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THE CONCEPTION OF THE HEGELIAN DIALECTIC

A Thesis

Presented to

The School of Graduate Studies

of

The University of Ottawa

by

JAMES BROUWER

In partial fulfillment of requirements

for the degree of

Master of Arts

Department of Philosophy

December 1997

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0-612-28404-2

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ABSTRACT

In its simplest form, this thesis is an attempt to clarify, interpret and defend the nature of the Hegelian dialectic - especially as it is articulated in the Science of Logic. This thesis does not ally itself with any picture of the dialectic as a constraining, oppressive structure, rather it suggests that the dialectic be read more as a dynamic process; an open-ended movement that has, in a certain sense, already anticipated and accounted for many of the objections brought against it.

ABBREVIATIONS

- BH - Desmond, William, Beyond Hegel and Dialectic: Speculation, Cult and Comedy. New York: SUNY Press, 1992.
- EL - Hegel, G.W.F. Encyclopedia Logic, Part I of the Encyclopedia of the Philosophical Sciences with Zusätze. Trans. T.F. Geraets, W.A. Suchtung, and H.S. Harris. Indianapolis: Hackett, 1991.
- EP - Hegel, G.W.F. Encyclopedia of the Philosophical Sciences in Outline, and Critical Writings. Trans. Steven A Taubeneck., ed. Ernst Behler. New York: Continuum Publishing, 1990.
- SL - Hegel, G.W.F. Science of Logic. Trans. A.V. Miller. New York: Humanities Press, 1969.
- HT - Schlitt, Dale. Hegel's Trinitarian Claim. Leiden: Brill, 1984.
- FA - Taminaux, Jacques, "Finitude and the Absolute" in Dialectic and Difference: Finitude in Modern Thought. Trans. James Decker and Robert Crease. New Jersey: Humanities Press, 1985.

THE CONCEPTION OF THE HEGELIAN DIALECTIC

INTRODUCTION

The problem to be addressed in this thesis concerns the supposed “absolute” or “totalizing” nature of Hegel’s philosophy. The question we are responding to is whether the logic of Hegelianism is a totalizing monolith as is so often claimed. Does it ultimately suppress otherness in the name of absolute identity? The answer being suggested here is that the dialectic cannot ultimately be seen in this way. The task of this thesis is mainly that of overcoming the picture of Hegelian philosophy as something oppressively ‘totalizing’, of inverting this picture in such a way that the insistence for *difference* reveals itself as an insistence for the very *identity* being disavowed. In effect, the objection that claims an otherness “beyond” Hegelian dialectics has yet to recognize that in and through its objection it *bears out* that which it opposes. It is in this way that the Hegelian Absolute emerges: it actively comes to be from its ‘outside’, opposition to it fulfills it, it *is* in this movement. So I want to suggest that what “total” or “absolute” *mean* when understood dialectically is not something realized by the persistent picture of Hegelian philosophy suggested above. This philosophy is not an abstract totality, it is *itself* total only *in* and *through* that which does not take itself to be speculative or dialectical. The dialectic is not “total” as a simple identity, as an ever-sameness in which difference is put aside, rather the dialectic is total as identity-in-difference, an active movement. This notion of totality is not an imposition of the dialectic but what is involved in the idea of “totality” itself.

But before one can ever defend Hegelian philosophy against a particular conception of it, one must first of all consider this philosophy itself. If the Hegelian philosophy is our subject matter then we must first of all consider what it actually states. One should not, as is sometimes the case

in Hegel criticism, approach Hegel too generally, rather one must begin with a detailed examination of what Hegel himself has written. This must be a comprehensive reading, one that enables us to see how this philosophy *unfolds*. It is in this way that this thesis begins. But of course, for obvious reasons, one cannot consider *all* of this philosophy in the context of a short thesis. For purposes of our enquiry we must isolate that aspect which is immediately relevant to the question of what this philosophy is, of how it is to be considered absolute, and most importantly, how it brings to light the dialectical process itself. In light of this I have chosen to look specifically at the beginning and the end of the Greater Logic. In terms of the beginning, I look at the relation between opening section entitled “With What Must the Science Begin?” and the initial dialectic of Being, Nothing, and Becoming. In terms of the end I look at the final chapter entitled the “Absolute Idea”, which is important in the way that it reveals the dialectic process in its most essential form.

Now these sections, taken together, bring to light several key ideas. First of all, in the Logic “beginning” and “end” are considered in themselves, the beginning *as* beginning, the end *as* end. What is ultimately revealed here is that beginning and end cannot ultimately function as stable *parameters* or limits. For in the Logic they *are* just as much as they *are not*, and really what is most basic here is not beginning and end *per se*, but the movement in which both are retained and denied. This means that the simple notion of *a* beginning and *an* end is, to say the least, extremely problematic - and it is this problem that will be found to carry through into the second section of the thesis, where I examine certain critical attempts to limit the Hegelian philosophy, to maintain parameters for it. In essence, the primary element I am trying always to bring out is that this philosophy is not a fixed entity but a movement, and I have sought to establish this

movement from the beginning. As movement this is in no way an oppressive philosophy; in no way is it one that threatens difference, otherness and so forth. On the contrary, Hegelianism is perhaps the first to seriously *think* difference, and to see its essentiality.

Too often, though, this differential nature of the dialectic is not seen for what it is. For instance, it is often mentioned that Hegel refers to the dialectic as a circular structure, and in that way it appears as an enclosedness. Yet, as will be brought to light in what Hegel says of the “beginning” and “end”, this circularity cannot be confined to this picture of itself; it is rather a transforming activity that cannot be placed within a particular form alone. Furthermore, as our examination of the beginning will reveal, Hegelianism cannot truly be considered a “foundational” philosophy. Its basis cannot be a particular point or principle, a *this* as opposed to a *that*. Thus, several pages are spent comparing dialectical movement to the Cartesian “beginning” of philosophy. Indeed, I not only draw a comparison between Descartes’ approach to the beginning and Hegel’s, but I also give a somewhat dialectical critique of the Cartesian attempt to give philosophy a fixed foundation in the first place. But this means, of course, that it is not merely opposed to foundationalism. Rather, Hegelianism is unique in that it incorporates philosophy’s attempts to “found” itself, to attain a *new beginning* for philosophy, and makes these transformative events in philosophy into the essential movement of philosophy as such. What has always already begun every “new beginning” is the one movement of speculative thinking as a whole.

This activity of the dialectic is followed through in the second section of the thesis. Basically, in the first section we see how Hegel himself brings to light the dialectical process, in the second section we see that same process brought to light in an *other*. And by “other” here we do not mean merely another philosopher, we mean a philosophy that seeks to *be other* than the Hegelian

dialectic. But again, for our purposes here, we cannot afford any sort of general survey of all the various philosophical oppositions to Hegel. We are concerned more with the general portrait of Hegelian philosophy they bear witness to. Now a common portrayal of Hegel is as one who ultimately subsumes difference in the name of identity, as one incapable of attaining otherness in the way that these detractors can. In this context I have undertaken a detailed analysis of two works I feel to be exemplary of this line of Hegelian criticism I wish to overturn - an essay by Jacques Taminiaux entitled "Finitude and the Absolute", and a book by William Desmond entitled Beyond Hegel and Dialectic. These works are chosen as examples of a reading of Hegel that is all too common: that his philosophy is an oppressive totality, that it ultimately disallows true difference, otherness and so on. But what I have sought to show, however, is the sense in which these criticisms are destructive of the very thing they seek - the difference they seek beyond the dialectic is in truth mere identity, just as true difference itself is found *in* the very process they seek to get outside of: the Hegelian dialectic itself. It is insisted, by numerous critics who speak in the name of "difference", that Hegelian philosophy is something that can and must be gotten beyond. But I have sought to show just the opposite, and that from the moment one isolates the Hegelian philosophy, from the moment one sets up parameters for it such that it *simply* becomes an object for critical opposition, from that moment one has in fact missed it altogether, one is misrecognizing what one sees, for the logic of this philosophy is such that it dialectically sublates limits - including those limits one sees belonging to "it" itself. This means that it is not a philosophy that is absolutely without limit any more than it is a philosophy which has limits which are absolute. Its identity is that of differentiating itself from itself, of returning into itself in and through what is other than itself. What has to be shown, then, are that

objections to the Hegelian philosophy are not simply *themselves*. Such objections are, in truth, actively involved *in* the very philosophy they seek to distance themselves from, essential to it, just as the Hegelian philosophy is in this sense being re-written and furthered in these very objections.

PART 1

CHAPTER 1: THE BEGINNING OF THE LOGIC

The Logical Beginning as Mediated

Hegel makes it clear that the Logic will begin where philosophy has *not yet* begun: with a consideration of the beginning *as* beginning, with the place of the beginning itself rather than with a particular content to occupy that place. This consideration of the beginning is demanded by what is to be begun, namely the science of logic. For the Science of Logic the question must arise as to what constitutes a logical beginning. Logic cannot assume its beginning, rather, to begin it must ask what is inherent to the beginning as such. What, then, is the inherent nature of the beginning? To the degree that logic is the self-reflection of thought into itself, Hegel states, “the beginning is *logical* in that it is to be made in the element of thought that is free and for itself, in *pure knowing*”(SL 68). In that this knowing is pure, it is absolutely self-related, for it there is nothing-other and it is thus a simple immediacy. This is, if you will, the logic of the beginning in itself - that it be a *simple immediacy*.

Yet insofar as we have arrived at *logic* as that which must be begun, this simple immediacy is at the same time mediated. For the beginning of logic’s science is at the same time the end of consciousness’ phenomenology. In the Hegelian system as a whole, logic presupposes the result of the Phenomenology of Spirit: the moment wherein, at all levels, consciousness has thoroughly overcome its confrontation with an alien objectivity, wherein it knows the object to be *itself* and itself to *be* in this alienation. Only at this moment where consciousness - of an object - becomes the pure knowing - of thought itself - can logic arise. Logic is thought in its self-relation, but this

reflection into self can only be the result of its opposite: reflection into another, that is, consciousness as it is developed in the Phenomenology. So, seen in terms of the system in which it is a part,¹ the Logic again begins in a doubled sense: with the *immediacy* of pure knowing that is nonetheless the *mediated* result of an investigation that lies outside its pages - in the Phenomenology. The Phenomenology is the presupposition of the Logic, it thereby 'comes first' in the System, but as the presupposition *of* the Logic it is just as much given from the latter. The Logic is the end of the Phenomenology, but an end implicit at the start, and which implicitly forms the Phenomenology out of itself. The Logic is at once the *basis* of the Phenomenology and its *result*. So "beginning" and "end" switch places in the system. If we want to say that it is the Logic which presupposes Phenomenology, we are at once led to the contrary position: that it is the Phenomenology which presupposes the Logic. Nor should this come as a surprise, for it is really only logic that can posit what amounts to a *logical presupposition* for logical science. That is why, although the pure knowing that begins the Logic is the result of a phenomenological process outside the pages of the Logic itself, it is nonetheless *immanent* to logic's own development. The outside becomes the inside, the mediated result becomes an immediate beginning.

Now the pure knowing which Hegel places at the beginning of the Logic repeats this process: it reveals itself as nothing other than its opposite. "*Pure knowing* as concentrated into this unity has sublated all reference to an other and to mediation." Pure knowing, being without relation to an other "ceases itself to be knowledge"(SL 69), for it has deprived itself of the relationality essential to knowledge as such. "At the extreme point of its union with the object," Hegel writes "knowing has collapsed" (SL 73), has vanished in the very indistinctness it sought. Pure knowing

is knowledge of absolutely *nothing*, which is to say, not knowledge at all. As wholly indistinct and void of content, it is nothing other than “*simple immediacy*.” Pure knowing, then, is really just the empty form of simple immediacy. Simple immediacy *is* in the beginning, and in truth, *all it is* is the mere “is” itself. For this abstract, undifferentiated immediacy, Hegel tells us, is really pure being, “nothing but *being* in general: being and nothing else, without any further specification and filling” (SL 69).

In one sense, then, we *arrive* at “pure being” as a result of the contradiction within “pure knowing” - that in this very purity it ceases to be “knowing” and becomes rather “simple immediacy”. So “pure knowing” shows itself to be “simple immediacy”, and “simple immediacy” shows itself to be “pure being” - that is to say, “pure knowing” and “pure being” are entirely the same; all they are is simple immediacy itself. Thus, they differ from one another in *name* only; and in a certain way, they *are* “name only”, for they are wholly without content, designations empty of all determination. Now it is this emptiness which makes pure being just as much a simple beginning, that is, something *not* “arrived” at, but something purely immediate. The beginning cannot be a “beginning” if it is a result, a beginning cannot be a “beginning” if it is in relation to some other, and so we must begin with the simply immediate, with what has no relation to otherness of any sort. But from the moment this is undertaken, we find that the simply immediate *cannot be* immediate, that it is always already in relation to an other and thus not itself at all. “Simple immediacy” - that which *is not* a result, *is not* mediated - can only be the negative result of mediation, it is literally the im-mediate. Because this negation is born of the beginning itself, neither side alone - neither the beginning nor its end - is the true. The true is rather the movement wherein each side vanishes into its other, a movement Hegel comes to express as

becoming. It is this movement which has always already begun the Logic, but *as* movement is nothing simple - it itself has begun out of its own opposite, the simple immediacy of pure being. The “beginning”, therefore, is doubled insofar as it can be taken in two different ways: the beginning can be taken as what is always already underway: the dialectical movement itself; or it can be taken as the simple immediacy, that is, pure being. In truth, the beginning *as such* must be taken as the simple immediacy, but the simple immediacy cannot be, and in this way gives rise to the dialectical movement. So to take the “beginning” in one way is to have ultimately taken it the other way as well; the “doubleness” of the beginning is just as much its unity. The “beginning”, in other words, can be taken in two antithetical fashions, yet *in the end* that divergence sublates itself. The beginning *is* the very movement at work “always already”, but there is no “always already” without first beginning immediately, with reference to nothing other. There must be the beginning, but from this we see that this beginning is not. The beginning reveals itself to be the movement, but the movement reveals itself to be from the beginning. Now it is, as we will see, only in the end, in “The Absolute Idea” that this movement at work *behind* the beginning will work its way to the *fore*, revealing itself as the constant method of the Logic as a whole .

Into the Beginning

“With What Must the Science Begin?” immediately indicates the movement of self-sublating negativity. The opening line of the chapter is the assertion: “What philosophy begins with must be either mediated or immediate and it is easy to show that it is neither one nor the other” (SL 67), that both refute themselves. *This* beginning is already its own example, for the stipulation that philosophy must begin either with the mediate or immediate is put forward immediately, but

an immediacy that is at once refuted: philosophy cannot begin with either, Hegel states. The only way it *can* begin is that which cannot be begun with. Now the essentially Hegelian point here is not what common sense is led to believe - that 'philosophy cannot begin at all' rather it is just the opposite. The annulment of the philosophical beginning does not mean that philosophy cannot begin, but that, *in and through the annulment of its beginning, philosophy has begun*. The "beginning", that is, must ultimately be preserved and negated, each *in* the other; its simple immediacy must *be* and yet *cannot* be. Hegel's beginning appears to describe the impossibility of philosophy's initial move, but actually it is stating just the converse: the immediacy that becomes its negation and the mediacy that becomes its negation is already the movement of philosophy itself, a movement in which both the immediate and mediate are each carried into the other. There is, as we have seen, a doubled, relationary beginning at work here - the beginning will have begun with the negative moment, but the negative moment will begin only through the initial immediacy. In this, all we are doing is fleshing out what Hegel himself states at the start - that "what philosophy begins with must be either *mediated* or *immediate*, and it is easy to show that it can be neither one nor the other". In the most general and abstract sense, *this* beginning is never departed from, all of the Logic is an expansion of this condition: the necessity of *either* mediate *or* immediate in concert with its contrary necessity - the *neither* mediate *nor* immediate.

This very restlessness reveals what is most essential in Hegelian philosophy. The point is not to be beguiled by a picture of the dialectical operation, to impose *limits* on it in the sense that "it begins this way" or "it ends that way". For just *what* is this way in which the Logic begins? In what sense has it begun in some determinate or singularly identifiable manner? Indeed, the essence of logic is that it begin in the very absence of identity, with complete indeterminacy: pure

being. There is no 'this way', no particular character to this beginning - *so much so* that its opposite must be acknowledged from the start. The beginning, in other words, cannot be simply contained as a "this" or "that" but actively overcomes such containment, is essentially *open*. From the very beginning the dialectic is *open-ended*. Before one can ever speak of "getting beyond" the Hegelian dialectic one must recognize this sense in which it is always already beyond itself. From the very beginning it - to the degree it can even be called an "it" - is in and of the movement of its own un-folding.

The Logical Beginning as Immediate

Pure being begins the Logic, and it is really *only* insofar as this is the case that the beginning can begin at all. The beginning will not be a first unless it is immediate. "*Precisely because* here it is the beginning"(SL 72), logic is not to begin as a result of consciousness, but is going to begin *at once*, without reference to anything other. So Hegel states that the logical beginning must "*not presuppose anything*", must not rest on any further ground "rather it is itself to be the ground of the entire science"(SL 70). Logic, has not truly begun insofar as it rests on some given determination or presupposition. For if this were the case, the *pre*-supposition itself has "begun the beginning". Logic will only have arrived at the true beginning by attaining a point totally void of presupposition, or what is the same, until it has *itself become* the sole presupposition for all other determinations. Thus, logic must begin *absolutely*, without reference to anything other or determinate, for logically, only in this absolute sense is the beginning *itself* initiated; in this way the genesis of logic *is* at the same time 'the beginning' *as such*. "If it were not this pure indeterminateness, if it were determinate, it would have been taken as something mediated,

something already carried a stage further: what is determinate requires an other to a first.

Therefore, it lies in the *very nature of a beginning* that it must be being and nothing else”(SL 72).

The beginning of the Logic and the logic of the beginning are here absolutely inseparable.²

It is in this essential link that the significance of “With What Must the Science Begin?” is established. The importance of this chapter is that it *enacts* the beginning in the act of *identifying* it. In effect, it is a chapter that is ‘doing’ what it is ‘saying’, for in truth it has not begun with “pure being” alone, but just as much with *the conception of what the beginning as such must involve*. Or better: it has begun with both in one. In showing that the Logic must begin with “simple immediacy” the beginning also reveals itself *as the showing that* this is how the beginning is to begin. But this conception of the “beginning” itself is not a preliminary to pure being, rather the beginning *is* pure being, the absolutely simple. “Only in what is simple” Hegel tells us, “is there nothing more than the pure beginning”(SL 78) - this is the essential revelation of “With What Must the Science Begin”. In no way is it a revelation external or accidental to the unfolding of the Logic, and nowhere in the chapter does Hegel indicate that it is to be seen as such.³ Nor could it be; the Logic simply could not begin with “pure being” without having revealed its intrinsic unity with the beginning itself - otherwise it would not have known to begin in this way as opposed to some other. Because this elucidation of *what a beginning is* remains inherent to the “pure being” that begins the Logic, the start of this work itself is identical to that which it writes of: what the Logic itself must actually begin with is the logic of “the beginning” as such. Because the Logic begins only by presupposing nothing, it can only begin with the beginning. The initial content of the Logic is nothing other than the form of “the initial” itself. The absolute of the Logic is implicit here insofar as there is no *possible gap* between its subject

matter and its own form: *its* beginning is none other than *the* beginning. Of course, this immediacy here at the start is entirely formal, the only content here to speak of is form itself, but by the end of the Logic, this one-sided immediacy of empty form will have developed into the true immediacy that is at the same time mediated, or the form that *is* in its developed content.

Logically, the beginning is absolute, Hegel states, and so is “merely *immediacy* itself”. It is, as we have said, purely itself: there can be nothing that mediates it from the outside, nothing other it stands in relation to, and there can be nothing that mediates itself from the inside, no determinations of content from which it results. For Hegel, this beginning *as* immediacy and nothing other is thereby *pure being* (SL 70). We must begin with pure being because pure being is the beginning as such. Consider the case were we to omit this reference to pure being, Hegel suggests, and simply assume a given content at the start, the analysis of which forms the initial step in the scientific development. This, certainly, is the route of common sense, and it is undoubtedly how we understand things in the natural world. Logic, however, is at once faced with a problem in this regard: precisely because logic enquires into thought as such there is nothing for it to assume. Logic cannot begin with ‘this’ thought or ‘that’ thought but only with thought *qua* thought, in its purely formal and abstract sense. The “object” of thought is here nothing more than the form of thought itself. In truth “we should be without a particular object, because the beginning, as the beginning of thought, is supposed to be quite abstract, quite general, wholly form without any content; thus we should have nothing at all beyond the mere idea of a beginning as such”(SL 73). In order to get beyond this, one need only bring out *what* this beginning as such is. The beginning, Hegel states, is “a nothing out of which something is to proceed”(p. 73). As a beginning, it is a beginning of something, the something makes the

beginning a beginning. But because something is to come from it, the beginning cannot be simply nothing, it must contain being also. The beginning, therefore, “contains both, being and nothing, is the unity of being and nothing; or is non-being which is at the same time being, and being which is at the same time non-being”(p. 73). Hegel’s point is that the very idea of the beginning as such necessarily involves the dialectical union of being and nothing: becoming. Of the dialectic, we must say that its beginning - and indeed its end - are not fixed parameters, but are ultimately the movement of becoming. So the dialectic of becoming that the Logic will explore in the first chapter, is at the same time “about” the beginning, about what belongs to the beginning as beginning - its self-negation and preservation. This initial dialectic, then, is at the same time a reflection on its position as the most *primary*. Becoming is the “first” and most basic. Becoming “begins” and remains until the “end” - which is to say that “beginning” and “end” *are* as much as they *are not*. As Hegel states, “*there is nothing which is not an intermediate state between being and nothing*”(SL 105).

The First Chapter

The beginning must be simple immediacy, Hegel tells us, but simple immediacy just is pure being. The beginning is thereby taken up, in the first chapter of the Logic, as pure being - as the absolute absence of determination. For only in this is the beginning in relation to nothing other, and *is* thus “the beginning”. So the beginning is being, *pure* being, and thus it would appear that from this beginning no further progress could ever be made (SL 94), for being is *all* there is. Yet it is precisely *because* being is here taken as pure, precisely *because* “it” is “itself” and nothing other, that pure being is *already* its opposite. A progress of sorts is always already underway.

Pure being, precisely insofar as it is *taken to be* wholly immediate and hence void of all determination, is entirely null. To be *pure* being, being itself rather than the being of this or that determinate entity, is to be purely empty, nothing. As pure being “there is *nothing* to be intuited in it, if one can speak here of intuiting; or, it is only this pure intuiting itself”(SL 82). For pure being is nothing, nothing can be thought of it; being entirely void of content, it is nothing but the empty form of thought itself. For this reason, though, we cannot say that pure being amounts to thought alone. For thought alone - the mere form of thought as such - is equally nothing. We cannot truly speak of “thought” here for *nothing* is being thought of. Hegel specifically states that this “pure empty intuiting” is enough to doubt whether we “can speak here of intuiting at all”. The “thought” of pure being just as much as pure being “itself” amount to the very same: simply nothing.

Yet if pure being is its own opposite - nothing- the converse is equally true. Nothing *is* the totally undifferentiated, nothing *is* not “something”, nothing *is* not this or that. Nothing, as our words here indicate, has meaning, it *exists* for thought. Or rather, it “exists”, like being, as nothing but the empty form of “thinking” - which is itself nothing. Nothing, as such, is pure equality to itself. It is no-thing, no determinateness of any sort. It is thus a pure indeterminateness in relation to nothing other. For this very reason, though, nothing *is* its other - nothing is *being* insofar as being is just as much this simple equality-to-self. “Nothing” is not *nothing* for thought but is rather the *same* as pure being: the thinking of empty self-equality. So precisely through their difference, being and nothing reveal themselves to be identical.

Now it is this their simultaneous identity and difference that is expressed in the third category: “becoming”. Pure being and pure nothing are ultimately the same, Hegel tells us. The truth is

thus revealed as neither one nor the other, but that each side “does not pass over but has passed over” (SL 83) into its other. That is, we do not here derive the one from the other in an external fashion, rather the one *is* the other; the other *is* the one. However, this is possible only by way of their difference. In the vanishing into one another, that is, in their becoming the same the opposite is at once maintained: “they are not the same, they are absolutely distinct”. Their identity is achieved in and through their very separation, and it is precisely this movement of identity-in-difference, a “movement in which both [sides] are distinguished, but by a difference which has equally immediately resolved itself”(SL 83) that is *becoming* . Becoming is not an external category imposed on being and nothing so as to contain them, it *is* what being and nothing are *in themselves*: the movement in which both their opposition and their identification are held together.

