time. Although Hegel at one moment claims that reason ultimately demonstrates its *necessity*, he is only able to make such a claim retroactively. This means that there is a primordial moment of contingency, even on Hegel’s account. Despite this fact, Hegel is

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<sup>57</sup> Ibid., 54.

always functioning as a thinker of both identity and difference (considered together) within his system of metaphysics.

On a related note, on my view, Hegel's philosophy itself is a sublation (*Aufhebung*) of Kant's transcendental philosophy. This means that there is something retained from Kant's view, while Hegel simultaneously transcends the Kantian viewpoint. In agreement with Adrian Johnston, I think that Hegel comes historically after Kant, but simultaneously thinks beyond Kant.<sup>58</sup> Hegel gathers the main insight of transcendental philosophy. However, on Hegel's account, the gap between subject and object is not limited to the reason of a knowing subject. Rather, on Hegel's view, the gap between subject and object is constitutive of the Absolute as such.<sup>59</sup>

Along these lines, my interpretive camp is not merely post-modern. I do not claim that Hegel is the father of post-modernity. This is to say that Hegel does not aim to demonstrate the fundamental priority of mere difference. Rather, he aims to show something even more radical: he aims to show that a repetition of emptiness "grounds" the heart of the Absolute.

### **0.5.3) Hegel as a Thinker of Both Identity and Difference (Both System and Freedom, taken together, in a precise sense)<sup>60</sup>**

For the reasons noted above, in this dissertation, I am primarily concerned with a Hegel who thinks at the intersection of modernity and post-modernity (in this sense, my reading is closely aligned with Slavoj Žižek's reading of Hegel). My reading could be characterized as

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<sup>58</sup> As Adrian Johnston notes, Hegel is "post" Kantian "in both senses of the prefix." See Adrian Johnston, *A New German Idealism: Hegel, Žižek, and Dialectical Materialism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2018), 21.

<sup>59</sup> Slavoj Žižek, *Absolute Recoil*, 16.

<sup>60</sup> See also Slavoj Žižek, "Hegel and Shitting: The Idea's Constipation," in *Hegel and the Infinite: Religion, Politics and Dialectic*, 24.



located in the camp of the “New Hegelians,” here I am thinking in particular of thinkers like Žižek and Johnston.<sup>61</sup> Of course, as Gavin Hyman has noted, not all of the “New Hegelians” agree on every aspect of their interpretation of Hegel.<sup>62</sup> However, these thinkers are unified insofar as they attempt to achieve two aims: 1) to explain how Hegel reconceives of terms that have traditionally been understood to constitute a dichotomy (notions such as “form” and “content” or “necessity” and “contingency”), but to simultaneously think them in terms of their identity as well as difference and 2) to reject *both* the notion of a “metaphysical” Hegel (propounded by thinkers such as Derrida, Levinas, Adorno, Deleuze, and Bataille) as well as the “deflationary” accounts of Hegel (proposed by thinkers such as Pippin, Brandom, Pinkard and Lewis and others).<sup>63</sup>

In their rejection of the metaphysical caricature of Hegel, the New Hegelians reject the notion of a Hegel who subsumes all of reality under a higher-order identity of self-explicative rationality. I agree with this “New Hegelian” rejection of such an interpretation. On my understanding, this could not possibly represent a correct interpretation of Hegel’s view, since in the *Science of Logic*, the beginning of reason as “Being” is in fact located in the emptiness (and negativity) of material substance.<sup>64</sup> This means that even if one can retroactively claim the necessity of reason, ontology will always be incomplete when it comes to rationality’s self-reflexive reconstruction.

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<sup>61</sup> See Hyman, “The ‘New Hegel’ and the Question of God,” 276-278.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>64</sup> I later refer to points noted by Comay and Ruda on Hegel’s style in particular to show how this is the case.

## 0.6) *Entäußerung*<sup>65,66</sup>: God's Self-Emptying and Hegel's account of the Absolute

Hegel aims to provide an account of how it is the case that consciousness could arrive at genuine knowledge of the Absolute (although his account will in fact imply that such a knowledge is inherently incomplete). That said, on Hegel's thinking, the accounts of his predecessors have been inadequate in various ways. As one example, Kant's account of metaphysics removes the possibility of genuine knowledge of the Absolute. As Kant famously states in *his Critique of Pure Reason*, "I had to deny knowledge in order to make room for faith." (Bxxx)<sup>67</sup> Hegel differs from Kant, however, since on Hegel's account it is possible to have genuine knowledge (although what we mean by knowledge here will need to be clarified) of a transcendent God (albeit as long as one acknowledges that he or she genuinely participates in the Absolute as substance when passing beyond individualistic reason). The notion of *Entäußerung* ("divestment") is therefore crucial to understanding Hegel's metaphysics, both in the sense of God's primordial action of emptying itself out as well as one's participation in divinity by following suit. In his "Translator's Note" to the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, Terry Pinkard comments on the theological importance of Hegel's usage of the German term, a term that Luther had also employed in reference to God's *kenosis* in the Bible.<sup>68</sup> As we will see, since the

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<sup>65</sup> Hegel uses the term *Entäußerung* more than fifty times in the *Phenomenology* and on six occasions in the *Logic*. In later chapters, I examine one particular connection between the usages in the two works. *Entäußerung* is usually translated by Miller as "divestment."

<sup>66</sup> I was made aware of the importance of the term *Entäußerung* to understanding Hegel's system by Terry Pinkard's "Translator's Note" to the Cambridge Translation of the *Phenomenology of Spirit*. See Terry Pinkard, "Translator's Note," in *The Phenomenology of Spirit* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), xlii.

<sup>67</sup> Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. and ed. by Paul Guyer and Allen Wood (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 117.

<sup>68</sup> As Terry Pinkard astutely observes, in his Bible from 1545 Luther uses the German "*entäußerte sich selbst*" during a discussion of God's self-emptying in Phillipians 2. See Terry Pinkard, "Translator's Note," in *The Phenomenology of Spirit* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), xlii.

action of divestment is ontologically primordial on Hegel's account, even the reflexivity of consciousness could never imply a complete, conscious self-knowledge of the Absolute.

On Hegel's account of metaphysics, all of reality, including God's becoming, is initially granted by an act of *Entäußerung*<sup>69</sup> ("divestment"). In the beginning, God divests itself from out of itself. In other words, in the beginning there is pure negation (empty substance beyond even the concept of negation or the concept of nothingness). Hegel then comments on how this original act of negation (beyond the possible attribution of a predicate on the order of the Understanding) which results in an *apparent* immediacy, in fact displays itself as always already mediated, since it stands in some relation to its opposite. Consequently, Hegel argues that God's initial act of emptying itself out (pure negation) eventually unveils itself as a positive act of self-constitution (qua the negation of negation). That said, God's original act of emptying itself out always simultaneously implies a transcendence that could never be fully captured by conscious reason. This is because substance itself is always deeper than what a conceptual structure could possibly capture in conscious reflection.

Hegel's description of the Absolute is also what enables him to develop a position of consciousness toward objectivity, which, according to Hegel, is the most advanced position of thought towards objective reality that is possible. At this final stage, thought arrives at the view that its self-transcendence is one with its identity. In other words, God comes to know itself as itself in its otherness from itself. Despite this fact, Hegel's notion of reflexive reason does not claim to capture the process in its entirety via concepts. Despite recognizing a certain implicit conceptual structure to the process, Hegel does not claim to capture the fullness of reality in his

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<sup>69</sup> See chapter two of this dissertation for a more in-depth discussion of this topic.

Logic, since God's self-divestment is a movement that inherently transcends what conceptual thinking could possibly grasp.

### 0.7) Schelling and Hegel on *das Unvordenkliche*

In Schelling's drafts of the *Weltalter*, he writes of *das Unvordenkliche* ("unprethinkable being"). Unprethinkable being is Schelling's term for that which thinking must retroactively presuppose as always already there in order for reason to be possible at all. This is because for thought-determinations to be possible at all, there must already be a logical "space" or domain that opens up the possibility for such determinations to take place.

Schelling writes of the "unprethinkable" in a fragment:

It is what comes before and precedes even whatever is thinkable; were it not otherwise the unprethinkable, the first? It is not something posited, for it posits itself. But it is not even that this self-positing could be thought of as a particular thinkable act. Instead, it is to be understood in that sense with which one says that something makes itself, but only in order to stress that it occurs of itself, without our doing anything. It is that which any positing whatsoever already *presupposes*, what is already there before we give it a thought or stumble upon it. In this way it has always already assumed the place of unconditionality, regardless of how early we come upon it.<sup>70</sup>

Of course, one cannot think the unprethinkable directly nor can one provide an explanation for it, since it precedes any possible thought-determination. Later on in this dissertation, I draw out some of the significant similarities and differences between Schelling's account of unprethinkability and Hegel's beginning in the *Science of Logic*. As one example, both Hegel and Schelling agree that the beginning of philosophy is located beyond the order of objective

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<sup>70</sup> F.W.J. Schelling, *The Ages of the World (1811)*, trans. Joseph P. Lawrence (Albany: SUNY Press, 2019), 196.

thinking. On both accounts, something like the unprethinkability of being stands at the beginning of philosophy.<sup>71</sup>

Contemporary scholar Markus Gabriel also writes about Schelling on the unprethinkable in his book, *Transcendental Ontology*:

unprethinkable being is the ‘starting point’ that exists ‘before all thinking.’ Unprethinkable being is unprethinkable in the sense that it is precisely that which we cannot not think, that which is at play in all thought but about which no grounded or groundable thought can be presupposed as possible. Unprethinkable being is thus only the name for the very structure of presupposition of all determinations, and not some transcendent **je ne sais quoi**.<sup>72</sup>

Many scholars (consider Andrew Bowie or Manfred Frank as two of the most prominent proponents of this position) argue that Schelling and Hegel differ on the point of whether or not the “beginning” of reason is explicable. In these traditional interpretations, what distinguishes Schelling’s view from Hegel’s is that on Hegel’s account the system ultimately becomes fully rational and transparent to itself. According to Hegel, these scholars argue, the beginning is eventually explained via the totalizing nature of reason. On the other hand, the beginning for Schelling is inexplicable qua unprethinkable being.

My argument is distinct from these traditional interpretations in that I argue that Hegel grounds his dialectical metaphysics in a notion that is akin to Schelling’s notion of unprethinkable being. Žižek makes a similar argument that Schelling’s WA stands at the basis of dialectical materialism. As Kelsey Wood notes, “Žižek locates the origin of dialectical materialism in a particular moment or problematic in the philosophy of Schelling.”<sup>73</sup> As Žižek

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<sup>71</sup> Schelling also sometimes speaks of this “unprethinkability” in more theological terms as “*Lauterkeit*” (which Joseph P. Lawrence translates as “lucid purity”). See Schelling, *Ages of the World* (1811), trans. Joseph P. Lawrence, 196.

<sup>72</sup> Markus Gabriel, *Transcendental Ontology: Essays in German Idealism* (New York: Continuum, 2011), 85.

<sup>73</sup> Kelsey Wood, *A Reader’s Guide to Žižek*, (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), 119-120.

observes in his book *Indivisible Remainder*, “For Schelling, then, the primordial, radically contingent fact, a fact which can in no way be accounted for, is freedom itself, a freedom bound by nothing, a freedom which, in a sense, *is* Nothing; and the problem is, rather, how this Nothing of the abyss of freedom becomes entangled in the causal chains of reason.”<sup>74</sup>

We find a similar explanation of Schelling’s beginning in Gabriel’s description of unprethinkable being as beyond the notion of “nothing” conceived as a determinate nothing. He writes, “[unprethinkable being] is not some *causa sui* or absolute I in an idealistic sense. It is itself nothing, and even this is incorrect: it is nothing that could be said to be identical to itself; thus it is not even nothing.”<sup>75</sup> Interestingly enough, here I note the connection to Žižek’s book on dialectical materialism entitled, *Less than Nothing* (incidentally, this phrasing for the title reiterates Hegel’s phrasing from the beginning of the SL in Chapter One (“Being”) of the “Doctrine of Being” where Hegel states that the beginning as “Being...is in fact *nothing*, and neither more nor less than *nothing*.”<sup>76</sup>) In his book, too, Žižek notes the connection between the starting point of dialectical materialism and Schelling’s notion of unprethinkability.

I argue in favor of the point that Hegel and Schelling arrive at similar notions here, since for Hegel’s account of the coming to be Spirit to make sense at all, Hegel must acknowledge that reason is only able to arrive at knowledge of its beginning as itself via a process that takes place in time. In other words, there is a moment of genuine contingency even in Hegel’s position on the beginning: Hegel’s beginning, too, is only necessary in a contingent sense.<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>74</sup> Slavoj Žižek, *The Indivisible Remainder: On Schelling and Related Matters* (New York: Verso, 1996), 16. Quote cited from Wood, *A Reader’s Guide to Žižek*, 120.

<sup>75</sup> Gabriel, *Transcendental Ontology*, 91.

<sup>76</sup> Hegel, *Science of Logic*, 82.

<sup>77</sup> Gabriel, *Transcendental Ontology*, 131, 136.

On Gabriel's account, Hegel and Schelling differ on the point about whether that which opens up the possibility for thinking to take place is itself contingent or necessary. Gabriel writes:

That there is reflection, in other words, that thinking and theory building processes take place, that the world thematizes itself and a logical space of possibility is opened, is according to Schelling a contingent fact. Hegel, on the contrary, endorses a *strong anthropic principle*, as it were, which states that of necessity something and thus logical space is given and that therein reflection came to be. Hegel has it that finite thinkers qua the place of reflection could not not have taken place.<sup>78</sup>

In many ways, my dissertation is an attempt to show how, even if Hegel's stated aim is to show the necessity of the givenness of logical space, Hegel himself must in fact resort to a more primordial contingency. In other words, due to the terms of Hegel's own system, the givenness of logical space is only contingently necessary (once it arrives on the scene, it appears that it must have always already been the case) in such a way that Hegel and Schelling's position on the beginning are actually quite similar.<sup>79,80</sup>

### **0.8) Hegel of the *Science of Logic* and Schelling of the *Ages of the World***

Along similar lines, I argue that both Hegel of the SL and Schelling of the WA express similar metaphysical positions. Both philosophers agree that the highest standpoint of consciousness is when consciousness arrives at a knowledge of the unity of subject and object (but this leads both of them to develop dialectical materialist positions). Both philosophers argue

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<sup>78</sup> Ibid., 136.

<sup>79</sup> Here, it is also historically noteworthy that Schelling and Hegel (along with Hölderlin) were roommates at the Tübingen Stift during a period in which the three studied pantheism à la Spinoza as well as neo-Platonism. See Redding, "Hegel's Philosophy of Religion." In *The History of Western Philosophy of Religion, Volume IV: Nineteenth Century Philosophy & Religion*, eds. Graham Oppy and Nick Trakakis (Chesam: Acumen, 2007), 52.

<sup>80</sup> As Žižek reminds us further, in 1796-1797, Schelling, Hegel and Hölderlin co-wrote *The Oldest Systematic Program of German Idealism*. See Žižek, *Sex and the Failed Absolute* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2020), 6.

against the limitations of a one-sided dialectical position in which such a unity is conceived on the order of the Understanding alone. Hegel and Schelling both take the unity of consciousness with divine substance as their metaphysical starting point. And both philosophers also agree that there is a moment when the divine alienates itself from itself in order to come to know itself.

The positions of Hegel and Schelling differ, however, insofar as Schelling provides a more explicit answer to the question of *why* God differentiates itself from itself in the first place. On Schelling's view, God's original being (which Schelling in his 1811 WA draft conceives as a will that wills nothing) is co-eternal with a will that desires to know itself. This co-eternity of wills develops in God in order for God to come to know itself as love. Although an ontology of dialectical materialism is consistent with the metaphysical positions of both philosophers, Schelling provides more of a direct response to the question of *why* the Godhead divests itself from out of itself in the first place. On Schelling's account, via an act of contraction, the Godhead creates a space in which God is able to genuinely differ from itself for the sake of an experiential knowledge of freedom. Schelling's conception of freedom here is so radical that God creates the possibility for evil to exist out of its love for creation and in recognition of the nature of freedom. On Schelling's account, for creation to be made in love, even the devil must be given the freedom to align its will with God's will (to love) rather than to will evil.

### **0.9) The Overall Structure of My Argument**

By way of a conclusion, I will introduce the main topics of each chapter:

In Chapter One, I explain how consciousness learns of its self-sacrificial nature at the end of the *Phenomenology of Spirit* and how this relates to the beginning of Hegel's *Science of Logic*. In Chapter Two, I further comment on this connection in relation to the overall task of Hegel's SL. There, I also consider different possible interpretations of the relationship between



Hegel's *Phenomenology* and his *Science of Logic* including the notion of a "non-relation"<sup>81</sup> as suggested by Comay and Ruda. In Chapter Three, I return to the topic of the beginning of Hegel's SL and the *nature* of the beginning. For example, is the beginning dialectical or (Un)-dialectical (as both and neither?) In Chapter Four, I present my argument for the unity of Schelling (of the WA) and Hegel's (of the SL) position on the beginning of metaphysics. In Chapter Five, I examine further connections between Hegel's *Phenomenology* and the *Logic* in relation to Schelling's *Ages of the World*. I argue that both thinkers understand the dual-natured task of metaphysics and the divine as present in all of experience (they are both thinkers of a pantheistic monism). In addition, I analyze Schelling's 1827 critique of Hegel's SL. I explain one way in which I disagree with Schelling's critique and demonstrate some of the metaphysical consistencies between the accounts of the two thinkers. I also examine some of the deeper connections to Schelling's *Philosophy of Revelation* (1841). However, while both thinkers are metaphysically consistent, I argue that Schelling provides a more developed account of why the process occurs in the first place – the entire process is for the purpose of the revelation of the divine as love.

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<sup>81</sup> Rebecca Comay and Frank Ruda, *The Dash—The Other Side of Absolute Knowing*, 37, 43.

## CHAPTER ONE

### ABSOLUTE KNOWING AND THE EMPTINESS OF SPIRIT IN HEGEL'S *PHENOMENOLOGY*

#### 1.1) Introduction

In this chapter, my primary task is to interpret the meaning of “Absolute Knowing” in Hegel’s *Phenomenology of Spirit*. Absolute knowing is important to the topic of my dissertation, insofar as it pertains to the question of whether or not Hegel believes that rationality is ultimately of a *totalizing* nature.<sup>82,83</sup> One mainstream, traditional reading of this section of the *Phenomenology of Spirit* has been that absolute knowing is where reason arrives at knowledge of the self-reflexivity (and completeness) of its own nature. This is to say that, after passing through the historical shapes of the *Phenomenology*, reason finally arrives at a complete grasp of its own nature and the nature of the world as rational. For thinkers who adopt this view, it might seem that this section represents the moment at which consciousness (in its unity with the Absolute) attains a complete knowledge of itself and the rationality of the world. Žižek refers to this interpretation – one on which reason imparts a *telos* from out of itself and all of creation works towards the unfolding of the identity of Spirit – as that of the “textbook Hegel.”<sup>84</sup>

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<sup>82</sup> For more on the topic of the incompleteness of “absolute knowing,” see also Slavoj Žižek, “Hegel and Shitting: The Idea’s Constipation,” 221 ff.

<sup>83</sup> For Schelling’s discussion of “knowing ignorance” in the WA, see F.W.J. Schelling, *The Ages of the World (1811)*, trans. Joseph P. Lawrence, 163.

<sup>84</sup> Žižek, *Absolute Recoil*, 238.

I consider contemporary philosopher Tom Rockmore a proponent of this classical interpretation of Hegel when it comes to his view of absolute knowing. For example, Rockmore writes of the section on “Absolute Knowing”:

For Hegel, the highest form of knowledge turns out to be self-knowledge, or knowing oneself in otherness and otherness as oneself. He sees the problem of knowledge as coming to an end in the subject's full conceptual grasp of itself.<sup>85</sup>

Here, it is clear Rockmore's interpretation is that Spirit attains a *conceptual* knowledge of the identity of identity and difference in absolute knowing. In other words, Spirit attains knowledge of the fact that it remains itself even in its otherness from itself. Furthermore, Rockmore contends that Spirit arrives at a *complete* conceptual knowledge of itself. For these reasons, Rockmore's view here seems aligned with what Žižek refers to as the “textbook Hegel.” The interpretation of this particular section as one of a complete conceptual knowing of Spirit is connected with the more general interpretation of Hegel as a thinker of synthesis (as an identity philosopher).

There is, of course, something right about Rockmore's view, in the sense that Spirit *does* attain a type of knowledge of itself as the Absolute here. Indeed, in the “Introduction” to the *Phenomenology*, Hegel discusses Absolute Knowing in the context of a discussion of how consciousness, historically speaking, arrives at a genuine understanding of the relationship between itself and the Absolute. The topic there is a familiar one – how to develop a science based in a proper understanding of the relationship between consciousness and the Absolute. At the end of the “Introduction,” Hegel writes:

In pressing forward to its true existence, consciousness will arrive at a point at which it gets rid of its semblance of being burdened by something alien, with what is only for it, and some sort of ‘other’, at a point where appearance becomes identical with essence, so

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<sup>85</sup> Tom Rockmore, *Cognition: An Introduction to Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 188.

that its exposition will coincide at just this point with the authentic Science of Spirit. And finally, when consciousness itself grasps this its own essence, it will signify the nature of absolute knowledge itself.<sup>86</sup>

On the surface, this portion of text may seem to provide further support for the reading of Hegel as an identity philosopher. However, on my interpretation, what Hegel says here does not merely eliminate difference from the Absolute. Rather, absolute knowing represents the moment at which consciousness understands difference as internal to itself – i.e., the moment when consciousness understands that it is internally incomplete. In other words, for “appearance” to become identical with “essence” means that appearance itself takes on the form of the other *as itself*. Also of note, the German word that is translated here as “grasp” is not *begreift* but it is actually *erfähft*. Although the two words are sometimes synonymous (when meaning “grab hold of” or “grip”), *erfähft* could also be translated as “comprehend,” “apprehend,” or “ascertain.” On my reading, for consciousness to “*erfähft sein Wesen*” (comprehend its essence) need not imply completeness, but rather in this case it actually implies knowledge on the order of Spirit’s self-transcendence. Where Rockmore and I seem to disagree, then, is with regard to what it means for consciousness to “know” its essence. On my interpretation, for consciousness to grasp its essence here is simultaneously for consciousness to grasp its essence as ungraspable. This is also why Hegel repeatedly emphasizes the importance of “divestment” to absolute knowing (as we will see more in later chapters).

In this discussion, let us not forget either that earlier in this same section during a discussion of how consciousness eventually arrives at genuine knowledge of its nature in relation to the Absolute, Hegel alludes to the “Stations of the Cross,”<sup>87</sup> a process in which consciousness

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<sup>86</sup> Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, 57.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*, 49.

“may purify itself for the life of the Spirit.”<sup>88</sup> Hegel has in mind a process during which consciousness must repeatedly purify itself in order to come to know itself as one with the Absolute. Even so, unity with the Absolute is never of a *totalizing* nature. In fact, just a few pages later, Hegel comments on the *self-transcendent* nature of consciousness. He notes how, “Consciousness, however, is explicitly the *Notion* of itself. Hence it is something that goes beyond limits, and since these limits are its own, it is something that goes beyond itself.”<sup>89</sup> The nature of consciousness is to transcend itself. Indeed, this is consistent with Hegel’s statement a few pages later where he characterizes the *Phenomenology* as a science that is *immanent* to consciousness. As Hegel writes there, “since what consciousness examines is its own self, all that is left for us to do is simply look on.”<sup>90</sup>

Along these lines, as we will see in this chapter, I argue that we ought to be precise about the type of *knowledge* that Spirit gains – what Spirit really comes to understand is a “knowledge” of a unique type. In order to understand such a knowing more deeply, I pose a couple of questions: 1.) What would it mean for God to genuinely sacrifice itself? What sort of knowledge could Spirit come to know via self-sacrifice?

My task in this chapter is therefore two-fold: 1) to elaborate and support my interpretation of this section and 2) to explain how it fits in with my interpretation of Hegel as a philosopher who thinks at the interstices of identity and difference. If I can show that Hegel does not posit the closure of reason (in a completely self-reflexive sense) at the end of the *Phenomenology*, then that would provide some support in favor of rejecting the notion of Hegel as a thinker of totality (or mere identity). That said, there are multiple possible interpretations of

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<sup>88</sup> Ibid.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid., 51.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid., 54.

the meaning of Absolute Knowing at the end of the *Phenomenology* by means of which Hegel would not thereby posit the closure of reason. For example, consider the two versions presented below:

### 1.1.1) Two Versions of the “Knowing of Unknowing”

a.) On this interpretation, absolute knowing represents a version of a doctrine of Socratic ignorance or a kind of “*docta ignorantia*”<sup>91,92</sup> in a broad sense. This version of the *docta ignorantia* is consistent with an intellectual virtue of humility in recognition of the fact that the nature of the divine transcends all possible human knowledge.

b.) As a subset of the *docta ignorantia* more broadly construed, Hegel’s type of *docta ignorantia* is a specific one (and here, I agree with Žižek that it is unique in the sense that it pertains to God’s own subjection to emptiness).<sup>93</sup> Hegel does not merely describe a knowing of unknowing (a knowing in which one knows the limits of one’s knowledge). Rather, more specifically, Hegel suggests that absolute knowing is an *experience* in which consciousness itself passes through emptiness. This, I take it, is analogous to consciousness submitting itself to the same process of crucifixion as Christ does, when Christ takes on the form of matter, dies, and genuinely experiences the transcendent. Therefore, Hegel’s reference to the Stations of the

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<sup>91</sup> Žižek, *Absolute Recoil*, 226. Žižek’s discussion of Hegel’s “Absolute Knowing” begins on p. 226 where he begins by addressing the topic of how “forgetting” relates to absolute knowing. In subsequent pages, he addresses the meaning of absolute knowing according to his reading.

<sup>92</sup> Reviewing the full history of the “*docta ignorantia*” is beyond the scope of my project. That said, there is a long historical thread here that traces back through many thinkers, such as Nicholas of Cusa, St. Augustine of Hippo, and Socrates before that (just to name a few).

<sup>93</sup> Žižek, *Absolute Recoil*, 238.

Cross is a pointed one, since the process is analogous to consciousness preparing itself for crucifixion in order to become the divine Spirit.

I argue in favor of b.) (the more radical thesis). By arguing in favor of this more radical interpretation, I provide further support for my reading of Hegel as a thinker of incompleteness.

### **1.2) Absolute Knowing as a Knowing of God's Self-Sacrificial Nature**

I subsequently argue that the type of knowledge that Spirit attains in absolute knowing is a knowledge of its own *nature* construed as a nature of self-sacrifice, divestment, letting go, and freedom. There is some discussion in the literature that maybe Hegel is not truly a thinker of incompleteness, due to some of his later views such as he presents them in his *Lectures on the Philosophy of History*, as one example.<sup>94</sup> In this sense, there may be a historical question about whether or not the later Hegel is consistent with the insights he presents in his earlier works, such as the *Phenomenology of Spirit* and the *Science of Logic*.

However, I agree with Žižek's intuition here that Hegel understands the deepest moment of Christianity as the claim that the nature of the Absolute is to sacrifice itself out of love.<sup>95</sup> For this reason, the deepest moment of Christianity is not the intellectual virtue of humility. Deeper even than that is the lived experience of the emptiness of Spirit: God's self-divestment out of love for the world. If Hegel's "Absolute Knowing" is a knowing of unknowing, then it is so in this precise sense.

### **1.3) Hegel's Schellingian Insight**

Throughout Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*, originally published in 1807, Hegel describes the concrete historical shapes (or moments) of the being of consciousness that

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<sup>94</sup> Žižek, *Absolute Recoil*, 237-238.

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*, 238.

consciousness has passed through during the course of history. In this specific sense, the phenomenology is a “science” (*die Wissenschaft*) of consciousness, which observes the various historical moments of the being of consciousness. Each of the historical shapes of consciousness is contingent – in the sense that they could have been otherwise – yet, it is also the case that each is simultaneously necessary, insofar as the course that history *actually* took is the necessary course that history has taken in the coming to be of Spirit in time (in other words, the path of consciousness through history is contingently necessary).<sup>96</sup> At the same time, Hegel sees how contingency and necessity are always dialectically bound together in such a way that to speak of one always already implies its other – in the sense that to understand one it is necessary to think the other (but more on this later on).

In any case, at the end of the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, Spirit has arrived at the standpoint of Absolute Knowledge (*das Absolute Wissen*). After passing through the previous shapes of consciousness (of morality and revealed religion most proximately), consciousness comes to the shape of “Absolute Knowing.” Hegel describes Absolute Knowing as “a reconciliation of consciousness with self-consciousness”<sup>97</sup> and furthermore, along these lines, he writes:

Spirit is *this movement* of the Self which empties itself of itself and sinks itself into its substance, and also, as Subject, has gone out of that substance into itself, making the substance into an object and a content at the same time as it cancels this difference between objectivity and content. <sup>98</sup>

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<sup>96</sup> As Findlay observes in his “Foreword,” to *Hegel’s Phenomenology*, “There is no reason then to think that Hegel thought that the path traced in the *Phenomenology*, though consisting throughout of necessary steps, was the only path that the conscious spirit could have taken in rising from sensuous immediacy to absolute knowledge. It was the path that *had* been taken by the World Spirit in past history, and that had been rehearsed in the consciousness of Hegel, in whom the notion of Science first became actual.” See J.N. Findlay, “Foreword,” in *Hegel’s Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. A.V. Miller (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977), vi.

<sup>97</sup> G.W.F. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. A.V. Miller (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977), 482. Henceforth, *Phenomenology*, unless otherwise noted (in the case of the usage of a different translation, I will note specifically).

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*, 490.



Here, Hegel arrives at an insight that Schelling often imparts. If we think of Spirit along the lines of the three persons (the Trinity) of God internal to the Godhead in Schelling's account, then the contours of the overall movement remain the same. Absolute Spirit (what is originally the Godhead, in Schellingian terms) divests itself (creates a space within itself, negates itself). This is God's action out of love. God empties itself out into matter. At the same time, from the standpoint of matter, the emptiness of substance repeats itself in a return to subjectivity. All the same, there is no genuine difference between subject and substance. Most properly speaking, the relation between the two is a "non-relation,"<sup>99</sup> as we will see. Spirit is thus the movement of God's eternal self-sacrifice – on this point, Hegel and Schelling agree.

#### **1.4) Spirit as both Subject and Substance (and also neither mere Subject nor Substance)<sup>100</sup>**

For the purposes of this dissertation, what is most important here is that as Spirit, subjectivity is simultaneously both subject and substance (in fact, it is subject that *knows* itself as substance), and what this implies is that it is also neither mere subject nor substance.<sup>101</sup>

Subject which knows itself as substance is also substance "without a subject,"<sup>102</sup> since subject that knows itself as substance recognizes that its own constitution is fundamentally founded in genuine otherness. As we will see, the subject who knows itself is also the one who has experienced the lived experience of emptiness to such an extent that even the determinations of the finite or infinite are conceptually uncertain.

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<sup>99</sup> Comay and Ruda, *The Dash*, 18.

<sup>100</sup> Slavoj Žižek, *Less than Nothing*, 379 ff.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid.

<sup>102</sup> Slavoj Žižek, "Hegel and Shitting: The Idea's Constipation," in *Hegel and the Infinite: Religion, Politics and Dialectic*, eds. Slavoj Žižek, Clayton Crockett, and Creston Davis (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011), 231.

In other words, the identity of subject and substance is not an identity on the order of a formal identity such as  $A=A$ . Nor is such an identity one that could be stated merely on the order of an identity statement like “Spirit is the unity of identity and difference.” Although there is something correct about each of these formalizations of Spirit, the essence of Spirit is in fact a deeper dialectical “movement,” as Hegel explains. In other words, Spirit is, as *living* spirit. What this means is that Spirit is deep enough that only through its own death (which in God is an eternal, primordial self-sacrifice) could it possibly come to know itself as alive at all. This is why Hegel explains how the difference between objectivity and content is simultaneously canceled through Spirit’s self-movement (into substance as subject). As Žižek puts it elsewhere, Spirit, as a dialectical process without subject, is concurrent with the notion of the Absolute as both substance and subject.<sup>103</sup> In this section of the *Phenomenology*, the truth of the paradoxes of Spirit are placed before our eyes very clearly. Spirit as Subject is simultaneously substance “without a subject,”<sup>104</sup> since the Spirit that genuinely knows itself as substance is the lived experience of a substance-subject in which a separate subject is not perceivable. As Žižek notes, “[Hegel’s] point there is not only that identity is always the identity of identity and difference, but that difference itself is also always the difference between itself and identity.”<sup>105</sup> Identity’s self-consciousness of identity simultaneously entails a genuine emptiness that is beyond the mere difference of identity and difference (or the unity of identity and difference, for that matter): it is the emptiness of emptiness as such that gives birth to genuine life.

In agreement with Žižek, I consider Hegel’s point here a profound one. It is a point that has perhaps been misunderstood, and one that is pivotal to how we read Hegel. When Hegel

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<sup>103</sup> Ibid.

<sup>104</sup> Žižek, “Hegel and Shitting,” 231.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid., 229.

asserts the identity of Substance (without subject) as Subject, I believe that he is making a two-fold claim: (1) Spirit posits its own negation from out of itself such that the subject itself is constituted by a lack on the objective order and (2) It is also the case that any identity that Spirit achieves through this process is simultaneously dissolved: Spirit passes through the genuine emptiness of emptiness as such. In fact, this dissolution is precisely what constitutes its identity.

### 1.5) The “Identity” of (In)completeness<sup>106</sup>

This is to say that identity is constituted by difference, but even so, self-consciousness of the tension between identity and difference allows for the possibility of the simultaneous affirmation as well as negation of such tension. In other words, if one is to say that identity is constituted by the “identity of identity and difference,” then on the Hegelian understanding, one ought to simultaneously acknowledge that such a unity is also at the same time bound up with the “difference between itself and identity.”<sup>107</sup> These two moments ought to be thought together — Hegelian dialectics is itself (in)complete (any possible completion is attained via incompleteness and simultaneous with it).

To the extent that any completion could possibly be achieved, then, it simultaneously points beyond itself and, in that moment, reveals its true finitude and, therefore, its (in)completion. In other words, on Hegel’s account, the living nature of Spirit’s identity implies that identity does not simply settle, and thus, as we will see, the genuine *Science of Logic* is not a dead one, but a living one on the order of the emptiness of emptiness. Indeed, Hegel writes about this in the section on “Absolute Knowing” in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*. There, he writes:

...it is only when the ‘I’ communes with itself in its otherness that the content is *comprehended* [i.e. in terms of the Notion]. Stated more specifically, this content is

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<sup>106</sup> Žižek, *Absolute Recoil*, 380 ff.

<sup>107</sup> Žižek, “Hegel and Shitting,” 229.

nothing else than the very movement just spoken of; for the content is Spirit that traverses its own self and does so *for itself* as Spirit by the fact that it has the ‘shape’ of the Notion in its objectivity.<sup>108</sup>

In other words, Spirit (as that which is “less than nothing”) divides itself from itself and unites itself with its other. And as Žižek notes, most properly speaking, there is no Spirit aside from this very processual movement.<sup>109</sup> Spirit *becomes* as that which goes through the process of division from itself and finds itself in genuine emptiness only to be re-born and repeat the process all over again. And, as we will see, Spirit’s other-ing of itself must be so profound that we only come to know it as Spirit after the fact: there is a moment in which Spirit genuinely loses sight of itself as Spirit as it passes through the abyss of freedom.

Another way of stating this thesis is to pose the question: what is “Absolute Knowledge” if not the realization that Spirit’s wholeness is simultaneously its emptiness? Is not the emptiness of emptiness simultaneously the fullness of fullness? Hegel makes a statement along these lines when he writes, “the self-knowing Spirit knows not only itself but also the negative of itself, or its limit: to know one’s limit is to know how to sacrifice oneself.”<sup>110</sup> Here, I find it interesting that Hegel equates self-knowledge with sacrifice and even more noteworthy, Hegel makes this claim in the section of the PhG on “Absolute Knowing.” Hegel’s point here is that there is a value and wisdom in sacrifice, even in an ontological sense, since even absolute Spirit’s identity is fundamentally constituted by divestment. Spirit’s knowledge of itself is achieved via a sacrifice and passage into emptiness. This is why Hegel is a thinker of both identity and difference, considered together. According to Hegel’s metaphysics, there is no such thing as identity that is not always already in relation to difference. When it comes to Spirit (as the

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<sup>108</sup> Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, 486.

<sup>109</sup> Žižek, “Hegel and Shitting,” 231.

<sup>110</sup> Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, 492.

passage through the emptiness of substance) the possibility for higher-order identity or difference always hangs in the balance, just as the passage between necessity and contingency is ultimately decided upon by life itself.

### 1.6) The Self-Sacrificial Nature of the Notion

In the “Introduction” to the book, *Hegel and the Infinite*, Clayton Crockett and Creston Davis review a history of thinkers such as Levinas, Derrida, Lyotard and Deleuze, all of whom they claim have failed to fully appreciate the possibility for genuine difference in Hegel’s thought. As the main thesis of the book, Crockett and Davis therefore argue in favor of a revival of the profundity of Hegel’s thought and hope to reveal the possibility for genuine otherness in Hegel’s philosophy. On the topic of absolute knowledge and the thesis of the book, they state:

Here we merely repeat Slavoj Žižek’s thesis originally submitted in *Le plus sublime des hystériques: Hegel passé*, namely, that Hegelian ‘dialectics is for Hegel a systematic notation of the failure of all such attempts—‘absolute knowledge’ denotes a subjective position which finally accepts ‘contradiction’ as an internal condition of every identity.’ In other words, Hegelian ‘reconciliation’ is not a pan-logician sublation of all reality in the Concept but an affirmation of the fact that the Concept itself is ‘not-all’ (to use this Lacanian term).<sup>111</sup>

Here again, notice the importance of sacrifice to absolute knowledge. Absolute knowing is not a totalizing knowledge of self-identity on the order of self-sameness. On the contrary, absolute knowing is coming to terms with the reality of the tension between completeness and incompleteness, and recognition of the dialectical nature of identity – every identity is simultaneously in dialogue with its other. In fact, Hegel explicitly states:

The self-knowing Spirit knows not only itself but also the negative of itself, or its limit: to know one’s limit is to know how to sacrifice oneself. This sacrifice is the externalization in which Spirit displays the process of its becoming Spirit in the form of *free contingent happening*, intuiting its pure Self as Time outside of it, and equally its

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<sup>111</sup> Clayton Crockett and Creston Davis, “Introduction,” in *Hegel and the Infinite: Religion, Politics and Dialectic*, 6.

Being as Space.<sup>112</sup>

Here, Hegel describes a process in which Spirit comes to know itself via self-externalization. Its coming to know itself is therefore never complete. This entails that the knowledge Spirit gains is not merely knowledge on the order of an “identity of identity and difference,” since it does not represent knowledge in the form of a relation of unity; rather Hegel’s point is even more profound: absolute knowing is an experiential self-transcendence of thought as being.

Along these lines, I agree with Žižek, Crockett, Davis and others here on the point that Hegel is not a mere thinker of sameness or totality. On the other hand, I believe that Hegel recognizes how every identity is bound up with difference, even in its fundamental constitution (we will see this in more detail in my discussion of Hegel’s beginning of the SL in Chapter Two). If difference in fact goes all the way down to the core of identity, then we ought to think through the profound consequences of this understanding.

Žižek himself makes a similar point in his own essay contribution to the anthology edited by Crockett and Davis. In Chapter 11, he writes:

Hegel introduces this notion of ‘oppositional determination’ in his logic of essence, when he discusses the relationship between identity and difference. His point there is not only that identity is always the identity of identity and difference, but that difference itself is also always the difference between itself and identity...<sup>113</sup>

Here, Žižek’s point is similar to the one I stated at the beginning of this dissertation. As a consequence of reasoning along these lines, I will hope to show throughout the rest of this dissertation how Hegel is not a mere thinker of identity (even on the order of the identity of identity and difference).

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<sup>112</sup> Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, 492.

<sup>113</sup> Žižek, “Hegel and Shitting,” 229.

In the SL, Hegel recognizes the fact that there is a two-way relationship between identity and difference. Surely, one could argue that the identical is capable of uniting itself with its own other; however, Hegel recognizes further that the dialectical relationship between difference and identity is such that in order for this to be the case, it must simultaneously be true that difference is also the difference between difference and itself. Žižek's point here is that dialectics is not merely one-fold or two-fold, but in fact, the implications of dialectics are actually four-fold (at minimum): the other side of the dialectic of the "identity of identity and difference" is the "difference between itself and identity."<sup>114,115</sup> In recognition of this fact, there must be a third moment in which difference and identity are affirmed and a subsequent moment in which this new identity is negated once more. What are we left with? The emptiness of emptiness: life itself in its genuine, living actuality.

But one might wonder: how is any of this discussion significant when it comes to Absolute Knowing? In response to this question, I pose the following as a response: Absolute Knowing is an experiential awareness that has always already been brought before the emptiness of emptiness. Hegel writes about this in the section on "Absolute Knowing" of the *PhG*, in the context of a discussion about the harmony of consciousness and self-consciousness. About this knowledge, Hegel writes about Spirit's knowledge not merely of the "in itself" or the "for itself," but of the "in and for itself" (which, incidentally, simultaneously implies knowledge of neither). He writes:

For in it [the unification of consciousness and self-consciousness] Spirit attains to a knowledge of itself not only as it is in itself or as possessing an absolute content, nor only as it is for itself as a form devoid of content, or as the aspect of self-consciousness, but as

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<sup>114</sup> Ibid.

<sup>115</sup> Ryan Krahn also argues in his doctoral dissertation that Hegel's notion of sublation is fourfold. See Ryan Krahn, "The Sublation of Dialectics: Hegel and the Logic of 'Aufhebung'," (Doctoral Dissertation: The University of Guelph, 2014).

it is both in essence and in actuality, or in and for itself.<sup>116</sup>

Here, Hegel explains how Spirit's knowledge of itself is not mere wholeness in the sense of knowledge of the complete content of itself, nor mere emptiness in the sense of being completely empty of content of itself. Rather, Spirit's knowledge of itself (as absolute knowing) is an awareness and recognition granted by Spirit's very self-emptying. If the "in itself" would be absolute content, and the "for itself" would be form empty of content, then the "in and for itself" represents that which ruptures the very dichotomy between form and content, and in doing so, constitutes Spirit's genuine actuality – a relation that *is qua* (non)relation (as a movement that opens up the possibility for relationality as well as the overcoming of relationality). Spirit's passage – as a repetition of emptiness as such – is that which grants it its constitution as living, genuine Spirit.

Significantly, while commentaries on the *Phenomenology* have tended to focus on this section as Hegel's discussion of the *identity* of the Absolute in its coming to know itself, I argue here that what it means for Spirit to attain to a knowledge of itself is actually precisely for Spirit to attain to an *experiential* knowledge on the order of emptiness. Thus, Spirit's knowledge is not a propositional knowledge on the order of a "knowledge that" but instead, an experiential knowledge – this is Hegel's *phenomenology*, after all. The section on "Absolute Knowing", then, represents the wisdom of the experience that the Absolute learns during its death to itself.

Along these lines, interestingly enough, when it comes to dialectics, Hegel also mentions how good and evil are dialectically bound together in this section. He writes, "so far as this self-sundering is the process of becoming *for itself*, it is evil; so far as it is the in-itself, it remains good."<sup>117</sup> The parallel here is that what is actually good is able to transcend a merely one-sided

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<sup>116</sup> Hegel, *Phenomenology*, 483. In brackets is my explanation of how "it" functions in the original text.

