



Introduction to the Reading of Hegel (Kojève)

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The Dialectic of the Real and the Phenomenological Method in Hegel

What is Dialectic, according to Hegel?

We can give a first answer to this question by recalling a passage from the *Encyclopaedia* — more exactly, the Introduction to the First Part of the *Encyclopaedia*, entitled *Logic*.

In § 79 (third edition) Hegel says this:

With regard to its form, logic has three aspects (*Seiten*): (a) the abstract or understandable (*verständige*) aspect; (b) the dialectical or Negatively rational (*vernünftige*) aspect, (c) the speculative or positively rational aspect.

This well-known text lends itself to two misunderstandings. On the one hand, one might believe that Dialectic reduces to the second aspect of “Logic,” isolated from the other two. But in the explanatory Note, Hegel underlines that the three aspects are in reality inseparable. And we know from elsewhere that the simultaneous presence of the three aspects in question is what gives “Logic” its dialectical character in the broad sense. But it must be noted right away that “Logic” is dialectical (in the broad sense) only because it implies a “negative” or negating aspect, which is called “dialectical” in the narrow sense. Nevertheless, dialectical “logic” necessarily implies three complementary and inseparable aspects: the “abstract” aspect (revealed by Understanding, *Verstand*); the “negative,” properly “dialectical,” aspect — and the positive” aspect (the last two aspects are revealed by Reason, *Vernunft*).

On the other hand, one might suppose that Dialectic is the preserve of logical *thought*; or in other words, that this passage is concerned with a philosophical *method*, a way of investigation or exposition. Now, in fact, this is not at all the case. For Hegel’s *Logic* is not a logic in the common sense of the word, nor a gnoseology, but an ontology or Science of Being, taken as Being. And “the Logic” (*das Logische*) of the passage we have cited does not mean logical *thought* considered in itself, but *Being (Sein)* revealed (correctly) in and by thought or speech (*Logos*). Therefore, the three “aspects” in question are above all aspects of Being itself: they are *ontological*, and not logical or gnoseological, categories; and they are certainly not simple artifices of *method of* investigation or exposition. Hegel takes care, moreover, to underline this in the Note that follows the passage cited.

In this Note, he says the following: (Volume V, page 104, lines 31-33):

These three aspects do not constitute three *parts* of Logic, but *are constituent-elements (Momente) of every logical-real-entity (Logisch-Reellen)*, that is, of every concept or of everything that is true (*jedes Wahren*) in general.

Everything that is true, the true entity, the True, *das Wahre*, is a real entity, or Being itself, as revealed correctly and completely by coherent discourse having a meaning (*Logos*). And this is what Hegel also calls *Begriff*, concept; a term that means for him (except when, as in the writings of his youth and still occasionally in the *Phenomenology*, he says: *nur Begriff*) not an “abstract notion” detached from the real entity to which it is related, but “conceptually understood reality.” The True and the Concept are, as Hegel himself says, a *Logisch-Reelles*, something logical and real at the same time, a realised concept or a conceived reality. Now, “logical” thought that is supposed to be true, the concept that is supposed to be adequate, merely reveal or describe Being as it *is* or as it *exists*, without adding anything to it, without taking anything away from it, without modifying it in any way whatsoever. The structure of thought, therefore, is determined by the structure of the Being that it reveals. If, then, “logical” thought has three aspects, if in other words it is dialectical (in the broad sense), this is only because Being itself is dialectical (in the broad sense), because of the fact that it implies a “constituent-element” or an “aspect” that is negative or negating (“dialectical” in the narrow and strong sense of the term). Thought is dialectical only to the extent that it correctly reveals the dialectic of Being that *is* and of the Real that *exists*.

To be sure, pure and simple Being (*Sein*) does not have a threefold or dialectical structure; but the Logical — real, the Concept or the True — i. e., Being revealed by Speech or Thought — does. Hence one might be inclined to say that Being is dialectical only to the extent that it is revealed by Thought, that Thought is what gives Being its dialectical character. But this formulation would be incorrect, or at least misleading. For in some sense the reverse is true for Hegel: Being can be revealed by Thought; there is a Thought in Being and of Being, only because Being is dialectical; i. e., because Being implies a negative or negating constituent element. The real dialectic of existing Being is, among other things, the revelation of the Real and of Being by Speech or Thought. And Speech and Thought themselves are dialectical only because, and to the extent that, they reveal or describe the dialectic of *Being and of the Real*.