This initial dialectic of the Logic has not escaped critical scrutiny. For one thing, as Dale Schlitt has argued, it is doubtful whether this beginning is truly thinkable at all.⁴ Schlitt argues that the beginning of the Logic - as the thought of thought’s own concepts - must meet the demand of thinkableness. “Cognition”, Hegel states in the Logic “is thinking by means of concepts, and therefore its beginning also is *only in the element of thought* - it is a *simple* and a *universal*” (SL 828). The beginning must begin in thought, it must begin, that is, in the conceivable. Schlitt argues, however, that the beginning Hegel gives is just the opposite:

Hegel tried valiantly to defend pure being as the one, necessary and absolute beginning of logical thought and of philosophy as a whole. It was a beginning forced on him by the demands of consistency in a systematically speaking deductively constructed and argued immanent dialectic whose beginnings are characterized by lacking. The absolute beginning had to be the absolutely immediate unity of Subject and object. But try as Hegel might to justify this determinationless first moment of logical thought, he failed to make such a beginning effectively available to that thought, which always remains

determinate, or is no thought at all. Therewith Hegel was unable to make such a beginning really thinkable at all, given his requirement of *begreifendes Denken* (comprehending/grasping thought)” (HT 79-80).

Although Hegel acknowledges that the determinationlessness of pure being is its sole determination, this according to Schlitt, “does not at all solve the problem of how to think being”(HT 81). For from the moment pure being is thought or spoken, “determinateness is immediately and inevitably present”(HT 83). If the beginning is at all conceptually graspable in the way that the Logic itself demands, then it must be of a determinate nature. So for Schlitt, the infinitude of pure being is an impossible beginning - the true opening of the Logic lies in finite being, *Dasein*.

While this is an interesting and considerate position to take in regards to Hegel, it is not one that will be defended here. Schlitt’s view, according to the position taken by this thesis regarding the operation of the Hegelian dialectic, is difficult to accept. The difficulty, however, is not that Schlitt’s characterization of the Hegelian beginning is “wrong”, on the contrary his characterization actually *re-establishes* the point of that beginning - the difficulty is rather in what Schlitt concludes from that characterization. The “problem” Schlitt identifies is in truth *not* a problem, rather it is the very condition the beginning is to reveal. For Hegel’s point is precisely that “pure being”, and just as much “nothing”, *are* unthinkable. “Pure being” ultimately cannot be thought - it amounts to nothing; but “nothing” too cannot be thought - for in being thought it *exists* for thought and thus is not nothing. The mistake however, is to infer from this inconceivability of the beginning that it thereby “leaves thought without a beginning in its own realm” (HT 82), as if this were all that is to be said of the matter. For one of the lessons of this

dialectic is that a certain conceivability persists *even within* what is inconceivable for thought. That is, when we say that “pure being” and “nothing” cannot be thought of we do not mean that they persist *beyond* thought, we mean rather that their very inconceivability *is* all they amount to; that they are “conceived” only *in* their very inconceivability. For from the moment we say pure being and nothing *are* unthinkable we are nonetheless *conceiving* of them in this their inconceivability. If pure being were absolutely beyond conception it would not be anything to write of in the first place; if it were truly not thinkable *at all* then it would not be a “problem”, it would not be anything we could even begin to discuss as an impossibility for thought. Schlitt’s own position is a tacit acknowledgement of this essentially Hegelian point: in order to say, as Schlitt does, that this beginning is not really available to thought, that it is not thinkable at all, there must be a sense in which it is thinkable nonetheless - otherwise there would be nothing for Schlitt to speak of here. In other words, when we say this beginning is unthinkable we must acknowledge the opposite truth in what we ourselves are saying: that it is thinkable *in* this its unthinkability. *Implicit* in the inconceivability of pure being is its being-conceived. Hegel says as much when he states that indeterminacy is its sole determination. The indeterminacy - its impossibility for thought - is in truth its very determination - all there is to be thought of it.

The sole determination of pure being is its very determinationlessness - it is true that this does not “solve the problem of how to think being” but it is equally true that pure being *is to be* a problem for thought. A dimension of inconceivability is the very point of this dialectic. The “problem” is in fact what is most essential here: thought *must* begin the consideration of itself in and through what is not yet conceivable for it, for that is all there *can* be for thought in the very beginning. Now for Schlitt, this means that the Hegelian beginning is at odds with its own stated

aim: to begin in the realm of thought. If the dialectic has its conception in what is essentially unconceivable, Schlitt maintains, then surely it has not begun in the manner it should have, namely, in the domain of the conceivable. But what we are suggesting here is that this inconceivability is *just as much* in the realm of thought, that the impossibility of “pure being” for thought is just that which is to be conceived of in it, that it is not simply an unthinkableness but an unthinkableness implicitly thinkable.

This becomes clearer when we remember that it is the purity of “pure being” that is the real problem Hegel is bringing out in this dialectic. Such purity is always already contaminated by the relational nature of thought. Thought, precisely because it is thought, can only think this purity as unthinkable. That is to say, the purity, the absolute abstraction from any and all otherness, is conceivable only in *its* otherness, in its very *inconceivability*. Purity, that is *taken as* simple immediacy, is the essence of the problem here. But for that very reason we do not want to say that it is *purely inconceivable*, for this would only recreate the very purity thought denies. Schlitt is right in seeing the impossibility of thinking the Hegelian beginning, but we do not want to say that this is simply so. The inconceivability of this beginning is true but it is not the *whole* truth. What must be acknowledged is an implicit thinkableness in the very unthinkability of this immediate beginning. That is why Hegel says of pure being not merely that it is “determinationless” but that this very indeterminacy is its sole determination. It is not *merely* unthinkable, rather its unthinkability is at the same time the sole thought of it.

Comprehending the beginning means comprehending what is implicit in it. Pure being, to the degree that it is inconceivable, is in truth not a concept of thought. Indeed, the first *actual* concept of thought is “becoming”, not “pure being” or “nothing”. But in saying that pure being is

not a concept we must equally affirm that it is not *outside* the concept either. It is rather, as Hegel states in the Encyclopedia,⁵ “the concept not yet posited as concept, or the concept that is implicitly concept” (EP # 185). Pure being is in truth no more a developed concept than it is “beyond conception”. It is rather the *beginning* of the first concept, and *as* beginning it is that in which the concept *is not* but *will be*. In this way we can indeed affirm Schlitt’s (and Hegel’s) point regarding the explicit unthinkability of this beginning, but we can differ from Schlitt’s contention that the Logic has here not begun in the realm of thought.

The Logic does begin in the realm of thought but it does so in the thought of the not-yet conceivable. *Begreifendes Denken* has its beginning in this *implicit* form of itself. Only this is the true beginning of thought. The true beginning of thought cannot be a developed concept, for a developed concept always *presupposes* that process of development, and in the acknowledgement of this presupposition it is acknowledged that the beginning has not yet been attained to. The true beginning, therefore, lies not so much in the first graspable concept of thought, but in the beginning of the process by which it *comes* to be graspable in the first place. The Logic cannot begin with a concept but with the genesis of the concept *as such*- this is the concept not yet conceivable. The true beginning of conceptual thought is the concept that has only just begun its development into being an actual concept, the concept that is immediately, or explicitly, unthinkable: pure being. This simple immediacy *is* inconceivable, but it is an inconceivable that *will be* conceived in its developed result: “becoming”. That is, if pure being were purely impossible for thought, a simple nothing, it would not develop into this initial concept at all. But it does so develop by the very condition Schlitt himself identifies of it - that to think it is to think what is unthinkable; it has always already *become* its other⁶.

We might ask in what way it makes sense to *speak* of pure being. As Schlitt states: “In an extreme form of indirect reference Hegel speaks of being as ‘unexpressable’ (EP # 87R). In the course of the logically later presentation of the universal he writes of being: ‘*Being* is simple as *immediate* being; for that reason it is only something *meant* or *intended* and we cannot say of it what it is’ (SL 601). An unexpressible as beginning of grasping comprehending thought ultimately leaves such thought without a beginning in its own realm” (HT 82). Schlitt goes on to state that “the trouble with ‘being’ however is that, as with any other term (*Ausdruck*) either of thought or speech, determinateness is immediately and inevitably present even before the transition to nothing simply because it is thought or spoken” (HT 82-3). But again, this “trouble” with being is precisely Hegel’s point when he states that its indeterminacy is itself its sole determination - indeterminacy itself does not pass over but has already passed over into determination. What Schlitt claims to be the “trouble” with pure being establishes Hegel’s very point about it. For as Hegel states, being brings out a contradiction between what we mean to say and what we actually say: “we cannot say of it what it is” for saying as such is always already a betrayal of that simple immediacy. Of course, it appears to Schlitt that this “unexpressable” aspect of pure being places it outside the realm of *begreifendes Denken*.

But Hegel specifically states that this unexpressible nature of pure being does not place it outside thought. If anything it is for thought *alone*, as something merely meant rather than something communicable. The mistake, however, is in thinking that this situation remains *static*: the Hegelian point here is not to introduce an unbridgeable schism between the expressible and the unexpressible, the point is rather that this unexpressible, “merely meant” nature is *implicitly* expressible, and will so develop into an expressible content through its own nature. Sublating the

difference between meaning and expression is in some sense the very point of the dialectic Hegel gives here: what has meaning for thought cannot ultimately persist outside an expressible, determinate medium; a purely immediate conceptual thought is “no thought at all”. To think the pure form of thought alone, its pure, simple immediacy - already this is to introduce mediation and determinacy all over again. There is *nothing* to be thought without determinacy. This means, though, that the truth here is not that pure being is *purely* unexpressible, or that it is *simply not* in the realm of thought. Rather, it is *implicitly* and it is not *explicitly*. The truth here is not one or the other but one *in* the other: we must speak of this simple immediacy *and yet* we cannot speak of it; we do think this pure being *and yet* we cannot do so. Hegel’s point is that *even* the unconceivable is given from within conceptual thought; the outside is always already an inside and vice versa. In other words, there is, already at the start, the implicit union of thought and its own antithesis that will become explicit in the full development of the speculative Concept.

The problems Schlitt identifies in pure being (and nothing) in turn have bearing on the Hegelian notion of “becoming”. One reason becoming flounders, according to Schlitt, is that “neither being nor nothing can be established in thought as indeterminate momentary totalities in the movement of absolute thought”(HT 85). But again, it is *precisely because* their indeterminacy cannot simply be established in thought that “becoming” arises. Becoming expresses this movement in which the simple immediacy contradicts itself by having always already passed over into its opposite, as Schlitt himself recognizes. But becoming equally expresses this sense in which the simple immediacy is not simply *nothing* for thought, is not purely unthinkable. For from the moment thought says pure being is unthinkable it has nonetheless thought it in this unthinkable. Pure being is nothing for thought, but at the same time it is not nothing for

thought - this is “becoming’, this movement wherein each side appears while at the same time disappearing into its other.

So far we have attempted to justify the place of “pure being” by bringing to light its complex relationship with thought. But the placement of “pure being” at the beginning of the Logic is justified just as much by the nature of the beginning itself. We have therefore to consider what Schlitt proposes the true beginning to be and to ask ourselves whether this beginning is indeed the logical beginning, the beginning *as such*. Schlitt argues that because pure being is conceptually impossible, the real beginning of the Logic must be made with determinate being, *Dasein*. “Any beginning conceptually graspable in thought which as beginning is not the being of pure thought is in fact *Dasein*, finitude or even more specifically the *Dasein* of finite thought”(HT 84). Thought, as Schlitt notes, “always remains determinate, or it is no thought at all” (HT 80), and this is true - Schlitt, as we have said, is absolutely right in maintaining that the thought of pure being is unthinkable, at least explicitly, and the reason he gives is perfectly sound: its simple indeterminacy is always already in determination. Hegel too insists on just the same point: pure indeterminacy has already passed over into its own contradiction, for the indeterminacy is itself its sole determination. It is not correct, however, to infer that for this reason the true beginning of the dialectic lies in determinate being, or *Dasein*. For thought cannot *presuppose* that it is “always determinate, or no thought at all”, rather this very condition must first of all be demonstrated in thought itself. This is what the dialectic resulting from pure being achieves. The impossibility of thinking pure being has this as its positive result: thought finds determinacy even in the thought of pure indeterminacy. It is *by way of* this demonstration that thought can say “thought is always determinate, or no thought at all”. Thought knows this

precisely *because* the thought of pure indeterminacy remains unthinkable for it; thought will have revealed itself as always determinate in the very impossibility to attain to an absolute indeterminacy. So, if we are to begin with *Dasein* because “thought is always determinate” then *for* that very reason we *cannot* begin with *Dasein* - the real beginning is what enables thought to say that it is always determinate in the first place, namely, the impossibility to think pure being itself. If thought is not merely to presuppose that “thought is always determinate, or no thought at all” then thought must first begin with the opposite condition - pure indeterminacy. This immediacy, we have said, is what cannot-yet be grasped, its conceivability is here only implicit, but for this reason we are at the beginning. This is the true beginning, for in the not-yet conceivable there is only the empty form of thought. In this there can be nothing presupposed, nothing *further* thought must first acknowledge.

Thought, Schlitt is correct in saying, is always determinate. Nothing can be thought without introducing determinacy. But of course, precisely because thought is always determinate, that is in relation to an other, then *this thought itself* is subject to that very same condition; it *itself* must relate to its other - namely, the thought of a simple immediacy, a pure indeterminacy. For indeterminacy is the necessary other of determinacy itself. And so, insofar as “thought is always determinate” a consideration of its determination - pure indeterminacy - is demanded first of all: this is what Hegel gives in pure being. Thought, it is to be remembered, is ultimately a developmental process but this process itself must be the *developed result* of its other, and this other is precisely the pure immediacy of the beginning. For this reason, what Schlitt says regarding the determinacy of thought is true, but it is not a truth of which one can begin *straightaway*. It is rather a truth that itself must be developed as a result.

As we have said, the Logic must begin with the logical beginning, the beginning *qua* beginning. Now determinate being cannot function as the beginning because determinacy makes reference to an otherness at odds with the notion of the beginning itself. The beginning *is* the beginning insofar as it is in relation to nothing other, insofar as it is pure and simple. The very thought of the beginning as such demands that it be a simple immediacy. If the beginning explicitly presupposes some other in order that it be at all - as is the case with *Dasein* - then it is this that is presupposed that indicates the true beginning. Had Hegel begun straightway with *Dasein* itself, that would have been a true “problem”. For determinate being is being-in-relation-to-an-other, it is not the pure simplicity requisite for the beginning *as* beginning.

For Schlitt, however, Hegel has begun the Logic in the way he has in order to be consistent with the demands of the system itself (see above, Schlitt quote p. 79-80). This is not *entirely* the case, however. The Logic, it must be recalled, investigates the process of cognition itself. To attain to the beginning of this process is to begin with the thought of the beginning itself and not any particular content for that beginning. It is by the logic of the beginning alone that the beginning of the Logic is as it is. Indeed, Hegel has begun the Logic in a most *unsystematic* manner - by presupposing nothing else, by beginning only with the beginning itself. Nothing could be more at odds with systematicity than simple immediacy - and yet the system arises out of its absence nonetheless. So it is not that Hegel felt obligated under the demands of systematic consistency to begin the Logic with, as Schlitt states, a beginning “characterized by lacking”(p. 79). For one thing, it is not clear that the dialectical beginning is “characterized by lacking”, or it is not clear that this is all that is to be said of it. Pure being is a beginning characterized first of all as being *without lack*. Pure being has absolutely no relation to otherness, pure being *lacks*

nothing. Of course, for this very reason pure being *is* nothing. As totally without lack pure being is total lack: nothing. Now once the beginning transforms itself in this way it is indeed true to call this a beginning “characterized by lacking” - but *in* this transformation we are no longer at the beginning; or *in* the beginning this “lack” cannot be said of it. The lack essential to the beginning reveals itself after the beginning. Yet this lack is not something Hegel has imposed upon the start, rather it is “the way it is” with the beginning. The strange contradiction of the beginning is that it is at once complete and incomplete. The beginning must be complete in itself, in relation to no other; it cannot presuppose an other for then it is this other that truly begins. Yet the beginning as such is equally incomplete, for it is essentially related to the “middle” and “end” which it is not, or is not yet. At the very beginning all is still to come, which is why Hegel calls the beginning a ‘nothing out of which something is to come’. Thus, it belongs to the very nature of a beginning *qua* beginning that it lack; it is not a lack placed *on* the beginning but a lack in place *from* the beginning.

The Movement of the Beginning

But what do these initial steps of the dialectic reveal about the beginning as such? We have seen that “pure being” ultimately is “nothing”, that “pure being and nothing” ultimately are “becoming”, and that in this way a dialectical procedure is seen to be at work. But to see this merely as a forward momentum is to have fallen into a one-sided picture of the dialectic, for the momentum is just as much a *retrogression* into that with which it begins. “The progress” we are to witness, Hegel states “does not consist merely in the derivation of an other”, it consists just as much in the constancy of the beginning, the getting ever deeper within it. The Logic, in this

sense, is thus the union of two different directions: one moves forward from the beginning along the moments that eventually culminate in “The Absolute Idea”, the other moves ever further back into the beginning until “The Absolute Idea” is revealed as its “ground”. To truly grasp the Logic is to see that *the difference* between these two directions is simultaneously *no difference* at all, that a singularly linear direction cannot contain logic as such. This is why we must not see the movement of the dialectic merely as something that “happens after” we begin with the simple immediacy of pure being, the movement reveals itself, rather, as what is always already underway. Becoming is the “result” of pure being, but it is just as true that pure being *is* in and through becoming, that pure being is just as much the “result” of the latter. The movement of becoming has always “begun” the simple immediacy, but only by way of the simple immediacy does this reveal itself.

The beginning reveals itself as, first of all, the movement away from the beginning: pure being reveals itself to be in truth nothing; in-itself, pure being is this departure from itself, and will return to itself only when this departure is in turn departed from. That is why we have maintained that progress is not entirely straightforward in the dialectic. Hegel states that “the advance is a *retreat into the ground*, to what is *primary* and *true*, on which depends and, in fact, from which originates, that with which the beginning is made” (SL 71). That is to say, the movement outward is at the same time the revelation of what is innermost, the progress is at the same time a getting-further-into the interior. So, in the classically Aristotelian sense, it is the end *which will have begun the beginning*. “This last, the ground, is also that from which the first proceeds, that which first appeared as an immediacy”(SL 71). It is the *end* which reveals itself as the essential ground of the whole process, this is why the dialectical progression is simultaneously a regression, the

expansion is at once a “retreat” into its own essence.

One can indeed work this out further by seeing that the beginning will not have begun anything, will not be a beginning, until what *follows* from that beginning takes shape⁷. The development out of the beginning in turn makes the beginning a beginning; the beginning becomes such after it has begun. But the converse is just as true: the beginning must be an immediacy, must be what is first of all, in order that anything proceed from it. Thus, while it is true to say that the end is the ground of the beginning, the opposite must also be maintained: the end just as much is the result of the beginning itself. Only because the beginning is can the end be arrived at.

But of course, what is at stake here is what the beginning *is* for philosophy; to articulate the beginning philosophically is to articulate the philosophical beginning. Philosophy cannot begin at a point where further determinations are presupposed, it begins when it gets behind all presupposition to the true beginning, to what the beginning as such is. So just as the end is a development given from within the beginning, so too does all progress and modification of philosophy take place within its own un-folding:

the progress from that which forms the beginning is to be regarded as only a further determination of it, hence that which forms the starting point of the development remains at the base of all that follows and does not vanish from it. The progress does not consist merely in the derivation of an other, or in the effected transition into a genuine other; and insofar as this transition does occur it is equally sublated again. Thus the beginning of philosophy is the foundation which is present and preserved throughout the entire subsequent development, remaining completely immanent in its further determinations (SL 71).

In other words, there is a legitimate sense in which the Science of Logic *never* gets beyond “the beginning”, that all of what follows is a delving into, or an expansion of, the being from which it

begins. This reveals something essential about what Hegelian philosophy is: precisely *because* there is a departure away from the beginning, precisely *because* there is the entire development of the Logic outward from the beginning, precisely for this reason all is the result *of* the beginning, all further developments *belong* to it. The beginning is constantly being returned to through its very negation. In this sense, the exodus is just as much a staying-at the genesis, the departing-from is the realization of that which is never departed from at all: the “beginning” as such.

The Speculative Significance of the Circular Form

From the beginning we have seen a movement at work in the Logic, a movement that is not *straightforward* but infinitely more circuitous. Indeed, to the degree that the speculative dialectic can be pictured at all, it is better seen not merely as the line, but as the line turned back upon itself: the circle, to which Hegel himself makes numerous reference. Within “With What Must the Science Begin?” he maintains that the “essential requirement for the science of logic is not so much that the beginning be a pure immediacy, but rather that the whole of the science be within itself a circle in which the first is also the last and the last is also the first”(SL 71). Consequently, the end of the Logic itself returns to the theme of circularity articulated here at the start:

By virtue of the method just indicated the science exhibits itself as a circle returning upon itself, the end being wound back into the beginning, the simple ground, by the mediation. This circle is moreover a *circle of circles*, for each individual member as ensouled by the method is reflected into itself, so that in returning to the beginning it is at the same time the beginning of a new member”(SL 842).

It is to be noted that this circular motif is rarely described by Hegel as a static thing, complete in itself, but as something *coming into being*. That is why it is described out of its opposite: the

line, a figure constituted by the relation between beginning and end. The circle, as Hegel's language indicates, is the result of this polarity of beginning and end, it is the opposition of this very opposition, whereupon each side returns into its other in single union. In other words, "beginning" and "end", though annulled in the circle, are just as much the means by which the circle is produced - they are both negated and preserved in it. Indeed, as one proceeds in the Logic - or in the Phenomenology for that matter - the dialectic reveals itself as predominantly linear, as a bottom-up progression to higher degrees of thought or consciousness, with circularity subsumed to being only the form of each moment. It is only at the end or the beginning of Hegel's works - the points where their form as a whole can be reflected upon - that the pattern reverses itself. When the dialectic comes to reflect on the nature of the dialectical method as such, that is, as a whole, it is then realized as predominantly circular. Hence the linearity that before appeared dominant is now revealed as the method of its own opposite: an overall cyclic pattern in which "beginning"/"end", "high"/"low" etc. are sublated, that is, preserved and negated simultaneously.

The significance of the circle, however, is essential in understanding the importance Hegel attaches to it: the circle is the most basic figure of self-relatedness, for in it any particular point in the circumference of the circle is equal to any other, all points are the same relation to center, so there is nothing extraneous, and precisely in this overall equality it has no beginning, no end. In this way the circle has less to do with particular co-ordinates, and more to do with omnipresence and universality - a point not lost on Christian medieval thought.⁸ The circle is defined by a consistent, singular relation-to-center. The circumference is nothing but the relation to center, and the center is nothing but the relation to its circumference - it is of all geometric figures, the

most unified and self-consistent. The circle, in other words, is that *external* shape that signifies *internal*-relation, that is, self relation. The circle is obviously a spatial figure but this is not its ultimate significance - the essence of the circle is that it signifies no particular place, no particular time, no plurality, no merely contingent co-ordinates - the essence of the circle is rather eternity, unity, necessity and perfection. In other words, it is obvious that the circle just is a limited spatial form, but its symbolic expression is entirely at odds with this condition of itself - for it means the opposite of limitation:eternity, perfection, oneness, etc. It is in this sense, the figure of *the overcoming of the spatial figure*, the exterior shape that means just the opposite: an interiorized, unified self-relation.

When Hegel describes the dialectic as the circle - indeed the circle of circles - one is continually beguiled by a picture of thought, for the circle is, at bottom, an image or figure. The difficulty for thought is in seeing through this picture at the very moment it is summoned into being. In other words, Hegel is saying that "thought becomes circular" only insofar as circularity is in turn recreated in the self-relation of thought, only insofar as the circle in its external form is sublated. That the abstract form of circularity must be, in some sense, sacrificed is given in circularity as such - for it is the spatial figure in which the figure is at the same time overcome. The circle is not a picture by which to ultimately contain thought, for it *means* just the opposite - being beyond containment. Indeed, thought itself realizes this when it ceases to recognize itself in alien representations, and returns into itself.

To take numbers and geometrical figures (as the circle, triangle, etc., have often been taken), simply as *symbols* (the circle, for example, as a symbol of eternity, the triangle, of the trinity), is so far harmless enough; but on the other hand, it is foolish to fancy that in this way more is expressed than can be grasped and expressed by thought. Whatever profound wisdom may be supposed to lie in such meagre symbols... it is properly for

thought alone to make explicit for consciousness the wisdom that lies only *in* them; and not only *in* symbols but *in* nature and *in* mind. In symbols the truth is dimmed and veiled by the sensuous element; only in the form of thought is it fully revealed to consciousness: the *meaning* is only the thought itself (SL 215).

Circularity, insofar as it is symbolic, claims a significance thought must struggle to retrieve; thought must *penetrate* the form to retrieve the abstract content therein. But this depth of the symbol is implicitly thought's own interiority, and the more it appears to go beyond itself, into the symbol, the more it is in truth retreating into itself. What is innermost to the symbol is the thinking that *goes into it*, and it is precisely this that is brought out in thought's becoming circular for itself, that is in its raising itself to the dialectical form of the Concept.

