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5

Hegel's Expressivist Modal Realism

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In attempting to understand Hegel's basic position on the modalities, the central thing to grasp is the precise nature of his modal realism. Hegel is adamant that possibility be understood as an actuality in its own right, and furthermore endorses a convergence of the modalities in which what is actual is equally possible and necessary. But Hegel gives an interpretation to these apparently realist claims that invokes neither possible worlds nor cognitive faculties, nor the fullness of time in which what is merely possible now is necessarily actual at some other time. His realism is rather an *expressivist* realism, or a realism of *manifestation*.¹ The actuality of the world is understood as the process through which the nature of the world is constantly expressing or manifesting itself, and so the modalities are taken to describe aspects of that process. Through necessity, with possibility and in actuality, in the unity of their interconnection, the world is manifested as what it is, i.e., in its honour and glory as absolute. And yet this suggestion of pantheism must immediately be qualified: though Hegel treats the modalities as fundamental aspects of the *objectivity* of the world, he holds that their traditional metaphysical articulations through notions of substance and causation cannot do justice to them. Rather, he holds that the world's modal character can only fully be articulated *subjectively*, specifically in judgements. What this means, and how it is compatible with his modal realism, are the issues with which this chapter concludes.

5.1 Modal Realism

The problem of interpreting Hegel's modal realism presses itself upon us from the moment we consult his most explicit discussion of modality, in the *Science of Logic*. There we find claims such as the following: '[R]eal possibility is itself *immediate*

¹ Martin Kusch and Juha Manninen, 'Hegel on Modalities and Monadology' in *Modern Modalities*, edited by S. Knuuttila (Dordrecht: Springer, 1988), 109–77, p. 131.

concrete existence . . . because this determination pertains to it by the very fact of being *real* possibility. The real possibility of a fact is therefore the immediately existent manifoldness of circumstances that refer to it' (WL 11.386).² Several important things must be noted in this connection. First, for Hegel the modal notions are not exclusively characteristics of propositions or judgements as distinct from the events, entities or other parts of the world to which such propositions and judgements refer. So there is no distinction made between, e.g., modal propositions and their truth-makers. Or, to be more precise, in his initial and most comprehensive discussion of the modalities, there is not yet any distinction made between objectivity and subjectivity. In the final section of this chapter we will turn to his discussion of judgements of necessity, but for now we will simplify things a bit by taking Hegel's initial presentation at face value as a conception of the modality of any kind of fact at all. On this initial take, modality is a comprehensive phenomenon, characterizing everything that could become an object of thought in any way.

Second, Hegel's claim here is not that the possibility of some (actual) fact is its actuality somewhere else, e.g., in another possible world or at another point in time. Instead the claim is that the possibility of a fact is the actuality of *another fact*, in the same world as the first fact. So, for example, the real possibility of a racecar going fast just is the size of its engine, the ratio of its gears, the grip of its tyres, the topography of the racetrack, and so on—as they are used in going fast, before they are used in going fast, or even after they are used in going fast (assuming that they are not destroyed in the process). We will get to the temporal dimension in a bit; for the moment the important point is the relational nature of modality on this conception. If the possibility of one fact is the actuality of another fact then modality is a way in which facts are embedded in relations with each other, into a concrete network of grounding relations.

Hegel's modal name for this network is 'necessity':

real possibility, since it has the other moment of actuality within it, is already itself necessity. Hence what is really possible can no longer be otherwise; under the given conditions and circumstances, nothing else can follow . . . But this necessity is at the same time *relative*.—For it has a *presupposition* from which it begins; it takes its *start* from the *contingent* . . . [T]his necessity . . . begins from that unity of the possible and the actual which is not yet reflected into itself—this *presupposing* and the *movement which turns back unto itself* are still separate—or [real] *necessity has not yet determined itself out of itself into contingency*. (WL 11.388)

On the one hand, Hegel puts his realist point in quite traditional language, understanding necessity as the unity of possibility and actuality. And within that language

² Citations to Hegel's and Kant's works are as follows: 'WL' = Hegel's *Wissenschaft der Logik*, cited by volume and page number from *Gesammelte Werke*. English translations (sometimes slightly modified) are from George di Giovanni's translation, *The Science of Logic*. 'EL' = Hegel's *Encyclopedia Logic*, vol. 20 of *Gesammelte Werke*, cited by section number. 'KrV' = Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*, cited by A- and B- edition pagination.

he expresses a thought common to Leibniz and Kant as well—that real necessity is hypothetical or conditional necessity and therefore includes some element of contingency. On the other hand, there is new and quite technical language in the mention of reflection into self, presuppositions and movement out of a starting point and into some other modal category. This gets us to a third point we need to make about Hegel's modal realism, which is that it is *reflective* and even *dynamic* in some sense yet to be specified. Since it is not fundamentally about propositions or judgements it cannot be a matter of reflection *on* objectivity; rather it must be a matter of reflection *in* and *through* objectivity. But on its face it is quite difficult to know what this could mean. The key is to see that for Hegel, reflection is fundamentally a matter of expression or manifestation.