However that may be, philosophic thought or “scientific” thought in the Hegelian sense of the word — i. e., rigorously true thought — has the goal of revealing, through the meaning of a coherent discourse (*Logos*), *Being (Sein)* as it *is and exists* in the totality of its objective-Reality (*Wirkllichkeit*). The philosophic or “scientific” *Method*, therefore, must assure the adequation of Thought to Being, since Thought must adapt itself to Being and to the Real without modifying them in any way whatsoever. This is to say that the attitude of the philosopher or the “scientist” (= the Wise Man) with respect to Being and to the Real is one of purely passive *contemplation*, and that philosophic or “scientific” activity reduces to a pure and simple *description* of the Real and of Being. The Hegelian *method*, therefore, is not at all “dialectical”: it is purely contemplative and descriptive, or better, *phenomenological* in Husserl’s sense of the term. In the Preface and the Introduction to the *Phenomenology*, Hegel insists at length on the passive, contemplative, and descriptive character of the “scientific” method. He underlines that there is a dialectic of “scientific” thought only because there is a dialectic of the Being which that thought reveals. As soon as the revealing description is correct, it can be said that *ordo et connexio idearum idem est ac ordo et connexio rerum*; for the order and the connection of the real are, according to Hegel, dialectical.

But scientific knowledge (*Erkennen*) demands, on the contrary, that one give himself (*übergibt*) to the life of the object (*Gegenstandes*) or, to say the same thing in different words, that one have before oneself and express in speech (*auszusprechen*) the inner necessity of this object. By thus plunging (*sich vertiefend*) into its object, this knowledge forgets that overview (*Übersicht*) [thought to be possible from the outside] which is [in reality] only knowledge's (*Wissens*) own face reflected back into itself from the content. But having plunged into the matter and progressing (*fortgehend*) in the [dialectical] movement of this matter, scientific knowledge comes back into itself; but not before the filling (*Erfüllung*) or the content [of the thought] gathers itself back into itself, simplifies itself to specific determination (*Bestimmtheit*), lowers itself to [being] *an* aspect (*Seite*) [merely] of an empirical-existence (*Daseins*) [*the* other aspect being thought], and transforms itself (*übergeht*) into its superior (*höhere*) truth [or revealed reality]. By that very process, the simple-or-undivided Whole (*Ganze*) which has an overview of *itself* (*sich übersehende*) itself emerges from the richness [of the diversity] in which its reflection [into itself] seemed lost.

"Scientific knowledge" gives itself or abandons itself without reserve, without preconceived ideas or afterthoughts, to the "life" and the "dialectical movement" of the Real. Thus, this truly true knowledge has nothing to do with the "Reflection" of pseudo-philosophy (i. e., pre-Hegelian philosophy) and of pseudo-science (Newtonian science), which reflects on the Real while placing *itself outside* of the Real, without one's being able to say precisely where; Reflection which pretends to give an "overview" of the Real on the basis of a knowing Subject that calls itself autonomous or independent of the Object of knowledge; a Subject that, according to Hegel, is but an artificially isolated aspect of the known or revealed Real.

To be sure, in the end, "scientific knowledge" comes back toward itself and reveals itself to itself: its final goal is to describe itself in its nature, in its genesis, and in its development. Just like ordinary philosophic knowledge, it is a self-knowledge. But it is a complete and adequate self-knowledge — that is, it is true in the strong sense of the word. And it is true because, even in its return toward itself, it simply follows passively the dialectical movement of its "content" which is the "object" — that is, the Real and Being. The Real itself is what organises itself and makes itself concrete so as to become a determinate "species," capable of being revealed by a general notion"; the Real itself reveals itself through articulate knowledge and thereby becomes a known object that has the knowing subject as its necessary complement, so that "empirical existence" is divided into beings that speak and beings that are spoken of. For real Being existing as Nature is what produces Man who reveals that Nature (and himself) by speaking of it. Real Being thus transforms itself into "truth" or into reality *revealed* by speech, and becomes a "higher" and "higher" truth as its discursive revelation becomes ever more adequate and complete.