For the Medievals, the circle very often functioned symbolically, that is to say it signified only *abstract* conceptions: perfection, unity etc. in this there is only a *line* extending from the form of circularity to its abstract content for thought: "perfection" or "unity". But in the circle of Speculative thought this line turns back on itself: the content given to thought becomes the circular form of thought itself - the polarity between form/content, symbol/symbolized, etc. becomes their union, their return into one another. When thought so returns to itself the essential meaning of the circle is at last made actual. Only in this way is "perfection" itself perfected, for it is achieved not in any one-sided, abstract sense, but is rather the entirety of concrete content thought has identified with. In other words, thought is seen to be circular precisely insofar as it does not cling to merely abstract identity, but rather externalizes itself in an alien content and returns to itself in and as that difference from itself. It is the circular process of identity, difference, and the return to identity as the difference of difference itself that forms true "oneness", "eternality" "perfection" and so on. Indeed, the entire Medieval significance of the

circle can only be realized when it ceases to be given as a representation for thought and instead returns - in *circular* fashion - into the being of thought itself. So long as the circle is a symbol for thought, there is still the form of the circle on one side and its signified content on the other. As a symbol for thought, it suffers from an exteriority at odds with what thought takes it to be in essence: self-relatedness. The dialectic, however, raises the circle into thought as such; the circle of the Logic - or of the Phenomenology, or indeed of the Speculative system as such - is no longer merely a symbol *for* thought, but *is* thinking itself. That is, precisely in negating the circle as an external figure for thought, and transforming it into thought's own self-relation, the significance of the circle *as* self-relatedness is fully realized.

As a symbol, the significance for thought of the circle is always beyond or separate from the form as such - the form has yet to be raised into the process of thinking itself. But if we look at the symbolized *content* we see this disparity repeated. The significance of the circle itself stands "beyond" thought - for the Medieval mind, the perfection it signifies does not belong to ourselves, but to God. Thought that thinks in symbols can comprehend perfection in the circle, and so *approach* God, but cannot comprehend this perfection as its *own* thinking. The point is really that insofar as thought comprehends the absolute in symbolic representations, it cannot see the absolute *in* the movement of thinking itself, but only as a beyond - for the symbol *itself* is but the indicator of an abstract significance beyond its particularity. When the symbolic form is no longer the expression of a meaning but *is* the meaning itself, then the symbol has ceased being a symbol, that is, it has transcended itself.⁹

The Problem of the Absolute Beginning

For Hegel, to the degree that philosophy takes for its object the establishment of a fundamental principle - substance, monad, etc. - the beginning of the process by which that object is to be attained is left unconsidered (SL 67). Only when philosophy itself has reached the stage where cognitive mediation became essential for objectivity itself, that is, when the subjective act was “grasped as an essential moment of objective truth” (p. 67) could the beginning arise as considerable in itself. For only from this vantage point does the objective content reveal itself as necessarily *bound* to the method by which it is established, such that every content reveals itself as always already begun through the process of cognition itself. For precisely this reason, though, it is “only in recent times have thinkers become aware of the difficulty of finding a beginning in philosophy”(p. 67). How to begin, that is, has become a *problem* distinct to modern philosophy, a “modern perplexity”.

By now it should be clear that the Hegelian response to this problem is not to come down ‘on either one side or the other’. To the degree that the problem is an antinomy between immediacy and mediation, between *either* establishing a groundwork of first principles for philosophy, *or* giving philosophy up, in a sceptical fashion, to the endlessness of presuppositions for any such beginning, then the Hegelian solution is to contradict this antinomy in itself, to reveal how “there is nothing in heaven or in nature or in mind or anywhere else which does not equally contain both immediacy and mediation”(SL 68). The problem is presented through the separation of immediacy and mediation, but this very separation is the real problem here. The solution to the problem lies in overturning what remains *unproblematic* for it: the assumption that immediacy and mediation are wholly external to one another. In other words, the answer to this ‘problem of

modern philosophy' lies in *problematizing* the assumption *essential to* its operation. In this way, the negativity held fast in the problem in turn negates itself, turns back upon itself, resolves itself. The problem itself *becomes the problem* - and herein it disappears. In itself, the *problem is already its own answer*; the Hegelian solution is really to see through the opposition which makes the problem a problem in the first place, to see it as in turn opposing itself, becoming its own answer.¹⁰ The 'Hegelian solution', then, is not imposed on the problem, it is rather the *ab-solution* given from within the problem itself.

The Case of Descartes' Absolute Beginning

In "With What Must the Science Begin", Hegel is not entirely specific about which philosophies in particular have, in recent times, made the beginning an object of philosophical concern. Nonetheless, he does, at one point, mention a beginning for philosophy which "has recently become famous, the beginning with the *ego*"(SL 75). Again, no specific philosophers are mentioned although Kant and Fichte certainly come to mind. But Descartes' Meditations are also an example of the problem Hegel mentions in regard to the ego as a beginning, and in seeing how the Cartesian beginning in particular becomes problematic, we may learn more about the problematic nature of the ego-beginning in general.

For Descartes, it is essential that the true beginning of knowledge not be derivative, but immediately clear and distinct, a fundamental intuition given in the *lumen naturale* of reason. It must be essentially unconditioned, known in and of itself alone - hence the manifold world, as essentially conditioned, transitory and prone to doubt or error can never form the basis of true knowledge. Indeed, true knowledge can begin only with the ego's certainty of itself, it is the ego

that emerges as the truly clear and distinct immediacy for Descartes, that from which external knowledge is merely derivative. In the experience of anything external - a piece of wax, for instance - what is immediately given is not the extensive object, but *that* the object itself cannot be experienced without the self that beholds it: the ego thus emerges as the clear and distinct basis of knowledge.

But of course, Descartes does not merely assume the ego as the way of proceeding philosophically. On the contrary, the method by which philosophy should proceed is of central importance to Descartes: the ego emerges *in and as* this attention to method. Certainly, the brilliance of the *cogito* is that the method by which it is arrived at, is at once the essence of the *cogito* itself: to engage the method of doubt *is* to think, is to *be* that which thinks. To say that the immediacy of the *cogito* is itself mediated by a skeptical mediation is not to criticize the *cogito* but to establish its essential point. The *cogito* recognizes itself as the immediate ground of philosophical thought because it recognizes itself in and as the skeptical method of philosophy: doubt itself is the one thing we can be certain of, to doubt that one is doubting is self-canceling. The negative process of doubt at once becomes equal to its own negation, that is, it becomes an indubitable certainty - and here, it is said, philosophy finds its immediate beginning.

Yet for all this the *cogito* has nonetheless overlooked its own essential possibility: the negative activity can become a positive foundation for philosophy only by way of its own negation, by way of the apparent content of the world called into doubt. What the *cogito* overlooks, in other words, is the method *of the method itself*. The true ground of the *cogito* is the very world the Cartesian ego extracts itself from, a world without which there could be no sceptical negating at all. The *cogito* begins precisely because the world has always already begun it. Because the world

belongs to the Cartesian essentially, the Cartesian is destined to return to it again and again. He cannot but return to what he always considers himself to be at odds with.

This is what is presupposed by Descartes in establishing a beginning without presupposition: the world as a network of appearance - a secondary, mediated realm - is wholly necessary for, and thus interior to, this simple, immediate beginning for philosophy. Indeed, precisely because the immediacy of the *cogito* is rendered negatively, as a process of isolating itself from its surroundings, its pure immediacy is essentially a pure mediation - for negativity is essentially an in-relation-to. This condition, of course, does not belong to Descartes alone but to the nature of immediacy as such, and thus will befall all attempts at beginning philosophy upon some isolated point - this is, in part, the lesson of "With What Must Science Begin?".

The point is that the "I" is not merely self-certainty, the "ego as such is at the same time also concrete, or rather, the ego is the most concrete of all things - the consciousness of itself as an infinitely manifold world"(SL 76). The world belongs essentially to what the ego is, that is why the diremption of the Cartesian ego from the world is just as much a self-diremption, a merely abstract self. The cogito appears as the point of self-coincidence, when it is just as much the extreme of self-estrangement. Hence the ego Descartes arrives at is fundamentally foreign to what the ego as such is taken to be. For the point of beginning with the ego, Hegel states, is its familiarity: the ego is to meet the requirement that "the *first* truth must be something with which we are [all] acquainted... something of which we are *immediately certain*"(SL 75). The first truth cannot be a mere contingency, but the most universal and basic. In this way, its immediacy is connected to its familiarity: it must be *given* in all, rather than deduced. But the cogito betrays these aims. The problem of the *cogito* is that in order to *show* this familiarity and immediacy of

the “I” as the true beginning of philosophy, it must *do* the opposite: produce an “I” mediated by the negation of the world, and it is really this negation that has already begun the Cartesian beginning. Indeed, precisely by way of this negativity, this is an “I” no longer familiar but removed.

Pure knowing is not immediately present in the individual consciousness but only as posited through the absolute act of the ego in raising itself to that stand-point, [therefore] we lose the very advantage which is supposed to come from this beginning of philosophy, namely that it is something thoroughly familiar, something everyone finds in himself which can form the starting point for further reflection (SL 76).

The opposite of what the *cogito means* to accomplish is already at work within it, and seeing the cogito dialectically means bearing witness to this which it itself is blind to, while at the same time, seeing the necessity of that blindness, that the dialectic itself is nothing without it. That is why it can never be a matter of merely denying the picture of philosophy Descartes puts forward, but of assenting to it to such a degree that it transforms itself. It is a matter of being *more Cartesian* than Descartes himself, of seeing through the immediacy he espouses. Thus, Descartes’ error does not lie, as many presuppose, in the drive for an absolute immediacy and autonomy itself, the fault does not lie in *these*, or in the fact that philosophy cannot ever claim such absolute goals for itself, rather, the fault lies in the fact that he took immediacy in its immediate appearance, as something wholly divorced from mediation, something purely self-identical. But self-identity as such, is always already the result of its own opposite, and the immediate appearance of the immediate is itself a result *mediated* by its opposition to conditionedness, negativity and appearance as such. Hence the ground, as a point of self-coincidence, is in truth, not the ground at all. As long as one takes a “foundation” as it

immediately appears, as an isolated, simple point, one does not have a foundation at all but its very opposite: something that can only be arrived at negatively, from elsewhere, and thus is not itself an immediate beginning. The problem, in other words, is not that Descartes was a foundational thinker, but that *he was not foundational enough*. For the ground of philosophy cannot be a point, but is to be found in the movement of philosophy as a whole, in the very process of philosophy and philosophizing. The essence of the dialectic is not merely to negate this immediate beginning but to see through such an immediacy, to *see* it realized in its *vanishing*.

What, then, is the true significance of Descartes' absolute beginning. Firstly, it is that philosophy *must* posit a foundational point. To merely negate the foundational impulse in philosophy, to see in it *only* that error which "anti-foundationalism" redeems itself from, is to repeat that error. For it belongs to what philosophy *is* that it demand an absolute basis for knowledge, a wholly immediate basis, in debt to no other. It is in this demand for the immediate that philosophy keeps its end in view - the *ultimate* knowledge that makes philosophy what it is. The absolute beginning is in this way an end for philosophy. Yet, precisely *because* this immediacy is the goal of philosophical speculation, it *negates* the immediacy with which it begins: thought finds the immediacy *as such* to be already its' own opposite, already a mediation; it is not at all the beginning sought for but something other. That is, it belongs to philosophy to demand an immediate beginning just as much as it belongs to philosophy to negate that beginning. A genuine immediacy cannot be a foundational point, or a perspectival limit for philosophy, rather it is the mediatory process itself, the very movement by which the foundational principles, points, limits etc. philosophy posits for itself are overcome.¹¹ In a

sense, the only way immediacy can truly result for philosophy is *through the impossibility of its merely abstract sense*. That is, the one-sided immediacy that initiates must be seen to negate itself, to *be not* the immediacy it takes itself to be and so gives rise to negativity. But the essence of negativity is, in turn, just as much to *be not* itself. Thus, the negating of immediacy is already *its own negation*, negativity negating itself, negativity in its self-relatedness and thus ultimately the very realization of the immediacy denied.

CHAPTER 2: THE END OF THE LOGIC

The Absolution of Method

As will become clearer later on, what is essential to “With What Must Science Begin?” becomes explicit at the end of the Logic, in “The Absolute Idea”, and this essentiality is precisely the concern with *method*. Implicitly, it is method that circumscribes the very question “with what must philosophy begin?” To enquire after the philosophical beginning is to recognize *first of all* that the means by which a philosophical end is realized is *itself* something that must be established philosophically. It is easy enough for philosophy to realize that the object cannot be assumed from the start but must be secondary to means of its presentation, but it is the brilliance of the Logic to have turned this around, to have seen that “means” itself cannot be assumed from the start but must be established objectively - that is, out of the nature of the beginning itself. Thus, the Logic begins neither with a particular object of consideration, nor with a particular method of consideration: rather, its method is to begin *without* method, to presuppose nothing, to begin with nothing but the beginning itself. The “method” that unfolds out of the beginning is

really that movement always already underway.

Now this achievement of the Logic is not accidental, it is rather the inherent result of philosophy's reflection on its own method, that is, of philosophy in its *modern* form. It is when philosophy affords a primacy to epistemological considerations that method becomes a distinct concern. As Hegel says, "when the *subjective* act has also been grasped as an *essential* moment of objective truth, ... this brings with it the need to unite the method with the content"(p. 67). Indeed, since Descartes, philosophy's consideration of method as *its own responsibility* has become essential to what modern philosophy *is*. This is what Habermas means when he states that "modernity can and will no longer borrow the criteria by which it takes its orientation from the models supplied by another epoch; *it has to create its normativity out of itself*"(Habermas p. 7). It is precisely this creation that brings philosophical method to the forefront for philosophy.

This is a distinction not in the sense that Medieval philosophy had *no* method, it is rather that method did not arise first of all for Medieval philosophy, did not arise as something to be created here and now rather than taken up from the past. Perhaps the simplest reason for this was that, despite the Medieval's great respect for philosophy, in the end it remained subordinate to divine truth. Thus the more philosophy served theological ends, the less could philosophy's *own* project become central for itself. Hence the logical method of the Scholastics was basically beyond transformation, a *timeless* continuation of the Aristotelian/Platonic beginning of philosophy. With the Cartesian "new beginning" for philosophy, however, the re-creation of the present becomes primary for philosophy. The task of philosophy is thus to *retrieve itself* from the past, become modern, and the essence of this distinction lies in establishing a mode ¹² for itself, in seeing its method as something to be created here and now. For philosophy to become modern is

thus for philosophy to enter into the recreation of itself: Descartes' sceptical doubt, Spinoza's axiomatic method, Kant's transcendental idealism and the recognition of philosophy as system, Fichte's dialectic of the ego are all methods that seek to transform the very nature of philosophy. That is precisely what difference of method achieves in philosophy - different forms of philosophy itself. And it is in this way that modern philosophy becomes a transformative project.

Now the absolute method of the Logic is *the transformation of this transformative impulse itself*. The transformation from "this" philosophical form to "that" philosophical form which marks its modern progress, is transformed in the speculative dialectic to the *inner* operant of philosophy as such. A particular form of philosophy is seen to *contain* in itself the movement into its other; the external differentiation of philosophical forms becomes the *inherent* difference within the shapes of philosophy. In the speculative dialectic the modernist transformation of philosophy becomes the philosophy of transformation. It is precisely the "labour of the Negative", the active movement of transformation, that reveals itself as the life of philosophy in its entirety. It is, for this reason, a mistake to reduce the dialectic - that is, this movement itself - to but a particular "method" for philosophy. This "absolute method", rather, is at once identical to and different from the philosophical articulation of mode. Hegel emphasizes time and again in the close of the Logic - the method is not a "mere *manner* peculiar to the process of cognition" (SL 825), it is not a merely mental operation in which a content is given to it in an external fashion. It is rather *the* method in which both cognition and its objective determinations, in which both consciousness and the object, are no longer both but *one* - or rather, precisely because they are the former they are at the same time the latter. If this were a "manner" peculiar to cognition alone, then, there would exist an exteriority for it, an other. But this method is precisely the

dialectical relationality in which and out of which 'exteriority' and 'otherness' are. It cannot be 'a method' as opposed to some other insofar as the very idea and possibility of otherness belongs to what this method is.

In the entire course of the Logic, Hegel states, "all possible shapes of a given content and of objects came up for consideration"(SL 826). Any particular content for thought has its possibility in a certain way of thinking: being, quantity, quality, essence and so forth. That is, a particular content has its possibility in a certain mode or shape of thought, and it is the system of these that the Logic reveals. Now what is revealed in the absolute Idea is *the* mode of all modes, the absolute method of the Logic. The absolute Idea is, in a certain sense, the *actuality* of all the "possible shapes of a given content", the shape of all possible shapes, their ultimate mode of being. In this way, the absolute Idea, as Hegel states, is "the sole subject matter and content of philosophy" (SL 824). It contains, in result, "*all* determinateness within it" (p. 824). Properly understood, the absolute Idea - which is in truth the speculative dialectic - forms the true method of philosophy insofar as there is no other determinacy remaining exterior to it. So in no way can the dialectic be seen as *a* method for philosophy, and to do so is precisely to overlook what one is claiming to see.¹³

The dialectical method is not externally imposed on philosophy from the start, it is the method of the start itself. It belongs to what the dialectical process *is* that it not begin with itself but in the very *absence* of dialectical relationality: the immediate, inert beginning. Only by assenting to what this immediacy is, does dialectical mediation unfold itself: the dialectic *is* through its own opposition, it is born from, and *carries out*, that negativity in such a way that its opposite is entirely within itself. In Hegel there thus lies the inversion of the Cartesian beginning of

philosophy. For now the method by which philosophy begins lies no longer in the method of negation but lies rather *in the negation of method itself*. At the start, nothing is assumed, not even the mode by which philosophy is to proceed. All that can be assumed at the beginning is *the beginning* itself - which is why we sought to demonstrate the link between the beginning of the Logic and the logic of the beginning. This beginning in turn sheds light on Hegel's 'transformation of the transformative' in modern philosophy: to the degree that it itself is a beginning philosophy anew, it is so as just the opposite - the beginning of all beginnings, what is universal within all new modes of philosophy, namely, the movement of philosophy as a whole. The Hegelian beginning, by beginning with the simple immediacy of the beginning, in turn shows it to be the mediated result of the movement of thought itself. It is the living *process* - one in which any beginning is ultimately but a *part* - that has always already "begun" the beginning. But the *significance* of this, it could be said, is that it likewise reveals the ongoing process of philosophy as more basic than any attempt to begin it 'anew'. The modern tendency to constantly transform philosophy, to begin it against the past, to revolutionize it, is incorporated in Hegel as the very *constancy* of philosophy itself - its truth is not *this* mode or *that* mode, but the ongoing movement of transformation itself. That aspect of Hegelian philosophy is itself transformative, but it is such that it at once carries through the modern tendency in philosophy while at the same time turning it inside out. In a sense, the Hegelian beginning is *at once* novel and timeless. To begin without a particular "method," without any instrument by which to proceed philosophically - this is to begin with the beginning. It is not from the method of the philosopher, but from out of the beginning itself that the true method arrives; the absolute method - the method of philosophy itself - can only arrive out of its own 'absence'.

In Descartes' method Descartes *himself* is established - not only in the literal sense by which he deduces his existence in the *cogito*, but in the larger sense of identifying Descartes in distinction from the Scholastic tradition. But again this is seen through in Hegel: to begin, as Hegel does, not by presupposing a particular formal method for philosophy, but by beginning with the beginning *as such* is to remove "the Hegelian method" from Hegel himself - it is to completely excavate the beginning from the unrecognized presuppositions of the philosopher. No method, no particular way of undertaking philosophy is being assumed - it is only by presupposing that *no picture of itself be presupposed* that Logic can get off the ground, for if one criticizes this as itself a 'presupposition' one is only fulfilling the very demand it speaks of. It is crucial to see that the dialectic is not a way of establishing the identity of *a* particular path of thought but the living identity of thought as such. In this way it continues in the modern preoccupation with philosophical method, but in such a way as to absolutize it, to remove it from being the emblem of a unique identity. In truth, the dialectical "method" is the *absolution* of philosophical method. The true method is not the vehicle of a philosopher or a philosophy but is the actuality of philosophy as an ongoing process - and in this way it transcends being "a method" at all. It is, in this movement, the universal and communal life of thinking, and cannot simply be the thought of this man, at this time, at this place - to see it as such is to not see dialectically at all.

The Logic is undoubtedly the result of modern philosophy, but a result in which the modern is seen-through. For the dialectic of logic is *the sole* philosophical "mode" - the essence of philosophy as such - precisely because it is nothing other than the inner relation of all possible modes. As Hegel says: "The logical aspect of the absolute Idea may also be called a mode of it;

but whereas mode signifies a particular kind, a determinateness of form, the logical aspect, on the contrary, is the universal mode in which all particular modes are sublated and enfolded”(p. 825). That is why, to the degree that speculative dialectics becomes the method of philosophy, the very word “mode” or “method” must be thought against at the same time it is employed. For there is nothing behind the method to employ it *as* a method *for* something. In other words, the “method” here, insofar as it is absolute, becomes no different from *the way it is*. This form, as Hegel says, is the “absolute foundation and ultimate truth”(SL 826) - there is nothing further by which this form could be justified - it is. And so, one must not, despite what the word itself connotes, see this “method” as an instrument. One must overcome, that is, the *immediate* sense of the word as a mediator between two extremes, and come to see in it the mediatory process in which and out of which all extremes are; that is, a process for which there is nothing other than what is its own other, and thus is in this way a *return* to immediacy out of mediation.

The Absolute Idea as Method

Hegel states that the absolute method is *analytic* (SL 830), for it does not add a determinate content to the matter at hand, but rather shows the determinacy buried within the subject matter itself. Yet for the very reason that, as we have shown, the dialectic is to begin with a simple immediacy, it “exhibits itself as an other”, and does so by virtue of the simple universality it is. Its simplicity, or lack of determination, becomes its very determination. What it is not becomes what it is. The absolute method then, is no less synthetic than it is analytic (p. 830) - or better, precisely insofar as it is one, it is the other. For the method is not analytic by entertaining merely self-identical propositions of the sort “a=a” and so forth; nor is it synthetic in the sense of adding

particularity to the simple universality with which it must begin. The self-identity of the analytic relation is in truth a self-negation, a genuine otherness of the synthetic sort, but it is equally true that this exteriority and otherness is its own, and thus belongs to it in an analytic sense. In other words, what is contained as the immanent, that is, *analytic* truth of the analytic proposition itself is precisely its being *synthetic*. Similarly, the synthetic is in truth the analytic, its result. The content the synthetic proposition *brings* to the simple universal is here the determinacy *belonging* to, interior to, the simple universal itself. So the absolute method is no more what is ordinarily meant by “analytic” than it is what is ordinarily meant by “synthetic” (SL 831). The absolute method does not cling to ‘what is ordinarily meant’ but attains, rather, to the transformation of the familiar, to the extraordinary. Indeed, we would be thinking too ordinarily if we saw the absolute method as some third element distinguished from either the “analytic” or “synthetic” - on the contrary it is the method in which both are what they are, it is the method that sees through these modes and reveals itself therein.

Hegel maintains that this being-at-once-synthetic-and-analytic realization is to be considered the *dialectical* moment of the absolute method, for therein otherness is brought forward as *belonging* to the subject matter at hand, that is, as genuine contradiction - being at once itself and other. For Hegel, dialectic is “one of those ancient sciences most misunderstood in the metaphysics of the moderns, as well as by popular philosophy in general, ancient and modern alike” (SL 831). Thus, although truly founded by Plato, dialectic has suffered a long history of misunderstanding, only to truly emerge again in Hegel’s own time, with Kant: “it must be regarded as a step of infinite importance that [with Kant] dialectic is once more realized as necessary to reason”(p. 831). Dialectic emerges out of the darkness of its misunderstanding and

returns “once more” to the philosophical centrality it deserves - all that is left is to turn the Kantian dialectic against itself, to work through it to the point “opposite of that arrived by Kant” (p. 831).

Putting aside what it means for this misunderstanding to have occurred, we must also ask in what the misunderstanding consists. The essence of the misunderstanding to which the dialectic succumbed, Hegel tells us, lies in the fact that it was seen to have only a negative result (SL 832). For the ancients, the dialectic consisted chiefly in the revelation that for any given assertion the opposite assertion is equally necessary. “The conclusion drawn from dialectic of this kind is in general the *contradiction* and *nullity* of the assertions made” (p. 832), but for the ancients this nullity extended in two opposing directions: it revealed either the nullity of the subject matter at hand or the nullity of cognition itself. It is this that led certain of the ancients to deny truth to the world itself, or in contrast, to deny truth to the practice of philosophy, to see in philosophy a type of self-refutation for which common sense and customary practice are the only true antidote.

