

### **The Hegelian Paradox: From the Inquisitorial to the Inquisitional**

The ultimate Hegelian Paradox is that the Philosophy is based on contradiction, yet the Philosopher [and his acolytes] will brook no argument.

The System is founded on the adversarial, yet disagreement is heresy (even if the Philosophy by its very nature seems to invite or attract heresy).

Similarly, it is reluctant to accept that a rational philosophical process or method is being utilised. It is enough to look, seek and ask questions. The answers are there waiting for us to find them. Truth and understanding will result from the only method that is necessary, an inquisitorial process. If you ask [God], you will be answered [by God, if not reason].

Still, the normal outcome of an inquisitorial process is a decision. In Hegel's Philosophy, it is not a human decision, but a divine revelation. Once revealed, it can't be questioned. It can only be respected, observed and enforced.

Hence, as is the case with all heretics, the sectarian non-believer attracts the attention of the Inquisition.

Hence, Hegel embraces both the Inquisitorial and the Inquisitional, having constructed both a System and an Institution.

This example illustrates an ongoing dialectical process that governs the unfolding of all reality, according to Hegel. This process is one in which opposite forces come into conflict, but instead of simply contradicting one another, they instead become synthesized into something more than the sum of their parts. Over the course of the book, Hegel multiplies examples from the history of consciousness, showing the various ways the world's struggles have contributed to the forward movement of history. History, it turns out, is an ongoing synthesis of various conflicts, all of which are inevitably leading to the full self-consciousness of *Geist*. Once *Geist* has come to understand itself, history (as conflict) comes to an end in the freedom of self-understanding.

Hegel wants to drive us out of the cloud-cuckoo land of the thing-in-itself and back into historical actuality, because the very idea of the transcendent keeps us locked in what he calls the "inverted world," in which we insanely insist that what is least real is in fact what is most real, and vice versa.

What does this mean? A key example may be found in Kant, who argues that the unknowable thing-in-itself ultimately serves as the basis for all experience. He thereby keeps us forever locked out of any satisfying possibility of getting at the truth, or of knowing the world as it is, because the thing-in-itself is forever unavailable. That is to say, what is most real, or the concrete actuality of our lived experience, is for Kant what is least real, and the most

contentless of all possible concepts, the thing-in-itself, is what is actual.

This is the general structure that inevitably falls out of subject-object dualism, and the first half of Hegel's book is largely focused on criticizing the structure of that dualism, which casts us back again and again into the inverted world and keeps us locked out of the possibility of truth. Hegel defines this problem as the situation of modern philosophy, ever since Descartes argued that epistemology is first philosophy, and that the foundation of philosophy is to understand how we reconstruct a mental image of the world and determine if those reconstructions are correct.

Hegel has two ways of dealing with this problem, and his solution constitutes one of his main contributions to philosophy. The first is to jettison the idea of the self as fundamentally a knower of objects out there in the world, and to replace it with an idea of human beings as actors, who live in a world that is given to them, and who know it not through consciousness of an external world, but through self-consciousness of their own lives. The second is to jettison the idea of subjective atomism and to argue - quite persuasively, I think - that human experience is fundamentally intersubjective; specifically, that all forms of experience are always already permeated by concepts, and that concepts are fundamentally intersubjective in their character.

Viewed from one perspective, what Hegel is doing is philosophically anticipating what was about to happen in the nineteenth century, and providing an account of it in advance. I think even he would have been surprised by the degree to which the European tradition's understanding of itself would, in the next 200 years, be taken over by psychology, anthropology, modern historiography, economics, sociology, and so forth - by all of the conceptual disciplines which have taken up the problems historically dealt with by narrative history and religion.

As to its uniqueness - if you believe, as I do, that Hegel is right in saying that Kant towers over Descartes, but nonetheless could be considered a kind of modification of Descartes, Hegel replaces the entire core structure of the problematic in a fundamental way, and in so doing gives us conceptual tools to bring to light various social, historical, and existential phenomena that would be extremely difficult to explicate using a prior framework. When Hegel begins his chapter on spirit half way through the book, we suddenly see the payoff - how easy it is for him to talk about phenomena like social movements, politics, world views, religion, and the history of ideas, which you could address from a strictly Kantian framework only with great difficulty. I think this can be seen by a careful reading of Kant's *Critique of Judgment*, where he begins pushing in that direction, and you can feel the whole fabric of his approach straining with the difficulty of managing to provide an account for complex phenomena.

Hegel, like Fichte, starts with the notion of the absolute I, or self. It is related, though distinct, from the conscious I/self. The conscious self remains alienated from the absolute self. Only through a particular process of the unfolding of spirit/mind does the conscious self come to be acquainted with the absolute self. These aspects of the absolute self's posited existence are occasionally termed "moments" in this translation, but also seem to be analogous to all facets of conscious subjective experience. One could liken Hegel's system of phenomenology to digital snapshots that together form a continuous whole. His absolute self occasionally doubles as "wesen" (a very complicated German term), which acts as a kind of substrate. The substrate, or "wesen", would be the medium all the snapshots are found in. Spirit/mind is the very process of movement through these snapshots that characterize their unfolding and manifested content.

This process reads as a sort of ontological ambivalence between subjectivity/objectivity, individuality/universality etc, where various aspects are posited, unfolded and transcended in various ways. According to Hegel, distinctions in the process of phenomenology are canceled and/or transcended. It is interesting that Hegel criticized Schelling for doing away with distinctions in his system, when clearly the ultimate end of distinctions in Hegel's system are to be canceled as well, or at least completely sublimated, which would mean the same thing. It seems that Hegel sees his difference from Schelling in the fact that they are canceled through process. I think it makes no difference in the end, however.

There is definitely some aspects of Hegel's system I find interesting, although one must admit that much of it was found either implicitly or explicitly in works published before him. One of the major issues with the work is the ambiguity of certain German terms. The most notable is the German term "geist", which can either be translated as "spirit" or "mind". Hegel purposefully utilizes the ambiguity in order to impart both religious and philosophical meaning to his system. It's not hard to see what Kierkegaard disliked about Hegel.

I share much of Kierkegaard's antipathy towards certain aspects of Hegel's system. There is no question that as a whole Hegel promotes a kind of collectivism. Individuality and subjectivity are seen as the ground of evil in the world and exist only to be sublimated into a kind of objective universalism. While Hegel occasionally attempts to keep both subjectivity and individuality as important "moments" in his system, they are ultimately to be canceled

and done away with. It's hardly any wonder that Kierkegaard emphasized the two things that Hegel worked so hard to de-emphasize. Also, Hegel's system is gnostic in the most literal sense of the word. His notion of spirit is essentially conflated with his notion of absolute knowledge (erkennen). Knowledge is emphasized throughout, faith hardly at all. The indifference to faith was shared by Fichte as well. Both mention it in passing but it is certainly not an essential part of their pseudo-religious philosophy; it is simply one very inconsequential aspect in their respective systems. It's also not hard to see how one can go from a philosophy that doubles as religious ideology, to a theosophy that doubles as philosophy (e.g. Steiner and Anthroposophy).