It is by following this "dialectical movement" of the Real that Knowledge is present at its own birth and contemplates its own evolution. And thus it finally attains its end, which is the adequate and complete understanding of itself — i. e., of the progressive revelation of the Real and of Being by Speech — of the Real and Being which engender, in and by their "dialectical movement," the Speech that reveals them. And it is thus that a *total* revelation of real Being or an entirely revealed Totality (an "undivided Whole") is finally constituted: the coherent whole of Being realised in the real Universe, completely and perfectly described in the "overview" given by the one and unique "Science" or the "System" of the Wise Man, finally emerges from Being which at first was only a natural World formed of separate and disparate entities, an incoherent "richness", in which there was no "reflection,)) no discursive knowledge, no articulate self-consciousness.

Taken separately, the Subject and the Object are *abstractions* — “objective reality” (*Wirklichkeit*) nor “empirical existence” (*Dasein*). What exists in *reality*, as soon as there is a Reality *of which one speaks* — and since we in fact *speak of* reality, there can be for us only Reality of which one speaks what exists in reality, I say, is the Subject that knows the Object, or, what is the same thing, the Object known by the Subject. This double Reality which is nonetheless one because it is equally real in each aspect, taken in its whole or as Totality, is called in Hegel “Spirit” (*Geist*) or (in the *Logic*) “absolute Idea.” Hegel also says: “*absoluter Begriff*” (“absolute Concept”). But the term *Begriff* can also be applied to a *fragment* of total revealed Being, to a “constituent-element” (*Moment*) of the Spirit or Idea (in which case the Idea can be defined as the integration of all the Concepts — that is, of all the particular “ideas”). Taken in this sense, *Begriff* signifies a particular real entity or a real aspect of being, revealed by the meaning of a word — i. e., by a “general notion”; or else, what is the same thing, *Begriff* is a “meaning” (“idea”) that exists empirically not only in the form of an actually thought, spoken, or written word, but also as a “thing.” If the (universal or “absolute”) “Idea” is the “Truth” or the Reality revealed by speech of the one and unique *totality* of what exists, a (particular) “Concept” is the “Truth” of a particular real entity *taken separately*, but understood as an *integral element* of the Totality. Or else, again, the “Concept” is a “true entity” (*das Wahre*) — *that* is, a real entity *named* or revealed by the meaning of a word, which meaning relates it to all other real entities and thus inserts it in the “System” of the whole Real revealed by the *entirety* of “scientific” Discourse. Or else, finally, the “Concept” is the “essential reality” or the *essence* (*Wesen*) of a concrete entity — that is, precisely the reality which corresponds, in that concrete entity, to the *meaning* of the word that designates or reveals it.

Like the Spirit or the Idea, each Concept is hence double and single at the same time; it is both “subjective” and “objective,” both real thought of a real entity and a real entity really thought. The *real* aspect of the Concept is called “object” (*Gegenstand*), “given-Being” (*Sein*), “entity that exists as a given-Being” (*Seiendes*), “*In-itself*” (*Ansich*), and so on. The aspect *thought* is called “knowledge” (*Wissen*), “act of knowing” (*Erkennen*), “knowledge” (*Erkenntnis*), “act of thinking” (*Denken*), and so on; and occasionally “concept” (*Begriff*) in the common sense (when Hegel says: *nur Begriff*). But these two aspects are inseparable and complementary, and it is of little importance to know which of the two must be called *Wissen or Begriff* (in the common sense), and which *Gegenstand*. What is of importance is that in the Truth—there is *perfect coincidence* of the *Begriff* and the *Gegenstand*, and that — in the Truth — Knowledge is purely *passive* adequation to essential-Reality. And that is why the true Scientist or the ‘Wise Man must reduce his existence to simple *contemplation* (*reines Zusehen*) of the Real and of Being and of their “dialectical movement.” He looks at everything that *is* and verbally describes everything that he sees: therefore, he has nothing to *do*, for he modifies nothing, — adds nothing, and takes nothing away.