<sup>117</sup> *Ibid.*, 484.



oppositional thinking. Furthermore, genuine goodness is able to transcend the notion of a shallow unity of the two (a mere unity of good and evil). Rather, if we consider goodness and evil in terms of the structure of dialectics, then the opposition between good and evil is not merely a shallow difference that is simply overcome via first-order unity. On the alternative, conscious thinking is stretched beyond itself to such an extreme degree that rational cognition can lose itself in emptiness as such – where the salvation of genuine goodness remains a possibility that we can only, albeit genuinely, hope for. Thus, after passing through and overcoming a false illusory divide between goodness and evil, it remains a possibility that genuine goodness will reveal itself as the actuality of divine grace and salvation in the phenomenology of spirit.

Hegel similarly explains how to think of *Geist* as simultaneously Substance and Subject and what that entails. Below I provide the full quote mentioned earlier:

Spirit, however, has shown itself to us to be neither merely the withdrawal of self-consciousness into its pure inwardness, nor the mere submergence of self-consciousness into substance, and the non-being of its [moment of] difference; but Spirit is *this movement* of the Self which empties itself of itself and sinks itself into its substance, and also, as Subject, has gone out of that substance into itself, making the substance into an object and a content at the same time as it cancels this difference between object and content. <sup>118</sup>

Hegel rejects one-sided interpretations in which either Subject or Substance considered alone plays the role of a monad. On the other hand, on Hegel's account, Spirit is that which passes between both – the subject is constituted out of the difference between substance and itself, while it is simultaneously true that from the other side, substance is not merely pre-given. This is why the notion of emptiness and its role are so crucial to understanding how Hegel thinks about Spirit and Absolute Knowing.

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<sup>118</sup> Ibid., 490.

The emptiness of emptiness – that which, as Gabriel and Žižek often remind us, is “not even nothing”<sup>119</sup> indeed bears the potential to constitute the Spirit insofar as emptiness plays a fundamental role in the dialectical relationship between subject and substance. Through the negation of the negation, the subject comes to be constituted. Spirit does not leave a mark that would gesture toward from whence it came – all the same, and paradoxically so, God (as absolute Spirit) is an immanent-transcendent on the Hegelian account.

### 1.7) Living Spirit as Both Substance and Subject

Hegel had already commented on such a relationship between Substance and Subject in the “Preface” to the work (in a discussion about the limitations of intellectual intuition considered separate from the actuality of experience):

In my view, which can be justified only by the exposition of the system itself, everything turns on grasping and expressing the True, not only as *Substance*, but equally as *Subject*. At the same time, it is to be observed that substantiality embraces the universal, or the *immediacy of knowledge* itself, as well as that which is *being* or *immediacy for knowledge*. If the conception of God as the one substance shocked the age in which it was proclaimed, the reason for this was on the one hand an instinctive awareness that, in this definition, self-consciousness was only submerged and not preserved...<sup>120</sup>

This is a crucial passage. Here, Hegel begins to comment on some different ways to think of the Absolute. Hegel proposes three alternatives. There is (1) in which substance is thought as total but it is not maintained as self-conscious substance. In other words, a substance-monistic view, but one in which substance is devoid of self-consciousness. The criticism of this view is that we lose the other side of the dialectic in which substance is also self-conscious thought; we think of the absolute as substance and lose sight of its own movement as self-consciousness. In (2) we think of the Absolute as substance again, but on this conception, the content of substance is

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<sup>119</sup> Gabriel, *Transcendental Ontology*, 91.

<sup>120</sup> Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, 9-10.

actually the mere form of thought. In (3) we realize our unity with the Absolute in intellectual intuition; however, since intellectual intuition is immediate recognition, Hegel's concern is that such a position might represent a dead Absolute and not the true, genuine, and living Absolute. Hegel rejects all three of these ways of thinking of the Absolute insofar as any one of them taken by itself fails to achieve a proper mediation between Substance and Subject.

Hegel's task is thus to mediate his thinking of the identity of Substance as Subject in such a way that he can show how Subject is as Substance – that is, as *living Spirit*. In the following paragraph, Hegel goes on to add:

the living Substance is being which is in truth *Subject*, or, what is the same, is in truth actual only in so far as it is the movement of positing itself, or is the mediation of its self-othering with itself. This Substance is, as Subject, pure, *simple negativity*, and is for this very reason the bifurcation of the simple; it is the doubling which sets up opposition, and again the negation of this indifferent diversity and of its antithesis [the immediate simplicity]. Only this self-restoring sameness, or this reflection in otherness within itself – not an *original* or *immediate* unity as such – is the True... <sup>121</sup>

In this passage, Hegel expands upon his understanding of the Spirit of the living Substance (i.e., the Spirit of the living Absolute as instantiated in humanity). As Hegel explains, the living Substance mediates its own difference from itself. What this actually entails is that in the process of substance becoming identical to itself, its identity is actually simultaneously changing and therefore its self-relation changes as well. Substance here plays the role of the “vanishing mediator” that relates itself to itself as both other and same to itself. In fact, its sameness can only be established via its self-othering and vice versa. This is why Hegel describes the “negation of this indifferent diversity” and “of its antithesis” as well. Even if the Subject is conceived as the process of its own becoming, what becomes does not remain the same throughout the process. And here is where we can really see how Hegel is open to genuine

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<sup>121</sup> Ibid.

difference. In the sentences that follow, he describes the process as “the circle that presupposes its end as its goal, having its end also as its beginning.”<sup>122</sup> What is significant here, then, is that in the process of Spirit’s development, the *telos* of the process in fact changes. Due to this fact, the beginning also changes in light of this development (since its relation to the goal has changed) – what can possibly be identical to itself at all changes via each repetition of difference.

### 1.8) “The Labor of the Negative”

This notion of the importance of negation and difference in the constitution of the self is also why Hegel writes about the importance of “suffering” and “the labour of the negative” to the life of the Absolute.<sup>123</sup> He continues:

Thus the life of God and divine cognition may well be spoken of as a disporting of Love with itself; but this idea sinks into mere edification, and even insipidity, if it lacks the seriousness, the suffering, the patience, and the labor of the negative.<sup>124</sup>

In other words, here Hegel cautions against an understanding of the Absolute that is devoid of the actuality and openness of life. This passage is essential to our reading of Hegel, especially given the fact that many commentators charge Hegel with the criticism that his Notion is ultimately on the order of a mere intellectual nature, and one that subsumes all genuine difference in its absolute, totalizing, intellectual form. In this passage, we see how Hegel is actually completely opposed to such a view. Hegel recognizes that there must be a dimension of sacrifice to the life of the divine, since form and content are so primordially and essentially bound together. If the life of God is the behavior of Love, then that also implies a connection to Love’s self-sacrifice: there can be no identity (and no real life) without the divine’s willingness to subject itself to the actual possibility that things could be otherwise. Indeed, the depth of

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<sup>122</sup> Ibid.

<sup>123</sup> Ibid.

<sup>124</sup> Ibid.

divine Love is so profound that it is able to empty out any particular identity and pass through the emptiness of emptiness as such. Hegel's thought here is extreme: the divine must be able to experience the possibility of its own inexistence. As Žižek notes, "[Absolute Knowing] means fully assuming the big Other's inexistence."<sup>125</sup> In addition, Žižek is not all that concerned with the classical reading of Hegel as a thinker of all-consuming rationality, since he notes how Hegel understands "the fundamental lesson of Christianity...*the Absolute itself pays the price, irretrievably sacrificing itself.*"<sup>126</sup> If the divine identity is one of love, it is not to be conceived as love's self-play on the order of a mere self-sameness. Rather, love displays itself through the divine's willingness to sacrifice itself and subject itself to negation.<sup>127</sup>

For this reason, passages such as this one raise serious challenges to the notion of Hegel as a totalizing thinker. Hegel was well aware that the Absolute must be capable of genuine difference. If, analogously, consciousness plays the role of mediator to itself, it does so in fact by dying to itself (it is the "vanishing mediator" of itself). In this way, we can understand why Hegel and Žižek both claim that Substance as Subject is equally Substance "without a Subject."<sup>128</sup>

The divine life is thus not to be understood as the mere *form* of thinking (in the sense of abstract universality). On the contrary, the divine consciousness alienates itself from itself to such an extreme degree that it must pass through genuine nothingness in its own constitution. Here, however, it is important to point out that it is only after the fact that we can come to recognize this process as one that belongs to consciousness at all. In other words, Hegel's

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<sup>125</sup> Žižek, *Absolute Recoil*, 244.

<sup>126</sup> *Ibid.*, 238.

<sup>127</sup> In later chapters, I further explore this topic of divine love in more depth. To see more on how I am using the term "love," see p. 207 of this dissertation.

<sup>128</sup> Žižek, "Hegel and Shitting: The Idea's Constipation," 231.

difference from Kant is that rather than positing a self-conscious thinking subject at the basis of cognition, on Hegel's account, the Absolute as subject simultaneously entails that the Absolute must be able to die a genuine death: Substance as Subject is simultaneously Substance without Subject, as Žižek puts it.<sup>129</sup>

With this point (that we only come to recognize this process as one which belongs to consciousness after the fact) in mind, I draw a connection to Hegel's subsequent discussion of why we ought to think of the Absolute as a *result*. Hegel writes:

The True is the whole. But the whole is nothing other than the essence consummating itself through its development. Of the Absolute it must be said that it is essentially a *result*, that only in the *end* is it what it truly is; and that precisely in this consists its nature, viz. to be actual, subject, the spontaneous becoming of itself.<sup>130</sup>

In order that we do not misinterpret Hegel here when he says, "the True is the whole," this passage ought to be read in the context of the overall discussion. When Hegel says "the True is the whole," I do not consider him as making a totalizing claim, all appearances to the contrary. On the other hand, Hegel's discussion of the truth as holistic here again ought to be read in the light of his thoughts about retroactivity and the role of retroactivity in how we think about the constitution of Absolute Spirit. If Hegel's comment that, "the True is the whole" is read in this way, then we can develop a reading of Hegel in which he recognizes that the true Absolute must be open to genuine difference.

Let us further consider the implications of such a reading on Hegel's understanding of time. Rather than a linear understanding of time – conceived as a succession of consecutive now points or moments – Hegel's conception of time here ought to be developed in light of his understanding that Substance passes through genuine emptiness in its very constitution. As such,

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<sup>129</sup> Ibid.

<sup>130</sup> Hegel, *Phenomenology*, 11.

Hegel's notion of time itself could be one in which time itself passes through, and is constituted out of, genuine nothingness. In this way, time itself would always remain open to the possibility of genuine difference. It would only be after the fact (retroactively) that time could be understood *as time* at all. This is likewise the case with the Absolute: a living god is one that continuously dies to itself and remains open to the possibility of rebirth. This is how I understand what Hegel means when he says that the Absolute is as "a *result*."<sup>131</sup>

We find further evidence in favor of Hegel as a dialectical thinker, one for whom genuine difference is fundamental to the constitution of identity, as Hegel continues his discussion in this section with examples from the subject-predicate structure of language as well as the inadequacy of any single principle to express the Absolute in its entirety. For starters, Hegel mentions how the word "God" obviously could not possibly contain the entire meaning of the Absolute, since, taken by itself, it is a mere subject-term and therefore empty.<sup>132</sup> Insofar as the Subject must become external to itself and extend out to the predicate in order to have a meaning, language itself evinces the dialectical nature of truth.

### **1.9) "God is Love": Hegel on the Subject-Predicate Structure of Language**

Let us consider one of the examples that Hegel himself provides: "God is love."<sup>133</sup> If the subject and predicate terms ("God" and "love" respectively) are different in their placement in the sentence, then *prima facie* we have a dialectical understanding of the sentence if we read "is" here as functioning as the mediator between our two disparate elements, "God" and "love." On this understanding, a unity (identity) is constituted out of identity (subject) and difference (predicate). However, a further step is to realize that difference is in fact so fundamental to

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<sup>131</sup> Ibid. For more on this topic, see section 4.2

<sup>132</sup> Ibid., 12.

<sup>133</sup> Ibid., 12.

identity that God could not be God without the possibility of God's own difference from itself in the first place: the subject's own apparent self-identity as a totality in fact requires the potential positing of an infinite number of potential predicates: God's ability for self-erasure is thus required for a genuine self-understanding of God as love.

Thus, Hegel is keen on the fact that "God as love" does not settle into a meaningless identity in which we merely equate one term with the other. Analogously, this is why the difference of difference from itself must be thought alongside with identity. My self-consciousness of God as love is insufficient if my understanding of the term "love" settles on a propositional meaning in which the content of love is not actual (and this can happen both in the case that I understand love as mere form without content or mere content without form). Ultimately, the next step is to realize that the sentence itself is only truly understood when the meaning of the terms involved are actually *experienced*. In this case, the meaning of love must be capable of being experienced as genuine self-sacrifice (losing oneself in emptiness to such an extent that love can shine forth in life itself), in this way, then, the Absolute could come to genuine self-conscious knowledge. If we are to continue using the analogy from language and subject-predicate structure, then, if God is really to be love, on Hegel's account, it is not enough to merely state the identity of God as love (as the identity of identity and difference), rather, for God's identity to be love entails that God has already been subjected to infinite negation (absolute otherness) in its constitution, and is experientially constituted such that the will of love is the genuine will of Spirit in time. In other words, if God is really love, then love must show itself capable of overcoming even the tension between absolute sameness and absolute difference in the freedom and living of life itself.



For this reason, I understand Hegel's conception of the Absolute's transcending of itself as analogous to his explanation of the meaning of a sentence in linguistic discourse as beyond a fixed, formal meaning based on a unity of formal meanings. In the Absolute's reaching out beyond itself, the subject itself is subsequently changed, since the predicate could not possibly have been anticipated from the start. The whole of the Absolute is therefore retroactively constituted in time (and continuously so). It is just as if we consider the term "God" alone; it is meaningless and empty. The sentence "God is love," represents one possible unification of subject as substance. However, since the Subject in this case could be represented as any possible substance from an infinite number of possible substances, Hegel's point is that the process can be repeated ad infinitum: the infinite future continuously sacrifices itself to the infinite past, and in this process, the present itself functions as the "vanishing mediator." If the whole is a circle in which the beginning meets the end that it presupposes and requires from the start, it is simultaneously true that the beginning and the end are re-conceived in each and every moment in light of their development through time.

As a consequence of this view, a single principle cannot be true when considered in and of itself. This is Hegel's basic refutation of an atomistic philosophy that would start with a single foundational principle (consider the Cartesian "cogito", for example). A philosophy that would start with the "I think" as its most basic founding assumption is easy to refute as inadequate, since it one-sidedly posits a subject as its most foundational element and is blind to the context in which the subject is constituted in the first place. This is why Hegel says that a first principle could equally be shown to be false just as much as it could be shown to be true. He writes, "Hence, the mere anticipation that the Absolute is Subject is not only *not* the actuality of this Notion, but it even makes the actuality impossible; for the anticipation posits the subject as an

inert point, whereas the actuality is self-movement.”<sup>134</sup> A single principle considered in and of itself that posits the Absolute as Subject can be shown as false, since it can be easily refuted as a false notion of identity – one that does not demonstrate consciousness of the fact that the constitution of any self-identity is fundamentally bound up with difference. Therefore, Hegel eliminates the possibility that a single principle could be adequate to express the Absolute.

### 1.10) The Absolute as “a Result”

Since a single principle is inadequate to express the Absolute, Hegel explains further that the Absolute ought to be conceived as a *result*.<sup>135</sup> Hegel writes about the process of arguing against a principle, and showing it to be inadequate, saying:

The refutation consists in pointing out its defect; and it is defective because it is only the universal or principle, is only the beginning. If the refutation is thorough, it is derived and developed from the principle itself, not accomplished by counter-assertions and random thoughts from outside. The refutation would, therefore, properly consist in the further development of the principle, and in thus remedying the defectiveness, if it did not mistakenly pay attention solely to its *negative* action, without awareness of its progress and result on their *positive* side too – The genuinely *positive* exposition of the beginning is thus also, conversely, just as much a negative attitude towards it, viz. toward its initially one-sided form of being *immediate* or *purpose*.<sup>136</sup>

Here, we see how the demonstration of the inadequacy of any single principle in fact aids a further purpose: it also shows how the single proposition is in fact a mere part of a larger movement. In other words, even the assertion of the identity of identity and difference displays itself to be part of a larger, actual process. Also, this proposition comes to be seen as a proposition that does not stand by itself (since it is bound up with its always-already dialectical opposite). We are to conclude from this that the genuine Absolute is a living one, and any

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<sup>134</sup> Hegel, *Phenomenology*, 13.

<sup>135</sup> *Ibid.*, 11.

<sup>136</sup> *Ibid.*, 13.

principle (if it is to be actual), must saturate itself in the depths of genuine content (being-in-itself).

Indeed, Hegel himself next discusses how the genuine Absolute is only actual as system<sup>137</sup> and it is safe to say that he also intends to imply this in the sense of a result, since he had explained so prior in his discussion of the Absolute as “a *result*,”<sup>138</sup> as I mentioned previously. This is also why Hegel says that we should think of the Absolute as a result. As a reminder, Hegel had said: “Of the Absolute it must be said that it is essentially a *result*, that only in the *end* is it what it truly is; and that precisely in this consists its nature, viz. to be actual, subject, the spontaneous becoming of itself.”<sup>139</sup> The retroactivity of the Absolute is such that we cannot predict the genuine future in advance. Any future that we could possibly predict in advance would be but a mere simulation or an artificial future: the genuine actuality of life places us before an abyss of absolute difference – one in the face of which we have no choice but to be *brave*. In this way, Hegel demonstrates how the genuine difference (of life itself) stands at the basis of the constitution of the Absolute. Consciousness’s realization of its identity is simultaneously its realization that such apparent completeness is in fact part of a larger incompleteness – that of Spirit in its ongoing self-development.

I will use an example from the phenomenology of dissertation writing to illustrate the point further. To use the writing of this dissertation as an example, the idea that I started with at the beginning when I set out to write this dissertation was surely not the entirety of the work, and in that sense it was not the whole dissertation. But surely, once the dissertation has been written, one is able to look back on it (retroactively) and exclaim, “well, now that is the dissertation!”

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<sup>137</sup> Ibid., 14.

<sup>138</sup> Ibid., 11.

<sup>139</sup> Ibid.

One is then more clearly able to see the relationship between the original thought and the “finished product.” The initial idea is only genuinely understood in light of the finished product, but Hegel’s point, paradoxically, is that in the case of Spirit, it is simultaneously true that the “finished product” is itself always a work in progress at the same time. In this way, emptiness returns itself to emptiness. Thus, the retroactive glance of the Absolute back on itself is never a totalizing glance. Indeed, this is why retroactivity is so essential to our understanding of Hegel and his philosophy itself as a philosophy of the vanishing mediator. What, then, is the relationship between the Absolute Spirit and time? The genuine, living Absolute is the absolute future and equally the absolute past. It affirms the unity of both absolute senses of time and the difference of both from each other, while simultaneously affirming the first and second move and then negating either the first or second move. The Absolute’s retroactive constitution in no way implies a priority of the future over the past.

Hegel’s discussion of the Absolute as a result, is even more significant when we consider this notion in connection with his *Science of Logic*. If the *Phenomenology* is primarily an experiential work, detailing movements of consciousness and historical shapes of consciousness in the process of their coming to Absolute Knowledge, then how does this work relate to the project of the *Logic*? What sort of *Logic* does Hegel see himself enunciating? And how is the task of the latter work intimately bound up with the *Phenomenology*? In some sense, the *Logic* works alongside the *Phenomenology* in recognition of the fact that even the *Phenomenology* itself is never a completed work. Indeed, as we have seen, one of the most fundamental insights of the section on Absolute Knowing resides precisely in the realization that knowledge is never complete due to the fact that Absolute Otherness plays a fundamental role in the constitution of Spirit as self-consciousness.

Interestingly, Hegel's subsequent discussion in the preface of the *Phenomenology* is about Science and *system*.<sup>140</sup> The reason for this is that one of the conclusions that Hegel draws from his previous discussion about the limitations of any principle to explicate the full, living meaning of the Absolute is that only an understanding of the Absolute given in a system is adequate to the task. However, here how we interpret what Hegel means by "system" is also of paramount importance, since paradoxically, Hegel simultaneously argues that a genuine science is neither founded on mere principles nor a system of principles. In connection to this, Hegel's thought that the Absolute is a *result* is of prime significance. If the Absolute is most properly understood as a result, then what sort of system does Hegel have in mind?

I propose that in order to understand Hegel's thoughts on system here, we really ought to delve deeper into his dialectical method considered as a method beyond method. Hegel explains how any principle has to be understood in light of the whole. He writes:

Among the various consequences that follow from what has just been said, this one in particular can be stressed, that knowledge is only actual, and can only be expounded, as Science or as *system*; and furthermore, that a so-called basic proposition or principle of philosophy, if true, is also false, just because it is *only* a principle.<sup>141</sup>

Significantly, this understanding of system is also expounded by the *Phenomenology* when it is considered as a work on the whole, and, as we will see, in relationship with the *Logic* as well. The *Phenomenology* ends with a discussion of Absolute Knowing. But we can only begin to understand what Absolute Knowing could possibly mean in light of the entire work. And with the view of the entire work in mind, we see how Absolute Knowing in fact brings us back to emptiness, since our task throughout the work is to be able to recognize the role of genuine, absolute difference in the constitution of the Subject (as opposed to merely one-sided

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<sup>140</sup> Ibid., 13.

<sup>141</sup> Ibid.

oppositional thinking, for instance.) In other words, the section on Absolute Knowing in fact represents the importance of continuous repetition of otherness (as emptiness) and how this functions for Hegel's understanding of system. Thus, the purpose of the section on Absolute Knowing is not to grant the reader any sort of totalizing knowledge of Absolute Identity that settles in one form. Rather, it is precisely to display the living movement of the Absolute in terms of a dialectical method (beyond method), one in which emptiness as such plays a constitutive role. As we will see, this interpretation is also supported by the fact that Hegel intended for the *Phenomenology* to be read together with the *Logic*.

If the Absolute ought to be conceived as a result, then Hegel is quite clever to end his work with a section about Absolute Knowing as emptiness. The Absolute as result is both shaped by the past (a past understood as past in light of the now that was once the future) and simultaneously open to the difference of the future of the then now. One can genuinely hope that love might reveal itself as that which rescues consciousness from the depths of the abyss of freedom; and it is precisely the watching over of this actuality that could constitute a phenomenology of spirit as system.

### **1.11) Spirit's "Divestment" as the Source of Hegel's Science**

The recognition of Spirit in difference is thus the source of Hegel's science. Hegel writes, "pure self-recognition in absolute otherness, this Aether *as such*, is the ground and soil of Science or *knowledge in general*."<sup>142</sup> If Hegel thought that the recognition of the self in absolute otherness was so crucial to knowledge as well as to the development of his science, then it is very important to focus in on the term "absolute otherness" here. I consider this term to be the key qualification in support of my reading and contra the "identity of identity and difference"

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<sup>142</sup> Ibid., 14.

readings. Hegel does not describe the otherness at work here as mere otherness but as *absolute* otherness. The shortcoming of the identity of identity and difference reading is that it develops the following notion of identity in its understanding of self-consciousness: self-conscious identity is the mere identity of consciousness and its other (one in which identity as the movement of the synthesis of opposition is presupposed). However, if Hegel really means to suggest that the self comes to recognize itself in *absolute* otherness, then even the identity reading must recognize that self-consciousness (in its constitution) is already subject to its own difference from itself (even the identity of consciousness with its other must already be subject to difference). Ultimately, we are left with the genuine *aporia* of life itself.<sup>143</sup> In simple terms, the development of Spirit out of absolute otherness implies that consciousness does not settle in either identity or difference but rather its constitution implies the absolute affirmation of both, thought together with the absolute negation of both.

This fact is why I take emptiness to be so important to the topic of absolute knowing. When we understand what it means to think of Subject as Substance, then we come to see that identity is simultaneously difference and that this relation goes all the way through. Thus, Absolute Knowing implies emptiness both in its original constitution as well as in its culmination. The constitution of self-consciousness entails that consciousness must always already have passed through emptiness, not merely on the order of the for-itself (form) but also on the order of the in-itself (content). But this fact simultaneously entails that it has eliminated both form and content in the process. This is the paradox of the transcendence of Spirit.

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<sup>143</sup> Joseph Cohen, "Hegel and the Gift of Sacrifice," *The Journal for Cultural and Religious Theory* 15, no. 1 (2015): 21.

## 1.12) Conclusion

Some further questions remain to be addressed: if we understand the fundamental source of Hegel's science as the tension between absolute sameness and absolute otherness (as represented by the *Phenomenology*) and to such an extreme degree that absolute Spirit dies to itself in the process of its own constitution, one might wonder: what role remains for Hegel's Science in the exposition of Spirit's coming to know itself? In other words, if form and content are bound together primordially, how can a Science be developed in light of this? Why did Hegel continue to place so much importance on the role of a systematic discipline, a science (*Wissenschaft*), in order to aid us in our understanding of its development? In other words, how did Hegel conceive of the nature and role of science in his overall project? I will hope to respond to these questions by looking at the connection between the project of the *Phenomenology* and the *Logic* and how the two works should be read together.

Along these lines, what was Hegel's understanding of the role of internal reflection to such a science, given his understanding of the vital importance of retroactivity to the entire process? If the Absolute transcends itself, how does the *Logic* text as well as its relation to the *Phenomenology* display Hegel's insights into the dialectical structure, such as I have outlined it?

Hegel acknowledges that Spirit's coming to know itself is an experiential process and that, for this reason, there is a bilateral relation between Spirit's experience and the Science. On the one hand, the Science cannot get us there completely of its own accord. This is a process that we must go through. On the other hand, perhaps we are justified in hoping that an actual science will point us toward that part of ourselves that is beyond science:

Science on its part requires that self-consciousness should have raised itself into this Aether in order to be able to live—and [actually] to live—with Science and in Science. Conversely, the individual has the right to demand that Science should at least provide



him with the ladder to this standpoint, should show him this standpoint within himself.<sup>144</sup> In other words, if the Science in part depends on an experiential awareness of our unity of the form of thought with its content considered together with an experience of difference, then perhaps the most we can hope for from the science is to point us to this truth. Hegel uses the ladder analogy and here we might be reminded of Buddhist metaphors for the canoe that helps one to cross the stream to enlightenment and at which point the canoe is left behind. Similarly, if the science is to function like the canoe, then one of the ways for it to achieve this goal is to point us back to our own beginning in emptiness. So, likewise, the ultimate goal of the science would then be to demonstrate how its task is ultimately the mere elaboration of a process that is internal to us, and, in that sense, the science itself is overcome.

Hegel encourages us to read *The Phenomenology of Spirit* and *The Logic* together, since they collectively constitute his reflections on the bilateral movement that consciousness itself undergoes and is internal to it. The text of the *Phenomenology* on the whole plays the role of the first part – that of self-consciousness in its existential recognition of its own nature as fundamentally (in)complete. By the end of the *Phenomenology*, Spirit has come to recognize the tension between absolute sameness and absolute otherness, such that its own existence is to live from this “*undecidable risk*”<sup>145</sup> that Hegel terms the “aether.” The second part of the movement is played by the *Logic*. This leaves open the question of the task of the *Logic*, which I will address further in the next chapter. So, I will end with some important questions that remain to be addressed: how are we to understand the role of the text of the *Logic* in this process? Why is it so important to read the *Phenomenology* together with the *Logic*? Further, *how* are we to actually

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<sup>144</sup> Hegel, *Phenomenology*, 14-15.

<sup>145</sup> Cohen, “Hegel and the Gift of Sacrifice,” 21.

read these two works together? How does the reading of the two works together connect to the theme of the relation between emptiness and absolute knowing?

## CHAPTER TWO

### PURE EMPTINESS AND THE PROJECT OF HEGEL'S *SCIENCE OF LOGIC*

#### 2.1) Introduction

Chapter Two is largely focused on the topic of how the main insight learned at the end of Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit* relates to Hegel's project in the *Science of Logic*. I consider this topic important to Hegel scholarship, since an understanding of the relationship between the *Phenomenology* and the *Logic* may serve an informative role for interpreting the *Logic*. That said, the relationship between the two works provokes a number of questions, especially when considered from the standpoint of dialectics.

Some Hegel scholars seem to think that even Hegel himself did not have a clearly worked out view of the relationship between the two works. Consider Andrew Bowie as one proponent of this view. In his book, *Aesthetics and Subjectivity*, philosopher Andrew Bowie comments on this interpretive importance of the *Phenomenology* to the *Logic*. He writes:

What causes the real trouble in interpreting claims of the *Logic* is the relationship between the *Phenomenology's* closely argued and *historically* based account of the genesis of the essential modes of thinking through the working out of the contradictions in the historical forms of thought in society, and the *Logic's* use of a similar method which does not refer to history as such and makes such claims as the one just cited. It is not evident to me that Hegel himself was wholly clear about this relationship.<sup>146</sup>

Here, Bowie claims that the *Logic* does not make reference to history (perhaps he intends to say that it is not explicitly historical, but I would argue that it is definitely bound up with history). He

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<sup>146</sup> Bowie, *Aesthetics and Subjectivity*, 306.

further argues that perhaps even Hegel himself was uncertain of the relationship of the two works.

There are other Hegel scholars who seem to suggest otherwise. Consider Paul Redding, for instance. As Redding notes, we know about Hegel's professorship at Jena during this time period, that he was working towards a systematic philosophy and that the *Phenomenology* was intended to guide the reader along to the beginning of Hegel's systematic philosophy.<sup>147</sup>

Redding's position is that Hegel's *Phenomenology* was meant as a starting point that could serve to introduce the reader into a system of a fundamentally cyclical nature. As Redding states:

Hegel's later years at Jena were *also* marked by the idea of a project, realized as his *Phenomenology of Spirit* of 1807, that was meant to lead the reader *into* the system. The consequences of this for the future of the system itself are complex and controversial. This new distinctly *phenomenological* project seemed to have emerged from the earlier 'logical' projects starting the system...<sup>148</sup>

Redding explains how Hegel considered the *Phenomenology* as crucial to understanding his entire system. Indeed, it was the *Phenomenology* itself which became the proper beginning of the Logical system as such. Redding therefore agrees that the *Phenomenology* is important to interpreting the *Logic*.

Even if Bowie is unsure of the relationship between the two works, he agrees with my more general point that the relationship between the *Phenomenology* and the *Logic* remains important when it comes to interpreting the *Logic*. Bowie's more general point is also a good one, since, as other scholars have noted, the works constitute a relationship of a very unique type. Bowie's point – that it is difficult to determine a relationship between the two works – also

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<sup>147</sup> Paul Redding, "The Logic of Hegel's Encyclopaedia Philosophy of Spirit," in *Hegel's Philosophy of Spirit: A Critical Guide*, ed. Marina F. Bykova (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), 12.

<sup>148</sup> *Ibid.*

holds, especially if one limits oneself to thinking of a linear type. And there are certainly other philosophers who would agree with Bowie that Hegel himself was not completely certain about the relationship between the two works.

I agree with the notion that there is not one interpretation that could fully synthesize the relationship between the two works once and for all: on the contrary, I agree with Žižek, Comay, and Ruda that Hegel espoused an ontology of “disorientation.”<sup>149,150</sup> If one were to synthesize Hegel’s *Phenomenology* and the *Logic* into one higher-order system, such a reading would be inconsistent with my understanding of Hegel’s dialectics. This is to say that even if Hegel’s stated intention was for the *Phenomenology* to serve a sort of introductory role, the *actual* relationship between the two works is a different story. Rather, in actual effect, it seems that the *Phenomenology* always already (as we will see) leads the reader into the *Science of Logic* (I agree with Žižek, Comay, and Ruda here).

Žižek may be helpful to illustrate the point. As he writes:

an absolute gap separates the two books: there is no common space between the two, no general thought of Hegel applied to two domains, there is no way to bring them together (in a big One book which would be simultaneously logical and historical)—if anything, Hegel’s thought in general is defined by this crack between his two books, a crack which is in itself impossible since one cannot ever draw a line of distinction that would give us two clearly divided books.<sup>151</sup>

Here, Žižek’s most important point is that there is not a definitive way to demarcate between the two books in the first place. First of all, Žižek’s interpretation of the relationship between the two works here seems to fit with his overall interpretation of Hegel as a thinker of the “gap.” Žižek’s point is that it is via the interplay between the two works that we arrive at a view of Hegel’s system. In a sense, there is no Hegel other than the Hegel who is created by the “gap” between

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<sup>149</sup> Comay and Ruda, *The Dash*, 45.

<sup>150</sup> See also Žižek, *Sex and the Failed Absolute*.

<sup>151</sup> Žižek, *Sex and the Failed Absolute*, 99.

the two works. Second, my general point is not that the two works stand in a relation of completeness, by means of which one arrives at a complete synthesis. Rather, my point is that an *insight* gained at the end of the *Phenomenology* always already carries us over into the *Logic*. It seems to me that Žižek would agree with this more general point.

Žižek, Ruda, and Comay all agree that Hegel's ontology is "non-orientable"<sup>152</sup> and in this sense analogous to a Möbius strip in mathematics.<sup>153</sup> As Žižek quotes from Ruda and Comay, "Despite or because of the impossibility of crossing from one side to another, each side has already passed over into the other side, as on a kind of Möbius strip."<sup>154</sup> Interestingly, Žižek once again takes up the philosophical project of the development and investigation of the implications of an ontology of "unorientable space"<sup>155</sup> in his latest book – *Sex and the Failed Absolute*.

In this chapter, I return once again to the question of how Spirit's insight into its self-sacrificial nature relates to Hegel's beginning of the *Science of Logic*. As I previously discussed in Chapter One, Hegel ends the *Phenomenology* with a discussion of how Spirit has come to learn of its sacrificial nature – that "absolute knowing" is a knowing on the order of a dwelling in emptiness. And, following his introduction, Hegel begins the *Science of Logic* with a discussion of "pure being" at the beginning of the *Logic*.

The main aim of this chapter is to demonstrate how the fundamental insight that consciousness learns at the end of the *Phenomenology* is also present at the beginning of the

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<sup>152</sup> Comay and Ruda, *The Dash*, 46.

<sup>153</sup> Although a Möbius strip is a closed figure, when Žižek uses it he employs it as an analogy for the *experience* of dialectical materialism (it is not to be read as a literal depiction of Hegel's ontology. Therefore, one need not worry about claims to completeness here). As Žižek writes, "the theoretical space of dialectical materialism is exactly such a convoluted space...this self-relating circular movement of falling-back-into-oneself..." Žižek, *Sex and the Failed Absolute*, 3. He further writes, "I persist in the failure of every ontology..." Žižek, *Sex and the Failed Absolute*, 8.

<sup>154</sup> Žižek, *Sex and the Failed Absolute*, 99. Žižek quotes here from Comay and Ruda, *The Dash*, 45.

<sup>155</sup> See Žižek, *Sex and the Failed Absolute* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2020), 1 ff.

*Science of Logic*. In this precise sense, I aim to demonstrate how these two works can be read together consistently. In order to accomplish this goal, I have two secondary aims. First of all, I show how the lesson that consciousness learns at the end of the *Phenomenology* functions as the motivating insight throughout the *Science of Logic*. I argue for this interpretation since, as Comay and Ruda also note, a repetition of emptiness stands at the beginning of the *Logic*.<sup>156</sup>

Hegel intended the *Logic* to be “the exposition of God as he is in his eternal essence before the creation of nature and a finite mind.”<sup>157</sup> However, (and this is one of my main argumentative points) what Hegel in fact discovered is that, in the beginning, God is a repetition of its own nothingness (a doubling on the order of the emptiness of matter).

We can make sense of the following two quotes from Hegel’s introduction to the work when we read Hegel in this way. Hegel says in this same section, “pure science presupposes liberation from the opposition of consciousness. It contains *thought in so far as this is just as much the object in its own self, or the object in its own self in so far as it is equally pure thought*.”<sup>158</sup> In other words, the main insight regarding the self-sacrificial nature of consciousness is present at the beginning of the *Science of Logic*. This is because consciousness is the very movement that arises from a repetition of nothingness. In this particular sense, there is “nothing” more than the movement of consciousness itself.

Shortly after, Hegel continues:

this objective thinking, then, is the content of pure science. Consequently, far from it being formal, far from it standing in need of a matter to constitute an actual and true cognition, it is its content alone which has absolute truth, or, if one still wanted to employ the word matter, it is the veritable matter – but a matter which is not external to the form, since this matter is rather pure thought and hence the absolute form itself.<sup>159</sup>

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<sup>156</sup> Comay and Ruda, *The Dash*, 94.

<sup>157</sup> Hegel, *Science of Logic*, 50.

<sup>158</sup> *Ibid.*, 49.

<sup>159</sup> *Ibid.*, 49-50.

Here, we find more evidence of the notion that matter is one with thought in the “pure science.” This means that a repetition of the emptiness of matter is simultaneously the repetition of the purity of thought (if thought and being are united, then a repetition of emptiness on the order of being is also a repetition of emptiness on the order of thought). This is Hegel’s key insight: God comes to know its transcendence by passing through an actual experience of emptiness.

God’s repetition (a “self-doubling”<sup>160</sup> in, and as, empty matter) is that which will lead to the constitution of God, as a living God. At the beginning, there is “nothing” other than this – God is the movement which transcends itself from out of the emptiness of matter.

We find from the very start, then, that Hegel’s insight into the self-sacrificial nature of the absolute permeates his entire *Logic*. For example, Hegel states that he cannot *presuppose* the beginning of the *Logic* from the start, since it is the emptiness of emptiness as such which stands at the beginning of the system. This is because according to Hegel’s view, it is only the self-repetition of empty matter which will give rise to the genuine, living absolute. In this sense, Hegel’s key insight into the heart of Christianity is at the core of his entire system of Logic.

Interestingly enough, this fundamental insight also affects how we are to interpret the relationship between the two works. For example, it makes sense to think of the two works as connected in their disconnection (such as Comay and Ruda suggest<sup>161</sup>), since both works take us into a sacrifice that transcends the limitations of a finite thinker. In both the *Phenomenology* and the *Science of Logic*, Hegel suggests that the only path to the genuine absolute is via a repetition of emptiness. This is how I make sense of Žižek, Comay, and Ruda’s claim to an “ontology of disorientation.”<sup>162</sup>

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<sup>160</sup> Schelling also employs the language of “doubling” and “self-doubling” in his WA text. See F.W.J. Schelling, *The Ages of the World (1811)*, trans. Joseph P. Lawrence, 58, 116, 128, 157, 174.

<sup>161</sup> Comay and Ruda, *The Dash*, 43.

<sup>162</sup> *Ibid.*, 45. See also Žižek, *Sex and the Failed Absolute*, 1 ff.



As we will see in later chapters, Comay and Ruda's suggestion that the relationship between the two works is truly a "non-relation"<sup>163</sup> will also connect to my discussion of Schelling as a dialectical materialist as well, as evinced by the beginning of his *Ages of the World*. There, Schelling writes of two co-eternal wills – the self-repetition of the will that wills nothing results in a will that desires to become.<sup>164</sup>

As Comay and Ruda note, what we find at the beginning of Hegel's *Science of Logic* is actually a repetition of emptiness: "Being Comma Pure Being Comma Dash... thought's insistence on being's emptiness and meaninglessness forces it to state this emptiness twice."<sup>165</sup> The significance of this point to my overall argument is that, at the beginning of the *Logic*, we find an openness to alterity – God that has already emptied itself out so fully as to be able to take on being for the first time. It is perhaps something akin to Christ as he empties Himself out in the beginning of time. In this sense, Hegel's entire system is one founded in the self-sacrifice of the absolute.

Next, I show how this fundamental insight influences the starting point of Hegel's *Science of Logic* and his threefold task in that work. An elaboration of the beginning will take us into the tension between identity and otherness that I will further pursue in Chapter Three.

In order for me to explain how Hegel begins with the beginning as such, I must first lay some of the initial groundwork for the relationship between the *Phenomenology* and the *Logic* in the first place. In order to achieve this end, I will primarily look to the "Preface" and

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<sup>163</sup> "We must finally consider a fifth possible way of relating the *Phenomenology* and the *Logic* – namely that *there is* no relationship between the two books. The punctuation is indispensable: there is an active (or absolute) *non*-relation between the two works." Comay and Ruda, *The Dash*, 43.

<sup>164</sup> Schelling, *Ages of the World*, 74-75.

<sup>165</sup> Comay and Ruda, *The Dash*, 94.

“Introduction” of the *Logic* to show some of Hegel’s comments on the relationship between the two works.

## 2.2) On the Unity of Form and Content in the *Logic*

How might the emptiness of absolute knowing relate to pure being? First of all, it is important to note that, on the Hegelian understanding, the form and content of cognition are not considered as strictly distinct. In fact, the dialectical nature of the form and content of cognition is one of Hegel’s primary demonstrations in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*. In that work, Hegel discovers the form and content of consciousness to be intimately united and explores all of the implications of such a dialectical interplay. Indeed, in the PhG, Hegel shows how, over time, and through the examination of a variety of possible relationships, consciousness comes to understand itself as one with the content that it initially considers as external to itself. Thus, the fact that Hegel states in the *Science of Logic* that he will not presuppose *anything* about the content of the science directly connects his latter work to his former work. In fact, Hegel himself tells us that this is the case.

The *Phenomenology of Spirit* is a demonstration of the harmonious interplay of the form and content of consciousness. However, Hegel also states that it is also a demonstration of a method in application to an *object* (in this case, consciousness). Here, significantly, however, it could be said only that the method is applied to an object insofar as the method itself is in fact internal to the very object under consideration in that particular science (the science of consciousness). In other words, if the PhG is a demonstration of a *method* at all, it is only insofar as that method in fact unfolds from out of the unity of consciousness with itself. As we will see, this very insight (into a method that unfolds from out of itself) stands at the beginning of Hegel’s *Science of Logic*.

At the beginning of the *Phenomenology*, consciousness starts from the standpoint that the objects of its knowledge stand opposed to it. As Hegel states:

In the *Phenomenology of Spirit* I have exhibited consciousness in its movement onwards from the first immediate opposition of itself and the object to absolute knowing. The path of this movement goes through every form of the *relation of consciousness to the object* and has the Notion of science for its result. This Notion therefore (apart from the fact that it emerges within logic itself) needs no justification here because it has received it in that work...<sup>166</sup>

As the work progresses, however, consciousness eventually comes to the standpoint of absolute knowing – the standpoint of the unity of thought and being. Hegel also comments in the passage quoted above on the general relationship between the *Phenomenology of Spirit* and the *Science of Logic*. Hegel explains how the unfolding of the Notion itself occurs in the former work in a historical fashion and it will continue to unfold throughout the course of the *Logic* as well. Hegel explains, therefore, that he need not provide a complete justification for how the Notion is true (as the unity of form and content) since he has already shown this to be the case in the PhG. Rather, the *Logic* will be a return to the same movement in a new way; that is, the *Logic*, too, will demonstrate the self-unfolding of the Notion. But, if this is true, then the result of the PhG is intimately bound up with the entire work of the *Logic*. Indeed, I argue that the two works are intimately bound together (in a way that reminds me of the German term for two things being bound together, “*zusammengebunden*”).

### **2.3) On the Relation Between Absolute Knowing and Pure Being**

I argue that the entire work of the SL is inherently infused with a crucial awareness learned during the course of the PhG. The culminating insight of the PhG – that absolute knowing is emptiness *as* the unity of thought and being – is what Hegel considers decisive to the

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<sup>166</sup> Hegel, *Science of Logic*, 48.

development of a genuine science of *Logic*. One way to understand this relationship is that the SL starts from the standpoint of absolute knowing – in recognition of the unity of thought and being in the Notion – a Notion, however, which ultimately begins in emptiness as such. As we will see, the result of the PhG (as demonstrated by the section on “Absolute Knowing” in which consciousness discovers itself as Spirit in and via its own emptiness) is actually precisely where Hegel begins the *Science of Logic*.