There is no space here to go into the technical matter of reflection in any detail, but discussion of a few features of Hegel's understanding of the term will suffice. First, Hegel develops his conception of reflection as an objective or general phenomenon, rather than a subjective, intentional relation to such objective phenomena. Second, he does so as a way of trying to understand how there could be something like a continuant (though Hegel does not use the term), i.e., how something could remain the same through change or variation. In other work I have described this as Hegel's search for an adequate conception of a locus of responsibility in the widest and most general sense of 'responsibility'.³ After rejecting various quantitative physical models of such continuity, he turns to the idea that things stay the same in virtue of an active relation to themselves in the changes that they undergo or variable relations in which they are entangled. That is, things stay the same in virtue of first expressing what they are under external influence and in context. This is the notion of reflection as expression (or manifestation—I use these expressions interchangeably) that is operative in Hegel's conception of modality:

The actual is therefore *manifestation*. It is not drawn into the sphere of *alteration* by its externality, nor is it the *semblance* of itself in *an other*. It just manifests itself, and this means that in its externality, and only in *it* is it *itself*, that is to say, only as a self-differentiating and self-determining movement. (WL 11.380–1)

Herbert Marcuse has quite a nice gloss on this central aspect of Hegel's theory of modality that is worth quoting:

the actual can transform itself and yet remain the same. It can be destroyed, but then *it* is the one destroyed, and this destruction also 'belongs' to it in a sense. Even when it is completely dependent on it, the actual is in active control of its mode of being-there. It does not allow no matter what to happen to it, but resists certain kinds of occurrences, while offering itself to others.⁴

³ Christopher Yeomans, *Freedom and Reflection: Hegel and the Logic of Agency* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011).

⁴ Herbert Marcuse, *Hegel's Ontology and the Theory of Historicity* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1987), p. 93.

To put it bluntly and in non-Hegelian terms, modality presents the substantiality of things as grounded in things' manifestation of what they are in relational contexts. That is, the substantiality of things is to be found not in their immunity to external influence but in their ability to utilize such influence as a resource for self-expression.

To sum up the basics so far, we have the notion that actuality is a locus of responsibility that is partially grounded in possibilities that are themselves other actualities in the same world, where those grounding relations (when conceived statically) or processes (when conceived dynamically) are necessity itself. So, for example, the actual state of an army is grounded in the possibilities of its size and discipline relative to other armies, its supply lines, the population's willingness to support war, and so on. Yet the very relations of the possibilities to the actual state are a kind of necessity of the army's nature manifesting itself in certain ways. As the saying goes, you can do anything with bayonets except sit on them.

5.2 Rejected Views

Before going deeper into Hegel's views, it may be helpful just briefly to review the other options he forecloses. First of all, at least as far as *real* modality is concerned, he does not see the principle of non-contradiction as fundamental. He thinks of what he calls *formal* (i.e., logical) modality as so defined, but he clearly thinks that considered in itself such a form of modality is relatively insignificant (WL 11.382–3). So whatever his argument for the necessity of the actual turns out to be, it cannot be Christian Wolff's claim that at the time that something is actual it is necessary because its contradictory is impossible.⁵ In fact, Hegel's argument for the claim that possibilities must be understood as actualities in their own right depends on the negation of Wolff's claim, i.e., it depends on the claim that the actuality of X as defined by the principle of non-contradiction requires the possibility of not-X.⁶

Second, it is clear that Hegel's view cannot be understood via the semantics of possible worlds. The crucial relational nature of Hegel's conception requires real relations of influence (causal or otherwise) between possibilities and actualities, not just the possibility of access to other possible worlds. Furthermore, as Hegel puts it in another context, 'Philosophy does not waste its time with such empty and other-worldly things [*bloß Jenseitige*]. What philosophy deals with is always something concrete and absolutely present' (EL§94Z).

Third, Hegel's view of real modality cannot be understood along the lines of a statistical conception according to which anything that is a real possibility at one point in time is necessarily actualized at another.⁷ For one thing, there is officially no

room for time in Hegel's discussion of the modalities, and this is essential to Hegel's conception as contrasted with Kant. But more importantly, the relational nature of Hegel's conception is lost on this interpretation, and thus also any sense that we can make of Hegel's distinctive conception of the convergence of the modalities (more on this in a moment). Possibilities are always possible with respect to some other actuality, and vice versa, and there must be a different content in these different possibilities and actualities in order to have articulate relations at all. Merely formal differences or differences in spatial location cannot be fundamental, even if they may also characterize the modal facts when more completely considered. So, for example, that which is a possibility with respect to some actuality is itself an actuality with respect to some other possibility and so on throughout the network of necessity, but the shape of that network must be given through the differences of contents of the nodes as much as the different kinds and directions of their connecting rods, as it were.

Fourth, Hegel's conception cannot be understood as a variation on Kant's theme, both because of the unimportance of time but more generally because of the complete absence of appeal to cognitive faculties of any sort. And yet the differences should not be overstated either. In fact, the complex of similarities and differences will help to introduce the next wrinkle into Hegel's view, which is the distinction between real and absolute modality. As noted above, when it comes to real modality Hegel shares with Kant the view that the actual is relatively necessary, i.e., it is necessary relative to some presuppositions. These material presuppositions distinguish real from formal modality, which for both thinkers is governed by the principle of non-contradiction. In Kant's way of thinking about this idea, it comes out as the notion that a state of a substance is necessary only given some previous state on which it is contingent, and the precise nature of this contingent necessity of everything actual is then specified by causal laws connecting the two (actual) states (KrV A226–8/B279–80). At the comprehensive or absolute limit of the relevant previous states and causal laws, the three modalities become coextensive: the possible is actual because it is causally necessary. As part and parcel of this coextension, Kant denies that there is an absolute sense in which one could take the actual world to be *merely* possible, say by the Leibnizian route of imagining that God could have created another world with a very different form had he so desired. So there can be no sense in which absolute possibility has a broader extension than absolute necessity or actuality on Kantian terms; this would require the possibility of representations belonging to another domain of possible experience not structured by causal laws, and Kant doesn't think we can make any sense of this idea. The intensional differences between the modalities even at this coextensive limit can only be maintained by connecting them with distinctive cognitive abilities: possibility to the formal constraints of the understanding, actuality in addition to sensation, and necessity in addition to the connection of

⁵ See Martin Kusch and Juha Manninen, 'Hegel on Modalities and Monadology', and chapter 2 of the present volume for more on Wolff.

