

# A CRITICAL EXPOSITION OF HEGEL'S DIALECTIC

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Hegel's philosophy inevitably inspires mixed reactions; even his worst adversaries cannot help honouring and admiring him, "for having willed something great, and having failed to accomplish it" (Kierkegaard); while, on the other hand, even the most ardent of Hegelians are forced to voice their perplexity at, and reservations on to, some of his extravagant leaps. Yet the aspect of Hegelian philosophy which, if it sometimes intrigues and charms us, at others, it vexes us, is precisely that it breaks loose from the straitjacket which our ordinary logical thought has imposed upon itself, and to which previous philosophical thought had been kowtowing, and legitimises, on the one hand, precisely these leaps of thought and on the other hand invests us with the hope that great things cannot only be willed but also accomplished. This Hegel achieves by the most thoroughgoing criticism of the ordinary notions and categories of thought: notions such as substance and properties, quality, quantity and relation, space and time. self, causation and the rest. The notion of the dialectic rises as the "phoenix" out of the ashes of the ordinary categories and the traditional philosophy which uncritically operates with the ordinary concepts. In both its extent and intensity the criticism of ordinary thought which Hegel proffers has no parallel in the history of philosophic thought. A failure to appreciate that this criticism forms the backdrop against which Hegel makes his dialectical moves has been the source of much perplexity for interpreters of the dialectical movement of thought proffered by Hegel. One may plausibly claim that this criticism is definitive of the nature of Hegel's dialectic.

In its extent, Hegel's criticism applies to each and every ordinary category of thought. Before Hegel many a philosopher had noticed and argued the inadequacy of our ordinary notions. But this criticism was limited to certain categories only. Hegel's position that all ordinary notions that we

come across in our ordinary sciences involve us in contradictions is clearly brought out in his discussion of Kantian Antinomies:

"In the first place, I remark that Kant wanted to give his four cosmological antinomies a show of completeness by the principle of classification which he took from his scheme of categories. But profounder insight into the antinomial, or more truly into the dialectical nature of reason demonstrates any Notion whatever to be a unity of opposed moments to which, therefore, the form of antinomial assertions could be given. Becoming, determinate being, etc., and any other Notion, could thus provide its particular antinomy, and thus as many antinomies could be constructed as there are Notions. Ancient scepticism did not spare itself the pains of demonstrating this contradiction or antimony in every notion which confronted it in the sciences."<sup>126</sup>

While Kant failed to see that all the ordinary categories of thought involve contradiction or "pass over into its opposite," however, with respect to the nature and necessity of contradiction Kant was right. Kant had shown that our notions of time, space, matter and causal dependence are such that reason must *necessarily* come up against contradiction. And this, Hegel thinks, is an important view<sup>127</sup> Before we discuss why this is important, it should be of some value to discuss some of the manifestations in ordinary thought wherein it holds oa to the truth of assertions which are contradictory. One such example is the assumed absolute separation of being and not-being, and yet alongwith this the ordinary thought also assumes such notions as coming-into-being and passing-away, which notions imply relatedness of being and not-being. As Hegel puts it:

"Ordinary reflective thought which accepts as perfect truth that being and nothing only are in separation from each other, yet on the other hand acknowledge beginning and ceasing to be equally genuine determinations but in these it assumes in fact the unseparatedness of being and nothing."<sup>128</sup>

While ordinary thought, unaware of the contradiction, holds on to both the notions of "separatedness" and "unseparatedness" of "being" and "non-being," understanding makes a fool of itself. Concerned with "consistency," and "making identity its law," formal thinking<sup>129</sup> considers that contradictions are unthinkable. To it "being" and "not-being" are entirely

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<sup>126</sup> W.11. Johnstone, Tr., *Hegel's Science of Logic* (Oxford : Clarendon Press, 1912), p. 191 ; see also *Hegel's Lesser Logic* (Humanities Press, 1974), p. 99.

<sup>127</sup> Johnstone, Tr., op. cit., p. 197.

<sup>128</sup> Ibid., p. 104.

<sup>129</sup> Ibid., p. 835.

exclusive.

But finding in actual fact, things coming into being and passing away, it tries various manoeuvres. It sometimes tries to maintain that the contradiction is the result of unsophisticated vulgar thought, and that the truly scientific thought shall not impale itself into contradiction. At others it tries to separate the contradictories into "space and time, in which the contradictories are held asunder in juxtaposition and reciprocal contact".<sup>130</sup> At still others, it lends itself into kinds of reasoning which are mere

sophisms. Thus we hear arguments of the following sort;

"It is impossible for anything to begin, either in so far as it Is, or in so far as it is not; for in so far as it is, it is not just be-ginning, and in so far as it is not, then it also does not begin. If the world, or anything, is supposed to have begun, then it must have begun in nothing, but in nothing—or nothing—is no beginning; or a beginning includes within itself a being, but nothing does not contain any being. Nothing is only nothing. In a ground, a cause, and so on, if nothing is so determined, there is contained an affirmation, a being. For the same reason, too, something cannot cease to be; for then being would have to contain nothing, but being is only being, not the contrary of its elf."<sup>131</sup>

This entire argument and similar pre-Kantian scholastic sophisms hang upon the dogmatic presupposition of the truth of the separation of being and not-being, as well as an unsubstantiated denial of coming-into-being and ceasing to be.

"With the absolute separatedness of being from nothing pre-supposed, then of course—as we so often hear—beginning or becoming is something incomprehensible; for a presupposition is made which annuls the beginning or the becoming which yet again is admitted, and this contradiction thus posed and at the same time made impossible of solution, is called incomprehensible."<sup>132</sup>

Understanding, which thus operates with the law of identity, has a distaste for anything loose and untidy and sets about a clear definition of concepts, in a manner where each concept simply entails itself and is clearly distinguished from the other. In its zeal for clarity and avoidance of confusion it defines its concepts and gives them neat and clean boundaries.