Kierkegaard saw the dangers in over-intellectualizing matters of faith. I indeed agree with him that Hegelianism is more an exercise in thought than an exercise in spirit. As philosophy it's interesting, as theology it's flawed. Much of his system that may have been inspired by religious ideas originally, could be easily reworked for things that have nothing to do with faith at all. Certainly, many new Hegelians (e.g. Marx) saw the potential in Hegelian dialectic for purely atheistic and secular ends. One must intuit that the system itself is not overly dependent on Christianity or theism as such. It should be noted as well that just as in Fichte, Hegel blurs the lines between his notion of absolute self and God. There is nothing that suggests that they are essentially different, or at least, not enough in the system itself to prevent them from being conflated easily. One could substitute the absolute self for God, just as one can substitute mind for spirit in Hegel's system. I seriously doubt that Hegel would intend this as such, but it seems very possible to do without it affecting the system itself in any profound way.

This translation was by J.B. Baillie, an English idealist.

Hegel can not stand relativism, but he really likes Parmenides and his 'One' (one can tell he likes him by how he starts his book with Parmenides). The essence is in the existence and existence is necessary for Hegel. In this book, Hegel doesn't directly say the Being is the "indeterminate immediate" (he'll do that in "Science of Logic"), but does hint at it and will say things equivalent to that statement. He's dancing around Spinoza in that both say there is a single substance and many attributes (infinitely many with Spinoza) and is using the formulation that 'every determinate is a negation' since for Hegel we live in an infinite and eternal universe.

With the 'One' as the only substance and as Karl Popper has pointed out, you'll get the block universe of Einstein and time will be an illusion (and everything has happened with certainty already) and the only moral truth would be relativistic like a Hobbes, but Hegel gets around this by invoking his dialectic which invokes 'the insistence of existence' as Caputo would say in his book, "The Insistence of God".

The Being from nothing or in the language of Hegel, the in itself and the for itself (the subjective and objective) only becomes aware of itself when it is for itself then it loses its in itself. He'll use self-conscious and conscious and at times he'll introduce a third item with alienation that leads to a for itself for another. Oddly, Sartre gets this part of Hegel very well as outlined in his book "Being and Nothingness" and in his play Huis Clos ("No Exit"). I say oddly because Sartre is not really a deep philosopher ("Pierre is not a waiter, he is just acting like a waiter", "don't be a girl, get up and be a man", or "there are no homosexuals there are only homosexual acts", or just try to read his last last section of his book and try to make sense out of his existential psychology).

There are five relationships that Hegel plays with and he definitely gets to play around with the ambiguity within the time period because 'spirit' and 'mind' where the same word. 1) Within the self there is the 'self conscious' and the 'conscious', 2) within the family or the community, there is the between you and me, 3) the us and the them, 4) the community and the nation, and 5) and all of the first four relationships across time.

Hegel accepts our separation from truth but resolves it with his dialectic, a syllogism that appeals the universal to the particular and the general to the specific. "Cigarettes cause cancer, but we never say that a particular cigarette cause a particular person's cancer". Kierkegaard in Anxiety will say something along the lines that "the particular is not the universal and the universal needs the particular, or Adam is not the race but each man is a member of the race. Every man is different but yet we think of them as part of a race or as humanity. Each individual is only like the others but is not the others. Adam, the first man, or what we call a man, is part of the race". Hegel does his best in squaring the circle and resolving the paradox that is inherent in our understanding of the Being of truth.

This is the exact opposite approach for which Heidegger uses in "Being and Time", he thinks understanding the parts that make up the whole provides for understanding (or using his nomenclature, gives an ontological foundation). Heidegger's book is actually my favorite book overall, but unfortunately I had to actually read it since there isn't an audio version, but there is an excellent lecture by Hubert Dreyfus freely available on iTunes. But, I like "Phenomenology" as much as I do because in the end there aren't truths but only perspectives, and Hegel gives a fabulous perspective.

*The mind for Hegel, as for Aristotle, is thus the place of forms, a bustling Agora where such forms are involved in endless transactions and conversations, and though it is by the intermediation of such forms that there is a reaching-out to their individual instances, they none the less enjoy a relative independence there, a detachment in the thought-ether, that they never enjoy elsewhere.*

For absolute knowledge is simply the realization that all forms of objectivity are identical with those essential to the thinking subject, so that in construing the world conceptually it is seeing everything in the form of self, the self being simply the ever-active principle of conceptual universality, of categorial synthesis.

*To judge a thing that has substance and solid worth is quite easy, to comprehend it is much harder, and to blend judgement and comprehension in a definitive description is the hardest thing of all.*

*To help bring philosophy closer to the form of Science, to the goal where it can lay aside the title 'love of knowing' and be actual knowing—that is what I have set myself to do.*

*If, namely, the True exists only in what, or better as what, is sometimes called intuition, sometimes immediate knowledge of the Absolute, religion or being—not at the centre of divine love but the being of the divine love itself—then what is required in the exposition of philosophy is, from this viewpoint, rather the opposite of the form of the Notion. For the Absolute is not supposed to be comprehended, it is to be felt and intuited; not the Notion of the Absolute, but the feeling and intuition of it, must govern what is said, and must be expressed by it.*

*The 'beautiful', the 'holy', the 'eternal', 'religion', and 'love' are the bait required to arouse the desire to bite; not the Notion, but ecstasy, not the cold march of necessity in the thing itself, but the ferment of enthusiasm, these are supposed to be what sustains and continually extends the wealth of substance.*

*The power of Spirit is only as great as its expression, its depth only as deep as it dares to spread out and lose itself in its exposition. Moreover, when this non-conceptual, substantial knowledge professes to have sunk the idiosyncrasy of the self in essential being, and to philosophize in a true and holy manner, it hides the truth from itself: by spurning measure and definition, instead of being devoted to God, it merely gives free rein both to the contingency of the content within it, and to its own caprice.*

*In a proposition of this kind one begins with the word 'God'. This by itself is a meaningless sound, a mere name; it is only the predicate that says what God is, gives Him content and meaning.*

*The goal is Spirit's insight into what knowing is. Impatience demands the impossible, to wit, the attainment of the end without the means. But the length of this path has to be endured, because, for one thing, each moment is necessary; and further, each moment has to be lingered over, because each is itself a complete individual shape, and one is only viewed in absolute perspective when its determinateness is regarded as a concrete whole, or the whole is regarded as uniquely qualified by that determination. Since the Substance of the individual, the World-Spirit itself, has had the patience to pass through these shapes over the long passage of time, and to take upon itself the enormous labour of world-history, in which it embodied in each shape as much of its entire content as that shape was capable of holding, and since it could not have attained consciousness of itself by any lesser effort, the individual certainly cannot by the nature of the case comprehend his own substance more easily.*

*Consciousness knows and comprehends only what falls within its experience; for what is contained in this is nothing but spiritual substance, and this, too, as object of the self. But Spirit becomes object because it is just this movement of becoming an other to itself, i.e. becoming an object to itself, and of suspending this otherness.*

*The disparity which exists in consciousness between the 'I' and the substance which is its object is the distinction between them, the negative in general. This can be regarded as the defect of both, though it is their soul, or that which moves them.*

Hegel says that the Master exists "for-itself", the slave "in-itself"; this means that the Master is a subject, and the slave is his object. Later, Hegel says that "servitude has the lord for its essential reality; hence the truth for it is the independent consciousness that is for itself." Hence, the slave realizes, through its subjection, that it must be a subject. But not just any subjection, Hegel says; it has to be one that contains "absolute fear". I do not see how this section says anything but that the worst form of tyranny, for instance, imperialism, of which Hegel seems to be referring to, is justified because the worse it is, the better it will become for the people enduring it. In the Philosophy

of History, Hegel, in fact, affirms this interpretation: "It is not so much from slavery, but through slavery that humanity became free." This seemingly innocuous sentence justifies every form of tyranny; it was most certainly the principle of the Soviet Union, and hence why the collected works of Hegel were available at most Gulag camps. Now let us examine the Stoic and the Skeptic. The Stoic retreats into a universal self, and denies reality. The Skeptic denies reality, but also denies its universal self. Hegel thinks that the skeptic, however, "converts itself again into a consciousness that is universal and self-identical; for it is the negativity of all singularity and all difference [i.e. skepticism]." This is how they are one. Is this convincing? It certainly isn't a mathematical identity. Personally, I feel this proof to be a smirking, conceited sleight-of-hand. Now let us examine Enlightenment and Naivety. Enlightenment says to the common religious believer, be what you are in yourself, for yourself, that is, you already are what you are seeking in this religion. Hegel has the naive believer turn around and say, I am being what I am in myself precisely through my religion.