Now this merely negative picture of the dialectic is the result of a merely finite thinking, a thinking that stops short of extending the dialectic into the determinations of thought themselves. The dialectic may nullify the matter at hand, or it may nullify cognition, but the categorical determinations out of which these are constituted are always presumed as fixed and immobile. One can render *X* void, for example, by showing both that ‘*X* is present’ and ‘*X* is absent’ but what remains is to turn this relation around and consider the relation of presence and absence itself. The determinations exhibited in the subject matter, for example, “receive no special attention and are presupposed as valid in themselves” (SL 833), yet it is precisely these determinations which have formed the content of the Logic - identity and difference, the one and

the many, the finite and the infinite, etc. - that “are the sole thing that *matters*”(p. 833) in the subject matter. Nothing can be considered without them, they are the essence of what is at hand. They are, as the Logic has shown throughout, “in and for themselves a transition”, essentially dialectical.¹⁴ But to the degree that the determinations of thought are presumed, and are not seen as dialectical in themselves, dialectic itself becomes an external operation. The determinations, taken to be stable in themselves, can create a dialectical condition only in an “external connexion”(p. 833) with the subject. Thus, the dialectical condition appears as a peculiar condition belonging to the subject matter or the subject of cognition alone. This is precisely the picture of things that the Logic seeks to overcome. In the Logic, dialectic is not an unfortunate problem that results from some limitation of cognition itself or some fault in the subject matter as such. For dialectic does not belong to one or other of these, rather the ‘one and other’ belong to dialectic.

The absolute method proceeds immanently. For the absolute method, Hegel states, “does not behave like external reflection but takes the determinate element from its own subject matter, since it is itself that subject matter’s immanent principle and soul” (SL 830). It is something quite other than the finite cognition of the understanding which takes up its content in an abstracted fashion. The absolute method, that is, does not begin with a set of presuppositions external to the subject at hand, it is rather an immanent process developed out of the subject matter itself. The movement of contradiction is not *applied* to the subject - the subject is *in itself* contradiction. The inner “soul” of the subject matter *is* the absolute method: the negativity that arises out of initial immediacy just *is* the negativity of the dialectic process itself. The dialectic is not a method one brings to the matter at hand, it is rather the very essence of the matter, “the way

it is". Thus, those essential determinations of any subject matter whatsoever, that is, the operants of thought the Logic has taken for its content do not form a fixed and given substrate, rather they are in truth the dialectic itself, they are that movement in and through which all subject matter is what it is.

What Hegelianism thus accomplishes is an extension of the dialectic into what had previously only been presupposed in an immediate, or non-dialectical sense. It is thus by extending the dialectic into what had been external to it - by making the dialectic *absolute* - that it can no longer have "only a negative result". For once the form of logic is itself seen to be dialectical, once the inner ground of anything at all - be it the matter at hand or cognition - is dialectic, then this very dialectic which negates the matter or cognition is equally that in which they are brought to life. Indeed, to the degree that the dialectic is now absolute, no longer held against an inert realm of determinations left untouched by it, that is to the degree that dialectic becomes *entirely achieved*, it simply cannot have its end in merely one-sided assertions of the sort that its result is only negative. If that alone is the 'result', then the dialectic has yet to result, for the negative itself is the result of an initial positivity or immediacy, and precisely this must be brought out. We could say the same thing this way: precisely insofar as the dialectic is taken as "having only a negative result" then *this* result must in turn be negated. The "negative result", precisely because it *is* negative, is already its own contradiction, the negative of itself. The "negative result" *negates this result* and dialectically restores the positive. In this way there results the restoration of immediacy that is *at the same time* the furthest reach of difference; the positivity which alone is absolute negativity. In other words, Hegel is saying that the merely negative dialectic of the ancients is *not negative enough*. Negation is not yet itself, not yet truly negation, to the degree

that it preserves itself from its own destructive power. In other words, negation becomes *entirely negative* in and through its becoming the restored immediacy. This means, in essence, that one must see through the dialectic in such a way that it no longer has a result that is *only* this or *only* that. This latter point, however, can only be developed in the second section of this thesis, where we look at the critical attempt to contain the dialectic in a particular fashion.

The Method of the Absolute Idea

The dialectic begins insofar as “a universal *first, considered in and for itself*, shows itself to be the other of itself (SL 834). Identity, for example, by its own accord, by way of what it itself is shows itself to be difference. But if the initial immediate is now extinguished in the other that mediates it, in its negative, this negative result is not merely itself. This is “not the *empty negative*, the *nothing*, that is taken as the usual result of dialectic. Rather it is the *other of the first*”(p. 834). Only by way of what the negative is *not* is it an *other* at all. Without a universal first, the negative *is not*; for the negative results from the first and thus is possessed *by* it in the very act of dispossessing itself *from* it. In other words, the passing away of the first in the other is at the same time the reception of what the first is in-itself. The going-out is a going-in. The “first is essentially *preserved* and *retained* even in the other”(p. 834). In other words, to truly grasp the absolute Idea it is not enough to hold these contradictories “*asunder* in juxtaposition and temporal succession”(SL 835), the separation of the one and the other must be raised into their self-sameness - the other being the one *because* it is the other, the one being the other *because* it is the one.

This differentiating process remains the same throughout. In the dialectical negation that

destroys the immediate first the immediate is recreated once again: to the degree that the first has been extinguished we are left with the negative alone, with a simple determination, an immediacy (p. 834). Thus *in being itself*, the mediation passes over into *its* other, just as the first in its self passed over into mediation. But again, to see what mediation *is* in itself is precisely to see that it *is not*-itself. That is, the contradiction of the negative as simple determination is given in that very determination: that is, it is just as true that it cannot be itself alone, for it *is* the negating relation to a positive, and thus possesses this its other within itself. It is itself an immediacy, yet itself is the negation of immediacy. It belongs to negation to oppose itself, but in this opposing it becomes itself. "It is the *other in its own self*" Hegel states, "the *other of an other*; therefore it includes *its* own other within it and is consequently, *as contradiction*, the *posited dialectic of itself*"(p. 835). From the im-mediate itself mediation is given, negativity results, but now this negativity is already the negation of its negation, for in this self-sacrifice negation is truly negative in itself; its self-identity lies in not being self-identical, in contradicting the abstracted, a=a form of identity as such. Now in this fulfillment of negation there is at the same time the fulfillment of the immediacy from which the dialectic began. Negation is ultimately the restoration of what it is-not. *Now*, then, is just as much what has always been. The end is a returning to the beginning: "as self sublating contradiction, this negativity is the *restoration* of the *first immediacy*, of simple universality; for the other of the other, the negative of the negative, is immediately the *positive*, the *identical*, the *universal*"(SL 836). The difficulty for thought, of course, is to hold fast to the negativity of the positive, the identical, the universal. For these terms are no longer simply themselves, they *are* the relation of the negative to itself, negation's own negating activity. The positive, the identical, the universal: these terms now

persist in and as their opposite, just as their opposites have been raised into themselves. The end of the dialectic is not a retreat from difference, negativity and so forth, it is rather the opposite - the constantly-remaining-with difference and negativity, so much so that “the positive, the identical, the universal” are its own expression.

So it is important to see, throughout all this othering, a sameness that nonetheless remains: the other of the othering. The dialectical moment of the first consists of revealing the difference within it, the particularity implicit in the simple universality of the beginning. The dialectical moment of the second is just the opposite; to reveal the unity contained in the negative. But though the content of the two moments differs, the transitional form of the dialectic differs not at all. Every introduction of difference is at once a *repetition*. The *othering* is in itself a remaining-the-same, and the “Absolute Idea” is itself the expression of what has remained constant throughout all the differences of content in the Logic. But what must never be lost sight of is that this sameness is difference that has become absolutely different, to think with this “sameness” is to think against it, to see it as nothing other than the absolution of otherness. Those who criticize the Hegelian absolute for its failure to let difference be are the true perpetrators of the crime they condemn, for it is they, not the absolute, that seek to maintain difference in its self-identity; that is, as something that is, in the end, different from its absolution.

In the end, Hegel tells us, the truth of the dialectic is its result (SL 837), but the result of the dialectic cannot *rest* with any simple, *X is Y* proposition as to what this result is. Ultimately, the result means going back to the very movement by which it is result; the end of the dialectic is the recognition that the end - as a determination - is inherently not-itself, already beyond itself in a process in which it is constantly overcome and constantly reproduced. “Such forms of judgment

as: the third *is* immediacy and mediation, or *it is the unity* of them, are not capable of grasping it; for it is not a quiescent third, but, precisely as this unity, is self-mediating movement and activity”(p. 837). But if the truth of the dialectic does not lie in the proposition alone, neither does it lie in the negative judgement. There is no one ‘shape’ of language that captures the dialectic, for the dialectic is the relation of all possible shapes.¹⁵ If the proposition is inadequate to the dialectical result, this inadequacy is its own result, for the overcoming of this inadequacy, its movement into the negative judgment, the syllogism and so forth, is its own movement. The result of the dialectic in which the proposition is negated is nothing independent of the proposition - it is what is innermost to it.

The absolute is a matter of thinking contradiction *as* contradiction - a task thought refuses as long as it sees the relation at work in terms of temporal “succession” or spatial “juxtaposition.” The relation is not external, with the one being ‘here and now’, the other being ‘there and then’, it is rather intrinsically necessary to what they are. It is precisely this intrinsic negativity that eludes a thinking for which identity is sovereign, for which $a=a$ alone. To the degree that common sense thinks contradiction in terms of an external juxtaposition of opposites it has yet to think contradiction at all. But this is really all that merely finite thinking can do: because identity alone is the law of its thinking, contradiction as such remains unthinkable for it (SL 835). Yet, as Hegel briefly notes, in its very avoidance of contradiction, that is, from the moment contradiction is *principally* recognized as impossible for thought, it is thought of nonetheless (p. 835). Here we are referring to the Principle of Non-Contradiction, which asserts as a matter of logical necessity that nothing can exist as contradiction. It denies contradiction in principle, in and as a formal law of thought. The Principle of Non-Contradiction understands contradiction to be logically

impossible; that is, nothing can be essentially contradictory because contradiction is unthinkable. Contradiction makes for the sheer absence of actuality, pure nullity. But already, in principle, contradiction cannot be a mere nothing - otherwise there would be nothing to oppose, otherwise there would be no principle to articulate this absence. Contradiction is said to *be* a nothing, and herein contradiction is put forward: it must *be there* for the very principle that sees only its absence; it must be brought *within* the very law which renders it an unthinkable beyond. This is just as much to say that the Principle of Contradiction would itself be non-existent without contradiction. *In principle, contradiction must be essential for any principle which states contradiction is-not.* The contradiction the principle declares to be sheer nullity, pure not, is already the inner movement of the principle itself; it *is* in this its *own* 'not'. In a merely formal or principled sense, contradiction must persist within the very Principle of Non-Contradiction.

It is in this movement that we have been tracing throughout that logic comes to life. It is commonsensical to rid the negative moment from logic, to reduce logic to a static set of axioms of the sort $a=a$ etc., but for Hegel, to extract this aspect of misidentification is to misidentify logic itself. The attempt to rid the negative from logic *becomes* precisely that negativity - for one is mistaking reason as something to be contained in the finitude of the understanding. The more one attempts to *seize* logic in terms of foundational - that is *immediate* - axioms, the more logic is *missed*. For the point is that logic is not any sort of self-identical entity, not a table of inert laws and principles, rather it is the process of comprehending itself through the self-contradiction of those inert laws and principles, through mis-identification, through steps that reveal themselves to have been inadequate positions. But at the same time, this negative aspect contains a positive result: the inadequacy of a previous state is itself seen through a logical advance. Logic

comprehends itself through the very differing from “itself,” but in this very act the difference is sublated; what is genuinely opposed to “itself” is in turn only “itself.” The identity of logic is to not be self-identical, that is, it *receives* its identity in and through the *negation* of self-identity.

Beginning in the End

It is only in the end that the beginning is reached; for the process that works itself out to the end is just as much within the beginning. The empty universality which began is, of its own accord and movement, now fulfilled as concrete, as a universality realized in and through particularity, mediation and negation. The beginning of the dialectic, insofar as this is conceived in terms of a merely formal universality, can be seen as imperfect (SL 839), but it is not simply so, for the overcoming of this imperfection is its own result. If it is an imperfection of the immediate beginning that, as we have seen, it is really not an immediacy at all but is always already mediated, one should not conclude that the beginning as such is simply imperfection. It is this merely abstract negation of the beginning that is rendered by those who see in every philosophical beginning the need for further, antecedent justification such that the beginning itself never gets off the ground; it is a need, that is, which leads nowhere but the infinite retrogression of proof and deduction (p. 839). This spurious infinitude belongs not to the beginning, but to that reflection not yet raised into the Concept (p. 839). The need to begin with an unconditioned is genuine, and the Logic realizes this need in beginning with *pure immediacy as such*: pure being, the absolute indeterminateness of which is already its own impossibility: pure being “is” nothing. The beginning contradicts itself, to be sure, but of its own accord. It is not an external contradicting of the sort that “to begin here, then that must be there, and if that is

there then there must be another behind it and so on to infinity”.

This spurious infinitude, as Hegel has pointed out, is destined to always fall short of the infinite, for it can only see the infinite as the abstract negation of the finite, a wholly separate realm. “This infinite has the fixed determination of a *beyond*, which cannot be reached, for the very reason that [the beyond] *is not meant to be reached*” (SL 142). Thus the purely *limited* conception of the infinite prevents the infinite from ever being realized. All that is attained is the futility whereby the finite is constantly repeated in the very attempt to transcend it: the spurious infinite attains to a limit, and then surpasses that limit *because* it is a limit, but here it realizes that this surpassing is in turn a limit that must be surpassed; and then again *that* surpassing a limit to be surpassed, and so on and so on. In this merely one-sided negation of the limit all that is achieved is the constant reproduction of limit; the infinite becomes only a deferred projection of the “and so on and so on”, it is what can never be actually achieved, it is only what *ought* to be. Precisely by way of this separation from its own demand, the spurious infinite is constant finitude, and the more it stretches on and on the more it is but the repetition of the same. It is like a *line* constantly being extended in space: according to the demand of infinitude it can never be completed, can never stop in the sense of having a beginning here and an end there, rather it must constantly overcome its stoppage at any particular point. Yet the line, precisely because it is a line, can never be considered as being without beginning or end, thus the overcoming of its limit can only result in limit once more.

The true infinite, however, is exhibited not in the line whose limit is constantly eschewed, but in the *circle* wherein the line is turned back upon itself. The line is given up on, or raised into its circular opposite, in the very act that achieves the infinitude it sought for itself. For in the circle

there is the exhibition of the Concept - the form of maintaining and returning-to-self in otherness. The spurious infinite seeks the infinite in a one-sided negation of the finite, by constantly negating limit, but it never gets beyond finitude insofar as the form of its reflection is inherently finite - in its desire for a one-sided *separation* from limit it can only attain a finite infinitude, thus one constantly deferred as an ought-to-be. But in the true infinitude of the Concept, the difference between finite and infinite has become different from itself, a difference that is at once their immediate identity. In the Concept, infinitude returns into itself, realizes itself, in and through the finite, rather than in an abstracted separation from the finite. That is, by way of the contradiction within this merely spurious infinitude, the true infinitude of the Concept is achieved, the line turns back upon itself and returns full circle.¹⁶

This means that the transitions of the dialectic must be seen as both temporal and atemporal. In truth, the transitions succeed one another, they are, as Hegel often describes them, “moments”. Yet “nothing”, for example, does not *simply* succeed “being”, rather, nothing *is* being. The one is *at once* its other. So it is just as true that there is *no succession at all*: every moment is *as* its other, and the whole is in this way eternal. But *at the same time*, this cannot but present itself in the Logic as a transition of successive moments. The eternity is the *result* of the succession, and is nothing without it. So just as the circle, we mentioned before, is the result of the line, and must always reconnect, in circular fashion, with the finitude of the line itself, so now eternity is the result of temporal succession and must always reconnect, in circular fashion, to the progress of moments that constitute it. In the absolute one is always required to think-with and think-against at once, that is, think in that circular sense wherein the extending-out and the withdrawing-in coincide.

The Absolute Idea

The absolute Idea reveals the basic *form* of the Logic that has worked through it from the beginning. In all previous sections, the particular determinations of thought - being, quantity, essence, etc.- operated as the content of logical thinking, but in the absolute Idea the essential movement carried throughout the thought of these determinations becomes the sole content of thinking. In the absolute Idea, that is, content has itself *become form*, and what will constitute the determinacy for thinking is precisely this its own *method*.

The absolute Idea “closes” the Logic as the revelation of that process in which all closure is sublated - the dialectical movement of thinking. The absolute Idea is the essential movement of all thinking, which *as* movement, is rendered in its *opposite*: as what itself cannot be moved beyond, as what itself has remained identical throughout all differentiation, as the absolute end of thinking. One cannot see the absolute Idea at all until one sees that precisely *because* it is the pure movement of dialectic, it is at the same time its *distillation*. When movement itself is the movement into its own opposite, then movement is at last actualized. So the absolute Idea is the revelation of the process of mediation which becomes, in that revelation, the return to true immediacy. The absolute Idea is the one stage that can never be *subjected* to the dialectic - precisely because it is the movement of dialectic in its essence. In other words, to subject it to dialectic is to do nothing more than repeat the dialectic it itself forms, to subject it to itself - and that is why it is “absolute”. Of the absolute Idea we must say that there is thus *no movement beyond it*, providing we no longer see it as an “it” at all. At the stage of the absolute Idea nothing further emerges, nothing new, nothing novel because the absolute Idea is that *out of which and in which* all novelty unfolds. The novelty of the absolute Idea, compared with all previous

determinations of thinking, is that in it itself nothing novel emerges. At the same time, what *makes* for this novelty of the absolute Idea is nothing other than what has remained constantly the *same* throughout all previous determinations, that is, the same dialectical process that bound all previous determinations together is what the absolute Idea distills. The point is that, in the absolute Idea the movement of the whole as such is brought to view, but in this very *act* the movement is solidified - nothing new results, we are at the end.

In the end, then, we can see the mirroring of the same condition found at the beginning. There we had said that the simple immediacy which constitutes the “beginning” has always already passed over into its own impossibility. Beginning with the simple immediacy constitutive of the beginning as such reveals within itself the mediatory process in which that beginning is negated. But now, at the end, we see the inverse condition: the “Absolute Idea”, in rendering the pure *movement* of mediation - the dialectical method - simultaneously achieves its *distillation*. For the Logic to begin with a pure immediacy it must have *already* begun with mediation, for the Logic to end in the pure method of mediation is for this to *result* in the ultimate immediacy. We said before that, to the degree that the dialectic begins with a pure *immediacy* - pure being - the dialectic begins in opposition to itself, in its negation, for the dialectic is a *mediatory* process. Now we see that it ends in a similar manner - the mediatory process of the dialectic as a whole reveals itself to be just the opposite of itself: the true immediacy for which nothing other remains. In the end, the opposition to itself becomes the realization of itself. So the entire mediatory process can only get off the ground by way of an immediate beginning, but more importantly, the entire mediatory process as such - as that in which all otherness is always already its result - becomes the *true* realization of immediacy. In this way it is a return to its ground. To the degree

that we can say the dialectic “begins” and “ends”, it does so in opposition to itself - that is, with immediacy, in the former sense implicit, the latter sense actualized - but this opposition belongs essentially to the mediatory process the dialectic is. Its opposite *is* its own self. Thus, to think *with* the dialectic is simultaneously to think it *against itself*. The dialectic is mediation, and for that very reason is just as much its opposite - an ultimate immediacy, the absolute.

But if there is one paramount point the reader is to carry away from here it is this: that “absolute” here is not merely what *immediately* springs to mind - a top-down containment of all determination. Rather, “absolute” means just as much the end of containment, an infinitely open arrangement, *freedom*. Indeed the term itself derives from the Latin *absolvere*: to release or set free. To think the absolute is to absolve it of its immediate sense as a “final containment” or “end” and so arrive at its truly philosophical meaning. For this reason, these meanings of ‘containment’ and ‘freedom’ are not separate in the absolute, one does not exist *in addition* to the other. The point is rather this: precisely insofar as the absolute does contain all exteriority, there is nothing left over, nothing other that the containment is preventing access to. In truth, then, this container precisely because it is absolute, is no container at all. It is *absolute openness*. It is true that there are no doors of exit from the Hegelian absolute, but that is because there are no walls to put them in.

FOOTNOTES

1) We say this in order to specify that the Logic can be taken on its own account. It is certainly not the case that the only way to see the Logic is in its relation to the Phenomenology, but insofar as we do, it is important to maintain what we are stressing here - that the relation is less linear than it is actively reciprocal.

2) Of course, one may want to object on the grounds that even in locating presuppositionlessness at the start of logic one cannot but *presuppose this* as belonging to the nature of logic itself. But this to say that presuppositionlessness itself 'contains its opposite', and this does not contradict what Hegel is putting forward, rather it affirms it. Indeed, the objection that says, "Hegel can only assume presuppositionlessness as belonging to logic" has itself resulted from the need to get beyond all presuppositions. The objection is in truth just the *reiteration* of what it objects to - that presuppositionlessness is the basis of logic. The point is that the Logic does not begin with some determinate content that is presupposed as being presuppositionless, rather it begins in the logical demand for presuppositionlessness *as such*.

Similarly, it is equally true that in the very *revelation* that logic is to begin absolutely, logic has *already* begun. But this does not contradict the notion of an immediate beginning so much as it fulfills it. The immediacy of the beginning is such that logic is to begin with nothing other than itself, it is to be itself the sole ground, depending on no extrinsic elements - and *that this is so* is the result of nothing other than logic. To begin the Logic immediately *just is* to begin in logic and nothing other.

3) Certainly, after having demonstrated the inherent link between the beginning as such and pure being Hegel goes on to briefly consider other aspects - how the beginning is considered in other sciences, beginning with the ego - that are not, strictly speaking, logically inherent to the link between being and beginning. These "further reflections", he states, "cannot be meant to serve as elucidations and confirmations of that exposition - this is complete in itself" (p. 70). Moreover, at the close of the chapter he states that "these preliminary, external reflections about it [i.e. about the insight that the absolutely simple is nothing other than the beginning itself] were not so much intended to lead up to it but to eliminate all preliminaries" (p. 78). It is perhaps peculiar to Hegel alone that preliminaries are introduced in order to achieve their elimination. Certainly, there is something tremendously difficult in what Hegel is saying here, for if these "preliminary, external reflections" are intended to negate "all preliminaries", does this function not in turn negate their status as external and preliminary? The insight that preliminaries are to be eliminated is scarcely different from the insight that the beginning be absolutely simple, but in that case these "preliminary reflections" are the insight of the beginning itself, and therefore no longer preliminary to it. The issue, however, is not of great importance to us. For quite apart from these negated preliminaries, the essential insight into the simplicity of the beginning remains. This insight is itself so simple as to require no introduction, Hegel tells us, for this simplicity is the beginning itself.

4) Schlitt's book is an extremely well researched and well thought work, and it raises numerous questions regarding the viability of Hegel's initial move in the dialectic as well as of the dialectical form as a whole. I have chosen to look at only what I feel to be Schlitt's prime argument against the Hegelian beginning, and I feel an examination of Schlitt's claims in this regard will offer a thoughtful contrast to the view of the Hegelian beginning we are defending here.

5) Hegel is here referring to the nature of "the beginning" when he states this. His use of the word "concept" however is different from what we are discussing here. We are trying to understand in what way "pure being" could ever be considered a concept for thought, Hegel however is putting forward the way this beginning stands in regard to the speculative Concept itself, i.e. thought that knows itself in its very otherness. As simple immediacy, the beginning is not yet the Concept identical to itself in differentiation. Simple immediacy is not outside the Concept, rather it is "the Concept not yet posited as Concept". Hegel does not state that it is the "not yet posited Concept" or

the “implicit Concept”, he states a far more contradictory condition: that it *is* the Concept *not yet* posited as Concept, that it *is* the Concept that is only *implicitly* Concept. This same relation, it is being suggested here, holds in regard to a concept of thought. Simple immediacy is not outside the conceivable, in another “realm” as it were, rather it is the not yet conceivable concept. “Becoming” is the first actual ‘concept’ of the Logic, but it itself is the result of the implicit conceivability in the inconceivable beginning. Pure being is unthinkable, nothing is unthinkable, but the result of this doubled impossibility for thought is the first possible concept: “becoming”.

6) We have said that the beginning, as Schlitt recognizes, is indeed inconceivable, but not *purely* so - it is rather an inconceivability that comes to yield the first actual concept of thought. Given this, it is intriguing to ask in what sense this initial dialectic is representative of the dialectical process of the Logic as a whole. In truth it is both *unique* and *common* to logical dialectic in general. The dialectic of “becoming” is unique insofar as it is not developed out of concepts *per se*. In the Logic thought comes to comprehend its own conceptual process. In this it is seen that the concepts of thought are not isolated entities but developed results, having their being in relation to one another. “Becoming” is unique, however, in that it is the *first* concept. It is not thereby developed out of other concepts, but from the other *of conception itself*: it is the result of “pure being” and “nothing”, what are themselves *inconceivable*, and what really only become conceivable in their development into “becoming”. This is what is peculiar to the dialectic of becoming - that it is the result of the not-yet conceivable, whereas all of the dialectical movement that follows from it is the development of concepts themselves. However, the dialectic of “becoming” is common to the rest insofar as this demand that it develop itself out of otherness is the essence of all dialectical movement. The first concept must develop itself out of the other of conception itself - this is the same dialectical form all is subject to, namely that whatever is develop itself out from its opposition. So the uniqueness of this initial dialectic does not place it at odds with the dialectic in general. On the contrary, its particularity is really the expression of the dialectic in its general nature; the uniqueness here is really just a staying true to the demands of the dialectical form.

