

HEGEL LECTURES

HEGEL'S ABSOLUTE DIALETHEISM

by Gregory S. Moss*

Abstract. *In Hegel's Absolute Dialetheism I argue that Hegel advances the view that there are true contradictions. In addition to the strong textual evidence for the view, I argue that without endorsing the truth of contradiction we cannot make sense of absoluteness and atemporality of Hegel's categories, the development from identity to ground, or the form of speculative thought in Hegel's corpus. Without accepting some form of dialetheism, Hegel's philosophy is defenceless against its critics.*

Keywords. *Hegel; the Absolute; Ground; Dialectics; Truth*

1. *Introducing the Question*

Dialetheism is the view that some contradictions are true. Accordingly, in order to answer the question 'is Hegel a dialetheist?' we must not only establish that there are contradictions in Hegel's system, but that they are *true* contradictions. In this paper I will focus almost exclusively on whether there are true contradictions in Hegel's system of logic. Before attempting to answer this question, we should first establish what is – and what is not – a matter of contention in this debate.

First, Hegel's *Science of Logic* begins without presuppositions¹. Because the system begins without any presuppositions, Hegel

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¹ «The beginning must then be *absolute* [...] and so there is *nothing* that it may *presuppose*, must not be mediated by anything or have a ground, ought to be rather itself the ground of the entire science. It must therefore be simply an immediacy,

certainly cannot endorse the principle of non-contradiction as a presupposition of his system of logic. As Houlgate notes, whether, and in what way, the principle of non-contradiction is true, must be established in the course of the system of logic itself:

Logic [...] cannot presuppose any of these forms of reflection and laws of thinking, for these constitute part of its own content, and first have to be established within the science².

Likewise, because the logic is without presupposition, we cannot presuppose that the principle of non-contradiction is false. Again Houlgate is on point when he writes that

If Hegel's logic does turn out to violate the law of non-contradiction [...] it will be because thought proves not to be completely governed by that law³.

In short: if the principle of non-contradiction is false, the system of logic must establish its falsehood in the course of its development.

Second, because contradiction is one of the categories of the logic, Hegel's logic contains contradictions. For this reason, there cannot be any serious dispute about whether there are contradictions in Hegel's system of logic. This is clear too from some recent literature. Philosophers who deny that Hegel is a dialetheist – such as Stefan Schick and Anthony Bruno – acknowledge that there are contradictions in the system. As Schick writes: «We have seen that for Schlegel and Hegel contradictions necessarily occur»⁴.

or rather only immediacy itself». G.W.F. Hegel, *Wissenschaft der Logik*, erster Band: *Die objektive Logik*, erstes Buch: *Das Sein* (1832), in *Gesammelte Werke*, Hamburg, Meiner, 1968 ss. (henceforth GW), vol. 21, ed. by F. Hogemann and W. Jaeschke, Hamburg, Meiner, 1985, p. 56; Eng. trans. and ed. by G. di Giovanni, *The Science of Logic*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2015, p. 48.

² S. Houlgate, *The Opening of Hegel's Logic: From Being to Infinity*, West Lafayette, Purdue University Press, 2005, p. 31.

³ Ivi, p. 31.

⁴ S. Schick, *Dialetheism as Romanticism*, «Symphilosophie: International Journal of Philosophical Romanticism», IV (2), 2020, pp. 273-295, here p. 292.

Although Bruno will preclude true contradiction from the speculative content of Hegel's thought, he acknowledges that contradiction is a necessary feature of the dialectical element of Hegel's method such that, as Bruno points out: «Hegel credits Kant with recognizing the '*necessity of the contradiction*' in the '*operation of reason*'»⁵. As is evident, the dispute about dialetheic readings of Hegel does not concern whether the principle of non-contradiction is a presupposition of logic, or whether contradictions are present in the system of logic. Rather, the dispute is whether those contradictions, which *necessarily* arise in the system of logic, are true.

We can reformulate the question in Hegelian terms: are the contradictions in the system *only* cancelled, or are they *cancelled and preserved*? If one holds that the contradictions necessarily arise in the system of logic, but are not true, the contradiction – and indeed its truth – must be cancelled. As Schick would put it:

For Hegel all contradictions have to be resolved within logical thought. Even more, the contradiction has in itself the logical resources for its own solution and sublation⁶.

Without question – it is the case that in the *Science of Logic* the concept of contradiction is sublated, and the result of that sublation is the concept of the ground. As Hegel makes clear as early as the *Differenzschrift*, the antinomy is «der sich selbst aufhebende Widerspruch»⁷. However, what does «sich selbst aufhebende Widerspruch» mean? According to H.S. Harris, this means 'the contradiction that cancels itself'. However, if we remember the simple fact that *aufheben* can mean both to cancel and to preserve, «sich selbst aufhebende Widerspruch» can mean 'the contradiction that cancels and preserves itself'.

⁵ G.A. Bruno, *Quietism, Dialetheism, and the Three Moments of Hegel's Logic* in R. Dunphy, T. Lovat (eds.), *Metaphysics as a Science in Classical German Philosophy*, New York, Routledge, 2023, pp. 315-338, here p. 327.

⁶ S. Schick, *Dialetheism as Romanticism*, p. 292.

⁷ GW 4, *Jenaer kritische Schriften*, ed. by H. Buchner, O. Pöggeler, Meiner, Hamburg, 1968, p. 26. Here I cite the German to emphasize that Hegel employs the term «Aufhebung» which does not simply mean that the contradictions are cancelled.

A number of recent commentators advance the view that Hegel's philosophy contains true contradictions. While it is well known that Graham Priest holds that «dialectic is dialetheic»⁸, Elena Ficara also offers a dialetheist vision of Hegel in her recent book *The Form of Truth*⁹. In her article *Contradiction or Non-Contradiction*, Michela Bordinon reads Hegel as affirming the truth of contradiction:

If we select some parts of Hegel's philosophy and get rid of the thesis of the truth of contradiction, like Brandom does, we are not looking at Hegel anymore, because we are just looking somewhere else¹⁰.

McNulty's *Hegel's Logic and Metaphysics* too advances a dialetheic view of Hegel. McNulty argues that Hegel rejects the PNC, since it is «incompatible with what he takes to be the correct metaphysical theory of the nature of reality»¹¹. Indeed, the PNC is in conflict with «the metaphysical principle that there is real opposition in the world»¹².

In the German-speaking literature, the luminous Heidelberger Professor Jens Halfwassen eloquently argued that Hegel's philosophy affirms the truth of contradiction. In his book *Hegel und der spätantike Neuplatonismus* Halfwassen argues that «Widerspruch ist darum gerade das Auszeichnende aller Vernunftkenntnis»¹³. And further: «Jede Spekulative Einsicht der Vernunft enthält

⁸ G. Priest, *Dialectic and Dialetheic*, «Science and Society», LIII, 4, pp. 388-415, here pp. 388-89.

⁹ E. Ficara, *The Form of Truth: Hegel's Philosophical Logic*, Berlin, De Gruyter, 2021.

¹⁰ M. Bordinon, *Contradiction or not Contradiction. Hegel's Dialectic between Brandom and Priest*, «Verifiche», XLI (1-3), 2012, pp. 221-245, here p. 237.

¹¹ J. McNulty, *Hegel's Logic and Metaphysics*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2022, p. 169.

¹² Ivi, p. 172.

¹³ J. Halfwassen, *Hegel und der Spätantike Neuplatonismus: Untersuchung zur Metaphysik und des Nous in Hegels spekulativer und geschichtlicher Deutung*, Hamburg, Meiner, 2016, p. 86.

darum, für Hegel einen Verstoß gegen den Satz vom Widerspruch»¹⁴. By my lights, Hegel's philosophy – not only its spirit but also its letter, affirms the truth of contradiction. More specifically, the truth of contradiction is *aufgehoben* in the sense that it is not only cancelled but *also* preserved¹⁵.

The term «dialetheism» was originally coined by Priest and Routley¹⁶. Since I take the term simply to mean that some contradictions are true, I hold that the term has *broad applicability*¹⁷. However, it is important to note that my argument for a dialetheist reading of Hegel does not rely upon Graham Priest's very specific concept of what a contradiction is¹⁸. We can agree with Priest that

¹⁴ Ivi, p. 82.