Hegel then says, "If they could disregard their own starting-points they would meet and would recognize that what to the one is an abomination, and to the other, a folly, is the same thing." It is heartening to know this, pray Hegel explain: "The universal common to both is the abstraction of a pure, inward oscillation, or of pure self-thinking." One must ask oneself again, is this convincing? I cannot help but think that one must be very intellectually dishonest to be able to assent to these highly unintelligible, overwrought assertions. Furthermore, Hegel says that Enlightenment ends in the French Revolutionary Terror - this is its truth: freedom, liberty, and equality are, for Hegel, really the sounds of heads rolling. Any person who, again, has any respect for humanity, which Hegel apparently does not, must reject this conclusion. Hegel goes on to say that humanity realizes that asserting its abstract rights, i.e. human rights, is an error, and that it should confine itself to the Fichtean "I=I". This is the culminating insight, in the book, where the person who is confined to subjective impulses, and disregards the "mere formality" of Kantian secular ethics, that is, the reflecting on one's actions to see if they accord with the universal, becomes automatically universal and good. Shortly after the writing of this book, capitalists began chanting their motto "Gain wealth, forgetting all but self"; one can see how this slogan is properly Hegelian. Again, the modern neoliberal version, chanted by, among others, Milton Friedman, "private vices create public benefits", is considered the "Absolute Knowledge" of Hegel, because good and evil are double opposites - they are opposed both as inner and outer - which, for Hegel, means "their truth is in their movement."

Basically, Hegel is saying, "You think you know what's right? Fuck you!" However, this elucidation is too mathematical, as Hegel explains: "The difficulty that is found in these Notions stems solely from clinging to the 'is' and forgetting the thinking of the Notions in which the moments just as much are as they are not." Hegel, then, is like the person in math class who shouts, "What's the point?" This stems from the prejudice that analysis can only begin once someone has grasped the object in all of its relations. However, a momentary reflection will allow one to realize that such a process is never-ending: hence, knowledge can never begin; it is incumbent, then, on the aspiring knower to give up the quest for knowledge, realize that "Science is Spirit", and bow down before the Christian altar (Christianity is called the "Absolute Revealed Religion", and its place in Hegel's system can only be understood as a shameless apology for bringing Christianity to indigenous peoples through imperialism). Hegel's philosophy, then, must be regarded as one of the most disgusting products of the human mind, comparable only to Machiavelli's and Nietzsche's. It is anti-Enlightenment in the fullest sense: it despises knowledge as much as it despises human rights. It is, therefore, proper to conclude this review with a quote by an Enlightenment figure who perhaps genuinely cared, at least more than Hegel, about knowledge and human rights, and which sums up the meaning of Hegel's philosophy.

Hegel credited Heraclitus with the elements of his logic. Indeed he says at some point that Heraclitus was the first to be able to understand the concept of the infinite. Indeed, it is a subject with which Hegel himself was profoundly affected.

One can hardly read any philosophy for the following century which does not practically steal concepts and ideas from The Phenomenology. This includes not only Marx, but Scheler, Husserl, Heidegger, Sartre and many others. While Hegel's idealism is practically scorned in modern philosophical circles, I often think that it is so treated because without modern disapproval, one might suppose that there was far too much similarity to the ideas which appeared first in this book 200 years ago.

People always forget to start at the very beginning. The important parts of us that are lost, might be found in the maze of deep Past. In Hegel's view, every epoch and culture retains an unique set of ideas and thus \*specific\* wisdom. Consequently, we must all be relentless paleontologists of ideas, digging into all kinds of concepts and worldviews, and learning from them, particularly the ones we dislike or disagree with - we cannot be blind to them and to the impact they can have in the world. The ability of being aware is the only means of preventing disgraces and cyclical repetitions of the same mistakes over and over.

Progress is never linear, as societies and communities will overcompensate to what is perceived as wrong takes. This is inescapable and will happen with every issue from every topic. Morals and ethics are dancing drunk on top of bamboo forests. Fortunately, insights are unforgiving - fractals hidden on every manifold and forever expanding - and can be taken from everywhere (think of Art). This makes Hegel an over-optimist, as he is blind to asymptotic escape velocity when it comes to framing improvement (e.g. his view on institutions). A kafkaesque take would be more honest: bureaucratic nightmares continuously prove, over and over again, to be able to grow faster than good intentions.

Hegel asserts a dialectical process simultaneously recapitulated in the historical process, human society, and individual consciousness, each equally the instantiation of a universal Spirit, which finds its ultimate culmination in that Spirit's self-recognition *in* and *as* self-consciousness. He proceeds by a meticulous method of progressive antitheses and negations, both conceptual and existential, and though clearly at pains to demonstrate the truth of what he has experienced as a profound insight, justifications for the premises from which he begins never seem entirely clear, and the logic determining the specific forms through which the series moves often remains frustratingly obscure behind what appear to be intuitive leaps or arbitrary turns. Despite all of this, Hegel does somehow succeed in communicating that it is through just this tortuous ascent - by each step, at each plateau, and in each mode of being - that consciousness passes through the struggle to overcome its self-alienation, that objective substance becomes subject, and, in the fullness of history, the absolute paradigm of Spirit in all its ramifications comes to be.

Agreeing with Kant that human knowledge is neither what the Rationalist (e.g., Descartes) nor the Empiricists (e.g., Locke) claim, but in the interface between the life of the mind that the world of experience, Hegel adds another moving piece to the system: the interface between mind and world is language, or linguistic concepts. An individual's experience of a thing in the world is mediated through the language that embodies past experiences (or collective knowledge) with this thing whenever the individual attempts to reflect upon and/or communicate their particular experience as meaningful.

Knowledge is not so much about facts as about genealogies of concepts, and Hegel sets out to tell the story of the development of human understanding through the world historical development of human consciousness or spirit. Consciousness develops through the operation of thesis-anti-thesis-resolution: a thesis is postulated, whereupon its opposite anti-thesis is generated (negation) creating a tension that is resolved with the postulation of a new thesis, *ad infinitum*. This is but a sketch of the dialectic established by Hegel in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*.

One of the key moments found in the *Phenomenology of Spirit* comes at the beginning of Hegel's explanation for the development of subjectivity, in a section entitled the Master/Slave Dialectic, or Of Lordship and Bondage. It is the story of how two opposing forms of consciousness, the master consciousness and the slave consciousness, give rise to an human subjectivity through a life and death struggle. It is beyond the scope of this review to explain this moment in full, but we do wish to note that this moment of the dialectic becomes important to understanding its later development in Marx's class analysis — see Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels' [The Communist Manifesto](#).