"In the study of nature, for example, we distinguish matter, forces, general and the like, and stereotype each in its isolation. Thought is here acting in its analytic capacity, where its canon is identity, a simple reference of each

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<sup>130</sup> Ibid., p. -6

<sup>131</sup> Ibid., p. 104.

<sup>132</sup> Ibid.,

attribute to itself."<sup>133</sup>

While Hegel assigns provisional merit to the successes achieved by Understanding, in a manner which Marx was later to employ in the tongue in cheek complements he gives to Capital- "ism in his Communist Manifesto, he soon turns to demonstrate the quagmires it lands itself into. Just as Marx's acclamation of Capitalism is the best known testimonial to that mode of production, so too Hegel excels all known approbations of Under-standing as a mode of thought. He maintains:

" . Understanding is visible in every department of the objective world; and no object in that world can ever be wholly perfect which does not give full satisfaction to the canons of Understanding."<sup>134</sup>

While this may be so, Hegel moves on to maintain that in attempting to erect facile boundaries of concepts, which have the semblance of a no-trouble clear coast. understanding abstracts from the particularity and diversity of ordinary thought, and invests its subject-matter with the "form of Universality". Each science carves out one aspect of reality for itself, and treats of it in its abstracted isolation: its *sine qua non* is that it treats of its subject-matter "given everything else is equal". It comes to have concepts which are fixed, distinct from one another, abstract as opposed to concrete, opposed to one another, universal as opposed to particular. But these convenient and comfortable dichotomies and classi-fications, all their advantages notwithstanding, soon appear to burst at the seams. We can thus have too much of a good thing. In law and morality there are endless examples of this. Thus *summum jus summa injuria*, which means to drive an abstract right to its extremities is to do wrong<sup>135</sup> It is as if these concepts, each one of which represented a *cul-de-sac*, while it worked very well so far as it went, becomes in certain circumstances a hindrance, a stumbling block which needs to be jumped over, yet understanding clinging to its law of identity, committed to its errand of guarding the boundaries of concepts would not budge.

The dialectician of a particular brand, practising the negative art has in this circumstance hi s heyday. He shows that each and if every finite concept of understanding leads to antinomy, that it passes over into its opposite ; and he too, clinging to the law of identity, fails to comprehend this passing

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<sup>133</sup> *Lasser Logic*, op.cit., p. 114.

<sup>134</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 115.

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

over into the other, and therefore declares them unintelligible. This dialectic, according to Hegel, is external<sup>136</sup> and contingent,<sup>137</sup> is practised as an adventitious art<sup>138</sup> as though it rested on a subjective talent.<sup>139</sup> This is the dialectic of understanding<sup>140</sup> in which the result is a negation. It leads to sophisms, which is "an argument proceeding from a baseless presupposition which is unthinkingly and uncritically adopted".<sup>141</sup> According to Hegel, this dialectic proceeds in the following form:

"It is shown that there belongs to some subject-matter or other, for example, the world, motion point, and so on some determination or other, for example, (taking the objects in the order named), finitude in space or time, presence in this place, absolute negation of space ; but, further, that with equal necessity the opposite determination also belongs to the subject-matter, for example, infinity in space and time, non-presence in this place, relation to space and so spatiality. . . . Now the conclusion drawn from dialectic of this kind is in general the *contradiction* and nullity of the assertions made. But this conclusion can be drawn in either of two senses—either in the objective sense, that *subject-matter* which in such a manner contradicts itself cancels itself out and is null and void . . . ; or in the subjective sense, that cognition is defective."<sup>142</sup>

When confronted with these results arising out of the fixed, distinct and determinate categories of understanding, philosophers set about to disentangle themselves in either of the two ways.

Firstly, they may totally deny understanding and point out that categories set up by the understanding are "limited vehicles of thought, forms of the conditioned, of the dependant and the derivative."<sup>143</sup> Instead they may wish to stick to the ordinary

thought and the immediacy of empirical assertions. Thus Diogenese, when a dialectician pointed out that motion was impossible or involved contradiction, silently walked up and down in answer. But as Hegel points out "such assertion and refutation is certainly easier to make than to engage in thinking and to hold fast and resolve by thought alone the complexities originating in thought. . . ."<sup>144</sup> The trick here consists in setting up the immediacy of ordinary sensuous consciousness against the mediacy,

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<sup>136</sup> Ibid., p. 116

<sup>137</sup> 12. Johnstone, Tr., op. cit., p 831.

<sup>138</sup> *Lesser Logic*, op. cit., p. 116.

<sup>139</sup> Johnstone, Tr., op. cit., is, 831.

<sup>140</sup> Ibid., p. 116.

<sup>141</sup> Ibid., p. 105; see also *Lesser Logic*, p. 117.

<sup>142</sup> Johnstone, Tr., op. cit., is, 831.

<sup>143</sup> *Lesser Logic*. pp. 95-863.

<sup>144</sup> Johnstone, Tr., op. cit., p. 198; see also p .832.

derivativeness, etc., of Understanding ; the concreteness of sensation as against abstractness of Understanding. But Hegel would not be a party to such criticisms of understanding, and points out that the dialectic of the understanding, at least, has the merit that it is self-consistent.<sup>145</sup> This appeal to immediacy is also, Hegel points out, characteristic of the proponents of Immediate or Intuitive knowledge.<sup>146</sup> In this appeal to immediate knowledge, Hegel argues, all the determinations and distinctions between Idea and Being, and all its other categories are rejected as finite in their import. But, Hegel argues that while philosophers should indeed welcome such an endeavour to prove unity of thought and being, subjectivity and objectivity, the asseverations of immediate knowledge (and Jacobi) need to be wholeheartedly rejected. It itself fixes a total separation of immediate and mediate knowledge, which Hegel, in the chapter on "Doctrine of Essential Being" in the *Science of Logic*, shows - are intrinsically united. There is, according to Hegel, no such thing as purely immediate knowledge; moreover, immediate knowledge, to the exclusion of mediate knowledge, can only tell us that God is but not what he is; it holds the fact of immediacy of consciousness to be the criterion of truth and thereby allows all forms of superstition and idolatry to pass for truth. What is required, Hegel argues, is not to set up immediacy of knowledge against the mediacy of understanding, in order to negate the latter, but that we must:

reject the opposition between an independent immediacy in the contents or facts of consciousness and an equally independent mediation, supposed incompatible with the former."<sup>147</sup>

