

# REPLIES: THINKING THE ABSOLUTE WITH THE PADUA HEGELIANS

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**Abstract.** *In Replies: Thinking the Absolute with the Padua Hegelians, I respond to the commentaries and the critical readings of Hegel's Foundation Free Metaphysics by Michela Bordignon, Marco Bonutto, and Elena Tripaldi. While Hegel's philosophy does advance a form of speculative dialetheism, the rational form of Absolute Dialetheism developed in Hegel's Foundation Free Metaphysics is not sufficient to fully develop a plausible Hegelian concept of truth. Hegel's self-particularizing concept calls for something even more robust: a Trans-Consistent Theory of Truth in which only contradictions can be true. By unifying rational and mystical forms of knowing into one concept of philosophical religion, speculative thinking can explain why there must be non-explainable contingent beings.*

**Keywords.** *Speculative Dialetheism; Formal Thinking; Empirical Contingency; Logic of Reflection; Speculative Mysticism*

## 1. Introduction

*Hegel's Foundation Free Metaphysics* argued that without accepting some form of Absolute Dialetheism, we cannot solve (or resolve) a number of perennial paradoxes that have plagued the Western philosophical tradition: the problem of the missing difference, the problem of absolute empiricism, the problem of nihilism, the problem of the third man, the problem of onto-theology, and the problem of instantiation. Six years after the publication of the book, I hold the same view: without re-thinking the concept of the concept as a self-contradictory and *self-particularizing* power, these traditional metaphysical, epistemic, and logical problems cannot be solved. However, the book

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remained *hypothetical*, for the book never desired «to impel the reader to accept any particular species of Absolute Dialetheism»<sup>1</sup>. As my commentators and critics have adeptly articulated, in some respects, the book has raised more questions than it has answered. On this point I agree and wish to add my voice to the chorus of critics.

Bordignon, Bonutto, and Tripaldi have done us a great service, for their insightful comments, questions, and critiques have granted us an opportunity to reflect more deeply on the form and implications of the absolute dialetheist worldview. Naturally, I do not agree with all the critiques raised in this book symposium. Nonetheless, many of their questions are my questions. First, although *Hegel's Foundation Free Metaphysics* is right to offer a dialetheist reading of Hegel's philosophy, I am now of the persuasion that dialetheism is not sufficient to fully articulate Hegel's theory of truth. Hegel's philosophy (and philosophy in general) demands a *trans-consistent theory* according to which *only contradictions can be true*. Second, the very existence of empirical universality raises a problem for Hegel's philosophy that has not been sufficiently addressed – in fact, it cannot be easily adjudicated by any interpretation of Hegel (including my own). Finally, if Absolute Dialetheism is true, we cannot conceive of Rational Dialetheism and Mystical Dialetheism as *opposing positions* that exclude each other. While *Hegel's Foundation Free Metaphysics* explores the formal and non-formal species of Rational Dialetheism, it does not systematically investigate Mystical Dialetheism, nor does it fully execute the demand of Absolute Dialetheism that «each species of Absolute Dialetheism must integrate its negation»<sup>2</sup>.

In *Absolute Dialetheism: Hegel, Schelling, and the End of Alterity* (Edinburgh University Press, 2026) I make good on these questions. Drawing upon *Hegel's Foundation Free Metaphysics* as a springboard for further reflections, *Absolute Dialetheism* calls for a trans-consistent theory of truth in which the Rational and Mystical forms of Absolute Dialetheism are integrated as *moments* of what I call

<sup>1</sup> G.S. Moss, *Hegel's Foundation Free Metaphysics. The Logic of Singularity*, New York, Routledge, 2020, p. 8.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibidem*.

*philosophical religion*. By integrating the conceptual with the trans-conceptual, *Absolute Dialetheism* further demonstrates why – despite the opposition between empirical and absolute categories – the absoluteness of the *One and All* remains uncompromised. Alas, here I can only *indicate* the solution to these problems; it is in *Absolute Dialetheism* where the reader can find a complete reply to my most insightful readers and critics.