⁶ Kusch and Manninen, 'Hegel on Modalities and Monadology', pp. 123–4.

⁷ As a view originating in Aristotle and continuing into medieval philosophers, see Knuuttila, 'Modal Logic' in *The Cambridge History of Later Medieval Philosophy* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1982), pp. 344–9. For more on this view, both with respect to Leibniz and Wolff and with respect to the role

that it plays in the relation between Hegel's three kinds of modality (formal, real, and absolute), see Kusch and Manninen, 'Hegel on Modalities and Monadology', pp. 111–14 and 137–8.

perceptions via concepts (KrV A234/B286).⁸ Hegel makes no reference to cognitive faculties in any of his discussions of modality, but neither does he argue for the coextension of possibility and actuality from the perspective of an intuitive intellect for which the two are one because it gives itself its own objects by thinking about them and thus eliminates any contingency in the fit between its representations and its objects.⁹ In fact—and here we come to the heart of the issue from the Hegelian perspective—Hegel argues for the coextension not by eliminating but rather by magnifying contingency:

It is necessity itself, therefore, that determines itself as *contingency*: in its being it repels itself from itself, in this very repelling has only returned to itself, and in this turning back which is its being has repelled itself from itself. Thus has form pervaded in its realization all of its distinctions; it has made itself transparent and, as *absolute necessity*, is only this simple *self-identity of being in its negation*, or in essence. (WL 11.390)

As in the difference with respect to Wolff on the grounding of possibility in non-contradiction noted above, Hegel's view is diametrically opposed to Kant's on this fundamental point.

5.3 Convergence of the Modalities

At this point, then, we must shift focus from the first feature of Hegel's modal realism—i.e., the idea that possibilities are themselves actual—to the second feature, i.e., the convergence of all of the modalities, not just possibility and actuality. The basic question that we have to answer here is how Hegel can maintain the distinctions between the intensions of the modal terms if they have become co-extensive. If the distinction between the modalities is not to be thought along Kantian lines as referring to the relation between experiences and particular cognitive capacities, how is that distinction maintained? After all, Hegel makes quite extensive use of the modalities and the differences between them in other areas of his philosophy (for example, in his analysis of the will), so it cannot be the case that Hegel's analysis of modality simply collapses the distinction—or at least not intentionally so on Hegel's part. It turns out that the key to understanding Hegel on this point is his distinction between formal, real, and absolute modality, and the changing significance of the distinctions between possibility, actuality, and necessity in those three different modal frameworks.

⁸ For a recent discussion of and dissent from this common interpretation of Kant see Abaci, 'The Coextensiveness Thesis and Kant's Modal Agnosticism in the "Postulates"', *European Journal of Philosophy* 24/1 (March 2016): 129–58, DOI: 10.1111/ejop.12049.

⁹ On this point see Sedgwick, *Hegel's Critique of Kant: From Dichotomy to Identity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), and Kenneth R. Westphal, 'Kant, Hegel, and the Fate of "the" Intuitive Intellect' in *The Reception of Kant's Critical Philosophy: Fichte, Schelling, and Hegel*, edited by Sally Sedgwick (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 283–305.

As we noted earlier, for Hegel formal or logical modality is characterized by the principle of noncontradiction. Famously or infamously, Hegel holds that this principle can do much less work even at the logical level than most philosophers have believed, primarily because whether something counts as an outright contradiction or just an opposition or tension depends on background assumptions that do the more important work, relegating contradiction to the status of a secondary technique or argumentative tactic (WL 11.383). With respect to Kant this is (positively) the lesson of the Antinomies and (negatively) the lesson of the failure of the Categorical Imperative to play the paramount role in guiding moral reflection, Hegel thinks. With respect to logic more generally, this is represented by the fact that it is almost always tendentious to characterize an opponent's view as containing both *p* and not-*p*. What Hegel calls real modality is the attempt to include those background assumptions of the real context into the modal characterization itself:

Formal possibility is immanent reflection only as abstract identity, the absence of contradiction in a something. But when we delve into the determinations, the circumstances, the conditions of a fact in order to discover its possibility, we do not stop at this formal possibility but consider its real possibility. (WL 11.386)

Real modality thus suggests a kind of continuum where placement along that continuum is determined by 'how much' information is considered.¹⁰ I use scare quotes here because there is no simple quantitative metric for what counts as more or less information across the board, though it seems as if in individual cases the distinction is clear enough, and it will turn out that this is the feature of real modality that is most important to Hegel.¹¹

Keeping this important qualification in mind, we can profitably introduce the contrast between absolute and real modality via the thought experiment of adding information to any given modal description. The question is one of location: where in the modal complex does the new information go? The natural tendency is to see that information going into background conditions, i.e., into real possibility in Hegel's sense: other actualities that enable and constrain the actual fact at issue. At the limit (e.g., the complete state of the world at a time) one then has a firm foundation to attach relations of necessity (e.g., natural laws), and then one gets Kant's conception of the convergence of modalities in determinism. For the moment, however, let us just focus on this location of the addition in the conditions of possibility. Hegel thinks that this addition only draws the actual and the possible together into the bonds of necessity, and in so doing renders the possible more an internal *feature* of the actual

¹⁰ For a helpful, brief discussion of Kant's revival of the distinction between real and logical modality against the Leibnizians, see Andrew Chignell, 'Real Repugnance and Our Ignorance of Things-in-Themselves: A Lockean Problem in Kant and Hegel', *Internationale Jahrbuch Des Deutschen Idealismus* 7 (2011): 135–59.