A second move, in the face of the incomprehensibility of the determinateness and the consequent negation of its fixed scheme of categories and concepts, is made by the understanding itself. Herein understanding itself rejects the finiteness of its own concepts, all the determinations of being and non-being, quality and quantity, essence and existence are negated to arrive at an indeterminate Infinite. But Hegel retorts: This Infinite as thus posited over against the finite, in a relation wherein they are qualitatively distinct from each other, is to be called the spurious Infinite; the Infinite of the understanding for which it has the value of the highest, the Absolute Truth. The understanding is absolutely satisfied that it has truly reconciled these two, but the truth is that it is entangled in unreconciled, unresolved, absolute contradiction.<sup>148</sup> The Infinite which is posited by the understanding is set above or beyond the finite, it is the mere negation of the finite, is separated from it, and thus the finite and Infinite both retain their places and limit each other. Understanding even here clings

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<sup>145</sup> Ibid., p. 104.

<sup>146</sup> *Lesser Logic*, pp. 95-112.

<sup>147</sup> Ibid., p. 111.

<sup>148</sup> Johnston, Tr., op.cit., p. 139.

to its law of identity and defines each, the Infinite and the finite, as the "unity of itself," and therefore distinct from an Other, the "finite" which is identical with itself, but distinct from the "Infinite". This, moreover, according to Hegel, leads to an infinite regress, because out of each separatedness a new limit arises, which needs to be transcended.<sup>149</sup> As well Hegel argues that this supposed separatedness of finite and in-finite once again generates the process of reasoning that we have seen in the negative dialectic, which asks questions like: "how does the infinite become finite?" With the supposed separatedness of the two, no comprehensible answer or solution can be forthcoming. In a similar vein Hegel criticises the understanding's notion of God who is free of all determinations, an absolutely indeterminate nothing, who is separated from and exists over against the determinate finite world. The understanding's continued operation of fixed determinate concepts is the cause and ground of dualistic metaphysics.

Hegel's conclusion is, therefore, that understanding which operates with the law of identity is totally inept to get beyond its determinate concepts, and yet such going beyond is necessitated by the fact that by themselves these concepts and categories lead into incomprehensibility. Scepticism is the understanding's ultimate result. "Scepticism, made a negative science and systematically applied to all forms of knowledge, might seem a suitable introduction, as pointing out the nullity of such assumptions."<sup>150</sup> From this it does not follow (as was already mentioned) that we should reject the determinateness, the universality, of the understanding and turn instead to the immediacy, undeterminateness, and particularity and concreteness of immediate knowledge. The major task of philosophy, for Hegel, is that of overcoming opposition, not only between the various categories of understanding, but also the opposition between understanding and immediate knowledge. Understanding itself is totally inept to achieve such a task, and philosophies which hold on to understanding with its law of identity are bound to fall over their own feet. In the Preface to the *Phenomenology*, Hegel writes: "Once dialectic had been divorced from demonstration, the conception of philosophical demonstration was in fact lost."<sup>151</sup> A return to

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<sup>149</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 141.

<sup>150</sup> *Lesser Logic*, p. 111.

<sup>151</sup> J.B. Baillie, Tr., *The Phenomenology of Mind* (London: G. Allen & Unwin/Macmillan Co., New York, 1931), 2nd Ed., p. 53.

dialectic as a positive science gives philosophy a mode of philosophical demonstration which has nothing to fear from scepticism, for it "includes it as a subordinate function of its own".<sup>152</sup>

The examination of the understanding thus necessitates that all oppositions need to be overcome, but this is not to be done in a way in which any one of the sides of the opposition is rejected in favour of the other. We cannot merely undo all oppositions and return to a primitive indeterminate unity. In the dialectical mode of thought these are sublated. Sublation is the core notion that needs to be understood for an appropriate understanding of the unique element in Hegel's thought that distinguishes it from all previous philosophical modes of argumentation, despite the fact that Hegel insists that this is one of the most important notions, of philosophy and occurs throughout philosophy. He finds its traces particularly amongst the ancients, who, unlike the moderns had not completely divested their abstract universal concepts from the concrete plurality of the empirical world.<sup>153</sup> Sublation, according to Hegel, has a two-fold meaning:

"On the one hand, it means to preserve, to maintain, and equally it also means to cause to cease, to put an end to... Thus what is sublated is at the same time preserved."<sup>154</sup>

The opposed and determinate categories exclude each other; in the resultant third category, wherein they are sublated they are not annihilated but receive an equilibrium. The resultant category has in itself the determinations of the categories from which it originates. It has their opposition and contradiction within itself.

The dialectic which consists of the movement of reason in which seemingly separate terms pass over into each other spontaneously, a movement in which disparate presuppositions sublate themselves, is itself viewed by Hegel as not opposed to understanding and sensuous consciousness, but as their sublation, which retains the immediacy, concreteness and particularity of the latter, and the mediateness, universality, determinateness and abstractedness of the former.

The essentialities of the determinate categories of understanding are its laws of identity, difference and excluded middle. In this sublation of

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<sup>152</sup> *Lesser Logic*, p. 119.

<sup>153</sup> *Goddamer*, p. 9.