Hegel demonstrates how his science must begin with “pure being.” In the section, “With What Must the Science Begin?”, he explains:

the beginning must be an *absolute*, or what is synonymous here, an *abstract* beginning; and so it *may not presuppose anything*, must not be mediated by anything nor have a ground; rather it is to be itself the ground of the entire science... The beginning therefore is pure being.<sup>167</sup>

This entails that, for Hegel’s system to be a true system of philosophy (as a science of logic), the only genuine beginning for philosophy is “pure being” as such. Hegel calls the being of pure being an “indeterminate immediacy” which “is equal only to itself.”<sup>168</sup> In fact, he explicitly equates it with “pure indeterminateness” and “emptiness” as well, since there is nothing determinate about it.<sup>169</sup> In other words, even here, the language that Hegel uses helps to set the stage for his thinking of Being and Nothingness in both their identity as well as in their difference. Hegel shows here, how Being, in its emptiness, in fact reveals itself as the same as Nothing. When consciousness empties itself out, what does it discover? The answer that will unveil itself: both itself and nothingness at the same time.

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<sup>167</sup> Hegel, *Science of Logic*, 70.

<sup>168</sup> *Ibid.*, 82.

<sup>169</sup> *Ibid.*

## 2.4) The Beginning of the *Logic* as Pure Being

Here, it will aid us to return once more to the original language of Hegel himself on the beginning. Hegel begins chapter 1, “Being,” of “Book One: The Doctrine of Being” of the SL as follows:

*Being, pure being*, without any further determination. In its indeterminate immediacy it is equal only to itself. It is also not unequal relatively to an other; it has no diversity within itself nor any with a reference outwards. It would not be held fast in its purity if it contained any determination or content which could be distinguished in it or by which it could be distinguished from an other. It is pure indeterminateness and emptiness. There *is nothing* to be intuited in it, if one can speak here of intuiting; or, it is only this pure intuiting itself. Just as little is anything to be thought in it, or it is equally only this empty thinking. Being, the indeterminate immediate, is in fact *nothing*, and neither more nor less than *nothing*.<sup>170</sup>

The beginning is with the immediacy of emptiness – it could be said to be akin to the Absolute in its own “vanishing.”<sup>171</sup> Furthermore, there is nothing determinate about it. Hegel ends this passage by stating that this beginning is “in fact nothing, and neither more nor less than nothing.”

So, as one might expect, this passage is followed by a section on “Nothing”. Hegel continues:

*Nothing, pure nothing*: it is simply equality with itself, complete emptiness, absence of all determination and content — undifferentiatedness in itself. In so far as intuiting or thinking can be mentioned here, it counts as a distinction whether something or *nothing* is intuited or thought. To intuit or think nothing has, therefore, a meaning; both are distinguished and thus nothing *is* (exists) in our intuiting or thinking; or rather it is empty intuition and thought itself, and the same empty intuition or thought as pure being. Nothing is, therefore, the same determination, or rather absence of determination, and thus altogether the same as, pure being.<sup>172</sup>

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<sup>170</sup> Ibid.

<sup>171</sup> As Angelica Nuzzo observes, “there is nothing that vanishes but only pure vanishing.” Angelica Nuzzo, “Dialectic, Understanding, and Reason: How does Hegel’s *Logic* Begin?,” in *The Dimensions of Hegel’s Dialectic*, ed. Nectarios G. Limnatis (New York: Continuum, 2010), 20.

<sup>172</sup> Ibid.

The original pure being could equally be said to be nothing, since it is undifferentiated and lacks determinate content. Hegel's point here, as we will see by commentators in later chapters (such as Angelica Nuzzo in Chapter Three), is that thinking of this original nothing is the same as the nothing's self-movement. In other words, it is the self-movement of the original pure being-nothing. So, when Hegel states that the SL begins with Being, it is equally true that it begins in Nothing. As I have argued, this point is crucial to understanding the connection between the end of the PhG and the beginning of the SL, since this insight brings us back to the insight learned in the section on Absolute Knowing from the PhG. What greater lesson could consciousness have learned during the course of the PhG than that its emptiness is simultaneously absolute knowing in terms of its own death being the condition for the possibility of its experiential awareness of its unity with the whole of existence? In other words, the experiential awareness that consciousness begins to unearth at the culmination of the PhG becomes the awareness that sets the stage for the birth of the work of the Logic.

Furthermore, one would do well to note how Hegel himself uses the language of emptiness to describe both pure being as well as nothingness, which further aids to highlight their connection. I will examine the dialectic between being and nothing in more detail in Chapter Three. But, for our current purposes, it is important to note what this reveals about the connection between the PhG and the SL.

Along these lines, a phenomenological investigation is infused into the *Logic* at its core. I argue that the education that consciousness has undergone in the PhG is centrally infused into the development of the *Logic* itself insofar as consciousness has been educated from a historical standpoint. The self-awareness of consciousness (with regard to its own dialectical nature) will be the awareness that Hegel deems necessary to bring to an investigation of pure reason as such

in the SL. If this is the case, then one might wonder: what might this imply about the work of the *Logic* as a whole?

Hegel states in the introduction to the SL that the Logic will be about a “content” that the PhG already in some sense supplies from the start. At first, this might seem contradictory, since elsewhere, he also states that the *Logic* will presuppose *nothing*. However, on further consideration, Hegel’s thought here is actually consistent. This is because the “content” that is required from the result of the PhG is actually the content of nothingness itself (as we will see in Chapter Three), since it is in fact in emptiness that consciousness recognizes its unity with itself as substance. Substance as Subject is simultaneously both and neither, etc. (as Žižek explains). To put it another way, the content of the Logic is born from out of the emptiness of the *Phenomenology*; what we find at the culmination of the *Phenomenology* internally unfolds itself to reveal the Logic as already there (or as Heidegger would have it, “always already” there). If the “content” provided is emptiness as such, then the method of the Logic begins in emptiness as well. As we will see, according to Hegel, the true infinite generates the content and the method from out of its internal absolute negativity.

Along these lines, an additional explanation for what I take to be Hegel’s consistency here is the fact that, on Hegel’s account, the form and content of consciousness are not strictly separated, and therefore, Logic should be developed in recognition of this insight. Indeed, Hegel’s critique of his predecessors is based on their separation of the form and content of Logic from each other in their development of systems of logic. As Hegel writes, “it is quite inept to say that logic abstracts from all *content*, that it teaches only the rules of thinking without any reference to *what* is thought or without being able to consider its nature. For as thinking and the rules of thinking are supposed to be the subject matter of logic, these directly constitute its

peculiar content...<sup>173</sup> And Hegel's keen insight into the unity of form and content is what he has already shown to be the case in the PhG when it comes to consciousness.

Thus, Hegel's insight at the end of the PhG is the same insight that carries over to the "beginning" of his *Science of Logic*. As Hegel writes:

The Notion of pure science and its deduction is therefore presupposed in the present work in so far as the *Phenomenology of Spirit* is nothing other than the deduction of it. Absolute knowing is the *truth* of every mode of consciousness because, as the course of the *Phenomenology* showed, it is only in absolute knowing that the separation of the *object* from the *certainty of itself* is completely eliminated: truth is now equated with certainty and this certainty with truth. Thus pure science presupposes liberation from the opposition of consciousness. It contains *thought in so far as this is just as much the object in its own self, or the object in its own self in so far as it is equally pure thought.*<sup>174</sup>

First of all, Hegel has already deduced the "Notion" in some sense in the *Phenomenology*, since he showed in that work that the dialectical nature of the Notion is that it is both Substance and Subject, but also neither merely one nor the other as I addressed in the first chapter. Second, the insight of Absolute Knowing runs throughout the work, since consciousness learns that it is ultimately, and intimately, bound up with the forms that it investigates. Third, the form and the content of thought were already shown to be one in the PhG. However, here it is also important to note that Hegel does not claim that since the PhG has done the heavy lifting of the phenomenological science that he can now elaborate a science of logic that will merely explore *fixed* forms of thought. Rather, Hegel's point here is, more importantly, that the same *insight* binds the two works together. If the end of the *Phenomenology* is the truth of absolute knowing as emptiness, then, as we will see, this is precisely where the SL begins. In other words, the SL does not merely operate externally on a content that the PhG supplies. Rather, it would be more apt to say that both works are imbued by the same fundamental insight – that the unity of form

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<sup>173</sup> Ibid., 44.

<sup>174</sup> Ibid., 49.



and content ultimately implies that a pure science ought to be grounded in subjectivity's self-divestment and subsequent reconciliation with itself (although not in the sense of completeness). In other words, if, at the end of the PhG, consciousness realizes that what it has been examining has actually been the internal structure of itself all along, then the *Logic* will now begin from this key insight to once again examine the absolute truth of the unity of form and content.

Here, a return to the end of the PhG will help to draw out the connection. At the end of his PhG, in the section on "Absolute Knowing," Hegel writes of a two-way movement involving the self-divestment of Spirit:

Spirit, however, has shown itself to us to be neither merely the withdrawal of self-consciousness into its pure inwardness, nor the mere submergence of self-consciousness into substance, and the non-being of its [moment of] difference; but Spirit is *this movement* of the Self which empties itself of itself and sinks itself into its substance, and also, as Subject, has gone out of that substance into itself, making the substance into an object and a content at the same time as it cancels this difference between objectivity and content.<sup>175,176</sup>

Original German text:

Der Geist aber hat sich uns gezeigt, weder nur das Zurückziehen des Selbstbewußtseins in seine reine Innerlichkeit zu sein, noch die bloße Versenkung desselben in die Substanz und das Nichtsein seines Unterschiedes, sondern diese Bewegung des Selbsts, das sich seiner selbst entäußert und sich in seine Substanz versenkt, und ebenso als Subjekt aus ihr in sich gegangen ist, und sie zum Gegenstande und Inhalte macht, als es diesen Unterschied der Gegenständlichkeit und des Inhalts aufhebt.<sup>177</sup>

In this passage, Hegel comments on what it means for there to be a unity of Subject and Substance as Spirit (*Der Geist*). Hegel explains how Spirit as Subject empties or divests (*entäußert*)<sup>178</sup> itself into Substance. Yet even this self-divestment does not constitute the whole

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<sup>175</sup> Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, 490.

<sup>176</sup> Here, the verb which Miller translates as "cancels" is "*aufhebt*" in the original German. Elsewhere, the verb "*aufheben*" is often translated as "to sublimate." So, it seems that Hegel has something like sublimation in mind here. This further supports my argument, since sublimation is not a one-sided cancellation.

<sup>177</sup> G.W.F Hegel, *Phänomenologie Des Geistes* (Project Gutenberg: E-book, 2004), retrieved November 11, 2018, from <http://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/6698>.

<sup>178</sup> Hegel's usage of "divestment" here is crucial and will be addressed more in subsequent chapters.

explanation of its unity with otherness, since it is equally true that the difference between Subject and Substance is “sublated” in the movement. In other words, Spirit ultimately overcomes its self-differencing in some sense – it is, arguably, the very movement of its own self-differencing and subsequent overcoming. Hegel even uses the word “*aufhebt*” (“sublates”) in the German to describe how the difference between Objectivity (*die Gegenständlichkeit*) and Content (*der Inhalt*) is sublated. For our purposes, what is important here is that the unity between form and content is simultaneously the positing of difference from out of itself and its subsequent overcoming (although not in a sense that would imply self-reflexive totality). Hegel’s comments here relate to my argument regarding the incompleteness of Hegel’s system, since it implies that Spirit is inherently irreducible. Spirit is an ascension (as a movement out of nothingness) that holds open the difference between objectivity and content while simultaneously moving beyond it.

## 2.5) Before God Becomes God

Transitioning back to the “Introduction” of the SL, Hegel reflects there on how this insight from the PhG relates to the *Logic*. In doing so, he comes to a momentous realization: that the beginning of the *Logic* is with God’s emptiness (of Spirit) before God becomes God: “It can therefore be said that this content is the exposition of God as he is in his eternal essence before the creation of nature and a finite mind.”<sup>179</sup> Indeed, one could argue that Hegel’s entire project is the elaboration of the course of God’s emptiness before creation. This is to say that, on Hegel’s account, at the beginning of everything God divests itself – empties itself out as pure negativity. On Hegel’s account, Christ is the symbol of God’s “self-alienation” in the absolute knowing of Spirit. Thus, as we will see in the next chapter, Hegel begins the project of the *Logic* from the

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<sup>179</sup> Hegel, *Science of Logic*, 50.

pure negativity of *emptiness* as such. Important to my argument, Hegel nowhere posits a substantive entity at the beginning. Rather, it is the immediacy of emptiness itself at the beginning of the movement.

Hegel continues the thread about the connection between the two works in the section, “With What Must the Science Begin?,” from the “Doctrine of Being” in the *Science of Logic*.

There he writes:

In the ‘Introduction’ it was remarked that the phenomenology of spirit is the science of consciousness, the exposition of it, and that consciousness has for result the *Notion* of science, i.e. pure knowing. Logic, then, has for its presupposition the science of manifested spirit, which contains and demonstrates the necessity, and so the truth, of the standpoint occupied by pure knowing and of its mediation. In this science of manifested spirit the beginning is made from empirical, *sensuous* consciousness and this is *immediate* knowledge in the strict sense of the word...in the work just mentioned [*The Phenomenology of Spirit*] immediate consciousness is also the first and that which has proved itself to be the result of that phenomenological consideration – the Idea as pure knowledge. *Logic is pure science*, that is pure knowledge, in its entire range of its development. But in the said result, this Idea has determined itself to be the certainty which has become truth, the certainty which, on the one hand, no longer has the object over against it but has internalized it, knows it as its own self – and, on the other hand, has given up the knowledge of itself as of something confronting the object of which it is only the annihilation, has divested itself of this subjectivity and is at one with its self-alienation.

Now starting from this determination of pure knowledge, all that is needed to ensure that the beginning remains immanent in its scientific development is to consider, or rather, ridding oneself of all other reflections and opinions whatever, simply to take up, *what is there before us*.<sup>180</sup>

In terms of what is most significant to our current purposes, here Hegel states that the culmination of the phenomenology is “pure knowing.” Hegel also states here that the Logic *presupposes* the PhG insofar as it shows the truth of the perspective of pure knowing. However, elsewhere Hegel has already stated that the Logic must begin without any presuppositions. So, one might wonder again if Hegel is inconsistent here – how can the Logic take the

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<sup>180</sup> Ibid., 68.

Phenomenology as its presupposition if the Logic is not to have *any* presuppositions at all? I argue again that Hegel is consistent, since the sense in which the PhG could be a “presupposition” at all is precisely insofar as it allows one to realize the unity of thought and being, and therefore it is actually a presupposition-less presupposition. It is of further note that Hegel again uses the language of “divestment” in this passage from the SL, which we just saw him use earlier in the passage from the “Absolute Knowing” section of the PhG as well. Hegel often uses the language of “divestment” (*Entäußerung*) (which is sometimes also translated as “emptying,” in the sense of *kenosis*) when he discusses the subject’s alienation or externalization from itself. As we will see, there are biblical undertones to Hegel’s understanding of Absolute Knowing and this understanding ties in to his starting point for the Logic overall: for God to become God, God must originally be as an absolute emptiness. As Hegel states soon thereafter, and I will explain more in the next chapter: “The beginning therefore is pure being.”<sup>181</sup> Spirit finds itself as the movement of its own divestment: Logic must begin as absolute emptiness. In the next chapter, I will explore the notion that pure knowing is simultaneously pure being and what this will entail.

Thus, for Hegel to claim that the deduction of the *Logic* was already provided in the PhG is essentially just a reaffirmation that, in that work, consciousness came to the realization of its unity with itself in its otherness. Consciousness became aware of itself as substance. On Hegel’s understanding, the form and content of consciousness are not strictly separated.

Indeed, we find Hegel’s thought process here reiterated when we review his commentary on the thoughts of the ancient metaphysicians and what he praises about them. He writes:

this metaphysics [the metaphysics of the ancients] believed that thinking (and its determinations) is not anything alien to the object, but rather is its essential nature, or that things and the thinking of them – our language too expresses their kinship – are explicitly

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<sup>181</sup> Ibid., 70.

in full agreement, thinking in its immanent determinations and the true nature of things forming one and the same content.<sup>182</sup>

Here, Hegel praises the ancient metaphysicians for the fact that they did not strictly separate thinking from the object of thought. Instead, the ancient metaphysicians whom he praises perceived a unity between thought and being.

Hegel goes on to connect what he praises about the ancient metaphysicians to his understanding of the unity of the form and content of Logic and also his explication of what this implies about the science of logic. He states, “However, the exposition of what alone can be the true method of philosophical science falls within the treatment of logic itself; for the method is the consciousness of the form of the inner self-movement of the content of logic.”<sup>183</sup> The last sentence here is of crucial importance. To put it in other words, what Hegel says here is that the form of the science must be provided from out of the dynamic process and movement of the content itself: in many ways, it is the awareness of the dynamism of the content itself. Thus, there is no strict separation between the two – Spirit is simultaneously Subject as Substance as well as Substance without Subject, as Žižek would have it.<sup>184</sup>

## **2.6) Absolute Knowing in the *Science of Logic***

Here, it is also helpful to reflect further on what Hegel says about the PhG as a demonstration of the method and what he hopes to explain by understanding his former work in that way. As Hegel writes, “In the *Phenomenology of Spirit* I have expounded an example of this method to a more concrete object, namely to consciousness...”<sup>185</sup> On first glance, it may appear that what Hegel intends to say here is that the PhG is an example of a method in its application to

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<sup>182</sup> Ibid., 45.

<sup>183</sup> Ibid., 53.

<sup>184</sup> Žižek, “Hegel and Shitting: The Idea’s Constipation,” 231.

<sup>185</sup> Hegel, *Science of Logic*, 54.

an object, namely, consciousness. However, given what has already been discussed above, the important point here is rather that the PhG is a demonstration of the *truth of absolute knowing* insofar as, in the case of empirical consciousness, Spirit comes to know itself in its otherness and as its subsequent reconciliation (although not a complete one). In other words, it is a demonstration of the unity of thought and being – and therefore, a demonstration of a method-less method.

Thus, despite all appearances to the contrary, I argue that the two works are in fact more closely tied together than the latter (the Logic) merely representing the application of a method that is developed once and for all in the former. As previously mentioned, I agree with Žižek, Comay, and Ruda that the reading of one work always already takes one into the other, in a way that is analogous to the non-orientable surface of a Möbius strip in mathematics.<sup>186</sup> In his later work, Hegel is inspired by the former work to return once more to a beginning that is the culmination of the former work (in the sense of an experiential insight). Even so, if the relationship between the two works is most akin to a circle, it is not a circle that returns to the same beginning. Also, although there are admittedly times in which Hegel speaks about the relationship between the two works as if the PhG is an example of an application of a method to an object (consciousness), I argue that Hegel's explanation is even subtler than that, since ultimately consciousness is not an object that merely stands against itself in any strict sense.

In some ways, we might want to say that for Hegel, consciousness is an empirical representation of a structure that he holds to be true about reality as such. Yet here is where Hegel also finds the limits of the analogy – since a true science of logic must itself “move

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<sup>186</sup> Žižek, *Sex and the Failed Absolute*, 99. Comay and Ruda, *The Dash*, 45.

through”<sup>187</sup> the very movement that it proposes to describe. In other words, the PhG does not borrow its method from anywhere external and neither does the Logic merely apply a method that is extracted from the development witnessed in the course of the PhG. Rather, in both works, the method must develop from out of itself internally. In the case of the PhG, we see this as consciousness develops from out of its own self-othering. In the case of the *Logic*, we see this as God becomes God from out of its own absolute nothingness. This implies that the *Logic* and the PhG are both results of the development of the Notion from out of itself and also that the two works are always to be read as intimately bound together.

The fact that the two works exhibit this close relationship also implies that what was learned from the course of the phenomenology was essentially an awareness – that the perspective of absolute knowledge entails the insight that a true beginning must begin in emptiness. The subject knows itself simultaneously as subject and object in a movement of Spirit, which ultimately overcomes or “sublates” the difference between subject and object.

A number of questions remain, however. For one, if the true beginning of pure knowing implies that one must begin in emptiness, then one might wonder: to what extent can Hegel *explicate* the Logic at all? In other words, if the Logic is a movement of thought that is a dynamic process in which form and content are understood as inherently bound together, and the only possible beginning for philosophy is ultimately the immediacy of emptiness, then is the Logic itself also a Phenomenology? Must not the Logic be *experienced* as well? If so, is the Logic more properly understood as a phenomenological science as opposed to a speculative metaphysics in the traditional sense?

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<sup>187</sup> Dieter Henrich, *Between Kant and Hegel: Lectures on German Idealism*, ed. David S. Pacini (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003), 319.

As we will see in the next chapter, Hegel acknowledges that, at the beginning of the *Logic*, absolute knowing must return to the perspective of what consciousness has learned at the culmination of the PhG – that absolute knowing is the knowing of emptiness, lacking any presuppositions of thought at all. So, in connection with the questions that I raised above, Hegel needs to address the nature of his work overall. This is to say that if absolute knowing returns itself to the beginning of being as such (without any presuppositions), then to what extent can Hegel elaborate a system at all? How does the system maintain the tension – (what Dieter Henrich essentially refers to as the relative stability and instability) between identity and difference?<sup>188</sup> Is this truly possible? In fact, Hegel himself explains that the *Logic* is of a *historical* nature and that it is to be read as such. In other words, his investigation ought to be read as a provisional exploration based on a historical process of consciousness – an elaboration of a process that is of a truly continuous and ongoing nature. He writes:

I could not pretend that the method which I follow in this system of logic—or rather which this system in its own self follows – is not capable of greater completeness, of much elaboration in detail; but at the same time I know that it is the only true method. This is self-evident simply from the fact that it is not something distinct from its object and content; for it is the inwardness of the content, the dialectic which it possesses within itself, which is the mainspring of its advance. It is clear that no expositions can be accepted as scientifically valid which do not pursue the course of this method and do not conform to its simple rhythm, for this is the course of the subject matter itself. In conformity with this method, I would point out that the divisions and headings of the books, sections, and chapters given in this work as well as the explanations associated with them, are made to facilitate a preliminary survey and strictly are only of *historical* value. They do not belong to the content and body of the science but are compilations of an external reflection which has already run through the whole of the exposition and consequently knows and indicates in advance the sequence of its moments before these are brought forward by the subject matter itself.<sup>189</sup>

There are a number of significant points here to address. First of all, Hegel acknowledges the fact that his method is not fully complete. In fact, I would argue that its very nature is to hold open

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<sup>188</sup> Ibid., 322.

<sup>189</sup> Hegel, *Science of Logic*, 54.



the tension between completeness and (in)completeness and this is also why it must be based in the actuality of history. Even so, Hegel states that it is certainly possible that his Logic could be explained and developed to an even greater degree than he was able to achieve. This makes sense, since the method that Hegel refers to here is the method of dialectic itself – a method that develops from out of the Notion and is not stated in its full completeness. This is also what Hegel considers as what grants the method its genuineness – the fact that the content of the science is understood as one with the method that spontaneously and organically develops from out of itself. For this reason, Hegel also comments on how the section titles of each part of the work are only of a provisional or “preliminary” nature, since he can only provide them from a historical standpoint. In other words, the section titles are provided after an “external reflection” – after consciousness has already gone the course.

Furthermore, this is also why Hegel clarifies what dialectic means to his science and how his position differs from that of his predecessors: on Hegel’s account, dialectic is internal to the science itself – it is not a method applied from the outside. As Hegel writes, “Dialectic in this way acquires an entirely different significance from what it had when it was considered as a separate part of logic and when its aim and standpoint were, one may say, completely misunderstood...it is in this dialectic as it is here understood, that is, in the grasping of opposites in their unity or of the positive in the negative, that speculative thought consists.”<sup>190</sup> As we will see, according to Hegel, the Notion posits its difference from out of itself – from out of its own negativity and then sublates this self-difference (also known as the negation of the negation) to realize its unity with itself. Simply put, something positive comes from out of the internal negativity.

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<sup>190</sup> Ibid., 55-56.

Thus, Hegel's critique of previous conceptions of the relationship between dialectic and logic is that these prior accounts failed to properly conceive of the internal connection between the two. On Hegel's account, dialectic is internal to the science of logic as such. When commenting on what has been learned from the PhG, Hegel states:

All that is necessary to achieve scientific progress – and it is essential to strive to gain this quite *simple* insight – is the recognition of the logical principle that the negative is just as much positive, or that what is self-contradictory does not resolve itself into a nullity, into abstract nothingness, but essentially only into the negation of its *particular* content, in other words, that such a negation is not all and every negation but the negation of a specific subject matter which resolves itself, and consequently is a specific negation, and therefore the result essentially contains that from which it results....<sup>191</sup>

So, if dialectic is internal to the *Logic*, and something positive comes from something negative, then the question becomes to what extent this is true of the *Logic* considered on the whole, and also, if so, then what would this imply? In other words, what will the resolution of a self-contradiction produce when it comes to the *Logic* considered on the whole?

## 2.7) Hegel on Kantian Dialectic

While postponing these questions until later chapters, I will now look more closely at the related topic of what Hegel praises about Kant's understanding of dialectic. Hegel praises Kant because Kant understands the "*necessity of the contradiction* which belongs to the nature of thought determinations."<sup>192</sup> Hegel found evidence of this in Kant's antinomies of pure reason. Kant makes an advance in the right direction in comparison to previous metaphysicians, since Kant advanced toward an understanding of the necessity of contradiction as an integral part of reason. However, on Hegel's account, Kant does not fully appreciate the *positive* aspect of dialectic. Hegel writes: "But if no advance is made beyond the abstract negative aspect of

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<sup>191</sup> Ibid., 54.

<sup>192</sup> Ibid., 56.

dialectic, the result is only the familiar one that reason is incapable of knowing the infinite; a strange result for—since the infinite is Reasonable—it asserts that reason is incapable of knowing the Reasonable.”<sup>193</sup> Hegel’s critique here is a familiar one, as it is the same account he provides as a critique of the Kantian and Fichtean systems of philosophy in his *Differenzschrift* (first published 1801)<sup>194</sup>, and ultimately what he praises about Schelling’s philosophy in contrast to those of Kant and Fichte. Along these lines, Kant does not raise the insight of dialectic to a higher perspective; he fails to fully appreciate the more relevant insight of his discovery – that dialectic is in fact the internal truth of reason as such. For this reason, Kant posits a strict difference between the transcendental categories (form) and their related content. Hegel’s solution is to see how this difference is in fact grounded in a *self*-othering – how could we come to know the difference otherwise?

Thus, the Hegelian insight here is that from a higher perspective, the dialectical negations that Kant observes (that which lead to necessary contradictions in the antinomies of pure reason) are internal to reason as such, such that the negative ultimately leads to positive content in the subject’s reconciliation with its otherness (though not in a sense that would imply totality). If one does not recognize this insight, then one is ultimately left in a standpoint in which the infinite cannot be known by reason at all – a failure that Hegel does not wish to accept.<sup>195</sup> Indeed, Kant himself was aware that his position leads to this conclusion. In fact, he is famously quoted in his

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<sup>193</sup> Ibid.

<sup>194</sup> A full exploration of the *Differenzschrift* is outside of the scope of this dissertation. There are, of course, many sources on Hegel’s critique of Kant. I will name just a couple here. See Paul Guyer, “Thought and being: Hegel’s critique of Kant’s theoretical philosophy,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Hegel*, edited by Frederick C. Beiser (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 171-210. See also Karl Ameriks, “Hegel’s Critique of Kant’s Theoretical Philosophy,” *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, Vol. 46, No. 1 (Sep., 1985): 1-35.

<sup>195</sup> Hegel’s alternative is that the individual will can know the absolute insofar as it can divest itself of its subjective nature, aligning itself with the structure of the absolute will. This will be explored in later chapters. For more on this, see also Dieter Henrich, *Between Kant and Hegel*, 326.

*Critique* as stating that he had to “deny knowledge in order to make room for faith.” (Bxxx)<sup>196</sup> Hegel’s point, on the other hand, is that reason can experientially come to know itself as united with the absolute (as that which transcends itself) via its own self-negation – dialectic is internal to reason itself.

This understanding – of the fact that dialectic is internal to reason – enables one to conduct a science of logic with the realization that thought and being are ultimately one, but we may also consider them as distinct forms for the purposes of our investigation. In other words, they may be investigated as forms but only to the extent that one recognizes that form and content are so intimately united in reason that they are in fact both form and content but neither merely form nor content. This is why Hegel states, “Consequently the earlier determinations (those used on the *pathway to truth*) such as subjectivity and objectivity, or even thought and being, or Notion and reality, no matter from what standpoint they were determined, have lost their independent and purely affirmative character and are now *in their truth*, that is, in their unity, reduced to *forms*.”<sup>197</sup> In other words, the preliminary forms are ultimately to be understood as unified in living Spirit; thus, when considered as forms, they are merely considered in their inert dimension to see what will result from the consideration of said forms as what ultimately constitutes a *living* system.

Since these forms are internal to the Notion, Hegel thinks that it is very important to the development of a speculative metaphysics to pass beyond an understanding of dialectic as an *external* method that is merely applied to an abstract content. Indeed, Hegel comments on this fact when he reflects on the subject-object relation as it is found in Kant’s philosophy. The

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<sup>196</sup> Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. and ed. by Paul Guyer and Allen Wood (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 117.

<sup>197</sup> Hegel, *Science of Logic*, 61.

meaning of Kant's transcendental categories is ultimately a meaning that is "mediated" insofar as the categories stand in relation to a subjective ego.<sup>198</sup> One problem with this viewpoint is that the categories are empty and meaningless if they are not related to the subjective ego – Kant's starting point is not immediacy, but mediation. Perhaps this would not be so problematic if Kant were aware of this, but Hegel thinks that this is true of Kant's system in a way that Kant is not, properly speaking, aware of in terms of all of its implications. On Hegel's account, what is needed as a remedy to this starting point for genuine knowledge is a more elevated and abstract reflection on the relationship between subject and object in the first place. How is the subjective ego related to the categories in the first place? What defines such a relationship? By undergoing such a reflection, we find that dialectic is internal to reason as such – the infinite form of the Notion (which is, simultaneously, a content). In other words, the antinomies of reason do not merely result in a negative implication (such as one's ability to state the limits of pure reason). Rather, the antinomies simultaneously provide a positive content insofar as contradictions are generated and sublated by the negativity of reason itself.

Hegel's point here is that Kant's consideration of the antinomies operates within the supposition that the transcendental categories of the subject stand at a remove from the content to which they are applied. What is lacking from Kant's account is sufficient higher-order reflection on the *relationship* between subjective knowledge and the content of said knowledge in the first place. In other words, how is it possible that the transcendental categories yield us knowledge at all? As Hegel comments on Kant:

But if philosophy was to make any real progress, it was necessary that the interest of thought should be drawn to a consideration of the formal side, to a consideration of the ego, of consciousness as such, i.e. of the abstract relation of a subjective knowing to an object, so that in this way the cognition of the *infinite form*, that is, of the Notion, would be introduced. But in order that this cognition may be reached, that form has still to be

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<sup>198</sup> Ibid., 63.

relieved of the finite determinateness in which it is ego, or consciousness. The form when thus thought out into its purity, will have within itself the capacity to *determine* itself, that is, to give itself a content, and that a *necessarily* explicated content – in the form of a system of determinations of thought.<sup>199</sup>

This is a crucial part of Hegel's explanation of his critique of Kant and also the project of the Logic as a whole. Hegel's point here is that when we progress past an understanding of dialectic as an abstract negative form that is applied to an external content, we come to an understanding of how dialectic is internal to reason as such – that a content can be generated through the form of its own negativity. This leads us to the question of how the forms of the Logic could possibly determine themselves out of nothingness (which I will examine more in the next chapter).

Interestingly enough, however, it is this precise reflection, which leads Hegel into his section on “The Doctrine of Being” (the first part of the “Objective Logic”) and his explanation of the fact that philosophy must begin in emptiness. Hegel's point here is essentially that Logic must not depend on a method from another science – philosophy must internally produce its science from out of itself. Hegel's point is that the only possible genuine starting point for philosophy is nothingness, since any other possible candidate would already presuppose a relation and a relation itself must already be mediated (and this is not a genuine starting point if it is merely a *presupposed* mediation).

Hegel's understanding of the *developmental* nature of dialectic also allows him to be able to explain the tripartite structure of the work. If former philosophers, such as Kant, had dealt with logic on the order of “thought alone” (Hegel's own example here is Kant's “transcendental philosophy”), then Hegel will be conscious of the fact that pure reason is nothing if Ideas do not take on a *substantial* nature. Dieter Henrich comments on the purpose of the third section of the Logic as the completion of the system, stating:

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<sup>199</sup> Ibid., 63.

The secret intention of the Logic of the Notion is to relate self-reference (as one structure) to otherness (as another structure) so that we may assert their mutual dependence, while simultaneously preserving their distinctive features.<sup>200</sup>

Here, the irony is that to assert the “completion” of the system is simultaneously to acknowledge its incomplete nature. Although I agree with Henrich’s interpretation of the general overall movement, I would emphasize a different conclusion. Since a distance of nothingness from itself is that which reveals itself as simultaneously identical and different (since the self-negation of emptiness as its erasure is simultaneously to affirm negation) we are to conclude that the basis of Spirit is itself a transcendent-immanent movement without a determinate ground. On my reading, then, Hegel’s “completion” of the system is not to posit a meta-structure on the order of identity. Rather, it is to unveil the movement of Spirit as that which relates the two structures, allows for their simultaneous unison and difference, and subsequently cancels out the difference between the two structures as it eliminates itself and allows for new categories to emerge from out of itself.

Furthermore, since the original *Ur*-structure is not a structure at all but rather a movement of nothingness itself (as we will see in the next chapter), Hegel does not posit closure to the system. To put it simply, even if Hegel’s intention is to achieve a structural stability, the only way that he is able to achieve his aim is to simultaneously acknowledge that what makes identity on the order of relationality possible is a prior movement in which even relationality as such could not properly be said to exist.<sup>201</sup>

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<sup>200</sup> Henrich, *Between Kant and Hegel*, 322.

<sup>201</sup> Slavoj Žižek, “Hegel and Shitting: The Idea’s Constipation,” 229.

## 2.8) Conclusion

If the Logic is to remain truly presuppositionless, then Hegel must not anticipate the structure of the overall work from the start. If philosophy begins in emptiness, then the structure of the work must reveal itself. Indeed, Hegel even states that, “what logic is cannot be stated beforehand.”<sup>202</sup> The Logic must arise from the self-unfolding of the beginning.

Furthermore, to what extent is such a structure a *necessary* structure? Do philosophers themselves participate in the movement insofar as we participate in the “thinking” of emptiness? In other words, do we pass through emptiness in thinking it? What would it mean for the *necessity* of the movement if the movement itself is revealed as the necessity of contingency and the contingency of necessity?

One thing is certain: if Hegel thinks “that this content is the exposition of God as he is in his eternal essence before the creation of nature and a finite mind,”<sup>203</sup> then we would do well to humble ourselves in an experiential sense (to practice a humility of spirit). Indeed, it is the culminating insight of the PhG that brings us to divest ourselves once more: to return back into the depths of the unknown – the first premise of all subsequent premises must itself be without premise. And as we will see, even this statement does not encapsulate the full thought of emptiness that Hegel has in mind.

So, the revelation of the *Logic*, interestingly enough, always brings us back to the culmination of the *Phenomenology* – that the reality of lived experience is actually the unfolding of the very tension between (1) self-reflexivity and (2) otherness: the Logic unfolds the identity (of the Idea) that results from the difference (emptiness) that we are left with at the end of the

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<sup>202</sup> Hegel, *Science of Logic*, 43.

<sup>203</sup> *Ibid.*, 50.



PhG. And this difference itself (in the way that the Logic is different from the PhG) will be shown to be an irrecoverable one: in some sense this is a symbol for the retroactive paradox of the Logic itself: the fact that the entire structure reveals something that must have already been the case from the start. Yet, this simultaneously seems to only make itself possible after the fact, since what sets the whole movement in motion in the first place is emptiness as such – nothing has been presupposed. Nothing at all.

## CHAPTER THREE

### THE NATURE OF THE BEGINNING

#### 3.1) Introduction

In this chapter, my first task is to delve deeper into the nature of Hegel's beginning as he presents it in the *Science of Logic* in relation to his overall system of philosophy. According to Hegel, the genuine beginning of philosophy is beyond even the principle or idea of a beginning.<sup>204</sup> Where else could philosophy begin, then, other than in the emptiness of emptiness (which reveals itself as simultaneously both being and nothingness but also neither merely one nor the other considered alone)? For this reason, I show how the true beginning leads into a dialectical, and dynamic, movement between being and nothingness that will eventually unveil the Notion.

My second task in this chapter is to reflect on Hegel's beginning as either dialectical or undialectical. I argue (in partial agreement with Angelica Nuzzo) that Hegel's beginning is "undialectical."<sup>205,206</sup> However, I use the term in a modified sense and I draw a slightly different conclusion from this than Nuzzo. On my understanding, the beginning of dialectics is

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<sup>204</sup> Schelling also seeks the authentic beginning of philosophy in his WA. For more on Schelling's beginning, see also Andrew Jussaume, "Schelling's Ages of the World: The Beginning of the Beginning" (Doctoral Dissertation, Duquesne University, 2017) Retrieved from <https://dsc.duq.edu/etd/220>.

<sup>205</sup> Angelica Nuzzo, "Dialectic, Understanding, and Reason: How does Hegel's *Logic* Begin?," in *The Dimensions of Hegel's Dialectic*, ed. Nectarios G. Limnatis (New York: Continuum, 2010), 13.

<sup>206</sup> When I use the term "(un)dialectical" here, I am using it to refer to what Schelling referred to as the "unprethinkability" of being. It is a self-vanishing movement of nothingness which opens up the difference between dialectical and undialectical thinking, erases the difference between the two, and returns to itself as emptiness. This implies that dialectics is inherently incomplete, since it is "grounded" in the self-movement of nothingness. See *Ibid.*, 13 ff. The connection to Heidegger here is strikingly apparent.

“(un)dialectical,” since it is both dialectical and undialectical and neither one nor the other. In other words, the beginning is a genuine emptiness. Hegel’s beginning is in fact the emptiness of emptiness – the “nothing” beyond nothing. Nuzzo does, however, agree that even the undialectical beginning must, of course, be related to dialectics.<sup>207</sup>

Next, I then show why this understanding of Hegel’s beginning fits with my understanding of Hegel as a philosopher who thinks at the interstices of identity and difference. My reading of the beginning as (un)dialectical supports my understanding of Hegel as a philosopher who thinks at the interstices of identity and difference, since the beginning is neither a static nor even comprehensible beginning. In agreement with Comay and Ruda, Hegel’s beginning, as we saw in absolute knowing, is with an “experience of the impossibility of experience:”<sup>208</sup> the self-transcendence of consciousness as the movement of absolute Spirit.

### **3.2) Hegel’s Overall Task in the *Science of Logic***

Hegel’s overall task in the *Logic* is essentially his attempt to create a system in which he can think both system and freedom together. Hegel wrote his major works during a (relatively short) period of German history which resulted in some of the most philosophical productivity in the entire history of Western philosophy. As Adrian Johnston notes:

An extremely brief period between the end of the eighteenth and beginning of the nineteenth centuries sees an incredible explosion of intense philosophical activity in the German-speaking world, perhaps rivaled solely by the birth of Western philosophy itself in ancient Greece (although Alain Badiou passionately maintains that postwar France is philosophically comparable to these other two momentarily important times and places)...<sup>209</sup>

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<sup>207</sup> Nuzzo, “Dialectic, Understanding, and Reason: How does Hegel’s *Logic* Begin?”, 21.

<sup>208</sup> Comay and Ruda, *The Dash*, 4, see also 105.

<sup>209</sup> Adrian Johnston, *A New German Idealism: Hegel, Žižek, and Dialectical Materialism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2018), 8.

With the development of his system of philosophy, Hegel responds to many of his contemporaries, such as F.H. Jacobi.

As Adrian Johnston further writes, as early as the 1780s, F.H. Jacobi had already posed the problem as one of “system” or “freedom.”<sup>210</sup> The main problem that motivated the development of Hegel’s system was how to think a monism on the order of substance in a way that would be consistent with autonomy and “transcendental subjectivity.” As Johnston states:

In a word, the problem was how to think of substance while retaining transcendental subjectivity as immanent – the problem of “grasping and expressing the True, not only as *Substance*, but equally as *Subject*.” (Hegel, *PhG*) This was the problem of unifying the thought of Spinoza (on Substance) with that of a Kant or Fichte (on transcendental subjectivity).<sup>211</sup>

My main argument, as we will see (in agreement with Žižek, Comay, Ruda, and Johnston) is that Hegel’s solution to this question is actually to begin the system with a genuine beginning – a repetition of emptiness that secures a beginning beyond Kant’s categories of a rational subject.

In the “Introduction” to his *Science of Logic*, Hegel clarifies the overall task of his work. We know that subsequent to the influence of relatively proximate historical thinkers such as Spinoza as well as his contemporaries (including Fichte, F.H. Jacobi, Kant and Hölderlin) Hegel develops his own system of philosophy to address what he perceives as inadequacies of the metaphysical systems of his predecessors. As is customary of Hegel, he hopes to retrieve their essential insights but to think them anew and from a more developed perspective “*als Aufhebung*.”<sup>212,213</sup>

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<sup>210</sup> Ibid., 8.

<sup>211</sup> Ibid., 10-11.

<sup>212</sup> Adrian Johnston, *Adventures in Transcendental Materialism*, 33. For a helpful and schematic overview of the relationship between Hegel’s work and some of his predecessors and contemporaries, such as Fichte and Hölderlin, see Dieter Henrich, *Between Kant and Hegel: Lectures on German Idealism*, ed. David S. Pacini (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003). An in-depth treatment of these relationships is beyond the scope of this dissertation.

<sup>213</sup> A similar claim could be made about Hegel’s relationship to Kant as well as Spinoza, among others.

Following the influence of Spinoza (as a thinker of monistic substance),<sup>214</sup> Fichte (as a thinker of the transcendental subject), and Hölderlin (among others),<sup>215</sup> Hegel begins his project to develop a system of the genuine Absolute. As became the goal in post-Kantian German Idealism, Hegel's aim is to think both substance (qua system) and subject (qua freedom) at the same time.<sup>216</sup> Hegel aims to achieve this goal by developing a system of a three-pronged nature:

- (1) An elaboration of the beginning of metaphysics in otherness (or emptiness as such).
- (2) To demonstrate this beginning as self-referential.
- (3) To show how otherness and self-reference are internally united, while retaining respect for the relative stability and instability of each of the moments of the system.<sup>217</sup>

Accordingly, for Hegel's project to even get off of the ground, Hegel first must address the topic of the *beginning*.

### 3.3) A Presuppositionless Beginning

Interestingly enough, Hegel begins the "Introduction" to his SL by adamantly stating that any genuine philosophy (and, in this particular case, any science of logic) must begin without any presuppositions. He states, "In no science is the need to begin with the subject matter itself, without preliminary reflections, felt more strongly than in the science of logic."<sup>218</sup> One reason why Hegel commits himself to begin the *Logic* without any presuppositions is that, according to Hegel, philosophy seeks to express the unconditional truth.<sup>219</sup> Surely, if philosophy makes any

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<sup>214</sup> For an in-depth treatment of Spinoza's influence on Hegel, see Adrian Johnston, *Adventures in Transcendental Materialism: Dialogues with Contemporary Thinkers* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2014), 33 ff.

<sup>215</sup> See also, Adrian Johnston, "'Freedom or System? Yes, Please!': Spinozisms of Freedom and the Post-Kantian Aftermath Then and Now," in *A New German Idealism: Hegel, Žižek, and Dialectical Materialism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2018), 8-12, for more of a discussion of the historical context of German Idealism that motivates Hegel's thought.

<sup>216</sup> Johnston, *A New German Idealism*, 8-12.

<sup>217</sup> Henrich, *Between Kant and Hegel*, 325.

<sup>218</sup> Hegel, *Science of Logic*, 43.