¹¹ The improvement (I hope) of the interpretation of this point in what follows over my earlier suggestions in *Freedom and Reflection* was spurred by helpful criticism by Kenneth R. Westphal.

than an external *condition on* it (WL 11.386–7). In the expressivist register of manifestation, the more something necessarily acts on some other thing the more it looks like an aspect of that thing's nature that is then expressed in the actual state of the thing. So, for example, chicken and egg. The natural temptation is to say that in increasing the information relevant to the modality of the chicken we are adding features to the egg—after all, the chicken is our given starting point, that whose modality is at issue. So we additionally consider not just the existence and outward shape of the egg but the process of development going on inside it. And the temptation is to think that as we add this information to the egg, we make the chicken more necessary. After all, it is not just a superficial play of contingent events that connects the chicken and the egg; rather the egg is such a thing as to lead to a chicken. But this is just Hegel's point: the egg is such a thing as to turn into a chicken, i.e., it is a form or feature of the chicken. So though it at first appeared that we were adding the information to conditions of possibility and then secondarily enriching up the necessary connections between those conditions and the actuality, it turns out that in so doing we brought the possibility further into the actuality as a determinate feature of its articulated expression and we brought necessity itself into the actuality as its mode of expressing.¹² That is, the significance of the three modal terms has changed: actuality is the whole pattern of variation or course of development rather than the merely existent states; possibilities are the specific contents of that pattern or phenomena in that course (i.e., what were formerly thought to be actualities) rather than external conditions; and necessity is the structure of that pattern or the force of that development, rather than the inevitability of the pattern or development. These shifts in the significance of the three modalities give us absolute as opposed to real modality.

But the crucial thing is that to get this contrast in modal character one needn't add all of the relevant information, either subjectively or objectively; rather, the crucial thing is the nature of the organizing structure and the way that it shifts with each change. In this respect Hegel's view is fundamentally like Kant's in the Antinomies: we don't actually need to have a whole quantitative continuum in view (e.g., of composition and decomposition) in order to be able to make a principled distinction (e.g., between the composite and the simple) at any particular point (KrV A523–4/B551–2). In the thought experiment, the point is the location of the additional information in the organizing structure and the way that changes the significance of the relations between the different parts of the structure, rather than there being some tipping point on the continuum that we reach by the successive addition of information. At every point at which we add (or subtract) information, the significance of the modal terms changes in this way, so the distinction between real and absolute modality is, like the distinction between formal and real modality,

¹² See also Kusch and Manninen, 'Hegel on Modalities and Monadology', p. 140.

available and applicable at every point in conceptual space. To use another Kantian distinction, formal, real and absolute modality constitute a distributive totality in virtue of such applicability, rather than the collective totality of a continuum of modal completeness.

We can bring out further the difference between real and absolute modality by focusing again on possibility, and specifically on the sense in which possibility is *mere* or *alternate* possibility, i.e., the sense in which what is actual could be otherwise—what Hegel calls contingency. For real modality Hegel understands such contingency as a kind of looseness of fit between the conditions of possibility and actuality, i.e., a sense in which the bonds of necessity are sloppy in virtue of the indefiniteness of their attachment points. Here the sense of the unity of possibility and actuality is given by the notion that a different actuality could have been generated if the attachment points had been slightly different. But for absolute modality the sense of 'actuality' has shifted to the whole pattern of production and so the question of contingency is different. Now the possible and the actual exist in a kind of part-whole relation, since possibility has been dragged further into actuality by the additional information. What sense then can be made of their unity?

Hegel's suggestion is to understand the absolute possibility of the actual as the possibility that it could be either (really) possible or actual (WL 11.389–90). The absolutely actual is a kind of magnification of one of its possibilities, or a way one of its possibilities serves as a lens for focusing the other possibilities, and so internal to the actual is the possibility that other possibilities contained within the actual could have served the same function. The possibility that serves as this focusing lens then places the other possibilities on a kind of axis or continuum of real possibility. That is why 'possibility' is not a pun here: the absolute possibility of the actual consists in the way that one possibility defines the axis of other possibilities, i.e., defines their specific nature as really possible. If the egg develops into the chicken we take the development of the chicken as the possibility that defines the absolute actuality of the whole phenomenon and we see other possibilities (e.g., environmental factors) as resources or conditions for such development. On the axis defined by this continuum the nutritional needs of the fox counts as a real possibility, an influence that may explain certain features of the actuality of the live chicken (e.g., its location within a secured henhouse) but otherwise has its significance coloured if not transmuted by the dominant possibility (chicken development) that becomes identical with actuality writ large. But if a fox eats the egg then the development of the chicken is a resource or condition for the nutritional satisfaction of the fox (which is the relevant absolute actuality). On the axis defined by this continuum the development of the chicken plays the role of a real possibility whose influence explains certain secondary features of the nutrition of the fox (e.g., its timing and location, or precise nutrients ingested). In both cases, the absolute possibility that the actual could be either actual or possible is also reflected in the fact that other existences have the status of real possibility.