<sup>154</sup> *Johnstone*, Tr., op, cit., p. 107.



understanding these essentialities are also sublated. The law of identity is expressed in the form of the tautology  $A=A$ ; the law of contradiction in the form  $\neg(A \cdot \neg A)$  and their absolute separation is asserted by the law of excluded middle " $(A \vee \neg A)$ ". Hegel's contention that the sublated category holds the opposed categories together has been the source of much criticism, and has resulted in the charge that he transgresses the law of identity. But such a criticism, Hegel believes, betrays one of the fundamental prejudices of logic and of ordinary thinking, which it is itself forced to qualify. First of all it is shown in its own admission that the law of identity asserts nothing, it has no content and is a tautology<sup>155</sup>; moreover, it is admitted that it expresses one-sided determinateness, that it contains only a formal truth, which is abstract and incomplete; finally, that in experience, in its concrete application the law of identity has its relevance only in its connection of the simple identical with a manifold that is different from it.<sup>156</sup> Difference expresses itself in diversity and opposition, but is in both cases already a contradiction. Hegel argues that even a little reflection would show that if something has been defined as positive and one moves from this basis then straightaway the positive has secretly turned into a negative, and, conversely, the negative determined into a positive, and then reflective thinking gets confused and contradicts itself in these determinations.<sup>157</sup> All the innumerable instances of the employment of the negative external dialectic of the sceptic wherein he demonstrates with respect to specific categories as to how these self-identical categories lead into their opposite may be viewed as diverse manifestations of the fundamental insight that the law of identity leads into the law of contradiction. Yet understanding considers contradiction to be a subjective error, thinks that only the identity is objective, while contradiction is subjective. But Hegel argues that "truth consists only in their relation to one another".<sup>158</sup> We need to enunciate it as a law that everything is inherently contradictory, which is the sublation of the law of identity and opposition. Now when an ancient dialectician argues that there is contradiction in motion we can grant him this, but it does not follow that motion is impossible; on the contrary, we should maintain that motion

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<sup>155</sup> Ibid., p. 413.

<sup>156</sup> Ibid., pp. 414-15.

<sup>157</sup> Ibid., p. 436.

<sup>158</sup> Ibid., p. 438.

is existent contradiction itself.<sup>159</sup> And not only with respect to motion, but we can retort him with respect to all the categories wherein he points out there is contradiction by pointing out that these are existent contradictions. "Contradiction is ... immediately represented in the determinations of relationship."<sup>160</sup> The sublation of identity and opposition into contradiction "shows" and "shines" through all the determinations of categories as self-identical and different from others, and it is only the understanding which sharpens "the blunt difference of diverse terms, the mere manifoldness of pictorial thinking, into essential difference, into opposition".<sup>161</sup>

The recognition that all the determinate categories of understanding together with the opposition between the law of identity and contradiction itself, which are the basis of the opposition between the various determinate categories, pass into each other, and are all sublated, is the fundamental insight of Hegel's philosophy. Ultimately this recognition is the task of philosophy, which apprehends the Absolute Idea that shines through all the determinate categories, and is the final and full sublation of all the determinations of logical thought, and contains all the determinations and oppositions within itself. It has shown itself not only through all the determinations, but 'through each one of them. This "Absolute Idea alone," for Hegel, "is *being*, imperishable *life*, self-knowing truth, and is *all truth*". All else, Hegel tells us, is error, confusion, opinion, endeavour, caprice and transitoriness. The Absolute Idea, which contains within itself the richness of all the determinations of manifold categories, their oppositions, as also the immediacy of sensuous consciousness and the mediacy of understanding is the most staggering Idea. It needs to be clearly distinguished from the Being of the Eleatics which is pure Being and as such is opposed to nothing; furthermore, the latter is indeterminate and contains no determinations is self. Hegel's absolute Idea which has a rich content, which contains all the oppositions and at the same time their resolution, cannot be confused with this impoverished, indeterminate being which stands opposed to nothing. Nor should it be confused with the God of rational theology, which conceived of God as a purely indeterminate Being. Even when attributes were assigned to God these were exalted into infinity, such as omnipotence,

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<sup>159</sup> Ibid., p. 440

<sup>160</sup> Ibid., p. 441

<sup>161</sup> Ibid., p. 4442

omnipresence, etc., thus forming them into indeterminateness.<sup>162</sup> As Hegel argues:

"Instead of being rich and full above all measure, it is so narrowly conceived that it is on the contrary extremely poor and altogether empty. . . . When the notion of God is apprehended only as that of the abstract or most real being, God is, as it were, relegated to another world beyond: and to speak of a knowledge of him would be meaningless. Where there is no definite quality, knowledge is impossible. Mere light is mere darkness."<sup>163</sup>

Here It would be worthwhile to say a word about the relationship between the Absolute Idea and the Geist or the Spirit. A number of interpreters and commentators of Hegel seem to have misunderstood the essential unity of the Absolute Idea and the Spirit. At the end of his monumental *Encyclopaedia*, Hegel argued: "The eternal Idea, in full fruition of its essence, eternally sets itself to work, engenders and enjoys itself as Absolute Mind."<sup>164</sup> And yet, as Goddamer argued, "amongst others Dilthey and Trendelenburg find fault with Hegel and attribute to him the view that he tried to deduce the system of logical relationships contained in the entirety of the world and yet without a conscious soul observing this movement, i.e. without a foundation such as Fichte had in the conscious self-intuition of Ego."<sup>165</sup>

In the *Phenomenology*, however, Hegel endeavoured to show how the opposition between Man and Nature, Man's rational will and his desires, inclinations, etc., Man's self-consciousness and the consciousness he has as a member of his community, how the opposition between finite spirit and infinite spirit, in short between the autonomous subject and fate is resolved in the *Geist*. It is this conclusion, according to Hegel, that is presupposed in the *Science of Logic* wherein he sets about to discuss only the pure determinations of Notions. As such the notions here employed are already seen as straddling the opposition between subject and object. In the *Phenomenology*, Hegel had argued that the Absolute Spirit is the free subject which out of its own rational necessity, to be aware of itself, posits embodied finite spirits, and the plurality of the kinds of living things, as well as inanimate nature. In the *Science of Logic*, where this movement is

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<sup>162</sup> Lesser Logic, p. 57.