## 2. Reply to Bordignon: From Absolute Dialetheism to Trans-Consistency

Dialetheism is that view that *some* contradictions are true, term coined by Priest and Routley. Just as there can be different kind of realists, there can be different kinds of dialetheists. This is already implied by Priest's observation that dialetheism does not commit one to any particular account of truth<sup>3</sup>. Bordignon is on point that I offer a «sort of dialetheist reading»<sup>4</sup> of Hegel. She rightly argues that Hegel is *not* a dialetheist in Priest's sense:

I thought that the association of Hegel's conception of true contradiction with dialetheism was criticisable by saying that Hegel and Priest assume two different notions of negation and, consequently, two different notions of falsehood (and then also of truth) [...]<sup>5</sup>.

However, he is a dialetheist in *another* sense:

It is certainly true that Hegel's notion of true contradiction [...] is in a certain sense dialetheic, even if it is not perfectly reducible, as Moss himself points out, to Priest's dialetheic account<sup>6</sup>.

<sup>3</sup> M. Bordignon, *A Dialetheist Reading of Hegel's Dialectic: Between Richtigkeit and Wahrheit*, *infra*, p. 305; G. Priest, *In Contradiction: A Study of the Transconsistent*, The Hague, M. Nijhoff, 2006, p. 53.

<sup>4</sup> Bordignon, *A Dialetheist Reading of Hegel's Dialectic*, p. 304.

<sup>5</sup> Ivi, p. 305.

<sup>6</sup> Ivi, p. 310.

She's on point that Hegel's dialetheism is not a standard one. Bordignon is the forerunner in this field, and has astutely explicated the difference between Priest's Dialetheism and Hegel's philosophy in her *Hegel: A Dialetheist? Truth and Contradiction in Hegel's Logic*. In *Hegel's Foundation Free Metaphysics*, I follow her comparison, agreeing with her on most points of comparison<sup>7</sup>. Bordignon's observations remind us that the one who *coins* a term is not entitled to *dictate* its meaning.

In her comments, Bordignon helpfully introduces a distinction that is only *implicitly* at work in my book: the distinction between *correctness* and *truth*. She links correctness to *non-sufficiency*: a logical determination is correct if it is a *necessary* (but not sufficient) condition for the full articulation of a concept. Regarding finitude she notes that a judgment such as «finitude is finite» can be read as «a necessary condition to express what is going on in the unity of finite and infinity»<sup>8</sup>. However, this judgment overlooks the equal correctness of the opposite claim: «finitude is infinite». The latter judgment is equally correct, for it too is a necessary condition for the full articulation of the concept of finitude. Logical determinations are correct insofar as

Each proposition expressing the contradictory structure of finitude – predicating respectively the identity and difference of the finite and infinity – is a necessary but not sufficient condition for saying what finite and infinity concretely and truly are. Differently put, each expresses part of the truth, but not the truth of the unity of finite and infinity as a whole<sup>9</sup>.

Each corresponds to an *element* or moment of finitude, but *not finitude in its completeness* or absoluteness. Neither judgment is true by itself, for as Bordignon notes, «a determination is true when it corresponds with the complete unfolding of its content»<sup>10</sup>. Truth is the *complete self-correspondence* of the concept with itself.

<sup>7</sup> Moss, *Hegel's Foundation Free Metaphysics*, pp. 280-281.

<sup>8</sup> Bordignon, *A Dialetheist Reading of Hegel's Dialectic*, p. 307-308.

<sup>9</sup> Ivi, p. 308.

<sup>10</sup> Ivi, p. 306.

To these reflections we might add the following *supplement*: Priest's dialetheism operates from the position of the Understanding. Since the Understanding does not connect the determinations in virtue of what they are, it can only unite them by means of an *external principle*. Since each correct determination is necessary, but not sufficient, in order to accurately describe the object in question, the correct determinations must be combined into a unity. How can this unity be achieved? Lacking the power of *Aufhebung* whereby the concept – in virtue of what it is – unifies with its opposite, the best the Understanding can do is to *combine* the contradictory determinations with a *conjunction* that *formally* unites them into one unity. A conjunction is an external principle *par excellence*: 'and' is *indifferent* to what it unites. It can combine any two determinations irrespective of their content. Uniting the correct determinations, one can accurately describe the act of moving into a room by the conjunction: it is *true* that 'I am in the room' *and* 'I am not in the room.' As a result, one can say that they are *both* «correct» for together they are *sufficient* for truth, but separately each is «incorrect» for by itself neither is sufficient for truth.