7) The beginning as such is inadequate or imperfect, and the same holds for pure being. Insofar as pure being reveals itself to be wholly inadequate - in that it is not being but rather is nothing - so too does its claim to establish the logical beginning reveal itself to be inadequate. Logic demands that being be the foundation of the entire enterprise, but this reveals itself to have been, in a sense, *imperfect* - thought sees that being is just the opposite of the simple immediacy it first took it to be; that the identification of being as the true beginning is in truth a mis-identification. But of course, this “imperfection” is only implicit in the beginning, not explicit. So it is not as if logic should have began otherwise - the “imperfection” of this beginning is itself revealed only *because* logic has begun the way it has; indeed, seeing the imperfection of the beginning is itself constitutive of the logical development of that beginning. Only logic can identify the mis-identification. Logic, in this way, is a type of self-overcoming: it is *only itself* that can surpass the very mis-identifications it begins with. This is precisely what makes logic, for Hegel, a living process.

8) Russell A. Peck, in his article “Number as Cosmic Language” (In By Things Seen: Reference and Recognition in Medieval Thought, Ottawa; University of Ottawa Press, 1979) notes that St. Augustine, Boethius, and Roger Bacon all saw the circle as a particularly virtuous and perfect form. Nor was it uncommon for the notions of perfection, oneness, eternity and the like to be related to the circle by such Medieval thinkers. Peck explains the Medieval significance of the circle and the triangle - the trinitarian aspects of which suggest further alliances to Hegelian thought - in the following manner: “The triangle and the circle share metaphysical qualities because of the idea of center, point, and 3 as the first real number. In seeking the center one moves from 3 (unity expressed) to one (point), one being the number base. Trinity is the spatial expression of that number base. Christ, the alpha and omega, completes the circle of time, thus providing circumference to the circle; He is also the creator and thus center of the circle” (p. 71 note 69).

9) Certainly, in the Logic Hegel leaves unsaid any link between the Conceptual circle and the circle as it had been conceived in philosophy. But of course, *that* the Concept is exhibited circularly affords not only new insight into the Concept, but into the circle as well. It is this latter insight that we are drawing out, despite its being left unsaid. The point being made here, and more vigorously in the thesis as a whole, is that what is immediately present in Hegel’s

writings cannot form the sole scope of their consideration. The point is not to inertly contain 'what they say' but to see through their meaning, to see *in* them a momentum outwards, for this is what they themselves demand. One works ever further *into* Hegel's writing by *working out* its significance past the immediate context.

10) Slavoj Zizek, it would appear, has also found this relation between problem and solution in Hegel's thought. It lies, he says, in realizing that "what we mistook for a question was already an answer... This is basically what is at stake in the Hegelian strategy: *the discordance, the incompatibility as such... makes the secret disappear* - what at first appeared to be an epistemological obstacle turns out to be the very index of the fact that we have 'touched the Truth', we are in the heart of the 'Thing-in-itself' *by the very trait which appeared to bar our access to it*" (p.177). Zizek, Slavoj. The Sublime Object of Ideology. London, Verso: 1989

11) There is an essential link here between the non-foundationalist aspect of Hegelianism and its non-metaphysical nature. Speaking in a very general sense, a basic foundation upon which all knowledge rests partakes of the same form as a basic entity upon which all others are derived - both are singular and immediate points fundamentally distinct from that which they ground. And herein we have precisely what the dialectic overturns. Despite how Hegel is often portrayed, he was certainly no metaphysician in any simple sense of the term. This is a point often put forward by Terry Pinkard. According to Pinkard, Hegel, like Kant, transcends the very form of metaphysics as such. "Hegel's dialectic is not concerned with positing entities to explain the possibility of things (that I shall call metaphysical argument) but with positing categories to resolve certain dilemmas found in other categories" (Pinkard, Hegel's Dialectic p. 7). This is certainly true - the very picture of an "entity" remaining *beyond* or behind things is precisely what the dialectic sees through. But we would need to add that Hegel's position is in no way an *alternative* to metaphysical argument, it is rather metaphysics' *own undoing* as it were. The dialectic does not ultimately take place beyond of or apart from metaphysics. But often Pinkard portrays Hegel in such an antagonistic relation. For Pinkard, Hegelianism takes philosophy to be a basically explanatory operation - philosophy does not establish the existence of things, rather it "tries to explain how it could even be possible to think coherently about some basic category or set of categories"(p.4). Yet, as Pinkard himself sometimes recognizes, the Hegelian dialectic as a *whole* cannot be reduced to the domain of categorical explanation. It is doubtful whether the ultimate conception of Hegelian philosophy can be sustained as an explanatory, *as opposed to*, ontological enterprise. This explanatory aspect is really only what Pinkard takes to be essential in it, and its justification lies mostly in the Science of Logic. So, for Pinkard, Hegel can be seen to lapse back into metaphysics in texts like the Phenomenology, where he posits "an *entity* (spirit) that is supposed to explain how the categorial program is possible" (p. 103). Without establishing a thorough critique of Pinkard's views, which, because spirit is not really the topic of this thesis, would cost more pages than can here be afforded, we can nonetheless raise several questions at this point. Firstly, in what sense are we to understand spirit as an *entity*? For an entity is some-thing, it is a this, distinctly so. But of course, this is precisely how spirit is not to be seen. Secondly, in what sense are we to understand spirit as metaphysical? For Pinkard, it is a metaphysical entity insofar as it jumps outside of categorial explanation in order to account for it, but is this not a dubious picture of spirit? For certainly a meta-physical entity is that which persists beyond things, or it is a stable and self subsistent substrate behind things insofar as it does not suffer the transitory, finite, othered etc. nature of things themselves. But again, nothing could be further from spirit, for spirit actively sublates the very gap metaphysics opens up. Spirit is dialectical and thereby cannot be pinned down by simple identifications like "entity", "metaphysical" etc. Thirdly, to what extent is spirit also not a continuation of the very explanatory operation Pinkard sees it as departing from? Is spirit ultimately apart from categorial explanation? Pinkard himself states that spirit is to *explain* "how the categorial program is possible". Or we could go the other route - does not the existent nature which Pinkard identifies with spirit remain implicit in categorial explanation as well? We would need to ask in what sense, for Hegel, thought itself *exists*, or cannot ultimately be thought of apart from existence. From this we would have to question the viability of an enterprise, like Pinkard's, which tends to see the essence of Hegelian philosophy in isolation from ontological concerns.

12) It is Habermas who has noted this essential "kinship of *modernity with mode*" (p.9).

13) William Maker also contends that Hegel 'has no dialectical method', if by "method" we "denote a specific set of rules of procedure as operational or cognitive principles for the consideration of a given subject matter"(p. 99).

Nor is there any Hegelian method "which can - even if only in principle - be justified, formulated, or learned in abstraction from the subject matter to which it is to be applied" (p. 99). All this is undoubtedly true. But although Maker admits that this absence of method is not a simple affair, that we can nonetheless "talk meaningfully about the issue of method in regard to his philosophical project (p. 100), the essential reason for this tends to be overlooked. The absolute method is just that - method made absolute, and thus no longer "a method" at all. It is true, there is not "a dialectical method" attributable to Hegel, but at the same time the dialectic is not unmethodical. There is "no" method here because it is the furthest reach of philosophical method - its absolutism. It thus ceases to be a way for thought to approach a certain subject matter, and is rather the way of "thought" and "matter" themselves. It is not a particular mode of philosophy but rather the living movement in which all philosophical modes both are and are-not.

14) It might be fruitful, at this point, to further consider in what nature this dialectical movement persists. Terry Pinkard, who does not want to commit the Logic to any form of metaphysical idealism, gives this account of "movement" in Hegel. Considering the question "does not Hegel in speaking of the *movement* of concepts commit himself to at least some form of metaphysical hypostatization of concepts?", he replies:

It depends on how literally one takes the idea of movement in the Hegelian system to be and how one understands Hegel's use of "*Begriff*." The movement of concepts in the Science of Logic may be taken as a metaphor for their logical relations. What moves in the Science of Logic are not the conceptions but thought itself. Each category is a *position* to which thought moves. The various positions are constituted by the conceptions to which thought moves. The sense of "movement" here is thus modeled on the same idea as is expressed in our talk about moving from the premise to the conclusion in an argument (Pinkard, Hegel's Dialectic, p. 14).

However, it is certainly worth asking why Hegel himself, so far as I can see, never referred to movement as "metaphorical". It is doubtful that the high position accorded to the movement of the speculative Concept would be anything less than literal - especially considering Hegel's own considerations on metaphor as inferior to literality. The bigger problem, though, is the distinction Pinkard here creates between thought and its conceptions: "what moves in the Science of Logic are not the conceptions but thought itself". But thought apart from its conceptions is no thought at all; thought apart from its conceptions is an emptiness far removed from any movement. There is not ultimately a *this* (thought) that moves as opposed to *that* (conceptions); movement lies in the sublation of any 'this as opposed to that'. The *whole* is (in) movement. It is certainly odd to think of each category as a position "to which thought moves". Is this "position" there before thought, waiting for it to arrive? To call concepts "positions" makes them appear as independent coordinates through which thought passes as in a *medium*. But in the Logic there persists the constant deconstruction of thought "itself" in distinction from its "medium". Thus, it hardly makes sense to re-inscribe this dualism in the very element it exalts - the movement of the speculative Concept. Pinkard is absolutely right in taking issue with this movement as some sort of "metaphysical hypostatization of concepts" but not for the reasons he gives. The essential reason is that the very form of the meta-physical is one of static opposition, whereas dialectical movement realizes the sublation of opposition itself.

#15) Only the syllogism raised to its rational form 'captures' the dialectic. But it does so *not* because it is a static shape, but because it realizes a *dynamic relation* between its figures. The syllogism, that is, must be seen in such a way that each of its parts - Subject, Predicate, Universal - become the other parts. Subject, Predicate and Universal do not stay in one place as it were, rather each moves into the others. Each part brings out the whole and the result is a cyclic movement.

16) We are not imposing this spatial language on Hegel's thought, it is rather an essential aspect of that thought itself. Hegel often uses "shape" to describe a particular stage of consciousness or thought, and the language used to illustrate the unfolding of the dialectic is itself often - though never exclusively - spatial; for instance, when a moment "passes over" into its opposite, when thinking becomes "one-sided" or "external", when thought conceives itself in terms of a "beyond", when thinking "raises" itself into its opposite, etc. But if Hegel sometimes uses a

spatial, and in a certain sense temporal, language to illustrate the conceptual operations he is dealing with, the whole of the system constituted by these operations cannot itself be reduced to spatial description. The speculative dialectic *cannot* be captured in the figure - the moment it is so captured is the moment it escapes us, for it is then reduced to something static and inert, a "this" *as opposed* to "that". The shapes of thought, taken as a whole, constitute a fluid and dynamic movement in which the particularity of shape is sublated. But in speaking of sublation, we do not mean that speculative thought ultimately divorces itself from "shape" or the externality of spatial description. For even here, in speaking of the "movement" Hegel himself so often uses to describe speculative thought, a certain spatiality remains. And it is really this that reveals the difficult work of the dialectic: one must negate and preserve at once; one must transcend thought as shape through the shapes of thought themselves; one must enlist spatial descriptiveness to reveal a dialectical operation that is always just as much beyond spatiality.

This is the very same work that must be brought to bear when the dialectic is revealed as a circle, or even as a circle of circles. One must not, that is, be seduced by a representative picture of the dialectic, that the dialectic carries this form as opposed to other possibilities. For this is to overlook the essential meaning of the circle being realized in speculative thought - that it is not 'in opposition to' but rather infinite and perfect. As we have said, the circle is that limited, finite figure that signifies the eternal and infinite; it is that enclosed spatial form that nonetheless denotes a perfection beyond spatial limit. For thought to recognize this signified perfection, infinitude, oneness, as its own process, is for thought to have itself become the circular movement of the speculative dialectic. The form and content held asunder in the circle as symbol is brought in unity through the circle as speculative thought. So when Hegel speaks of an ultimate circularity of the dialectic, it is not that thought is now being reduced to spatial externality, but that spatial externality is now being raised into thought. Indeed, once circularity is raised into the form of thought's own return into itself, the circle can no longer be thought of as just a particular shape, for it has now become its meaning, has now become the shape of all possible shapes, the shape made perfect made infinite, the shape at once particular and universal, contained and yet beyond containment. Thus it is no longer an inert form alone but is now just as much dynamic process - the unity of which is *cyclic*. The work of thought, insofar as it comprehends itself in the speculative dialectic, is to maintain both this dynamism and this inertia in one, to figure the dialectic in and as that continuing process whereby its figuration is overcome, to see thought in terms of the circle by seeing through the circle.

PART II

CHAPTER I: ANOTHER VIEW OF THE DIALECTIC

Introduction

Since the topic of our consideration concerns, in the widest sense possible, the scope of the Hegelian dialectic, we began our study with Hegel himself, with his own account of the dialectic given in the Logic. Our overriding concern was to show how this dialectic avoids any simple reduction, how it sublates any simple boundaries for itself. That is why the unescapably *dialectical* nature of (its) beginning and (its) end was of prime importance for us: the dialectic does not simply start at a singular point, nor does it end at a final place of rest; or rather, in the very attempt at starting it, giving it such a beginning, one finds the dialectic always already at work. It is this movement only implicit in the beginning that is made fully explicit in the end. That is why "end" here cannot be understood as a cessation, or a bringing to a close. It remains at work ahead of any simple end just as it remains at work behind any simple beginning. For precisely this reason, though, the dialectic cannot be bound to Hegel *alone*, it is what remains to be seen wherever and whenever philosophy is engaged in. The very truth of what we have found Hegel to be saying regarding this "absolute method" is that this method not be contained, that it will be seen through other philosophical texts. Our concern here is to *see through* the dialectic in those texts that actively seek to *be other* than dialectic, that seek to put Hegel at a distance in order to get beyond him. There is little shortage of such work, and the two that we are to look at here - a short essay by Jacques Taminiaux and a book by William Desmond - should be seen as exemplary of a larger body of continental thought regarding Hegel.¹ Our concern here is with this particular reading of the Hegelian dialectic: as something that totalizes "identity" and

suppresses “difference” - a reading that very conveniently *creates for itself* the scope and possibility of a genuine difference from the dialectic. The problem with such a reading of Hegel, in its simplest sense, is that it is a reading of Hegel in the *simplest sense*. What should remain constantly in view throughout our consideration of both Taminaux and Desmond is that movement wherein any simple determination of the Hegelian philosophy is overturned by the nature of determination itself.

Jacques Taminaux’s “Finitude and the Absolute”

“Finitude and the Absolute”, by Jacques Taminaux, is an enquiry into the distinction between Heidegger’s thought about difference and Hegel’s dialectical thought. Taminaux’s point is that both philosophers are linked by their basic subject matter: difference. Yet, whereas Heidegger himself sees Hegel gradually distancing himself from the centrality of this theme, particularly in those works written after the Phenomenology, Taminaux sees it as something maintained throughout. According to Taminaux, the more essential distinction is that, where Heidegger’s thought maintains the priority of difference, Hegel’s thought ultimately extinguishes difference.

I am inclined to think that right from the beginning, from the moment Hegel takes up the philosophical project, the proper subject matter for his thought lies in the theme of difference, but that the way in which he relates to it entails the elimination of difference (FA 75).

What is of concern for us is not so much the relation between Heidegger and Hegel that Taminaux indicates, but rather the picture of Hegel being offered by him. Certainly, there is truth in what Taminaux says here, but as it is said it remains entirely one-sided and abstract. It is for

this reason, and in a way that will become clearer as we proceed, just as much *untrue* as it is true.

First of all, is difference alone “the proper subject matter” of Hegel’s thought? It is certainly doubtful that Hegel himself would have agreed to this conception, for not only is “difference” better understood as a mode of negation - such that “negation” itself forms the “proper subject matter” here - but more importantly, the proper subject matter of Hegel’s thought is not to be contained under the banner of a singular determination: difference *per se*, negation *per se*. The “proper” subject is just as much identity, just as much positivity and so on. Indeed, this condition is implicit in the very *identification* of difference as the proper subject matter: If difference *per se* constitutes the proper subject matter of Hegel’s thought then for that very reason, difference is no longer difference but identity, for as we will see, difference *per se* is identity. Herein we witness a transformation, a *difference*, within Taminiaux’s attempt to maintain the identity of the Hegelian philosophy. It is really this transforming activity that moves beyond whatever is maintained, that brings us into the “proper subject matter” of Hegelian thought.

The “proper subject matter of Hegel’s thought” is not a this-particular-subject. There is not one area as opposed to another that Hegelian thought finally possesses. Rather, the “proper subject matter of Hegel’s thought” is the inherent *dispossession* of any and every subject matter, the active dispossessing proper to any particular subject. It is this movement of identity -in- difference which we witnessed in “The Absolute Idea”. What is proper *to Hegel* is this absolute method proper to *any* subject matter insofar as it is a subject matter. The sacrifice of the proper as such, the giving up of what is possessed within a subject, the dis-owning constitutive of the “labour of the negative”, precisely this *sacrifice of the proper* is perhaps what is most proper to Hegelian thought - so much so that the sacrifice actively sacrifices itself, the movement of the

dis-possession becomes *itself* the restoration of identity. So one can call this subject matter “difference” only insofar as one sees “difference” as itself a subject caught up in the movement it articulates; that is, as a self-differing difference that possesses itself *in* its dispossession: difference *is* in its difference *from itself*. This self-differing movement must be seen as inherent to any identification of the Hegelian project. It is essential to our very seeing of what Hegelian thought is. In this way, one overlooks the “proper subject matter” of Hegel’s thought from the moment one *maintains* a “proper subject matter” for it. It is far better to say that the dialectic is maintained in its constant re-creation.

In the Name of Difference

Now the key point in Taminaux's description of Hegelian philosophy, as for so many others, is the ultimate betrayal of difference in the dialectic. In the end, he states, “the way in which [Hegel’s thought] relates to [difference] entails the elimination of difference”(FA 75), a point Taminaux repeats further on: “The task of thought as envisaged and taken up in this word [the Absolute] is indeed the difference, but when seen as the Absolute, the difference and the whole interplay of forces connected with it are condemned to elimination”(p. 75). This sense in which difference emerges in the absolute so as ultimately to be “eliminated and swallowed up in the indivisible unity of self-consciousness” (p. 75) is, for Taminaux, the essential aspect of Hegel's conception of difference. But what needs to be asked however is just what this “elimination of difference” entails? Is it not synonymous with the negating of difference, that is, a differing from difference or a type of negating of negation? Insofar as this is so, we must see the difference at work *in* its being negated, for that is precisely what the negation of negation entails: that in being

“eliminated” it is simultaneously preserved. Only *through* negation, through the *being* of negation can negation *be not*. In short, there can be no simple “elimination of difference”. What Taminaux’s description does not specifically address is the degree to which the “elimination” of difference is the *furthest reach* of difference, the most differential relationship conceivable. That is to say, negation not only retains itself in the very act of its elimination, but *fulfills* what negation as such is. Once negation is taken back into negativity itself negation ceases being the merely abstract *identity* of itself. Rather, in its very negation the negative is *realized* in and for itself.

Now this preservation of difference is given from within the very language Taminaux uses to describe its eradication. For Taminaux, Hegelian thought is not such that it ignores difference, but that it acknowledges difference only to finally “eliminate” it. But this is to implicitly admit that difference belongs essentially to Hegelian thought from the outset: difference must *be in* Hegelian thought for it ever to be “eliminated” by it. For this very reason, however, the elimination *is not* just as much as it *is*. To say that, in the end, Hegel’s thought amounts to the elimination of difference means that difference is preserved in Hegelian thought as well. If the elimination is ultimate, its opposite is just as ultimate. Indeed, only if the end is looked at in abstraction from the very process which produces it *as* an end is the end ever merely the “elimination of difference”. That is why, if this is what is seen “in the end”, then the end *has yet to be reached*. The end is seen when the “elimination of difference” is seen through, when the end is no longer a halt wherein the movement of differentiation ceases, but is rather the *complete and total* movement of differentiation itself. Thus, Taminaux’s account overlooks how, in the end, the form of Absolute identity is absolutely *differential*: the simultaneous preservation and

negation, the disappearance of contradiction *as* contradiction.

By definition the Absolute is that which absolves itself from all reference, that which, in the very difference and interplay of references it implies, makes itself equal to itself, coincides with itself. As a result, at the very moment when the difference is recognized as radical, it is no longer radical but derived - or, what amounts to the same thing, is uprooted. It follows that at the very moment when the notion of coincidence seems discredited, it actually is expanded, and words like "concordance, equivalence, equality" take over the whole of Hegel's text (FA 75).²

That the dialectic eliminates difference is taken as its absolute end; far better, it would seem, if the dialectic maintained difference constantly. What is overlooked here, however, is the sense in which difference *is* constantly realized precisely insofar as it is *not* simply maintained. In effect, the dialectic is condemned for doing what it says, becoming itself different from the difference it speaks of. The shift into "concordance, equivalence and equality" that comes to take over Hegel's text is the very shift that actualizes difference: the word "difference" is here no longer precisely because the meaning of "difference" has realized itself in the shift to its opposite term: "concordance", "equivalence" and "equality". The dialectic enacts *in deed* what Taminaux account recognizes *in name* only. In essence, Taminaux's objection is 'not hearing what it is saying', for the radical difference supposedly lost has become the radical difference *in the Hegelian text itself*, in the very shift Taminaux sees as "taking over" the end of the dialectic. In the very shift Taminaux identifies as the problem of the dialectic, the answer to that problem is given - what is supposedly lost *is right there* in what is being described. The error of the dialectic is placed in the fact that it *differs* from difference, but in this differing the dialectic is already giving precisely what Taminaux here demands of it. What is said not to be of it reveals itself to be of it essentially - a truly speculative condition. The problem is that Taminaux's account does not recognize

difference *in its* difference. For difference de-familiarizes itself and evades that thinking for which the familiar alone counts as true. Such, we might say, is the “cunning of Reason”.

Taminaux goes on:

Just when truth is recognized as arising from a mysterious abyss, it loses all mystery and is declared to be logical, since, as Hegel says, it is only “one moment of the supreme Idea and no more” [Faith and Knowledge, p. 190] And as a final result, even when the nothing is associated with this mysterious abyss, it too finds itself circumscribed and defined as “[one] side of the absolute Idea.” The difference, therefore, is absorbed into a conciliation in which it is eliminated and swallowed up in the indivisible unity of self-consciousness. (FA 75)

To describe difference in the absolute ultimately in terms of its elimination is, we are suggesting, not to have attained to the dialectical conception of difference the absolute expresses. The elimination of difference is at one and the same time its fulfillment. The issue becomes clearer if we ask questions from the converse direction: what *is* this difference that Taminaux sees Hegel as betraying? What is this difference that would somehow be different from Hegelian difference? What could this “difference” be that does not differ from itself, that is kept as “difference” over and against its elimination? Ultimately this would be difference *pure and simple*, difference that does not eliminate itself, that persists as itself, that *remains the same*. Difference must be difference. Yet in truth it is really identity that governs this entire insistence upon “difference”; it is identity that insists “difference is difference”. To insist that difference remain *as* difference is to ultimately insist on the law of identity - to speak in the name of this difference is to speak of difference *in name* only. What is constantly overlooked in this hollow insistence on “difference” is that difference *becomes* difference precisely in breaking the law of its identification. That is, when the law that insists “difference is difference” differs in itself so as

to give rise to its own opposite: “difference is not difference but identity”. Indeed, as Hegel has said, the very insistence upon this identity of difference has yet to hear what it is saying: that difference *is different*, that difference is to be *not* itself, to be *not* difference. Difference that does not negate itself, that remains itself alone and thus essentially independent of identity, is merely a fixed abstraction of the understanding. This difference *is itself and nothing other*, it is free of any intrinsic relation to what opposes it. In its very freedom and independence, then, this would be a difference without any other, *without any difference*, and thus reveals itself to be that which it is not. In itself it is identity. Ultimately, then, difference that does not move into elimination remains *no* different from the very absolute from which it originally sought to differ. That is, in the insistence upon its essential independence from the absolute, this difference becomes the very vision of the absolute it had opposed: that which “makes itself equal to itself, coincides with itself”(FA 75).

The Understanding

So far, we have been trying to bring out, in a way Taminaux himself does not, why the “elimination of difference” in the absolute is simultaneously the absolute realization of difference itself. But to persist in only one side of this condition - that difference as such must ultimately be preserved from its elimination, or that the absolute results only in the ultimate loss or swallowing up of difference - is to persist in that sphere of thought Hegel refers to as “the understanding” (*der Verstand*). The understanding, Hegel states in the Encyclopedia Logic, “has abstract identity for its principle” (EL # 82). This is to say that the understanding takes a given content or entity as a “this” *opposed* to “that”; it is a thinking that clings to one or another side and holds them apart.