This, at least, is what Hegel says in the Introduction to the *Phenomenology*:

If by *concept* we mean *knowledge* (*Wissen*), and by the essential *reality* (*Wesen*) or the *true-entity* (*Wahre*) we mean entity existing as a given-being (*Seiende*) or *object* (*Gegenstand*), it follows that verification (*Prüfung*) consists in seeing (*zuzusehen*) if the concept corresponds to the object. But if by *concept* we mean the *essential reality* of the In-itself (*An-sich*) of the *object*, and by *object*, on the other hand, we understand the object [taken] as *object*, namely, as it is *for another* [i. e., for the knowing Subject], it follows that verification consists in our seeing if the object corresponds to its concept. It is easily seen that both [expressions signify] the same thing. But what is essential is to keep [in mind] for the whole study (*Untersuchung*) that these two constituent-elements (*Momente*), [namely] *concept and object, Being for another and Being in itself*, are situated within the very knowledge that we are studying, and that consequently we do not need to bring in standards (*Massstäbe*)

or to apply *our* [own] intuitions (*Einfälle*) and ideas (*Gedanken*) during the study. By omitting these latter, we attain [the possibility] of viewing the thing as it is in *and for itself*.

Now, any addition (*Zutat*) [coming] from us becomes superfluous not only in the sense (*nach dieser Seite*) that [the] concept and (the) object, the standard and what is to be verified, are present (*vorhanden*) in the Consciousness (*Bewusstsein*) itself [which we, as philosophers, study in the *Phenomenology*]; but we are also spared the effort of comparing the two and of *verifying* in the strict sense, so that — since [studied] Consciousness verifies itself — in this respect too, only pure contemplation (*Zusehen*) is left for us to do.

When all is said and done, the “method” of the Hegelian Scientist consists in having no method or way of thinking peculiar to his Science. The naive man, the vulgar scientist, even the pre-Hegelian philosopher — each in his way opposes himself to the Real and deforms it by opposing, his own means of action and methods of thought to it. The Wise Man, on the contrary, is fully and definitively reconciled with everything that *is*: he entrusts himself without reserve to Being and opens himself entirely to the Real without resisting it. His role is that of a perfectly flat and indefinitely extended mirror: he does not reflect on the Real; it is the Real that reflects itself on him, is reflected in his consciousness, and is revealed in its own dialectical structure by the discourse of the Wise who describes it without deforming it.

If you please, the Hegelian “method” is purely “empirical” or “positivist”: Hegel looks at the Real and describes what he sees, everything that he sees, and nothing but what he sees. In other words, he has the “experience” (*Erfahrung*) of dialectical Being), and the Real, and thus he makes their “movement” pass into his discourse which describes them.

And that is what Hegel says in the Introduction to the *Phenomenology*:

This dialectical movement which Consciousness carries out (*alstübt*) in (*an*) itself, both in terms of its knowledge and its object, to the extent that the new. [and] true object *arises* (*entspringt*) out of this movement [and appears] before Consciousness, is strictly speaking what is called *experience* (*Erfahrung*).

To be sure, this experience “strictly speaking” is something quite different from the experience of vulgar science. The latter is carried out by a Subject who pretends to be independent of the Object, and it is supposed to reveal the Object which exists independently of the Subject. Now in actual fact the experience is had by a man who lives within Nature and is indissolubly bound to it, but is also opposed to it and wants to transform it: science is born from the desire to transform the World in relation to Man; its final end is technical application. That is why scientific knowledge is never absolutely passive, nor purely contemplative and descriptive. Scientific experience perturbs the Object because of the active intervention of the Subject, who applies to the Object a *method* of investigation that is his own and to which nothing in the Object itself corresponds. What it reveals, therefore, is neither the Object taken independently of the Subject, nor the Subject taken independently of the Object, but only the result of the *interaction* of the two or, if you that interaction itself. However, scientific experience and knowledge are concerned with the Object as independent of and isolated from the Subject. Hence they do not find what they are looking for; they do not give what they promise, for they do not correctly reveal or describe what the Real is *for them*. Generally speaking Truth (= revealed Reality) is the coincidence of thought or descriptive knowledge with the concrete real. Now, for vulgar science, this real is supposed to be independent of the thought which describes it. But in fact this science never attains this autonomous real, this “thing in itself” of Kant-Newton, because it incessantly perturbs it. Hence scientific thought does not attain its truth; there is no scientific *truth* in the strong and proper sense of the term. Scientific experience is thus