<sup>219</sup> Sebastian Stein, "Absolute Idealism: Hegel," in *A Companion to Nineteenth-Century Philosophy*, ed. John Shand (Hoboken: Wiley, 2019), 84.

presupposition at the beginning, then, problematically, it could be demonstrated as a conditional premise. Therefore, it would not suffice as the genuine beginning of a science of an *unconditional* nature.

Along these lines, there are two unique facts when it comes to a speculative metaphysics (in Hegel's case, which begins with the science of logic) in comparison to other sciences or disciplines (*die Wissenschaften*). The first unique fact about logic is that (unlike in the other sciences) there is not a method of the science that is distinct from the object(s) that the science investigates. For example, in a science such as biology, there is often a method of the science and a corresponding content of the science that the science investigates (in the case of biology, it is the study of *bios*, for example). However, when it comes to the science of logic, there is neither an external nor, strictly speaking, distinct method that is applied to a foreign content under investigation. This is because, in logic, the form and content are co-constitutive. The second unique aspect of logic (which follows as a result of the first) is that the fully developed subject matter that is under investigation is also inherently bound up with the nature of the scientific investigation itself insofar as the investigation is of a developmental nature. In other words, what is under investigation in the science unfolds from out of the science itself. As Hegel writes, "But not only the account of scientific method, but even the Notion itself of the science as such belongs to its content, and in fact constitutes its final result."<sup>220</sup> This is to say that, on Hegel's account, it is of the utmost importance that the science supplies the content and the method from out of itself *internally*.

Indeed, in the "Preface" to the First edition, Hegel states again that philosophy ought not to seek its method from another discipline. He writes:

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<sup>220</sup> Hegel, *Science of Logic*, 43.

Philosophy, if it would be science, cannot, as I have remarked elsewhere, borrow its method from a subordinate science like mathematics, any more than it can remain satisfied with categorical assurances of inner intuition, or employ arguments based on grounds adduced by external reflection. On the contrary, it can be only the nature of the content itself which spontaneously develops itself in a scientific method of knowing, since it is at the same time the reflection of the content itself which first posits and *generates* its determinate character.<sup>221</sup>

In other words, when it comes to philosophy, Hegel contends that the content develops a method from out of itself – the content and the method ought to spontaneously and simultaneously develop in a harmonious interplay.

The notion that both the method and the content of the logic develop internally from out of the logic itself is directly bound up with Hegel’s explanation that there ought not to be any presuppositions when it comes to the beginning of the *Logic*. As Hegel writes, “what logic is cannot be stated beforehand, rather does this knowledge of what it is first emerge as the final outcome and consummation of the whole exposition.”<sup>222</sup> This is to say that one does not come to the study of a genuine science of logic with a method in hand and a presupposed idea of what object(s) will be taken for consideration, for to do so would be to preclude the possibility of a genuine science of logic developing from out of pure reason itself. For this reason, Hegel expands on this discussion, explaining how, “the Notion of logic has its genesis in the course of the exposition.”<sup>223</sup> In other words, what will constitute the content of the *Logic* is ultimately not known until the process has taken its course. This realization – regarding the developmental nature of the logic – raises the question: wherefrom could the science possibly even start at all? (As we will see, this leads Hegel into the first section of the “Doctrine of Being,” entitled “With What Must the Science Begin?” which I will discuss in more detail later on in this chapter).

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<sup>221</sup> Ibid., 27.

<sup>222</sup> Ibid., 43.

<sup>223</sup> Ibid.

Hegel's rejection of the notion that there could possibly be any adequate presuppositions when it comes to the development of a science of logic also connects to what distinguishes his position from that of his predecessors – his rejection of a strict distinction between form and content.

Indeed, following his statement that the Logic ought not presuppose *anything*, Hegel goes on to explain that the predecessors to his *Logic* have problematically presupposed a strict separation between form and content. As Hegel explains, “Hitherto, the Notion of logic has rested on the separation, presupposed once and for all in the ordinary consciousness, of the *content* of cognition and its *form*, or of *truth* and *certainty*.”<sup>224</sup> Here, significantly, the object under consideration is cognition as such. In other words, previous thinkers often tend to presuppose a strict division between the form and content of cognition; Hegel, on the other hand, denies such a strict division.

In the section, “With What Must the Science Begin?” from the *Logic*, Hegel reflects once again on what constitutes the genuine beginning of philosophy – what is its “absolute ground”? Hegel had shown at the culmination of the PhG that consciousness is self-referential but, importantly, it is also true that in this self-reference, consciousness is *simultaneously* different from itself (and, therefore, it is never self-referential in a complete sense). It is with this insight into “pure knowing,” that Hegel begins his reflections on how philosophy as such begins in the SL.

Here, once again, Hegel is keen on the fact that one does not arrive at philosophical reflection *externally*, especially when it comes to the beginning of philosophical reflection as such. On the contrary, Hegel shows how, more properly speaking, philosophy (as the love of wisdom) in fact reveals itself as always already there from the start. If this is the case, however,

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<sup>224</sup> Ibid., 44.



then it follows that the *beginning* of philosophy must reveal itself as always already there in some sense (although we will see that a paradox remains when it comes to revealing exactly how this is the case). And this is in fact precisely what Hegel concludes. He writes:

Now starting from this determination of pure knowledge, all that is needed to ensure that the beginning remains immanent in its scientific development is to consider, or rather, ridding oneself of all other reflections and opinions whatever, simply to take up *what is there before us*.

Pure knowing as concentrated into this unity has sublated all reference to an other and mediation; it is without any distinction and as thus distinctionless, ceases itself to be knowledge; what is present is only *simple immediacy*.<sup>225</sup>

Hegel indicates here that the beginning of philosophy must be made with what he refers to as the “indeterminate” and “simple immediacy” of pure being. However, in his reflections on this fact, Hegel later comes to realize that this simple *immediacy* reveals itself as already bound up with *mediation* as well. For this reason, at this point, Hegel notes how he will consider the beginning (at the initial stage of his reflection) as the emptiness of “simple immediacy.” Hegel hopes to show how philosophy begins with what is already there. It must begin without any presuppositions at all; the beginning must be already here – it is not something that we arrive at externally (in the sense that it must not be based on other considerations). As we will see, however, this consideration of the pure immediacy of Being is later revealed as a merely preliminary one, since Hegel later demonstrates how immediacy is necessarily bound up with mediation. I will examine Hegel’s explanation for this connection in more detail later on in this chapter.

In any event, the context of Hegel’s discussion prior to this passage had been how it is relatively simple to show how philosophy cannot begin either with mere mediation nor mere

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<sup>225</sup> Ibid., 69.

immediacy alone.<sup>226</sup> For example, if one were to begin in mere mediation (any possible relationship or even the nature of relationship as such), then one could show that the mediation of two things has already been presupposed from the start, which means that it could not truly be the first. In other words, the problem with this approach is that it seems to presuppose a relationship of two different possible relata or mere relation as such. Problematically, however, such a presupposition is of a conditional nature, and therefore, could not lead to the discovery of the unconditional truth. On the contrary, if one begins with a mere axiom (of a particular posited principle, for example), then that principle has to be presupposed from the start, and then it seems impossible to explain why we should begin with that principle as opposed to any other – it becomes arbitrary to choose any particular principle and one seems equally justified in arguing for any particular principle as opposed to any other.

### **3.4) How to Return to the Beginning as Such?**

Hegel's question, then, becomes how might he return philosophy to the genuine beginning?<sup>227</sup> This is to say, how might philosophy arrive at the beginning as such (even without presupposing an idea of what constitutes a beginning from the start)? And I argue (in agreement with Dieter Henrich on this point, as we will see) that understanding Hegel's proposed solution to this dilemma is actually crucial to understanding the whole system.<sup>228</sup> A large part of Hegel's response to this dilemma is also bound up with a profound insight: his understanding that the emptiness of the genuine beginning passes before the positing of any particular principle, and

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<sup>226</sup> Ibid., 67.

<sup>227</sup> For a contemporary discussion on the issue of how to interpret Hegel on the "beginning," consider also Adrian Johnston, *A New German Idealism*. As Johnston writes there, "which comes first, the positivity of contingent material facticity or the negativity of a primordial Void?" Adrian Johnston, *A New German Idealism*, xi. Johnston states that he argues in favor of the former and Žižek argues for the latter.

<sup>228</sup> Henrich, *Between Kant and Hegel*, 325.

that for this reason, the genuine ontological beginning actually reveals itself as the *true* beginning.

Indeed, Hegel continues through this discussion by stating that “it lies in the very *nature of a beginning* that it must be being and nothing else. To enter into philosophy, therefore, calls for no other preparations, no further reflections or points of connection.”<sup>229</sup> Since, for Hegel, the form and the content of philosophy are unified (as I discussed previously), he argues therefore that, “the first for thought ought also to be the first in the *process* of thinking.”<sup>230</sup> In many ways, this means that the beginning is not something that we come to secondarily, since it is, on the contrary, already there (although not in the form of a complete or completed notion), and that is why the connection to the PhG is also significant here as well.

Hegel’s solution to the dilemma, then, is that the beginning of philosophy must also be the beginning of thought as such – that which starts thought on its way – the unity of pure knowing (subject) and pure being (substance) in emptiness. In other words, Hegel will attempt to retrieve the beginning of thought itself (in an absolute sense) as that which will ground his entire system of philosophy. As he states:

thus the beginning must be an *absolute*, or what is synonymous here, an *abstract* beginning; and so it *may not presuppose anything*, must not be mediated by anything nor have a ground; rather it is to be itself the ground of the entire science. Consequently, it must be purely and simply *an immediacy*, or rather merely *immediacy* itself...the beginning therefore is *pure being*.<sup>231</sup>

Here, Hegel’s solution, then, to the question of the beginning of philosophy is to be found in the immediacy of pure being. It is only here, in such an absolute beginning, that philosophy could truly begin and repeatedly return. However, Hegel’s thinking on the beginning, both *in* and *as*

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<sup>229</sup> Ibid., 72.

<sup>230</sup> Ibid., 68.

<sup>231</sup> Ibid., 70.

the immediacy of pure being will actually take him on a path that extends across the entire work, since “pure immediacy” is not static on Hegel’s account. Rather, the beginning as immediacy will aid Hegel in his demonstration that a structural tension between immediacy and mediation is actually definitive of life as such, and consequently, of his philosophical and ontological system as well.

Along these lines, due to what will eventually unveil itself as the *circular* nature of the *Logic*, what is shown to be true at the beginning will also be revealed to be true throughout the course of the entire science as well. In other words, the circular nature of the *Logic* entails that the beginning will not merely be present at the beginning and then no longer. Rather, the beginning maintains its truth throughout the entire process: Spirit’s “dying” to itself into the actuality of Substance in fact entails that genuine *sacrifice* highlights the nature of existence.

### **3.5) The Beginning as Both Immediacy and Mediation**

For this reason, Hegel’s further reflections on the beginning reveal an irony: although the beginning must be neither mere immediacy nor mediation considered alone, it is also true that the beginning must in some sense be both immediacy and mediation at the same time. He writes:

pure being is the unity into which pure knowing withdraws...It is when taken in this way that this *pure being*, this absolute immediacy has equally the character of something absolutely mediated. But it is equally essential that it be taken only in the one-sided character in which it is pure immediacy, *precisely because* here it is the beginning.<sup>232</sup>

What Hegel discovers is the following: if pure being is taken as absolute immediacy, then it is also true that it must be pure mediation also, since it is equally true that pure being is then in relation to pure knowing (and therefore, absolute immediacy is equally the mediation of pure being and pure knowing). Hegel seems to be saying here that what makes it possible for pure

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<sup>232</sup> Ibid., 72.

being to exist is that it exists as the sublation of mediation itself. In other words, for pure immediacy to exist at all, pure immediacy must sublimate the purity of pure mediation. Thus, the pure immediacy of pure being is simultaneously both immediate and mediated: the beginning reveals a dialectical tension between identity and difference. That said, the last part of the quote above is also essential. Hegel comments that, at this stage of the *Logic*, he is only considering pure being insofar as its relationship to pure knowing has been sublated, and therefore, he considers it from the viewpoint of its immediacy. Here, Hegel attempts to pause and retrieve a genuine beginning on the order of pure being.

My reflections on the double meaning of the beginning (as both mediated and immediate while also neither mere mediation nor immediacy) lead to the notion of a tetralemma. The majority of my thought in this chapter will be occupied by an attempt to display how this reveals itself. Now that we have the more general idea of the movement at hand, I will begin with my attempt to demonstrate this movement in a more detailed fashion. Later on in this chapter, I will bring in some reflections by contemporary philosophers in an attempt to aid my illustration of the movement in a variety of ways.

### **3.6) My Reconstruction of Hegel's Beginning**

To reiterate, in the section “With What Must the Science Begin?” from the “Doctrine of Being,” Hegel explains that a genuine Science of Logic ought not to presuppose *anything*. For this reason, the *Logic* begins in what he calls “indeterminate immediacy” or “pure being.” He writes:

Now starting from this determination of pure knowledge, all that is needed to ensure that the beginning remains immanent in its scientific development is to consider, or rather, ridding oneself of all other reflections and opinions whatever, simply to take up, *what is there before us*.

Pure knowing as concentrated into this unity has sublated all reference to an other and to mediation; it is without any distinction and as thus distinctionless, ceases itself to be knowledge; what is present is only *simple immediacy*.

Simple immediacy is itself an expression of reflection and contains a reference to its distinction from what is mediated. This simple immediacy, therefore, in its true expression is *pure being*. Just as *pure knowing* is to mean knowing as such, quite abstractly, so too *pure being* is to mean nothing but *being* in general: being, and nothing else, without any further specification and filling.

Here the beginning is made with being which is represented as having come to be through mediation, a mediation which is also a sublating of itself; and there is presupposed pure knowing as the outcome of finite knowing, of consciousness. But if no presupposition is to be made and the beginning itself is taken *immediately*, then its only determination is that it is to be the beginning of logic, of thought as such. All that is present is simply the resolve, which can also be regarded as arbitrary, that we propose to consider thought as such. Thus the beginning must be an absolute, or what is synonymous here, an *abstract beginning*; and so it *may not presuppose anything*, must not be mediated by anything nor have a ground; rather it is to be itself the ground of the entire science. Consequently, it must be purely and simply *an immediacy*, or rather merely *immediacy* itself. Just as it cannot possess any determination relatively to anything else, so too it cannot contain within itself any determination, any content; for any such would be a distinguishing and an interrelationship of distinct moments, and consequently a mediation. The beginning therefore is *pure being*.<sup>233</sup>

According to Hegel's reflections here, the science of logic must begin with "being" considered by itself. Furthermore, he indicates that said being must be empty, since if it were not, then being would be mediated, in the same sense that there would be a specific relationship between a content and a form, for example. Yet, he will eventually find that this apparent absolute immediacy is in fact only possible in the first place since mediation has been sublated. Furthermore, it is particularly interesting to me that here Hegel aims to begin his system of philosophy with the beginning of thought as such – the beginning even beyond the *idea* of a beginning. In order to do so, Hegel explains that the only genuine beginning is to begin with the purity of immediacy itself – in other words, a state of awareness that is not focused on any particular determinate content. I would liken this state to a divine, meditative state, which

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<sup>233</sup> Ibid., 69-70.

observes all thoughts but is not restricted to any particular thought. In other words, Hegel discovers that, if his system is to begin with a genuine beginning, then Spirit must enter into the beginning of all beginnings: the emptiness of emptiness.

Hegel arrives at a number of important discoveries in this passage quoted above. First of all, pure knowing (insofar as it is immediate) exists as immediate only insofar as it exists as the sublation of mediation. In other words, it can be considered in its immediacy but at the same time in a different sense it is only immediate insofar as mediation has been both negated and preserved. In other words, while the positive side of negation is apparent immediacy, the negative side is the lack of the appearance of mediation (even abstract immediacy stands in some relation to mediation upon further consideration). The second interesting discovery, then, follows from the first: that insofar as we may call “simple immediacy” immediate at all, it is equally true that it is mediated: this is why Hegel uses the language here of “an expression of reflection.” For instance, in the part where Hegel writes how, “Simple immediacy is itself an expression of reflection and contains a reference to its distinction from what is mediated,”<sup>234</sup> he provides evidence of how immediacy is only immediate insofar as it is distinct from, but also in relation to, the notion of mediation. In other words, there is already a relation to what it is not insofar as the apparent lack of any mediation is what defines it as immediacy. But, when immediacy pushes the extreme of pure and abstract immediacy, one discovers that it is already related to that from which it is distinguished – mediation. Next, the part of the quote where Hegel comments on “pure being and nothing else” also reveals the dialectical tension between being and nothing. For Hegel to even comment here on “being and nothing else” already reveals a dialectical interplay between being and nothing. Lastly, it is important to reflect further here on what makes possible

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<sup>234</sup> Ibid.

the “abstract beginning” that Hegel is searching for here in the first place. As we will see, in the truly abstract beginning (the only genuine beginning), spirit must negate itself – and wager the genuine possibility of its own non-existence. Or, to put it in another way, identity must sublimate itself in otherness – this is the genuine beginning that Hegel desires for philosophy. In some ways, it seems that Hegel is saying here that when God dies to itself God discovers that it has already overcome death: Spirit has always already been resurrected from the dead. This does not imply completeness, however, since the life of God (via the resurrection and overcoming of death) is constituted by the very movement of Spirit out of the emptiness of emptiness and its continuous return to nothing (it is simultaneous with God placing itself before the possibility of its own genuine death repeatedly).

During Hegel’s entrance into the emptiness of pure being, a number of further insights are unveiled. First of all, pure being, although initially considered in its apparent “immediacy,” actually reveals itself as possible only to the extent that any possible relationship has first been overcome. I will use an example here to illustrate the point.

I believe that Hegel has something like the following in mind (admittedly, in my analogy, I am thinking on the order of a finite thinker, whereas Hegel ultimately demonstrates how this process is shown to be retroactively inscribed within the absolute as such (as we will see Žižek explain later on)). Thus, Hegel thinks that the two domains are fundamentally united – insofar as they are integral correlates of each other<sup>235</sup> – so my analogy serves a useful purpose. To return to the true beginning, one ought not to think any particular thought. This means that one would

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<sup>235</sup>The notion of an “isomorphism” between the human and divine may be helpful here, as Žižek sometimes suggests. For example, Žižek writes this way of Meister Eckhart’s philosophy: “it is God who needs man in order to reach himself, to be born as God.” See Slavoj Žižek, “The Fear of Four Words: A Modest Plea for the Hegelian Reading of Christianity,” in *The Monstrosity of Christ: Paradox or Dialectic?* ed. Creston Davis (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2009), 33 ff.



return to a state of awareness that is beyond any particular thought, yet simultaneously capable of being all possible thoughts. This means that the thinker opens himself up to the possibility of empty observance. In this state, there is an appearance of immediacy or what Hegel would call “pure being.” However, upon deeper observance, one further notices that what actually opens up the possibility for one to exist in this state of immediacy in the first place is the overcoming of thinking any determinate, particular, or otherwise finite thoughts. This is what Hegel calls the “sublation of mediation.” However, the mediation that is sublated here is not merely thoughts insofar as they are related to other thoughts, but rather the relationship between immediacy and mediation as such. In other words, it is the very relationship between difference and identity as such that is sublated – and this opens up the possibility for a deeper nothingness. For this reason, the sublation of the relationship between identity and difference actually entails a fourfold structure, since it is such a sublation that actually allows for the affirmation of identity but also the simultaneous possibility of its negation. In other words, Being is free at bottom. In this way, Hegel shows that it is actually the sublation of mediation that unveils the possibility for the immediacy of pure being in the first place.

Thus, I argue that Hegel’s thinking of the beginning as the pure immediacy of being in fact displays a tetralemma structure. When thinking empties itself out into the empty content (of being) via negation and is considered as abstract immediacy what we find there is that this immediacy is actually enabled by the sublation of mediation (the sublation of the relation between substance and subject allows for the apparent immediacy of substance). For this reason, apparent immediacy in fact displays itself as inherently bound up with its own self-negation (explicated as the negation of negation) and unveils a higher-order identity. In other words, immediacy’s self-negation (the negation of difference) is actually united by a higher-order unity

with the affirmation of identity and for this reason, the proper structure is a fourfold one in which there is an indifference of a higher order when it comes to identity and difference. I argue that this is the proper reading of what Hegel means when he begins the system of Logic in pure immediacy and also why he says that the Being at the beginning is also bound up with Nothingness.

On my reading, then, Being and Nothingness, therefore, stand in a dialectical relationship of a (at minimum) fourfold nature. Immediacy stands at the beginning as the sublation of mediation, since what makes said immediacy possible is actually a constitutive self-repetition that reveals a higher-order indifference between identity and difference (a simultaneous identity and difference).<sup>236</sup> If this is the case, then the actuality of mediation is actually latent within pure immediacy itself. And therefore, pure immediacy is both identity (the identity of immediacy with itself), difference (the difference of immediacy from mediation), and also neither merely immediacy nor mediation. In other words, the beginning as “pure immediacy” is both identity and difference but also the indifference of both. As a consequence, if Hegel thinks that philosophy’s task is bound up with the revelation of absolute truth, then it is very significant here to consider what this would imply, since the only prior truth that could be said to be presupposed when it comes to philosophy (if there could be said to be any presupposition at all) is, in fact, *nothing* – the actuality of nothingness and the subsequent revelation of the indifference of pure being and nothingness which lies at the bottom of life considered as a continuous, dynamical process.<sup>237</sup>

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<sup>236</sup> Some of the secondary literature refers to this as a constitutive “indecision”, or a “coincidence of opposites,” see Joseph Cohen, “Hegel and the Gift of Sacrifice,” *The Journal for Cultural and Religious Theory* 15, no. 1 (2015): 21, see also Adrian Johnston, *A New German Idealism*, xix.

<sup>237</sup> *Ibid.*, 70.

In a passage following shortly after the one quoted above, Hegel discusses this notion of spirit's self-sublation and its importance to understanding the *beginning*. He writes there:

It must be admitted that it is an important consideration—one which will be found in more detail in the logic itself – that the advance is a *retreat into the ground*, to what is *primary* and *true*, on which depends and, in fact, from which originates, that with which the beginning is made. Thus consciousness on its onward path from the immediacy with which it began is led back to absolute knowledge as its innermost *truth*. This last, the ground, is then also that from which the first proceeds, that which at first appeared as an immediacy. This is true in still greater measure of absolute spirit which reveals itself as the concrete and final supreme truth of all being, and which at the *end* of the development is known as freely externalizing itself, abandoning itself to the shape of an *immediate being* – opening or unfolding itself [*sich entschiessend*] into the creation of a world which contains all that fell into the development which preceded that result and which through this reversal of its position relatively to its beginning is transformed into something dependent on the result as principle. The essential requirement for the science of logic is not so much that the beginning be a pure immediacy, but rather that the whole of the science be within itself a circle in which the first is also the last and the last is also the first.<sup>238</sup>

In this passage, Hegel clarifies the fact that “the beginning” of his system is a beginning in a tenuous sense. It is certainly not a beginning in the sense of a pure principle taken by itself. At first, Hegel thinks about the beginning as a beginning that could be considered as a pure immediacy. But when he considers this pure immediacy taken alone, what he comes to find is that the condition for the possibility of this immediacy is in fact the sublation of mediation. This further points to the dialectical movement between immediacy and mediation. The qualification that Hegel makes at the end of this passage is crucial, then, since it is here where Hegel explains that the beginning is actually part of a *circular* process. Here again, it is absolute spirit's own self-emptying which makes possible the “shape of an immediate being” at all. To put it in my own words, when absolute spirit empties itself out into nothingness, what it discovers there is actually simultaneously its self-affirmation. This passage is also part of Hegel's “retroactive”

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<sup>238</sup> Hegel, *Science of Logic*, 71.

logic. When Spirit empties itself out in the final stage, what at first appeared to be simple immediacy is no longer simple immediacy. Rather, Spirit discovers there what had to have been the case via the eyes of emptiness, such that the effect reaches back in time and fundamentally transforms what it sees. As Žižek and Henrich will explain, the negation of negation is simultaneously both an affirmation and a negation. As we will see, Hegel's reflections here point us to his three-part movement that leads from the Doctrine of Being to the Doctrine of Essence to the Doctrine of the Notion.

In Hegel's view of the circular nature of the beginning, then, the beginning is not merely present in the beginning and then no longer. Rather, he notes how in his system, the beginning retains its presence throughout the development of further philosophical reflection. As he writes, "thus the beginning of philosophy is the foundation which is present and preserved throughout the entire subsequent development, remaining completely immanent in its further determinations."<sup>239</sup> In the way that I interpret this quote, I understand it to mean that Absolute Spirit's self-emptying is both the culmination as well as the beginning of the process. When absolute spirit empties itself out, it in fact finds itself in emptiness, and yet it also discovers itself anew. This process is simultaneously a resurrection and a rebirth, although according to Hegel, the process is not predicated upon a completely totalizing resurrection. On the contrary, there is always something old, simultaneous with something new.

The key part from the quote above for our current purposes is when Hegel notes how Spirit demonstrates absolute knowledge when it is divested as the immediacy of pure being. To reiterate, he states there:

This is true in still greater measure of absolute spirit which reveals itself as the concrete and final supreme truth of all being, and which at the *end* of the development is known as freely externalizing itself, abandoning itself to the shape of an *immediate being* – opening

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<sup>239</sup> Hegel, *Science of Logic*, 71.

or unfolding itself [*sich entschliessend*] into the creation of a world which contains all that fell into the development which preceded that result and which through this reversal of its position relatively to its beginning is transformed into something dependent on the result as principle...<sup>240</sup>

Hegel suggests here that when Spirit is divested, it is as something positive – Substance! This developmental structure is not presupposed from the start. However, there is a sort of reconciliation of Spirit that ultimately reveals itself to be true, and indeed, continuously so. Even so, this reconciliation is not a complete one – Spirit *need not completely* recover itself from out of the abyss in order for Hegel to be consistent here. This is because Hegel is making a different claim altogether. He is instead asserting that it is the very tension between the possibility of Spirit’s annihilation and affirmation that defines its identity.<sup>241</sup> In other words, the tension between identity and difference is internal and constitutive of Spirit such that in the process of its own self-reconciliation a tension is revealed between identity and difference: Spirit unveils itself as beyond a complete reconciliation merely on the order of a static identity. This is why Hegel uses the analogy of a circle here – no matter where on the circle one takes as the beginning, Spirit’s self-emptying ultimately reveals the circular structure insofar as it implies a continuous reversal back to an empty beginning and a subsequent development from there. In other words, the reason that the circular nature is so important to Hegel (even more important than the pure immediacy) is that through the course of Spirit’s self-emptying it reveals an internal tension between identity and difference.

Along these lines, Hegel continues on to describe why the *Logic* begins with the immediacy of pure being and how this beginning makes itself known throughout the course of the *Logic*. He writes:

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<sup>240</sup> Ibid.

<sup>241</sup> Joseph Cohen, “Hegel and the Gift of Sacrifice,” *The Journal for Cultural and Religious Theory* 15, no. 1 (2015): 18-19.

Through this progress, then, the beginning loses the one-sidedness which attaches to it as something simply immediate and abstract; it becomes something mediated, and hence the line of the scientific advance becomes a *circle*. It also follows that because that which forms the beginning is still undeveloped, devoid of content, it is not truly known in the beginning; it is the science of logic in its whole compass which first constitutes the completed knowledge of it with its developed content and first truly grounds that knowledge.<sup>242</sup>

Of primary interest to me here is the way in which Hegel discusses the beginning as not known in the beginning as what it is, since, in the beginning, it is only considered as the immediacy of pure being. Yet, throughout the course of the logic, the beginning reveals itself as a necessary beginning, since there would be no better place for philosophy to begin other than in the immediacy of pure being without any presuppositions. In other words, Hegel does not presuppose pure being as a principle. Rather, Spirit continuously sacrifices itself, emptying itself out into a profound nothingness, and in doing so, genuine Spirit is revealed: this is the truth that the Logic unveils.

Hegel contends that as Spirit undergoes this journey, what is revealed is that pure Being is, in fact, always already mediated. Thus, to consider anything from the standpoint of pure immediacy is also to consider it as mediated. As Hegel explains, “It is when taken in this way that this *pure being*, this absolute immediacy has equally the character of something absolutely mediated.”<sup>243</sup>

As we will see later on, Žižek also discusses this when he notes how the “immediacy of mediation” is simultaneously the “mediated nature of... immediacy.”<sup>244</sup>

Hegel does not merely presuppose “pure being” in the sense that anything could be *presupposed* as a beginning. This is to say that the beginning of the *Logic* as pure being is not an

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<sup>242</sup> Hegel, *Science of Logic*, 71.

<sup>243</sup> *Ibid.*, 72.

<sup>244</sup> “it is not enough to assert the mediated nature of every immediacy – we have to add the immediacy of mediation itself, as Hegel does it, for example, apropos the pure Self...” See Slavoj Žižek, “In Defense of Hegel’s Madness,” *Filozofija i društvo* 26, no. 4 (2015): 786, doi: 10.2298/FID1504785Z

external presupposition. On the contrary, it is a beginning that becomes more and more apparent as “always already” there during the course of the overall movement. This is why Hegel writes:

It also follows that because that which forms the beginning is still undeveloped, devoid of content, it is not truly known in the beginning; it is the science of logic in its whole compass which first constitutes the completed knowledge of it with its developed content and first truly grounds that knowledge...<sup>245</sup>

Interestingly enough, during this process, the beginning that necessarily must have been there at the start as “immediate” simultaneously reveals itself as mediated (since it is the sublation of mediation which makes said immediacy possible). In the way that I understand it, then, Hegel seems to indicate that the emptiness of emptiness is the form of all forms – in the sense that it is both emptiness (without form), and yet, simultaneously all possible forms. Naturally, here the question arises – to what extent could Spirit *know* pure emptiness? Indeed, to what extent is it possible to *know* pure emptiness at all? Hegel’s point here is that knowledge of pure emptiness is internal to, and constitutive of *experience* as such. As Hegel puts it, “pure being is the unity into which pure knowing withdraws, or, if this itself is still to be distinguished as form from its unity, then being is also the content of pure knowing.”<sup>246</sup> In other words, in emptiness, pure being and pure knowing are united (there is a coincidence of substance and subject). In Spirit’s surrender of itself, there is a unity of pure being and knowing, since consciousness dissolves itself into the emptiness of pure being. Yet in order for this to be possible, pure knowing must sacrifice itself. In the beginning of philosophy, pure knowing sacrifices itself to the emptiness of pure being, and in this emptiness there is an affirmation of its identity with being.

The structure of Hegel’s text (in rough outline) is the movement from the Doctrine of Being to the Doctrine of Essence and finally, to the Doctrine of the Notion. However, if what we

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<sup>245</sup> Hegel, *Science of Logic*, 72.

<sup>246</sup> *Ibid.*

have stated beforehand (about the fact that mediation must be sublated in order to allow for apparent immediacy) is true, then it is also the case that, in many ways, what apparently comes later must actually precede the apparent first.<sup>247</sup> I will attempt my reconstruction of the overall structural movement in rough outline with some help from Dieter Henrich's chapter, "The Logic of Negation."<sup>248</sup>

Let us say for starters that the *Logic* begins at first with the Doctrine of Being (Negation understood as pure immediacy). Then what reveals itself next in the process is that this pure immediacy of Being (which is negation understood as the lack of all properties and simultaneously the possibility of all properties) must also be self-identity, since the only thing that negation could possibly negate here is negation itself. Yet, what appears to be a subsequent negation here in this process must have actually been there already (since it is the self-sublation of mediation which made apparent immediacy possible in the first place). As Dieter Henrich puts it: "we are led unavoidably to the conclusion that the state that is opposed to negation is *with* the state to which it is opposed in the relationship of self-reference."<sup>249</sup> Finally, chronologically speaking, the Doctrine of the Notion comes next. However, it, too, reveals itself as ontologically prior to the Doctrine of the Essence. In the Doctrine of the Notion, Hegel presents a more developed understanding of the relation between the two prior moments of the movement in their instability and stability, respectively.<sup>250</sup>

Following that brief structural outline, let us return once more to our reflections on the *beginning* according to Hegel. Hegel notes how the beginning is not anything tangible or

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<sup>247</sup> Henrich, *Between Kant and Hegel*, 322.

<sup>248</sup> See Dieter Henrich, "The Logic of Negation and Its Application," in *Between Kant and Hegel: Lectures on German Idealism*, ed. David S. Pacini, 316-332 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003).

<sup>249</sup> Henrich, *Between Kant and Hegel*, 319.

<sup>250</sup> *Ibid.*, 325.



concrete in the sense that one could state it as an external presupposition that would allow for our reflections to subsequently begin. Indeed, throughout Hegel's various texts he often refers to the beginning in terms of a "divestment" (*Entäußerung*) (as I explained in Ch. 2 of this dissertation) or "emptiness." In recent Hegel scholarship, contemporary philosophers have written on the topic of connecting this notion of *beginning* to the notion of kenotic sacrifice and emptying oneself.<sup>251</sup> So, when Hegel argues that the beginning is not anything concrete in terms of an external presupposition, I would similarly argue that understanding the etymological connection of the word Hegel uses to the notion of sacrifice is also crucial to understanding what Hegel means to say about the beginning of the *Logic* in the emptiness of Being.

### 3.7) The Sacrifice of the Absolute

The notion of *sacrifice* is crucial to understanding the beginning, since, as we will see, to give oneself away is simultaneously to find oneself.<sup>252</sup> In the spirit of the 13<sup>th</sup> century German mystic Meister Eckhart, and just as Molly Farneth points out in her essay, "The Power to Empty Oneself," many Christians often espouse the view that one ought to be a humble servant in faith, allowing "the same mind to be in you that was in Christ Jesus."<sup>253</sup> Yet to allow the Christ mind to live in you is to empty oneself of one's particular, or otherwise finite, determinate identity. Could it be that what Hegel had in mind for the beginning of the *Logic* was a sacrifice akin to this (albeit on the order of the absolute)? What arises here in emptiness (I will also argue this point in connection with Schelling in the next chapter) is actually the holiness of God – the sacrifice of God from out of its own emptiness that is simultaneous with divine Love. Moreover,

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<sup>251</sup> See Molly Farneth, " 'The Power to Empty Oneself': Hegel, Kenosis, and Intellectual Virtue," *Political Theology* 18, no. 2 (2017):158, doi: <https://doi.org/10.1080/1462317X.2016.1224050>.

<sup>252</sup> Joseph Cohen, "Hegel and the Gift of Sacrifice," 19.

<sup>253</sup> *Ibid.*, 159.

the sacrifice that stands at the beginning of philosophy must be given as an absolute one – it must be the sacrifice that God makes from out of itself at the very beginning. In this sacrifice, the infinite discovers itself in its own difference: as the “subject” dies to itself, an irrevocable tension is revealed that is constitutive of philosophy as such – the tension between existence and non-existence.

In his essay, “Hegel and the Gift of Sacrifice,” Joseph Cohen comments on the importance of *sacrifice* to Hegel’s *Logic* and the *PhG*. He writes there:

This is why Hegel warns, in our opening quote, that the force of Spirit is not to ‘close its eyes to the negative,’ but only by the long and sustained gaze in the face of nothingness transform, transpose, alter and transfer it, ultimately negate it and thus relieve it into its own end which is its own truth, testifying thus that the ‘negative’ reflects that it was already and always a name, amongst others, of the ‘infinite life’ of Spirit. This point needs here to be marked as it clearly demonstrates the inherent necessity in Hegel’s speculative dialectic to think the essential movement of a negation which retains and re-appropriates the truth of that which it negates. And such is the speculative definition of sacrifice: to retain whilst negating, to keep the actuality of that which is abandoned, to preserve the essence of that which is annihilated. The question, for Hegel, is what is being retained here whilst at the same time being dispensed? <sup>254</sup>

In the spirit of Cohen’s reflections here, what might this imply when it comes to the beginning of philosophy for Hegel? The connection that I would like to make here is to the beginning of the *Logic* in the pure immediacy of Being. In Spirit’s self-sacrifice, one discovers that, for Hegel, the apparent pure immediacy of Being actually reveals that what makes apparent immediacy possible is in fact the suspension of mediation (likewise, the subject’s development out of substance demonstrates that substance was always already subject in some sense).<sup>255</sup> In other words, Hegel’s attempt to think Nothingness actually reveals a phenomenological and structural

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<sup>254</sup> Joseph Cohen, “Hegel and the Gift of Sacrifice,” 18.

<sup>255</sup> Johnston explains how, according to Hegel, Kant’s transcendental unity of apperception takes on the role of a unity of subject and substance (it is that which becomes subject out of objectivity, thereby displaying a “structural isomorphism” between subject and substance.) See Adrian Johnston, “Where to Start?: Robert Pippin, Slavoj Žižek, and the True Beginning(s) of Hegel’s System,” *Crisis and Critique*, “Critique Today” [ed. Agon Hamza and Frank Ruda], 1, no. 3 (2014): 385-6.

tension between identity and difference that is constitutive of the *Logic* as such and therefore, of ontology in a more general sense. Indeed, such a tension informs the structure of the work on the whole and the transition from the Doctrine of Being to the Doctrine of Essence and the Doctrine of the Notion.

Significantly, Cohen and Henrich both note how there is a double meaning of the negation of Spirit here. If Spirit negates itself in the beginning, it is equally true that this is what defines Spirit as genuinely alive – this self-negating aspect is never completely total, but rather propels Spirit forward and produces its living nature. In other words, the courage of Spirit in the face of its own non-existence and the possibility of its negation are actually what constitute life.

As Cohen states:

what must retain attention however, as we have just noted, is the sovereignty of the auto-protection of meaning deployed through Spirit's incessant sacrifice. As if Spirit's incessant sacrifice always sought to protect Spirit from its own negation. As if what protects Spirit from itself is always the sacrificial process of its negation.<sup>256</sup>

Interestingly enough, the point here is that there is a paradox when it comes to the beginning of philosophy in and as negation: by subjecting itself to absolute negation, Spirit simultaneously preserves itself. Hegel's point is that in Spirit's movement of development from out of substance, spirit simultaneously preserves itself as subject.

For this reason, on Cohen's account, the purpose of Hegel's move at the beginning of the *Logic* is actually also to demonstrate the tension between a one-sided negation (on the order of self-elimination and one-sided infinitude) versus a self-determining negation (affirmation and finite determination). Due to this aporetic tension, there is also a dimension of holiness present here as well (a holiness that Schelling even more explicitly comments on, as we will see in the next chapter).

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<sup>256</sup> Cohen, "Hegel and the Gift of Sacrifice," 19.

Hegel's point (in agreement with Schelling) is that the genuine absolute does not stand at a distance from the world of experience.<sup>257</sup> Rather, it is God's self-vanishing movement that displays the sacredness of the genuine Absolute – the transcendent is, paradoxically, simultaneously both in being and beyond being. God's self-movement in Nothingness – the passage across the possibility of its own non-existence – is actually what continually establishes the genuine actuality of the Absolute from out of the abyss of freedom.<sup>258</sup> As Angelica Nuzzo writes, "It is only once the radical 'sacrifice' of thinking is performed that dialectic can begin."<sup>259</sup> As God sacrifices itself absolutely, in pure emptiness it discovers that its own self-movement is the very moment that constitutes itself as God (the expression of Spirit as the Absolute Idea). Here, Hegel thinks both elimination and affirmation simultaneously. Indeed, the whole movement is an aporetic one, as Joseph Cohen points out. As Cohen writes:

Such is the *risk* opened by Hegel: that of a 'double blind' so powerfully *aporetic* that it risks of projecting speculative dialectic towards an impossible decision between sacrificing itself or recognizing itself as sacrifice. But such is perhaps also its *gift*: that of an *undecidable* risk, a radical indecision between a sacrifice *without* sacrifice, a sacrifice that would consume itself by voiding, incinerating, destroying Spirit itself, its sacrifice its violence AND a sacrifice which operates always in the name of Spirit, which assumes, recognizes, acquiesces itself as a sacrifice.<sup>260</sup>

Cohen views this tension (between an absolute sacrifice that would void oneself and a self-affirming sacrifice) as constitutive of Spirit. To put it briefly, it is precisely the experience of its self-sacrificial nature that constitutes its identity. For this reason, the aporetic tension is preserved during the process of the Absolute coming to know itself. Furthermore, since Hegel

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<sup>257</sup> Adrian Johnston, *Adventures in Transcendental Materialism*, 33-34. See also Markus Gabriel, *Transcendental Ontology*, 2. See also Markus Gabriel, "The Dialectic of the Absolute: Hegel's Critique of Transcendent Metaphysics," in *The Dimensions of Hegel's Dialectic*, ed. Nectarios G. Limnatis (New York: Continuum, 2010), 87.

<sup>258</sup> For more on the immanent movement of the nothingness at the beginning of Hegel's system, see Angelica Nuzzo, "Dialectic, Understanding, and Reason," 18-27.

<sup>259</sup> *Ibid.*, 25.

<sup>260</sup> Cohen, "Hegel and the Gift of Sacrifice," 21.

does not posit a strict divide between form and content when it comes to the Absolute, the Absolute's subjection to negativity is actually one with its experiential passage through non-existence. Indeed, the passage through non-existence is actually what constitutes experience. For this reason, it is this passage that opens up the genuine beginning of philosophy.

Therefore, the notion of sacrifice is crucial to understanding Hegel's Logic at its core, since it stands at the beginning of the entire movement. Hegel does not merely presuppose an internal relation at the start – on the contrary, the Absolute subjects itself to the internal possibility of its own non-existence. In other words, something akin to God's contemplation of its own impossibility or possibility (taken together) is what grounds the possibility of the Logic in the first place. Absolute Spirit must die to itself in order that form and content can reveal themselves as internally united (Substance without Subject is simultaneously Substance as Subject, as Žižek would have it).<sup>261</sup>

This movement is precisely why Hegel explains that the *Logic* must begin in the emptiness of pure being. Indeed, if Hegel conceived of his project as the revelation of unconditional truth,<sup>262</sup> it is a truth that must *become* through a process of its own self-differentiation out of an original emptiness (an emptiness prior to the logical space that makes possible a determinate nothing – nothing conceived as a lack of something). This is to say that philosophy arises from out of its internal *Ungrund* (a groundless ground) akin to its own unconscious.<sup>263</sup> As Hegel writes,

The foregoing shows quite clearly the reason why the beginning cannot be made with anything concrete, anything containing a relation *within itself*. For such presupposes an

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<sup>261</sup> Slavoj Žižek, "Hegel and Shitting: The Idea's Constipation," in *Hegel and the Infinite: Religion, Politics and Dialectic*, eds. Slavoj Žižek, Clayton Crockett, and Creston Davis (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011), 231.

<sup>262</sup> Sebastian Stein, "Absolute Idealism: Hegel," 84.

<sup>263</sup> Jon Mills, *The Unconscious Abyss: Hegel's Anticipation of Psychoanalysis* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2002), 21-22.

internal process of mediation and transition of which the concrete, now become simple, would be the result. But the beginning ought not itself to be already a first *and* an other; for anything which is in its own self a first *and* an other implies that an advance has already been made. Consequently, that which constitutes the beginning, the beginning itself, is to be taken as something unanalyzable, taken in its simple, unfilled immediacy, and therefore *as being*, as the completely empty being.<sup>264</sup>

On Hegel's account, the beginning of philosophy, therefore, must be *aporetic*.<sup>265</sup> It is not merely a beginning on the order of immediacy nor mediation but rather, as I have argued – it is prior to the discursive space in which we could properly name it as one or the other. In other words, empty being is being that is beyond being (in the sense that it is not merely defined by its opposition to nothing). Indeed, empty being is that which enables the dialectic between being and non-being to arise in the first place (paradoxically, empty being holds open the dialectical tension between being and non-being, while simultaneously unifying them).