For this reason the understanding is a finite capacity: what is only understood finds its limit in its other, and is restricted by it (EL # 28). Most often, or in its most *familiar* sense, what we mean by “thinking” is precisely this activity of the understanding: the sun shines and we understand it to be daytime, the stars come out and we understand it to be nighttime; it is through these simple identifications that we proceed for the most part and there is nothing illegitimate about it. There is, in other words, a certain “merit” to the understanding, for without it “there is no fixity or determinacy in the domains either of theory or practice” (EL # 80). It is for this reason that Hegel likens the understanding to the *analytic* aspect of thought - the understanding breaks down a given content into categorial elements, each distinct from the other.

But this abstract thinking, although a necessary and valuable domain, is not the total realization of thought - it is that thinking which is strictly *partial*. If philosophy is to attain absolute comprehension, it will not do so through the finite capacity of the understanding alone, rather that capacity must transform itself into its own other: the infinite nature of reason. Reason ultimately brings into unity what the understanding takes apart, and is in that sense *synthetic*. But reason does not bring about this synthesis in an external manner, by containing distinctions under another rubric, rather the unification is the *inherent result* of the analytic divisions themselves. This inherency is what makes reason what it is, for in this it is a direct and necessary result. Reason makes known the finitude in *finite thinking itself*, that is, reason sees the limitation of the understanding in a way the understanding itself cannot. But again, “reason” here is the result of the divisions of the understanding itself, for the finitude of the understanding is “such that when pushed to an extreme it overturns into its opposite” (para. # 80) - reason is distinct from the understanding yet is the understanding’s *own* overturning.³

It is this sense of self-overturning that we can bring to light in the abstract notion of difference as well, a notion that similarly overturns itself when pushed to its extreme. Hegel brings out this nature of identity in the Logic, and no critique of Hegelian identity can be complete without tarrying with this account he gives: “Difference in itself is self-related difference; as such it is the negativity of itself, the difference not of an other, but of itself from itself; it is not itself but its other. But that which is different from difference is identity. Difference is therefore itself and identity. Both together constitute difference” (SL 417). Now this sense in which the demand for merely abstract “difference” contradicts itself finds its correlate in the equally one-sided demand for “identity”. Those who treat identity as an immovable law, Hegel remarks, have yet to see what they themselves are saying:

It has rightly been remarked that this law of thought [A=A] has *no content* and leads no further. It is thus the empty identity that is rigidly adhered to by those who take it, as such, to be something true and are given to saying that identity is not difference, but that identity and difference are different. They do not see that in this very assertion they are themselves saying that *identity is different*; for they are saying that *identity is different* from difference; since this must at the same time be admitted to be the nature of identity, their assertion implies that identity, not externally, but in its own self, in its own nature, is this, to be different (SL 413).

This is one way by which the transgressing of the law of identity is given from *within* the law of identity as such. The law of identity differs from itself *by law*; the true law is the movement it itself gives rise to. It is precisely this *active* differing from merely formal identity that is realized in the ‘negation of the negation’ - a shift which Taminaux describes as mere “elimination”.

Truth and Mystery

As was stated above, Taminaux maintains of the dialectic that “just when truth is recognized

as arising from a mysterious abyss, it loses all mystery and is declared to be logical, since, as Hegel says, it is only ‘one moment of the supreme Idea and no more’ [Faith and Knowledge p. 190]”. The “mysterious abyss” Taminaux here refers to is taken from the conclusion of Hegel’s Faith and Knowledge. Hegel there compares the spurious infinite hypostasized, say, in the philosophy of Jacobi, with the true conception of the infinite realized speculatively. Infinity cannot merely be in antithesis to finitude, Hegel maintains, for antithesis as such is the very form of finitude. So this purified infinity, as we have seen before, is *ultimately finite*, it is exactly what it takes itself not to be. For in truth, neither side is purely itself at all, and this is what is realized in speculative infinity. According to Hegel, this is “the pure nullification of the antithesis or of finitude; but it is at the same time also the spring of eternal movement, the spring of that finitude which is infinite, because it eternally nullifies itself. Out of this nothing and pure night of infinity, as out of the [mysterious] abyss that is its birthplace, the truth lifts itself upward”(Faith and Knowledge, p. 190). For Taminaux this “mysterious abyss” suggests, in Heideggerian fashion, “an untruth, a night, a withdrawal at the heart of truth”(FA 71). However, it is precisely this un-truth which is betrayed by the final swallowing-up of difference in the “indivisible unity of self-consciousness”.

To see what this mystery entails we need first of all to see how Hegel uses the term. The “mystery” Hegel is describing above concerns the actualization of the negative precisely in its own negation; the self-relating of the finite in and as its own antithesis - the true infinite. Infinity is bound to be a “mystery” for merely finite thinking, something forever beyond reach, until that thinking becomes infinite itself. In almost sublime fashion, what can only be a “mystery” *for the understanding* converts itself into rational truth. This truth of *reason*, rather than the merely

contingent truths of the understanding, is for Hegel the furthest reach of truth: truth that is born of its own destruction, that contains its own negative within itself. It is this *philosophical* comprehension of the truth as the infinitude of the speculative concept that is mysterious to the understanding of finite abstractions.⁴ So Hegel is here not putting forward a *particular* mystery, of which there are numerous examples in the empirical world. For here there is no specific, factual truth being withheld, rather, it is that truth *as such* (the speculative infinite) is said to “arise” from its opposite: what Taminaux/Heidegger calls the concealment of the truth, the untruth, etc. But it is important to see that precisely because it is the mystery of the truth as such, the sole content of this “mystery” is *just* that it is the negative other of the truth. In this way, the negative which for Taminaux appears as a mystery barring access to the truth is actually given over from it, for it is nothing but its negative relation. In truth, this negativity is the *only* content the mystery can have: only as this relation to the truth can there be this mystery at all. The “mystery”, then, is nothing other than this negating relation - this is *all it is*. And insofar as this is all it is, the mystery ab-solves itself: all there is to know of it *is* known. The mystery negates itself of its own accord, we might say, because it *is* negation. But if we try to remain true to the “mystery” in the way that Taminaux suggests; if we try to fix it in place or keep it from converting into its opposite, we nonetheless find it converting into its opposite from the moment we seriously consider what this “mystery” could possibly be. Pushed to its limit the mystery overturns itself - *and this is precisely the philosophical conception of truth Hegel is here trying to get us to see*. The restoration of rational truth is bound to it of necessity. It is thus not, as Taminaux suggests, a betrayal of this mystery that it “is declared to be logical” for it was never anything but the logic of identity-in-difference.

None of what is being suggested here is an external denial of Taminaux's position. On the contrary, all we are doing is *seeing through* what Taminaux himself envisions. The "mystery" and difference Taminaux seeks to maintain is not anything *we* oppose, for the opposition lies within Taminaux's own position, in the center of the "mystery" itself. We might say, using Taminaux's own language, that the truth of the mystery is the *untruth* "in its heart". As Taminaux himself realizes, the "untruth in the heart of truth" is an essentially dialectical condition. Indeed, at virtually every stage, the dialectic moves precisely because what is taken to-*be* reveals itself to-*be-not*. In other words, an essential untruth reveals itself within what is taken as the truth, and this movement of the two comes to be the nature of rational truth itself. In this way we must agree with Taminaux: it is *true* that un-truth lies in the heart of truth. But precisely because this is true, the un-truth of *this* truth arises. The un-truth becomes untrue. The withdrawal, the un-truth in the heart of truth, has by way of its truth already contradicted itself - it has arisen as the trespass of its own rule. To insist solely on "the un-truth in the heart of truth" is not to hear what one is saying, not to hear the un-truth *in the insistence* itself. This is one, albeit very rudimentary and formal, reason why one can see the "arising" of rational truth out this "nothing and pure night of infinity": the truth belongs to the destruction, to the truth of the destruction, just as assuredly as day belongs to night. So that is why, as Hegel says above, the "pure night of infinity" (Faith and Knowledge, p. 190) contains its negation, for it is only "night" in and through this its other - the light of reason. Seen rationally, the "pure night" is not *purely* night: the night carries in itself the dawn of day.

The End

The essential error in Taminiaux's account of Hegel is one that is all too common: the attempt to sum up Hegelianism in terms of what it amounts to "in the end". In the end, it is supposed, difference, negativity, etc. is cast aside in order to make room for the triumphant return of identity, universality, absolute knowing, and so forth. But while it is tempting to see the Hegelian dialectic in terms of its end alone, the final restoration of identity is never enough to capture what Hegelian thought is. But if the final restoration were all that Hegelian thought amounted to, there would be no need for the differentiating process by which the restoration results. If anything, the end demands that we see all the prior stages in which "the end" *is-not* as essential to what the end is. In this way, we are truly *in* the end by returning to the process behind it; by returning to the beginning and moving forward once again. The end demands, in a certain way, that we move back from it and regard those moments wherein it is absent - for these moments *make* the end an end. That is to say, it is a mistake to regard the end alone as what counts in the dialectic - in the end, the dialectic demands that we consider the *whole* of its moments, not just the last *part*.

It is true, of course, that all of these preceding moments are *in* the end, for the result *is* itself this process of its own coming-to-be. For this reason the stages of its production are not external to the end, but internal to it. In this way, it is proper to see the end as the *whole*. However, it must be acknowledged that insofar as the preceding stages are that "wherein the end is not" the end is just as much *different* from its stages. That is, it is equally true that the stages of its production are not internal to the end but external to it: all the preceding moments have an independence of their own that separates them from the end; all the preceding sections, precisely because they *precede* the end, are just as much not the end. The dialectic of becoming that begins the Logic,

for instance, is not yet the Absolute Idea that will end it. In its actuality the end is apart from the beginning. Thus, the final stage is also distinct from those other stages that lead up to it. In this way, it is proper to see the end as a *part*. On one side “the end” contains all the previous moments as a whole, on the other side “the end” is the last stage of the process, and is thereby only a part of it.

The real task for thought, however, is not to hold these sides apart, but to see the end expressing at once the part in the whole, and the whole in the part. Indeed, it expresses both in one and the same *reason* - because the end is the active process of its own coming-to-be. That is to say, the end *is* this process that brings it about, but at the same time it is above the process as that which the process moves towards.⁵ The process moves towards this comprehension of itself as process. The end is the *articulation* of the very movement that bears it - the movement finds itself in its articulation, and the articulation finds itself in the movement. This relates to what we have mentioned previously in regards to the Logic: the dialectical movement at last distills itself in the expression of its method, but this distillation is the inherent result of the movement and actually demands that one return to it.⁶

CHAPTER II: ANOTHER VIEW OF THE DIALECTIC.

The Metaxological Philosophy of William Desmond and the Hegelian Dialectic

The problem with the Hegelian dialectic, Desmond claims in Beyond Hegel, is its “equivocal tendency to interpret *all* mediation primarily in terms of *self-mediation*”(BH 7). For Desmond, that is, the dialectic is essentially totalizing, it ultimately relates to *itself* at the expense of its *others*. As he sees it:

....the danger here is that of reducing *all otherness* to a form that must be subordinated to the putative primacy of such self-mediation. The doubleness of the self and the other is not fully recognized as the basis of a togetherness that is irreducibly plural; it becomes dialectically converted into a dualism that is to be mediated and included in a higher and more embracing process of self-mediation. Then dialectical [thought] converts the mediation of self and other into two sides of a more embracing and singular process of total self-mediation. The thought of everything other to thought risks getting finally reduced to a moment of thought thinking *itself* (BH 7).

Time and again Desmond stresses that this criticism is not in opposition to Hegelian dialectic. It is not a complete rejection of Hegelianism, rather it is an attempt to confront Hegelianism with its necessary other, and thereby think *between* what Hegelianism can and cannot acknowledge. Desmond calls this “metaxological” thinking, deriving from the Greek *metaxu*, meaning “middle”, and *logos* meaning “discourse”. As this ‘discourse of the between, or the middle’ metaxological thought takes itself to have avoided the totalizing wholism of dialectical thought as such. Now the middle, according to Desmond, is plurally mediated, that is, “it can be mediated from the side of the dialectical self; but also it can be mediated from the side of an otherness that is not to be reduced to a moment of self mediation”(p. 7). Desmond acknowledges that Hegel too sees the other as mediating the middle, but in the end this other turns out to be nothing other than “a mediation of the self in the form of *its own* otherness, and hence not the mediation of an

irreducible other at all”(BH 8).

It is this stress on the "middle", the "between", the "double", the "both" that remains the definitive element of Desmond's position. As he states:

The metaxological sense of being tries to give a different modulation to the *dia* of *dialectic*. This *dia*, this dyad, this twosomeness recalls us to a doubleness, recalls us to the middle itself as plural. One way to open the dialectic, and move beyond the closure of self-mediation, is simply to become mindful again of dialectic's own doubleness. This reminder of doubleness makes us less impatient, after Hegel, to reduce the double inter-mediation to a singular process of total self-mediation. The dialectic must become dynamically dyadic because ultimately it finds itself in the interplay of the middle as metaxological, and its demand of pluralized mediation (BH 10).

As we will see, Desmond is so committed to this doubleness that he cannot *deny* what he sees as the unitary, self-mediatory of Hegelian thought, his point is rather that one must *also* affirm an otherness *irreducible* to self-mediation. Neither side can here be reduced to the other, one can ultimately affirm only that they both are. One of the basic points we will want to make throughout, however, is that this maintenance of doubleness, of the difference-between the *metaxu* articulates, is at odds with its own aim. The otherness it seeks falls short of the fully developed concept of otherness. The difference it maintains is external for its horizon consists only of the "the two", the both", the "double' and so on, it does not attain to that difference as self-differing difference: the "two" that is at the same time *not* two but one, the "double" that is at the same time *not* double but a singular whole. The trick is to see that the dialectical whole, its ultimate emphasis on self-mediation, circular unification and so forth is *already* absolutely double at the same time that doubleness is overcome. So unlike Desmond, I do not see the Hegelian dialectic as standing in need of a metaxological "other", nor do I see how this other, insofar as it insists on the concept of otherness *per se*, could not escape being articulated within

the dialectical process itself.

One question to ask here concerns the “risk” Desmond identifies of “reducing *all otherness*” or “*all* mediation” to self-mediation. The Hegelian dialectic, Desmond implies, is a partial account: it gives one way of mediating otherness, not the only way. Desmond thereby offers the “other version” of otherness. The problem though, as will become clearer, is that this version cannot but occupy the place of being *the* account of otherness, cannot but occupy the place of what it seeks to deny: the place of *its* other. For Desmond is offering an account of otherness *as such*. The other *is* metaxological. Otherness “must be mediated in terms other than dialectical self-mediation”(BH 8), he tells us; only the “between” of metaxological thought “grants otherness its irreducible otherness”. Yet, precisely because of Desmonds’ own *partiality* for the other, he must allow the very self-mediation that is being denied. Desmond cannot himself be totalizing, so instead of simply denying Hegel he must create a space between Hegel’s dialectic and another account of the other. So while the metaxological ends up giving a portrait of what otherness is, at the same time it must acknowledge the limit of this account, that the metaxological *itself* is only partial, that it is not an account of otherness itself. Similarly, although the metaxological denies the reduction of the other to self-mediation, it can only say this while standing next to self-mediation. As Desmond states:

Philosophy must be *both* thought thinking itself and thought thinking its others - others irreducible to the complete self-mediation of philosophy itself... This would be a metaxological philosophy, one which would genuinely open up the dialectic to the other in a dialogue between philosophy and its others, a dialogue that in the end could not come down to the self-mediation of thought thinking itself” (BH 184).

Desmond here calls for a dialogue, an intermediation between philosophy and its others but

one that cannot be reduced to the unity of self-thinking thought. So philosophy must be *both* thought thinking itself and thought thinking its others - such is its "double requirement" according to Desmond. In effect, philosophy both *is* self-mediation and *is not* self-mediation - the question for us, however, is whether the one cancels the other. In the end, Desmond maintains, we must affirm the impossibility of the self-mediation at the same time that we grant it, but the true impossibility is that this double gesture could leave intact the dialectical self-mediation itself. That is, to the degree that we do grant the bothness of the metaxological, then the self-mediation is effectively negated, for the self-mediation *is* in the seeing through of the bothness Desmond here places it in. The Hegelian self-mediation *is not* insofar as it persists as an externality, side-by-side with its other, in the way that Desmond has here fixed it. Inadvertently, then, Desmond has denied this other - the self-mediation - in the very attempt to preserve it *as* an "other". In effect, the "both" Desmond here speaks in the name of has disappeared in the act of uttering its arrival. The 'metaxological reading of otherness' alongside the 'self-mediation of otherness' is really *just* the 'metaxological reading of otherness'.

Above all, Desmond must not reduce all otherness to *one* version of what the other is, he therefore has no choice but to preserve the dialectical self-mediation of the other as a version of the other persisting alongside the metaxological account of the other. "There", he says, "is an affirmative sense of the double that cannot be spoken of simply as a dualistic opposition" (BH 8). If opposition is the province of the dialectic, then plurality is the province of the metaxological. What remains unseen in all this, however, is the sense in which plurality itself is in *opposition* to the reductive oneness Desmond seeks to avoid. Plurality as such persists in "dualistic opposition" to unity as such, the unity which the metaxological constantly denies. In truth, of course, the

metaxological cannot be a denial, cannot be an opposition, for it is to affirm plurality. However, this affirmation is itself an opposition, and Desmond himself cannot but describe this metaxological vision as a “denial” of Hegelian dialectic. “Against Hegel,” he tells us “metaxological philosophy denies that there is *one* comprehensive dialectic that subsumes all the others. Such philosophy does not dialectically sublimate the otherness of art and religion into its own self-thinking thought, as we find in the final totalizing move of Hegel’s absolute spirit” (BH 184). As we have seen, precisely because “metaxological philosophy denies that there is *one* comprehensive dialectic” it cannot merely be “thought thinking its others”, it cannot be of and for otherness *alone*, for this is to be *exclusive*, to be closed-off from its own other - the Hegelian self-mediation itself. Hence, metaxological philosophy is “*both* thought thinking itself and thought thinking its others”, both the preservation of the Hegelian dialectic and its “denial”. So there is a conflict here with Desmond’s aim to deny “that there is *one* comprehensive dialectic”(p. 184). For in its pursuit of double affirmation, it is just as true to say that metaxological philosophy does *not* deny that there is one comprehensive dialectic, as it is to say that it does.⁷ Again contradiction arises: precisely because it must deny the enclosed nature of self-mediation, metaxological thought must itself be open to its other, must affirm it. Yet insofar as it must affirm the self-mediation of the dialectic, it must deny itself. In its drive to be “both”, in its drive to also affirm the “*one* comprehensive dialectic” of self-mediation, in this drive it defeats itself. For if the one comprehensive dialectic *is* then this its other *is not* - that is what is entailed in the very idea of the “*one* comprehensive dialectic”. To *actually* affirm self-mediation as its other is for the metaxological to enter into the self-mediation, thereby enabling the one dialectic to *be one*. This is, from the other side, the same contradiction as we saw above: in order that the

metaxological itself not be totalizing and reductive it is limited to revealing the empty space “between” the totalizing grasp and its irreducible other, but in this very act the totalizing grasp is no longer total, the totalizing grasp is *denied* - there is no longer this “other” there is no longer a “between”, just the metaxological “itself”. Such contradiction is just the inverse side of the problem seen above: that to be both, and thus to affirm the self-mediation that is its other, the metaxological must deny itself - for only through this denial can the self-mediation be one. In sum, for the metaxological to grant the ‘one comprehensive dialectic’ is for the metaxological to *vanish* into this affirmation, but for the metaxological to deny the one comprehensive dialectic is for the metaxological to deny its other, a denial in which it is no longer the “discourse of the between” but is instead the ‘one’ it is claiming *not to be*. From each side of the metaxological, then, - the affirmation and the denial - there is this movement whereby each vanishes into its own other. But it is important to see that this movement is not anything we are applying to Desmond’s thought, rather it is the movement implicit in this thought itself - all we are doing is *carrying out* Desmond’s own demands.

The Other and Dialectic

The essence of dialectical self-mediation, as Desmond sees it, is that the other is finally reduced to sameness. Although he grants that Hegel sees the other as mediating the middle, “this mediation from the side of the other invariably turns out to be a penultimate, hence subordinate moment of a more ultimate process of dialectical self-mediation; mediation from the other and by the other turns out, in the end, to be a mediation of the self in the form of *its own* otherness, and hence not the mediation of an irreducible other at all”(BH 7- 8). This is how the “beyond” of

Beyond Hegel continually works: the other is other to the degree that it is not brought within dialectic, insofar as it is maintained in and as an externality, *beyond* Hegel and dialectic. For Desmond can see the dialectic only as the “attempted closure of thought upon itself in seamless self-mediation”(BH 9), and so the other becomes the outside of this self-enclosure. The “picture” of the Hegelian dialectic Desmond wants to preserve as the other of metaxological philosophy is always this merely closed totality.

But the dialectic is not simply this self-enclosed structure.⁸ Desmond’s picture of the dialectic is literally one-sided, for it is a picture *placed against* the “outside”, or the beyond-enclosure Desmond speaks in the name of. But the reader has only to recall what was established in the previous section regarding the dialectical method itself, to see the dialectic as sustaining itself *in and through* the self-destruction of such one-sidedness. The Hegelian dialectic *cannot* be a mere self-enclosure in the way that Desmond insists, for its “closure” *is* an absolute openness. It cannot be a container that forever excludes true otherness, for Hegel shows time and again how this ‘exclusive’ form of thinking has yet to raise itself into truly speculative thought. Moreover, what could possibly be the boundaries of such a dialectical container? As we saw in the first section, the parameters of this “totality” - its beginning and end - are not *simply* simple. The beginning must be the simple immediacy, but we find it to be always already the irreducible movement of becoming. The ending must be a final result, but this last is precisely the movement itself, the method by which it has arrived, and so this finality is ultimately a re-turning. The essence of its beginning and end is that these very parameters *bring out the movement* in which those parameters are sublated. Certainly, the parameters of the dialectic ‘are there’, but they are there to be seen through. The beginning and end of the dialectic simply cannot remain in one

place, on 'this' side of things as opposed to 'that' side of things. The method cannot be a static *this*, as opposed to 'some other', but this is the picture metaxological philosophy insists upon in order to get "beyond" Hegel.

More importantly, however, it is by insisting on this beyond that the dialectic can be portrayed as a static closure in the first place. *That* there is this genuine otherness to the dialectic *makes* the dialectic into something "closed off" from its other. The two go hand in hand: a *beyond* of the Hegelian philosophy is the necessary correlate to the *limiting* of the Hegelian philosophy. What Desmond, and the countless other thinkers of the twentieth century, have attained to is really only this limited portrayal of Hegelianism. In other words, Hegel is not yet present in metaxological philosophy: Desmond gives us only *Desmond's* Hegel, not the essence of Hegelianism itself. The real otherness of Hegel is in this way missed. In this way, the self-mediation Desmond opposes in Hegel, is really the self-mediation belonging to Desmond's own position; Desmond's own dictum against Hegel can be seen as a dictum against himself: "mediation by the other and from the other turns out, in the end, to be a mediation of the self in the form of *its own* otherness"(BH 8). The interaction between metaxological philosophy and its other - Hegelian dialectic - is, in the end, the interaction with "its [metaxological thought's] own otherness". The essence of Hegelianism as that movement which cannot be contained as a self-enclosed totality, this is the "other" that has yet to be reached in metaxological thought.

Wholeness and Irreducibility

According to Desmond, "there is in Hegel, a dominance of the language of the whole, expressed in a pervasive metaphors of circularity, that is not compatible with the notion of

agapeic infinitude and its unmastered otherness”(BH 13). But although Desmond rejects the closure of self-thinking thought he does "not blankly repudiate the notion of wholeness, as does deconstruction. This again relates to the complex togetherness of self and other. A metaxological web of relations articulates their differences but also holds them together. Being held together, holding together points to a sense of "wholeness" that is not closed"(BH 10). The "whole" for Desmond is not the enclosed self-mediation, but an open relation. "The openness of every whole is precisely the eruption of the metaxological charge of otherness, either within that whole itself or at its utmost limit where it faces what is not itself" (p. 10). Although Desmond's position here is not, strictly speaking, in opposition to Hegel, it nonetheless rejects what it sees as its "tendency towards a final closure of self-thinking thought" or the culmination of the dialectic in a "singular process of total self-mediation" (p. 10). It is this totalized "whole" that is supposed to be closed-off to that otherness which cannot be brought within the scope of dialectical reasoning. But it should be said, however, that the dialectic cannot be a closed process in the sense that Desmond takes it to be. For if dialectical wholeness is a closure falling short of true otherness, then it is *not* a whole but an incompleteness. In other words, the dialectic is whole only insofar as its "outside" is at once its "inside" and vice-versa. It *is* insofar as there is *nothing* left outside it because the very opposition of inside/outside is actively absolved. This is what a "whole" *as such* must be: it belongs to the very idea of the whole that it not be some static enclosure, that it not draw a limit between itself and an other. This too reveals the problem in Desmond's conception of the openness of every whole being the "eruption of the metaxological charge of otherness, either within that whole itself or at its utmost limit where it faces what is not itself". As soon as Desmond introduces the relation between the whole and its other, the *whole then becomes* the

"whole"-and-its-other. The whole is not at the limit where it faces "what is not itself", the whole is the simultaneous separation and unification of the 'itself' and 'not itself'. This I take to be one of the lessons of the dialectic. But insofar as metaxological philosophy can only see a limited abstraction of the Hegelian dialectic, it is in fact guilty of the very crime it condemns - that of *reducing* the otherness of the other. This picture of the dialectic is the other of the metaxological itself, but this other has been reduced to a mere closed totality. For the metaxological philosophy, the *one* other that is not maintained in its otherness is that of the speculative dialectic itself.