<sup>163</sup> Ibid., p. 58,

<sup>164</sup> Baillie, Tr., op. cit., p. 316,

<sup>165</sup> Goddamer, p. 10.

presupposed, Hegel's problem is specifically to demonstrate that if the world is posited out of rational necessity by the self-knowing spirit, then this rational necessity must be evident in the movement of pure thought and the logical Idea.

We must also clearly understand the relationship of the Absolute Idea with the Notion and the Dialectical Method. A failure to see the essential unity of these led Findlay to say that the "Dialectic is not, however, for Hegel the end of philosophising: it is only a 'moment,' an aspect of philosophical thinking. If it overcomes the hard-and-fast notions and fixed presuppositions of the understanding, it must itself be overcome in the higher thought of Reason, or, as Hegel also calls it, speculative thought."<sup>166</sup> This, however, is far from correct. Though Hegel at times speaks in a manner that would give some credence to the view that the Absolute Idea, the Notion and the Method stand in an order of hierarchical ascendancy, a closer scrutiny, however, shows that these are all various aspects of the Absolute Idea. Thus, though Hegel says that the "logical aspect of the Idea may also be called a mode of it,"<sup>167</sup> yet when he turns to the issue again, he says that the Absolute Idea has for its content the form which is the Notion and that, therefore, to understand the Absolute Idea we need only concentrate on the universal aspect of its form, the method. As he puts it:

More exactly, the Absolute Idea itself has... merely this, that the form determination is its own completed totality, the pure Notion. . . . Therefore, what remains to be considered here is not a content as such, but the universal aspect of its form —that is, the method."<sup>168</sup>

It would indeed be alien to Hegel's system if, within the Absolute Idea, a distinction remained to be made between its content, the determinations contained in the Idea, and its form its logical aspect, the Notion or the concept which shows itself to be Dialectical. In the Absolute Idea there is an essential fusion of the form and content, so that the Dialectic, far from falling short of knowing the Absolute Idea, is in fact viewed as knowing itself, reflecting upon itself.

".. also that merely was it impossible for a given object to be the foundation to

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<sup>166</sup> J.N. Findlay, *Hegel: A Re-Examination* (Humanities Press, 1464),

p.66.

<sup>167</sup> Johnstone, Tr., op. cit., p. 825.

<sup>168</sup> Ibid.

which the absolute form stood in a merely external and contingent relationship but that, on the contrary, the absolute form has proved itself to be the absolute foundation and ultimate truth. From this course the method has emerged as the self-knowing Notion that has itself, as the absolute, both as the subjective and the objective, for its subject-matter, consequently as the pure correspondence of the Notion and its reality, as the concrete existence that is Notion itself."<sup>169</sup>

The "pure correspondence" of form and content, of the Notion which is the pure logical form, and the Absolute Idea with its rich content of all the determinations, is a cardinal principle in Hegel's philosophy, on which rests the guarantee that the formal self-explication of Notion in the dialectical process would also unfold the rich content and all the determinations of the absolute. While, on the one hand, the Notion stands in a pure correspondence with the Absolute Idea, the method and the Notion too stand in pure correspondence. In ordinary cognition, the method is treated as the instrument through which a subject becomes aware of the object. But this is not true of the Dialectic as a method:

"In the cognition of enquiry, the method likewise occupies the position of an instrument, of a means standing on the subjective side by which this side relates itself to the object. . . . In the true cognition on the contrary, the method is not merely an aggregate of certain determinations but the Notion that is determined in and for itself."<sup>170</sup>

Or again:

"The method is this knowing itself, for which the notion is not merely the subject-matter, but knowings own subjective act, the instrument and means of the cognising activity, distinguished from that activity, but only as that activity's own essentiality."<sup>171</sup>

The fusion, therefore, of the Absolute Spirit, the Absolute Idea, or Notion, of the Dialectic, and Philosophy at the apex of Hegel's system is its cardinal principle. Though it may be most difficult to comprehend, yet if Hegel's view that determinations of all kinds have shown themselves to be incomprehensible is allowed, one cannot see any other alternative to extreme scepticism. This is exactly how Hegel viewed his system. The threat of the sceptic is the backdrop against which Hegel recommends his own staggering system. In his hands the sceptic has an advocate of unsurpassable

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<sup>169</sup> Ibid., p. 826.

<sup>170</sup> Ibid., p. 827.

<sup>171</sup> Ibid.

genius ; scepticism is a monster which in his hands has been strengthened beyond all control, yet in his system it is thoroughly domesticated:

"Even to this day scepticism is often spoken of as the irresistible enemy of all positive knowledge, and hence of philosophy, in so far as philosophy is concerned with positive knowledge... It is only the finite thought of Understanding which has to fear scepticism, because it is unable to withstand it. Philosophy includes the sceptical principle as a subordinate function of its own."<sup>172</sup>

In view of the pure correspondence brought out, there is nothing which is not everything else. Thus when the Method reflecting on the Notion, that is upon itself, exposes itself in various logical forms, it is at the same time manifesting the determinations, the rich content of the Absolute Idea, and it is also nothing but Absolute Spirit positing itself in its concrete embodiment. Similarly, when the Absolute Spirit in its freedom and necessity expresses itself in finite spirits and the variety and diversity of nature, this positing shows itself to be dialectical. It is only in this background that we can understand Hegel's various pronouncements that the Dialectic is the movement of the Notion itself; that it is an activity. It is his fusion of the logical with the ontological, the metaphysical, and the spiritual, that distinguishes Hegel's logic from the formal logic as traditionally conceived, or even from the transcendental logic of Kant. The dialectic is conceived of as a logical movement of Notion which is the result of or, more correctly, itself a movement of the Absolute Spirit becoming aware of itself in its various" determinations.