¹⁵ Todd McGowan's recent book also makes a compelling case for the truth of contradiction in Hegel's system. See T. McGowan, *Emancipation After Hegel: Achieving a Contradictory Revolution*, New York, Columbia University Press, 2019.

¹⁶ See Ficara's account of the history of the concept: E. Ficara, *The Birth of Dialetheism*, «History and Philosophy of Logic», XLII (3), 2021, pp. 281-96.

¹⁷ While Priest employs it to mean that «some contradictions are true», Beall has argued that the term 'dialetheism' has more specific connotations, such as the rejection between meta and object languages. Naturally, this connotation fits Hegel's view perfectly, since Hegel also rejects this distinction. (Beall prefers the term 'glut' to describe a true contradiction.) For Beall's comments, see his review of Zach Weber's *Paradoxes and Inconsistent Mathematics* here: <https://ndpr.nd.edu/reviews/paradoxes-and-inconsistent-mathematics/>.

¹⁸ Bordignon makes a compelling case that Hegel's concept of contradiction diverges significantly from Priest's. Among many other differences, Hegel advances a developmental concept of truth that Priest's dialetheism does not. Bordignon is on point that «Precisely by looking at these last considerations, I think Priest is wrong in associating Hegel's notion of contradiction with his own theory. Even if Hegel can be read as claiming that some kinds of contradictions are true, he conceives of these contradictions and of their truth in a way which is different from Priest's notion of dialetheia. Most importantly, Hegel assigns to contradiction a conception of truth which I consider to be even more radical than the dialetheist one. In fact, dialetheism remains within a paradigm of rationality which uses truth as a coin. What Priest teaches us is to look at both sides of the coin. Nevertheless, he still uses this coin in order to understand how our thought

‘some contradictions are true’ and have *significant disagreements* about the concepts of truth and contradiction.

Indeed, just as Schelling and Hegel can employ «Idealism» to mean something other than what Fichte meant, so we can employ «dialetheism» to mean something different from the precise way Priest employs it in his own theorizing. On the whole, the truth of contradiction can be justified on Hegel’s own terms without importing any foreign concepts of contradiction or truth, i.e., by employing Hegel’s concepts of truth and contradiction alone. In order to undermine the objection that the dialethic reading of Hegel imposes foreign ideas onto Hegel’s text, I will employ concepts endemic to Hegel’s text and show that a dialethic reading, a reading according to which there are truth contradictions in his system, is well motivated both by the spirit and the letter of Hegel’s thought.

2. *The Absolute Atemporality of Hegel’s Logic*¹⁹

While logic is a presuppositionless science, the philosophy of nature must presuppose logic. While time simply does not appear as a category of the *Science of Logic*, it does appear as a category in the philosophy of nature. For Hegel, time first develops out of space. The category of space, however, is the first category of nature. For its part, the category of nature depends upon the completion of the *Science of Logic*. Thus, the category of time does not appear within logic itself. Rather, time is *posterior* to logic. Indeed, logic only contains eternal truths. Hegel puts it more colorfully. Logic is the «Exposition of God as he is in his eternal essence before the creation of nature and of a finite

can interact with the actual world. What Hegel teaches us, instead, is to get rid of the coin as a medium between our thought and the world in which we live in order to give our thought the chance to stop just reflecting on reality, and to try to be one with reality itself». M. Bordignon, *Hegel: A Dialetheist? Truth and Contradiction in Hegel’s Logic*, «Hegel Bulletin», XL (2), 2019, pp. 198-214, here p. 211.

¹⁹ The following argument can be found in G.S. Moss, *Hegel’s Foundation Free Metaphysics: The Logic of Singularity*, New York, Routledge, 2020, pp. 274-282.

spirit»²⁰. In Hegel's philosophy, whatever logical truths there may be, these are *eternal* truths. Hegel easily avoids the charge of psychologism that has always plagued empiricism, since the categories of the logic are not derived from anything trans-logical. The categories of the logic are neither natural nor psychological entities, nor is their content derived from anything natural or psychological.

Being itself as well as the subsequent determinations, not only those of being but also the logical determinations in general, can be regarded as the definitions of the absolute, as metaphysical definitions of God²¹.

Why should we consider Being, and the categories of the logic in general, to be absolute? Consider Being – the category with which the *Science of Logic* begins. The beginning is, but without further qualification. The predicate 'being' does not draw any differentiation between anything. Naturally, by saying of 'x' 'that it is' and of 'y' 'that it is' one cannot differentiate x from y. In virtue of beginning with 'Being', that category which is completely devoid of all determinate content, the *Science of Logic* begins without presupposing any determinate content. Being is indeterminate.

Merely relative predicates do not apply to all beings. Instead, they only apply to this or that being. A concept is absolute on the condition that it is not-relative, namely if it applies to everything. What is determinate maintains its independent reality by negating what it is not, thereby occupying a relative position vis-à-vis what is other to it. It is 'this' in contrast to 'that'. However, since Being is completely indeterminate, it is not distinct from or relative to what is other to it. To put it otherwise: the indeterminate is without limit and all-encompassing. Accordingly, indeterminacy is absolute. Being is an absolute beginning – it does not exist relative to something else.

²⁰ GW 21, p. 34; Eng. trans. p. 29.

²¹ G.W.F. Hegel, *Enzyklopädie der philosophischen Wissenschaften im Grundrisse* (1830), in GW, vol. 20, ed. by W. Bonsiepen and H.-C. Lucas, Hamburg, Meiner, 1992 (GW 20), § 85; Eng. trans. and ed. by K. Brinkmann and D.O. Dahlstrom, *Hegel's Logic*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2010, § 85, p. 135.

Just as being is absolute, so are its successor concepts – such as the concept of nothing. In virtue of having no determinate content whatever, being is nothing – that which is completely empty of all determination. Being negates itself, for the indeterminate is so indeterminate that it cannot even have indeterminate content – it is nothing at all. Likewise, because nothing is without determination, it is also indistinguishable from being. As we have already indicated – one cannot look to nothing to find what is other to being, for it too is being.

To prove that being does not apply to all things, one could attempt to argue by counterexample. One must only discover a being, call it *q*, that *is*, but does not instantiate being. However, this is impossible, for whatever counterexample to which one may refer would *be* that which does not instantiate being, and would thereby instantiate being. Being applies to everything – it is an absolute category. As Hegel points out:

A category, according to the etymology of the word and Aristotle's definition of it, is what is said and asserted of every existent²².

Hegel rehearses how the Absolute necessarily transforms itself into determinate being out of its indeterminate indeterminacy: pure Being as such²³. Because each immediately vanishes into the other, each is becoming: being ceases to be being, and nothing *comes to be* being. Since each is immediately the other, each constitutes a unity of being and nothing: Being is the unity of being and nothing, and nothing is the unity of nothing and being. Since each is immediately the other, what does not vanish is the very unity of being and nothing – this is the 'stable' unity of being and nothing constitutive of determinate being that Hegel characterizes as quality. Being becomes qualified being, but it can only become qualified being

²² G.W.F. Hegel, *Wissenschaft der Logik*, erster Band, *Die objektive Logik*, in GW, vol. 11, ed. by W. Jaeschke and F. Hogemann, Hamburg, Meiner, 1977 (GW 11), p. 259; Eng. trans. by G. di Giovanni, *The Science of Logic*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2015, p. 355.

²³ GW 21, p. 69; Eng. trans. p. 59.

through the self-negation of becoming. Becoming vanishes, for in every case we find always the same unity that never ceases to be: the unity of being and nothing. Hegel proceeds to identity the stable (non-vanishing) unity of being and nothing in the form of being as reality, while the stable unity of being and nothing on the side of nothing is negation. Note, of course, that 'negation' is not identical to 'nothing', but is rather a further development out of it. In the logic of determinate being (*Dasein*), 'reality' and 'negation' become the moments of the categories of 'something' and 'other'. Indeed, 'reality' is not negation, and thereby admits negation, while 'negation' has its own reality apart from reality itself, and thereby admits reality. 'Something' is constituted as a unity of reality and negation in the form of reality, while the 'other' is the unity of negation and reality' on the side of negation.