But this means that the sense in which the actual is merely possible or contingent has changed between real and absolute modality (WL 11.389–90). In real modality, this contingency is a kind of sloppiness or loose fit between conditions of possibility and the actuality for which they are conditions that renders either one or the other relatively indeterminate (depending on which one is given as the point to attach the necessary connections); but in absolute modality it is precisely the tightness of the fit between all three elements that shows that other tight fits are possible. That is, to return to our example, it is precisely the seamless way in which the nutritional needs of the fox fit into the modal story of the developed chicken that indicates the possibility of those needs playing the more important explanatory role at another time or in another respect. But not only has the significance of the alternativeness or mere possibility of the actual changed in absolute modality; of course the nature of the actual itself that is merely possible qua contingent has changed. Now the actuality in question is a more complete phenomenon establishing its own axes of possibility, i.e., its own continua of contrasting tight fits. Each alternate possibility is now not just another possible *following state* of the world but another *expression* of the way that the different features of the situation fit together.

5.4 Two Modal Illusions

This distinction between real and absolute modality will help us to get at a unique and surprisingly Kantian *dialectical* feature of Hegel's treatment of modality, namely its diagnosis and treatment of two illusions naturally suggested by the distinction between real and absolute modality. The first is the illusion of modal determinism. This illusion arises out of the procedure of the addition of content to modal characterization, a procedure that itself arises out of our sense that real modality is something different from merely formal or logical modality. The temptation here is to think that there is a maximal addition of content to the conditions of possibility that could then be connected with a separate maximal addition to the lines of necessity to generate a picture of the complete state of the world (either at a time or in its past history) and exceptionless laws of nature that would together entail future events. As it plays a role in the debate about free will, the point is that our actions considered as actual events cannot be within our control but rather must be traced back to separate events and laws over which we have no control. This picture is natural enough to pass without much need of justification in a broad swath of modern and contemporary philosophy, but on Hegel's view it is an illusion brought on by misunderstanding of the differential contribution of the new modal information. As we have already seen, Hegel holds that such an addition undermines a key feature of the illusion, which is the discreteness of the three parts (conditions of possibility, necessary laws, and the actual event they together generate). Attending closer to the actual change brought on by the addition shows, Hegel thinks, that necessity and possibility are just pulled closer into actuality, and thus that the picture

of a complete state of the world plus causal laws entailing a discrete consequent event is a conceptual impossibility.

But there is a further consequence here that we only hinted at towards the end of the previous section in the distinction between thinking of alternate possibilities as consequent states (i.e., real actualities) and thinking of them as expressions of the tight fit in the modal network (i.e., absolute actualities). Hegel thinks that if we attend to the differential shift in significance from real to absolute modality, and particularly to the importance of the drawing of more features into the necessity of expression of the absolutely actual, what we see is that we have drawn in more pivot points to alternate expressions, and laid them closer to the heart of the actual. Or, to use the metaphor from the previous section, every time we add a new piece of information and bind it tighter to the actual we add another axis of possibility to intersect with those we had before. This adds another potential expression of the way that the whole fits together as, e.g., both the axis of the bee and the axis of the flower provide an expression of the way that their ecosystem hangs together. Thus, for Hegel one might say that contingency and necessity are directly proportional rather than inversely proportional. The way that this arises from attending to the change in significance of absolute as compared with real modality leads us to the second illusion.

The second illusion complements the first by arising from precisely the recognition that possibility and necessity are drawn into actuality. This is the illusion of monism, i.e., the illusion that such successive additions of information to the modal picture would finally lead to a single *ens realissimum*, the one necessary entity (suggested by the part-whole relation of absolute possibility and actuality above). The illusion comes from thinking that the continuum *generated by* the process of absolute actuality is rather *prior to* that process, or determinable outside that process.¹³ Though there is no space here to go into the issue in the detail it deserves, a very brief digression through Kant's argument for the necessity of the existence of the *ens realissimum* can set the stage here. We take our reconstruction of Kant's argument from Brady Bowman:

All possibility is grounded in antecedently given real determinations as its material element. Now, let *impossibility* be defined as that which cancels all possibility whatsoever. If no real determinations at all existed, then all possibility whatsoever would be cancelled. Therefore, it is impossible that no real determinations at all exist. That whose non-existence is impossible is necessary. Consequently, the real determinations that ground all possibility necessarily exist. Now, real determinations are either affirmative or negative (privative) in character; that is, a thing may be determinate either in respect to the properties it has or in respect to those it lacks. But privations refer essentially to the positive determinations whose absence they denote. Therefore, all determinations whatsoever are ultimately grounded in affirmative

¹³ Examples of scholars taken in by this illusion are many. Recent examples include Chignell, 'Real Repugnance and Our Ignorance of Things-in-Themselves', pp. 153–7, and Yeomans, *Freedom and Reflection*, sec. 7.3.

determinations: call these *realities*, and call the set of all such realities the *omnitudo realitatis*. The *omnitudo realitatis* therefore exists necessarily. The steps Kant takes from this distributive totality of all realities to their collective totality or unity in a unique, supremely real (purely affirmative), indivisible, unchanging, eternal being [i.e., the *ens realissimum*] are subtle. He argues for its uniqueness on the basis of his characterization of it as the *ground* of all possibility...¹⁴

In relation to this two-step process, Hegel's discussion of absolute modality effects a twofold therapy:

First, the absolute possibility that focuses the actuality as a whole need not be considered the end of the axis or continuum of real possibility that it defines. Quite to the contrary: it will define an axis along which even the absolutely actualized is incompletely actualized, and this is also essential to Hegel's expressivism: every expression, even the most perfect, wears on its face the real possibility of alternative and (in some respects) greater expression. The apparent continuum of real possibility is itself shown to be an expression of absolute possibility, in the same way that the contradiction of formal modality is shown to be generated by the additional information of real modality. So however big or healthy is the chicken that makes it out of the egg, there is always the (real) developmental possibility of a bigger chicken, or one that was healthy in a different way. This mitigates the temptation to generate the *omnitudo realitatis*, since even for each axis there is no complete positive determination.