For Desmond, the counterpart to the unity of dialectical "totality" is what can never be unified: the irreducible. Desmond takes the "irreducibility" of a relationship as that in which philosophy must finally rest. It is spoken of time and again as the true aim of metaxological thought. In this way, the highest point for metaxological philosophy is this merely *external* difference of "irreducibility". For externality is the keeping apart of "self" and "other", the "same" and the "other"; it is 'keeping apart' that remains central to the metaxological 'between' and its continued emphasis on a doubleness resistant to higher unification. As Desmond states "the between grants otherness its irreducible otherness" (BH 8). We need to ask, however, in a way that Desmond does not, just what is involved in this notion of "irreducibility". If one is irreducible to an other it remains forever outside it, locked in a relation for which difference *alone* counts. In an irreducible relation one and other do not sublimate their difference but maintain their difference. But the simplicity of this difference results from the fact that the one and the other all the while *remain themselves* - the "one is one" and the "other is other", each side *understood* in opposition to its counterpart. Thus, the simple difference of "irreducibility" directly results from the *fixed identity* of what is being differentiated. The sides that make the irreducibility do not themselves

consist of an irreducible difference - just the opposite, they are self-identical. In truth, this very identity befalls the 'irreducible difference' itself. Because the self-identical or self-mediating whole is itself in fixed opposition to the irreducibility the "irreducible" is *simply itself*. In its very opposition to self-identity, the "irreducible" difference is itself a self-identity.

Otherness as the Divine Other

We now want to turn our attention to a more concrete examination of the other in Beyond Hegel, for we have a right to ask what this "other" Desmond speaks in the name of could possibly *be*. One way in which the other is specified for Desmond is through religious thought - this is the theme of the third chapter of the book: "Speculation and Representation: The Masks of Philosophy and Its Religious Double". The first part of the chapter concerns the dominance of "representational thinking", a thinking which has, according to Desmond, received much criticism in this century. For "representation" is seen to belong to the knowing subject, such that "representation" is ultimately representation for a self. When philosophy calls into question the privileging of the subject as a basic category, it thereby critiques the dominance of "representability". In this regard, Desmond again places himself at the middle - agreeing with the critique of representational thought, but seeing this break from representation as given within representation itself. This break, he maintains, is especially manifest in religious representation, and thus the issue of God's representability for thought becomes the central concern for this chapter. In short, Desmond takes it as his aim to defend God in His irreducibility to dialectical self-mediation, that the thought of God is the "thought of an other beyond thought" (BH 141). For Hegel, as Desmond recognizes, representation (*Vorstellung*) is thought's relation to itself in

the form of another, it is not yet the thought that sees through this *picture* of itself so as to grasp itself in and as its own *movement*. Representation is not an ultimate: in itself it is the transformation into its other, the fullest expression of which is speculative philosophy itself. Now Desmond states “I agree with Hegel - representation has a necessary relation to an other; but I defend this necessity as essentially positive. Against the absolutizing of self-mediating thought, I defend the double in representation as itself the promise of an *openness to the unrepresentable*” (BH 140). Whereas, for Hegel, the relation of man and God is at once one of identity-in-difference, for Desmond “the relation of man and God is metaxological, hence susceptible to a double mediation which preserves difference from the two sides, without the difference having to be conceived as a dualistic opposition, nor rearticulated as but two moments of a complete, singular process of total dialectical self-mediation”(p. 144).

For Hegel, as Desmond explains, both religion and philosophy share an identical content - the absolute - yet they attain this content in different forms. For both, infinitude is the essential content, but whereas religion can only portray the infinite in a *finite* manner, philosophy attains to the true infinitude of thinking. Religion can only represent the absolute, whereas philosophy, in raising itself to the speculative concept, attains to the absolute itself. In this, representational thought is not simply negated, for the very content of the representation is now realized in conceptual form. In philosophy there is both the preservation and succession of religious thinking. The question for Desmond is whether, in the end, Hegel preserves the full difference between the two. He notes that in the mediation between religion and philosophy, “it is crucially important that Hegel stress that *thought* is at work in both”(BH 153). Because their discordance is ultimately resolved into a speculative unity in and through thought, the doubleness of their

difference must always yield to “the synoptic thought that completely thinks itself, that is, to *Hegel’s idea of philosophy*”(p. 153).⁹ Because, in this way, there is no ultimate otherness between the two, there appears to be little chance of a genuinely mutual relationship, one which respects the distance between the two.

According to Desmond, Hegel has always already defined *Vorstellung* in its reference to thought, for the sensuous aspect of the representation does not have its purpose in itself but only in its significance.¹⁰ For Desmond, though, this betrays a certain “doubleness”: on the one hand we must pass through the representation to its essential meaning, but on the other hand the representation is not itself the significance and is really at a distance from it. Thus, “the sensuous form of representation both unites us with the content and separates us from it”(BH 167). In and through the *Vorstellung*, the absolute is made manifest, given to us, but at the same time it is taken away: the representation situates its content as a beyond, the absolute cannot be present here and now, only *re-presented* in a provisional sense. For Desmond this indicates that the representation withholds itself from complete conceptualization. The religious representation makes manifest the divine to human understanding but at the same time maintains an otherness and mystery forever beyond our grasp. Hegel, however, passes over this - the *Vorstellung* is a limited form, in contradiction to that which it claims to represent. When *Vorstellung* passes into the speculative concept, the opposition between the form and content will have been absolved. This means that the mystery and otherness of the divine, preserved at the level of representation, vanishes at the level of the speculative concept. For Desmond, the disjunction between form and content, here and beyond, man and God, is something Hegel sees negatively, as that which is itself to be negated in the triumphant harmony of the dialectical reconciliation. This move is what

metaxological philosophy must avoid: the doubleness of the religious representation must be steadfastly *affirmed*, not resolved into dialectical unity. What Hegel treats as a limitation in the manifestation can instead “be seen as preserving the promise of religious release towards the absolute original, beyond all representation”(BH 180). This would preserve a certain mysticism in our approach to the divine, outside any rational resolution. More importantly, it would preserve the doubleness of the mediating movement between man and God which Desmond sees as finally silenced in Hegel. It is to be remembered that Hegel sees the relation of the human and divine as dialectically resolved from each side: there is a process by which man becomes conscious of himself in and as that which was previously beyond him, and there is a process by which the divine becomes itself in ceasing to be a beyond, in actualizing itself in and as the human community. For Hegel, as Desmond notes, this movement from the two sides is, in the end, *one* all-encompassing movement. The actual difference of directionality here ultimately amounts to nothing, since “the double mediation collapses into this total and single self-mediation”(p. 181).

Desmond’s opinion, quite simply, is that “this is wrong”(p. 181), for it undercuts a certain doubleness within the absolute itself. In Hegel, Desmond insists, the absolute is achieved through the desire to overcome its own limitation, its limit is determined only negatively, as a *lack*; what fuels its entire movement is its need to negate its limitation in the other and so become *total and infinite*. In short, the desire of this “erotic” absolute is that it ‘fill up’ what it lacks such that there is eventually nothing other than its *self*. The erotic absolute is “initially marked by a certain lack or indeterminacy”(p. 181) and so must work through finite or determinate being in order to complete itself. In contrast, Desmond maintains that the Hegelian absolute be placed

alongside its other, the “agapeic absolute”. The agapeic absolute is not defined by a lack of determination but by a

plentitude that is *more* than any determinate entity, a plentitude that is overdetermined and infinite. Its relation to finite being is not that of a necessary determination that will fill up its own lack. In itself it exhibits the affirmative indeterminacy of inexhaustability, the overdetermination, more than determinacy, of plentitude in itself. An agapeic absolute allows the absolute to be absolute in itself, hence other to finitude; but it also allows finitude to be other in itself (BH 181-182).

If, for Hegel, “Creation” is an intrinsic moment within the self-mediation of the absolute, for Desmond - echoing Heidegger - it is an inexplicable gift. “Agapeic creation is the giving of being to the other that lets the other-being be as other”(BH 182). This giving from the side of transcendence can never be equated to the mediation from the side of immanence. Where Hegel ultimately neutralizes the difference of directionality in the mediation between God and man, claiming the two movements to be truly one movement, Desmond sees this difference as irreducible. The divine opens up a disproportion beyond all equalization. This excess, this “more” of the agapeic absolute demands the thought of pure inequality. The agapeic is “the Unequal itself”, never reducible to determination. “As the Unequal Itself it has no dialectical equivalent with which it could be speculatively interchanged”(p. 182). The Unequal Itself reveals a certain impotence within human being, the inability of thought to master this “ultimate excess”. To recognize this impotence is to give thanks for the other, to enter into “the grateful acknowledgement that all being and power is given from the other, the agapeic absolute”(p. 183)

For us, however, the question arises as to what this “Unequal Itself” could possibly be. Now for Desmond, such a question is misdirected from the start - it presupposes that the being of the Unequal can be grasped, which is precisely what the Unequal is not. It is enough to see, though,

that in this very response the Unequal is given a negative determination. To say it *evades* our grasp is to *conceive of it as* this opposing of our grasp. The Unequal *is* simply the not-equal, the not-same, the different-than. It is what can never be a “this” or “that” only the not-this, the not-that. Negativity *alone* is its sole function. For this reason, the Unequal does not “exceed” so much as it excavates. It is not so much a “more” as a *less*, for all it can do is *deny* that it is a “this” or a “that”, and in the end this is all it amounts to. Its un-equality is just non-identity. Of course, Desmond wants to say there is *more* to it, that it is not mere negating but ‘something’ that persists *beyond* thought, dialectic, identity and so forth. But in this beyond, the Unequal *Itself* thereby amounts to a pure *autonomy* - it is *not* any of “this” but it *is* itself. In the end, all we can say of the Unequal *itself* is: the Unequal *Itself is* the Unequal *Itself*. In the end this Unequal amounts to pure *self-equality* - just the opposite of itself.

Desmond states of this Unequal that it cannot be reduced to the interchange of opposites in dialectic. As unequal it has no dialectical equivalent - it is always beyond such sublating movement. If this is true, though, then the Unequal is the opposite of the dialectic - the Unequal is that “excess” which *as such* opposes what it sees as dialectical “closure”. Like it or not, the Unequal does indeed have an opposite. As this opposite, it is itself an identity that constantly refuses the movement into otherness - it is the unequal *itself*, always so, always retaining itself in being beyond dialectical transformation. *In* itself it is without an other, without determination, for it must constantly deny its identification in such. The very poverty and emptiness of this notion lies in the fact that it is just itself and nothing other.¹¹ Its “more” than determinacy is, in the end, *nothing more* than a sheer removal of determinacy. The “more” is no more. Despite what Desmond maintains of the Unequal *Itself*, the Unequal *is* thereby equivalent to its opposite. It

achieves this equivalence *in* its very attempt to oppose such equivalence.

Now the supposed value of the Unequal is its ability to shatter the self-enclosed, totalizing nature of the dialectic, but it is the Unequal itself which is absolutely self-enclosed, for it defines itself solely insofar as it is *not anything other* than the Unequal. This inequality whose essence is taken to be negativity actually maintains itself in its isolation, stays the same. Because it insists on non-identity, on un-equality, it becomes the simple form of identity. Precisely in its own refusal to become other - that is, to become other than the Unequal itself - it is a self-sameness. In this there lies the movement by which the distinction between the "totalizing" tendency of Hegelian philosophy and its "beyond" is itself *aufgehoben*. The dialectical "enclosure" it is to exceed becomes its own enclosure, just as the exceeding that lies in the Unequal becomes the movement it has here given rise to, *the exceeding of the Unequal itself*. For in the active overturning of the Unequal Itself, the "more" is not at all lost. If we want the "more", if we want "excess", we are here seeing it at work - it is the transforming movement of the dialectic itself. This very movement by which we have seen the unequal "beyond" of the dialectic ultimately *become dialectical* is an active exceeding. The dialectic is not a simple self-enclosure, it is that movement which itself sees through mere enclosure.¹² As we indicated in Part I regarding this method: its re-turning into itself is also its absolute *openness*; its maintenance of itself is in and through its active going-beyond any static determinations for itself. Thus, the real loss of excess lies not in the dialectic but in those abstractions of the understanding which attain excess in name only. By definition, the "Unequal Itself" names such a one-sidedness.

The Unrepresentable

Desmond states that “against the absolutizing of self-mediating thought, I defend the double in representation as itself the promise of an *openness to the unrepresentable*” (p. 140). Desmond’s partiality towards the other always brings him to this point: real otherness is beyond the grasp of thought, beyond all our attempts to contain it. If this is true, however, this rule must apply to metaxological philosophy as much as it must apply to any other. Metaxological thought realizes this and so continually indicates its limitation: in the end it only *opens onto* the other, the other is “unrepresentable” for it and all thought. In saying this, however, metaxological thought is already indicating something of the ‘unrepresentable’. What remains definitive of the unrepresentable is that it is taken *to be*, and that it is taken to be *beyond* thought (BH 141).

In regards to its being it is, like the Unequal, something for which no determination can ever be given, for any such determination (mis)-represents it as a 'this'. But for this reason, all the unrepresentable can be here is a sheer emptiness: nothing positive, nothing *more* can be claimed of it. Although one might insist that it is not this emptiness but *something* that genuinely persists beyond thought, this is, however, to insist on some positive, thinkable content for it. In other words, by insisting, through thought, that the unrepresentable is not just an empty word but something that is a beyond, we have already introduced into the unrepresentable that which, by definition, the unrepresentable must be without. What is more than the mere emptiness of the unrepresentable is that which is positively represented in thought. Thus, to stay true to the unrepresentable itself is to see that it can only amount to the sheer absence of positivity. In the end it amounts to *nothing*.

Ultimately, thought can recognize nothing that *stays* beyond thought. For once we recognize

this unrepresentable, once we claim this beyond *to be*, it is no longer an outside of thought but is recognized from *within* thought itself. The outside, the unattainable other Desmond speaks in the name of, *moves into its other*. The outside actively becomes the inside just as the inside actively becomes in the outside. But this movement is continually overlooked by Desmond. The entire breadth of Beyond Hegel is concerned with the fact that, ultimately, the other *is the other* only as an irreducible beyond. But in this it claims to have grasped the other in a way previous philosophy does not. To see the other *as* unrepresentable is, according to Desmonds' own position, to see the other for what it *is*. But there is no "inconceivability" in this, on the contrary, Desmond is conceiving of the other in the simplest manner possible. In effect, this supposed inconceivability of the other here functions as its true conception.

What Desmond fails to see is that, according to his own position, the real unrepresentability of the other lies in that very view he opposes. According to Desmond, it is the Hegelian philosophy that leaves the other in the dark, for the fault of this philosophy is taken to be its reduction of otherness to the hegemony of self-mediation, a reduction that always fails to attain to the "other as other". But to the degree that it does, according to Desmond's own position, leave the other in the dark so too we must ask whether this darkness is precisely what Desmond's notion of otherness demands. Does not the darkness actually *preserve* the other *as* beyond? In other words, there is a sense in which the degree to which Desmond sheds *light* on the other is the degree to which the other is no longer 'other'. On the one hand, according to Desmond, the dialectic reduces all otherness to self-mediation, it thereby *misses* the real otherness of the other, for the other is ultimately what cannot be so reduced, and thus every such reduction actually fails to get at the other. On the other hand, however, metaxological philosophy, in not reducing the other to

itself but in 'letting-be the otherness of the other', does not miss the real otherness of the other, but truly *renders* it. If metaxological philosophy is open to "what is other to thought, precisely as other" (BH 8) then metaxological philosophy alone *achieves* the other. In insisting that the other *is* what exceeds our grasp, metaxological philosophy has grasped what the other *is*. But Desmond's account of the other is at odds with itself for this very reason: if we really wanted to preserve the simple unrepresentability of the other we would have to preserve that very self-mediation which is taken to fall short of "the other as other". For to the degree that the other is constantly *misconceived* it remains outside of conception, the degree to which we are 'wrong' about the other is the degree to which the other remains an unrepresentable. But once we insist on the *truth* of "the other as other" - which Desmond takes to be the value of metaxological philosophy - then we have at last grasped what otherness demands. Once we insist that "the other *is* the unrepresentable", thought has at last attained to its representation. If it really were beyond conceivability thought could not have grasped that this beyond is what the other is in truth.

It is important to see that the dialectic itself is not a purely transparent representability. Hegel's "self-mediating" philosophy is itself "unrepresentable" but not *simply* so. It is not *the* Unrepresentable, something fixed beyond all possible representation. Rather, speculative thought sees the active negation of representation that works in and through representation itself. It is that movement which cannot be fixed as 'this' particular representation, or 'this' particular shape, but a movement which comes *through* those representations and is their own inherent result. The unrepresentable is thus not an other persisting outside all representation, it is its own active negation persisting within it.

Beyond Logic

In the end, Desmond insists, Hegel retreats from the thought of the between. For Desmond this between, insofar as it preserves the other as other, is an abyssal gap, incomprehensible to reason. Hegel's retreat from metaxological otherness is thus concomitant to his constant retreat into logical necessity. Instead of seeing God's revelation as a wholly free, inexplicable gift, "*by a necessity of logic* Hegel would determine God to come across the gap of the abyss"(BH 185). Hegelian logic, precisely by way of its necessity, can never tolerate the excess of the agapeic absolute. It "can make no sense of the gratuity of agapeic creation"(BH 186). Logic forbids any final gratuity.

Dialectical thought will try to build its logical shelter, but once the thought of this abyss breaks through, speculative philosophy can never henceforth be entirely at home or at ease in this shelter. The consoling peace of logic is broken forever. Thought becomes unhoused before this other, stripped of its self-certainty, naked before the limit of the illimitable. Hegel is right in one regard: there is no limit for thought, and every limit, as drawn, as thought, is already transcended. But there are no limits here, because we come across a limit/unlimit, at whose edge there is no conceptual protection from the ultimate other (BH 186-7).

So Desmond will admit that Hegel is right in this regard: from the moment thought conceives of its limit it has already gone beyond that limit. Nonetheless, Desmond will go beyond this, for when it comes to the agapeic other, the Unequal Itself, the unrepresentable and so on there are A) "no limits", B) "a limit/unlimit" and C) an "edge" beyond which lies the unconceivable other. The compatibility of these three is highly questionable, however. If there are "no limits here" then there simply cannot be any ultimate other - for any such other requires an absolute limit. Similarly, if we "come across a limit/unlimit" then it is not the case that there are "*no* limits

here” but that limit passes into its other and unlimit passes into its other. For this reason as well, limit/unlimit cannot form an “edge”, that is, a *limit* whereby thought comes up against the unconceivability of the other - such a limit is always already internal to limit/unlimit itself. Desmond is right in one regard: thought must come across the union of limit and unlimit, but *for precisely this reason*, thought must not retreat from this union by seeing it as some threshold beyond which lies an inscrutable alterity. From the moment *this* limit is drawn it “is already transcended”. From the moment thought conceives of the limit of thought *as such* it has already gone beyond that limit. Desmond *claims* to recognize this condition as something Hegel was “right” about, but it is never taken to heart. It is never recognized that the limit/unlimit Desmond here speaks of is inherent to the very dialectic he claims to get beyond. Indeed, limit/unlimit is not thought of dialectically at all. Because this notion has not been thought through, in the end there is this retreat into the external antagonism of conceptuality and its “ultimate other”

These criticisms regarding logic are certainly convenient for metaxological philosophy. It would appear that to dare hold its position accountable to logic is to have it elude our grasp - it is always going to be a “more” than what logic says of it. So, one might say, it has always won every argument in advance because it has always already declared the very rules of the game to be limited and incomplete. In truth, however, resigning oneself from the task of logical efficacy is the easiest way of *losing* every argument in advance. For if there is no inferential process at work in the claim that metaxological philosophy cannot ultimately be held accountable to the court of logic then we have no reason to accept it, or just as much reason to accept its opposite. One can only maintain this sort of claim through a process of reasoning which makes *this* the conclusion as opposed to its contrary. If one wants to maintain that there is *more* to the

metaxological 'beyond' of logic than logic itself can make sense of, then we have every right to enquire into *how* one is able to defend this claim rather than some other. Yet the only way to defend this position is to give some necessary reason for it - but from the moment that is undertaken the position is circumscribed within the very logic it claims to be other than. To be able to *maintain* that logic is limited by something irreducibly other than it is to rely on a certain logical efficacy. We cannot truly accept what metaxological philosophy claims of logic - that it is a limited form against which there remains an irreducible other - unless it is conclusively demonstrated. Metaxological philosophy does not do this, it tends to *assume* a limited picture of "thought" and "logic" from the start - this is the assumption we are taking issue with. But of course, if it were to specifically conclude that "logic is ultimately limited" as a result of a logical demonstration, then the contradiction of its enterprise would become even more apparent. For such a conclusion can only contradict the very inferential process needed to establish its truth. Insofar as we logically conclude with this supposed limitation of logic, we would have to find this conclusion itself to be of a limited and incomplete nature. As a conclusion, as something resulting from an inferential process, it is limited - limited by its own admission. So according to the conclusion we must go beyond it, we cannot conclude with "logic is limited" because this conclusion at once falls victim to the limitation it declares.

Desmond nonetheless maintains that logic, precisely by way of its necessity, can never tolerate the "excess" of the agapeic absolute. Logic is something self-enclosed for Desmond, and because he sees it this way he thinks that there must be some *other* to this self, some inexplicable "gift" which the logical process can never get behind. Already, however, the instability of this position should be apparent. For in putting forward this position, metaxological philosophy relies

on logical necessity all over again. *Since* 'the other is the other', *since* the other is "as other", *then* the other must remain apart from its identification in thought. *Therefore* the other must be beyond the conceptual grasp of logic; logic must be limited. Indeed, *since* logic is limited, *then* logic cannot effectively criticize the ultimate other. A process of reasoning, albeit a simple one, is entirely visible in metaxological philosophy, though it is a process not yet seen through. It attains only to the thought of an otherness inexplicable to reason, in excess of it, but in this it has only retreated into the most rudimentary stage of reasoning. The truly limited and incomplete logic is *Desmond's own*. For Desmond's entire thinking, though it speaks constantly in the name of difference, can see only in terms of identity. The other is other, it is only as an outside. Logical necessity, in contrast, is a restriction, a containment, it is only as an inside. Necessity is a binding-to, otherness is a freeing-from.

Things, however, are not this simple. In truth, there is nothing other about this "ultimate other" Desmond entertains. In the end, nothing concrete can ever become of it, all it is and all it can ever be is just the empty insistence of its equality to self: "the other" = "the other", and nothing other must enter into this equation. All that is ever attained in this "other" is just the hollow form of identity. The essentially Hegelian point is, therefore, continually overlooked - namely, that the other is insofar as it enters into its own other, that is, insofar as it itself becomes other. It is thus this movement, what Hegel tends to describe as a circular re-turning into identity, re-turning into universality and so forth, that "ends" the dialectic. But Desmond can see this only in an abstract sense, as simply a giving up on the other. In truth, though, it is really he who has so given up, for it is he who refuses to retain the otherness inherent in this supposed "self-mediation". It is he who refuses to see that this re-turning into identity is at the same time the furthest reach of

difference. In the end, identity is not simply “identity”, it is at the same time the other in its becoming other. This is necessary for the other, this is what the other is.

Of course, such necessity, such logic, is for Desmond a limited, self-enclosed form. For this way of thinking, the other must be beyond logic. But precisely because the other is itself alone, precisely because it is defined in its absolute severance from our grasp, this “other” is the true model of self-containment here, not logic. In truth it is logic which always moves us beyond such enclosure. This is what Desmond’s “beyond” always fails to see. For Desmond gives us a “beyond” which merely *repeats* the containment it is to surpass; it is really not a “beyond” of self-enclosure but only the reproduction of another enclosed self. So we are left merely with this antagonism between the self-enclosure of thought, and the self-enclosure of its inexplicable other. Yet when this static opposition is seen through, when “self” and “other”, “enclosure” and “openness” etc. are seen in their vanishing into one another then we have indeed moved beyond the containment Desmond would oppose. The exceeding of self-restriction metaxological philosophy *seeks* is at work in the very philosophy it claims to have *left behind* - the speculative dialectic itself. The dialectic *realizes* the very otherness Desmond claims in name only. Desmond misses the dialectic in the attempt to contain it, for the dialectic is the moving-beyond its inert closure. Desmond speaks against this closure time and again but his own treatment of the dialectic is precisely such a closing-off.