In short, Hegel's logic is a science of categories, all of which are non-temporal and absolute concepts. The Absolute is being. However, in virtue of what being is, being is nothing. The very concept of being transforms into nothing autonomously – *auto kath' auto* – itself by itself. Hegel rehearses how the Absolute necessarily transforms itself into determinate being out of its indeterminacy: pure Being as such. As a result, we quickly discover that the concept of the Absolute is self-determining. In the *Science of Logic*, each category is an instance of one atemporal self-transforming totality.

Like all the others, contradiction is a non-temporal category of the Absolute. Because every concept of the *Science of Logic* is a concept of the Absolute, and contradiction is a concept of the *Science of Logic*, so contradiction too is an absolute concept. Because contradiction is a concept that applies to everything, it too must be an absolute category. It is what he calls «der Absolute Widerspruch»²⁴.

Given its absolute application, Hegel remarks that contradiction – like identity, difference, and opposition – can be formulated as an absolute principle: «All things are in themselves contradictory»²⁵. If everything is contradictory, then all the categories of the

²⁴ G.W.F. Hegel, *Wissenschaft der Logik*, Zweiter Band, *Die subjektive Logik* oder *die Lehre vom Begriff* (1816), in GW, vol. 12, ed. by F. Hogemann and W. Jaeschke, Hamburg, Meiner, 1981 (GW 12), p. 187.

²⁵ GW 11, p. 286; Eng. trans. p. 381.

logic must be contradictory – from being to the Absolute Idea. Hegel himself declares as much:

On the contrary, every determination, anything concrete, every concept, is essentially a unity of distinguished and distinguishable elements which, by virtue of the determinate, essential difference, pass over into elements which are contradictory²⁶.

To deny that contradiction obtains in any category would require an explicit revision of Hegel's logic. But we can go farther. If every concept is contradictory, then all the categories of the philosophy of nature and spirit must be contradictory too – from space all the way to absolute spirit. The sublation of contradiction in the *Science of Logic* is not just its cancelation, but it must also be its *preservation*. The preservation of contradiction is also engendered by the atemporal character of the logic. There are many contradictions that arise in the course of Hegel's *Science of Logic*, such as 'being is nothing' and 'finitude is infinite'. Are the contradictions 'being is nothing' and 'infinite is infinite' cancelled? Yes, for they are not sufficient for the articulation of the absolute idea – none of these ultimately stands by itself – each is preserved as an element of the absolute idea.

However, are the contradictions not also preserved? Given that the *Science of Logic* is atemporal, the developments do not happen in time. Being becomes nothing and finitude becomes infinite, but it would be misguided to investigate when being becomes nothing, or when finitude becomes infinite. Because it is the case – it is true – at one place in the system, that finitude is infinitude, and the logic itself is atemporal, it is always true that finitude is infinitude. Simply put: because logic is atemporal, 'being is nothing' and 'finitude is infinite' are eternal truths. Given the atemporality of the logical system, every contradiction must be preserved. In short, the contradictions are cancelled, but they are also preserved – they are *aufgehoben*. Because each contradiction is preserved, the absolute idea contains all of the contradictions of the logic, so that, as Priest notes, the Absolute would be the «biggest contradiction of them all»²⁷.

²⁶ Ivi, p. 289; Eng. trans. p. 384.

²⁷ Priest, *Dialectic and Dialetheic*, p. 402.

Because Hegel preserves the absolute contradiction, I hold that Hegel is an absolute dialetheist. This means (i) that the Absolute is, (ii) that it is a contradiction, and that it is (iii) a true contradiction. Because the absolute contradiction is an eternal truth, Hegel's commitment to preserving the absolute contradiction in logic is nothing less than a commitment to the *eternal truth of contradiction*. In more theological terms, the eternal God exists as a true contradiction.

Because philosophy thinks the categories, the categories are the intentional objects of the philosopher's logical knowing. Because the philosopher knows the categories in time, one might suppose that the logical categories themselves to be temporal. Accordingly, one might attempt to refute the atemporality of logic by inserting time into the logical sequence of categories. First, this may not save the logic from preserving contradiction, for time itself appears to be explicitly contradictory. For Hegel, time is «That being, which, inasmuch as it 'is', is 'not', and inasmuch as it is 'not', it 'is'»²⁸. But what is more, one must be careful not to equivocate on the logic as a system of categories, and the logic as an object of philosophical knowing. Philosophers can only know the logical categories because they are born and educated. While logic presupposes nothing, the activity of the philosopher presupposes mind and nature²⁹ and constitutes the final stage in the development of Hegel's whole philosophical system.

It is true that being becomes nothing and that being is nothing. However, neither the development of this truth, nor the truth itself depends upon the philosopher's knowing. 'Being is nothing' is the case and would be the case even if no philosopher ever conceived it. Hegel is clear that the truth of the categories and their development does not depend upon our thinking. Rather, our thinking acquires its direction from them:

²⁸ GW 20, § 258; Eng. trans. by A.V. Miller, *Hegel's Philosophy of Nature*, Part Two of the *Encyclopaedia of the Philosophical Sciences*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 2004, § 258, p. 34.

²⁹ GW 20, § 577; Eng. trans. by W. Wallace and A.V. Miller, revised with introduction and commentary by M. Inwood, *Philosophy of Mind*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2007, § 577, p. 276.

But still less shall we say of the concepts of things that we dominate them, or that the thought determinations of which they are the complex are at our service. On the contrary, our thought must accord with them. [...] It is all the less possible, therefore, to believe that the thought determinations that pervade all our representations – whether these are purely theoretical or hold a material belonging to sensation, impulse, will – that such thought determinations are at our service; that it is we who have them in our possession and not they who have us in theirs. What is there of more in us as against them? How would we, how would I set myself up as the superior universal over them – they that are the universal as such?³⁰

Philosophical logic thinks what is always already there – it must «simply look on»³¹. By taking the atemporal as its object, logic itself becomes a science – a science of logic. Subsequently, this science can be communicated via speech and writing to members of the philosophical community. The advent of the *Science of Logic* is an historical event – but this historical event should not be confused with the non-temporal development of logical categories as such.

3. *From Contradiction to Ground*

Does Hegel not make it clear that contradiction is sublated? He does indeed. Being is sublated too. However, it hardly occurs to the reader of the *Science of Logic* to ask: is the absolute idea or is it a being? It goes without saying that the sublation of being engenders both that it is cancelled and preserved. Each category is, and is a being. However, contradiction hardly receives the same charitable treatment. It falls to the detractors of dialetheism to articulate how exactly the cancelling and preserving of the logical categories reverts to pure cancellation in the case of contradiction.

³⁰ GW 21, p. 14; Eng. trans. p. 16.

³¹ G.W.F. Hegel, *Die Phänomenologie des Geistes*, in GW 9, ed. by W. Bonsiepen and R. Heede, Hamburg, Meiner, 1980 (GW 9), p. 59; Eng. trans. by M. Inwood, *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2018, p. 40.

To the contrary, just as being remains absolute, the category of contradiction remains absolute too – it is cancelled and preserved. The sublation of contradiction does not cancel it completely – like being it is preserved as a constituent of the successor categories that follow it. This is already obvious from the text itself. Hegel explicitly identifies contradiction in a variety of categories long after its sublation. Hegel also proclaims that syllogism too «must run into contradiction»³². We even discover contradiction in the absolute idea:

It is rather the other in itself, the other of an other, hence, it includes its own other within itself and is consequently the contradiction, the posited dialectic, of itself³³.

In order to illustrate the way that contradiction is preserved, however, we need only investigate the way that contradiction is preserved in the concept of the ground. Hegel's formulation of the PNC, namely «A cannot be A and not A at the same time», is a proposition that expresses the category of identity³⁴. Note that in Hegel's formulation of the principle, what cannot be A and not A is not some different subject 's', but 'A' itself cannot be A and not A.³⁵ What is precluded is that 'A' stand in contradiction *with itself*. Identity is an absolute category that has absolute application: each category is self-identical, and is not its negation. Thus, each category is consistent – each is *not* contradictory. Each category maintains its self-identity by precluding its negation.