Second, once one has this sort of schema it is easy to see that every modal fact is an intersection of these different axes, without having to think that in every case one axis has to be dominant, i.e., without having to think of the actuality or manifestation of one as coming at the expense of the other(s), as is suggested by the fox/chicken example. Think, in contrast, of flowers and bees. This is a point about substantiality (loosely construed) that turns out to be essential to Hegel's expressivist realism. This mitigates the temptation to construct out of the *omnitudo realitatis* an *ens realissimum* as the single ground of all possibility. In fact, under the influence of Hegel's diagnosis of absolute modality we are supposed to see that the basic distinction between monism and pluralism cannot be fundamental and reflects an inappropriate hypostatization: 'Absolute necessity is not so much the *necessary* [*das Notwendige*], even less a necessary [*ein Notwendiges*], but *necessity*—being simply as reflection' (WL 11.393).

Though there is no space here to go into the issue in any detail, I believe that Hegel's discussion of substance and cause as inadequate articulations of modal realism can be reconstructed as turning on the diagnosis and treatment of these two illusions; the crucial thing to see with respect to that modal realism is that the real itself looks different than we might have expected, and cannot easily be identified with either a single entity or even field of entities. At this point, however, we need

¹⁴ Brady Bowman, *Hegel and the Metaphysics of Absolute Negativity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), p. 119.

rather to turn to Hegel's more positive suggestion for such an adequate articulation, namely his theory of judgement.

5.5 Subjective and Objective Modality

As we said in the first section of this chapter, Hegel thinks of modality as a general feature of everything that could be an object of thought, i.e., of the world as such. Nonetheless Hegel holds that the traditional ways of articulating the nature of absolute modality (substance and cause) are both contrastively objective and decidedly inadequate. And the inadequacy of the objective models for absolute modality motivates the development of better conceptual resources that Hegel himself characterizes as contrastively subjective. This one gets simply from his *Science of Logic*, in which these conceptual resources are specifically discussed. But the sense of the contrast becomes even greater when one looks to the rest of Hegel's work and notes that though many of the categories of the objective logic do a lot of work there (e.g., measure, reflection, form and content, and the modalities themselves), the categories of substance and cause do virtually none. So though the argument of the *Logic* commits Hegel to the claim that, in principle, the latter categories are applicable to all objectivity, in practice he sees them as either insignificant or more trouble than they are worth given the misunderstandings that they suggest. So however we are to characterize Hegel's modal realism, we will have to do justice to his idea that the structure of modality has to be given a subjective modelling in order to secure its general applicability and even its objective significance. The obvious initial question is what 'objective' and 'subjective' mean here.

As a way of entering into this question, consider the fact that Hegel provides explicit discussion of judgements of necessity.¹⁵ The most important feature of this discussion is the importance Hegel attaches to the concept of totality and the way that different totalities can be connected together (WL 12.53). Reaching back to the first section of this chapter, we can connect this theme with the idea that for Hegel, modality articulates substantiality in context and under influence; again, emphasizing that we are using non-Hegelian terms to understand Hegel here, we might say that true substance is never lonely. Or, to reach back to the third section, we can connect this theme with the idea that for Hegel, the absolute modality of a fact involves the intersection of different axes of possibility that are represented by actualities in their own right. To return to our examples, the question is how to model the way that the actuality of the fox or the bee constitutes a possibility of the chicken or the flower, without prejudice to the dominance of one over the other or the possibility of their ontological coexistence, as it were. The presence of this theme in Hegel's discussion of judgements is not surprising, since this feature (articulating the relational nature of totalities) is also the basic advantage that Hegel sees in

¹⁵ There is also a discussion of syllogisms of necessity, but I leave that out of consideration here.

subjective models generally. The point of his discussion of objective modality is to show that objectivity itself has to be understood from this perspective, which then gives him the opening to attempt to show that the best models of this necessary understanding of objectivity are, in fact, subjective. So 'subjective' here means deeper self-organization in the context of other instances and forms of self-organization, whereas 'objective' refers to *relatively* independent forms of self-organization; this is why reciprocal interaction is the very outer limit of the conceptual space of objectivity on its border with subjectivity (and is thus the transitional category between these two sides in Hegel's *Logic*). Spatial metaphors fail us here, but we can think of subjectivity as modelling interpenetrating patterns or processes of self-organization, such as the fox and the chicken or the flower and the bee. Objectively speaking, we try to model the fox and the chicken by thinking of them as substances, or causes and effects, but these notions cannot adequately articulate the idea of intersecting modal axes that we saw already to be contained in absolute modality, Hegel thinks. Subjectivity is what allows us to speak of coexisting and codependent totalities, which looks like an outright contradiction if 'totality' is rendered as 'substance' and 'codependence' is understood causally.