"Accordingly what is to be considered here as a method is only the movement of the Notion itself. . . . Notion is everything and its movement is the universal absolute activity, the self-determining and self-realising movement. It is therefore soul and substance, and anything whatever is comprehended and known in its truth only when it is completely subjugated to the method; it is the method proper to every subject-matter because its activity is the Notion. . . . It is therefore not only the highest force, or rather the sole and absolute force of reason, but also its supreme and sole urge to find and cognise itself by means of itself in everything."

When we consider that the method is considered by Hegel that "highest," the sole and absolute force, when we consider that "everything is

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<sup>172</sup> *Lesser Logic*, p. 119.

completely subjugated to it," and other such remarks, it becomes evident that Findlay is clearly wrong in thinking that the Dialectic method is not the end of philosophising. Similarly, when we consider that the method is activity, it is the substantiality of things, it is the sole urge of consciousness not only to cognise but also find itself, it becomes clear that criticisms of Dilthey and Trendelenburg are off the mark.

Thus confident that the method is everything, we may turn to enquire into the nature and significance of the determinations in which the Dialectic unfolds itself. Both through the *Science of Logic* and also through the *Lesser Logic*, Hegel gives an exposition of an ascending dialectic which, starting from the simplest, indeterminate immediate pure Being terminates in the Absolute Idea. Towards the end of both works, however, where Hegel takes up the problem of explication of the method, he gives us a view of a circular movement of method wherein the beginning and the end fuse together. In consequence it implies that the problem of an appropriate beginning which has so much vexed philosophers is also superfluous.<sup>173</sup> Basically, Hegel's attitude appears to be that one can start anywhere. One can start with any category by which we designate a pervasive aspect of reality—"being," "essence," "universality," etc. For him it is sufficient for the beginning that it is immediate and that it is simple universality.

Hegel's reasons for starting with an immediate Universality appear to be several. First of all he wishes to show that the dialectical movement of concepts is necessary, Hegel himself would probably have no aversion to starting with concepts such as "becoming," "determinate being," etc., but then it may be argued that these have a determinate-ness of content as also of form, and hence necessarily lead over into their others.

Moreover, it may be argued that if these categories show themselves to be leading to contradiction, these may be replaced by other categories. We, therefore, start with a category which seems to be indispensable, and yet at the same time shows itself to be incoherent. It is for this reason that Hegel himself starts with "Being" the emptiest of all concepts, which has no determinateness of content, and which is immediate, and allows that one may start with any concept which is universal and immediate. If Hegel can show that even these categories necessarily involve a contradiction and necessarily lead to the deduction of a new category, then this new category

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<sup>173</sup> 48, Johnstone, Tr., op. cit., p. 841.

will retain this aspect, since it is introduced as the only way to resolve the certain contradiction.<sup>174</sup>

Moreover, such immediate universals, apart from having no determinateness of content, show themselves to be the necessary beginning of both sensuous consciousness and the understanding. As Hegel argues: "When it means immediate being, the beginning is taken from sensation and perception. . . when it means univereality it is the beginning of the scientific method."<sup>175</sup>

As immediacy and simple Universality are the two necessary and sufficient conditions for any beginning, though Hegel has shown the operation of the method with respect to such beginnings as "Being," "Essence," and how these necessarily lead to the deduction of other determinateness, yet in the last chapter, he demonstrates the operation of the method with respect to simple universality which we already know from his discussion of the Notion is nothing but the pure simple Notion.

Universality is pure simple Notion, and the Notion is pure universality. The immediate of the beginning, however, is itself deficient, and is endowed with an urge to carry itself further. The method, "as consciousness of the notion, knows that Universality is only a moment and that in it the Notion is not yet determined in and for itself".<sup>176</sup> The absolute method finds and cognises the determinations of the universal within the latter itself, and posits it as an other. Now

"a universal first, considered in and for itself, shows itself to be the other of itself. Taken quite generally, this determination can be taken to mean that what is at first immediate now appears as mediated, related to an other, or that the Universal appears as a particular. Hence the second term that has thereby come into being is the negative of the first, and if we anticipate the subsequent progress, is the first negative."<sup>177</sup>

This negative, however, is not to be considered as merely an other of the first immediate; it in fact contains the first, and is its other. It is mediate determination, and contains the determinations of the first within itself. But at the same time it is also to be construed as the mediating determination. "Because the first or the immediate is implicitly the Notion, and

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<sup>174</sup> Cf. Charles Taylor, *Hegel* (Cambridge: University Press, 1975), p. 119.

<sup>175</sup> *Lesser Logic*, p. 204.

<sup>176</sup> Johnstone, Tr., op. cit., p. 829.

<sup>177</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 834



consequently is also only implicitly the negative, the dialectical moment with it consists in positing the difference that it implicitly contains. The second, on the contrary, is itself the determinate moment, the difference or relationship; therefore with it the dialectical moment consists in positing the unity that is implicit in it." In this moment, the first negative, acting as a mediating determination, sublates itself and its positive whose other it is and their opposed determinations into a single determination which Hegel calls the individual. "As self-sublating contradiction this negativity is the restoration of the first immediacy, of simple universality, for the other of the other, the negative of the negative, is immediately the positive, the identical, the universal."<sup>178</sup> As the simple immediacy and the universality, it is also the realization of the Notion, which has reasserted itself, and by so sublating the oppositions in which it had divided itself has now become united with itself and has restored its absolute reality, its simple relation with itself. The dialectic thus essentially consists in restoring the unity of opposites, in which the Notion, the immediate universality had separated itself, into a Notion which, according to Hegel, is also the truth of those separated determinations. In so far as this Individual—the sublated immediacy—is a return to the Notion, it is in the image of the absolute. It is essential to the Hegelian doctrine that the Dialectic moves from a totality to a totality, wherein each stage reflects the absolute more or less adequately, depending upon its proximity to the Absolute Idea.