only a pseudo-experience. And it cannot be otherwise, for vulgar science is in fact concerned not with the concrete real, but with an *abstraction*. To the extent that the scientist thinks or knows his object, what really and concretely exists is the *entirety* of the Object known by the Subject or of the Subject knowing the Object. The isolated Object is but an abstraction, and that is why it has no fixed and stable continuity (*Bestehen*) and is perpetually deformed or perturbed. Therefore it cannot serve as a basis for a Truth, which by definition is universally and eternally valid. And the same goes for the “object” of vulgar psychology, gnoseology, and philosophy, which is the Subject artificially isolated from the Object — i. e., yet another abstraction.

Hegelian experience is a different story: it reveals *concrete* Reality, and reveals it without modifying or “perturbing” it. That is why, when this experience is described verbally, it represents a Truth in the strong sense of the term. And that is why it has no specific *method* of its own, as experience, thought, or verbal description, that is not at the same time an “objective” structure of the concrete Real itself which it reveals by describing it.

The concrete Real (of which we speak) is both Real revealed by a discourse, and Discourse revealing a real. And the Hegelian experience is related neither to the Real nor to Discourse taken separately, but to their indissoluble unity. And since it is itself a revealing Discourse, it is itself an aspect of the concrete Real which it describes. It therefore brings in nothing *from outside*, and the thought or the discourse which is born from it is not a reflection *on* the Real: the Real itself is what reflects itself or is reflected in the discourse or as thought. In particular, if the thought and the discourse of the Hegelian Scientist or the Wise Man are dialectical, it is only because they faithfully reflect the “dialectical movement” of the Real of which they are a part and which they *experience* adequately by giving themselves to it without any preconceived *method*.

Hegel's method, then, is not at all dialectical, and Dialectic for him is quite different from a method of thought or exposition. And we can even say that, in a certain way, Hegel was the first to abandon Dialectic as a philosophic *method*. He was, at least, the first to do so voluntarily and with full knowledge of what he was doing.

The dialectical method was consciously and systematically used for the first time by Socrates-Plato. But in fact it is as old as philosophy itself. For the dialectical method is nothing but the method of dialogue — that is, of discussion.

Everything seems to indicate that Science was born in the form of Myth. A Myth is a theory — that is, a discursive revelation of the real. Of course, it is supposed to be in agreement with the given real. But in fact, it always goes beyond its givens, and once beyond them, it only has to be coherent — i. e., free of internal contradictions — in order to make a show of truth. The period of Myth is a period of monologue, and in this period one *demonstrates* nothing because one “discusses” nothing, since one is not yet faced with a contrary or simply different opinion. And that is precisely why there is true or false “myth” or “opinion” (*doxa*), but no “science” or “truth” properly so-called.

Then, by chance, the man who has an opinion, or who has created or adopted a myth, comes up against a different myth or a contrary opinion. This man will first try to get rid of it: either by plugging up his ears in some way, by an internal or external “censoring”; or by overcoming (in the non-dialectical sense of the term) the adverse myth or opinion, by putting to death or banishing its propagators, for example, or by acts of violence that will force the others to *say* the same thing as he (even if they do not *think* the same thing).

But it can happen (and we know that this actually did happen one day, somewhere) that the man begins to *discuss* with his adversary. By an act of freedom he can decide to want to “convince” him, by “refuting” him and by “demonstrating” his own Point of view. To this

end he *speaks* with his adversary, he engages in a *dialogue* with him: he uses a *dialectical method*. And it is by becoming a dialectician that the man of myth or opinion becomes a scientist or a philosopher.