Identity, and its formalization in the PNC, requires the elevation of an absolute difference between 'A' and 'not-A.' According to Hegel

It is essential that we grasp absolute difference as simple. In the absolute difference of A and not-A from each other, it is the simple 'not' which, as such, constitutes the difference³⁵.

³² GW 12, p. 96; Eng. trans. p. 594.

³³ Ivi, p. 245; Eng. trans. p. 745.

³⁴ GW 11, p. 258; Eng. trans. p. 354.

³⁵ Ivi, p. 266; Eng. trans. p. 361.

‘A’ is not ‘not-A’. The ‘not’ that separates ‘A’ and ‘not-A’ is the absolute difference. Applied to identity and difference, ‘identity is not difference’ and ‘difference is not identity’. Absolute difference, as absolute, is not itself opposed to anything else. Absolute difference is not one side of an opposition. It is the difference *simpliciter*, not difference opposed to some other. Absolute difference is not itself immediately opposed to identity – it is the difference between identity and difference. Accordingly, Absolute difference is itself not different from anything – as absolute it is not conditioned by an ‘other’; it is not relative to an ‘other’. To put it another way, absolute difference is the whole of the opposition: it is the Absolute. According to Hegel:

Difference in itself is the difference that refers itself to itself; thus it is the negativity of itself, the difference not from another but ‘of itself from itself’; it is not itself but its other. What is different from difference, however is identity. Difference is, therefore, itself and identity. The two together constitute difference; difference is the whole and its moment. – One can also say that difference as simple difference, is no difference; it is such only with reference to identity; even better, that as difference it entails itself and this reference equally³⁶.

Since difference is absolute, it neither stands in any relation to an ‘other’ nor is it opposed to anything other to itself. Hence, difference is not different from anything. For something to count as a difference, and stand in a relation of difference, it must stand in a negative relation to something in virtue of which it is not that other. Absolute difference, however, does not stand in any relation of difference to anything, for it is absolute. Thus, absolute difference, or difference as such, is different from difference itself. Because difference is different from itself, it is that which is ‘not’ identical to itself. Absolute difference, ‘A’, is ‘not’ difference, ‘not A.’ Thus, ‘A’ is ‘not A’. As a result, the difference between A and not A articulated in the PNC leads to contradiction and thereby violates the PNC. Indeed, it is the very difference between A and not A (their mutual

³⁶ Ivi, p. 266; Eng. trans. pp. 361-362.

exclusivity) that constitutes the exception to the principle that A cannot be both A and not A. As Hegel comments here, «difference is implicitly contradiction»³⁷ for difference turns back on itself – as self-referring (*sich beziehen*) it is self-negating.

Difference is different from itself. Given that difference as such is not just different, but different from itself, and as Hegel says, «what is different from difference, however is identity», it follows that difference is not different from identity. Insofar as difference is not different from identity, it is identical to identity. Difference is identity.

To recount: (i) difference is different from difference, and (ii) difference is identical to identity. What is more, because ‘difference is different from difference’ difference does in fact stand in a relationship of difference. Difference stands in a relation of difference with itself. Thus, difference is different – it is an instance of difference. Indeed, if difference is an absolute principle, such that ‘everything is different,’ then difference too must be different. Each term ‘A’ and ‘not A’ instantiates difference, such that difference itself is the identical form of both. What is more, insofar as difference is different, difference is self-identical for the predicate corresponds with the subject.

Thus, difference as difference is both difference and self-identity. As a result, difference as such differentiates itself into two differences: difference and identity. Difference cannot be distinguished from the elements ‘identity and difference’ which are opposed to one another. As Hegel writes, «it [difference] is the whole and its moment». Finally, the category of difference immediately gives rise to diversity, from which polar opposition arises.

Since absolute difference gives rise to both identity and difference as relative differences, and each admits the other, identity contains difference and difference contains identity. The former is the positive, identity and difference in the form of identity, and the latter is the negative, identity and difference in the form of difference. The positive contains its other (the negative) as its negation – as what it is not, and is what it is through its negation of the negative. Likewise, the negative is what it is in virtue of its negation of the

³⁷ Ivi, p. 279; Eng. trans. p. 374.

positive. The opposition between the ‘positive’ and ‘negative’ are contraries, in the sense that the opposition here is one of specific difference. The negative is the specific other of the positive; the positive is the specific other of the negative. In other words, each is its other. The positive is the unity of identity and difference in the form of identity, while the negative is the unity of identity and difference in the form of difference.

Since in the formulation of each, identity and difference are united, each is reducible to the formulation of the other: the positive is negative and the negative is positive. Each contrary, though opposed to its other, has an identical formulation: each is what it is through the negation of its negation. Accordingly, the category of contradiction consists in this: the positive is negative in virtue of itself and the negative is positive in virtue of itself³⁸.

What is the character of this contradiction? Like all the logical determinations – the unity of the positive and the negative is Absolute – it contains all of the determinations. As Hegel writes, «each moment is thus the whole self-contained opposition»³⁹.

Because the unity of the positive and the negative (A and not A) is absolute, nothing is outside of the totality. Accordingly, each stands by itself and depends only upon itself. Each is ‘self-subsistent’. However, since both the positive and the negative are absolute, and each is distinct, each «excludes the other in the same respect as it contains it [...] And so it is contradiction»⁴⁰.

In terms of Priest’s «inclosure schema», the positive is the Absolute. Thus, it contains all the determinations, and successfully achieves closure. However, the negative is and is other than the positive. Thus, the negative stands outside of the Absolute – the element of transcendence. Thus, the Absolute is not absolute. Likewise, the negative is the totality of the determinations, and the

³⁸ This reconstruction of the dialectic of difference can be found in Moss, *Hegel’s Foundation Free Metaphysics: The Logic of Singularity*, pp. 256-258. I have reproduced it here in order to lay the foundation for the reconstruction of the development of contradiction and the ground.

³⁹ GW 11, p. 279; Eng. trans. p. 374.

⁴⁰ *Ibidem*.

positive stands outside the negative. Thus, in the case of the negative too, the same result is achieved: the Absolute is not absolute. In the case of the positive and the negative, 'A' is not A': each absolute stands in contradiction with itself. Each is absolute and not absolute.

Note that it would be enough if only one determination exceeded the Absolute. However, the contradiction is more than this. As we have already indicated, it is an «absolute contradiction». Because each is the self-subsistent absolute, and each is distinct from the other, the Absolute transcends itself: it is the Absolute – as a whole – that is not itself. As Hegel states, «in its self-subsistence the determination excludes its own self-subsistence from itself»⁴¹. For this reason, contradiction is the absolute contradiction of the negative and positive: «This is the absolute contradiction of the positive; but it is immediately the absolute contradiction of the negative»⁴². The contradiction, to use Hegel's formulation, «excludes itself from itself [*sich selbst von sich selbst auszuschließen*]»⁴³. With contradiction, we can affirm with Halfwassen that «der Satz von Widerspruch, das Prinzip des trennenden Verstandesdenken, tritt damit im Absoluten außer kraft»⁴⁴.

Although 'being is nothing' is a contradiction, we are only justified in identifying it as a contradiction or violation of the PNC after the PNC is established within logic itself – namely in the category of identity. Having arrived at the concept of contradiction, we can retrospectively recognize the violation of the PNC at the very outset of the logic.

Contradiction develops into the category of the 'ground'. The opposition constituting contradiction «zugrunde geht» and «has gone back to its foundation, to its ground»⁴⁵. The opposition «geht zugrunde». First, that means that ground arises in virtue of the collapsing of the opposition. Both the positive and the negative have the same content. Each is the Absolute that is not absolute – each is

⁴¹ *Ibidem*.

⁴² Ivi, p. 280; Eng. trans. p. 375.

⁴³ *Ibidem*.

⁴⁴ Halfwassen, *Hegel und der Spätantike Neuplatonismus*, p. 65.