From this position one might advocate a form of *conjunctive paraconsistency* according to which simplification is false. The conjunction is true, but simplification would no longer be truth preserving, for each conjunct would be false by itself<sup>11</sup>. Using Priest's sense of dialetheism, Bordignon notes that

This is why I think that the claim that determinations are dialetheically true and false opens the space for the risk of reducing the self-contradictory truth (*Wahrheit*) of determinations to their being correct and incorrect (*richtig* and *unrichtig*)<sup>12</sup>.

Naturally, this is not Hegel's strategy in his *Science of Logic*. One can make a good case that correctness is a form of truth, for in the *both-and* structure one seems to achieve a sufficient correspondence

<sup>11</sup> See F. D'Agostini, *Conjunctive Paraconsistency*, «Synthese», CXCIX (3-4), 2021, pp. 6845-6874, p. 6846.

<sup>12</sup> Bordignon, *A Dialetheist Reading of Hegel's Dialectic*, p. 312.

of the concept with itself. However, since the self-correspondence is realized *externally*, it is not a speculative truth. Correctness is a non-speculative form of truth, and insofar as *truth is speculative*, by itself correctness is ultimately insufficient – by itself it is a false concept of truth. Thus, Bordignon is right that «Hegel and Priest are thinking falsehood in two different ways»<sup>13</sup>.

Unlike speculative contradictions in which each side of the contradiction is a *moment* of another category, correctness simply leaves the contradiction *internally unresolved*. In this sense, Priest's dialetheism belongs to the dialectical moment, for the dialectical moment affirms the contradiction of the Understanding articulated by the conjunction, but never resolves it in another concept through the power *endemic to the concepts themselves*.

For this reason, I think Bordignon is on point that Priest's dialetheism is a *dialetheism of correctness* and incorrectness, but not of truth in Hegel's sense. Because Hegel incorporates correctness into his logic at the stage of dialectical thinking, «the similarity between Priest's notion of dialetheia and Hegel's combination of truth and falsehood comes to light»<sup>14</sup>. Priest's dialetheism is a *dialectical dialetheism* for the contradictions are not internally resolved by the power of *Aufhebung* into a richer category that negates and preserves them both. In order to advance to a *Speculative Dialetheism*, «one needs to think the resolution of this contradiction»<sup>15</sup>. For this reason, it is exactly right that

Hegel would buy Priest's dialetheism within the perspective of standard thought. Translated in Hegel's term, his approach to contradiction would include Priest's proposal as the best option available when one is still trapped in the point of view of the Understanding (*Verstand*), whose conception of truth is a simple property of something satisfying a given criterium: the categories are meant to be *richtig* or *unrichtig* when they one-sidedly correspond to their concept<sup>16</sup>.

<sup>13</sup> Ivi, p. 305.

<sup>14</sup> Ivi, p. 307.

<sup>15</sup> Ivi, p. 309.

<sup>16</sup> Ivi, pp. 312.

Rather than working against the dialetheist interpretation of Hegel in *Hegel's Foundation Free Metaphysics*, by drawing on the difference between *dialectics and speculation*, again a distinction implicitly operational but underplayed in the book, Bordignon helpfully illuminates how these distinctions help us to better motivate the *Speculative Dialetheism* for which I am an advocate<sup>17</sup>.

Bordignon asks:

Can we claim that Hegel has a dialetheist conception not only of *Richtigkeit* and *Unrichtigkeit*, but also of *Wahrheit* and *Unwahrheit*, as Moss seems to claim?<sup>18</sup>

Yes – and Bordignon shows us how. How does the speculative contradiction operate? The speculative contradiction is achieved in *Ideality*, the overcoming of otherness, in which the opposing determinations become *particular moments of one category* that contains them. Ideality is realized via the *Aufhebung* or what is normally translated as ‘sublation’. While I (following standard translations) describe the speculative contradiction in terms of *Aufhebung* as «cancellation and preservation» Bordignon prefers «negation and preservation» – terminology with which I have no objections.