In Plato (and probably already in Socrates) all this became conscious. If Plato has Socrates say that not the trees, but only the men in the city can teach him something, it is because he understood that, starting from (false or true) myth and opinion, one can attain science and truth only by way of discussion — that is, by way of dialogue or dialectic. In fine, according to Socrates-Plato, it is from the collision of diverse and adverse opinions that the spark of the one and the only truth is finally struck. A “thesis” is opposed to an “anti-thesis,” which, by the way, the thesis generally provokes. They confront each other, correct one another mutually — that is, destroy each other — but also combine and finally engender a “synthetic” truth. But this latter is still just one opinion among many others. It is a new thesis that will find or arouse a new anti-thesis, in order to associate itself with it by negating i.e., by modifying it — in a new synthesis, in which it will be different from what it was at the start. And so on, until one achieves a “synthesis” that will no longer be the thesis of a discussion or a “thesis” that can be discussed; an indisputable “truth” that will no longer be a simple “opinion” or *one* of the possible opinions; or, speaking objectively, the single One which is not in opposition to an Other because it is the Whole — the Idea of the ideas, or the Good.

In philosophy or science born from discussion — that is, in dialectical (or synthetic) truth which realises the Good in man by verbally revealing the One — Whole — the intermediate theses, antitheses, and syntheses are *aufgehoben*, as Hegel will later say. They are “overcome,” in the threefold sense of the German word *Aufheben* — *that is*, “overcome dialectically.” In the first place, they *are overcome* or annulled with respect to whatever is fragmentary relative, partial, or one-sided in them — that is, with respect to what makes them false when one of them is taken not for *an* opinion, but as *the* truth. Secondly, they are also *preserved* or safeguarded with respect to whatever is essential or universal in them — that is, with respect to what in each of them reveals one of the manifold aspects of the total and single reality. Finally, they are *sublimated* — *that is*, raised to a superior level of knowledge and of reality, and therefore of truth, for by completing one another, the thesis and the antithesis get rid of their one-sided and limited or, better, “subjective” character, and as synthesis they reveal a more comprehensive and hence a more comprehensible aspect of the “objective” real.

But if dialectic finally attains the adequation of discursive thought to Reality and Being, nothing in Reality and Being corresponds to dialectic. The dialectical movement is a movement of human thought and discourse, but the reality itself which one thinks and of which one talks is in no way dialectical. Dialectic is but a method of philosophic research and exposition. And we see, by the way, that the method is *dialectical* only because it implies a negative or negating element: namely, the antithesis which *opposes* the thesis in a verbal *fight* and calls for an *effort* of demonstration, an effort, moreover, indistinguishable from a *refutation*. There is truth properly so-called — that is, scientific or philosophic truth, or better, dialectical or synthetical truth — only where there has been discussion or dialogue — that is, antithesis *negating* a thesis.

In Plato, the dialectical method is still quite close to its historical origins (the sophistic discussions). In his writings we are dealing with genuine dialogues, in which the thesis and the antithesis are presented by different persons (Socrates generally incarnates the antithesis of all theses asserted by his interlocutors or expressed successively by one of them). And as for the synthesis, it is generally the auditor who must make it — the auditor who is the philosopher properly so-called: Plato himself or that disciple who is capable of understanding him. This auditor finally attains the absolute truth which results from the entirety of the dialectic or from the coordinated movement of all the dialogues, a

truth that reveals the “total” or “synthetical” Good which is capable of fully and definitively “satisfying” the one who knows it and who is consequently *beyond* discussion or dialectic.

In Aristotle the dialectical method is less apparent than in Plato. But it continues to be applied. It becomes the aporetic method: the solution of the problem results from a discussion (and sometimes from a simple juxtaposition) of all possible opinions — that is, of all opinions that are coherent and do not contradict themselves. And the dialectical method was preserved in this “scholastic” form until our time in both the sciences and philosophy.

But along a parallel line there was something else.

Like all opinion, the Myth arises spontaneously and is accepted (or rejected) in the same way. Man creates it in and by his (“poetical”) imagination, content if he avoids contradictions when he develops his initial idea or “intuition.” But when the confrontation with a different opinion or myth engenders the desire for a *proof*, which cannot as yet be satisfied by a *demonstration through discussion*, one feels the need to found one’s opinion or the myth that one is proposing (both being supposed to be unverifiable empirically — i.e., by an appeal to common sense experience) on something more than simple personal *conviction* or “subjective certainty” (*Gewissheit*) — *which* is visibly of the same type and weight as the adversary’s. A foundation of superior or “divine” value is sought and found: the myth is presented as having been “revealed” by a god, who is supposed to be the guarantee for its truth — that is, for its universal and eternal validity.

just like dialectical truth, this “revealed” mythical truth could not have been found by an isolated man confronted with Nature. Here too “trees teach man nothing.” But “the men in the city” do not teach him anything either. It is a God who reveals the truth to him in a “myth.” But in contrast to dialectical truth, this mythical truth is not the result of a *discussion* or a dialogue: God alone spoke, while man was content to listen, to understand, and to transcribe (and to do this far from the city, on the top of a mountain, and so on).