⁴⁵ GW 11, p. 282; Eng. trans. p. 377.

constituted by the same contradiction. Thus, there is one category instantiated by both the positive and the negative: the self-contradiction of the Absolute. As Hegel notes, «This self-subsistent is the negative posited as the negative, something self-contradictory»⁴⁶. And further: «It is the unity of essence to be identical to itself through the negation (not of another) but of itself»⁴⁷. As a result, neither of the poles of opposition are self-subsistent. Rather, what is self-subsistent is the self-contradiction that each shares in common, for it is only this self-contradiction that is without opposition – it is independent, all-encompassing and without limit. Hegel notes how the positive and the negative become «mere determinations»:

It thereby reduces its formerly self-subsisting determinations, the positive and the negative, to determinations that are only determinations; it is simple essence; but essence as ground⁴⁸.

Given that the opposition collapses (*zugrunde geht*), why should this be sufficient for the development of the concept of ground? Note first that the ground is described in the same way as contradiction. Quoting Hegel: «As ground, therefore, essence excludes itself from itself»⁴⁹. To use other terminology, which is very similar, the ground is the «absolute repelling of itself within itself»⁵⁰. Given the similar description of contradiction and ground, what is the difference between them?

First, contradiction is conceived as a relation between two opposing terms – each which constitutes the totality – the positive and the negative. ‘P is absolute’ contradicts ‘N is absolute’. As a result, it is the case ‘both’ that ‘P is self-contradictory’ and ‘N is self-contradictory’. Nevertheless, because each opposed term is identical in content (in the predicate), neither term is opposed to the other. Rather than two absolutes that stand in contradiction with each other,

⁴⁶ *Ibidem*.

⁴⁷ *Ibidem*.

⁴⁸ *Ibidem*.

⁴⁹ *Ibidem*.

⁵⁰ Ivi, p. 291; Eng. trans. p. 386.

there is one absolute that is instantiated in both cases. Each (namely P and N) is a particular instance of the same Absolute. Note however, that the content they share in common is that each is the self-contradictory Absolute. Although the Absolute is not in contradiction with anything beyond it, it is in contradiction with itself – it is a contradiction that is not relative to another, but only to itself. Self-contradiction is the unity instantiated in both terms. Each term is an instance of the same contradiction.

Hegel writes that in order to arrive at the concept of the ground, one must only add self-unity to the self-contradictory opposition: «The self-contradictory self-subsistent opposition was itself, therefore, already ground; all that was added to it was the determination of self-unity»⁵¹. Hegel employs a number of descriptions for the Absolute self-contradiction, among which is «self-exclusion». Because the Absolute excludes itself, it is both 'not' what it is, and it is something other than itself. The absolute – P – negates itself as P – and posits itself as N. As N, the Absolute negates itself as N, and posits itself as P. These determinations – P and N – to use Hegel's words, are «self-contradictory determinations [*selbst-widersprechenden Bestimmungen*]»⁵².

One can equally conceive of the relation of ground to grounded in a circular as well as a linear fashion. The self-contradiction of P and N are perpetual. Although P negates itself and posits itself as N, and N as P, one can count each new instance of the self-contradiction as a novel instance of self-contradiction without end. A is not A. It is other than A – it is B. B is not B. It is other than itself – it is C. C is other than itself, it is n – *ad infinitum*.

In each case of self-contradiction there is something that remains the same: the self-contradiction itself. In virtue of negating itself, the Absolute posits beings – P and N – beings that can only exist in virtue of the perpetual self-negation of that absolute. As a

⁵¹ Ivi, p. 283; Eng. trans. p. 378. The German indicates that Hegel explicitly identifies the unity of self-contradiction with the ground: «Der sich widersprechende selbständige Gegensatz war also bereits selbst der Grund; es kam nur die Bestimmung der Einheit mit sich selbst hinzu».

⁵² Ivi, p. 282; Eng. trans. p. 377.

result, the concept of ground is nothing more than this: in virtue of the unified activity of self-contradiction, particular beings are posited. The perpetual self-contradiction of the Absolute is the ground of what there is. Insofar as each being is grounded in the self-contradiction of the Absolute, each being is that which is grounded. Thus, out of contradiction the category of the ground, and the relation of ground to grounded, arises.

Fascinatingly, Hegel had already developed a rudimentary concept of ground in the *Differenzschrift*:

A has a ground means: to A pertains to an existence that is not an existence of A: A is a being posited that is not the posited being of A. Hence, A is not equal to A, A is B⁵³.

Although Hegel's reflections here are not as well developed as in the *Doctrine of Essence*, the rudimentary idea is already there. Simply put: because A is not A, A is B. B is grounded by A in virtue of A's self-contradiction – in virtue of the fact that A is not A.

When ground is expressed as a principle, it has the form of the principle of sufficient reason: «Everything has a sufficient ground or reason»⁵⁴. Because ground is inherently contradictory, in his Jena writings Hegel is explicit that the formulation of ground as a principle will contain an antimony⁵⁵. With these reflections on self-

⁵³ GW 4, p. 25; Eng. trans. by H.S. Harris and W. Cerf, *The Difference Between Fichte's and Schelling's System of Philosophy: An English Translation of G.W.F. Hegel's Differenz des Fichte'schen und Schelling'schen Systems der Philosophie*, New York, SUNY Press, 1988, p. 107. See the section *The Principle of Philosophy in the Form of an Absolute Basic Proposition*.

⁵⁴ GW 11, p. 293; Eng. trans. p. 388.

⁵⁵ GW 4, p. 26. Since Hume, philosophers have wracked their brains on the problem of causality. Although here we are only concerned with ground, and have not yet arrived at causality, the concept of ground is entailed in the concept of causality. Causes are the grounds of their effects, and Hegel himself briefly addresses the problem of causality (both in the mechanical and teleological senses) in his remark on the principle of sufficient reason in the *Science of Logic*. How can a necessary connection be established between the ground and grounded? Hume pointed out that in the concept of the cause one cannot discover its effect. Experience cannot

contradiction *qua* ground in hand, we can better understand how the self-transformation of the Absolute autonomously transforms itself from one logical category into another. Since self-contradiction is absolute, it applies to every category. Every category is an instance of self-contradiction. But since self-contradiction is also the ground of everything, self-contradiction is also the ground of every category. In virtue of its perpetual self-contradiction, the Absolute posits itself as every category of the logic – being, essence, concept, truth, and absolute idea. The ground grounds the whole series of categories. Being – A – becomes nothing – B – in virtue of the self-contradiction of being – finitude becomes infinitude in virtue of the self-contradiction of finitude.

However, we must note that in the *Science of Logic* the principle of explosion has no foothold – it is not a presupposition (as there are none) and every particular development of the logic leads to a specific category, such that particular categories follow from particular contradictions. To know that categories are self-contradictory is a formal truth – it does not specify what the self-contradictory categories are. To know what these categories are, one must uncover how each specific category contradicts itself and thereby gives rise to its successor concept.

And yet – if self-contradiction is the ground of every category, does that not contradict the groundlessness of logic? It does indeed.

establish a necessary connection between cause and effect. Rather, the cause is juxtaposed with the effect by association, habit, etc. As is obvious, Hegel's logic is *a priori* – he refuses to draw the connection between ground and grounded by appeal to experience – logic is without presupposition and is thereby free of all appeals to experience. However, Hegel's answer to the problem does more than simply render the connection *a priori*. His solution is both radical and unique: A is necessarily connected to what is different from it – B – in virtue of *self-contradiction*. A is necessarily connected to what is distinct from it – B – only by overstepping its own limitation, only by negating itself. Hegel's solution explicitly collapses the distinction between analysis and synthesis such that the category is «no less synthetic than analytic» (GW 12, p. 242; Eng. trans. p. 741). A is synthetically connected to B in virtue of what is analytically contained within itself – its power of self-contradiction. In Hegel's words: «Contradiction is the root of movement and life». See GW 11, p. 286; Eng. trans. p. 382.

With the arrival of the ground, even the groundlessness of logic is overcome. The logic can only acquire a principle for its very development by contradicting itself.