But how does subjectivity do so? Again, there is no space here to go into the question in any great detail, but Hegel thinks that Kant has opened up for us access to the ontological significance of forms of judgement. In particular, the idea of totalities that are both self-standing and essentially related is represented in the connection of subject and predicate in a judgement (WL 12.53–4). At least initially, this possibility of co-self-organization or co-self-determination is represented by the idea that the singular (or individual) subject and universal predicate each become what they are by sharing with each other axes of their own character:

the start is made from the singular as the first, the immediate, and through the judgement this singular is *raised* to universality, just as, conversely, the universal that exists only *in itself* descends in the singular into existence or becomes a being that exists for itself. . . . These two are one and the same—the positing of singularity in its immanent reflection and of the universal as determinate. . . . Through this determinate universality the subject refers to the outside, is open to the influence of other things and thereby confronts them actively. (WL 12.57)

The judgement, that is, is supposed to model the way in which different absolute actualities can intersect and each constitute an axis of possibility for the other. The universal becoming determinate is supposed to model the magnification of possibility into actuality in such a way that the explanatory force of other possibilities is secured, whereas the reflection of singularity is supposed to model the way that actuality absorbs necessity as its own law or drive rather than external force or compulsion. Now it is, of course, an open question whether the terminology of judgement helps any more with this modelling than other vocabularies—your mileage may vary, as the saying goes—but that is Hegel's view and the whole point of his

extensive discussion of different forms of judgement. For the purposes of this chapter we will leave this issue aside and see what progress we can make on our general project of understanding Hegel's apparent modal realism by considering more specifically his treatment of what he calls judgements of necessity.

As Hegel frames the issue, the distinctive nature of the judgement of necessity is to be found in the insight that some judgements express the essentially relational nature of their singular subjects in such a way that they are best understood not as predicating a property to a class of objects, but rather to the singular object in its universal significance: 'the subject, e.g. "all humans", sheds its form determination and "the human being" is what it should say instead' (WL 12.77). This universal singular is the genus. But perhaps more importantly, the judgement of necessity comes in three forms (categorical, hypothetical, and disjunctive) which are precisely the forms of judgement that Kant includes under the general heading of *judgements of relation*, and which then generate the *categories* of relation (substance, cause, and interaction) that Hegel considers to be the *objective* articulations of modality. So built into the architectonic relation of Hegel's discussion to Kant's is the claim that *judgements of necessity* do a better job of articulating the *absolute* modal nature of the world than do the *objective categories* of substance and cause, and it appears that the crucial feature of such judgements that allows them to serve this role is their articulation of the universal singular, i.e., the genus, whether as subject or predicate. So in what follows we will just briefly indicate, for each of the kinds of judgement of necessity, how the invocation of the genus modifies the significance of the judgement from Kant in such a way as to more clearly express the co-determination of totalities.

Categorical judgements: Hegel thinks that in the attribution of a genus-predicate to an individual-subject the copula expresses a bond of necessity rather than mere being (WL 12.78). That is, when I judge that a rose is red I merely tack an accident onto a bearer, and the connection remains external. This should remind us of real modality, and Hegel's criticism of the model of substance includes the claim that the only kinds of connections it can articulate are precisely these external ones (WL 11, 396). Since the accidents have no internally necessary connection to the substance they cannot articulate the substance's manifestation of its own nature. But when I judge that the rose is a plant, Hegel thinks, the bond is tighter. Furthermore, as part and parcel of this necessity I place both the individual and the genus on a continuum of genera such that it is inherently possible to pick out another genus that would also have such a tight bond:

But objective universality also has here only its first *immediate* particularization; on the one hand, therefore, it is itself a determinate genus with respect to which there are higher genera; on the other hand, it is not the most *proximate* genus, that is, its determinateness is not directly the principle of the specific particularity of the subject. But what is *necessary* in it is the *substantial identity* of subject and predicate, in view of which the distinguishing mark of each is only an unessential positedness or even only a name. (WL 12.78)

This is, of course, precisely the connection we saw in absolute modality between tightness of fit and alternate possibilities. And it comes from the magnification of one of the possibilities of the actual, as represented in the specific predicate, which as we saw above was the first feature of absolute modality that Hegel wants to model using the subject-predicate form of the judgement. So whereas the alternate possibilities of real modality are represented by the loose fit between substance and accident (e.g., the rose could have been white), the alternate possibilities of absolute modality are represented by the continuum generated by the tight fit between subject-particular and predicate-genus, a tight fit of necessity that is itself generated by the magnification of one possibility of the subject to serve as the focal point for the subject as such. So the distinctively objective articulation of modality can only model real modality, but the subjective articulation can model absolute modality. But notice that on Hegel's view the advance comes from recognizing that only certain types of predicates can play the role of opening up a continuum; 'plant' will do the trick for the rose but not 'red'.¹⁶ This restriction is what constitutes the distinctively subjective nature of the articulation, and this reminds us that 'subjective' in this context refers to depth of self-organization rather than mental life or a personal perspective.

Hypothetical judgements: Interestingly, Hegel has very little to say about subjective organization in hypothetical judgements; or rather, what he says is that hypothetical judgements offer rather little in terms of the modelling of subjective organization. In fact he twice says that such judgements are properly not judgements at all: 'The hypothetical judgement, therefore, has a shape which is more that of a proposition; just as the particular judgement is of indeterminate content, so is the hypothetical of indeterminate form, for the determination of its content does not conform to the relation of subject and predicate' (WL 12.79-80).¹⁷ That is, the hypothetical judgement runs away into too many particular forms—ground and consequence, conditioned and unconditioned, cause and effect—so that the restriction on type of predicate that secured self-organization in the categorical judgement is missing. As it stands, this is a merely negative claim: hypothetical judgements cannot do parallel work to categorical judgements, i.e., they cannot model absolute modality. But if we do look for necessity in the connection between antecedent and consequent of a hypothetical judgement we are thus driven back to consideration of the role of the genus in relation to multiple particulars, and a model for this we find in the disjunctive judgement.¹⁸

¹⁶ On this point see also Stern, *Hegelian Metaphysics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), particularly chapter 12.