The notion arrived at through the sublation of the first immediacy and its other sets itself up as a new immediacy, and is, therefore, in the image of the first starting point. However, there is, according to Hegel, a difference. The difference consists in the fact that while in the first beginning there was only its form for its content from which the other emerged, in this new immediacy the content has appeared. "Through the movement we have indicated, the subject-matter has obtained for itself a determinateness that is content, because the negativity that has with-drawn into simplicity is the sublated form, and as simple determinateness stands over, against its development, and first of all over against its very opposition to universality."<sup>179</sup> The negativity that, in the sublation, was thus extinguished becomes the source of the extinguishing of the sublated immediacy itself.

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<sup>178</sup> Ibid., p. 836.

<sup>179</sup> Ibid., pp. 838-39.

The arrived at immediate must, therefore, itself burst asunder, to be sublated again in the Notion, and so on, until it returns into the Absolute Idea.

This progressive expression of the Notion until its return, and its implications, shall concern us in a moment. We should pause, however, to consider further the nature of the third, which sets itself as an immediate, though as an immediate that is "deduced and proved," for Hegel regards this as the "turning point of the movement of the Notion".<sup>180</sup> In passages which are probably the most perplexing in his Logic, he says:

"It is the simple point of the negative relation to self, the innermost source of all activity, of all animate and spiritual self-movement, the dialectical soul that everything true possesses and through which alone it is true ; for on this subjectivity alone rests the sublating of the opposition between Notion and reality and the unity that is truth. The second negative, the negative of the negative, at which we have arrived, is . . . the innermost, most objective moment of life and spirit, through which a subject, a person, free being, exists."<sup>181</sup>

This sudden introduction of the subject, the self as the source of activity, is, to say the least, perplexing, and there appears to be little or no justification for it. It may be recalled here as well that in the beginning of the Logic where we begin from the simple, indeterminate, immediate "Being," Being and "Not-Being" pass over into a "Determinate Being," and then into "Something" which is the first negation of the negation. Here, too Hegel apparently quite suddenly introduces self and the subject, and regards "this determination as of supreme importance."<sup>182</sup>

This apparent perplexity can perhaps be dissolved if we remind ourselves that the dialectical movement in Logic is not to be treated as the movement of dead and bare formal categories of formal Logic, but is to be viewed as the formal aspect of the self-awareness of the Absolute spirit which of its own necessity posits itself in finite spirits and all the diversity of nature. As the Absolute Idea, Hegel tells us, enjoys itself as Absolute spirit, so the first substation of immediacy and its Other, the first negation of the negation, augurs the positing of the Absolute spirit into a finite spirit, a subject, which, as pure contradiction, absolute negativity, now serves as the

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<sup>180</sup> Ibid., pp. 835

<sup>181</sup> Ibid.

<sup>182</sup> Ibid., p. 115.

motor of the dialectical movement. The third term is thus subjectivity embodied—the necessary medium of Geists' self-expression. Hegel repeatedly tells us that where there is contradiction, there is life, and where there is life there is contradiction. "It is not a quiescent third, but, precisely as this unity is self-mediating movement and activity it is the individual, the concrete, the subject."<sup>183</sup>

The negation of the negation, which thus, as self-mediating activity, posits itself in the image of the Notion, as immediacy and universality, has, as we said earlier, in the negativity that it extinguishes and sublates, the germs of its own annihilation. This union, as we said, destroys itself, and bursts asunder in its own negations. Even a cursory inquiry of all the negations and contradictions shows, however, that the senses in which the second term is the other of the first, or is its opposite vary from triad to triad. Thus even the two cases—universality and Being — we have considered, appear to present two different senses of negation. Particularity cannot be said to be a negation of universality, in the same sense in which nothing is the negation of being, and so on. This led McTaggart and Findlay to say that Hegel's use of the word "negation" is unsystematic.<sup>184</sup> But on Hegelian terms the criticism would appear to be unjustified: first of all in Hegel's sense contradiction includes both diversity and opposition as he has shown in his treatment of the law of identity and contradiction.<sup>185</sup> Moreover, Hegel argued that for the Method it is immaterial what kind of negation or determinateness exists between the first two terms of the triad: "for the method it is a matter of indifference whether the determinateness be taken as determinateness of form or of content. . . . For since it is the absolute form, the Notion itself and everything as Notion, there is no content that could stand over against it and determine it to be a one-sided form."<sup>186</sup> It is important to realise that the dialectical movement does not operate merely because the first and second determinations stand opposed to each other, but because the Notion as absolute form cannot tolerate them standing over against itself. Not only this, but Hegel himself would accept a much greater variety of negations, oppositions and contradictions than any of his critics

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<sup>183</sup> Ibid., p. 837.

<sup>184</sup> Cf. Findlay, *op. cit.*, pp. 72-73 ; J.M.E. McTaggart, *Studies in the Dialectic* (New York ; Russell & Russell, 1964), Chapter 4.

<sup>185</sup> Johnstone, *Tr.*, *op. cit.*, pp. 431-39.

<sup>186</sup> Ibid., pp. 839-40,

realise. Thus Hegel argues:

"At each stage of its further determination it raises the entire mass of its preceding content, and by its dialectical advance it not only does not lose anything or leave anything behind, but carries along with it all it has gained, and inwardly enriches and consolidates itself."<sup>187</sup>

A picture such as the one Hegel offers here appears to involve that in each progressive step we are confronted with a new determination, for it implies all the previous determinations plus more.

The variety of determinations with their various differences appears even to contribute to the picture that Hegel offers of the intensity with which the subject, the pure personality in a mighty dialectical moment, grasps the absolute within itself as the first immediacy and universality which holds and contains everything. Thus each new stage of accumulating determinations is also a stage of withdrawal into the notion, and the greater the richness of determinations the greater and higher the intensity of their resolution in the Notion. The highest stage is, therefore, the one in which the pure personality embraces and holds every single determination within itself and returns to its first immediacy and universality. The circular movement of the dialectic consists in precisely this: in the process in which the Notion posits itself into opposed determinations it none the less asserts itself at each stage and returns into the Notion. As such also the dialectic movement knows no infinite regression, for "what at first may appear to be different, the retrogressive grounding of the beginning, and the progressive further determining of it, coincide and are the same."<sup>188</sup> This, however, is also a circle of circles; for the rich absolute which is grasped in all its immediacy and universality in one intense moment of reflection into itself, unfolds itself into its various determinations. As Hegel puts it: "... in returning into its beginning it is at the same time the beginning of a new member".