It is heady stuff, and Hegel is forced to create a new language in order to express and develop his epistemology, so that the *Phenomenology of Spirit* reads very much like a foreign language. Nonetheless, we do recommend that readers begin with an original encounter with this thinker, rather than beginning with a secondary text, understanding that it will take some time for Hegel's writing to begin to make sense. Much like with becoming proficient in a foreign language, known words will not be meaningful until there is an *aha!* moment when his writing will click and meaning will begin to emerge.

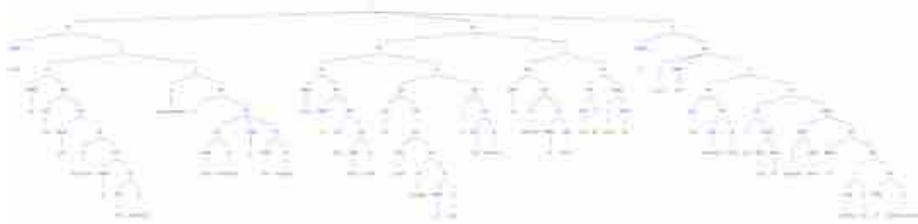
Here's our random sentence:

Since, of the two moments of the antithesis, sensuousness is sheer otherness, or the negative, while, on the other hand, the pure thought of duty is the essence, no element of which can be given up, it seems that the resultant unity can only be brought about by getting rid of sensuousness.

It's very hard not to read this as

Since, the two moments of the antithesis, sensuousness is blah blah, on the other hand, the pure thought of blah blah blah can be given up, it seems that the resultant blah blah blah getting rid of sensuousness.

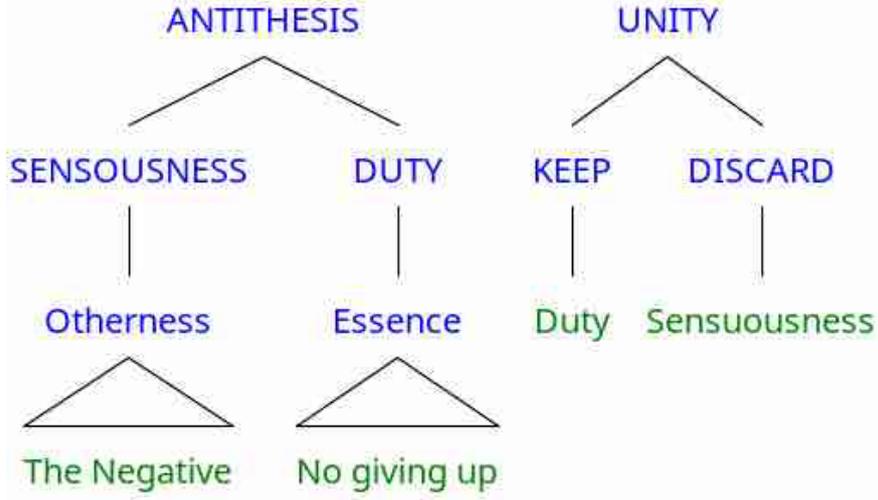
To help navigate the complicated sentence structure, let's create a syntax tree:



(Please excuse any errors. This was my first time making a syntax tree!) With this visual aid we can break the sentence into manageable parts. There are three main branches of the tree:

- The first clause introduces "antithesis", which has two "moments". The first moment is "sensuousness" which is "sheer otherness".
- The second clause introduces the second moment, "thought of duty", which is "essence".
- The final clause introduces a "unity". And because "essence" seems more unitary than "otherness", the the unity can only be arrived at by ditching the sensuousness and keeping the thought of duty.

We can represent this diagrammatically like so:



Pop test! Can we re-write this sentence to make it clearer and more compact?

Consider the two moments of antithesis: sensuousness is sheer otherness (or the negative), and pure thought of duty is indivisible essence. It seems then, that we can only get from antithesis to the resultant unity by discarding sensuousness.

This does seem significantly clearer. And it's  $38/53 = 72\%$  as many words. This isn't a decisive blow, because there may be translation issues and Hegel was writing in extreme circumstances. But it does elicit a weak update in favour of Hegelianism being a sham.

Ok, so we've now got to a point where we understand the relationship between the linguistic symbols. What do the symbols signify? The idea that "sensuousness" (ie, sensory experience) is "sheer otherness" kinda makes sense. Putting aside proprioception. [incomplete]

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I'm now about halfway through PoS and I still have almost no idea what it's about. As I listen to the audiobook, I can follow the syntax along for a clause, maybe a few clauses, but not have any picture in my head at the end of what this means. I can get a rough sense of the subject matter in different sections, simply by watching keywords come and go. So the story so far is something like "blah blah Notion blah blah Force (and something about electricity and gravity) blah blah lord and bondsman blah blah Ethics blah blah..."

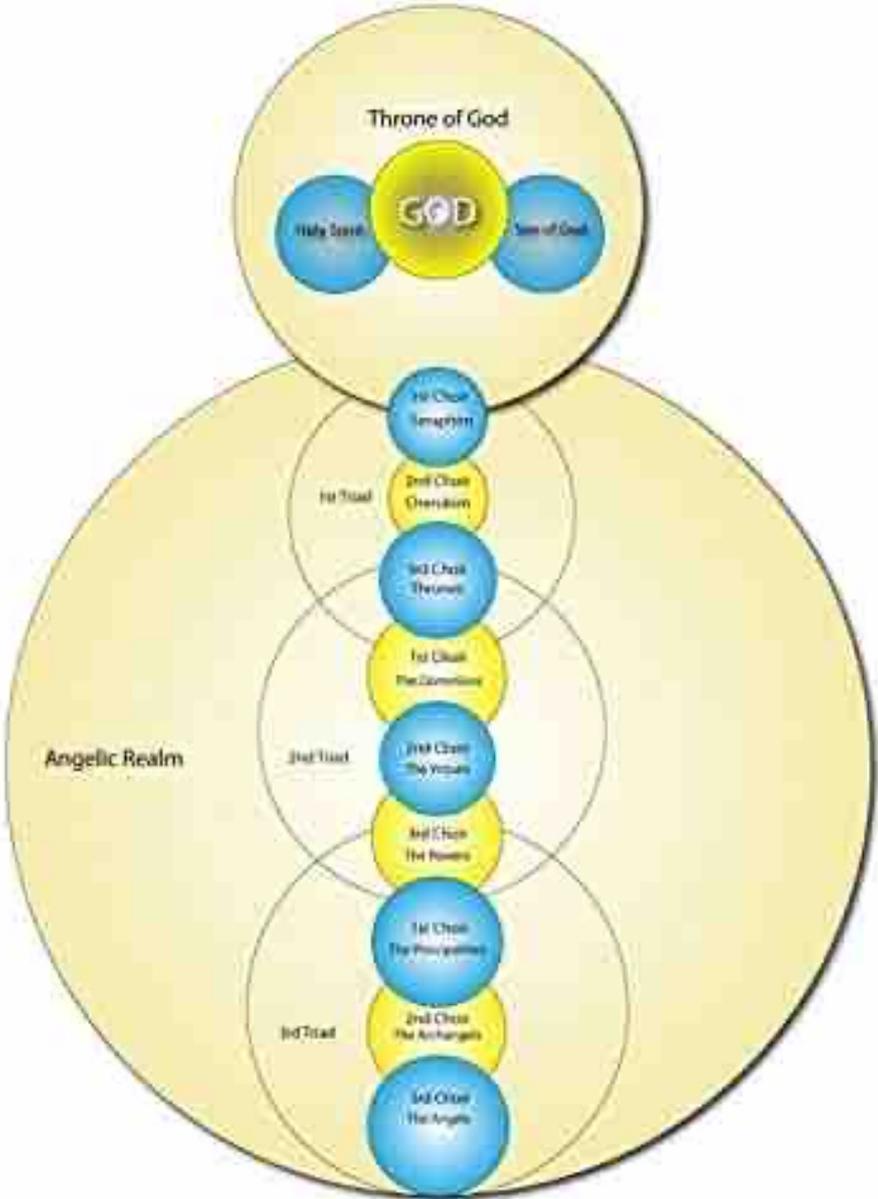
My current best guess of what's going on is that this is a project in the spirit of the Russell/Whitehead Principia Mathematica. But rather than deriving maths from logic, Hegel wants to derive philosophy, science, ethics, history, and pretty much everything from scratch. So to start the process, you can do "We start by assuming nothing. Nothing is a contraction of 'no thing'. So contained within Nothing is the idea of a negation of some 'thing'. Thus we have Something. But we also have the fact that we got Something from Nothing. We can call this fact Becoming."