Indeed, there is further evidence for this reading a few pages later (here we are still in the “Doctrine of Being”), when Hegel describes the beginning as one that is prior to mediation. He writes there:

...for only in what is simple is there nothing more than the pure beginning; only the immediate is simple, for only in the immediate has no advance yet been made from a *one* to an *other*. Consequently, whatever is intended to be expressed or implied beyond *being*, in the richer forms of representing the absolute or God, this is in the beginning only an empty word and only being; this simple determination which has no other meaning of any kind, this emptiness, is therefore simply as such the beginning of philosophy.<sup>266</sup>

If the beginning that Hegel has in mind here is *prior* to mediation, then how could one call it either being or non-being considered alone? In other words, empty being *seems* (at this stage) to be in some sense ontologically prior to the mediation that enables one to name it as either being

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<sup>264</sup> Hegel, *Science of Logic*, 75.

<sup>265</sup> Cohen, “Hegel and the Gift of Sacrifice,” 21.

<sup>266</sup> Hegel, *Science of Logic*, 78.

or non-being.<sup>267</sup> On Hegel's account, this emptiness of Spirit is that of pure substance: conceived in its truly circular nature, it is both the death as well as the birth of Spirit. It is the place wherein Spirit is most properly nourished and its true home. This is why Hegel claims that in this emptiness, what is revealed is the self-reference of Spirit. When Spirit empties itself out, it actually discovers itself in this purity: emptiness reveals its self-referential nature. The logical structure of the Subject as such is the dialectic that is born from out of the emptiness beyond emptiness. After the fact, we can say that the vanishing itself forges a dialectical process: it opens up the gap between non-being and being while simultaneously serving as the bridge between the two. When Hegel says that this pure being lacks content, he means to say that it is beyond the speculative dialectic that would enable one to make a determinate judgment about it. Dieter Henrich, as we will see, explains that Hegel means to say that the beginning is pure negativity (but from the other side of things, one could just as equally call it pure positivity). The beginning is emptiness in the sense that it is considered prior to mediation as such – i.e. pure being is both pure positivity and pure negativity, but also neither merely one nor the other. In other words, here Hegel could use any term to represent the lack of determinate content – some of his choices are “emptiness”, “simple”, “indeterminate immediacy”, “pure being”, etc.

### **3.8) The Beginning of Philosophy in *Aporia*<sup>268</sup>**

Thus, although one might initially think that what Hegel means by “indeterminate immediacy” is emptiness in the sense of the mere lack of any properties (the presence of absence, i.e. determinate negation) upon further reflection, Hegel means something deeper, and I hope to show that both Henrich and Nuzzo agree on their interpretation of Hegel here. In what

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<sup>267</sup> Later on, Hegel will show how, after the fact, this apparent immediacy contains mediation latent within it.

<sup>268</sup> Cohen, “Hegel and the Gift of Sacrifice,” 21.

follows, I provide more argumentation in favor of my reading (with additional support from Slavoj Žižek, Dieter Henrich, Angelica Nuzzo, Joseph Cohen, and Markus Gabriel) that the beginning of the movement in fact implies a fourfold structure (i.e. the beginning is of an “aporetic”<sup>269</sup> nature), and negation here is eventually understood as part of a dynamical process that constitutes the logical structure of *becoming* – i.e., philosophy’s own development from out of the abyss of freedom.

### 3.9) The Word That is “Nothing” Twice

My first source of support for my reading is Dieter Henrich’s interpretation of the beginning of the Logic.<sup>270</sup> Henrich provides his account of the beginning of the Logic in Ch. 21 (“The Logic of Negation and Its Application”) from his book, *Between Kant and Hegel*. Here, Henrich explains the outline of the movement of the Logic including the beginning in negation. There, he comments on the origin of the Logic in negation. He writes:

Let us take our beginnings with negation alone. In this sense, negation is isolated, and so *autonomous* negation. Starting only with negation means having *nothing but negation*. Now in order to have nothing but negation, we need negation more than once. For, in Hegel’s view, negation is *relational* in the sense that there must be something it negates. But inasmuch as there is nothing that negation could possibly negate – owing to the assumption that we have *only* negation – negation can only negate *itself*. Accordingly, *autonomous* negation can only be a negation *of negation*. This means that autonomous negation is originally self-referential: in order to have only negation, we have to have negation twice.<sup>271</sup>

Here, I would add that negation only reveals itself as *relational* after the fact (since Hegel himself even says that it is immediate in the first place and only subsequently reveals the fact

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<sup>269</sup> Ibid.

<sup>270</sup> According to Adrian Johnston, Hegel scholars are generally divided into three camps when it comes to how to interpret the beginning of Hegel’s Logic as fundamentally grounded in either the Doctrine of Being (Stephen Houlgate), the Doctrine of Essence (Dieter Henrich) or the Doctrine of the Notion (Robert Pippin). Johnston places Žižek in the first camp with an additional clarification. See Johnston, “Where to Start,” 373-4.

<sup>271</sup> Henrich, “The Logic of Negation,” 317.



that said immediacy is made possible by the sublation of mediation). In any event, the main point of Henrich's interpretation here is that in the beginning there is only negation. And from this, one comes to the insight that negation's self-elimination is simultaneously that which grants its self-preservation (i.e. being). In other words, negation's self-denial in some sense serves as what establishes and grounds Spirit (significantly, however, as itself ungrounded). As Henrich continues:

We come now to a typical Hegelian step: to have negation as *self*-referring means to have even *more* than what we have so far said. Thus far, we have said that negation is relational. The relation of negation to itself, therefore, is not a stable, static, logical state. It becomes dynamical to negate negation, which means to arrive at the logical state of having no negation at all. This amounts to saying that the negation of negation is *not* having negation. So understood, autonomous negation apparently eliminates itself at the outset.

We are led unavoidably to the conclusion that the state that is opposed to negation is *with* the state to which it is opposed in the relationship of self-reference. Therefore, we are back at the very beginning. The outcome of the self-elimination of negation is the self-reference of negation.<sup>272</sup>

This portion of text is crucial to my argument, since it is one place where we see the incompleteness of the movement most clearly. The very beginning of the overall movement is negation's elimination of itself. But if negation's self-elimination is that which grants the identity of Spirit, then there is certainly not a completeness of reason (in the sense of a self-reflexive totality) to the system at all. This is because the self-erasure of negation (as that which opens up the possibility of dialectical thinking in the first place) cannot be thought in terms of determinate concepts. I agree with Henrich that the key to understanding Hegel's overall system is to understand the beginning in terms of negation.<sup>273</sup> However, I furthermore emphasize how the beginning demonstrates the inherent incompleteness of Hegel's system.

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<sup>272</sup> Ibid., 318-9.

<sup>273</sup> Ibid., 317.

Henrich analyzes the overall movement as a movement that begins in abstract negativity. As Henrich points out, the interpretation of Hegel's beginning has long been a topic for debate, even during Hegel's own time. As Henrich explains in his essay, "Beginning and Method of (The) Logic," even during Hegel's lifetime, Hegel's followers did not often debate over interpretations about every particular detail about the entire movement of every particular "thought-determination [*Gedankenbestimmung*]" of the Logic, for, to do so would be a truly massive task and, furthermore, a task in which one could too easily lose sight of the movement of the work from a broader perspective. For this reason, contemporary followers of Hegel most often focused on the larger scale movements of the work on the whole. In this discussion, it was often either the "logic of the determinations of reflection" or the *beginning* of the movement as such which most often presented themselves as causes for contention.<sup>274</sup> Henrich writes about how the beginning of the movement of the whole often stood out as a cause for debate:

the only exception on this uneven balance sheet is the debate over the beginning of the *Science of Logic* and the development of its first three categories. Within Hegel's own lifetime, his followers [*Schüler*] came into a dispute with his opponents [*Gegnern*] over the question of the meaning of the strange formulation [*Sinn der befremdlichen Rede*] that being [*Sein*], as indeterminate immediacy [*unbestimmte Unmittelbarkeit*], must equally be thought of as nothing [*Nichts*], and that both, insofar as each vanishes into its opposite [*jeweils in ihrem Gegenteil verschwinden*], have their truth in the thought of becoming [*Werden*].<sup>275</sup>

For our present purposes, what is important about this quote is that the beginning of the Logic was often a cause of contention even for Hegel's contemporaries.

In his book, *Between Kant and Hegel*, Henrich notes how one can think of the movement along the lines of a movement that begins with negation by itself, since absolute immediacy at first appears to lack any positive content (Hegel himself often refers to it as "empty being.")

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<sup>274</sup> Dieter Henrich, "Beginning and Method of (the) Logic," trans. Ben Hjorth and Alexander Kern, *Journal of the Circle for Lacanian Ideology Critique* 10 & 11 (2017-2018): 31.

<sup>275</sup> *Ibid.*

Henrich's point is that, if Hegel hopes to show how the movement begins with negation as such (the lack of any positive content), then this immediacy simultaneously reveals itself as self-affirming but also different from itself. Henrich further notes how Hegel's intention behind the entire project is to think both identity and difference simultaneously:

The secret intention of the Logic of the Notion is to relate self-reference (as one structure) to otherness (as another structure) so that we may assert their mutual dependence, while simultaneously preserving their distinctive features.<sup>276</sup>

In other words, Hegel hopes to show how the logical structure of his system (the structure of metaphysics) at its core (as demonstrated by the Notion) is such that it displays a movement between self-identity and difference. Although I agree with the *essence* of Henrich's interpretation of Hegel's overall purpose, I highlight an important consequence regarding the nature of the movement: in order for Spirit to be the original negation simultaneously means that Spirit never fully recovers itself. This leads me further into a discussion of Angelica Nuzzo's interpretation regarding the nature of Hegel's beginning.

### **3.10) The Beginning as a Movement of Nothingness: Some Interpretations**

Angelica Nuzzo's interpretation is that the first moment (at the beginning) of Hegel's dialectical idealism is actually "un-dialectical." Nuzzo explains that the beginning is most properly speaking "un-dialectical," since the empty beginning is prior to a dialectical notion of nothing as a determinate nothing (it is not nothing on the order of a concept). Additionally, on her interpretation, Hegel here writes of an objective notion of the "understandable" (*das Verständige*) – not a subjective mental capacity. At the beginning, objective "understanding" (*das Verständige*) and objective "reason" (*das Vernünftige*) are together.<sup>277</sup> In other words, the

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<sup>276</sup> Henrich, "The Logic of Negation," 322.

<sup>277</sup> Angelica Nuzzo, "Dialectic, Understanding, and Reason," 13.

empty beginning is prior even to dialectics as such and likewise prior to discursive reason. I consider Nuzzo's reading to be aligned with the notion of a fourfold structure insofar as she agrees that "the understanding raises *against reason* and yet also *with reason*."<sup>278</sup> However, for this reason I would argue that if one is to call the beginning "undialectical," one could just as equally call it a dialectical beginning as well.<sup>279</sup>

In any case, in her chapter, "Dialectic, Understanding, and Reason: How does Hegel's *Logic* Begin?", Nuzzo writes:

Instead of bringing to the fore the *dialectical* movement that opens the *Logic* and leads on to its first determination (the common task of all interpretations of this passage), I point to the radically *un-dialectical* moment present at the beginning—namely, to the claim that the understanding raises *against reason* and yet also *with reason*.<sup>280</sup>

Nuzzo's insight here is to point to the fact that what begins dialectics is actually not dialectical at all: it is rather the emptiness of emptiness from out of which the dialectic later unfolds. Nuzzo continues:

Yet, at the beginning of the *Logic* it is *nothingness itself* (not our thinking of it) that moves in the sheer absence of thinking. For here thinking is itself the same as nothing. The movement of nothing is an *immanent* movement...<sup>281</sup>

Here, it is important to note how Nuzzo makes the same conceptual move that Žižek and Gabriel both make in their interpretation of Hegel insofar as it is a nothingness on the order of substance that Nuzzo perceives at the beginning of the entire movement. Nuzzo's interpretation of the beginning is also consistent with Žižek and Gabriel's understanding of the fact that Hegel's ontology is inherently incomplete. Nuzzo, Žižek and Gabriel all seem to agree that it is the movement of substance itself that results in the dialectical process. Later on, we will see how

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<sup>278</sup> Ibid.

<sup>279</sup> I will sometimes use "(un)dialectical" to convey this point. It is both and neither, etc.

<sup>280</sup> Ibid.

<sup>281</sup> Ibid., 18.

Gabriel and Žižek describe the movement in particular. But the basic idea is that Hegel differs from Kant insofar as, according to Hegel, the *an sich* (in itself) does not stand at a remove from a knowing subject due to the subject's limitations, but rather reality itself is inherently incomplete. For example, as Nuzzo states: "I show, first, how Hegel transforms 'understanding' and 'reason' from subjective mental 'faculties' to formal 'moments' of 'objective thinking' to internal functions responsible for the deployment of the logical dynamism."<sup>282</sup> Thus, Nuzzo's clarification here is that the beginning of the Logic is not the thought of nothing (thought on the order of a determinate concept); rather, it is beyond that – it is thought's participation in nothingness as such. This interpretation is also plausible if we consider that Hegel had something like a unity of subject and object in mind, here. When we participate in this state as philosophers, we participate in the process by which the Absolute Idea instantiates itself in time via finite thinkers – in other words, the Absolute Idea comes to know itself via philosophy.

Nuzzo claims that it is a common misunderstanding to think that Hegel's *Logic* begins with "Being." While this is a plausible reading (since Hegel *seems* to make this claim) Nuzzo cautions us to pay close attention to how we read Hegel's usage of the term "Being" (*Sein*) at the beginning. As Nuzzo writes,

my starting point is the immanent movement of pure being-nothing or of being-nothing as a pure movement occurring in the absence of and (logically) before all thinking.<sup>283</sup>

On Nuzzo's reading, Hegel's Logic cannot begin with Being (if being is conceived as the *thought* of being), since the beginning of the Logic is actually prior to all thought. Nuzzo contends that her reading is consistent with Hegel's tripartite structure of the Logic, Philosophy of Nature, and the Philosophy of Spirit, since "At the end of the *Logic*, the thinking for which

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<sup>282</sup> Ibid., 12.

<sup>283</sup> Ibid., 18.

being-nothing becomes a problem is the ‘subject’ of Hegel’s philosophy of spirit.”<sup>284</sup> In other words, the logical structure of the Logic is later instantiated by finite thinking subjects in the Philosophy of Spirit and, in doing so, these subjects represent the coming to be of the Absolute in time.

Nuzzo further clarifies her position and argues her case regarding why she considers the beginning of the Logic as “un-dialectical.” She writes:

I argue that the movement of nothing with which Hegel’s dialectic begins is in itself a non-dialectical movement – it is a position that fully represents *das Verständige*, that it must be non-dialectical in order for dialectical thinking to begin (to begin absolutely or ‘out of nothing’, so to speak)...<sup>285</sup>

#### **With what *must* the science begin?**

After a discussion of the relationship between the *Logic* and the *Phenomenology* aimed at assessing the peculiar ‘element’ of the logical science... when we reach the beginning of the Objective Logic the issue seems finally settled on ‘being’ (pure and immediate). But in fact it is not.

#### **How *does* Hegel’s Logic in fact begin?**

This is a different question “*Sein, reines Sein.*” What are we being told here? *Nichts* is Hegel’s answer in spelling out—in a sort of in-the-margins comment—what *Sein* is. For ‘*Sein, reines Sein*’ is neither properly a saying nor truly Being. The beginning is not with being as Hegel promised in the introduction, but with nothing. Truly, however, it is also not with nothing, at least not with the *nihil* that we know from a long-standing tradition; and not with the *Nichts* that Kant analyzes in the ‘Table of Nothing’ appended to the Analytic of the first *Critique*.<sup>286</sup>

On Nuzzo’s understanding, the beginning is not with “Being.” Rather, the beginning is with the non-dialectical movement of nothingness itself that opens up the possibility for the dialectic to begin in the first place.<sup>287</sup> When Hegel writes “*Sein, reines Sein*” in the German (or “Being, pure Being” in English), we are actually to read that as what I have been referring to as the “emptiness

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<sup>284</sup> Ibid.

<sup>285</sup> Ibid.

<sup>286</sup> Ibid., 19.

<sup>287</sup> On my understanding, this implies that the beginning is both undialectical and dialectical, but also neither one nor the other considered alone.

of emptiness.” It is being beyond being (in other words, being-nothing). Nuzzo refers to this nothing as “the purely logical movement of the beginning.”<sup>288</sup> Significantly, and in agreement with my reading, Nuzzo claims that this movement is ontologically prior to both being and nothing when they are considered on the order of dialectic.

Nuzzo’s explication of the beginning is that it is a “vanishing” that discursive reason is too late to fully capture. She writes: “There is nothing that vanishes but only pure vanishing.”<sup>289</sup> Furthermore, Nuzzo continues, “Hegel’s *Logic* begins with the *movement* of nothing – neither with being nor with nothing as *ens*. Such movement is non-dialectical, and precisely *because* it is non-dialectical it is the beginning of dialectic proper – *Werden*.”<sup>290</sup> It seems to me that Nuzzo is committed to a non-dialectical beginning, since to call the beginning dialectical would seem to *presuppose* mediation, which Hegel would oppose as a problematic presupposition. Likewise, for this reason, she is committed to the notion of the Word beyond the Word, which stands as the transcendental *Ungrund* that gives birth to the Word. She writes, “The movement of nothing is the pre-linguistic movement that grounds all discursive language. There is no Logos or Word in the logical beginning.”<sup>291</sup> On my understanding, there also seems to be an additional dimension of nuance to Hegel’s position here: that the non-logical beginning attests to the incompleteness of the system itself. Indeed, it is precisely the failure of the non-logical to be fully captured by the logical that itself constitutes reality (as Žižek and Gabriel often remind us of as well). I take this to be why Nuzzo states that “the understanding raises against reason and yet also with reason.”<sup>292</sup>

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<sup>288</sup> Ibid.

<sup>289</sup> Ibid., 20.

<sup>290</sup> Ibid., 22.

<sup>291</sup> Ibid.

<sup>292</sup> Ibid., 13.

One significant point of difference between Nuzzo and Henrich's reading is that Nuzzo refers to the beginning as "indeterminate" and without relation. She writes, "Nothing is utterly indeterminate movement, not relation."<sup>293</sup> On Henrich's reading, the negation of the beginning is necessarily a function of *relation*. He writes, "For, in Hegel's view, negation is *relational* in the sense that there must be something it negates."<sup>294</sup> On this particular point, my interpretation stands closer to Nuzzo's reading, since I believe it is the emptiness of emptiness that opens up the possibility for relation in the first place. In other words, Hegel does not *presuppose* the function of negation as relational at the start. Rather, it reveals itself as such during the course of the process. Even so, one could find support for both interpretations in the text. While commenting on "With What Must the Science Begin?" Hegel soon after states, "here the beginning is made with being which is represented as having come to be through mediation, a mediation which is also a sublation of itself."<sup>295</sup> So, it seems that it is via a "sublation of mediation" that apparent immediacy is made possible in the first place. In other words, on my understanding, when we call the beginning (non)-dialectical, we simultaneously acknowledge the beginning as both non-dialectical and dialectical, since even when we call it non-dialectical, we acknowledge that dialectics is latent within it. This is how Hegel is able to show that dialectics emerges from out of the (non)-dialectical.

Nuzzo considers the claim that the beginning is non-dialectical to be significant. If the beginning were dialectical, then Hegel would seem to presuppose the truth of dialectics from the start. However, elsewhere Hegel states that the true, genuine beginning of philosophy must be presupposition-less. As Nuzzo writes:

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<sup>293</sup> Ibid., 22.

<sup>294</sup> Henrich, "The Logic of Negation," 317.

<sup>295</sup> Hegel, *Science of Logic*, 69.



The movement of nothing is the non-dialectical *beginning*, not the *presupposition* or the *condition* of dialectic. For a dialectical-speculative logic to be truly presupposition-less the beginning itself must be non-dialectical.<sup>296</sup>

Nuzzo's contention is that if the beginning of dialectics were taken to be dialectical, then dialectics itself would be presupposed from the start. In addition to this, on Nuzzo's understanding, at the beginning, thinking unites itself *with* genuine nothingness. Indeed, Nuzzo explains, "It is precisely because thinking is itself nothing that the movement of nothing is immanent."<sup>297</sup> This "immanent" movement of nothingness as such is what enables Absolute Spirit to emerge in time.

Nuzzo's discussion of Hegel's "beginning" here bears some resemblance to Heidegger's treatment of the "Nothing" in his essay, "What is Metaphysics?"<sup>298</sup> In agreement with Heidegger, Nuzzo argues that the nothing that stands at the beginning of philosophy is not a determinate nothing but the indeterminacy of nothingness as such. As Nuzzo explains:

*Nichts* is not nothing *for thinking* (for our *discursive* thinking, for our thinking of *something*); rather, thinking (all thinking) is nothing *for nothing itself*. It is only once the radical 'sacrifice' of thinking is performed that dialectic can begin...<sup>299</sup>

In other words, on Nuzzo's account, when Hegel describes the beginning of the Logic as "*Sein, reines Sein*," he calls thought back prior to thinking as such: to the absolute beginning of the nothing prior to the *Logos*. Nuzzo provides further support for her reading by pointing to the fact that here Hegel inverts Kant's thinking of nothing. She writes:

Hegel overturns Kant's table of nothing presenting it, this time, as the nothingness of thinking itself. The movement of nothing in which the understanding is extinguished, is the most original horizon of dialectical thinking. Nothing is neither *nothing of something*

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<sup>296</sup> Angelica Nuzzo, "Dialectic, Understanding, and Reason," 23.

<sup>297</sup> *Ibid.*, 24.

<sup>298</sup> See Martin Heidegger, "What is Metaphysics?," in *Basic Writings*, ed. David Farrell Krell (New York: HarperCollins, 1993).

<sup>299</sup> Angelica Nuzzo, "Dialectic, Understanding, and Reason," 25.

(determinate nothing) nor *thinking of nothing* (determinate thinking according to the categories).<sup>300</sup>

In other words, on Kant's account, *nothing* would have to be conceived of as either 1) a nothing on the order of something or 2) nothing on the order of the categories. Hegel's inversion is to allow for an original nothingness (indeterminate nothing) in which thought participates in the nothing as such. I connect this reading to my previous points in this chapter about the importance of sacrifice to the beginning. In the beginning, indeterminate nothingness sacrifices itself, and, in this movement, it simultaneously affirms itself. As a result, its self-sacrifice establishes the possibility of determinate thinking.

Adrian Johnston agrees with Nuzzo's reading on the point that the beginning of Hegel's system is undialectical. However, he also further elaborates the conclusion of this insight – that for thinking to begin in the undialectical is precisely what makes it the most dialectical moment of all. Johnston's insights on this matter may be found in the "Preface" to his book, *A New German Idealism*. There, Johnston states:

Hegel goes even further in his defense of *Verstand*. He argues that it is exclusively in and through an unreserved intensification of the understanding's analytic, divisive, and dichotomizing tendencies that the genesis of dialectical-speculative *Vernunft* becomes possible. Counterintuitively, the determinations of the understanding sublationally (*als Aufhebung*) pass over or are transubstantiated into the fluidity of the moments of reason precisely at the (tipping) point of their maximum degree of 'fixity' or 'rigidity' (that is, nonfluidity). In a coincidence of opposites, fixed/rigid *Verstand* transitions into fluid or supple *Vernunft* specifically at the very height of its fixity/rigidity; the understanding comes closest to reason exactly when the former appears to be at the greatest distance from the latter, when *Verstand* contracts into the most extreme, exaggerated versions of its (seemingly) subrational (qua neither dialectical nor speculative) defining characteristics (such as the understanding's insistence on the absoluteness of classical bivalent logic).<sup>301</sup>

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<sup>300</sup> Ibid., 26.

<sup>301</sup> Adrian Johnston, *A New German Idealism*, xix.

Here, Johnston comments on the relationship between *Verstand* (the understanding) and *Vernunft* (reason) on Hegel's account. According to Kant, the difference between *Verstand* and *Vernunft* had primarily been one of cognition in terms of determinate concepts versus reasoning on the order of indeterminate ideas. While the understanding is only able to think in terms of determinate concepts, reason is able to think in terms of indeterminate ideas. On Kant's account, for example, we are able to think of the idea of God as an idea of reason although we do not have a determinate concept of God, since we do not experience God as a determinate something in our experience. Johnston's point is that Hegel shows how it is precisely where the understanding seems the farthest from reason that it actually comes closest to it. In this sense, the understanding and reason are inherently bound together.

Johnston sees "a coincidence of opposites"<sup>302</sup> at play here – where the understanding comes to its deepest inherent fulfillment, it actually dialectically crosses over into its opposite: reason. Here, I draw a connection to Nuzzo's point about the undialectical beginning. On Johnston's account, to call the beginning "undialectical" is simultaneously to show how it is the most dialectical moment of all. I will explain with an example. For the understanding to attempt to think a determinate concept of God in the most fixed or determinate way, the understanding actually must negate all determinate concepts. But in this, it must go a step further – it must also negate itself, and herein lies its transition into the substance of nothing (and its subsequent unity with reason). This is why Hegel thinks that *Logic* stands at the beginning of metaphysics (since it is via a process, beginning with the negation of determinate concepts as well as its own self-negation, that the Absolute is eventually able to manifest itself). This is also why Hegel

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<sup>302</sup> Ibid.

conceives that the absolute is retroactively posited from out of a negation of “logical space”<sup>303</sup> as such.

Next, I will examine the similarities between Markus Gabriel’s interpretation of the overall movement in connection with Johnston and Nuzzo’s interpretations. Markus Gabriel writes:

Given that transcendent metaphysics conceives the absolute as the entirely other that transcends the totality of determinations, it cannot characterize it through any positive predicate. For this reason, the transcendent absolute is traditionally dealt with in terms of an absolute oneness or absolute identity which cannot positively be described, as this would make it something determinate and, hence, part of the world, part of the network of determinate beings. As Hegel has it,

The simple substantial identity of the absolute is indeterminate, or rather in it every determinateness of *essence* and *Existence*, or of *being* in general, as well as of *reflection*, has dissolved itself. Accordingly, the process of *determining what the absolute is* has a negative outcome, and the absolute itself appears only as the negation of all predicates and as the void.

It is obvious that the negation of all predicates cannot be a reflection performed by the negative absolute itself. Otherwise we would have to ascribe some sort of self-determining activity to it, a move that would contradict its alleged absolute identity. Hence, it is our own reflection that accomplishes the negation of all predicates. However, this entails that the absolute is already determined in opposition to our reflection as that which does not accomplish the negation itself. This in turn implies that our reflection has merely been an ‘external reflection’ up to this point. Reflection opposes itself by positing an absolute: it posits the absolute as if it were not posited by reflection. Yet it is, hereby, already determined by reflection. This motivates a countermove.

If it makes sense to talk about the absolute at all, we cannot define it in opposition to reflection, lest this opposition relativize it. Reflection must not ‘stand *over against* the absolute identity of the absolute.’ This is why the absolute has to be understood as the ‘ground’ of totality, with no determinate content but that of grounding. For this reason, the correct determination of the absolute has to be the ‘absolute form,’ which is in and for itself ‘the absolute content,’ as Hegel puts it. It is nothing but the name for the grounding relation, by which the finite becomes intelligible as such. Yet, this grounding relation does not have a content apart from that of being a grounding relation, it is no particular relation, which would hold between two relata and, therefore, between two entities. An absolute, which satisfies this *prima facie* weird condition can only be the movement of pure thought performed by the *Science of Logic* itself. The *Logic* itself is the unfolding,

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<sup>303</sup> This is Gabriel’s terminology. See Gabriel, *Transcendental Ontology*, 119 ff.

the exposition of the absolute. The absolute is both the form and the content of the *Logic* and is, hence, not something prior to its manifestation in logical thought.<sup>304</sup>

Here, Gabriel comments on the general movement that Hegel discovers to be the case in the *Logic*. Gabriel uses the analogy of transcendent metaphysics in its attempt to think of the absolute (as that which is beyond any possible determination in particular or all possible determinations). This might seem problematic at first glance, since it might seem to raise the question of how Gabriel's analogy could apply to Hegel's *Logic* (i.e. does the absolute itself pass through the same movement that Gabriel describes? And if so, in what way is the transcendent not presupposed from the start?) However, Gabriel's point is that his analogy holds (as an explanation of the movement that absolute reflection passes through) since he provides the contours for the same movement that the absolute passes through in its attempt to know itself (in its internal self-reflection). If reflection first attempts to think the absolute as a transcendent absolute, then it must think beyond itself. For this reason, it attempts to think the negation of all predicates. However, in doing so, reflection merely posits the absolute as a transcendent Other insofar as the absolute cannot be thought in terms of a determinate predicate (nor, likewise, on the order of a concept of the understanding). This is problematic since it would entail that the absolute would be simultaneously undermined in terms of its absoluteness – i.e., it would be determined as that which cannot be determined (and therefore, it would not be a genuine absolute).

Hegel's solution, as we will see (on Žižek's understanding as well) is the transition from external reflection to absolute reflection. In this transition, the difference that was originally discovered (on the order of transcendent metaphysics and external reflection) is subsequently shown to be internal to the absolute as such. In other words, consciousness discovers that it is the

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<sup>304</sup> Gabriel, *Transcendental Ontology*, 108-109.

absolute itself that moves between self-transcendence and identity. In fact, it is this very movement that constitutes the absolute.

In his book, *Absolute Recoil*, Žižek comments on the same fourfold Hegelian dialectical movement. He writes:

This, then, is the dialectical process: an inconsistent mess (first phase, the starting point) which is negated, and through negation, the Origin is projected or posited backwards, so that a tension is created between the present and the lost Origin (second phase). In the third phase, the Origin is perceived as inaccessible, relativized – we are in external reflection, that is, our reflection is external to the posited Origin which is experienced as a transcendent presupposition. In the fourth phase of absolute reflection, our external reflexive movement is transposed back into the Origin itself, as its own self-withdrawal or decentering. We thus reach the triad of positing, external reflection, and absolute reflection.<sup>305</sup>

Here, I would like to draw out the similarities between Gabriel's and Žižek's readings insofar as they describe Hegel's dialectic as a movement that moves from an initial negation of all predicates to the subsequent realization (of thinking) that this moment (which had originally posited the absolute as transcendent) becomes internal to the absolute as such. In other words, in the final stage of reflection (absolute reflection), the difference between the immanent and transcendent is actually demonstrated as internal to the absolute itself, but in such a way that it is shown to be the case that it was the absolute itself which had distanced itself from itself. Thus, all three<sup>306</sup> contemporary philosophers of German Idealism (Žižek, Gabriel, and Johnston) agree that it is via an original movement of nothingness itself in Hegel's *Logic* that the absolute exhibits itself: in the terms of Hegel's *Logic*, what Kant had discovered to be true of the understanding and reason (as transcendental capacities related to subjective cognition) is demonstrated to be internal to the manifestation of the absolute as such (on the order of subjectivity-objectivity). It is not merely that finite thinkers cannot think of the absolute by

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<sup>305</sup> Žižek, *Absolute Recoil*, 148-149.

<sup>306</sup> Comay and Ruda would agree as well, incidentally.

means of a determinate concept (like Kant had thought) but rather that the absolute itself is the very movement of thought between indeterminacy and determinacy (and vice versa) in time.

Furthermore, Markus Gabriel agrees with both Henrich and Nuzzo on many additional important points regarding the nature of the overall movement. First of all, he agrees with both Henrich and Nuzzo that the negation of negation stands at the beginning of the overall movement (although all three, admittedly, differ on how they interpret the specific meaning of this beginning). On Gabriel's reading, the most important point to remember here about Hegel is that he is a metaphysician of the *immanent* (and this is especially important when it comes to Hegel's conception of the absolute.) Hegel is committed to the notion that the Absolute is not transcendent in such a way that it would be diametrically opposed to the immanent world of experience.

In his chapter, "The Dialectic of the Absolute: Hegel's Critique of Transcendent Metaphysics," Gabriel comments on the beginning of Hegel's system. He writes:

This movement of the negation of negation is precisely what takes place in the chapter on 'the Absolute' in the *Logic*, the introduction and first subchapter (A) of which proceed in three steps. First the absolute is determined as absolute transcendence, or as absolute identity which outstrips our conceptual capacities. It can only be paradoxically determined by the negation of all predicates. Second this movement, which is a movement of reflection, is made transparent *as* reflection. In order to steer clear of the problem of absolute transcendence, the finite is determined as an image of the absolute, which has being far more than any finite being due to its pure positivity, a position Hegel ascribes to Spinoza... Third this whole movement is presented as a process by which we eventually arrive at the form determination of the absolute form, where form and content of reflection coincide in the 'self-exposition' of the absolute, i.e. in the reflection of reflection.<sup>307</sup>

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<sup>307</sup> Markus Gabriel, "The Dialectic of the Absolute: Hegel's Critique of Transcendent Metaphysics," 80.

For our current purposes, what is most important here is that the general outline of the movement remains the same on Gabriel's recounting of it. This is to say that, at the beginning stands negation, the second part of the movement is the realization that this original negation entails a self-negation, such that in the third part of the movement, there is a realization of a sort of underlying coherence of the overall movement. For Gabriel, it seems that the most important insight to remember when reflecting on the Hegelian process is the fact that ultimately, reflection does not reflect on something completely outside of itself (i.e. it is not an "external reflection"). At the same time, neither thinker posits completeness either. On the contrary, the two thinkers agree that the absolute itself is internally incomplete. This fact is key to both Gabriel and Žižek's understanding of the movement, since it implies that the Absolute is not pre-supposed from the start – rather, the transcendent is internal to the immanent in the sense that the Absolute is always already beyond itself – in fact, it is constituted precisely by its own failure to fully grasp itself. In other words, the expanse between the transcendent and immanent is actually internal to the constitution of the immanent-transcendent.

Thus, according to Gabriel's reading of Hegel, the transcendent is not prior to, outside of, or beyond metaphysics. Rather, the transcendent is constitutively infused into the immanent. As Gabriel notes:

The crucial point of Hegel's dialectic of the absolute is that metaphysical reflection must not be external reflection. We cannot determine the absolute as absolute substance ontologically anteceding our conceptualization of it...Therefore, reflection has to become absolute, i.e. self-referential.<sup>308</sup>

In other words, it is the absolute itself that passes through the process of its own becoming: the absolute's self-realization of its own absoluteness is precisely its realization that part of itself must always remain beyond itself. This is what it means for the Absolute to sublimate its otherness

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<sup>308</sup> Ibid., 87.



in its identity (In the next chapter, I will further explore to what extent this is possible and also examine similarities and differences between Schelling and Hegel on the question of the beginning).

Gabriel also highlights the consequences of his reading of Hegel insofar as it implies additional questions about the infinitude or finitude of the Absolute. Gabriel clarifies that his reading implies that the Absolute is simultaneously both infinite and finite. He further explains that it would be a mistake to think that an infinite substance *precedes* the process of the *becoming* of the infinite in time. He writes:

The absolute idea is only grasped in the context of a theory of self-constitution of logical space, i.e. of *the* concept in an eminent singular...The answer, therefore, to the question: how does the infinite become finite? is this: that *there is not* an infinite which is first of all infinite and only subsequently has need to become finite, to go forth into [*herausgehen*] finitude; on the contrary, it is on its own account just as much finite as infinite.<sup>309</sup>

I agree with Gabriel's reading of Hegel here, since Hegel's statement that there ought to be no "presuppositions" at the beginning of his system guarantees that the infinite could not exist as a preconceived substance prior to the process of its becoming. Rather, Hegel's position is more along the lines of this reasoning: as the infinite becomes out of nothingness, it discovers that it must have always already been the case, although at the same time, prior to its becoming in time, such a statement would have been nonsensical.

Also, the Absolute's self-discovery of itself as infinite is simultaneously its discovery of its tension with the finite as well as the capacity to surpass such limitation: it is simultaneously that which limits itself and surpasses its own self-imposed limitation. In this way, there can be parts of itself that are unknown to itself: as Gabriel writes, "For this reason, Hegel conceives the

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<sup>309</sup> Ibid., 88.

infinite or absolute as an ongoing process of self-constitution which is not determined over against anything external to this very process.”<sup>310</sup>

On Hegel’s account, the Absolute Idea is the Notion that becomes aware of itself as Notion. With the Absolute Idea, Hegel hopes to demonstrate a structure that is able to maintain the relative stability and instability of identity and difference respectively,<sup>311</sup> all the while explaining how this structure (which opens up the dialectic between the two in the first place) simultaneously remains internal to itself. In other words, the third “thing” that would unite the two prior moments is actually internal to the overall process. Indeed, we find that Hegel thinks of the Absolute Idea in this way in his section on the “Absolute Idea” from the *Logic*:

Now more precisely the *third* is the immediate, but the immediate *resulting from sublation of mediation*, the simple resulting from *sublation of difference*, the positive resulting from sublation of the negative, the Notion that has realized itself by means of its otherness and by the sublation of this reality has become united with itself, and has restored its absolute reality, its *simple* relation to itself. This *result* is therefore the truth. It is *equally* immediacy *and* mediation; but such forms of judgment as: the third *is* immediacy and mediation, or: *it is the unity* of them, are not capable of grasping it; for it is not a quiescent third, but, precisely as this unity, is self-mediating movement and activity...<sup>312</sup>

For our purposes, the important part here is that that which grounds the whole movement from the position of emptiness (the *Ungrund* or the non-dialectical “non-ground”) is simultaneously that which unites itself with itself (by mediating itself with its own otherness) erasing the mediation, and subsequently returning to the emptiness of substance.

Gabriel’s remarks on the Absolute Idea further support this reading, since he, too, does not think that Hegel posits an external something in order to achieve the mediation. Gabriel states:

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<sup>310</sup> Ibid.

<sup>311</sup> Henrich, *Between Kant and Hegel*, 322.

<sup>312</sup> Hegel, *Science of Logic*, 837.

The overall end of the Hegelian system in the *Encyclopedia* is the absolute idea in its actuality...As Hegel writes, ‘this notion of philosophy is the self-thinking Idea, the truth aware of itself (S 236) -- the logical system, but with the signification that it is universality approved and certified in concrete content as in its actuality.’<sup>313</sup>

In other words, by the end of the system, the Absolute Idea has discovered itself in its otherness, and therefore it has achieved the realization of its existence (as the “self-mediating movement,”<sup>314</sup> as Hegel puts it).

Gabriel is keen to note how the existence of the Idea is guaranteed by a tripartite overall system: the Logic is also tied to Hegel’s Philosophy of Nature as well as his Philosophy of Spirit. Gabriel writes, “In order to attain actuality, the idea is strictly speaking dependent on nature and spirit. It has to form a system, which can only occur in the historically bound situation of finite thinkers.”<sup>315</sup> This is significant because it implies that the Idea must *become* in time and in a system that is together from the start with nature and spirit. On Gabriel’s understanding, Hegel’s Logic does not provide some sort of account of an ontological process that could possibly take place outside of the limits of history. Rather, the system of Logic, Nature, and Spirit are all united in the historical reality of time. Indeed, he states, “Here, absolute spirit does not refer to any transcendent entity or teleological guarantee concealed by the potentially misleading appearances. It is nothing but the activity of putting the system together.”<sup>316</sup> Absolute Spirit comes to be in time.

One reason Gabriel thinks that Hegel is able to defend his position regarding the Absolute is that Hegel’s position entails that the Absolute is not static. Rather, the very movement in the

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<sup>313</sup> Markus Gabriel, “The Dialectic of the Absolute,” 88.

<sup>314</sup> Hegel, *Science of Logic*, 837.

<sup>315</sup> Markus Gabriel, “The Dialectic of the Absolute,” 88.

<sup>316</sup> *Ibid.*, 90.

process of thinking of finite thinkers from one manner of thinking of the Absolute to the next itself constitutes the Absolute. Gabriel notes:

The absolute does not stand still but continues to manifest itself as that which performs the shifts from one determinate conception of the absolute to another. This very insight however does not change in the same way as the definitions of the absolute change. Hegel thus tries to secure the critical position of philosophy by, at the same time, subjecting it to the patterns of change that it discovers in critical self-reflection.<sup>317</sup>

In this way, Hegel is able to allow for a reflection internal to the Absolute to play a crucial role in its self-constitution. The continual reflection of the Absolute on its self-transcendent nature is internal to itself in a way that pays heed to the boundaries of relative transcendence and immanence, respectively.

### 3.11) Conclusion

Furthermore, such a reading of Hegel has significant implications when it comes to the traditional presentation of one of Schelling's main critiques of Hegel. The question becomes: is it a fair critique for Schelling to argue that Hegel's Idea remains bound to the order of the purely virtual or the ideal, given that Hegel is committed to the notion that the Idea has to *become in history*? If the Idea is constituted by its passage through otherness (and by losing itself in the emptiness of emptiness) does it not achieve genuine actuality? What might these questions imply about the actual similarities between Schelling's and Hegel's starting point for philosophy? In what ways, then, could their starting points actually be united at heart and in their deepest insight (since both overcome the subject-object divide)? These sorts of questions will occupy my thinking in the next chapter.

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<sup>317</sup> Ibid.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### HEGEL AND SCHELLING ON THE SELF-TRANSCENDENCE OF THE ABSOLUTE

#### 4.1) Introduction

To briefly recap, in Chapter One, I argued that Spirit learns of its self-sacrificial nature at the end of the PhG. In Chapter Two, I argued that this same insight guides the beginning of Hegel's SL insofar as an emptiness of emptiness constitutes the beginning of the system. In Chapter Three, I conducted an in-depth investigation into the nature of the beginning as "(un)dialectical." In this chapter, I argue for the metaphysical consistency between Hegel's and Schelling's position on "the beginning" when we consider Schelling's 1811 draft of his text, *Ages of the World*, in combination with Hegel's beginning from his text, *Science of the Logic* (published between 1812 and 1816).

The main thesis of this chapter is that both thinkers demonstrate how identity and difference ought to be conceived together from the beginning. In Hegel's SL, there is a doubling of emptiness at the beginning of the system. In Schelling's WA, at the very beginning, the Godhead dwells in its "lucid purity" (*Lauterkeit*).<sup>318</sup> On Schelling's account, as the Godhead enjoys itself in its nothingness, two equiprimordial wills arise. The first is a "will that wills nothing." Co-eternal with the "will that wills nothing" is a second will – a will that desires to become something. Now, the second will is actually subordinate to the first, because it exists in order that the first will may come to experience itself in actuality. However, the first will is actually so

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<sup>318</sup> F.W.J. Schelling, *The Ages of the World (1811)*, trans. Joseph P. Lawrence, 72-73.

profound that it harbors within itself the possibility either to be or not to be. In order that the first will may *experience* its nature as freedom, then, the second will must take on the object of “nothingness,” however not in a one-sided sense. Rather, the second will must empty itself out so entirely, that the first will may inhabit it. In this way, the first will may experience itself as freedom. In this sense, Schelling argues that the two co-eternal wills are bonded together by *love*. Schelling’s famous quote here helps to illustrate the point – “this is the mystery of love that it combines what could be by itself and yet is not and cannot be without the other.”<sup>319</sup> The two, co-eternal wills are bonded together by love, since their relationship is one of freedom and necessity thought simultaneous with each other. Schelling’s position on the beginning is therefore metaphysically consistent with Hegel’s, since a doubling of emptiness (by means of which the divine may come to know its self-sacrificial nature) stands at the beginning of Schelling’s system as well.

As a sub-thesis for this chapter, I also argue that Hegel would agree with Schelling that the purpose of the entire movement is for the revelation of the Absolute as love (this point is implicit in Hegel’s system). However, Schelling *explicitly* comments on the movement as one of the divine’s revelation of itself as love – God repeats nothingness out of an act of love. This is because on Schelling’s account, the original will contracts (or negates) itself so completely that it is, properly speaking, “nothing”: love is absolute self-sacrifice. Similar to in Hegel’s system, the process Schelling describes is one of the Absolute learning about its nature. Along these lines, both thinkers are aware of the mysterious and enigmatic nature of the divine throughout their

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<sup>319</sup> For the full quote and context, see F.W.J. Schelling, “Philosophical Investigations into the Essence of Human Freedom and Related Matters,” trans. Priscilla Hayden-Roy in *Philosophy of German Idealism: Fichte, Jacobi and Schelling*, ed. Ernst Behler (New York: Bloomsbury, 1987), 278.

philosophical thinking. However, it is equally true that the two thinkers develop this insight (and what it means for their overall philosophical systems) in different ways.