In the *Science of Logic*, Hegel continues to hold that the category of contradiction is still present in the concept of the ground. In fact, the concept of the ground could not be articulated without the concept of contradiction. Hegel makes this explicit: «In ground, therefore, opposition and its contradiction are just as much removed as preserved [*Der Gegensatz und sein Widerspruch ist daher im Grunde so sehr aufgehoben als erhalten*]»⁵⁶. And what is more: «This self-subsistence is the negative posited as the negative, something self-contradictory which, consequently remains in the essence as in its ground»⁵⁷. In theological terms, God is and can only be the absolute ground of everything in virtue of the divine power of self-contradiction.

4. *The Dialectic Form of Truth*

The view that Hegel endorses true contradictions seems to violate his understanding of truth. Hegel argues that truth is self-correspondence or the agreement of the thought content with itself⁵⁸. Falsehood would be the failure of self-correspondence. ‘A is not A’ is not the self-correspondence of the category with itself. To the contrary, it is explicitly the absence of self-correspondence. Thus, one may infer that contradictions cannot be true because they do not correspond with the form of truth.

Before we address this critique directly, we must first acknowledge that Hegel’s discussions of truth *per se* are not so unequivocal. For instance, in his *Differenzschrift*, Hegel states that «in

⁵⁶ GW 11, p. 282; Eng. trans. p. 378. Here the original German clearly indicates that the contradictions are fully preserved.

⁵⁷ Ivi, p. 282; Eng. trans. pp. 377-378.

⁵⁸ *Zusätze aus G.W.F. Hegel’s Encyclopädie der philosophischen Wissenschaften im Grundrisse*, in *Vorlesungen über die Wissenschaft der Logik*, in GW, vol. 23.3, ed. by A. Sell, Hamburg, Meiner, 2017 (GW 23.3), p. 822.

der Antinomie, wenn sie für den formellen Ausdruck der Wahrheit anerkannt wird, hat die Vernunft das formale Wesen der Reflexion unter sich gebracht»⁵⁹. What is more:

Wenn man bloß auf das Formelle der Spekulation reflektiert und die Synthese des Wissens in analytischer Form festhält, so ist die Antinomie, der sich selbst aufhebende Widerspruch, der höchste formelle Ausdruck des Wissens und der Wahrheit⁶⁰.

Here contradiction is presented as the very form of truth itself – indeed its ‘formula’. This recognition of the contradictory form of truth is carried over into the *Science of Logic* too. In the *Science of Logic*, truth is the Idea – here the correspondence of the concept with its object. Indeed, articulating what ‘truth’ means in Hegel’s *Science of Logic* requires both elucidating the concept, the self-particularizing universal, and the object – the self-subsistent totality. Accordingly, whatever we say about truth here is preliminary since what truth is requires more than the categories of consistency and contradiction. The idea qua truth is the absolute truth: what it is to be truth. No category is true unless it instantiates the idea. The idea or truth itself is first determined as life: «The immediate shape of the living being is the idea in its simple concept, the objectivity conforming to the concept»⁶¹. This term «*der Absolute Widerspruch*» – the Absolute contradiction – re-appears beyond the *Doctrine of Essence* as a description of the category of life, the first form of Truth or the Idea. Hegel calls the self-determination of life «the absolute contradiction»⁶².

⁵⁹ GW 4, p. 26.

⁶⁰ *Ibidem*. Also see E. Ficara: *The Form of Truth: Hegel's Philosophical Logic*, De Gruyter, Berlin, 2021, p. 8.

⁶¹ GW 12, p. 187; Eng. trans. p. 684.

⁶² *Ibidem*. Not only is truth self-contradictory, but the element of truth, the concept is contradictory too. Hegel writes that the concept is «outside itself»: In this universality, the concept is outside itself, and because it is it, the concept, which is there outside itself, the abstract-universal contains all the moments of the concept. Ivi, p. 40; Eng. trans. p. 537.

In life, the self-determination of the concept corresponds with the teleological character of the organism wherein the purpose of the organism is the very means by which the purpose is realized. Internal teleology is contradictory, for while the means is not the end (for the means is for the sake of something else), the means is the end itself, and thus not a means at all. Indeed, if all contradictions are eventually cancelled, this would put an end to the concept of life itself. If all contradictions are cancelled – so is life, and the categories are dead. With the end of contradiction, so ends Hegel's campaign to re-animate the life of thought, and to re-animate the dead bones of formal logic. In short, Hegel never abandoned his early view that contradiction is the rule of truth: «*Contradictio esta regula veri, non contradictio falsi*»⁶³. If the form of truth is contradiction, then any category that is not contradictory cannot be true. If all of Hegel's logical categories were ultimately consistent, then none of them would be true.

In his *Untrue concepts in Hegel's Logic*, Alznauer cites a passage from §33 of the *EL*, in an attempt to defend the view that inconsistent concepts are untrue⁶⁴. After initially noting the context of the passage, he states that «This passage suggests that a concept has the wrong self-relation when its content includes contradictory determinations»⁶⁵. However, the context of the passage informs us that at this juncture in the *Science of Logic* Hegel is discussing metaphysics insofar as it is «Dogmatismus»⁶⁶. More specifically, he is addressing «den ersten Teil dieser Metaphysik»⁶⁷ as ontology. Here Hegel does not baldly endorse the view that the true is the consistent. Rather, he is considering what the self-agreement of the concept with itself would be if we strictly adhered to the law of the understanding. If we strictly followed the form of the understanding,

⁶³ G.W.F. Hegel, *Schriften und Entwürfe (1799-1808)*, in GW, vol. 5, ed. by M. Baum and K.R. Meist, Hamburg, Meiner, 1998 (GW 5), p. 227.

⁶⁴ M. Alznauer, *Untrue Concepts in Hegel's Logic*, «Journal of the History of Philosophy», LXI (1), 2023, pp. 103-126, here p. 110.

⁶⁵ M. Alzauer, *Untrue Concepts in Hegel's Logic*, p. 112.

⁶⁶ GW 20, § 32; Eng. trans. by W. Wallace, *The Logic of Hegel*, pp. 66-67.

⁶⁷ Ivi, § 33; Eng. trans. pp. 67-68.

then internal inconsistency would be sufficient to demonstrate the untruth of a concept. For this reason, the sentence appears in the subjunctive form: «Wenn die Wahrheit also weiter nichts *wäre* [my emphasis] als der Mangel des Widerspruchs»⁶⁸. Indeed, for the understanding, which advances a one-sided view of truth, the concept must eschew all contradiction, but this passage says nothing about truth for reason⁶⁹. With speculative truths, we know that «A one-sided proposition therefore can never even give expression to a speculative truth»⁷⁰. A consistent proposition is by definition one-sided: it affirms one side of a contradictory opposition and denies the other. For this reason, it cannot give expression to a speculative truth. The problem is clear enough – Alznauer measures Hegel's concept of truth by appealing to the dogmatic view of truth.

If we attend to these various passages on truth, we find ourselves in position that is much more nuanced than Alznauer acknowledges. We learn from Hegel both that the form of truth is contradictory, and that truth is correspondence of the concept with itself. As a result, we know that (i) a category is true if it corresponds with itself, and (ii) this self-correspondence ought to have the form of contradiction. Conceived together, these conditions engender an inconsistent concept of truth. If a category is true on the first criteria, then it corresponds with itself. Because self-contradiction is a lack of self-correspondence, according to (i) no contradiction can be true. Thus if (i) is true, (ii) must be false. However, according to (ii), truth has the form of contradiction, and since contradiction is a lack of self-correspondence, self-correspondence must be false. Thus, if (ii) is true, then (i) is false. Since both (i) and (ii) are true, Hegel's concept of truth is internally inconsistent.

⁶⁸ Ivi, § 33; Eng. trans. p. 68.

⁶⁹ Although I agree with Alznauer's argument that the concept is the primitive bearer of truth. Alznauer endorses a one-sided view of truth, when he argues that for Hegel a concept is untrue «if it cannot be predicated of the absolute or used to characterize things as they are in themselves – without generating a contradiction». Alznauer, *Untrue Concepts in Hegel's Logic*, p. 124.

⁷⁰ GW 23.3, p. 858; Eng. trans. p. 154.