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Hegel is a bit like God. His ways are fearsome and inscrutable, and under him is a complex hierarchy of commentators, arch commentators, translators, and seraphim.

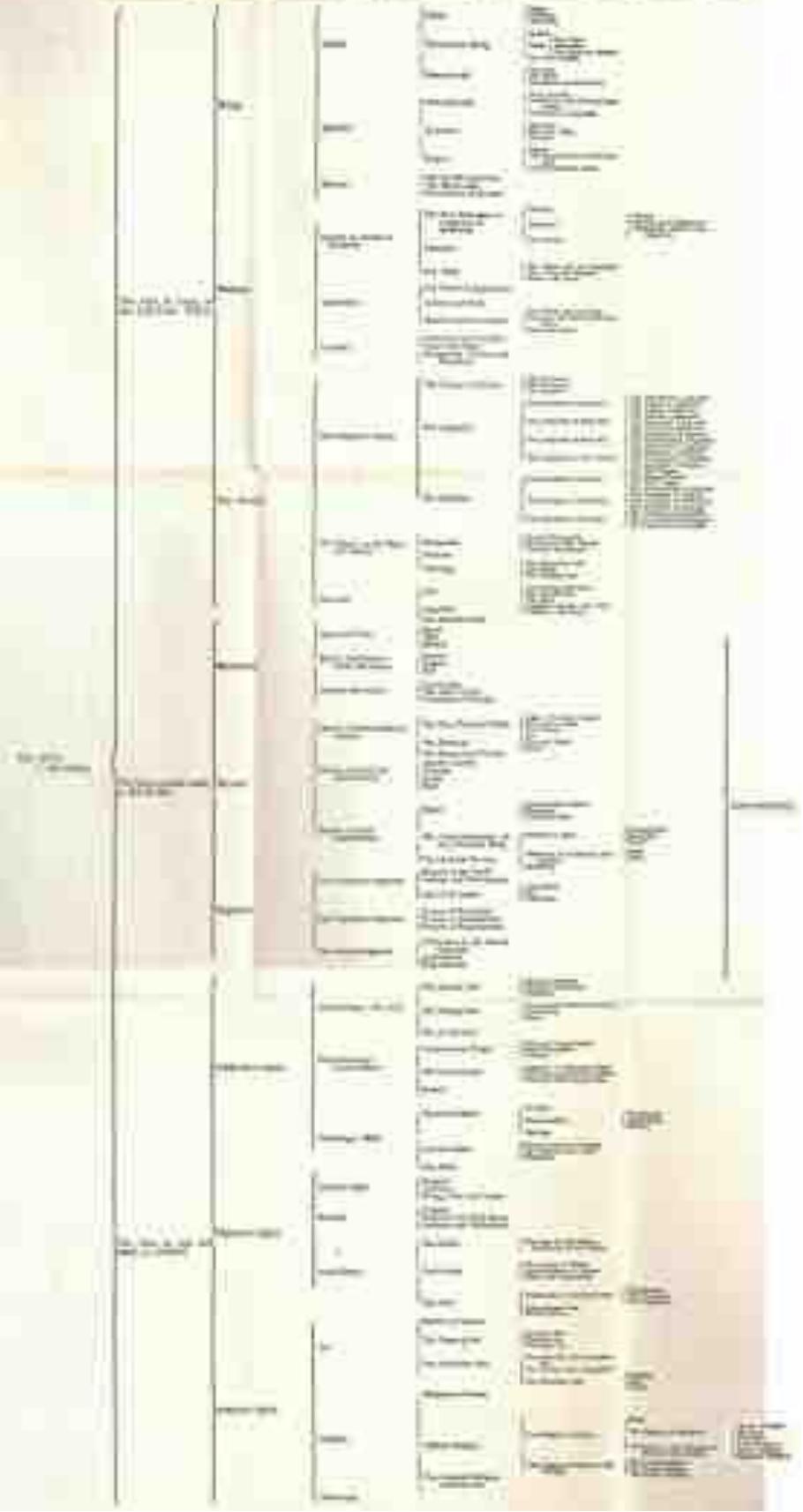
I should make this into a diagram of primary, secondary, tertiary literature:

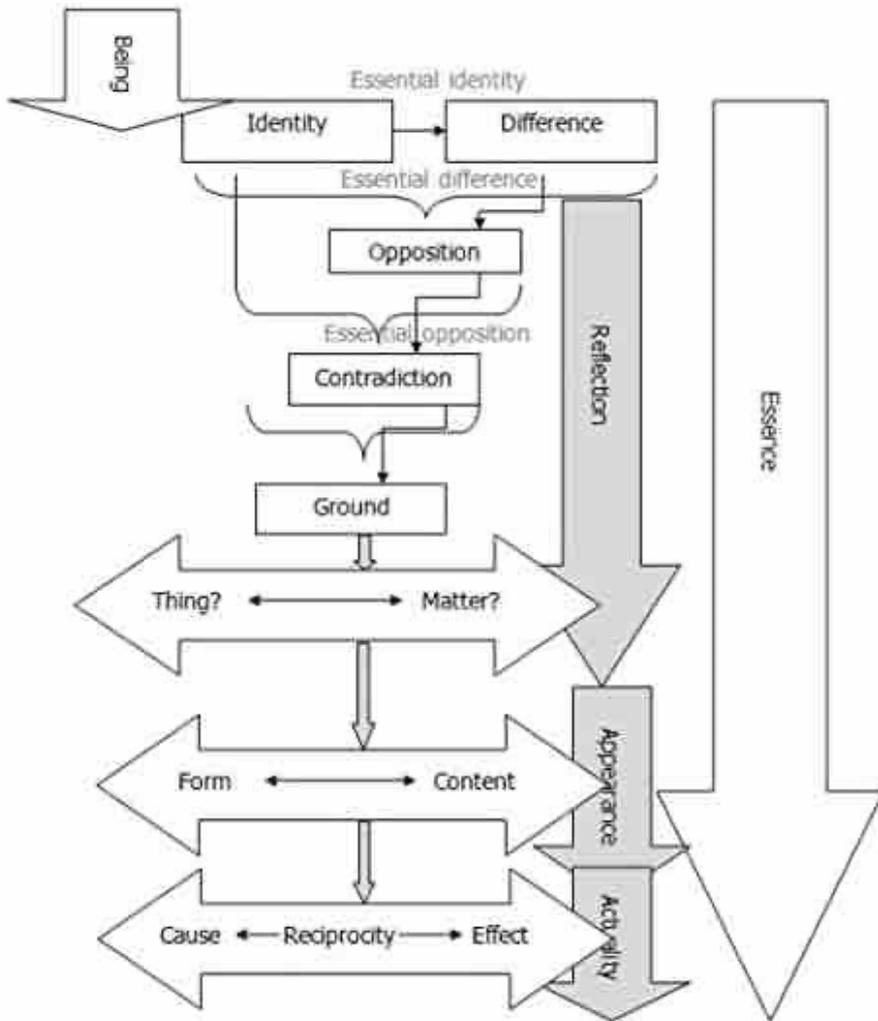
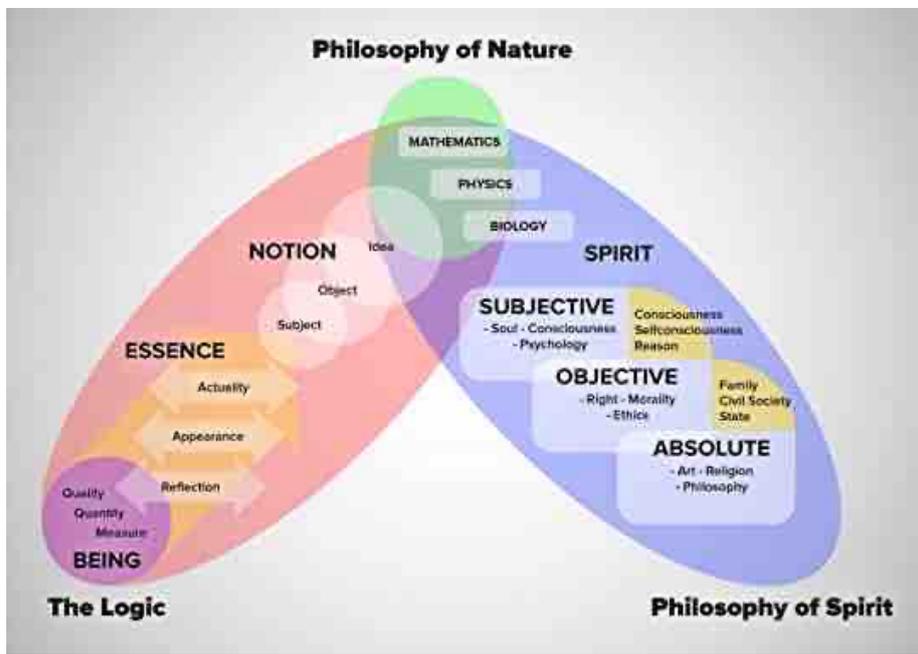
### The Celestial Hierarchy of Angels The Nine Choirs



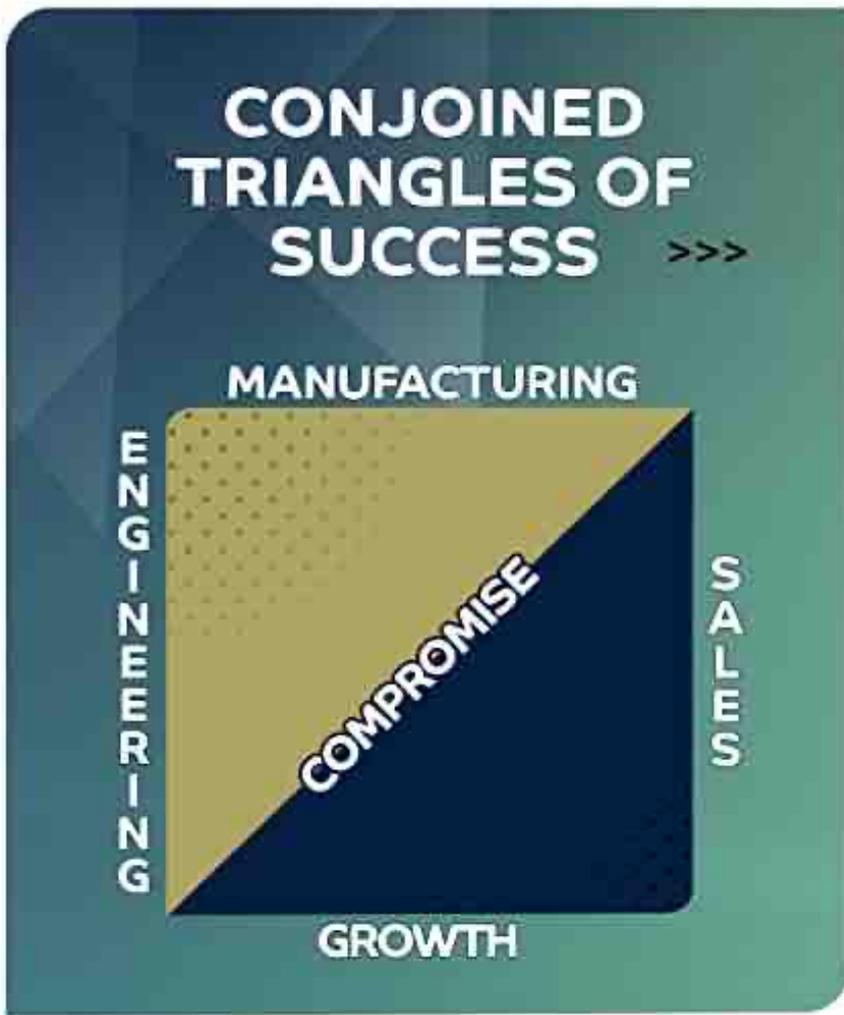
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It would be nice to be able to just look at the pictures.





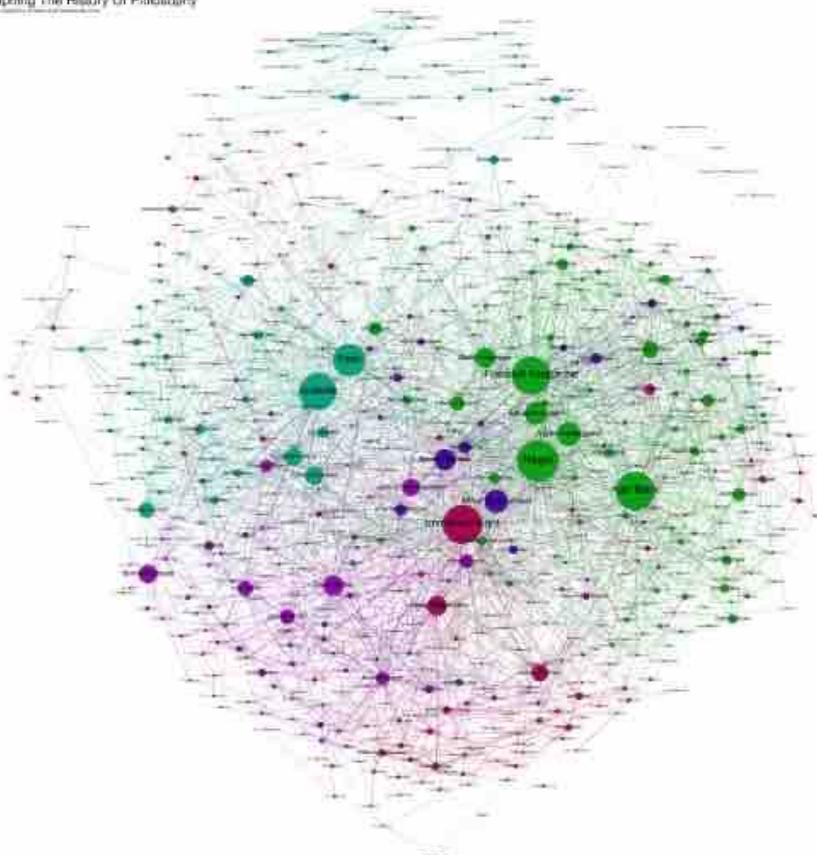
This image made something click for me: Hegel is the philosopher of vacuous business diagrams like the Conjoined Triangles of Success:



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I first came across Hegel in this visualisation:

Graphing The History Of Philosophy



To make this, Simon Raper \"extracted the information in the 'influenced by' section for every philosopher on Wikipedia\".