#### 4.2) Some Traditional Readings of Hegel and Schelling on the Beginning

Many of the more “traditional” German Idealist readings tend to place Schelling and Hegel’s positions on the *beginning* of metaphysics and what it entails for understanding their overall systematic positions (or lack thereof) as relatively opposed to one another. For example, if Schelling is traditionally presented as the figure who stands for the ontological priority of the Real (as a “proto-existentialist”),<sup>320</sup> then Hegel tends to be presented as the figurehead for the ontological priority of the Ideal (in the sense that, as these readings claim, Hegel ultimately sublates material otherness via the Idea in what is presented as a sort of rational totalization).

Let us consider, as one example, Manfred Frank’s reading of Schelling’s critique of Hegel as he presents it in his, “Schelling’s Critique of Hegel and the Beginnings of Marxian Dialectics.”<sup>321</sup> Frank’s contention in this piece is that Schelling’s main critique of Hegel aims at Hegel’s failure to fully acknowledge the boundaries of rational thought in a way that adequately pays homage to the genuine other (of history) as that which the rational Idea can never *fully* grasp or totalize: Schelling’s critique of Hegel, according to Frank, is to point out that there is always an irreducible remainder of the Real that the Idea will never be able to completely sublimate, since said otherness is constitutive of the Idea as such.<sup>322</sup> According to Frank, Schelling argues that Hegel is ultimately bounded by the order of the rational, since, in the final analysis,

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<sup>320</sup> See G. Anthony Bruno, “Determinacy, Indeterminacy and Contingency in German Idealism,” in *The Significance of Indeterminacy: Perspectives from Asian and Continental Philosophy*, ed. Robert H. Scott and Gregory S. Moss (New York: Routledge, 2019), 77.

<sup>321</sup> Manfred Frank, “Schelling’s Critique of Hegel and the Beginnings of Marxian Dialectics,” *Idealistic Studies* 19, no. 3 (1989): 251-268, doi: 10.5840/idstudies198919325.

<sup>322</sup> *Ibid.*, 256.

the Absolute Idea sublates all difference into a sort of higher-order identity on the order of the rational.<sup>323</sup>

Frank repeats this concern in his German text, “Die Reduktion des Seins auf Reflexion in Hegels ‘Logik.’” There, he writes:

Die Logik , so wird man sagen, bezieht sich, wenn immer sie von >Sein< spricht, auf den >Begriff des Seins<; und nur von ihm behauptet sie, er bestimme sich von selbst weiter zur Reflexion. Ist dies der Fall, so scheint unsere These, Hegel reduziere die Bedeutung von Sein auf die negativer Selbstbeziehung und logifiziere so ein prinzipiell Außerlogisches, in einer Fehleinschätzung des Geltungsbereichs logischer Aussagen zu gründen.<sup>324</sup>

Frank’s main point here is that when Hegel speaks about “Being” in the Logic, he only ever refers to the “Concept of Being.” On Frank’s contention, Hegel utilizes the Concept to play a role that it simply cannot fulfill – a logical concept cannot fulfill an extra-logical (“*Außerlogisches*”) role. Frank contends that this is problematic for Hegel’s account, since Hegel cannot therefore explain the coming to be of the Concept as such.

Frank continues on:

Offensichtlich verweist uns dieser Einwurf an die Natur- und die Geistesphilosophie als diejenigen Teile des >Systems<, die >außer der Logik< zu gelten beanspruchen. Er befindet sich dann freilich in einem gründlichen Mißverständnis gegenüber der Funktion der Logik im Gesamt der Enzyklopädie. Das, was jenseits ihrer Konstitution über die Idee des Logischen hinausgeht, erweist sich als deren eigene Entäußerung: Natur und Geist sind selbst nur Weisen des Sich-Anderswerdens und Insichzurückkehrens der Idee, fallen also selbst in deren >Sphäre<. Mit Recht hat darum Schelling auf den zu Beginn der Logik erhobenen Anspruch hingewiesen, mit dem Postulat der >Zurückziehung auf das bloße Denken< dies zu meinen, >daß der Begriff alles sey und nichts außer sich zurücklasse<. Wäre etwas anderes intendiert, Hegels System hätte wenig Grund zu der Gewißheit, gerade mit einer logischen Begründung des Seienden etwas gegenüber seinen Vorgängern durch und durch Neues begonnen zu haben.<sup>325</sup>

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<sup>323</sup> Ibid., 257.

<sup>324</sup> Manfred Frank, “Die Reduktion des Seins auf Reflexion in Hegels ‘Logik,’” in *Der Unendliche Mangel an Sein: Schellings Hegelkritik und die Anfänge der Marxschen Dialektik* (Munich: Wilhelm Fink, 1992), 116-117.

<sup>325</sup> Ibid.



Frank's main argument here is that, on Hegel's account, the Idea has a totalizing nature. In Hegel's EL, the philosophies of nature and spirit represent the mere "divestment" of the Logical. Frank's critique seems to be that there is no genuine otherness on Hegel's account: ultimately everything is the Idea in its return to itself. Frank further notes how: "Schelling discerned with an ingenious accuracy the *circulus in probando* in Hegel's proceedings. If the concept is, at the end of its development, to attain recognition of itself *as* itself, it would have to implicitly possess this self-knowledge from the beginning."<sup>326</sup> However, on my reading, this is not a serious concern for Hegel's view, since he nowhere posits self-knowledge of a totalizing nature. The type of "knowledge" that the Idea gains is merely an awareness of its transcendent, self-sacrificial nature. Furthermore, the sort of "knowledge" that the Idea attains is in fact *retroactively* attained via an experiential process. In this way, Hegel's account does not imply complete knowledge of the subject as itself from the start.

#### **4.3) Hegel's Conception of Rationality (as fundamentally constituted by otherness)**

Along these lines, my main concern with this sort of critique of Hegel is that it seems to be grounded in an incomplete conception of the way in which the Absolute Idea is *rational* according to Hegel's view. On my reading of Hegel, the fact that the Absolute Idea is "rational" *does not* entail that the Idea ultimately overcomes all otherness once and for all, demonstrating a rationality of a totalizing nature.

That said, I concede that there is certainly something correct about Frank's position. I agree with Frank on the point that there is "nothing" besides the Idea. However, where we seem to disagree is on the point of how to interpret the meaning of the nothing to Hegel's overall system. On my reading, "nothingness" itself plays an active role in the constitution of the Idea

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<sup>326</sup> Manfred Frank, "Schelling's Critique of Hegel and the Beginnings of Marxian Dialectics," 258.

itself. My understanding is that the Idea is constituted by a movement on the order of an emptiness of emptiness. Therefore, I do not think that Frank's critique is actually problematic for Hegel, since I do not think that Hegel claims that thought or being are *reducible* to the Idea in a fully explicable sense. Rather, on my understanding, the Idea itself is incomplete (qua the movement of nothingness – an emptiness of emptiness which divides itself into thought and being and subsequently sublates the difference between the two). To put it simply, the nothing is not a determinate nothing on Hegel's account, but rather its very movement constitutes the possibility of dialectics in the first place.

For this reason, the nature and function of "sublation" (*Aufhebung*) is key to my understanding of Hegel. On my reading, sublation does not entail a totalizing transformation that merely transforms *reality* into *ideality*. Rather, on my reading, the play between the real (the genuine otherness of actuality) and the ideal remains internal to, and constitutive of, the Absolute Idea as such. Indeed, the Absolute Idea first arises from out of the emptiness of emptiness in the first place. It is my contention that Hegel's account of the Idea retains within it an internal openness that pays heed to the other. As Žižek, Johnston, and others often remind us, the distinction between the real and the ideal is not merely a one-sided opposition on Hegel's account.

Along these lines, in order to further explicate my reading, one of the primary ways that I would like to revise the traditional reading is to revisit the meaning of the "rational" for Hegel. If one is to argue that Hegel stays bounded by the order of the rational, then one equally ought to admit that, according to Hegel, the constitution of the rational itself is given by a process in which rationality develops from out of internal indeterminacy. In other words, on Hegel's account, both indeterminacy and uncertainty are constitutive of reason (the Absolute Idea

develops from the interplay between uncertainty and certainty). This is to say that reason is neither completely deterministic nor completely certain. Similarly, on Hegel's account, *time* itself is always at issue when it comes to the nature of reason – the development of reason necessarily takes place via time. But, due to the genuine nature of time in its relation to otherness, there may be moments of utter and genuine uncertainty and a lack of self-knowledge. All the same, this evokes Spirit's desire to become its genuine self via a process of development and discovery: the identity of Spirit does not preclude the truth of uncertainty. Rather, the nature of Spirit is to embrace and love the uncertainty of time as such (like we saw in Chapter One, for instance).

The fact that Hegel believes this to be the case is also evident in subsequent chapters when Hegel discusses how the Idea comes to be from out of the emptiness of emptiness (see Chapter Three of this dissertation on the topic of how the transcendence of substance is immanent to subjectivity's self-constitution). Furthermore, just as the dialectic repeatedly returns to a more original nothingness, Hegel acknowledges that thought is repeatedly confronted by difference throughout its activity. As Žižek points out, the birth of the dialectic is simultaneously that which prevents thought from ever being able to fully grasp from whence it came:

At a more formal level of his logic of reflection, Hegel uses the unique term '*absoluter Gegenstoss*' (recoil, counter-push, counter-thrust, or, why not, simply counter-punch): a withdrawal that creates what it withdraws from.<sup>327</sup>

We will revisit this theme in more detail later on, but in essence, Žižek writes here of the notion that the subject's identity is generated by a process that simultaneously engenders a more original emptiness. Reason cannot grasp from whence it came because there is no subject given

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<sup>327</sup> Žižek, *Absolute Recoil*, 148.

at the beginning. Rather, it is the negative's distance from its own lack that constitutes rationality<sup>328</sup>: reason eventually discovers emptiness as one with its identity.

Žižek's understanding of the fourfold dialectical process is, for him, akin to "the necessity of Christ." As he explains in a footnote, "therein resides the necessity of Christ...Christ stands for the self-alienation of substance itself—our distance from substance is the distance of substance from itself."<sup>329</sup> For the purpose of this dissertation, what is important here is the notion that, from the standpoint of absolute reflection, reason comes to perceive how the negation of negation is a difference internal to itself. The transcendence of substance ("the difference of substance from itself"<sup>330</sup>) is therefore internal to the constitution of the subject as such. This raises a related question of whether or not Hegel and Schelling consider the rational as *reducible* to the real. I argue that both Hegel and Schelling are committed to the notion that reason is not completely *reducible* to the material Real.<sup>331</sup> For Subject to "know" itself as Substance means that subject is substance *as* its self-transcendence. Therefore, on Hegel's conception, Subject's full immersion as Substance precludes the possibility of reducibility.

On a separate (but related) point in support of the irreducibility of reason, I agree with Dieter Henrich that Hegel hopes to achieve a system of relative stability and instability and to think both identity and difference at the same time.<sup>332</sup> However, I differ from Henrich in terms of the implications of this goal. Hegel is certainly aware of the importance that rationality's "other" plays in its self-constitution. As Adrian Johnston often notes, for Hegel, transcendence is

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<sup>328</sup> Ibid., 153.

<sup>329</sup> Ibid., see footnote no. 49 on this page.

<sup>330</sup> Žižek, *Absolute Recoil*, 153.

<sup>331</sup> Schelling on this notion from his WA: "Therefore all consciousness has what is unconscious as ground, and, just in coming to be conscious, this unconscious is posited as past by that which becomes conscious of itself." See Schelling, F.W.J. *The Ages of the World* (1815 draft), trans. Frederick de Wolfe Bolman, Jr. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1942), 150.

<sup>332</sup> Henrich, *Between Kant and Hegel*, 325.

“transcendence-in-immanence.”<sup>333</sup> Indeed, what makes the Absolute Idea *rational* in the first place is its confrontation with its own “death,” and its subsequent becoming out of the emptiness of emptiness. But, since this is the case, Hegel’s notion of rationality is arguably not a rationality conceived as a *consummating* totality, at all. Rather, I agree with Žižek’s claim here:

Hegel knows very well that every attempt at rational totalization ultimately fails, this failure is the very impetus of the ‘dialectical progress’; his ‘wager’ is located on another level – it concerns, so to speak, the ‘squared totalization’: the possibility of ‘making a system’ out of the very series of *failed* totalizations, to enchain them in a rational way, to discern the strange ‘logic’ that regulates the process by means of which the breakdown of a totalization itself begets another totalization. (Žižek 2002a, 99-100)<sup>334</sup>

Here, the overarching thesis is the *historicity* of Hegel’s system. This is to say that even if a basic necessary structure is eventually revealed by rationality’s failures to achieve totality (and the SL unveils a pattern regarding the nature of these failures), it remains equally true that Hegel allows for a *developmental* conception of an Absolute that reveals itself in *time*. Indeed, Hegel proclaims that the SL itself *requires* history.

Moreover, when it comes to Hegel and Schelling on the historicity of the Absolute, I argue that the important point for the purpose of my dissertation here is actually one of connection: Hegel and Schelling both agree that it is the *Absolute* as Spirit that stands at bottom (so to speak) of the entire process. Indeed, although Schelling realizes that there must always be an irreducible remainder of the Real that will never be fully captured by Reason (and thus the importance of history), he never wavers on his thinking of the original source of the remainder (and therefore, from whence this remainder most properly arrives): the divine.

According to Schelling, the most original source of *everything* is, in fact, the Godhead (“*die Gottheit*”) – that in God which is *beyond God*, and yet, equally immanent to God, and the

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<sup>333</sup> Adrian Johnston, *Adventures in Transcendental Materialism*, 33.

<sup>334</sup> Quote provided in Adrian Johnston, *Žižek’s Ontology: A Transcendental Materialist Theory of Subjectivity* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2008), 131.

most divine in God.<sup>335</sup> In other words, and here is my most crucial point – what unites Schelling and Hegel is not that they agree that the highest unity is to be found on the order of Reason – rather, it is actually their agreement that the highest unity is to be found beyond the Rational (the true heart of the rational is to be found beyond reason) – in God’s self-transcendence – a transcendence irreducible to either the ideal or the real. On the contrary, the two thinkers agree that the transcendent is a “transcendence-in-immanence,” and they are united by their commitment to the notion that the Absolute reveals itself in all of experience – a crucial point.<sup>336</sup>

Next, I will compare Hegel’s discussion of the “beginning” from his SL and Schelling’s discussion of the “beginning” from his 1811 draft of *The Ages of the World* in order to further illuminate the connection. Hegel begins his *Science of Logic* (as I previously mentioned in Chapter Three) with the disappearing of an original nothingness in its own movement (the emptiness of emptiness). Hegel then shows how this original nothingness leads to dialectics. For this reason, Hegel’s system has been called a “dialectical materialism” by thinkers such as Žižek and Johnston.<sup>337</sup>

Spinoza influences Hegel, like Schelling, to the extent that Hegel agrees with the consequence of Spinoza’s system: that the transcendent must be understood as simultaneously immanent if the infinite is to be grasped as a genuine infinite.<sup>338</sup> In other words, although the Absolute is transcendent, it is equally immanent, since it reveals itself as transcendent throughout all of experience. Hegel’s task is to provide an explanation for how a monistic “substance” (which in the beginning is nothing but the emptiness of emptiness as such) in fact produces

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<sup>335</sup> For more on Schelling’s notion of the Godhead, see the next chapter.

<sup>336</sup> As Schelling states in his *Philosophy of Revelation*, “Any particular moment of time is a revelation of a particular aspect of God in each of which he is absolute.” See F.W.J. Schelling, *Philosophy of Revelation* (1841-42), trans. Klaus Ottmann (Putnam, CT: Spring Publications, 2020), 36.

<sup>337</sup> Adrian Johnston, *Žižek’s Ontology*, 274.

<sup>338</sup> Adrian Johnston, *Adventures in Transcendental Materialism*, 33.

something like subjective consciousness from out of itself internally. On my reading, as we will see, Hegel's beginning (as "the emptiness of emptiness") is aligned with Schelling's account of God's original "indifference."

#### 4.4) Schelling's Project Post-*Freiheitsschrift* (Post-1809)

Before delving into Schelling's *Ages of the World* text explicitly, I will first address Schelling's project as he conceived it post-1809 (from his *Freiheitsschrift* onward). In his post-1809 works, Schelling is primarily concerned with providing a genetic account of how a conscious, transcendental subject arrives on the scene from out of unconscious substance or nature.<sup>339</sup> Schelling's contention is that this sort of description is lacking from Kant's philosophy. As Adrian Johnston states:

Whereas Kant's transcendental system implicitly treats the subject, embedded in experiential reality and its world of constituted objects, as always already existent and operative, Schelling seeks to account for the very emergence of such subjectivity, for the origins of this agent-function. That is to say, Schelling, especially in his texts from 1809 and after, attempts to sketch the (transcendental) subject's (ontogenetic) pre/proto-history.<sup>340</sup>

On Schelling's account, Kant does not adequately address this question, as evinced by his *Critique of Pure Reason*. While Kant addresses what guarantees genuine cognition for the transcendental subject on the order of concepts and intuitions, he does not provide a satisfactory account as to how or why the transcendental subject arrives on the scene. This is to say, Kant leaves unaddressed the following questions: how does the transcendental subject first arise? How is it possible to have genuine cognitions *at all*?<sup>341</sup> As Johnston notes, Schelling himself once wrote in his *Ideas for a Philosophy of Nature*, "How it happens that things comes to be

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<sup>339</sup> Adrian Johnston, *Žižek's Ontology: A Transcendental Materialist Theory of Subjectivity*, 70.

<sup>340</sup> Ibid.

<sup>341</sup> Ibid.

represented at all, about that there is the deepest silence.”<sup>342</sup> That is, while Kant’s account addresses what makes for genuine cognition on the order of representations, he does not address the prior meta-transcendental questions of how or why these cognitions are possible for a transcendental subject at all.

Upon perceiving a lack in Kant’s account, Schelling sets out to provide an account for why and how it is the case that transcendental subjectivity arises from the material “real” in the first place. Even so, Schelling never argues that transcendental subjectivity is *reducible* to the material real. Rather, Schelling (along with Hegel) claims that the material real harbors within itself that which separates it from transcendental subjectivity – indeed, it is this very separation (or gap) that leads to the production of subjectivity (as the identity of its own lack, since the difference is eventually shown to be an internal, and generative, difference). As Adrian Johnston writes:

Generally speaking, Schelling seeks to delineate the process wherein more-than-material subjectivity (as spiritual transcendence or transcendental ideality) immanently emerges out of a substantial material base (as the real ground [Grund] of ‘productive’ nature). And yet, although Schelling maintains that subject arises from substance, he nonetheless insists that, following this movement of genetic emergence, the subject thus produced remains thereafter irreducible to the materiality of its (now-occluded) source(s).<sup>343</sup>

In other words, although subjectivity arises out of substance, it is not *reducible* to substance.

Schelling’s project (at least in large part) becomes one regarding the explanation for how it is the case that transcendental subjectivity (along the lines of a Kant) could arise on the scene from out of one substance (a monism on the order of substance) without thereby *reducing* the existence of subjectivity to mere substantial reality (upholding the irreducibility of subject to substance).<sup>344</sup> As Johnston writes:

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<sup>342</sup> F.W.J. Schelling, *Ideas For a Philosophy of Nature*, quoted from Johnston, *Žižek’s Ontology*, 74.

<sup>343</sup> Johnston, *Žižek’s Ontology*, 71.

<sup>344</sup> *Ibid.*, 74.



The Schellingian task...is to formulate a genetic transcendentalism, a system in which the gradual emergence of the transcendent(al), along with its corresponding modes of experience, is grasped as a philosophically explicable process immanent to a monistic ontological register.<sup>345</sup>

Furthermore, Johnston notes how Žižek is also united in this task during the development of his ontology. He states:

This is a task that Žižek, too, can be seen to take up via his combined use of German idealism and psychoanalysis in the effort to forge a transcendental materialist theory of the subject according to which, to put it in Schellingian language, the seemingly transcendent ideality of subjectivity is a rupture in the fabric of being immanently produced within and by the inconsistent, unstable [proto]-materiality of the Real-as-ground.<sup>346</sup>

In other words, according to both Schelling and Hegel (and Žižek, for that matter), it is the movement of the material real as such (in its self-disappearing, i.e. the emptiness of emptiness) that produces transcendental subjectivity as well as the appearance of transcendental subjectivity as divided from substance in the first place. For this reason, the transcendence of subjectivity may be understood as immanent to a monistic substance. That said, it is also crucial to note that Schelling is committed to maintaining the *irreducibility* of the Ideal to the Real. As Johnston notes:

But, as becomes clear in Schelling's later texts... although *I* emerges from *R*, and although the Ideal medium of the epistemological subject's experiential reality harbors within its own heart a primordial kernel of the Real (the existence of experience reflects both levels simultaneously as *I/R*), this kernel is nonetheless lost in terms of its direct accessibility for the subject (in the style of Schelling's 1809 notations, experiential reality as *I/R*, although having arisen out of the *Grund* of *R*, is nevertheless irreducible to *R* – that is, *I/R ≠ R*).<sup>347</sup>

This is to say that, although the Ideal is produced by the Real, it is never fully *reducible* to it. This leads one to the following question: how does Schelling address *how* it is the case that the Ideal

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<sup>345</sup> Ibid.

<sup>346</sup> Ibid.

<sup>347</sup> Ibid., 76.

arises in such an *irreducible* fashion? Later in this chapter, I will examine Schelling's response to this question of origination (with respect to both why and how) as he presents it in the 1811 draft of his text, *The Ages of the World*.

Before delving into that text explicitly, I will first comment on Schelling's starting point as opposed to that of Kant. Rather than working from the initial position of the transcendental subject (as Kant does in his *Critique of Pure Reason*), Schelling aims to provide an account of the creation of such subjectivity in the first place. Schelling's alternative to Kant's system, then, would seem to require a "meta-transcendental" account of how the transcendental subject arrives on the scene in the first place.<sup>348</sup> And this brings Schelling's task close to Hegel's in that they are both concerned with how it is the case that the transcendence of reason is one with the *actuality* of substance as such.

As a result, Schelling's thinking also deviates from Kant's with regard to the distinction between the noumenal and phenomenal (especially the Kant of the *Prolegomena*). As is well known, Kant posits a strict dichotomy between noumenal and phenomenal reality. However, on Schelling's account, the transcendent is ultimately conceived as a "transcendence-in-immanence"<sup>349</sup> (just as it is for Hegel). By thinking in this way, the noumenal is thereby conceived as the *immanently* noumenal. As Johnston explains:

Instead of positing a link between thing and object as two external entities otherwise opposed to each other, Schelling, deviating from the standard Kantian notion of *das Ding an sich* being a transcendent exteriority beyond or behind the experienced object, insinuates that the Real, ontological level of the *an sich* is itself immanently embedded within the reality of the subject's experiential field (as Žižek puts it, the Schellingian Real is the obfuscated originary/primordial underbelly of reality that nonetheless repeatedly 'insists' within the fragile, framed field of experience, an unruly proto-materiality constantly threatening to irrupt within the domain of mundane reality – the 'existence' of reality is to be opposed to the 'insistence' of the Real).<sup>350</sup>

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<sup>348</sup> Ibid., 69-70.

<sup>349</sup> Johnston, *Adventures in Transcendental Materialism*, 33 ff.

<sup>350</sup> Johnston, *Žižek's Ontology*, 71.

Here, Schelling differs from Kant because his claim is not that the “in-itself” is transcendent due to its inaccessibility (as what is outside of, beyond, before, or prior to experience). Rather, Schelling’s thought here is that the in-itself is transcendent precisely as the *immanence of transcendence*. In other words, our experience of the transcendent is precisely the experience of nothingness,<sup>351</sup> i.e., we experience the transcendent (in-itself) insofar as we merge (in the sense of becoming one) with the emptiness of substance (this is what Žižek described above as the fourth stage of absolute reflection). The experience of the transcendent (as an immanence of otherness) is, therefore, a “transcendent-immanent” experience.

Schelling and Hegel agree regarding this topic insofar as they both posit a monism on the order of absolute substance in order to explain how this is possible. Thus, rather than dividing epistemology from ontology, according to both Schelling and Hegel, epistemology and ontology are fundamentally bound together and mutually develop (I commented on this notion in earlier chapters when I mentioned how form and content are primordially bound together and develop in a harmonious interplay). Since both Schelling and Hegel note how epistemology and ontology are bound together at core, in this precise sense they are both post-Kantian thinkers (Kant had fundamentally divided epistemology from ontology, since according to Kant what could be known was always on the order of representations relative to the thinking of a finite subject).

Both Schelling and Hegel describe a process through which the primordial Real (in its self-disappearing) generates the Ideal from out of itself, and yet, the Ideal that is generated cannot subsequently be *reduced* to the Real from which it arose (since the Real itself is no longer).<sup>352</sup> On Hegel’s account, the primordial Real begins as the emptiness of emptiness (emptiness before it becomes known as the substance of experience). For the Schelling of his

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<sup>351</sup> Ibid., 9, 274.

<sup>352</sup> Ibid., 76. Here, Johnston describes Schelling’s position.

*Weltalter*, as we will see, the beginning is the “indifference” of the Godhead in its eternity. That said, both thinkers agree that the Absolute *becomes* in history. The two thinkers also both agree regarding substance monism and the corresponding consequence that the transcendent is most properly conceived as a “transcendence-in-immanence.” That is to say, neither of the two thinkers posits a strict dichotomy between the transcendent and immanent.

Furthermore, Schelling’s account more explicitly addresses the principles that follow from the Absolute’s original indifference. Schelling goes on to provide a more explicit discussion than Hegel as to *why* the Absolute is prompted to develop itself from out of an original indifference in the first place (on Schelling’s account, it is for the purpose of the expression of freedom, as we will see in Chapter Five). Whereas Hegel’s SL primarily examines the logical, internal structure of the movement, Schelling’s account strives beyond that insofar as he further aims to address the question of *why* the movement takes place. This is true, despite the fact that Schelling, like Hegel, recognizes the importance of not making any inordinate presuppositions at the beginning of ontology. In other words, they are both committed to the notion that something like “God’s own law”<sup>353</sup> guides the process along.

#### **4.5) “The Will that Wills Nothing”<sup>354</sup>: The Love of Freedom**

On Schelling’s account of the “beginning,” as he provides it in his *Ages of the World*, the Godhead, as pure love, stands at the very beginning of the entire movement. In the beginning, the Godhead, as that which is most divine in God, ruminates within itself as a “lucid purity” (*Lauterkeit*).<sup>355</sup> As Schelling writes, “But the Godhead is not God. It is instead the radiance of

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<sup>353</sup> F.W.J. Schelling, *Philosophy of Revelation*, 170.

<sup>354</sup> F.W.J. Schelling, *The Ages of the World (1811)*, trans. Joseph P. Lawrence, 71.

<sup>355</sup> *Ibid.*, 72-73.

the unapproachable light in which God dwells, the scorching heat of its purity (*Reinheit*)...”<sup>356</sup> In the beginning, then, it is the Godhead’s joy to simply dwell in itself – as a celestial and heavenly love (in this sense the Godhead is beyond being).<sup>357</sup> As Schelling writes, “Unable to distinguish itself from itself, it cannot be truly aware of itself. It is a going into itself, a playful searching for and finding of self, that is all the more blissful the more soulful it is.”<sup>358</sup> On my reading, this moment of Schelling’s account is akin to that of the emptiness of emptiness in the Hegelian movement: from within its “lucid purity,” the Godhead repeats itself out of its own nothingness. We see this same movement in Hegel’s account with “Being, pure being, --”<sup>359</sup> at the beginning of the SL. As we will see, on Schelling’s account (in agreement with Hegel’s) God’s expansion is equiprimordial with God’s contraction.

From out of the Godhead’s original lucid purity, there arise two opposed and co-eternal wills. As Schelling writes:

In this way [the Godhead] gives rise to (*erzeugt*) the lustful desire to have itself and to perceive itself externally.<sup>360</sup>

From out of its pure bliss, the Godhead develops a desire to come to know itself as freedom in an experiential sense. Schelling describes a process guided along by freedom in which God desires to express itself and to come to know itself as a determinate something. The will that wills something is thus derived from the will of the divine to experience itself as freedom. In other words, if the second will is the desire to have an experience of a particular object, in this case the object that the second will desires to experience is precisely freedom (an objectless object). The second will signifies for God the ability to experience its own nature as freedom.

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<sup>356</sup> Ibid., 73.

<sup>357</sup> Ibid.

<sup>358</sup> Ibid., 74-5.

<sup>359</sup> Hegel, *Science of Logic*, 82.

<sup>360</sup> F.W.J. Schelling, *The Ages of the World (1811)*, trans. Joseph P. Lawrence, 75.

The Godhead is the depth of freedom from out of which both wills arise. The Godhead is both infinite affirmation and infinite negation thought together with the unity of both (which simultaneously implies it is the indifference of both.) In this precise sense, the Godhead represents absolute freedom. As Schelling writes:

The godhead, as what in itself neither is nor is not, is *necessarily* consuming No in relation to external being. However, as what in itself neither is nor is not [it cannot be a No unless] it is also necessarily eternal Yes, empowering love, essence of all essences... But just because the godhead is the whole and undivided, eternal Yes and eternal No, it is also neither the one nor the other, and the unity of both.<sup>361</sup>

For this reason, the Godhead is freedom as such – both divine affirmation and negation as well as neither. The second will (the will that wills a determinate something) arises in order that the Godhead may experience itself. However, since the will that wills nothing is actually the unity of absolute negation and absolute affirmation, the second will must actually take on the form of freedom itself, if the Godhead is to *experience* the nature of freedom. In other words, in this case, the form that the second will (the will that takes on the form of a determinate something) takes on, is actually the form of nothingness as such. In short, just as in Hegel's SL there is a repetition of emptiness at the beginning of the system, here too, we find a repetition of emptiness at the very beginning.

Schelling's interpretation of the beginning, then, is that divine love (in its purity) eventually develops a will to know itself not merely internally, but also externally. He writes, "...In its original state of soulful inwardness, each and every nature is nothing other than a quiet inner reverie (*ein stilles Sinnen über sich selbst*)."<sup>362</sup> At the beginning, the soul is at peace in its internal state. But out of this internal peace, love generates a will to express itself externally.

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<sup>361</sup> Schelling, F.W.J. *The Ages of the World* (1815 draft), trans. Frederick de Wolfe Bolman, Jr. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1942), 188.

<sup>362</sup> F.W.J. Schelling, *The Ages of the World* (1811), trans. Joseph P. Lawrence, 74.

Along these lines, Schelling develops an interesting (and paradoxical) position on the relationship between love and being. He writes:

Everyone agrees that the Divinity is the being within every being (*Wesen aller Wesen*). As such, it is the purest love, infinite outpouring and communicability. But at the same time, everyone wants to maintain that the Divinity, as such, exists. But love by itself does not find its way to *Being (Seyn)*. Existence is separation, the singularity of what is one's own (*Eigenheit*). Love, however, is the negation of the singular (*das Nichts der Eigenheit*). It does not look out for what belongs specifically to it. For this reason it can never attain existence on its own.<sup>363</sup>

Schelling's reflections here help to further demonstrate his position (in agreement with Hegel) that the identity of the divine is constituted by its transcendence of itself. Schelling's explanation as to why this is the case is that it allows for the divine to experience itself as love. From out of love's negation of a particular identity, the divine moves through emptiness to establish its identity in union with otherness.

Schelling sometimes speaks about this movement in metaphorical language. Schelling notes how freedom itself somehow draws the lower principle in God to the service of freedom. To put it differently, God (out of love) expresses a potency of manifestation that ultimately makes itself subordinate to eternal freedom. (As Schelling says elsewhere, the lower will stands in service of the higher will [to freedom]. Likewise, even the potencies are ultimately in service of divine freedom). God lovingly develops a will to manifest itself from out of its eternal potencies. Paradoxically, that which God desires to experience, however, is the nature of its own freedom. Therefore, when God opens up the space within itself to be able to manifest itself, it must simultaneously allow for the possibility that it does not become at all.

Schelling's point here is that pure love is infinite expression and expansion, so much so in fact that it is also infinite negation. If love were merely the will to express oneself (the will to

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<sup>363</sup> Ibid., 77.

infinite self-affirmation), then it seems that love could never exist at all (since it would not exist as a particular something), and therefore, no individual particular or finite being could experience it as such. Schelling's solution to this dilemma is to philosophize that God posits its own otherness from out of itself internally in order to come to know itself as freedom: God's taking on the form of emptiness is that which enables it to come to know its nature as freedom, since in doing so, God *experiences* the indeterminacy of Being.

The paradox is that somehow, and in some way, Being comes forth at all from out of the purity of God's love in its seeming ontological nothingness as "the will that wills nothing" (eternal freedom). Schelling, like Hegel, wonders *how* this is possible at all. Just as Hegel, in his *Science of Logic*, addresses the question of how emptiness can negate itself (as the emptiness of emptiness) in order to become something, Schelling, likewise, wonders: how, from the nothingness *beyond* being, does being possibly arise at all? Schelling's response to this question is essentially the following: in eternal freedom (conceived as a will of indifference) there is a loving unity between two wills: a will of infinite affirmation (which is simultaneously a will to infinite negation) and a will to individuality. These two wills are eternally bound together and one in their essence. The divine is composed of both wills and utilizes them for its purpose of self-development. Furthermore, beyond these two wills stands the Godhead – as the "will that wills nothing," somehow (and in the service of love), the Godhead provokes from within itself a desire to express itself, which is how the potencies arise. Even the potencies thus ultimately stand in service of divine freedom – they allow for divine freedom to experience itself as actuality. On Schelling's account, it is not contradictory to state that eternal freedom is both of the lower wills also, since God's essence can be both of these wills (and neither) and in different aspects.



Along these lines, the question as to “why is there something at all rather than nothing?” is one possible point of contention between Schelling and Hegel. On Hegel’s account, an original contradiction (conceived as the emptiness of emptiness) leads to the generation of experience. The fact that anything exists at all is ultimately bound up with the fact that there is an original affirmation contained within the original negation. In negating itself, God finds its self-affirmation on the other side of the abyss, so to speak. God’s crucifixion is simultaneously God’s resurrection, etc.

Schelling’s solution is in fact similar to the one provided by Hegel. However, Schelling thinks beyond Hegel insofar as he provides an explanation as to *why* this is the case. Schelling’s thought is that God’s eternal beginning, and the continuous process of finite beginning(s), must be united by the higher order will of eternal freedom. Eternal freedom is so free that God must have sacrificed itself into the fullness of existence. The proof of this fact is Nature herself. One is astounded before the *actuality* of nature’s existence. God’s death to itself is simultaneously God’s resurrection. Eternal freedom ultimately reveals itself as that which was and is guiding the process along throughout.

Schelling’s description of the overall movement is akin to the self-affirmation of the original nothingness in the Hegelian movement that opens up the possibility for dialectics in the first place. In this process, Schelling allows for an excess of material nature that is irrecoverable, since there is always a part of God that remains beyond God (and therefore, unconscious). In other words, the highest notion of God (the Godhead) is beyond thought (yet, not in a one-sidedly transcendent sense). Rather, God remains God throughout the entire process (since the entire process is one of God’s self-transcendence in-and-as immanence). For this reason, even if Schelling allows for an irrecoverable remainder of substance that cannot be fully captured by

reason, ultimately all of substance is one with God (on the order of an absolute monism). Thus, my claim is that both Schelling's and Hegel's accounts (à la dialectical materialism) are united at heart on the order of an absolute monism – both thinkers ultimately consider the process as one of divine revelation.

Here, a more explicit consideration of Schelling's "beginning" from the WA text will aid my interpretation. In the "Introduction" to Draft I of his 1811 draft of *The Ages of the World*, Schelling writes:

The animating principle of the highest form of philosophy can only be the original living being itself (*das Urlebendige*), that being that has no being before it and is therefore the oldest of all beings, the very heart of reality as such (*Wesen*).

This original living being, since there is nothing before or outside of it from which it might be determined, can develop itself only freely, living out of itself and out of its own will and instinct. But for precisely this reason it develops itself not lawlessly, but in accord to its own inner law. There is in it no caprice. It is a nature in the most complete sense of the word, just as human beings are a nature, not only irrespective of their freedom, but even more because of it.<sup>364</sup>

Note here, significantly, how Schelling describes the "principle" at the essence of philosophy as a *living* being (a primordial living being, "*das Urlebendige*"). In agreement with Hegel's ontological beginning, Schelling argues that this original living being must have "no being before it." Schelling's position here is similar to Hegel's, since Schelling, too, does not want to presuppose anything from the start. Rather, the original principle must be a principle that develops from out of itself internally. As a result, Schelling agrees with Hegel that the genuine transcendent is a transcendence-in-immanence. If the Absolute that Schelling has in mind is to be a transcendent one, then it must somehow be transcendent from within itself, since otherwise, it would not be a genuine Absolute (since anything that is one-sidedly transcendent would actually be limited by that which stands outside of itself).

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<sup>364</sup> F.W.J. Schelling, *The Ages of the World (1811)*, trans. Joseph P. Lawrence, 56-57.

Consequently, Schelling agrees with Hegel that this original living being must develop itself in accordance with its own “law.” The inner law of this original living being is its *freedom* – the law of highest love in its purity. Thus, Schelling’s task, like Hegel’s, becomes the explanation and elaboration of how this process unfolds – how does the Godhead as “the will that wills nothing” come to know itself as such? The answer is bound up with the manifestation of itself as freedom.

Schelling even explicitly comments on how he reverses the order of philosophy, returning it back to primordial, unconscious spirit before it comes to know itself as conscious subject. Unlike Kant, who begins with the transcendental subject, Schelling begins with *unconscious* spirit. As Schelling writes:

The science of philosophy no longer has to begin from the remote distance of abstract thoughts, in order to climb down from there to nature. The direction is now the reverse. Beginning with the unconscious existence of the eternal, philosophy leads it upward toward its highest transfiguration in a consciousness that is divine.<sup>365</sup>

In other words, philosophy is the development and evolution of the unconscious divine coming to a conscious knowledge of its divinity. As we will see, this is the significance of history to Schelling’s account.

Schelling’s account entails that all of experience is infused by divinity. Although it is true that divine love is that which enables the possibility for existence as such (and, therefore, at the heart of all experience), it is also true that there is part of God that remains unaware of its divine nature: this is the part of God that has not yet undergone a “transformation into...love.”<sup>366</sup>

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<sup>365</sup> Ibid., 63.

<sup>366</sup> Ibid., “Translator’s Introduction,” 10.

#### 4.6) God's Internal Dialogue

Along these lines, on Schelling's account, what follows next is a discussion of *dialogue*. According to his account, within the human soul, an internal dialogue takes place. This dialogue mirrors an eternal dialogue that originally takes place on the order of the Absolute when it desires to know itself. Indeed, the Absolute's desire to know itself is what drives creation forward from the start. As Schelling writes:

This division, this doubling of ourselves, represents a clandestine intercourse in which there are two beings, one that questions and one that answers, one that knows – or is knowledge (*Wissenschaft*) itself – and one that, not knowing, always struggles for clarity. The real secret of the philosopher is this inner art of dialogue. Dialectic, its external correlate, derived its name from it, but is at best only its imitation. Where it becomes a mere form it is no more than a shadow and empty appearance.<sup>367</sup>

First and foremost, here I find Schelling (as well as Hegel, for that matter) speaking to the notion that the psyche is not fully transparent to itself. For this reason, internal dialogue is fundamentally important. In this way, dialogue reflects the process of creation itself. Just like in the process of creation, during the process of dialogue, there is both a part that is concealed and a part that is made unconcealed. Interestingly enough, I am reminded here of Nuzzo's reading of Hegel, since on Nuzzo's interpretation, the original nothingness "says" in a way that precedes dialectics, i.e. the *Logos* itself is bound to a more original dialogue. I agree that one could find a similarity with Hegel's overall movement here, since the beginning of the movement (as the emptiness of emptiness) must be an *actual* experience on Hegel's account, and not merely a formal one, i.e. subjectivity itself is constituted by the emptiness of emptiness. To put it briefly, Schelling agrees with Hegel that there is a more original dialogue prior to dialectics and

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<sup>367</sup> Ibid., 58.

discourse as such. On Schelling's account, this knowledge is knowledge on the order of an internal movement of the Absolute.

This is important, since it entails a number of related implications. First of all, there is an internal "dialogue" in the sense of a movement that precedes its external expression as discourse. Second, there is an original unconsciousness in the sense that there is always a part of God that remains beyond God – it is the striving to know itself that drives it forward and simultaneously assures its self-transcendence. (In fact, we will see later that God freely "decides" to conceal part of itself as unconscious due to its nature as freedom.) In other words, even if there is a part of material nature that can never fully recover itself as conscious knowledge, it still belongs to God's nature: God's unconscious knowledge of itself belongs to God's nature. Lastly, the point about dialogue as *living* dialogue is also crucial. Schelling's point, in agreement with Hegel, is that the essential nature of genuine dialectics is that it must take place in time – it cannot be reduced to a mere atemporal sequence of symbols.

Schelling's comments about the dialectical nature of philosophy as an original (un)-dialectical dialogue are also related to his understanding of transcendence as "transcendence-in-immanence" (incidentally, Schelling agrees with Hegel on this point). As Schelling writes, "All knowledge and comprehension begins where things become internalized."<sup>368</sup> This is a crucial comment, since it portrays Schelling's stance on genuine knowledge (as well as experience, for that matter, since epistemology and ontology are primordially bound together for Schelling). This means that what is transcendent may be understood in its transcendence by means of the analogy of an internal dialogue. If this is so, then what is beyond experience is defined by its

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<sup>368</sup> Ibid., 60.

transcendence in the sense of a conversation in which certain aspects of oneself transcend one's conscious dialogue.

According to Schelling, the entire process is one of *eternal freedom* coming to know itself. By placing the unconscious absolute at the beginning of the process, Schelling conceives of an Absolute that is Absolute the whole way through, even if there are times when it loses itself or is not fully aware of itself in the process. In a similar vein, Hegel's claims about the connectedness of epistemology and ontology imply that if the genuine beginning is the emptiness of emptiness, then the transcendence-in-immanence of the Absolute that emerges cannot be *reduced* to the material Real. Schelling agrees with Hegel on this point. As Johnston writes, "In fact, Hegelian dialectics is both an epistemology and an ontology, namely, a mobile, dynamic knowledge-process that, in its functioning [and, more importantly, malfunctioning], simultaneously reveals the very configuration of being itself."<sup>369</sup>

On both Schelling's and Hegel's accounts, the overall process demonstrates God's self-movement. On Hegel's account, God's genuine self-sacrifice is one with God's resurrection – by dying to itself, God finds itself as one with life. Schelling's starting point is very similar in the sense that the Godhead's original indifference implies that it is both everything and nothing.

Schelling states:

For most people, because they have never felt within themselves this highest freedom, the highest thing imaginable must itself be a subject, a "something" that is being (*ein Seyendes*). For this reason they ask: what could be above being? – and then answer: Nothingness, or something similar to it.

And yes truly it is a nothing, but in the same way that <sheer (*laute*)> freedom is a nothing. It is like the will that wills nothing (*der Wille, der nichts will*), having not a thing it desires. Indifferent to all things, it is for this very reason moved by nothing. Such a will is nothing and everything. It is nothing insofar as it neither desires to become active for itself nor hungers for anything actual. All the same, it is everything, for all strength

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<sup>369</sup> Johnston, Žižek's *Ontology*, 129.

derives from it – as from eternal freedom alone. Because it has all things under it, it commands everything and is commanded by nothing.<sup>370</sup>

Schelling's point here is that, for many of us as human beings, it is difficult to imagine what the highest freedom of the Godhead could be, since we have not yet experienced it. One tends to imagine that the highest freedom takes on the form of a subject due to our lack of experiential awareness of the divine presence as nothingness. On the other hand, one finds that the highest freedom is in fact nothing, but for that reason it is equally everything: the pure love of divinity is equally present in all of experience. Schelling's remarks on dialogue are further evidence for the incompleteness of his philosophy. If Schelling posits something akin to the movement of the unconsciousness of God at the beginning of philosophy, then he surely does not posit the closure of reason.