Hegel's theory of the Absolute unifies these different criterions of truth into one criterion. In order to correspond to itself, the Absolute must transcend everything relative. Thus, to correspond to itself, the Absolute cannot be relative. However, this implies that the Absolute exists as something other to relativity. As other to what is relative, the Absolute is relative to relative existence. Since the relative is not Absolute, the Absolute is true to itself in the form of contradiction. Thus, in order to correspond with itself and be true to its absoluteness, the Absolute must be contradictory. Thus, Hegel's theory of absolute truth unifies both criterions of truth into one form: to be true to itself, the Absolute must be contradictory. Since Hegel teaches us that «The absolute alone is true»⁷¹ and the Absolute is only true to itself if it exists in the form of self-contradiction, Hegel holds that truth itself is contradictory in form.

If the concept of truth is inconsistent, then every instantiation of that concept must also be inconsistent. For this reason, every proposition of the form 'it is true that x' is inconsistent, and every particular truth would instantiate a contradiction. For this reason, the question is not: can there be any true contradictions in Hegel's system of philosophy? To the contrary, given that truth itself is an inconsistent predicate, the question ought to be reversed: on the speculative view of truth, how is it possible for there to be any consistent truths whatever?⁷² More than simply taking a position on this controversial issue, what is really necessary for the dialogue today is a complete transformation (and inversion) of the parameters of that conversation itself.

⁷¹ GW 9, p. 54; Eng. trans. p. 36.

⁷² The trans-consistent theory of truth is the view that 'only contradictions can be true'. It is not the same as the view that all contradictions can be true, nor is it synonymous with a dialetheic view according to which only *some* contradictions are true. While *Hegel's Foundation Free Metaphysics* does not defend a trans-consistent theory of truth (it only argues for a dialetheic view of the Absolute), in some recent lectures I have begun to push beyond dialetheism by developing a trans-consistent theory of truth that is inspired by Hegel's texts. For instance, *Beyond Dialetheism: Towards a Trans-Consistent Theory of Truth*, was first presented in Julia Peter's German Idealism seminar in Heidelberg on October 4th, 2023.

In Hegel's *Logic*, consistency and self-identity are not simply banished from Hegel's *Logic* – they are not simply overcome and discarded. Rather, they are cancelled, but they are also preserved in the consistency of self-contradiction. Of course, the logic of identity, non-contradiction and consistency is not banished from the logic, for it is integrated into the logic. However, such an integration can only succeed if contradiction is acknowledged as the explicit form of truth. In order to further elucidate the inter-relationship of these two criteria, consider the concept of self-contradiction that we developed in the transition from contradiction to the ground.

What is self-contradiction? Self-contradiction contradicts itself. If self-contradiction never contradicted itself, it would not be self-contradiction. Because self-contradiction contradicts itself, the predicate 'contradicts itself' corresponds with the subject 'self-contradiction'. Because there is a correspondence of the subject with the predicate, the subject is consistent with the predicate. Self-contradiction is true – it is true to itself. However, since self-contradiction is only consistent with itself in virtue of contradicting itself, it corresponds with itself in virtue of not corresponding with itself. Simply put, the consistency of self-contradiction consists in the fact that it is consistently in self-contradiction. Truth is consistent, for it corresponds to itself. However, what corresponds to itself is the contradiction – the lack of consistency. As is evident, truth itself demands the unity of consistency and inconsistency: it must be the contradiction of consistency and the consistency of contradiction⁷³.

Does the self-correspondence of self-contradiction engender a complete absence of all contradiction? Decidedly not. In fact, because self-contradiction is consistent with itself, it is consistently that which is self-contradictory. Because self-contradiction is self-contradictory, it corresponds with itself. Since self-correspondence is the form of truth, the self-contradiction of self-contradiction is the truth of contradiction. The speculative result of the dialectical process is not the total elimination of contradiction. To the

⁷³ This paragraph is a reproduction (with slight amendments) of a passage in my review of McNulty's book, *Hegel's Logic and Metaphysics*. See <https://www.csc-p.org/2024/07/04/jacob-mcnulty-hegels-logic-and-metaphysics-cambridge-cambridge-university-press-2023-288-pp-isbn-9781009067805>.

contrary, speculative thinking stresses that the concept remains true to itself in its self-contradiction⁷⁴. No contradiction – no truth⁷⁵.

5. *Conclusion: Speculation and the Absolute*

The Absolute does not stand in contrast to anything. Because it stands alone, it cannot stand in contradiction with anything else. Accordingly, one might raise the objection that speculative thought, which thinks the Absolute, could not stand in contradiction. However, if the Absolute stands in contradiction with itself, then this objection dissolves. Indeed, the absolute determinacy of the Absolute requires the truth of self-contradiction. Since the Absolute is determinate and not merely indeterminate, it must be determinately related to what it is not. In order to be determinate, it must be other to what it is not – relativity. However, since there is nothing other to the Absolute (for it is all encompassing), it cannot be determinately related to anything other than itself. There is nothing beyond it to negate. Since it is determinate and absolute, it can only be determinate if it is its own other – if it is other than itself. Simply put, in order to be determinate, the Absolute must exclude itself. Only via self-negation and self-contradiction can the Absolute be true to itself as that which is absolutely determinate.

Every category is a category of the Absolute. The category ‘truth’ is an absolute category. Accordingly, the consistency of self-contradiction that is constitutive of truth itself should have absolute significance. As a result, articulating what the Absolute is inevitably invokes an appeal to contradiction. As Hegel states, speculative thought holds on to the contradiction, and Hegel’s example of speculative thought indicates just this.

⁷⁴ GW 11, p. 288; Eng. trans. p. 383.

⁷⁵ Although I tend to agree with Alznauer’s argument that the concept is the primitive bearer of truth. Alznauer endorses a one-sided view of truth, when he argues that for Hegel a concept is untrue «if it cannot be predicated of the absolute or used to characterize things as they are in themselves – without generating a contradiction». Alznauer, *Untrue Concepts in Hegel’s Logic*, p. 124.

Hegel writes that «the speculative reflection of spirit, to mention it here, consists on the contrary in grasping and enunciating contradiction»⁷⁶. Speculative thought does not consist in letting go of the contradiction. By holding onto contradiction, it holds on to itself. Thus, speculative thought is inherently contradictory. In paragraph 79 of the *Encyclopedia, Einteilung der Logik*, Hegel divides the moments of the logic into three phases: understanding, dialectic, and speculation. Here Hegel gives us an example of speculative thought that confirm this reading. However, because these remarks are only anticipatory and historical remarks on their own they are not properly scientific, and should be supplemented with illustrations from the content of the logical developments itself. In paragraph 82 Hegel writes:

Instead, it is explicitly what contains those oppositions at which the understanding stops short (thus including the opposition of the subjective and the objective) and contains them as something sublated within itself and precisely by this means proves itself to be concrete and a totality. For this reason, a speculative content can also not be expressed in a one-sided sentence. If we say, for instance, 'the absolute is the unity of the subjective and the objective', this is, to be sure, correct but one-sided insofar as only the unity is expressed here and emphasis is placed on it alone, whereas in fact the subjective and the objective are indeed not only identical but also distinct⁷⁷.

Speculative thought thinks the Absolute. The Absolute is the unity of the subjective and the objective. In other words, it is the unity of the concept and the object. However, this is only a relative concept of the Absolute, for it only predicates one side of an opposition to the Absolute. In order to articulate the speculative truth, one must also enunciate the difference between concept and object. The Absolute is also the difference between concept and object.

⁷⁶ GW 11, p. 288; Eng. trans. pp. 383-384. Also see GW 21, p. 139; Eng. trans. p. 122.

⁷⁷ GW 23.3, p. 858; Eng. trans. by K. Brinkmann and D.O. Dahlstrom, *Hegel's Logic*, p. 133.

According to Hegel, the Absolute is both the unity of concept and object – A – as well as their non-unity – not A.

It is true that the Absolute is consistent. However, this is a one-sided or relative truth. It is also true that the Absolute is contradictory. This is also true, but it is a one-sided or relative truth. Each proclamation excludes something true: in the former case, the Absolute precludes the contradictions, and is thereby not all-encompassing – not Absolute. In the latter case, the Absolute is relativized too, for it precludes consistency. Each articulation of the Absolute is only a relativized absolute.