In this visualisation, Hegel kinda looks like the single most significant philosopher. There are three circles which are visibly bigger than all the others (although the ordering out of those four is hard to discern), these are Hegel, Kant, Marx, and Nietzsche. These form a tetrahedron, with Hegel as the central node.

I first saw this visualisation while still at school. At the time I knew most of the big names in philosophy. But I hadn't heard of Hegel. Who was this Philosopher of Philosophers?

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At university I took a class on Kant and Hegel.

One of the tutorial exercises was literally \"Here's a paragraph from the Foreword of the Phenomenology of Spirit. What is it about?\" I couldn't figure it out in the allotted hour.

I remember there was one student who would always interrupt lectures to make stupid rambling comments and questions which annoyed the hell out of everyone. Eventually the lecturer got enough complaints that he had to ban questions during lectures. Shortly before that happened, the student interrupted one particularly opaque lecture with the mother of all rambling stupid questions. It started with \"So what Hegel is saying is...\" then went on for a couple of minutes of random strings of words and hands waving in the air. The lecturer looked thoughtful for a few seconds. Then he came to life; \"Yes, that's exactly right!\" he exclaimed.

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Like the sun, we cannot look at Hegel directly. We are forced to examine the impressions he has made on others.

Swift, Macauley, and Shaw would say that André was hanged. Bradley would say that he was killed. Bosanquet would say that he died. Kant would say that his mortal existence achieved its termination. Hegel would say that a finite determination of infinity had been further determined by its own negation.

- Bran Blanshard

Even Tyler Cowen, normally a champion of reading old culturally-significant books for their secret Straussian wisdom, doesn't have much positive to say about Hegel:

I have looked at every page of Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit — usually considered his most profound work — but I can hardly claim to have read it. Maybe the Master-Slave dialectic was profound at the time but, frankly, I considered the book a waste of time and I couldn't keep on paying attention. Philosophy of Right and Philosophy of History are more coherent (the writings on aesthetics also) and every now and then Hegel is striking prescient or otherwise brilliant, such as when he is writing about the forthcoming nature of bourgeois commercial society. But \"every now and then\" is the operative phrase here. Mostly you read him because he has been an influential thinker. [...]

I very much like Charles Taylor's book on Hegel. I do not think it is what \"Hegel really meant\" but perhaps it is what \"Hegel would have had to have really meant, had some smart people like Robin Hanson pinned his back against the wall, lectured him about futarchy, and made him write shorter sentences to boot.\" [...]

I believe that the secondary literature on Hegel is fraught with danger and is highly unreliable. [...]

Overall I don't think much people should spend much time with Hegel, although if someone tells me he found it a revelation, I don't think him crazy.

Hegel's philosophy is so odd that one would not have expected him to be able to get sane men to accept it, but he did. He set it out with so much obscurity that people thought it must be profound. It can quite easily be expounded lucidly in words of one syllable, but then its absurdity becomes obvious.

and

When I was young, most teachers of philosophy in British and American universities were Hegelians, so that, until I

read Hegel, I supposed there must be some truth to his system; I was cured, however, by discovering that everything he said on the philosophy of mathematics was plain nonsense.

- Bertrand Russell

If I were to say that the so-called philosophy of this fellow Hegel is a colossal piece of mystification which will yet provide posterity with an inexhaustible theme for laughter at our times, that it is a pseudo-philosophy paralyzing all mental powers, stifling all real thinking, and, by the most outrageous misuse of language, putting in its place the hollownest, most senseless, thoughtless, and, as is confirmed by its success, most stupefying verbiage, I should be quite right.

- Arthur Schopenhauer

What's funny about this is that in my mind, Schopenhauer and Hegel are philosophical siblings.

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I don't know why I find Hegel so fascinating right now.

Perhaps it's just because reading Hegel is very difficult intellectual task, so it's got \"climbing Everest\" vibes.

Perhaps it's because most of the modern humanities seem like obvious nonsense to me. Hegel is an archetype of this style of scholarship. If there is genuine value to be had from careful study and an open mind of weird humanities, then surely there is *a lot* of value to be had from careful study and an open mind of the weirdest of all the humanities writers.

If Hegel is completely unreadable and *also* totally vacuous, then how could he have had such a major influence on Western philosophy? Are most philosophers and humanities scholars frauds? I mean, as someone who has an aptitude and appetite for science, I've always enjoyed to *claiming* that the humanities were worthless. But this was always in a \"haw haw, my thing is better than your thing\" kind of status gloating way. But could it actually be *true*?

This leads me to think about my mother, who is vaguely Christian and believes deeply in the importance of the humanities. She did a PhD in childrens literature, and when I get too superior about my scientific ideology she likes to quote \"there is more than is dreamt of in your philosophy\". When I think that she's sacrificed a big chunk of her life work to an intellectual tradition which is simply *wrong* I don't feel smug. I feel sad.

Perhaps this is what happens when rationalists mature. We stop delighting in demolishing the arguments of feebler minds. We instead want to patiently and sympathetically walk people through their mistakes. The fact that so much of humanity are victims of false belief is a great tragedy. Perhaps comperable to the great diseases of the world, like malaria.

It's starting to look like the most likely explanation is that Hegel was never actually taken that seriously. Of course now and then Hegel would have provided just the right magic phrase to make a significnat idea click for someone, so he would've always had some admirers or other. And of course there would have always been clueless and opportunistic academics who would have used Hegel's obscurity for their own end. But maybe the deep influence of Hegel is actually a myth?

To begin, until the promised 'utopian' end-state finally and completely arrives different people interpret this end state differently. This is why Hegel reminds us that philosophy can only equal Science (of Wisdom) at the end of this phenomenal and historical process. Until then, and this is important, each and every understanding of Hegel necessarily remains mired in partiality, ambiguity and irrationality. (- This is also true, I would argue, of the ones that base themselves on (Hegel's) Logic.) But this, the ambiguity of speculative or dialectical Logic & Phenomenology, leads to other difficulties. For instance, this end state has been taken by `Hegelians' in either a religious or atheistic manner. But until world history catches up to the `necessities' of the Logic, whatever they may be, even something as fundamental as this necessarily remains ambiguous. Another problem, is Hegel himself at the end of this process (at least as far as Logic/System are concerned) or is he the beginning of the end of this process?

In fact, one can say, with perhaps only a little exaggeration, that the Logic itself waits, or seems to wait, on human history to turn the final page. But that is the problem with this `biography of Spirit' - does the hand that turns the

page also write 'new' pages? Is the Logic (and System, the full account of reality) changed too by the (seemingly endless) 'phenomenological' ruses of human history? For if the 'new' occurs in this sense (Logically) then there is no System at all. If you object that the Logic (or the Hegelian System) forbids the new (at least in Logic & System) then you will find yourself in the uncomfortable position of explaining how Hegel himself could introduce a new operator (the speculative or, if you prefer, the dialectic) into Logic.