#### **4.7) The Pure Heart as Closest to Divinity**

Schelling sees that God's original indifference – as both nothing and everything – is God's divinity. Likewise, Schelling understands that there is a part of God that remains hidden from itself, precisely because it is so pure, that the only way for us to experience it is to return to the primordial ground in which we are united with the divine. By embodying our divine nature, we connect with an experience of the transcendent. Hegel agrees with Schelling that this experience must be an *actual* one, and not merely an imagined or otherwise self-created one.

Another important point of unity for Schelling and Hegel, is that for both thinkers, this is a divine process the whole way through. The fact that (1) the transcendent cannot be reduced to the material real (2) that this is an internal process and (3) that God's nature entails a knowledge that lies beyond our fully conscious grasp are all consistent with a divine process. On Schelling's

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<sup>370</sup> F.W.J. Schelling, *The Ages of the World (1811)*, trans. Joseph P. Lawrence, 71.

account, even if there is a part of the material real that is not fully recovered in conscious knowledge, our unity with that material real implies that it, too, belongs to God's internal knowledge of itself. In other words, the divine is present in all of nature. When we connect to the eternal freedom of the divine, the divine reveals this to us in our surrender to it.

Indeed, this is precisely what Schelling says shortly after. He writes:

How can we even begin to describe such lucid purity (*Lauterkeit*)? To do so is impossible unless we first ask what it is that, *within a person*, precedes all actual and all conditioned being. For what is supreme within a human being is what, in God and in all things, is the innermost heart of reality. It is eternity, properly speaking... we have elsewhere called the supreme the true and absolute unity of subject and object; because it is neither the one nor the other, it is yet the power to be either, or both. It is pure freedom in itself, the calm bliss (*die gelassene Wonne*) that, oblivious of itself, is so full and content with itself that it has nothing to think about. It is the quiet soulful inwardness (*Innigkeit*) that takes joy in its own nonbeing. Its essence (*Wesen*) is nothing but grace, love and simplicity. It is the humanity in human beings, the divinity in God.<sup>371</sup>

Schelling's key point here is that within each and every human being there is a part of us that is one with our divine nature and essence. There are many names for this divine nature: eternity, the divine, compassion, pure freedom, pure love, the heart, nothing and everything (it is, in fact, both and neither), etc. Ironically, it is our divinity that brings out the fullness of our humanity and the fullness of our humanity brings out our divinity.

Indeed, Schelling is highly aware of this divine nature, and the way in which he writes about it indicates that he himself had experienced it. We know this from the fact that Schelling indicates that the one who is able to be one with his divine nature has emptied himself out completely, such that what remains is precisely the fullness of the divine nature. It is here where humanity "meets" divinity and divinity "meets" humanity. But such a "meeting" is not to be understood merely as a coming together of two disparate things. Rather, it is a meeting as many mystics have described it – unification with the divine heart and an embodiment of divine

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<sup>371</sup> Ibid., 72.



essence. As opposed to a physical meeting, such a coming together is more analogous to a flower blossoming into the fullness of the truth of its internal nature. Likewise, the more one dwells in the truth of the divine presence, the more and more one embodies harmony with his or her divinity. As Schelling writes, “But the Godhead is not God. It is instead the radiance of the unapproachable light in which God dwells, the scorching heat of its purity (*Reinheit*), which a human being can approach only with an equally immaculate heart (*mit gleicher Lauterkeit des Wesens*).”<sup>372</sup> Here, in Platonic fashion, Schelling describes how only the pure-hearted one is able to connect with his or her divinity. Schelling knows this to be the case, since he himself had experienced it;<sup>373</sup> Schelling had gone through the process of emptying himself out to become one with the divine nature within himself.

I would furthermore like to highlight Schelling’s comment about divinity as neither merely subject or object but “the power to be either or both,” as I quoted above. Here, Schelling is speaking of *eternal freedom*. Schelling’s point is that freedom is the movement of life itself. Freedom “walks the fine line,” so to speak, between existence and non-existence – it holds itself open to the possibility of its own non-existence. Hegel and Schelling are both concerned with how to philosophize about such a genuine and absolute freedom.

Significantly, the epistemology at work here is an epistemology of the *heart*. Indeed, Schelling even writes that the way for one to know when he has found the God within himself is by means of an *inner* experience. He continues:

this is what provokes the universal question, how is it possible to recognize such lucid purity? The only possible answer is to let emerge in yourself an equally lucid purity – and to feel and recognize it as the highest in *you*. In doing so, you will immediately understand that it is what is absolutely highest. If on the other hand you are distracted and torn in many directions, how can you possibly hope to experience the supremely simple

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<sup>372</sup> Ibid., 73.

<sup>373</sup> Lawrence, “Translator’s Introduction,” 12.

as something real?<sup>374</sup>

Schelling is able to provide his readers with this advice from a first-person point of view. He had found the highest within himself through a process of self-sacrifice and internal death, so to speak. To put it in other words, Schelling so fully immersed himself in the divine presence that the divine truth could shine forth from out of the Divine Itself. This process is excruciatingly painful at times. It entails the death of the ego self, which can sometimes feel like a genuine death. However, when one experiences this process, one eventually finds that what remains at bottom is the genuine living God – the God which never dies, but merely changes from one form to the next.

In his discussion of time, Schelling even describes how each subsequent form (of the ages) conceals the one that came before it:

We can see a series of ages, whereby one has followed upon the other, always obscuring its predecessor. Nowhere does anything original show itself. A wealth of slowly piled up layers, the work of many millennia must be taken away in order finally to come to the ground.

If the world that lies before us has finally attained its form only after going through so many intermediary periods of time, how, without knowledge of the past, are we to recognize even just the present for what it is?<sup>375</sup>

This leads Schelling more and more towards his notion of the Absolute as a living being, expressing eternal freedom. The true self cannot perish, since it is eternal. Its *essence* (as freedom) is, at bottom, unchanging. One discovers, in other words, that the Divine Itself is evolving. And one becomes a participant in this divinely beautiful process of self-transformation.

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<sup>374</sup> F.W.J. Schelling, *The Ages of the World (1811)*, trans. Joseph P. Lawrence, 73.

<sup>375</sup> *Ibid.*, 67.

#### 4.7.1) Concluding Remarks

The difference between Schelling and Hegel on this topic is primarily a difference regarding the place from which each philosopher writes (on an experiential level) of the topic. Both philosophers are *humble* in the sense that both Schelling and Hegel recognize that there is an unconscious and unknowable part of the divine that is continuously revealed to us as humans and yet, never in a complete or totalizing sense. While Schelling and Hegel arrive at similar conclusions, each reaches these conclusions in a different way. The Hegel of the SL approaches his conclusions more from the level of the logical mind (here I am speaking of the general style of his approach),<sup>376</sup> yet simultaneously he recognizes the fact that the Notion is the movement of emptiness in its process of becoming. As for Schelling's stylistic approach, he philosophizes more from his heart space, in the sense that he is more primarily concerned with his inner experience – indeed, he even says in his *Ages of the World* text that it is the one who has experienced “lucid purity” within himself who is able to see it, as I quoted above. In other words, Schelling is more primarily concerned with the insights gleaned from his heart. On the other hand, even Hegel's mind-level philosophical approach arrives at the same insight that Schelling has observed from his heart. In this sense, the difference is more one of style than a fundamental discord.

#### 4.8) Philosophy's Arrival from Unconscious Spirit (qua Nature)

In his *Ages of the World* draft from 1811, Schelling writes of the shift that was occurring during his time in the discipline of philosophy, and interestingly, this shift is demonstrated by

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<sup>376</sup> Here, it is also helpful to keep in mind that there is an ongoing scholarly debate about which part of Hegel's philosophy is more fundamental, i.e. the Logic or the *Realphilosophie*, as one example. See Johnston, *A New German Idealism*, xii.

both Schelling's and Hegel's works insofar as they are both ahead of their time. Schelling writes of how the order of the beginning of philosophy has now been reversed: philosophy can arrive at itself directly from unconscious spirit instead of attempting to construct the arrival of nature from distant, abstract concepts. Schelling and Hegel are actually both united in the task of describing the beginning of philosophy as arriving from out of Spirit herself: Hegel writes about this as the beginning of dialectics in the emptiness of emptiness. On Schelling's terms, as we will see, this is the process of the becoming of divinity as the play of Love between the simultaneous possibilities of "to be" or "not to be": the heart's internal dialogue and rumination. According to Schelling, divine Love is both everything and nothing: God's love is so profound that it entails the possibility of God's self-negation so as to allow for the experience of divinity as freedom.

Since eternal freedom is present at the heart of all things, Schelling describes a harmony between the world of thought and the world of nature. He writes:

It seems to have been reserved for our own age to open for good the path to this objectivity of philosophical science. As long as philosophy restricts its concern to what is inward it must lack the natural means of an external form of exposition. But now things have finally changed. After having so long gone astray, philosophical science has recalled the memory of nature and of its own previous unity with her. And this is not all. Hardly were the first steps taken to rejoin philosophy with nature, when the enormous age of the physical became apparent. Far from being what is last, it is much rather what is first. It is that from which everything begins, including the development of the life of divinity. The science of philosophy no longer has to begin from the remote distance of abstract thoughts, in order to climb down from there to nature. The direction is now the reverse. Beginning with the unconscious existence of the eternal, philosophy leads it upward toward its highest transfiguration in a consciousness that is divine. Even the most supersensible thoughts now attain physical strength and life. And nature, conversely, can be recognized ever more clearly as the visible imprint of the loftiest concepts. In due time, the contempt with which ignorant people alone still look down on the physical will pass away. Once again the truth of the old saying will be acknowledged that the stone which the builders rejected has become the cornerstone. Then popularity, so often sought after in vain, will come of itself. At that point there will no longer be a gap separating the world of thought and the world of actuality. It will be One World (*Eine Welt*). The peace of the golden age will make itself known for the first time in the peaceful union of all fields of knowledge.<sup>377</sup>

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<sup>377</sup> F.W.J. Schelling, *The Ages of the World (1811)*, trans. Joseph P. Lawrence, 63.

On my reading, Schelling's insight here is primarily with regard to the starting point of his philosophy as the eternal freedom present within nature. This connects Schelling's task in the *Ages of the World* to Hegel's task in the *Logic*, since both are concerned with the development of accounts in which nothing is presupposed from the start. Schelling hopes to show how unconscious nature becomes conscious of itself as divinity. In this respect, I would also like to highlight the significance of Schelling's reference to the biblical phrase, "the stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone."<sup>378</sup> Schelling employs this famous biblical adage here to emphasize that unconscious Spirit had previously been rejected, but in Schelling's philosophy it will rise to prominence once more as the beginning of philosophy. On Schelling's understanding, the world of unconscious Spirit is equally as important as the world of thought, since it, too, speaks to the truth of eternal freedom. If the world of thought had previously been prioritized, it will now "bow down," so to speak, before the world of the heart's actuality. Significantly, Schelling calls for a resurrection of the world of actuality, and in doing so, he hopes to reveal the internal unity between the two worlds. The heart imbues the physical with meaning. Divine nature reveals God in the physical. While previous philosophical eras had rejected the knowledge of the heart, Schelling considers his era as one that can pronounce a future revelation of unity: "there will no longer be a gap separating the world of thought and the world of actuality."<sup>379</sup>

#### **4.9) Schelling's Conception of the Ultimate Form of Philosophy**

Indeed, Schelling considers his epoch as the anticipation of a future time in which this goal could be achieved. The evidence that such a period has not yet arrived in Schelling's era is

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<sup>378</sup> Ibid.

<sup>379</sup> Ibid.

that the form of philosophy is still primarily conceived as one of *research*. In the future time that Schelling anticipates, a narrator could exist who would speak directly from the unity of heart and mind. According to Schelling, research is not the ultimate form of philosophy.<sup>380</sup> In research, one seeks information to support his or her argument and to argue for a particular point of view. Schelling's thought is that the genuine philosophical narrator would be one who is capable of speaking directly from an internal experience of unity with all of nature. Research alone can only achieve at best a partial awareness of unity, since it does not speak from the place of a *living* unity. If research is not coupled with lived experience, then one is incapable of speaking from a place of truth.

Since the current historical epoch has evolved after Schelling and Hegel's era, it remains an open question as to what extent we can now be the genuine narrators that Schelling has in mind. This is a question that each person must ask himself: How could I be the narrator that Schelling describes? Who is the genuine philosophical narrator? This leads to a related question: what would it mean to be such a narrator? Schelling writes of such a narrator: "Perhaps the one is yet to come who will sing the great heroic song, comprehending in spirit, like the famed seers of old, all that was, is, and will be."<sup>381</sup> Here, Schelling's vision of the genuine philosopher is the one who speaks from his or her direct knowledge of the unity of heart and mind. He has internally experienced such a unification of himself with Spirit as such. For this reason, Schelling also writes that the genuine philosophical narrator grasps the nature of time on a spiritual level.

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<sup>380</sup> As Schelling later re-iterates in his 1827 Munich lecture, "The ultimate goal of philosophical study cannot be reached by simply acquiring pieces of knowledge, which, while not without merit and to some extent even indispensable, are only the *means* to a higher end." See F.W.J. Schelling, "Inaugural Lecture," in *Philosophy of Revelation*, 45.

<sup>381</sup> F.W.J. Schelling, *The Ages of the World (1811)*, trans. Joseph P. Lawrence, 63.

Such a narrator contrasts with the researcher: whereas the researcher primarily speaks from the past and lacks a view of the whole, the narrator speaks from the wholeness of his or her heart.

While commenting on the contrast between the narrator and the researcher, it is also noteworthy to mention that Schelling places Freedom above Being in an ontological sense. The researcher is limited to the extent that her comprehension is primarily focused on the past. The researcher differs from the narrator, since she does not open herself to the unity of all experience as the unity of the past, present, and future. In constructing her philosophical argument, the researcher is primarily concerned with gathering evidence from the past.

On the other hand, the living God must be capable of dying to its Godself in such a profound way that the present unfolds from out of a genuine abyss (of freedom). This death in fact allows for the past itself to be fundamentally transformed in its meaning. While the researcher understands her experience from the point of view of a linear conception of the past, the narrator speaks from the unity of the whole, in which her conception of time itself is capable of changing. In other words, the philosophical narrator writes from the unity of her mind and heart, using the mind as a tool to express what he or she experiences from a heart-level awareness. Significantly, the philosophical narrator speaks from a place of connection between her heart and the heart of divine love due to her awareness that the divine heart is the highest essence of humanity and the existential *Ungrund* of all of experience.

#### **4.10) The Primordial Nature of Eternal Freedom**

As mentioned previously, Schelling considers eternal freedom as metaphysically more *primordial* than even the becoming of being in time (incidentally, Hegel also demonstrates this sort of prioritization as evinced by my earlier comments about whether Hegel's beginning is "(un)dialectical"). In any case, my interpretation of Schelling's point here is that God's infinite

love (and freedom) ontologically transcends God's finitude. However, Schelling is also aware that we, at times, speak of different aspects of things and sometimes in a seemingly contradictory way. Schelling holds that this is perfectly legitimate due to the nature of *time*. As one example, one can legitimately exclaim that God is both finite and infinite and one's words are not therefore empty of meaning. As Schelling writes:

The true meaning of that unity which was originally asserted is therefore this: one and the same (=x) is the unity as well as the antithesis; or the two opposites, the eternally negating and eternally affirming potency, and the unity of the two constitute the one, indivisible primordial essence.<sup>382</sup>

This statement implies that there must be a third thing (the copula) that unites these two seemingly contradictory aspects. The living essence of the divine (as it reveals God in time) allows for the union of these two seemingly contradictory principles. Coupled with such a relation is another relation of difference as well. These two, thought together, allow for God's movement between both and the sublation of both. God continuously manifests divinity as the possibility either to be or not to be. God can be an infinite possibility of options, and endlessly so. Despite this fact, the freedom of eternity also implies that God is present in each and every possible option at the same time: infinity *transcends* finitude in such a way that its very transcendence over finitude simultaneously implies the immanence of infinitude within finitude. The reason that this is important is that Schelling's philosophical edifice (at least up until this point in his career) is aimed towards the unification of 1) a logic of being (understood as recollection) with 2) the revelation of God.<sup>383</sup> Schelling's goal is to demonstrate how creation

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<sup>382</sup> Schelling, F.W.J. *The Ages of the World* (1815 draft), trans. Frederick de Wolfe Bolman, Jr. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1942), 103.

<sup>383</sup> Frederick de Wolfe Bolman, Jr., "Introduction: Schelling's Interests After 1812," in *The Ages of the World* trans. Frederick de Wolfe Bolman, Jr. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1942), 62.



itself (as elaborated by his “metaphysical empiricism”<sup>384</sup>) also represents the nature of the divine in its eternal freedom.

#### 4.11) Conclusion

Thus far, I have attempted to show how Hegel’s Logic of “Being” from his SL is consistent with Schelling’s WA. In these two works, both Schelling and Hegel proclaim the dual task of metaphysics (as the description of a structure on the order of identity (“re-collection”) as well as difference (“revelation”). Although on the surface, Hegel’s *Science of Logic* is a logic of being, it is actually much more than that, since internal to Hegel’s entire system is the nature of *difference*. In other words, if Schelling’s project aims to unify logic and history<sup>385</sup>, then my argument throughout this dissertation has been that Hegel’s conception of metaphysics is (at a minimum) *consistent* with that of Schelling; Hegel does not remain constrained merely to the order of logic, since the Notion itself is *inherently* historical.

Along similar lines, Schelling’s epistemology is one with his ontology (just as we also saw was true of Hegel’s epistemology). On Schelling’s account, knowledge of the transcendent (as a beyond) is simultaneously immanent knowledge (and therefore, available via phenomenal experience). To put this in another way, freedom transcends Being in such a way that freedom is present in all of experience while simultaneously existing as *more than* all possible experience.

Schelling elaborates on this topic:

Only one thing is to be heard in all of the best and most sublime teachings: being (*das Seyn*) is a debased (*tiefer*) condition of the original being, whose most primordial, unconditioned state towers above all being. As for being itself, we all have the feeling that necessity clings to it like a disastrous fate (*Verhängnis*). All being (*alles Seyn*) is caught up in the urge for manifestation and development. Everything that is (*alles Seyende*) is agitated by a thorn that prods it forward and makes it spread itself out, hiding within it an infinity that would like to express itself. For whatever is and has being

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<sup>384</sup> Ibid.

<sup>385</sup> Ibid.

demands more than its inner existence. What a thing is internally, it must be yet again, externally. True, eternal freedom only dwells above being. Freedom is the affirmative concept of eternity, or of that which is above all time (*dessen, was über aller Zeit ist*).<sup>386</sup>

The freedom that is “above all of time” is the freedom that is simultaneously everything and nothing: it is the freedom of becoming and nothingness in their internal unity. It is also true that freedom as such *moves* in and as becoming, but never in a way that it could be fully delimited – it is absolute freedom. As desireless desire, it is the divine love present in all of experience but which could never be reduced to any particular experience; it is the eternal life of the divine.

Schelling also comments on the difference between philosophy conceived as a discipline that merely dissects and analyzes past experience versus philosophy understood as a discipline of life. Schelling hopes for the day when the discipline of philosophy will return to the freedom of its genuine essence. Schelling’s point is that ultimately, the only wisdom worth having is the wisdom of the divine speaking from out of its eternal Spirit: the wisdom of divine freedom. He writes:

For human beings, philosophical science is always a remembering. This is not the case, however, for eternity, which can never fade into the past. Man alone has to be set free, so that his true nature (*sein Wesen*) might become again what it is in itself: a flashing forth (*Blick*) of the most pristine (*louterste*) divinity, in which a subject or an object can be distinguished so little as in the heart of divinity itself. For this reason, insight into the ultimate is completely unique with regard both to its immediacy and its soulful inwardness.<sup>387</sup>

The philosopher speaks from out of the unity of himself with the divine heart.

This passage is also significant to the rest of my dissertation, since it connects Schelling’s philosophy to Hegel’s ontology once again. On Hegel’s account, subject and object are unified from the beginning as the emptiness of emptiness. According to Schelling, subject and object are

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<sup>386</sup> F.W.J. Schelling, *The Ages of the World (1811)*, trans. Joseph P. Lawrence, 70-71.

<sup>387</sup> *Ibid.*, 73-74.

unified from the beginning in the divine heart – to philosophize from divinity is to philosophize from the presence of eternity in which subject and object are indistinguishable.

The main purpose of this chapter was to argue for the metaphysical consistency between Hegel's beginning in the SL and Schelling's beginning in the WA. Both thinkers agree that a repetition of emptiness is bound up with the process by which the divine comes to learn of its nature. Furthermore, on both accounts, God's nature is self-sacrificial. However, significantly, Schelling *explains* the way in which God's self-sacrificial nature relates to God's freedom in the WA. In the next chapter, I pursue this topic further in the context of divine revelation and Schelling's response to the purpose of the entire movement.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### THE *ACTUALITY* OF DIVINE LOVE (AS FREEDOM)

#### 5.1) Introduction

In this concluding chapter my main goal is to analyze Schelling's 1827 critique of Hegel's conception of the Absolute. I demonstrate that Schelling's critique is not problematic for Hegel's account, provided that we read the beginning of Hegel's SL as I have suggested throughout this dissertation. Consequently, I argue that Hegel's and Schelling's positions on the beginning are actually closer together than even Schelling himself contended. Both thinkers agree that the actuality of love (qua freedom) implies both a beginning in emptiness and a return to emptiness. In this sense, both the SL and the WA present the inherent incompleteness of a system of the absolute.

As a sub-goal of this chapter, I conduct a meta-reflection on the placement of logic in Schelling's and Hegel's systems of philosophy, respectively. For both thinkers, logic is important to ontology. In previous chapters, I identified the same overall schematic movement in the metaphysics of Hegel and Schelling. The two thinkers agree that the Absolute is fundamentally (in)complete and that God's nature is to transcend God Itself. As we will see, Christ is the symbol of such self-transcendence. That said, Schelling more explicitly addresses the question of *why* the absolute is self-divestment in the first place: co-eternal with the "will that wills nothing" is God's desire to *know* and experience divinity as love. Therefore, while Schelling and Hegel agree on the schematic question of *how* the Absolute unfolds from out of its

own freedom, Schelling thinks beyond Hegel insofar as he provides an explicit response to the question of *why*.<sup>388</sup>

## 5.2) Hegel and Schelling on Logic and Metaphysics

To pinpoint one specific point of possible contention between Hegel's and Schelling's accounts of metaphysics, I look to the question of whether or not each thinker contends that a logic of Being is sufficient to the task of metaphysics. As Frederick de Wolfe Bolman notes in his "Introduction" to Schelling's *Ages of the World*, Schelling agrees with Hegel that a "logical analysis of being must be carried through prior to positive knowledge of existence."<sup>389</sup> As Bolman states, "certainly the seeds of philosophical difference between Schelling and Hegel lay as far back as 1804, yet it was not until after 1827 that Schelling precisely stated the difference..."<sup>390</sup> Bolman notes how Schelling's own conception of God changed in his post-1804 works.<sup>391</sup> Schelling then realized that he had not been able to think through an understanding of God as both subject and object in a comprehensive sense in his works from the period prior to 1804. Bolman states:

In effect, Schelling blamed Hegel with having made the same error. In his logic, Hegel started from what is most negative or logical, the notion of pure being, that in which there is nothing of subject. But, claimed Schelling, while Hegel proceeded to ascribe immanent movement to pure being, the notion is immovable if it is not the notion of a thinking subject, i.e., if it is not a *thought*, and further, the movement Hegel described as immanent has a *terminus ad quem*, the actual world, which unconsciously affects the course of such philosophizing.<sup>392</sup>

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<sup>388</sup> Here, it is important to note that an assertion of the purpose of the revelation in no way contradicts the incompleteness of the system, since what is being revealed is divine freedom.

<sup>389</sup> Frederick de Wolfe Bolman, Jr., "Introduction: Schelling's Interests After 1812," in *The Ages of the World* trans. Frederick de Wolfe Bolman, Jr., 33.

<sup>390</sup> *Ibid.*, 34-35.

<sup>391</sup> *Ibid.*, 35.

<sup>392</sup> *Ibid.*

Schelling's thought is that in his pre-1804 works he had considered God as an Absolute Subject. The problem, Schelling reasons, is that God qua Subject is incapable of attaining to genuine, objective reality. In 1827, Schelling said of his own works prior to 1804, as Bolman quotes, "God was that subject which remains *as* subject, victorious over all, which can no longer fall into the object."<sup>393</sup>

### 5.3) My Analysis of Schelling's Critique

The Schelling of 1827 charges Hegel with the same philosophical misconception, since "pure being without subject with which it is identical or for which it is object is an impossibility."<sup>394</sup> In other words, to put it simply, Schelling's critique (as formulated in 1827) is that Hegel's system remains relegated to the order of subjectivity and the thinking of essence – it is thought bereft of being. As Bolman quotes from Schelling, "real thought is that whereby something opposed to thought is overcome. Where one has only thought, and abstract thought, for content, thought has nothing to overcome."<sup>395</sup>

To elaborate on this point, Schelling further argues that Hegel's account of the Absolute remains an inherently *subjective* one (like Schelling's own in his pre-1804 works). As one example, Schelling takes issue with Hegel's account of how the absolute Idea externalizes itself as Nature. Schelling argues that Hegel *presupposes* agency in his account of Nature as the externalization of the Absolute Idea.<sup>396</sup>

Schelling agrees with Hegel that logic is important to metaphysics. Where Schelling differs from Hegel (on Schelling's understanding) is that Hegel considers logic sufficient to the

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<sup>393</sup> Ibid.

<sup>394</sup> Ibid.

<sup>395</sup> Ibid., 36.

<sup>396</sup> Joseph P. Lawrence, "Schelling as Post-Hegelian and as Aristotelian," *International Philosophical Quarterly* Vol. XXVI, No. 4 104 (1986): 325.

task in and of itself. That is, according to Schelling, Hegel does not couple logic (the analysis of being) with a positive philosophy that is constructive and seeks wholeness as opposed to the dissection of the logical Concept. In Schelling's later works especially (the seeds for which he planted as early as the WA), he realizes the need for a negative philosophy to be coupled with a positive philosophy.<sup>397</sup> As Bolman writes, "While he considered Hegel correct in asserting that logic in the metaphysical sense must be the real foundation of all philosophy, Schelling held that Hegel failed to recognize that the logical is merely the negative aspect of existence."<sup>398</sup> Bolman quotes directly from Schelling:

The whole world lies, as it were, in the nets of understanding or of reason, but the question is *how* it came into these nets, since something else and something *more* than mere reason, indeed, even something striving beyond these limits, is evidently in the world.<sup>399</sup>

The task of the positive philosophy is to explain *how* it is the case that time allows for the actuality of the divine to be revealed in experience. According to Schelling, the logic of Being (à la Hegel) ultimately remains on the order of negative philosophy, since it provides an answer to the question of *what* exists and the developmental structure of Being. Schelling claims that Hegel leaves unaddressed the higher-order question of *how* reason could know Being at all. Bolman continues, "Hegel's logic, then, was the science in which the divine idea completed itself in mere thought before actuality, and the idea was thus *logically* result."<sup>400</sup>

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<sup>397</sup> In this context, it is also significant that, as Žižek notes, Schelling made the "move from *logos* to *mythos*..." in his later writings. Žižek, *Sex and the Failed Absolute*, 2.

<sup>398</sup> Frederick de Wolfe Bolman, Jr., "Introduction: Schelling's Interests After 1812," 36.

<sup>399</sup> F.W.J. Schelling, SW I, 10:143-144. Quote provided in *Ibid.*, 36.

<sup>400</sup> *Ibid.*

The point of contention seems to hinge on whether Hegel's account in the SL is able to genuinely (in a way that is true to lived experience) account for the *actuality* of existence. As Bolman continues:

Hegel, [Schelling] said, tried to make pure thought or logic account for existence. But existence for Hegel did not have the character of natural object, but only that of an object of thought, which, since Hegel denied the real illogicity of existence at the outset, could only characterize reality essentially, not existentially.<sup>401</sup>

Now, in order for us to assess whether Schelling's 1827 critique of Hegel's system of philosophy holds, we need to assess whether or not it is true that Hegel ultimately remains barred to the order of thought alone. Does Schelling's critique of 1827 apply as a valid critique of Hegel's *Science of Logic*?

To re-iterate what I have discussed previously, I do not think that Schelling's critique of 1827 is problematic for Hegel. I have my reasons, which I have noted throughout this dissertation (my reading of Hegel is that he is not a thinker of mere Subject. I hold that Absolute Spirit is inherently historical, etc.) Furthermore, I am not alone in my view that Schelling's critique of Hegel misses the mark.

Consider, as one example, Stephen Houlgate's commentary on Schelling's critique. Houlgate, a prominent contemporary Hegel scholar, makes a similar argument (although his reading differs from mine) that Schelling misunderstands the beginning of Hegel's SL. In Houlgate's paper, "Schelling's Critique of Hegel's *Science of Logic*", Houlgate writes:

Hegel accepts Schelling's claim against Fichte that being is not merely there for consciousness, but that it exists prior to consciousness. In that sense, Hegel agrees with Schelling that being is independent of thought. But he insists against Schelling that thought is directly aware from within itself of the very thatness of being.<sup>402</sup>

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<sup>401</sup> Ibid., 37.

<sup>402</sup> Stephen Houlgate, "Schelling's Critique of Hegel's *Science of Logic*," *The Review of Metaphysics* 53, no. 1 (Sept. 1999): 117.



Houlgate's point throughout his paper is that Schelling's critique of Hegel does not hold. First of all, Houlgate argues, Schelling charges Hegel with presupposing (or otherwise anticipating) the movement from Being to Becoming in his account in the SL. However, Houlgate claims that Schelling's charge is grounded in a faulty understanding of Hegel's position, since Hegel's account is not a movement that is anticipated by a subject nor a movement on the order of mere thought bereft of being. Rather, the movement is an immanent one – it is thought's participation in being and its reflection on itself as simultaneously same and other. I agree with Houlgate that Schelling's critique of Hegel is off the mark here. However, my interpretation differs slightly from Houlgate's. On my reading, the movement that Houlgate aims to describe is not merely thought's internal awareness of external being. Rather, the disappearing of Spirit from itself is the basis for thought as being. For this reason, my argument is that Hegel's and Schelling's accounts (understood via dialectical materialism) are actually much more similar than even Schelling himself contended.

Let us further consider the charge that Hegel presupposes agency in his account of how the absolute Idea externalizes itself. One relevant passage here comes from "The Absolute Idea" section at the end of the SL. There, in a discussion about how the Absolute Idea is also nature, Hegel writes:

The passage is therefore to be understood here rather in this manner, that the Idea *freely releases* itself in its absolute self-assurance and inner poise.<sup>403</sup>

Original German Text:

Das Übergehen ist also hier vielmehr so zu fassen, daß die Idee sich selbst *frei entläßt*, ihrer absolut sicher und in sich ruhend.

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<sup>403</sup> Hegel, *Science of Logic*, 843.

On my reading, the fact that the Idea “freely releases itself” (*sich selbst frei entläßt*) does not imply independent, subjective agency. As a side point, Hegel’s discussion of actuality as the “unity of essence and existence”<sup>404</sup> provides further support for my reading. In any case, on my understanding, for the Absolute Idea to “freely release itself” is for the Absolute Idea to express its essence. Or to put it in other words, the expression of the Absolute Idea as Nature (as an expression of otherness) *is* its essence.

The relationship between the absolute Idea and Nature is fundamental in assessing whether Schelling’s critique holds when it comes to the question of whether Hegel’s system remains on the order of an absolute Subject lacking genuine actuality. In his paper, “The Logic of Hegel’s *Philosophy of Nature: Nature, Space, and Time*” by Edward Halper, Halper comments on the relationship between the absolute Idea and Hegel’s *Philosophy of Nature*. Everyone seems to agree that Hegel’s *Philosophy of Nature* is a result of the externalization of the absolute Idea, but the question is how this is possible in Hegel’s system, to what extent Nature is in fact an *externalization* of the Idea and whether or not this implies closure to the system. If Nature is *completely* external to the Idea (as Schelling’s objection to Hegel would be), then Hegel is hard-pressed to explain how the Idea arrives at Nature *as* Nature. On the other hand, if Nature is entirely internal to the Idea, then how does Hegel’s account pay heed to the genuine otherness of Nature? Halper explains that Hegel’s solution is actually that the absolute Idea is simultaneously same and other to itself – it is both a particular category (the absolute) and indifferent to all categories (as a universal). As Halper writes:

Again, the content of absolute idea is the conceptual transformations between all the logical categories, and its form is just its character as a particular category. Absolute idea is the culmination of logic in so far as its form is identical with its content; that is, in so far as its individuality is just the totality of the transformations of all categories. However, it is also a category that is distinct from all other logical categories: it is a

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<sup>404</sup> Ibid., 529.

single universal that differs from the logical categories contained within it and from their complex conceptual development. In this latter respect, absolute idea is indifferent and external to the processes of conceptual unfolding that constitute logic. It is precisely this *externality* of absolute idea's form from its content that defines the realm of nature. So it is that absolute idea, in being just what it is, is also something else.<sup>405</sup>

Here, I find further support for the notion that Hegel and Schelling are metaphysically united insofar as they are both dialectical materialists (as philosophers who think beyond the divide between materialism and idealism).

Hegel's solution to the problem of how the absolute Idea externalizes itself as Nature is that the absolute Idea could be thought akin to a "category"<sup>406</sup>, but since it is also a category of all possible categories, it is simultaneously indifferent to all of the changes on the order of particular categories. Hegel's thought on the absolute Idea here is actually very similar to Schelling's thought of the two co-eternal wills (a will to indifference and a will to particularity) in his WA. The content of the absolute Idea is to be beyond, other, or external to itself and its form is to be as all possible categories. Yet, Hegel thinks of form and content together, so the Idea must be somehow both universal and absolute. As Halper goes on to explain, "absolute idea does not develop; it is its own self-unfolding."<sup>407</sup> In this sense, the Idea is simultaneously same and other to itself – its identity is to be always already beyond itself. To put it simply, Hegel wants to say that the Idea is always already mediated, since it exists on the order of both thought and being. In this sense, Nature is not merely an expression of all-consuming thought. Rather, Nature is an expression of the absolute Idea's movement, as a movement of both thought and

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<sup>405</sup> Edward Halper, "The Logic of Hegel's *Philosophy of Nature: Nature, Space and Time*," in *Hegel and the Philosophy of Nature*, ed. Stephen Houlgate (Albany: State University of New York, 1998), 32.

<sup>406</sup> Here, all of the consequences of the "retroactivity" of Absolute Spirit should also be taken into account and also the nature of Absolute Spirit as the one that "vanishes," as Žižek often reminds us.

<sup>407</sup> Halper, "The Logic of Hegel's *Philosophy of Nature*," 32.

being. The entire movement implies a circular return, repeatedly back to the nothingness of “pure being.”

Along these lines, Žižek makes a similar argument that Schelling’s critique of Hegel is based on a misconception of the nature of this moment (the externalization of the Idea as Nature) of the movement. He writes:

Schelling was the first to criticize this move as illegitimate: after Hegel completed the circle of logical self-development of the Notion, being aware that all this development took place in the abstract medium of thought, outside real life, he had to somehow make the passage to real life. There were, however, no categories in his logic to accomplish this passage, which is why he had to resort to terms like ‘decision’...This critique clearly misses the way that this act of releasing the other is *immanent* to the dialectical process and its conclusive moment: the sign of the conclusion of the dialectical circle.<sup>408</sup>

Here, Žižek agrees with my reading that the absolute Idea’s expression of itself as Nature follows directly from (as an expression of) its essence (as both thought and being).

In addition, I argue that Hegel’s account of the *actuality* of existence (incidentally, he considers essence and existence as fundamentally bound together) is actually close to Schelling’s own account, since, as we will see, Hegel agrees with Schelling about the ontological prioritization of the actual. As Karen Ng notes, “like Aristotle, Hegel invokes the priority of actuality over possibility because thought always begins with an actual object of thought, with reality and the thing itself...thinking begins with the unity of thinking and the thing thought.”<sup>409</sup> Hegel and Schelling both agree on this broader point that the unity of thought and being is most primordial to ontology.

Furthermore, I disagree with Schelling’s claim that Hegel (as Bolman puts it) “denied the real illogicity of existence at the outset.”<sup>410</sup> Hegel even says in this same section (on “The

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<sup>408</sup> Slavoj Žižek, “Hegel and Shitting: The Idea’s Constipation,” 224.

<sup>409</sup> Karen Ng, “Hegel’s Logic of Actuality,” *The Review of Metaphysics* 63 (September 2009): 156.

<sup>410</sup> Frederick de Wolfe Bolman, Jr., “Introduction: Schelling’s Interests After 1812,” 37.

Absolute Idea”) that “the thinking of contradiction is the essential moment of the Notion.”<sup>411</sup>

Indeed, contradiction lies at the heart of the Notion, since contradiction is what drives the process forward.<sup>412</sup> Without an account of the importance of contradiction, it seems that Hegel would be hard-pressed to explain how God develops at all. If the Absolute Idea were fully self-comprehending in a subjectivistic sense, then it seems to me that Hegel would be unable to provide a convincing account for the processual nature of the Absolute in the first place.

Along similar lines, I contend that Hegel’s SL has a negative and positive philosophy internal to it. Similar to Schelling’s account, the logic of being (negative philosophy, recollection) ought to be coupled with the actuality of a lived history (positive philosophy, revelation of God).<sup>413</sup> To put it in other words, Hegel agrees with Schelling that there is an irrevocable indeterminacy internal to the process of becoming – God is the freedom of Spirit that actualizes divinity in time. Hegel therefore agrees that the negative philosophy is inherently bound up with a positive philosophy (conceived as the revelation of *Geist* in time). Crucially, Hegel, even in his Logic of Being (qua the SL), realizes that a mere negative philosophy is not sufficient for a comprehensive ontology. In fact, this is why the Notion is emptied out as the emptiness of emptiness. However, on Hegel’s conception, what the Notion finds on the other side of the abyss is its *necessary* existence. When the Godself dies, God discovers the necessity internal to its freedom. It seems to me, then, that Hegel and Schelling actually come to similar conclusions although they perhaps arrive at them from different perspectives.

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<sup>411</sup> Hegel, *Science of Logic*, 835.

<sup>412</sup> Karen Ng, “Hegel’s Logic of Actuality,” *The Review of Metaphysics* 63 (September 2009): 151.

<sup>413</sup> It is also important to note in this connection that although there are intimations of Schelling’s positive philosophy in his *Weltalter* of 1811, it is not presented there in its consummate form. See F.W.J Schelling, *The Ages of the World* (1815 draft), trans. Frederick de Wolfe Bolman, Jr. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1942), 187.

#### 5.4) Aristotle's Prioritization of Actuality in Metaphysics

In further support of the notion that some of the main features of metaphysics remain fundamentally similar for both Schelling and Hegel, it is also noteworthy that both thinkers are heavily influenced by Aristotle's conception of metaphysics. Although Schelling charged Hegel with thinking of a logical science that is bereft of being, my argument is that there is a positive philosophy internal to Hegel's account. In this sense, both philosophers are influenced by Aristotle's prioritization of actuality in metaphysics.

In his *Philosophy of Revelation* (1841) Schelling remains concerned that Hegel's dialectic remains a mere "negative science." There, he states:

Hegel has re-asserted the concept of dialectic in philosophy. For Plato it is the royal art, *i.e.* a divine one. But one ought not to apply it merely to the logical, negative science, as Hegel does. Aristotle used *διαλεκτικός* and *λογικός* synonymously, but he did so because, for him, the logical presupposed the actual. In the negative philosophy, dialectic has at most a formal significance. *Actual dialectic* is found only in the realm of freedom: it alone *is able to solve all riddles*.<sup>414</sup>

Here, Schelling's concern seems to be that Hegel utilizes dialectic in what Schelling would characterize as a mere "negative" science. The question becomes whether or not Hegel sufficiently prioritizes actuality in his metaphysics. If Hegel does not prioritize actuality sufficiently, then Schelling's critique would be that Hegel's logic remains on the order of thought and does not follow from a genuine living unity of thought and being.

In response to Schelling's concern here, part of my argument is to argue that both Schelling and Hegel agree on the primordial nature of actuality to ontology (we saw this at the beginning of Hegel's SL with "Being, Pure Being –" as an emptiness of emptiness.)

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<sup>414</sup> Schelling, *Philosophy of Revelation*, 171.

In fact, both thinkers agree with Aristotle that existence and essence are bound together by actuality. As Robert B. Pippin writes in his book, *Hegel's Realm of Shadows: Logic as*

*Metaphysics in the Science of Logic*:

Again, as for Aristotle, the task of metaphysics is not to say of any particular thing what it is. It is to determine what must be *true* of anything at all...<sup>415</sup>

Furthermore, Pippin rightfully points out that Hegel conceives of logic as metaphysics in the SL.

As Pippin quotes from Hegel, on Hegel's account, " 'logic' has taken the place of the old metaphysics." <sup>416</sup>

Further on, Pippin continues:

In his lectures on Aristotle, Hegel aligns himself with the goal of Aristotle's *Metaphysics*, as the 'science of that which is insofar as it is and what belongs to it in and for itself...As Aristotle puts it in a canonical formulation from *Metaphysics Z*:  
And *since the existence of the thing must already be given*, it is clear that the question must be *why the matter is so-and-so*...<sup>417</sup>

Here, I would particularly like to highlight Aristotle's notion that "the *existence of the thing must already be given*" (my emphasis). Even beyond this fact, in the SL Hegel is concerned with existence as such. For this reason, he must ontologically prioritize *actuality* (just like Schelling does as well). In the SL, what we ultimately discover (retroactively) as already given from the start is the disappearing of emptiness as such. It seems to me, then, that Hegel would agree with Schelling that a positive philosophy ought to complement a negative philosophy. However, admittedly, each philosopher elaborates on the details of the relation between positive and negative philosophy differently. For Schelling, such a division requires two separate branches of

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<sup>415</sup> Robert B. Pippin, *Hegel's Realm of Shadows: Logic as Metaphysics in 'The Science of Logic'* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2019), 15.

<sup>416</sup> Quoted from *ibid.*, 37.

<sup>417</sup> *Ibid.*, 54. My emphasis.

metaphysics whereas on Hegel's account the two could be conceived as internal to a science of Logic, conceived as the *Ur-grund* of metaphysics.

There is further evidence in support of the notion that Hegel prioritizes actuality in an ontological sense in his EL. Pippin later quotes from section 142 of Hegel's *Encyclopedia* where Hegel draws a contrast between Aristotle and Plato. There, Hegel writes:

On this head, it must be remarked that actuality certainly does form the principle of Aristotle's philosophy, but his actuality is that of the Idea itself, and not the ordinary actuality of what is immediately present... More precisely, therefore, Aristotle's polemic against Plato consists in his designation of the Platonic idea as mere δύναμις, and in urging, on the contrary, that the Idea, which is recognized by both of them equally to be alone what is true, should be regarded essentially as ἐνέργειᾶ, i.e. the inwardness that is totally to the fore, so that it is the unity of inward and outward. In other words the Idea should be regarded as actuality in the emphatic sense that we have given it here. (EL, section 142Z)<sup>418</sup>

On Hegel's account, Aristotle's argument against Plato is that the Idea is more properly understood as ἐνέργειᾶ than as δύναμις.<sup>419</sup> On my understanding, this means that the Idea is actuality as both essence and existence, which means that it is also neither merely one nor the other. If Hegel were to conceive of the Idea as δύναμις, then he would prioritize one side of the dialectic.