What logic or reason is at work in metaxological thought itself? Implicit throughout Desmond’s entire position is that there is good *reason* to place reason in a secondary position to an inexplicable otherness, that there is an ultimate *reason* not to affirm its ultimate status, but to insist instead that “all being and power is given from the other” (p. 183). But when looked at

more closely these reasons turn out to be *assumptions* of certain fixed abstractions: that the other must *remain*, on its side, an 'irreducible other'; that thought, logic and so on must *remain*, on their side, a limited form of 'self-mediation'. The picture that Beyond Hegel constantly draws out - that of otherness in fixed distinction from sameness - is the very one it has *assumed* from the start. We end having not moved from where we began. But this assumed picture of things does not thereby place it outside reason, logic, thought etc., rather it should be conceived as a necessary, but not fully developed, stage within reason itself. For despite its own claims to the contrary, there is *reason* at work behind metaxological philosophy. A certain force is posited for its claims. The abyss, the "between" and so forth is not taken as a whim, it is taken as a truth, a necessary other to every closed self-mediation. A *rationale* is implicit throughout metaxological philosophy albeit an imperfect one - for its ultimate basis is an assumption of the very thing in question, the form of fixed antithesis itself. Because the logic of Desmond's position is essentially incomplete it can be found to overturn itself when pressed to the extreme. Thus, we are told that logic, *for some reason*, is to be secondary to the primacy of the 'inexplicable gift of otherness' - metaxological philosophy asks of us that we maintain this as being the case. But if we are indeed to *maintain* this as being the case; that is, if we are to show it as the necessary conclusion to be drawn rather than its contrary, then we are making *primary* use of that which we are claiming to be *secondary*. Logic is the *basis* at work in any attempt at disavowing that basis. As a result, this unconceivable "outside" is really conceived from the "inside"; the "gift" is not a "gift" but something always already determined by a logical relation. In truth, this "gift" is nothing but the negative of self-mediation; it is not a gift that has fallen inexplicably from the sky, it is a notion derived in antithesis to the enclosedness it is "beyond".

Of course, Desmond might say that he is not ultimately relying on logic in the way we take him to be, and he really *must* say this if logic supposedly falls short of the ultimate other.¹³ But such a position would only be entertained in order to avoid logical contradiction. That is, it would be put forward out of deference to logic even though *this is the very position it claims to avoid*. Desmond might maintain that logic does not have an ultimate role in his own position in order to avoid contradiction, but even if we accept this as true, contradiction results all over again. If one maintains that there is *ultimately* no reason for maintaining that logic “can make no sense of the gratuity of agapeic creation”, then one must equally admit the opposite conclusion. There can be no reason *not* to affirm the opposite, namely, that it *does* make sense of it. If reason is not the ultimate court of appeal for Desmond’s position - a fact which would appear to follow from the claims of the position itself - then it necessarily leads to the contrary position as well. There is thus a movement at work here, yet it is this movement that is constantly being avoided in metaxological philosophy. For Desmond, it is ultimately *not* the case that reason, thought etc. can grasp its other: all we are left with is the unbridgeable gulf “between” the two. To affirm the opposite of this, to affirm that the beyond does not remain beyond but becomes thought of - *this* is an affirmation of an *other* that metaxological philosophy has little tolerance for.

Metaxological philosophy is not between logic and its other, rather it is circumscribed within the *simplest* form of logic. Always, for Desmond, the thrust of his ‘argument’ regarding otherness is merely the *commonsensical assumption* of identity - that the “other is other” to the degree that it is *maintained* beyond the dialectical transformation. Only in this “irreducible heteronomy” does he see a “standing before the other, a standing up for the other as other”(p. 180). It is thus constantly assumed that as long as we keep speaking in the name of the other, as

long as we keep designating the “other as other” we are keeping it in view. But it is precisely this assumption that is the real issue here, and insofar as thought does not penetrate into this question it remains shortsighted. What does “standing up for the other as other” entail? What is the other itself *as other*? What is really at work when we remain with this designation? It is not enough to merely assume what the other is here, thought must *think through* otherness. Thought must not rest with the ordinary, but must rather become extraordinary, become *other* than the ordinary - such otherness truly belongs to speculative thought. But metaxological philosophy falls short of this, for what is really being addressed by its maintenance of the other is that familiar line of thinking which insists that things ‘are what they are’. The way of thinking Desmond’s position epitomizes is *nothing other* than the most familiar of habits. The highest point for metaxological thought is a “doubleness”, a holding-apart, it thereby portrays itself as that picture of the dialectic Hegel specifically renders problematic - namely, the age-old conception of the dialectic as having a merely negative result, a conception that dates back to Pyrrho. There is little that is new in Desmond’s discourse of the ‘between’, the ‘middle’, etc. - rather it betrays an old way of thinking. It backs down from the highest task of thought - the movement of identity-in-difference - and instead retreats to the *middle ground*.

Conclusion

Desmond has much to say that is positive regarding Hegel, and metaxological philosophy is to be commended in at least trying not to be one-sided in its approach to dialectical thought. But although it speaks of avoiding reductivist readings of Hegel, Desmond himself has not heard what he is speaking of. The picture we are given of Hegel is precisely such a reduction, and along

with that goes the reduction of the very thing Desmond wants to *open up*: otherness, difference, negativity, etc. in truth, Desmond, like Taminiaux, is part of a larger trend in the perception of Hegelian thought, a trend which, by way of its very commonality, has yet to become truly *different*. It is merely assumed that the contemporary concern for “difference” must be found as a difference from Hegel, beyond his articulation of the dialectic. It is never once asked whether this trend might betray the most commonplace thinking, and that “difference” might actually result in the return to the very dialectic it seeks to escape from.

CLOSING REMARKS

At the close of the Logic Hegel describes the dialectic as a “system of totality”.

To place this in context, Hegel states that the dialectical method “converts *the immediate beginning into something mediated*”(p. 840). It brings about a content as a result. But it is equally true that the method is itself the result of the content; the method is itself ‘mediated’ by the determinations it yields. Content unfolds from out of the simple form of this method, but it is equally true that this method is *not* in its mere simplicity, that it itself comes out of the unfolding of content, for in truth it *is* such unfolding. The method, therefore:

returns *through a content* as through an apparent *other* of itself to its beginning in such a manner that not only does it restore that beginning - as a *determinate* beginning however - but the result is no less the sublated determinateness, and so the restoration of the first immediacy in which it began. This it accomplishes as a *system of totality* (SL 840).

The system of totality is not merely, therefore, what the dialectic amounts to “in the end”. It is just as much the carrying out of the immediate beginning as it is the bringing it back; an expanding-outwards and a drawing-into. The determinacy that results is itself the result of the indeterminate immediacy from which it began, this immediacy is thereby preserved in it. As a whole this system is an immediacy, but an immediacy that is in and through the movement into its own opposite, an immediacy that restores itself through determinacy, mediation, difference and so forth. It is an immediacy insofar as all possible determinations of thought are its own, insofar as there is no determinacy persisting outside it, no determinacy that would not always already be of it. In this it is not opposed to determinacy but is rather its absolution. At once

determinacy made absolute and the absolve of determinacy; both in one, that is, the movement at work from the start: becoming.

So it should now be clear that this system of totality is not a static entity but one better understood as a living process. It is simultaneously an expanding-outwards and a drawing-into, the movement of which is circular. As a movement, it is not limited by the static picture of circularity as a self-enclosed form; it is not something bounded against an outside that is its other. It cannot be insofar as it is the identity-in-difference of the identical and the different. So it is not anything we can hold up to view, as it were, for really *we* are always already caught up in it. This is a totality, but not one that circumscribes itself through fixed limits.

Even the most elementary logic demands this of the “totality”. When common sense considers the notion of totality, it considers the sum of all things, a completion which brings to a close. This notion of “totality” is inert insofar as it circumscribes all that is. This circumscription, however, is just as much its limit. At once a problem arises. From the moment we fix the totality, maintain it through imposed limits, we have already, through the limits themselves, introduced an otherness beyond those limits - the “totality” is thereby not total insofar as it lacks this otherness. The very parameters that would maintain the totality as such are the very parameters that destroy it. It is easy enough, therefore, for the totality to appear as something unattainable, something essentially beyond our grasp. Thought can thereby take “totality” in the opposite sense as before. It thereby is no longer limited but is rather opposed to limitation, the truly unlimited. Of course, all this does is reintroduce the very problem it was to overcome. As a mere beyond, as something separated from our grasp, the totality is limited once again; its opposition to limitation is its limitation. So now the very lack of parameters that would maintain the totality as such has

become the very lack that destroys it. The totality, therefore, appears as an insoluble problem: as a limited entity it is negated, as non-limitation it is negated. In truth, however, this problem is already its own answer. The height of its apparent impossibility is its full realization; its negation has itself become negated. For the movement the problem articulates - the limited becoming the illimitable, the illimitable becoming the limited - is totality itself. The vanishing of the one into the other, each preserved and negated simultaneously, this is totality. Total because nothing could possibly be left out of it, for any "outside" reintroduces the problem it absolves; total because it cannot be contained as an "it" at all. "It" is not an "it" but that movement which restores itself in and through its negation: dialectic.

We have seen this in what Hegel himself has written of the dialectic in the Logic, but we have also seen it through a certain opposition to Hegel, through the attempt to enclose the dialectic as a structure of enclosure. Such opposition is really only apparent, it does not get beyond Hegel but only retreats to the point of view Hegel carries out. This form of opposition to the dialectic, we saw, is really only fodder for the dialectic. It forms the beginning of dialectic all over again. In this way the second part of this thesis is the natural ally of the first: just as the beginning, the simple immediacy of pure being, is already the movement of its own sublation, already the dialectical movement in its not yet, so too is the supposed "end" of the dialectic, an end spoken in the name of true difference and alterity etc. already the movement of its own sublation. Those criticisms that seek to get beyond Hegel on the issue of difference overturn themselves and give *rise* to the dialectic. The dialectic reveals itself *from* where it is taken not to be - this is the lesson of the beginning.

FOOTNOTES

1) For instance, despite the distinctions between such philosophers as Adorno, Heidegger, Bataille, Derrida, Levinas, there is nonetheless an ingrained suspicion of the unifying tendency in Hegelian philosophy. Speaking very generally, if there is a common concern between their attitude to Hegel, it is that the dialectic fails to consider difference as such. Difference truly grasped breaks the dialectical completion of philosophy; instead of the triumph of thought, difference is embraced as that which divides and thwarts the absolute fulfillment of thought. The attitude Gasche attributes to Derrida and Heidegger is not far removed from what we will see in Taminaux and Desmond: "What distinguishes Heidegger's and Derrida's positions from that of [Hegelian] idealist philosophy is primarily their enquiry into what may be called the difference between identity and difference, between the totality of what is and the difference that inhabits self relation" (p. 87). In distinction from Hegel, Gasche states "Heidegger's investigation is into difference *itself*, into the true *essence* of difference, not into difference that would simply be the same as the whole of Being (let us not forget that Heidegger later relinquishes the name of Being) and that would unite what is set forth within it..."(p. 87). We will leave aside the question of whether this search for "the true *essence*" of difference is not, for that very reason, already a search into the very opposite of "difference" - for much of what follows regarding Desmond and Taminaux is an investigation of this very point. Also I have already written far more extensively on Bataille's, Heidegger's, and Derrida's relation to Hegel in a previous M.A Thesis: Over and Over: From Derrida to Hegel and Beyond. University of Western Ontario.

2) Hegel's specific text here is presumably Faith and Knowledge, which Taminaux had referred to previously. In essence, though, "Finitude and the Absolute" is about Hegel's thought in general. Thus Taminaux refers to Hegel's work in a rather indefinite fashion. In its most widespread sense, then, Taminaux is referring to Hegel's text in general, that it is a mark of Hegelian thought as such to shift into talk of "concordance, equivalence" etc. at the very moment difference is taken to be fundamental. I am thereby replying on a similar level, that is, by reference to the dialectical method as such which has been explicated specifically in the preceding section.

3) Of course, to speak of the "understanding" and "reason" often makes it appear that these exist in separation from one another, but this is itself a limited understanding of their relation. For it is just as true that they are *one*, that implicit in the understanding is reason as result. The understanding is thought *not yet* raised itself into the infinitude of reason. This infinitude, the comprehension of which is philosophy, thereby contains the finite within it just as the finite contains the infinite as its ultimate result. So philosophy cannot be without the understanding. For philosophy, as Hegel insists, despises vagueness, it demands the precise and determinate, but at the same time it cannot let these distinctions "have the last word" (para. # 80) , that is, they must be shown to sublimate themselves.

4) Here we can make use of a distinction between the contingent truths of the understanding, truth in the sense of an external correspondence between our thought and some object or situation in the world, and truth in the rational sense: the inherent unity in the very difference between thought and world - or subject and object, infinite and finite, etc. - as such. Because it thinks in terms of opposed distinctions, it is this truly infinite truth that is the "mystery" for the understanding. Hegel himself writes of the inadequacy of the understanding to the truth in its absolute sense:

The expression *objective thoughts* signifies the *truth* which ought to be the absolute *ob-ject*, not just the *goal* of philosophy. But at the same time this expression indicates in any case an antithesis - indeed, the very one whose determination and validity is the focus of our philosophical interest at the present time, and around which the quest for *truth* and for the cognition of it revolves. If the thought determinations are afflicted with a fixed antithesis, i.e., if they are only of a *finite* nature, then they are inadequate to the truth which is absolutely in and for itself, and the truth cannot enter into thinking. The thinking that brings forth only *finite* determinations and moves within these alone is called *understanding* (in the more precise sense of the word) (EL # 25).

5) By analogy we could speak of 3 as the end of 1 and 2 . Of course, 3 *is* 1 and 2; 1 and 2 thereby dissolve into 3

which expresses them as a whole. But there is no 3 without the 1 *itself*, and the 2 *itself*, indeed, one must always affirm the independence of these others within the 3. To extend the analogy: most critics of Hegel, insofar as they see his philosophy as an ultimate erasure of difference, tend to look at 3 alone, whereas the true expression of the 3 is that it is the 1 and 2. To see 3 one must see past it into 1 and 2 as well. To see the completion one must see past it into those moments of its incompleteness.

6) We say that the “Absolute Method” which closes the Logic is a “distillation” precisely because it is at this point that the movement of moving-beyond ceases. That is why the expression of the absolute method is the *end*: there is no movement to another stage here for what is being expressed is the pure form of *that movement itself* - any move beyond it could only be a move within it. In other words, the movement itself is immovable, it is at last distilled insofar as we see there is no moving beyond the dialectical process and that it alone is what has remained constant behind the entire progression of different contents in the Logic. All we are adding above is the demand that one see the expression of dialectical form which closes the Logic as inherently bound to all the previous stages before it; it is the expression of those stages wherein it is not-yet. One cannot stay at the end but must move back and regard its union in the whole.

#7) So at other points in the book Desmond speaks less of a “denial” and more of a doubled affirmation: “The double mediation of the metaxological means that genuine speculative mind must be both self-mediating and also open to the intermediation between thought and what is other to thought, precisely as other” (BH 8). Our point is that there is a tension in Desmond’s thought between denying the one comprehensive dialectic, the self-mediation and so forth while also having to affirm it as one side of the double relation metaxological philosophy articulates. In a nutshell: one cannot *actually* affirm the self mediating thought, or the one comprehensive dialectic, if it is alongside its metaxological other. Similarly, to *actually* deny that there is one comprehensive dialectic, or self-mediating thought, is not to let the other *be* other in the way that Desmond must allow for.

8) “Self-mediation” for Desmond is ultimately a self-enclosed form. But while Desmond speaks much about Hegelian “self-mediation” he says too little on what this concept of “self” involves for Hegel. Desmond himself would readily agree that the ultimate form of selfhood for Hegel is not the subjective “I”. But often Desmond takes issue with self-mediation as if it were something whose relation to otherness results only in its own circumscription, as if it were some circularly self-enclosed entity. But this is a limited picture of Hegelian selfhood, and one that fails precisely because it is a picture. In the end, Desmond understands “self” in opposition to “other”, whereas the Hegelian self is the movement in which this opposition both comes to be and passes away. *However* Desmond conceives of this “otherness” it always places itself against a limited conception of selfhood. Thus it misses the fact that “self” for Hegel is ultimately not anything that could be closed off from an “otherness” as such. For “self”, in this fully developed sense, is that active process of identity-in-difference, a movement at once totally open and totally closed.

9) Desmond is not the only one to voice this issue. It is often said that Hegel is presumptuous in holding all accountable to “Hegel’s idea of philosophy”. But it should be clear from our discussion of the Hegelian “method” that this is a one sided claim. It overlooks the fact that *ultimately* Hegel’s idea of philosophy is that there *can be no such thing* as “Hegel’s idea of philosophy”. That is, the dialectic is not, in its fullest comprehension, an “idea” of Hegel’s; it is not a *particular* way of doing philosophy unique to him; it is not an invention on his part that he arrogantly presumes all to be accountable to. It is rather the movement of philosophy itself, a movement that cannot exclude other philosophies and philosophical methods outside Hegelianism, a movement in which “inside” and “outside” sublimate themselves. This is precisely what our reading of Desmond shows. By remaining true to Desmond’s claims to be in some way “beyond Hegel and dialectic”, we can see these claims overturn into their own opposite. The outside becomes inside and vice-versa. This dialectical movement is not “peculiar” to Hegel for it reveals itself to be at work in the very attempt to be not Hegel, to be beyond dialectic.

But it might be countered that insofar as this is a Hegelian defense of Hegel it merely presumes the validity of this philosophy - when this is precisely what is being questioned. That is, it might be said that we have merely presupposed ‘Hegel’s idea of philosophy’ in order to get him off the hook. Yet it is not clear that we have done this at all. For precisely what we are supposedly “presupposing” here is that there is no particular method to presuppose;

that there ultimately cannot be 'Hegel's idea of philosophy'. The one "presupposition" of the dialectic is that we not begin by presupposing the dialectic. The demand that we are here being held accountable to - that we not presume what it is we wish to establish - is a demand *already* met by the dialectic.

10) It is a mistake, however, to think that this sensuous aspect of representation is not just as much inherent in thought. As Hegel states, "in the order of time consciousness produces *representations* of objects before it produces *concepts* of them; and that the *thinking* spirit only advances to thinking cognition by going *through* representation and by converting itself *to* it"(EL # 1). Thought, for Hegel, is not something that ultimately leaves behind representation, rather it incorporates it. Thought *is* representation, as Hegel here states, but it is not *simply* so: thought in its most developed form *also* exceeds representation. The highest form of thought - philosophy - cannot be fixed as a particular representation, for it is the living movement in which such fixity is sublated. For this very reason, though, necessary to this movement of thought is its "going *through* representation and by converting itself *to* it". Thought ultimately knows itself to be at one with representation just as much as it knows itself to be distinct from it.

#11) Desmond can of course always deny this, insisting that it is always "more" than the categories we are here using to identify it. But, of course, this is the very problem - that in the end the Unequal can amount to nothing more than mere denial. To deny this is to contribute to the problem at issue.

#12) It is as this movement too that Hegel ultimately conceives of *thought*. Desmond constantly treats thought as if it were a restrictive entity. That is to say, what Desmond takes to be ultimate for thought is the thought of its *own beyond*. It is this beyond that is supposed to articulate something genuinely other than Hegel's constrained sense of thought. But Hegel's ultimate conception of "thought" - for reasons we have articulated throughout - is not something that could be *simply limited* in the way Desmond sets it up as. Indeed, to see it as limited is to *miss* it, to not really see it at all.

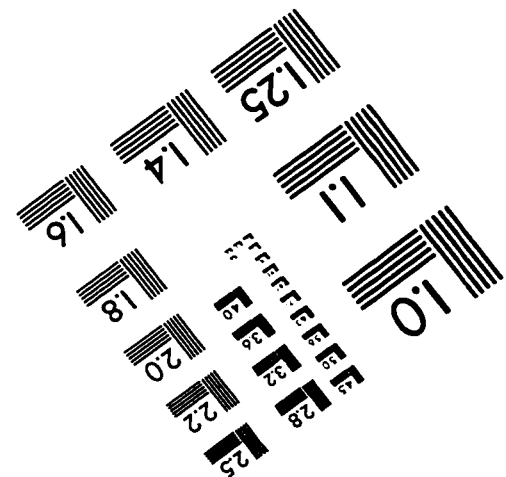
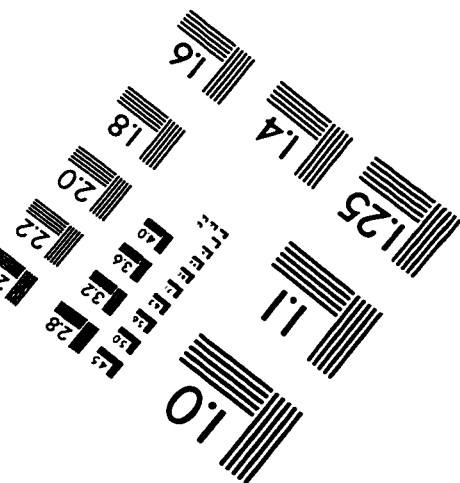
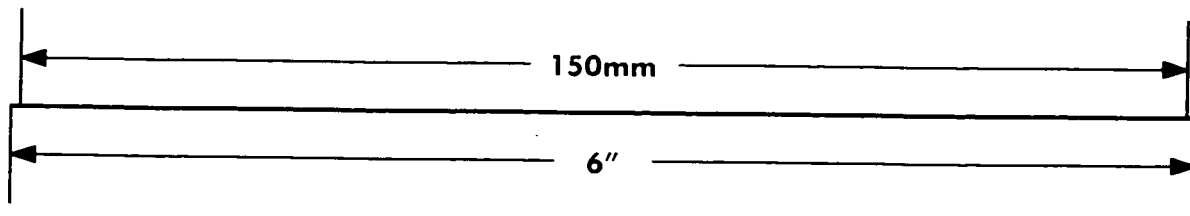
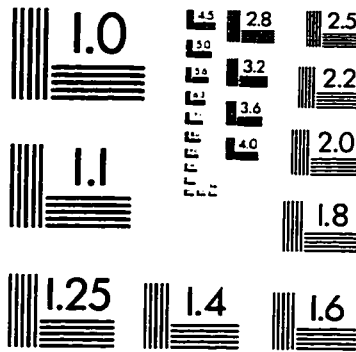
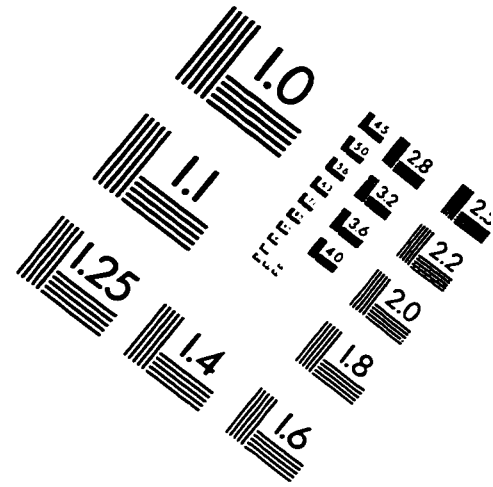
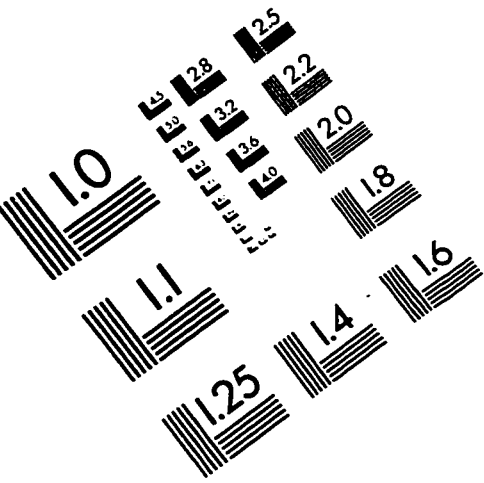
#13) It could also be said that any logical argument we might introduce here is bound to fall short of capturing the sort of thing Desmond is trying to get across - the *experience* of a beyond. Yet if it is to be defended as the experience of a beyond then this seems to limit it to something subjective. The more it is *confined* to experience the less is it an *actual* beyond at all. Moreover, we are not given this experience of a beyond in Desmond's work, rather we only read of this beyond as a reason whereby the limit of reason itself might be established. More crucially: what enables Desmond or anyone to say that this is the experience of a "beyond" as opposed to something other? How is it that one *recognizes* this experience as being of a certain sort? It would seem that some logical background, some conceptual matrix is requisite if the experience here is going to have the particular meaning Desmond wants to give it. The point is not that there is nothing other than what is logical, but that the separation between what is and what is not logical is an actively sublating one.

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