For, while the 'new' in history can be explained (or so Hegelians maintain) by the Logic, by the self-contained Circularity of the System, all this collapses, or so one suspects, if the new can also happen in the Logic. ...How does (or could) one explain, from within the System, the irruption of the new within the Logic? One cannot. This is why Kojève (correctly and, from his point of view, necessarily) reminded us, in his great commentary on the Phenomenology, that Hegel "definitely reconciles himself with all that is and has been, by declaring that there will never more be anything new on earth." It is this 'declaration' by Hegel that is the great stumbling block of the System. Did the new come to an end in Jena almost 200 years ago? Is the Logic the only thing that no longer develops in the Hegelian System? We all need to read the Phenomenology and the Logic together, each in the light of the other, again.

To reiterate all this in a different manner; for Hegel, one can indeed say that the System never encounters anything new. There is indeed only this great circularity of the Concept. But this is only correct from the standpoint of the Logic. From the standpoint of the Phenomenology (and History) the new does indeed emerge out of the ruins of the old. The 'new' can perhaps be best understood as what's left after as much of the superfluous (the partial and ambiguous) and the unreasonable are subtracted (or burned away in the Golgotha of Spirit, the hell of history) as possible. It is only at the end of this process, the beginning of that end is the publication of the Phenomenology, that Logic and Being are precisely the same. Or, to put it yet another way, the only thing that doesn't change in Hegel is the System. Everything else, possibly even the Logic understood as the schematics of Spirit, moves. For Kojève (and possibly Hegel) when movement finally stops (the End of History) one has the System entire. ...This is perhaps why Merleau-Ponty, in the Adventures of the Dialectic, calls this position of Kojève an 'idealization of death.'

As an aside I want to point out that the earlier mention of Kojève should remind us of his great sparring partner, Leo Strauss, the great explicator of the esoteric. The political esoteric he writes about (and demonstrates in his commentaries on Plato, Al-Farabi, Maimonides, Machiavelli, Hobbes, Spinoza, Nietzsche) is the only real methodological rival of Dialectics, at least for political philosophy. By way of comparison I will briefly say that Esotericism excludes nothing; everything comes back. There is no progress or change, not even through some exclusion of the negated. There is, of course, the hidden - but the hidden always returns, as the greatest modern esotericism, the one we find in Nietzsche, affirms. In esotericism the 'negated' (or hidden) remains, indeed, if it didn't remain esotericism would have no reason for continuing in its esoteric manner. This esoteric says there never was anything fundamentally new while the Hegelian Dialectic teaches that the new emerges until, and only until, Logic and Phenomenology are exactly the same. All that the esoteric requires is (exoteric) myth; all that the dialectical requires is Science. Each particular myth dies, but the necessity of myth is unending; while Science (in the Hegelian sense) seemingly can never reach birth. ...This is the impasse that the great methodological war of our time has brought us to: undying myths vs. unreachable Science.

Derrida himself says that he works in an almost 'absolute proximity' to Hegel. And yet Derrida claims to 'subvert' or destabilize Hegel right at the moment of Aufheben or sublation. In other words, Derrida seeks to retain a radical and irreducible difference that he claims Hegel attempts to reduce to identity. However, I think Derrida has missed some of the crucial aspects of "Absolute Knowing". First of all, Hegel shows the dialectical process of difference as being crucial to the attainment (it is the very motor of the system) of the philosophical standpoint. Now--Derrida would say, yes, but that Hegel reduces this constitutive difference to identity in the Absolute--the whole idea of Spirit going outside of itself, confronting difference, seeing itself in its antithesis, and reducing its antithesis to itself. But, as a rebuttal, it should be noted that Hegel's absolute is NOTHING BUT this constitutive difference. Absolute knowledge, in one of my interpretations, is nothing but the recollection of the previous 'shapes of consciousness' in the Phenomenology and realizing that it is the culmination of all of these one-sided views. So, while you could perhaps say that, yes, the Absolute assimilates its differences you could also say that the Absolute attains the knowledge that it is nothing BUT these differences--a view that is remarkably similar to Derrida's very starting point (the importance of difference as constitutive; the role difference plays in destabilizing supposed systems of identity, etc). In other words, Derrida and Hegel agree that all viewpoints are necessarily constructed (and, ultimately, undermined) by what they exclude.

Hegel is nipped from the very first section in his preliminary discussion of Universals.

His is an interesting and insightful piece though – both philosophically and culturally. Though his dialectical method is dubious at best in certain sections (though I am not by far claiming to fully comprehend everything that he speaks of), he has exerted a great influence in social thought. He not only was the springboard for Marx and Engels, but also provided the necessary sociological insights that led to fascist ideology and organicist ideals. As a matter of fact, in social philosophy WWII is sometimes referred to as the war between left wing and right wing Hegelians. I think that there is a rather simple explanation for this. Due to his dialectical method, anyone can so choose to pick the sections which they find support their position, all the while ignoring the evolutionary character of Hegel's project. The most intimidating section, on lordship and bondage, can be taken in many ways. The part that is often ignored though is its progression into the moral consciousness that was what Hegel supported: the sublation between the opposing moments that find their particular actualization in the individual who confronts absolute Spirit.

Rather than continue on with a cultural analysis here though, my biggest distrust of the Phenomenology of Spirit lies in its lack of determination. Hegel's goal was essentially to prove that the Kantian noumena and phenomena could in fact co-exist, that we were not separate from the world in-and-of-itself, i.e. that we are not confined to phenomenal reality alone. Yet, given the cultural and individualistic importance/role in the realization of Spirit, we are given very little to go by in realizing this. It is presented merely as a progression that Spirit alone knows and will find its justification only in its end. He resorts back to an intuitive justification within the moral individual. Granted, Hegel does not claim to know what this end is himself, he is not presenting a theology and does not try to place himself over and above the Historicity of his philosophy, nevertheless it places a tenuous hole in which the future misapplications of his philosophy have placed themselves. In end of fact, Hegel gives us almost nothing. It's a project that leads to no further understanding of the Kantian noumenal/phenomenal division that he set forth to disempower. So far as one wishes to read a philosophy which could justify a secularized vision of religion/morality in the conjunction of universal and particular re-interpretations of what it means to have a "soul," Hegel gives you just that, but it is no less vulnerable to the theological criticisms, and if one is looking for such a philosophy you would be best suited to read Kierkegaard.

Hegel achieves it by arguing (and dialectically showing) that everything partial, ambiguous and irrational in history is burned away in the process of that history until ...what? Until all that remains is all that could possibly (Hegel means theoretically and practically, logically and existentially) remain. There are, as you might guess, several non-trivial difficulties with a position as profound as this.

To begin, until the promised 'utopian' end-state finally and completely arrives different people interpret this end state differently. This is why Hegel reminds us that philosophy can only equal Science (of Wisdom) at the end of this phenomenal and historical process. Until then, and this is important, each and every understanding of Hegel necessarily remains mired in partiality, ambiguity and irrationality. (- This is also true, I would argue, of the ones that base themselves on (Hegel's) Logic.) But this, the ambiguity of speculative or dialectical Logic & Phenomenology, leads to other difficulties. For instance, this end state has been taken by 'Hegelians' in either a religious or atheistic manner. But until world history catches up to the 'necessities' of the Logic, whatever they may be, even something as fundamental as this necessarily remains ambiguous. Another problem, is Hegel himself at the end of this process (at least as far as Logic/System are concerned) or is he the beginning of the end of this process?

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