Pippin further clarifies the task of metaphysics on Aristotle's conception:

For Aristotle, the task of metaphysics is not to say of any particular thing what it is, nor does it deduce what beings there are... Metaphysics' task is to determine what must be true of anything at all, such that what it is in particular can be determined.<sup>420</sup>

On Aristotle's conception of metaphysics, an account of universal ontology on the order of actuality ought to precede an account of the essence of a thing. So, both Schelling and Hegel are

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<sup>418</sup> Quote provided in Robert B. Pippin, *Hegel's Realm of Shadows*, 247.

<sup>419</sup> Here, I am following Markus Gabriel's reading of ἐνέργειᾶ as "actuality" and δύναμις as "possibility." See Markus Gabriel, *Transcendental Ontology*, 67.

<sup>420</sup> Robert B. Pippin, *Hegel's Realm of Shadows*, 15.



influenced by Aristotle's view of metaphysics in terms of his influence on the overall structure of their philosophical thought.

In Hegel's *Encyclopedia Logic*, there is further evidence of Aristotle's influence on Hegel, and correlatively, one can draw out further connections between Schelling and Hegel. For example, Hegel writes in the EL, "God communicates, God reveals what he is and, indeed, first through and in nature."<sup>421</sup> Here, it is significant that Hegel agrees with Schelling that God reveals the Divine Itself in nature. Along these lines, Hegel's conception of actuality brings him close to Schelling, and as we will see, also to Schelling's thoughts on God's highest essence as one with God's existence. Hegel writes:

Actuality is that unity of essence and concrete existence [Existenz], of inner and outer, that has immediately come to be. The expression [Äußerung] of the actual is the actual itself, so that in the expression it remains something equally essential and is something essential only insofar as it is in immediate, external [äußerlich] concrete existence.<sup>422</sup>

Here, the fact that Hegel conceives of essence and existence as united in actuality also helps to shed light on why Hegel begins the "Doctrine of Being" with the emptiness of emptiness.

According to Karen Ng, the emptiness of emptiness is simultaneously "the most concrete and the most abstract."<sup>423</sup>

### **5.5) Schelling's *Philosophy of Revelation* (1841): God's Highest Essence is Existence**

Along similar lines, Schelling states in his *Philosophy of Revelation* that God's highest essence is existence. He writes:

He is *that which only as the ability to necessarily be [nur-nothwendig-seyn-Könnende]*. But even *that which necessarily has Being* is in itself the *potence of that which has Being as the highest essence [das-höchste-Wesen-Seyns]*. *That which has the ability to be as the highest essence, or the highest essence, has the necessary existence as part of its potence.*<sup>424</sup>

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<sup>421</sup> Hegel, *Encyclopedia Logic*, 209.

<sup>422</sup> Ibid., 142.

<sup>423</sup> Karen Ng, "Hegel's Logic of Actuality," *The Review of Metaphysics* 63 (September 2009): 151.

<sup>424</sup> Schelling, *Philosophy of Revelation*, 151.

But, if God's highest essence is bound up with necessary existence, then this also supports the idea that the positive philosophy in some sense precedes the negative philosophy and makes it possible. Therefore, I consider Hegel and Schelling in agreement on this point.

Schelling's conception of the relationship between the positive philosophy and the negative philosophy is akin to Hegel's understanding of how dialectics arises from the (un)dialectical. Schelling explains the difference between the positive philosophy and the negative philosophy in his *Philosophy of Revelation* (1841). He says there:

the negative philosophy was an *a priori* science because its activity of thought preceded all Being. *The beginning of the positive philosophy is the Being that precedes all activity of thought. It moves from Being, which is not preceded by a concept, toward the concept, toward 'that which has supra-Being ['Ueberseyenden']*.<sup>425</sup>

Here, we can clearly see the connection to Hegel's beginning in the SL with the emptiness of emptiness as an (un)dialectical movement. Schelling's beginning of positive philosophy with the unprethinkable is akin to Absolute Spirit in its self-disappearing at the beginning of Hegel's SL.

At this point in his life, Schelling conceives of the negative and the positive philosophy as two branches of metaphysics. The negative philosophy grows out of, and presupposes, the positive philosophy. However, it is equally true that the culmination of the negative philosophy is the positive philosophy (this is similar to Hegel's understanding of the relationship between the Understanding and Reason). Likewise, the positive philosophy implies the negative philosophy. The goal of metaphysics is the conscious harmony of both as the external expression of their natural, unconscious harmony. When one understands this relationship, it is clear why Schelling reasons that the divine is revealed on the order of a tetralemma: it implies a fourfold movement along the lines of identity, difference, the affirmation of both the former and the latter, and the negation of either the former or the latter. Furthermore, Schelling's explanation that the

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<sup>425</sup> Ibid., 150.

precise reason why necessity appears first in the ontological order (in order for its eventual sublation) in the revelation of the divine as freedom is a new step that goes beyond Hegel's own conception. In other words, if Hegel's thought remains primarily at the level of metaphysical structure, Schelling's philosophy passes on to the purpose behind it all – God's revelation of divinity as eternal freedom.

### 5.6) Is Hegel's Notion *Actual*?

On Schelling's account, the unity of thought and being is best explained by the notion that eternal freedom guides the process of life along. When one questions *why* we are able to make sense of reality and why anything exists at all (which is relevant to the positive philosophy), we would do well to remember our divine origin and to see the divine at work in all of life. In the SL, Hegel, on the other hand, is primarily concerned with the development of a Logic, and in doing so he begins with "pure Being." In the beginning of the Logic, he demonstrates how the emptiness of emptiness is actuality. When the divine Notion completely empties itself out, the possibility of its internal existentiality is laid bare. In other words, the fact that Spirit is emptied out as material reality is actually what constitutes existence as such.

In Section 6 of the "Introduction" to his EL, Hegel writes:

On the other hand, it is just as important that philosophy come to understand that its content [*Inhalt*] is none other than the basic content [*Gehalt*] that has originally been produced and reproduces itself in the sphere of the living spirit, a content turned into a *world*, namely the outer and inner world of consciousness, or that its content is *actuality* [*die Wirklichkeit*].<sup>426</sup>

Soon after, Hegel goes on to provide a quote of a statement that he makes in his *Philosophy of Right* (p. XIX) in which he states, "What is rational, is actual, and what is actual, is rational."<sup>427</sup>

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<sup>426</sup> Hegel, *Encyclopedia Logic*, 33.

<sup>427</sup> *Ibid.*

Hegel notes how this statement has generally been received in a negative light, so here Hegel would like to clarify his position. He states: “we may presuppose that the reader is sufficiently educated to know [*wissen*] not only that God is actual – that he is what is most actual, indeed that he alone is what is truly actual –”<sup>428</sup> In this sense, Hegel clarifies that when he refers to actuality in the highest sense, he is referring to the actuality of God.<sup>429</sup>

*Prima facie*, Hegel’s statements here from the EL may seem to be at odds with my argument throughout this dissertation. Namely, if what is rational is actual, then does Hegel posit a *complete* account of the rational? However, my argument throughout this dissertation has been that in order for Hegel to provide an account of rationality, he must in fact resort to the discussion of a self-sacrificial Absolute that does not maintain a complete or totalizing understanding in terms of self-knowledge. Furthermore, I have also argued that the reason why Hegel would make such a claim regarding the actual as rational is that Hegel’s more demanding argument is actually to argue for the unity of thought and being, which never implies a complete whole. For this reason, the reader ought to be careful here. Furthermore, I have argued throughout this paper that Hegel’s *actual* notion of rationality (insofar as he develops it in the SL) is incomplete in a four-fold, “aporetic”<sup>430</sup> sense.

In the final section of the *Science of Logic*, Hegel himself comments on the “incompleteness” of the genuine beginning. He writes there: “the method of truth, too, knows the beginning to be incomplete, because it is a beginning; but at the same time, it knows this incompleteness to be a necessity, because truth only comes to be itself through the necessity of

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<sup>428</sup> Ibid.

<sup>429</sup> For more on Hegel and actuality, see Karen Ng, “Hegel’s Logic of Actuality,” *The Review of Metaphysics* 63 (September 2009): 139-172.

<sup>430</sup> Cohen, “Hegel and the Gift of Sacrifice,” 21.

immediacy.”<sup>431</sup> In this section of the Logic, Hegel reflects back on how the beginning of the Logic is the pure immediacy of the Notion. Hegel’s statement here is further support for my reading that the Notion’s self-comprehension nowhere implies a full and complete self-knowledge. Rather, the Notion’s self-comprehension is more akin to a knowing on the order of Spirit.

In any case, the notion of *freedom* seems to be at stake in Schelling’s critique of Hegel. Schelling’s criticism of Hegel is bound up with his preoccupation that Hegel’s dialectical metaphysics ultimately lends itself to a metaphysics on the order of reason, and is therefore one of a *processual formalism*, but that it perhaps fails to adequately acknowledge the truth of eternal freedom which stands at its core.<sup>432</sup> To put it differently, Schelling’s charge is that the movement of the Notion on Hegel’s account is ultimately immanent to an Absolute Subject (and therefore not adequately transcendent). This is to say that the movement of the Notion (according to Schelling’s critique) is inadequate to the actuality of a genuine Absolute. As Bolman quotes Schelling, “real thought is that whereby something opposed to thought is overcome. Where one has only thought, and that abstract thought, for content, thought has nothing to overcome.”<sup>433</sup> The question is whether or not Hegel’s system allows for an adequate transcendence of Spirit as freedom.

### **5.7) The Metaphysical Consistency of Hegel’s and Schelling’s Beginnings**

I take issue with Schelling’s criticism of Hegel because Hegel was not such a one-sided thinker, even in the development of his Logic qua the SL. This is to say that, in the SL, what

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<sup>431</sup> Hegel, *Science of Logic*, 841.

<sup>432</sup> Bolman, “Introduction: Schelling’s Interests after 1812,” 36-37.

<sup>433</sup> F.W.J. Schelling, SW I, 10:141. Quote provided in Frederick de Wolfe Bolman, Jr., “Introduction: Schelling’s Interests After 1812,” 36.

grounds the actuality of the Notion is *not* that the Notion is conceived on the order of mere thought-determinations. Rather, what originally “grounds” the Notion is the disappearing movement of the Absolute and the Notion’s self-transcendence.

Consider, for instance, Hegel’s discussion of logic from the section on “Absolute Idea” at the end of the SL. There, Hegel states: “Thus then logic, too, in the absolute Idea, has withdrawn into that same simple unity which its beginning is; the pure immediacy of being in which at first every determination appears to be extinguished or removed by abstraction...”<sup>434</sup> Here, Hegel reminds the reader that the beginning of the Logic is the “pure immediacy of being.” In other words, he does not say that the beginning of the Logic is with reason, but rather with, as we have seen, “pure being” – something akin to Spirit’s divestment (this does not imply *completeness*).

Therefore, on my reading, Hegel’s conception of ontology is actually much more closely related to Schelling’s conception than it appears on first glance. While Hegel thinks of metaphysics as co-extensive with a logic of being, Schelling, on the other hand, starts with the eternal freedom of the eternal past and shows how the divine will guides along the process of creation. Schelling ultimately concludes that both moments (the memory of eternal freedom as the irrecoverable past, along with the divine’s continued presence) are of the utmost importance.

My argument (as other contemporary thinkers such as Žižek and Johnston have also noted) is that Hegel, like Schelling, is aware that the reality of history is fundamentally bound up with ontology. Indeed, on Hegel’s account, history as such is internal to Logic. I have argued throughout this dissertation that one way to make sense of the similarities between the two thinkers’ accounts is therefore in terms of a *theological* conception of ontology.

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<sup>434</sup> Hegel, *Science of Logic*, 842.

For both Hegel and Schelling, it makes sense to speak of God's self-negation as crucial to God's revelation in the world. On my reading, the difference is that Schelling is more attuned to the dimension of freedom at work in God's self-revelation and this leads him to develop his notion of the potencies in God (along with God's eternal will which transcends them) from the eternal beginning. This is to say that Hegel and Schelling have similar ontological frameworks in terms of structure, but Schelling more explicitly comments on how the eternal freedom of divine love is at work throughout the entire process.

Consider Schelling's discussion of the Godhead, for example. Schelling says that the Godhead is both eternal Yes, eternal No, and the unity of both Yes and No.<sup>435</sup> The idea is that the Godhead (in one aspect) is both affirmation and negation, but in another sense it is also neither at the same time. Schelling's point is that although God is latently all of Being and all knowledge, God is not yet manifest as such externally. On Schelling's conception, by a free act, God chooses to conceal part of Godself such that God can freely manifest divinity in time as actual. Thus, it is via an act of divine love by which God wills to begin in the emptiness of the eternal No. It is via this beginning in the eternal No that we are pointed back to God's eternal freedom, which is the true nature of the divine. As Schelling writes:

Just because it is eternal freedom, the godhead can stand to being only as No, as Yes, and as the unity of both. For it must be explicitly remembered that these differences are not differences of essence but only of relationship, of the relation of the one essence to being. But also inversely, only because it stands thus to being, is it eternal freedom. If the godhead were merely Yes or No, then it would have to take the part of being in one way or another, to affirm or negate it. That it is both, and both with equal essentiality, is the reason why it is the highest freedom. All this had to be so, in order that a necessary ground of the world would never be found, and that it would become evident that everything which is, is only by the most free divine will.<sup>436</sup>

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<sup>435</sup> Schelling, F.W.J. *The Ages of the World* (1815 draft), trans. Frederick de Wolfe Bolman, Jr. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1942), 188-189.

<sup>436</sup> *Ibid.*

Here, I see Schelling in agreement with Hegel that *nothing* can be presupposed at the start.

Schelling's insight above should be coupled with his interpretation of the importance of *revelation*. Recollection is always to be coupled with revelation, since there is a relationship of God to Godself by which God (by the will of freedom) restricts the power and expanse of self-recollection in order that the revelation of divine nature may proceed via the actuality of time.

To put this in other words, Schelling contends that God eternally ordains (via a free act of love) that God's self-negation will simultaneously serve God's self-resurrection. As Schelling continues:

In the same act, therefore, when God determined on revelation, it was then determined that God as eternal No was to be the ground of existence of the eternal Yes. And thereby it was determined at the same time that God, as the eternal negation of external being, should be conquerable by love.

But no compulsion may be considered anywhere in the godhead; everything must depend on the highest voluntariness. Consequently God, in so far as he is the eternal No, cannot be overpowered, he can be compelled only by goodness to give way to love, to make himself love's ground.<sup>437</sup>

In other words, it is precisely God's free decision to deny Godself that simultaneously acts in service of God's free will. God's infinite self-constriction and negation is the necessary ground that God's freedom overcomes. God's freedom makes it such that God transcends Godself out of its own emptiness to lay its own ground: God's free act of self-negation becomes its own ground. Out of a free act of infinite denial, God negates Godself in order to reveal its nature as *love*. The relationship between eternal No and eternal Yes is therefore fundamentally bound up with the revelation of divine love.

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<sup>437</sup> Ibid., 192.



Schelling contends that it is precisely God's freedom that makes *time* crucial to God's self-revelation. Were it not for time, then there could be not be real freedom and vice versa. As

Schelling writes:

It had to be recognized in one and the same indivisible act that, if God wanted to reveal himself, he could do so only as eternal No, as eternal Yes, and as the unity of both. It was recognized in the same act that this revelation could only happen in different times, or in a succession, and that just that would have to be posited as beginning which had just been overcome, the necessary [character] of God's freedom, the No of all external being and thus far of all revelation (for without an overcoming there is no beginning). All this was contained in one and the same resolution, at once the freest and most irresistible, by a miracle of eternal freedom which is sole ground unto itself and is therefore its own necessity.<sup>438</sup>

On Schelling's account, in God's essential nature, God is eternal No, eternal Yes, and the unity of both. Time is also discovered in the nature of God, since the triune relationship reveals the necessity of time. Freedom simultaneously lays the ground for God's internal necessity. This also implies that God has the freedom to reveal divinity in an infinite number of ways in actuality. God is so free, in fact, that God is even able to transcend the seemingly most necessary aspect of freedom (being beyond finitude is likewise united with finitude). This is also why recollection by itself could never be sufficient to a complete, developed ontology. Schelling's thinking here raises a related question: how does the pure Godhead make its way out from pure possibility as actuality? If God is everything in pure potentiality, then how does God come into being?

In this discussion, Schelling thinks that God does not *need* to reveal itself – in the sense that God's revelation is fundamentally necessary-contingent. If God's self-revelation were completely determined, then God would not truly be free. In this sense, God's self-revelation ought to be understood as an act of freedom. As Schelling writes:

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<sup>438</sup> Ibid., 193.

a being is free in that it does not have to reveal itself. To reveal one's self is to act, just as all acting is a self-revelation. The free, however, must be free [either] to halt at mere ability, or to pass over into act. If it necessarily passed over, then it would not become real as what it is, namely, as the free.<sup>439</sup>

Schelling's solution between the paradox of possibility and actuality, then, is to develop two senses of time: time as succession and time as eternity, conceived together. He continues:

If the godhead were eternally actual (in the sufficiently defined sense of 'externally manifest'), then it would not be the power to realize itself. But since it can only realize itself out of its free eternity, so, in order that the latter remain free and untouched, there must be something between free eternity and the act of realization, something which separates the latter from the former. This can only be time—not time in eternity itself, however, but time coexisting with eternity...For eternity must be considered not as those moments of time *taken together*, but as coexisting with each single one, so that eternity sees only itself in each individual moment.<sup>440</sup>

This is where we clearly see Schelling's conception that the eternal, infinite divine is present in every instant of creation. It is equally true, however, that God is coming to know the Divine Itself in every moment: the coming to be of God via revelation in time does not preclude the possibility of the Godhead's eternal perfection. Rather, God's freedom results in God's decision to reveal divinity in time in order that God may demonstrate the divine's eternal, infinite nature in each particular, finite moment.

God's revelation is the final cause of creation on Schelling's account. And yet, precisely for this reason, it is also the case that time is *real*. The succession of the potencies in time is the coming to be of the infinite as the finite in time. Symbolically understood, it is God's Incarnation. The fact that God is internally three main principles, the eternal yes, the eternal no, and the unity of the two, lends itself to God's revelation in time. Schelling comments on this, saying, "With respect to his highest self, God is not manifest; he reveals himself. He is not real;

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<sup>439</sup> Ibid., 194.

<sup>440</sup> Ibid., 195.

he becomes real, just that he may appear as the most free being of all.”<sup>441</sup> Creation is therefore of a circular nature.

God’s internal essence is determined as the principle of negation, the principle of affirmation, and a higher unity – that of love – which allows for the unification of both principles. God’s nature (as freedom) is precisely that which allows for God to have both a nature by natural necessity (the potencies) as well as to transcend this nature (the freedom of the will is also internal to God’s nature). Here is where Schelling’s thinking connects to the idea of “transcendence-in-immanence.” It is not a contradiction for Schelling to posit that God has a nature by necessity and to simultaneously hold that God is free, since it is precisely God’s nature that allows for God’s freedom. In fact, God’s freedom is the higher will that lays the ground for its necessity to become actualized. Along these lines, Schelling writes: “We can therefore also consider this sequence of revelation as a succession of potencies through which being passes to its perfection [“Vollendung”].”<sup>442</sup> The passage of the principles (or potencies) from potentiality to actuality (their revelation in time) allows for the coming to be of the divine.

Hegel and Schelling agree that from the standpoint of the question of ontology (when considered as a logical analysis of pure being) in the “beginning” God is as a negation of negation. Where the two thinkers seem to differ is about the limitations of ontology when one considers its role in their overall system of philosophy. Schelling is more keenly aware of the fact that God’s will as the eternal freedom of divine love in some sense precedes even nothingness. On Schelling’s account, God’s will sets the process in motion: God voluntarily dies to the Godself in order to come to know the Divine Itself as love.

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<sup>441</sup> Ibid., 196.

<sup>442</sup> Ibid., 198. Note: Here, *Vollendung* could also be translated as “completion.”

For this reason, both Schelling's WA and Hegel's SL are metaphysically consistent. Hegel's work is consistent with Schelling's system, since Hegel agrees with Schelling that pure being's self-reflection is concurrent with its self-transcendence. However, one could simultaneously argue that Schelling's WA has a more profound vision than Hegel's SL in terms of the role of ontology as part of his larger overall system. Schelling has a grander vision, since he believes that God's eternal will is what sets the entire process in motion from the start. In other words, it is not sufficient to remain thinking from the level of an ontology of pure being and nothingness. A philosophical system that remains on the level of ontology begs the question as to *why* it is the case that nothingness doubles itself in the first place.

Schelling's solution to the question as to *why* ontology begins with pure being and nothingness is that God *ordains* it as such via divine will. As Schelling writes:

The eternal exists only by his will. Only by free determination does he make himself into that which is in being...The decision to reveal himself, and to posit himself as the superable eternal No, was only one and the same decision. Therefore, as this decision is a work of the highest freedom, so it is also a work of the highest love.<sup>443</sup>

On Schelling's understanding, the revelation of God in creation is a work of *love*. This is the case, since creation is the eternal revelation of transcendence-in-immanence. In each and every moment, freedom is revealed as that which is at the heart of existence. For this reason, there is always the possibility for things to be otherwise. Freedom is love, since it is the perfect union of being-for-self and being-for-other (the revelation of the divine in its self-transcendence). As Schelling wrote in his *Freedom Essay*, "this is the mystery of love that it combines what could be by itself and yet is not and cannot be without the other."<sup>444</sup>

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<sup>443</sup> Ibid., 200.

<sup>444</sup> As previously noted, for the full quote and context, see F.W.J. Schelling, "Philosophical Investigations into the Essence of Human Freedom and Related Matters," trans. Priscilla Hayden-Roy in *Philosophy of German Idealism: Fichte, Jacobi and Schelling*, ed. Ernst Behler (New York: Bloomsbury, 1987), 278.

God reveals the Godself as the perfect relation between self and other. In fact, God is the triune relationship – the three principles considered together in their internal unity.

The question that Schelling hopes to address in this section of his *Weltalter*, namely, “*why* (in terms of a final cause) does God create at all?” is not of primary concern to Hegel in his SL. Rather, there Hegel aims to address *how* it happens – his primary aim is to provide a logical analysis of being. One could also speak about this in terms of causes. On Hegel’s account in the SL, the final cause toward which the work is oriented is the revelation of the Idea as such (and Hegel does think that God reveals Godself in Nature). However, in the *Ages of the World*, Schelling’s final cause is more expansive, since Schelling argues that the purpose of the revelation of Spirit is to reveal God as love. Although Schelling and Hegel arrive at ontology with different aims in mind and different systematic visions, each philosopher arrives at similar conclusions (at least when it comes to the principles that are involved in ontology and the internal structure of absolute Spirit).

### **5.8) Schelling’s *Philosophy of Revelation* (1841): God’s Law of Self-Negation**

According to Schelling’s account in his *Philosophy of Revelation* (1841), in God’s eternal past, there is a law (prior to God’s Being and prior to thought) such that the Godhead constricts itself internally and infinitely so (Schelling refers to this as God’s internal law of self-negation). In this internal law of infinite negation, there is so much self-constriction, that one could refer to it as the emptiness of emptiness (emptiness prior to a logical domain of thought or Being). Indeed, it is the emptiness of emptiness, since it is not even a conscious activity of emptying. Here, Schelling makes it a point to emphasize the *actuality* of God’s nature prior to thought. He writes:

The *accidental in that which unforthinkably has existence* was to be shown. It precedes that which exists, that which has existence itself, so that it is not even posited *as* essence but

rather is *posited altogether ecstatically, outside of itself*, is straightforwardly [*geradezu*] that which has Being. The essential nature has not emptied itself [*entäussert*]; rather, it is emptied before it thinks itself [*sich denkt*]. It is the *antipodal to all idea*, but in this opposition it is itself idea on account of this complete reversal.<sup>445</sup>

Schelling's main point here is to argue that God's ecstatic nature (as that which is beyond God) precedes God's own conception of the Divine. In fact, Schelling's account is so extreme that he claims that God's Spirit is empty before conceptuality even arrives on the scene.

From out of an internal emptiness, God develops a will to self-expression (as the nothingness that it is) – and to manifest itself in actuality as infinite constriction. In fact, the *actus of the infinite negative potency* is the *ability to either* express itself in existence or to remain in a state of potency – for this reason, the *existence of the potency* itself implies both the *expression* of the potency *and* its remaining latent at the same time. Thus, one with the original nothingness is the expression of an infinite, both as potency and as *actus*.

Once God comes to existence from out of the Godhead, however, there is a moment of *recoil* just as in Hegel, in which one is unable to discern that things could possibly have been otherwise. For this reason, God must have been there both in its *unprethinkability* and as its conscious manifestation as Being. This leads Schelling into a tetralemma type of argument, in which the Godhead is in four ways throughout its self-development:

- 1) The law of the Godhead – infinite constriction as infinite self-negating potency. \*
- 2) From step 1, infinite self-negating potency is simultaneously a potency and an *actus of the* infinite self-negating potency, and therefore also as the *actus* of Being.) In other words, step 1 implies that internal to the infinite constriction qua the potency of infinite negation is also Being as actuality – the actuality of *either* infinite self-negating potency or infinite self-negation as expressed in Being.
- 3) Internal to the latter (the affirmation of the self-negation in Being), however, is simultaneously the affirmation of existence, since in order to experience itself as self-negation it would have to exist. God desires to express itself as the actuality of this “either or...” Therefore, it embodies both options.

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<sup>445</sup> Schelling, *Philosophy of Revelation*, 169.

4) Finally, God becomes conscious of its divinity as the entire process (as the unity of the “both...and” *and* “the either...or” .. (This is the reasoning behind Schelling’s assertion of the tetralemma.)<sup>446</sup>

\* According to Schelling’s account, the reason that the first step is a necessary one is that God first posits its necessary nature in order to ultimately sublimate it (in order to show itself as freedom).

Here again, Schelling’s beginning from his *Philosophy of Revelation* is similar to Hegel’s beginning in the SL, since both thinkers agree that God’s actuality (as the emptiness of emptiness) precedes God’s consciousness of Godself. Schelling’s thought here also connects up with his beginning in the WA, which we saw in the previous chapter. The notion of a will to indifference that develops a desire to experience Godself as freedom is here analogous to the infinite self-restricting potency.

Schelling surpasses the Hegel of the SL with his argument that God *freely* wills to incarnate in order to “raise up” the finite to the infinite via an act of divine self-revelation. Through a process of revelation combined with recollection, God is able to reveal the Divine as Love. During this process, there is a two-fold mirror relationship at play. First, there is a part of God that is unconscious that comes to consciously reveal Divinity in creation. Secondly, there is the notion of the unconscious in human beings that comes to know itself over time as one with divine revelation. God awakens us from our slumber in order that we may come to an awareness of our divine nature within.

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<sup>446</sup> This is my reconstruction of Schelling’s argument here. See *Ibid.* ff.

## 5.9) God as a Mystery to the Divine Itself<sup>447</sup>

Schelling and Hegel both consider Christ as an essential symbol in terms of the revelation of the divine. As Žižek writes in his book, *The Monstrosity of Christ: Paradox or Dialectic?*<sup>448</sup>:

That is to say: it is precisely because God is an enigma also *in and for himself*, because he has an unfathomable Otherness in himself, that Christ had to emerge to reveal God not only to humanity, but *to God himself*— it is only through Christ that God fully actualizes himself as God.<sup>449</sup>

Here, I highlight Žižek’s insight that the nature of God is mysterious – not only to humanity— but in and of Itself. Žižek notes how Christ’s Incarnation is pivotal, since in the Incarnation, the Divine reveals Itself as the One whose nature is to be beyond Itself – as the unity of the finite and infinite. When Christ dies on the cross, Christ’s death symbolizes God’s own passage into nothingness. Here, God undergoes such a passage out of love. God dies to the Divine Itself in order to come to know Itself. Christ Himself passes through His own mystery for the purpose of self-revelation. Christ reunites with the Godhead to symbolize to humanity our own eternal freedom: our freedom to be our divine selves.

I would also like to connect some of Žižek’s further remarks from the same chapter with the quote from Schelling above about how God’s decision to reveal its nature is a “work of the highest love.” Žižek agrees with Schelling’s insight. Drawing from Lacan, Žižek writes, “love is always love for the other insofar as he is lacking—we love the other because of his limitation. The radical conclusion from this is that if God is to be loved, he must be imperfect, inconsistent in himself; there has to be something ‘in him more than himself.’”<sup>450</sup> Žižek’s point here is that

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<sup>447</sup> Slavoj Žižek and John Milbank, *The Monstrosity of Christ: Paradox or Dialectic?*, ed. Creston Davis (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2009), 38.

<sup>448</sup> Incidentally, I also consider what Žižek says here to be consistent with Schelling’s WA.

<sup>449</sup> Ibid.

<sup>450</sup> Ibid., 39.



Christ both symbolizes and embodies that in God which is beyond Godself. God reveals the Divine as that which is to be both Godself and other. The reason that God's revelation is a work of love (on both thinkers' accounts) is that God passes beyond mere identity to reveal difference-in-identity. In other words, God's revelation is not merely the revelation of identity or difference but also both (and therefore, simultaneously neither). In other words, God dies to Godself in order to reveal the life that is one with death. In this way, the Symbol of Christ allows for the revelation of the Godhead.

Along these lines, Žižek also connects this premise to Hegel's insight about Christ as the "vanishing mediator." As Žižek writes:

Hegel's underlying premise is that what dies on the Cross is not only God's earthly representative-incarnation, but the God of beyond itself: Christ is the 'vanishing mediator' between the substantial transcendent God-in-itself and God qua virtual spiritual community.<sup>451</sup>

Christ's death symbolizes God's passage through infinite emptiness. By taking on such a role, Christ is able to demonstrate that in God which is more than God – in doing so, he simultaneously makes God immanent. Christ "vanishes," so that God is able to reveal itself as freedom in actuality. The love that is demonstrated by God's own passage through the abyss of freedom is the same love that is available to humanity. God's passage from the unconscious to self-consciousness mirrors the passage that takes place in humanity. When Christ dies, the Spirit of love is revealed as actual – as a substance that transcends itself and returns to nothingness. This is the actuality of infinite love.

Žižek considers Hegel's project to be the inquiry into how it is possible that God as Subject emerges from the emptiness of emptiness. As he writes:

Eckhart's goal is to withdraw from the created reality of particular entities into the 'desert' of the divine nature, of Godhead, the negation of all substantial reality,

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<sup>451</sup> Ibid., 29.

withdrawal into the primordial Void-One beyond Word. Hegel's task is exactly the opposite one: not from God to Godhead, but from Godhead to God, i.e., how, out of this abyss of Godhead, God qua Person emerges, how a Word is born in it. Negation must turn around onto itself and bring us back to determinate (finite, temporal) reality.<sup>452</sup>

As I reflected on in earlier chapters of this dissertation, Hegel is concerned with providing an account of how it is the case that the primordial double negation is the movement of "Substance as Subject."

Schelling agrees with Hegel on the importance of this point. However, as I mentioned previously, Schelling provides more of an explicit explanation in the WA in response to the question of *why* this is the case. As Schelling explains:

...God is negating power only in order to make a ground for himself as eternal love. But this negating power does not know itself, therefore also not its own state, does not know the freedom of decision, by virtue of which it is what alone is active. It had to be thus. This higher life had to sink again into unconsciousness of itself, in order that there might be a true beginning...<sup>453</sup>

Schelling's explanation for as to *why* God functions as a negative principle from the beginning is that it allows God the genuine possibility of establishing Godself from out its internal unconsciousness – it allows for the possibility of a true beginning from out of an eternal past that is unknown, even to the Divine Itself. In fact, on Schelling's account, the Divine occludes part of Godself from Itself for the sake of love.

Both Schelling and Hegel agree that a true ontological beginning must start without any presuppositions. As Schelling continues on in the WA:

Here, too, it holds that the beginning must not know itself. This means it must not know itself as beginning. Nothing is or discerns itself at once as merely ground or beginning. Whatever is a beginning must regard itself not as beginning but as essence (something which is for its own sake), in order to be a true beginning.<sup>454</sup>

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<sup>452</sup> Ibid., 41.

<sup>453</sup> Schelling, F.W.J. *The Ages of the World* (1815 draft), trans. Frederick de Wolfe Bolman, Jr, 203-4.

<sup>454</sup> Ibid., 204.

Schelling's statement here coincides with what Hegel says in the SL – that for a beginning to be a true beginning, there can be no presuppositions on the order of reason.

The distinction between Hegel's and Schelling's accounts here also applies to the distinction between their systems of philosophy considered in a more general sense. Both thinkers arrive at similar metaphysical accounts in terms of broad structure. Both thinkers agree that absolute subjectivity is constituted by a doubling of an original nothingness. That said, Schelling is more explicitly aware that the entire movement is a condition for the possibility of the revelation of the divine as love.

Schelling is keen on the fact that, via this process, God reveals divinity as *love*. God buries Godself deep in the earth as a “seed” in which its nature is an actual-potential but has not yet been fully realized. Freedom draws out and educates these potential natures of God, such that God grants Godself the ability to come to be in time. Schelling writes:

Then what is this unity? The answer: It is the eternal seed of God which is not yet an actual God, but only a God with respect to [its] powers. Therefore it is the state of possibility (of potentiality) in which God has voluntarily placed himself, and which must necessarily precede the actual God (revealed in reality) if there is to be a becoming, a sequence, a gradation in this revelation or birth of God into actuality.<sup>455</sup>

God's free nature is that which allows us to become participants in God's self-actualization in time. Out of pure love, God freely decides to serve as the “vanishing mediator” in time.

### **5.10) Schelling and Hegel on the Contingency of Reason**

In his paper, “Determinacy, Indeterminacy and Contingency in German Idealism,” by G. Anthony Bruno<sup>456</sup>, Bruno sets up a fruitful discussion regarding Hegel and Schelling in terms of

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<sup>455</sup> Ibid., 205.

<sup>456</sup> Anthony G. Bruno, “Determinacy, Indeterminacy, and Contingency in German Idealism,” in *The Significance of Indeterminacy: Perspectives from Asian and Continental Philosophy*, ed. Robert H. Scott and Gregory S. Moss (New York: Routledge, 2019), 67-83.

their respective positions on the question of contingency and necessity in their systematic philosophies. Bruno contends that the difference between Hegel and Schelling is primarily one of the value and placement of necessity in the ambition of a German Idealist system. The structural framework of Bruno's paper (in terms of the distinction between determinacy and indeterminacy) is helpful for drawing contrasts between some of the systematic works of the two thinkers.

On Bruno's account, the primary difference between Schelling and Hegel is ultimately one of *meaning* when it comes to contingency. As Bruno writes:

By removing Fichtean presuppositions from the system of *a priori* conditions, Hegel provides a deeper solution to the rhapsody problem. Nevertheless, his solution exhibits yet a deeper contingency, for systematicity raises the question of its value, the indeterminacy of which, Schelling will argue, reveals reason's insuperable limits.<sup>457</sup>

According to Bruno, Schelling thinks beyond Hegel on this point insofar as Schelling is aware that the contingency of freedom (attributable to the divine will) precedes even the systematicity of reason. On Bruno's reading, Hegel's account of reason is one of necessity and determinism. As Hegel writes, the categories of the understanding (which for Hegel are objective categories) must be "deduced from thinking itself,"<sup>458</sup> and therefore must be explicable on the order of reason (even if dialectically, so) i.e. dialectic locates contradiction as internal to reason (and necessity is thereby saved, according to Bruno's interpretation). Indeed, on Bruno's assessment, "Hegel rejects haphazard or rhapsodic limits on reason's power for explanation in order to demonstrate its absolute freedom."<sup>459</sup> Bruno seems to equate Hegel's desire to maintain the absolute freedom of reason with a desire to uphold the determinism and necessity of reason.

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<sup>457</sup> Ibid., 76.

<sup>458</sup> Ibid., 73.

<sup>459</sup> Ibid., 76.

Here, however, I think that we must be particularly cautious. I think that we equivocate on meanings if we maintain that Hegel's version of dialectics in the SL rescues or otherwise aims to maintain absolute *necessity* on the order of reason.

For this reason, my reading of Hegel here subtly differs from Bruno's reading. The key difference hinges on whether or not Hegel's claim that reason must be absolutely free simultaneously implicates him in affirming the *determinacy* of reason in an unqualified sense. Bruno and I both agree that Hegel considers dialectics as rational. For Hegel, as Bruno points out, "a condition thus negates itself through the contradiction that it contains."<sup>460</sup> However, I think that Hegel's conception of rationality is actually defined in relation to its other. On my understanding, this implies that dialectics is neither a purely deterministic nor necessary system of reason. I maintain that Hegel is aware of the contingency of reason (as internal to his system of dialectics) at the start of his *Science of Logic*. Bruno himself even notes how the SL starts with the "indeterminate immediacy"<sup>461</sup> of pure Being. On my interpretation, Hegel's beginning here means that the beginning of his logic is to be found in the emptiness of emptiness (which is therefore not *absolutely* deterministic, by any means). This allows for Hegel to develop a conception of reason that is actually both contingent and necessary but also neither (as I stated in my original thesis, and furthermore, Hegel agrees with Schelling on this point). To state this in another way, the Notion is best understood as its own justification in a *historical* sense. In other words, on Hegel's account, contingency (which one could consider as freedom in this context) is internal to the constitution of Absolute Spirit.

On a separate point, I agree with Bruno's assessment that, for the Schelling of this period (post-1809, in his *Freedom Essay* and later), he is mostly concerned with the freedom of the

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<sup>460</sup> Ibid., 75.

<sup>461</sup> Ibid.

divine will as the original “*unground*”<sup>462</sup> of reason.<sup>463</sup> As Schelling writes: “Thus nothing should rest on mere necessity, and the highest voluntariness, even in the first beginnings of life, should witness to the unlimited freedom of God.”<sup>464</sup> Schelling, therefore, agrees with Hegel on the point that indeterminacy is internal to (and constitutive of) a logic of Being. However, he differs from Hegel on the specifics insofar as he provides an account for as to *why* this is the case.

On Schelling’s account, the explanation for this fact is that God *ordains* the (in)determinate non-ground of reason from the start, for the purpose of divine revelation as love. Due to eternal freedom and divine love, God makes it such that reason cannot grasp a determinate ground of divinity. Rather, out of a loving will, God freely ordains a process in which reason comes to be from out of an eternal past that is (by its nature) never fully recoverable.<sup>465</sup> Rather than this leading one to despair, however, reason’s task becomes creative and imaginative in recognition of the freedom of the will.

### 5.11) Conclusion

It remains important to question how the philosophies of each thinker (both Schelling and Hegel) could serve as effective practical guides for contemporary humanity. For example, which philosophy would better allow for us to live a good and meaningful life? To me, it seems that the answer to this question largely depends on if one chooses to adopt the worldview of an apophatic theology on the order of reason (Hegel) or a theology that knows God on both the level of the

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<sup>462</sup> Bruno, “Determinacy, Indeterminacy and Contingency in German Idealism,” 77.

<sup>463</sup> *Ibid.*, 76 ff.

<sup>464</sup> Schelling, F.W.J. *The Ages of the World* (1815 draft), trans. Frederick de Wolfe Bolman, Jr., 154.

<sup>465</sup> “The primordial state of contradiction, that wild fire, that life of passion and desire, is posited as past by the godhead which is, by that supernatural essence of freedom. But because the godhead, which is from eternity, can never come to be, that primordial state is posited as an eternal past, a past which did not first become past, but was the past primordially and from all eternity.” F.W.J Schelling, *The Ages of the World* (1815 draft), trans. Frederick de Wolfe Bolman, Jr. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1942), 142.

mind and the heart (Schelling). If one chooses to embody the former, then the world of experience could still potentially serve as the embodiment of the divine, but one does not claim knowledge of a deep heart-level intuition of this fact. On the other hand, if one chooses to embody the latter, then one affirms a world of beings grounded in the divine heart and sees the divine at work in all of experience.

Schelling's philosophy is consonant with a society in which we recognize the divinity of all beings – we all (as divine beings and in union with nature) participate in the process of divine revelation in time. I recognize fellow human beings and respect their freedom, not from a place of recognition of their rational autonomy, but rather from an eternal co-knowledge (*Mitwissenschaft*) of our union with the Godhead—that which is beyond determinate reason, but forever reveals the Divine in the world throughout history.

In addition, humility is naturally upheld as an *experiential* value to a member of such a society for a number of reasons. First of all, I am humble out of my recollection of the mysterious and enigmatic nature of the divine at work in all of experience. I recognize that other beings, like myself, also hold within themselves a co-knowledge of eternal creation. For this reason, there are aspects of myself that others may perceive better than I am able to perceive myself and vice versa. Likewise, God's nature as mysterious implies that there are parts of God that are continuously revealed throughout time. Time, and life itself, is a gift granted by the divine. Union with the Godhead is not purely of a rational nature. Rather, it is a unity on the order of the wholeness of my spirit and being with nature. Also, God's nature is evolutionary such that I am continuously growing in both my spirit and being. To pay heed to the Divine is to unify myself with the Godhead. We are all in service of the divine in its revelation as love –

beyond the one who knows on the order of determinate concepts is the one who lives in service of love.

I end this fifth, and final, chapter with the following quote from Schelling:

“Everything divine is human, and everything human divine.”<sup>466</sup>

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<sup>466</sup> Schelling, F.W.J. *The Ages of the World* (1815 draft), trans. Frederick de Wolfe Bolman, Jr., 179.



## CONCLUSION

*“In the end, it is love that will stand alone as the true existent, as what has been revealing itself through the entire process...”*<sup>467</sup>

In this dissertation, I hoped to demonstrate a fundamental point of agreement in terms of Hegel’s and Schelling’s beginnings in their systems of metaphysics. I argued that Hegel and Schelling both begin their systems with the same insight: that an emptiness of emptiness (as the self-emptying of Absolute Spirit) stands at the beginning of metaphysics.

In Hegel’s *Science of Logic*, we saw this as the emptiness of the Word that is nothing twice in “Being, Pure Being, --”<sup>468</sup> In Schelling’s *Ages of the World*, we saw this in the co-eternity of two wills – a will that wills nothing co-eternal with a will that wills something (which subsequently takes on the form of nothingness out of love and for the purpose of the revelation of divine freedom). I argued that Schelling’s conception of ontology (while structurally similar to Hegel’s) differs insofar as he provides an answer to the question of *why* the structure is as such in the first place. Schelling’s response to this question is that the conditions for the possibility of ontology are bound up with God’s decision to negate Godself for the purpose of the revelation of eternal freedom and God’s nature (as love) in time. Ultimately, on Schelling’s account, we discover that love has been “revealing itself”<sup>469</sup> all along – it is by an act of highest freedom and therefore, of love, that God “dies” to Godself in order that it may come to be in time.

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<sup>467</sup> F.W.J. Schelling, *The Ages of the World (1811)*, trans. Joseph P. Lawrence, 82-83.

<sup>468</sup> Rebecca Comay and Frank Ruda, *The Dash*, 94.

<sup>469</sup> F.W.J. Schelling, *The Ages of the World (1811)*, trans. Joseph P. Lawrence, 83.

In further works, I could explore in more detail the relationship between Schelling's *Philosophy of Revelation* and Hegel's *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*. These two works would seem to provide an additional philosophical research area related to my interests. For example, Hegel's lectures there are on the topic of the Incarnation and its relevance for philosophy. In particular, the third volume from these lectures includes Hegel's in-depth discussion of God's self-emptying as in Phillipians 2 from the Bible and in connection with *kenosis*.<sup>470</sup> Hegel uses the term *Entäußerung* ("divestment") in this discussion in connection with Christ's self-emptying, and the relationship between divine and human form. So, that volume could serve as a helpful resource for further study.

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<sup>470</sup> Farneth, 'The Power to Empty Oneself,' 158 ff.

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