¹⁷ Cf. WL 12.55: 'It can also be mentioned in this context that a *proposition* can indeed have a subject and predicate in a grammatical sense without however being a *judgement* for that. The latter requires that the predicate behave with respect to the subject in a relation of conceptual determination, hence as a universal with respect to a particular or singular.'

¹⁸ Westphal argues that this interconnection of the three kinds of judgements of necessity is an element of a different kind of realism in Hegel, namely epistemological realism; see his 'Kant, Hegel, and the Fate of "the" Intuitive Intellect'.

Disjunctive judgements: If the categorical judgement advances on objective models by using the subject-predicate form of the judgement to model the magnification of a single possibility into the focal point for an actuality as a whole, the disjunctive judgement is supposed to advance on objective models by using the subject-predicate form of the judgement to model the way that actuality absorbs necessity as its own law or drive rather than external force or compulsion. This comes out particularly in the way that Hegel wants to distinguish the disjunctive judgement, properly so-called, from merely empirical enumeration of species: 'An empirical disjunctive judgement is without necessity; A is either B or C or D, etc., because the species B, C, D, etc., are *found beforehand*; strictly speaking, therefore, there is no question here of an "either or" ...' (WL 12.81). The exclusive nature of the disjunction in a proper disjunctive judgement can only be secured if the totality of species 'has its *necessity* in the negative unity of the objective universal which has dissolved singularity within itself and possesses, immanent in it, the simple *principle* of differentiation by which the species are *determined* and connected' (WL 12.81). So the question that confronts us is how it can do so, and it will turn out that a further restriction on the universal (this time of the subject rather than the predicate) will generate the '*proximate genus*'. Such a genus would secure true necessity in the multiple realizations of a principle in a way that neither hypothetical nor empirical disjunctive judgements could do.

The whole orientation of Hegel's problem and solution here come out of the difference between real and absolute modality. Several features of this background are familiar from our earlier discussion. First there is the idea from real modality that the multiple possibilities are just given and contingent background conditions that are, as Hegel puts it here, merely found. Absolute necessity is only modelled if there is a way of seeing how these multiple possibilities in fact derive from the driving force or principle of the absolutely actual itself. In subjective terminology, the correct possibility that is made the focal point is a '*greater universal*' that allows it to encompass the particularity of the different species in the predicate (WL 12.80). But this can only happen if the different possibilities are themselves actualities, i.e., if they are themselves different axes of the development of the genus in its determinate form. In the subjective vocabulary Hegel models this move by talking of two senses of membership in a genus, and emphasizing that in the second sense the universal principle itself is placed alongside its particular realizations:

Now, because the concept is the universal, the positive as well as the negative totality of the particulars, for that reason it is immediately itself also *one of its disjunctive members*; the *other* member, however, is this universality resolved into *its particularity*, or the determinateness of the concept as *determinateness*, in which the very universality displays itself as totality ... In the first instance, the disjunctive judgement has the member of the disjunction in the predicate. But the judgement is itself equally disjoined; its subject and predicate are the members of the disjunction. (WL 12.82-3)

So when we have a true disjunctive judgement the subject term itself generates the totality of particular realizations with respect to the set of which the subject term's

own universality is only one realization.¹⁹ Hegel's example here is from Goethe's theory of colours: 'If colour is conceived as the *concrete unity* of light and darkness, then this *genus* has within it the *determinateness* that constitutes the *principle* of its particularization into species [i.e., into the various colours]' (WL 12.83). This principle of determinateness then models the internalization of necessity within the absolutely actual.

This is important because it shows that for Hegel the image of the relation of genus to species is not that of a pyramid, or not *only* that of a pyramid. There is no global image of how all genera and species hang together, since there is no global quantitative continuum of subsumption of more or less particularity under the universal (WL 12.82). In terms of traditional models of the absolute this looks like neither pantheism nor monism. But locally we might say that there is the combination of pyramid and line, where the subject term provides the key for translating between the two; or, to use another analogy, the genus is always *primus inter pares*, e.g., the Holy Roman Emperor with respect to the other German princes. We can say that this is the way in which the primacy of judgement as an articulation of modality gives a positive model for the negative feature of modality that we noted at the end of section 5.4, i.e., that the actual cannot easily be identified with either a single entity or even field of entities. There really are genera and species, Hegel thinks, but it turns out that the objective relations between them are more complicated than we might have originally expected. The species manifest the nature of the genus, but this expressive relation requires precisely that the genus appear alongside them as another possible expression.²⁰

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¹⁹ Though there is no room to take up the issue here, this relates to Hegel's discussion of the difference between pure and abstract universality. See my 'Power as Control and the Therapeutic Effects of Hegel's Logic', *Hegel Bulletin* 36/1 (2015): 33–52.

²⁰ Though there is no room to go into the issue here, this suggests a way that the mature Hegel can have a systematic philosophy that responds to the imperatives of both holism and monism without falling prey to Jacobi's objection of nihilism, i.e., the objection that holistic monism makes individuality impossible. See Paul Franks, *All or Nothing: Systematicity, Transcendental Arguments, and Scepticism in German Idealism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005).

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