Even after having been a Platonic philosopher, man can still sometimes return to the “mythological” period. Such was the case of Saint Augustine. But this “return” is in reality a “synthesis”: the myth-revealing God becomes a quasi-Socratic interlocutor; man engages in *dialogue* with his God, even if he does not go so far as to have a discussion with him (Abraham, *however*, *discusses* with Jehovah!). But this divine-human “dialogue” is but a hybrid and transitory form of the dialectical method. Accordingly, it assumed an infinite variety of forms among the diverse “Mystics,” ranging from true dialogue in which “God” is but a title for the human interlocutor with whom one *discusses*, to diverse “revelations” on the tops of mountains in which the human partner is only a mute auditor, “convinced” beforehand.

In any case, the divine interlocutor is, in fact, fictitious. It all happens in the soul itself of the “scientist.” And that is why Saint Augustine had “dialogues” with his “soul.” And a distant disciple of that Platonic (or Plotinian) Christian, Descartes, deliberately dropped God and was content to have dialogue and discussion with himself. Thus Dialectic became “Meditation.” It was in the form of Cartesian meditation that the dialectical method was used by the authors of the great philosophical “systems” of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries: from Descartes to Kant-Fichte-Schelling. At first sight, this is a step backwards in relation to Socrates-Plato-Aristotle. The great modern “Systems” are like so many “Myths” which are juxtaposed without being discussed, which are created out of nothing by their authors without coming from an earlier dialogue. But in fact, this is not at all the case. On the one hand the author himself *discusses* his “theses” and *demonstrates their* veracity by *refuting* possible objections or “antitheses”:

thus he applies a dialectical method. On the other hand, in fact, the Platonic Dialogues preceded these Systems, which come from them “dialectically” through the intermediary of the aporetic discussions of Aristotle and the scholastic Aristotelians. And just as in a Platonic Dialogue, the auditor (who in this case is a historian-philosopher of philosophy) discovers the absolute truth as the result of the implicit or tacit “discussion” between the great Systems of history, hence, as the result of their “dialectic.”

Hegel was the first of these auditor-historian-philosophers. In any case, he was the first to be so consciously. And that is why he was the first who could knowingly abandon Dialectic conceived as a philosophical *method*. He is content to observe and describe the dialectic which was effected throughout history, and he no longer needs to *make* a dialectic himself. This dialectic, or the “dialogue” of the Philosophies, took place before him. He only has to have the “experience” of it and to describe its synthetical final result in a coherent discourse: the expression of the absolute truth is nothing but the adequate verbal description of the dialectic which engendered it. Thus, Hegel’s Science is “dialectical” only to the extent that the Philosophy which prepared it throughout History *has been* (implicitly or explicitly) dialectical.

At first sight, this attitude of Hegel is a simple return to Plato. If Plato lets Parmenides, Protagoras, Socrates, and still others have dialogues, while being content to record the result of their discussions, Hegel records the result of the discussion which he organises between Plato and Descartes, Spinoza and Kant, Fichte and Schelling, and so on. Hence, here again we would seem to be dealing with a dialectical *method* in the search for truth or in its exposition, which in no way affects the Real which that truth reveals. And Hegel does actually say somewhere that he is only rediscovering the ancient or, rather, Platonic, dialectic. But a closer examination shows that this is not at all the case, and that when Hegel speaks of Dialectic, he is talking about something quite different from what is found in his predecessors.’