In the end we may enquire as to what is the relation between the Dialectic method on the one hand, and understanding and sensuous consciousness on the other. We have seen that Hegel's justification for the Dialectic method emerges in his criticism of the understanding and sensuous consciousness. Now that we know that the Dialectic is the method of pure thought, it would be interesting to inquire as to what is left of the

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<sup>187</sup> Ibid., p. 840.

<sup>188</sup> Ibid., p. 841.

understanding and the perception of ordinary thought. It would at first appear, as suggested by Hartmann, that given the Hegelian system understanding and sensuous consciousness would be impossible.<sup>189</sup> If the Notion is what determines the movement of the determinations, this movement being irresistible, it should be totally out-side of the powers of understanding to arrest this movement, and rest content with fixed and determinate notions. Understanding itself would be impossible. This, however, is incorrect in the light of Hegel's conception of his system, wherein understanding and sensuous consciousness themselves are seen as expositions, determinations of the dialectic, and the dialectic is seen as the sublation of the sensuous consciousness and understanding. We must once again point out here that Hartmann's objection seems to be rooted in his inability to see that Hegel's system presupposes a unity of the logical and the ontological, wherein as the Notion posits itself into opposed determinations, the Dialectic too unfolds itself into the opposed determinations of the understanding and sensuous consciousness which, in their various ways, reflect upon the opposed determinations ; but as the opposed determinations are sublated into their notion, so the sensuous consciousness and the understanding are sublated into the Dialectic, which is the Notion's method of reflecting upon its own nature. It is for this reason that Hegel consistently argues that the Notion shows itself in opposed determinations, and the Dialectic shows itself only when, through the understanding, the opposed terms have been driven to the point of contradiction. Thinking reason, according to Hegel:

"sharpens the blunt difference of diverse terms, the mere manifoldness of pictorial thinking, into essential difference, into opposition. Only when the manifold terms have been driven to the point of contradiction do they become active and lively towards one another, receiving in contradiction the negativity which is the indwelling pulsation of self movement and spontaneous activity."<sup>190</sup>

The Hegelian system, viewed as culminating in the Absolute wherein all the determinations are contained in an immediate and a universal, would appear to contain a safety mechanism against all criticism. For any criticism would appear to contain demands that can be shown by Hegel to be determinate and hence leading over into their negation. For example,

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<sup>189</sup> Hartmann, B. I I, p. 6.

<sup>190</sup> Johnstone, Tr., op. cit., p. 442.

Popper's criticism that talk of the Absolute is meaningless for it is not falsifiable can be easily shown by Hegel to be dependent upon a criterion which leads into its negative. That is, the proposition that only statements that are falsifiable are meaningful, in order to serve as a criterion, must itself not be falsifiable. Similarly, the logical positivist criterion of verifiability would lead, according to Hegel, into the negative. Moreover, presumably statements that shall be considered by Popper as meaningful (empirical hypothesis, generalisations, etc.) shall on Hegel's view, that all empirical statements can be shown to be antinomial, turn out to be involving their contradiction.

There is none the less a difficulty with Hegel's view ; the system seems to be the jacket that shall fit any body of knowledge, any content whatsoever. Hegel had himself criticised the notion of immediate knowledge (as presented by Jacobi) on the ground that since it makes the fact of consciousness the criterion of truth it has for its corollary, that all superstition or idolatry is allowed as to be truth. Similarly, since Hegel's subject is the embodied subjectivity of the Absolute spirit, who thinks in the necessity of the Notion and spirit, whose understanding and sensuous consciousness is the mirror image of the Dialectic, all superstitions and idolatries would constitute the inner determinations of the Absolute, wherein they shall be preserved alongwith all the other ideas, in equilibrium. In so far as the contradictions are resolved in Hegel's system in a manner, where the opposite determinations are both impartially preserved and assert themselves in the sublated category, constitute its source movement, and are carried over into its further determinations until the highest stage, the system appears to retain a curious impartiality to truth and falsehood. Such a criticism would probably not stick to Hegel for he reckons that the contradiction itself is the truth. But, firstly, Hegel nowhere in his system adequately accounts for error, illusion, etc. As well he considers contradiction only in the sphere of experience and understanding, where those contradictions would not be reckoned as contradictions, but, as he himself says, would be spread over time and space. Secondly, as we indicated above, he himself criticises Jabobi's system on account of his failing to distinguish between superstition and truth.

It is of the nature of Hegel's system that it will fit any body of knowledge. It is for this reason that, though in his *Philosophy of Nature* he

made innumerable mistakes,<sup>191</sup> none the less every-thing falls neatly into its place in his explication of the manifestation of the Absolute in the sphere of Nature. Of course, here we should not be misunderstood as criticising Hegel for holding the view which is ascribed to him by some Hegelians, and by some critics, that the particular laws of Nature can be deduced from the categories of Logic. Our criticism should not be confused with that of Krug who challenged Hegel to deduce his "pen" from the categories. A reading of Hegel's various works should suffice to dispel such misconceptions. Hegel's own way of dealing with the data of natural sciences, as Petry points out, "simply involves the structuralisation of the data provided by informed common sense, by means of the principle of the dialectic".<sup>192</sup> Our criticism concerns this later view; even as a principle of structuralisation of data, and not of its generation, the dialectic should fail for it provides a structure which can be fitted on entirely different bodies of data. It is the magical cap that fits all the heads.

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<sup>191</sup> See. M.J. Petry, Tr., (Hegel's) *Philosophy of Nature* (Humanities Press, 1970), pp. 40-63.

<sup>192</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 62