According to Hegel, «the proposition, in the form of a judgment, is not adept to express speculative truths»⁷⁸. This concept of the false as the one-sided motivates the dialectic concept of truth advocated here, for the falsehood of what is one-sided implies a commitment to the falsehood of consistency. By affirming one side of an opposition and negating its negation, the Absolute is a consistent, finite being that is transcended by its other. However, such a consistent absolute is only a relative, one-sided, and therefore false absolute. In order to correspond with itself, the Absolute must correspond with its negation. Truth *qua* self-correspondence entails a contradictory concept of truth.

In fact, there is no purely consistent concept of the Absolute. By insisting that the Absolute be absolute, one must also insist that the Absolute be relative. If it were not relative, then it would exclude the relative, and would not be all-encompassing or absolute. Hence, one cannot affirm the consistency of the Absolute without simultaneously affirming the truth of contradiction. Since the consistent conception of the Absolute renders it contradictory, one cannot cancel the contradiction in the consistent conception of the Absolute without affirming its very inconsistency. As a result – the only way to cancel the contradiction is to preserve it. In order to discover that the contradiction is not only cancelled, but also preserved, one need only think through what is entailed by any consistent concept of the Absolute. Only by cancelling and preserving the contradiction can Ideality, the cancelling and preserving of otherness and finitude, be achieved.

⁷⁸ GW 21, p. 78; Eng. trans. p. 67.

We will remember too that the Absolute is false insofar as it does not correspond to itself, and when it is conceived as merely consistent, it is in contradiction with itself. This self-contradiction 'the Absolute is not absolute' is a lack of self-correspondence and thereby false. Thus, one will raise the objection that the Absolute is false if it is only self-contradictory. This is true. However, when we remember that self-contradiction is consistent with itself *qua* self-contradiction, we remember that in self-contradiction consistency is present too.

The speculative conception of the Absolute is not one-sided – it thinks the Absolute absolutely – the Absolute is only truly absolute if it is consistent and contradictory. Only when we recognize that the Absolute is both consistent and contradictory do we have an absolute articulation of the Absolute. The Absolute corresponds to itself – it is true – when the Absolute is thought absolutely. Only in the consistency of contradiction is the Absolute true to itself.

Intriguingly, Hegel notes that the speculative is identical in meaning with what the philosophical tradition called the mystical.⁷⁹ A cursory reading of Pseudo-Dionysius shows that the mystical apprehended the Absolute as something inhere contradictory, indeed as the «being beyond being [ὑπερὸς ἰα οὐσία]»⁸⁰. However, mysticism gave up on thought (at least mediated thought)⁸¹ because it could not articulate the truth of that contradiction. Hegel's concept of speculative thinking corresponds to the mystical because it endorses the truth of contradiction. Unlike mysticism, however, Hegel's concept of the speculative integrates the truth of contradiction into logic itself. Because contradiction is integrated into a necessary logical development, Hegel can still critique romantic irony for its contingency and arbitrariness, while still holding on to the truth of contradiction. Romanticism may endorse the truth of

⁷⁹ Ivi, p. 205; Eng. trans. p. 179.

⁸⁰ Pseudo-Dionysius, *The Divine Names, The Complete Works of Pseudo-Dionysius*, transl. by C. Luibheid, Mahwah, Paulist Press International, 1987, pp. 47-133. Here p. 49 [585-88].

⁸¹ GW 23.3, pp. 858-859; Eng. trans. by K. Brinkmann and D.O. Dahlstrom, *Hegel's Logic*, p. 133.

contradiction, but they failed to see how that contradiction could be integrated into a science of logic.

In fact, the whole development from the understanding through dialectics to speculation also supports the dialetheic reading. Hegel illustrates each kind of thinking by appealing to the development of the true infinite out of finitude. The understanding conceives of categories in their mutual exclusivity – it proceeds by means of the principle of identity and non-contradiction. In other terms, the understanding thinks the categories in their finitude⁸². ‘The Absolute is finite’ – this is the truth of the Understanding. Dialectic is the self-cancellation of finitude, the internal self-negation of finitude whereby finitude becomes non-finite⁸³. Finitude, grasped by the understanding, is that which comes to an end, or ceases to be. Because it contains its own limit within itself, or has its own ceasing to be within itself, it contains its own negation within itself. When finitude is posited as absolute, it is no longer in a relationship of limitation but is without limit. Insofar as it is without limit, that which comes to an end no longer comes to an end.

When finitude no longer ceases to be, it can no longer be finite. Instead, finitude itself becomes non-finite – this is the moment of dialectic. Hegel is explicit that the stage of dialectic is nothing other than a dialectic of finitude⁸⁴. In short: the understanding affirms that everything is finite, while dialectic is the cancelling of finitude, or the assertion of the falsehood of the understanding. Dialectic is a type of thinking that overcomes the understanding within itself. Dialectic is the «*negative Vernünftige*».

The bad infinite is the infinite that is opposed to finitude. This infinitude is ‘bad’ in the sense that it is incomplete, for there is something standing beyond the infinite. Because the infinite qua non-finite is always in opposition to another that it excludes, it is not truly infinite, but a false infinitude. Insofar as the infinite is not finite, and the infinite and finite stand in a relation of mutual exclusion, the concept of the non-finite is limited by finitude, and

⁸² Ivi, pp. 854-855; Eng. trans. pp. 126-128.

⁸³ Ivi, pp. 853-857; Eng. trans. pp. 128-131.

⁸⁴ *Ibidem*.

ceases to be infinite – it is not infinite. Thus, in order for the infinite to be truly infinite, it must be the case that ‘the infinite is finite.’ Because the infinite has no limit, and whatever is finite has a limit, the infinite is unlimited and limited – it stands in contradiction. This is the true or the affirmative infinity, what is grasped by positive reason or speculation.

Naturally, the true infinite is not related to anything beyond itself. However, it is internally self-contradictory, for the infinite is itself, i.e., infinite, and not itself, i.e., finite. Indeed, speculative thought overcomes the relative or bad infinity and thinks the infinite as the unity of opposition that constitutes absolute truth. That the finite is infinite is a contradiction – it is the infinite infinitely conceived – it is the truth of speculation that holds on to the contradiction – the contradiction that consistently contradicts itself without end – that is, infinitely. Moreover, speculative thought is not other to the other stages, but itself constitutes the unity of the understanding and dialectic – it cancels and preserves both finitude [the understanding] and the non-finite [dialectic] within itself – it is an ‘affirmative’ unity in which the negative result of dialectic is also the positive: «Because the dialectic has the negative as a result, the negative is equally positive, precisely as a result»⁸⁵.

By preserving both the understanding and dialectics, speculative thought preserves both the truth of finitude and its cancellation – its falsehood. By negating the negation of finitude, it preserves what has been cancelled, and speculative thought raises the Absolute to contradiction in which the finite is true and false. The result of the dialectic is the unity of the negative and the positive, which, we will remember, is exactly the same unity that constitutes contradiction. The dialectic of finitude leads to the true infinite – the infinitely self-preserving contradiction grasped by speculative thought.

Schick notes the following: «Like Adorno, Schlegel blames Hegel for not tolerating contradictions but resolving them and dissolving difference into an alleged absolute identity»⁸⁶. If we read Hegel as

⁸⁵ Ivi, p. 857; Eng. trans. p. 131.

⁸⁶ Schick, *Dialetheism as Romanticism*, p. 293.

endorsing a consistent view of the Absolute that denies truth to contradiction, then Hegel's absolute is relative – it fails to live up to the Absolute. By reading Hegel in this way, we fall victim to the old prejudice – already articulated in Schlegel, that Hegel again returns to affirm the truth of empty abstraction. If all contradictions are cancelled, Schlegel has the argument, and Hegel's philosophy is an abysmal failure.

To be sure, the Hegel who denies the truth to contradiction is defenseless against such critiques. By banishing contradiction from the domain of truth, Hegel could only ever achieve knowledge of a relative Absolute, a relative God, and could never think the true infinite, the true God. However, defeating Hegel is not so easy. By affirming the truth of contradiction, Hegel comes to the defense of the true God by resuscitating his true infinity. By canceling and preserving the contradiction, the dialetheic Hegel affirms the true God in his eternal and contradictory form.