One can say, if one pleases, that the eternal light of absolute Hegelian truth, too, comes from the collision of all the philosophic opinions which preceded it. However, this *ideal* dialectic, the dialogue of the Philosophies, took place, according to Hegel, only because it is a reflection of the real dialectic of Being. And only because it reflects this real dialectic does it finally achieve, in the person of Hegel, the truth or the complete and adequate revelation of the Real. Each philosophy correctly reveals or describes a turning point or a stopping place — thetical, antithetical, or synthetical — of the real dialectic, of the *Bewegung* of existing Being. And that is why each philosophy is “true” in a certain sense. But it is true only relatively or temporarily: it remains “true” as long as a new philosophy, also “true,” does not come along to demonstrate its “error.” However, a philosophy does not by itself transform itself into another philosophy or engender that other philosophy in and by an autonomous dialectical movement. The Real corresponding to a given philosophy itself becomes really other (thetical, antithetical, or synthetical), and this other Real is what engenders another adequate philosophy, which, as “true,” replaces the first philosophy which has become “false.” Thus, the dialectical movement of the history of philosophy, which ends in the absolute or definitive truth, is but a reflection, a “superstructure,” of the dialectical movement of the *real* history of the Real. And that is why all philosophy that is “true” is also essentially “false”: it is false in so far as it presents itself not as the reflection or description of a constituent element or a dialectical “moment” of the real, but as the revelation of the Real in its totality. Nonetheless, even while being or becoming “false,” all philosophy (worthy of the name) remains “true,” for the total Real implies and will always imply the aspect (or the “moment”) which that philosophy revealed. The absolute truth or the Science of the Wise Man, of Hegel that is, the adequate and complete revelation of the Real in its Totality — is indeed, therefore, an integral synthesis of all the philosophies presented throughout history. However, neither these philosophies through their discussions, nor the historian-

philosopher who observes them, effects the synthesis in question: real History is what does it, at the end of its own dialectical movement; and Hegel is content to record it without having to *do* anything whatsoever, and consequently, without resorting to a specific mode of operation or a *method* of his own.

“*Weltgeschichte ist Weltgericht*” (“World History is a tribunal that judges the World”). History is what judges men, their actions and their opinions, and lastly their philosophical opinions as well. To be sure, History is, if you please, a long “discussion” between men. But this *real* historical “discussion” is something quite different from a philosophic dialogue or discussion. The “discussion” is carried out not with verbal arguments, but with clubs and swords or cannon on the one hand, and with sickles and hammers or machines on the other. If one wants to speak of a “dialectical method” used by History, one must make clear that one is talking about methods of war and of work. This real, or better, active, historical dialectic is what is reflected in the history of philosophy. And if Hegelian Science is dialectical or synthetical, it is only because it describes that *real* dialectic in its totality, as well as the series of consecutive philosophies which corresponds to that dialectical *reality*. Now, by the way, reality is dialectical only because it implies a negative or negating element: namely, the active negation of the given, the negation which is at the foundation of every bloody fight and of all so-called “physical” work.

Hegel does not need a God who would reveal the truth to him. And to find the truth, he does not need to hold dialogues with “the men in the city,” or even to have a “discussion” with himself or to “meditate” *a’ la Descartes*. (Besides, no purely verbal discussion, no solitary meditation, can lead to the truth, of which Fighting and Work are the only “criteria.”) He can find it all alone, while sitting tranquilly in the shade of those “trees” which taught Socrates nothing, but which teach Hegel many things about themselves and about men. But all this is possible only because there *have been* cities in which men had discussions against a background of fighting and work, while they worked and fought for and because of their opinions (cities, moreover, which were surrounded by these same trees whose wood was used in their construction). Hegel no longer discusses because he benefits from the discussion of those who preceded him. And if, having nothing more *to do*, he has no *method* of his own, it is because he profits from all the actions effected throughout history. His thought simply reflects the Real. But he can do so only because the Real is dialectical — that is, imbued with the negating action of fighting and work, which engenders thought and discourse, causes them to move, and finally realises their perfect coincidence with the Real which they are supposed to reveal or to describe. In short, Hegel does not need a dialectical *method* because the truth which he incarnates is the final result of the real or active dialectic of universal History, which his thought is content to reproduce through his discourse.

From Socrates-Plato until Hegel, Dialectic was only a philosophical method without a counterpart in the real. In Hegel there is a real Dialectic, but the philosophical method is that of a pure and simple description, which is dialectical only in the sense that it describes a dialectic of reality.

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