The speculative contradiction comes to pass exactly when the concept *corresponds with itself*:

Paradoxically, the negation of the finite is equivalent to its truth: finite negates itself and passes over into infinity precisely because of its finitude<sup>19</sup>.

Consider finitude: in virtue of self-referential predication, *finitude itself is finite*. But since finitude is that which comes to an end, that which comes to an end must itself come to an end. By coming to an end, finitude is no longer finite, but must be the negation of finitude: *finitude is infinite*. As Bordignon notes: «the

<sup>17</sup> In *Hegel's Absolute Dialetheism* («Verifiche», LIV (1), 2025, pp. 253-286) I draw on the distinction between dialectic and speculation in order to demonstrate that Hegel's dialetheism is not merely dialectical but is absolutely speculative.

<sup>18</sup> Bordignon, *A Dialetheist Reading of Hegel's Dialectic*, p. 309.

<sup>19</sup> Ivi, p. 311.

finite, insofar as it is finite, is also not finite, or, better said, it is infinite, because it passes over into its other; infinity»<sup>20</sup>. Unlike the formal procedure of applying a separate connector, i.e. ‘and’, to a given set of contents, e.g. ‘S is P’, ‘S is not P’, finitude negates itself and is preserved within its negation – infinitude – in virtue of finitude’s own internal process of sublation:

Each determination is identical to itself, but it is also necessarily led to transcend and negate itself. This is why the self-determining process of speculative thought is dialethic in a sense which does not seem to be reducible to Priest’s one<sup>21</sup>.

In conclusion, *Speculative Dialetheism* is achieved by means of the internal process by which categories negate and preserve themselves.

One needs to account for the immanent negation of logical determinations, for its self-contradictory structure, and for its *Aufhebung*<sup>22</sup>.

In speculative truth, *truth is true to itself*. As Bordignon notes, speculative thought takes the Absolute as its object<sup>23</sup>. Every category of Hegel’s logic is a concept of the Absolute<sup>24</sup>. The Absolute is *not relative* to anything. Since the Absolute is not relative to anything, it is *opposed to relativity*. The concept of the Absolute corresponds with itself exactly at the point where it excludes everything relative. Nevertheless, in virtue of excluding relativity, the Absolute must

<sup>20</sup> Ivi, p. 307.

<sup>21</sup> Ivi, p. 310.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>23</sup> Ivi, p. 313.

<sup>24</sup> G.W.F. Hegel, *Gesammelte Werke* in Verbindung mit der Deutschen Forschungsgemeinschaft herausgegeben von der Nordrhein-Westfälischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, Hamburg, Meiner, 1968ff., vol. 20 (henceforth GW, followed by the respective volume number); Engl. trans. by K. Brinkmann and D.O. Dahlstrom, *Encyclopedia of the Philosophical Sciences in Basic Outline, Part I: Science of Logic*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2010, § 85.

itself be relative, for it is *relative to relativity itself*. Thus, in order to be true to itself – to sufficiently correspond to what it is – *the Absolute is relative*. Thus, the Absolute is only true to itself when it is contradictory: «This kind of dialetheism, therefore, is absolute, because it is a dialetheism inherent in a thought which is in itself absolute»<sup>25</sup>. Every consistent rendering of the Absolute that conceives it as opposed to its negation – the relative – inevitably fails, for it is *contradictory in virtue of its very consistency*. The Absolute Idea is the self-relativizing method, a method that relativizes itself as each and every particular category in the *Science of Logic*<sup>26</sup>.

Here we ought to note another important feature of Speculative Dialetheism. The operative contradiction is a form of *self-contradiction*<sup>27</sup>. Against Priest's view of contradiction according to which two distinct propositions contradict each other, in the form of Speculative Dialetheism the Absolute exists in *contradiction with itself*. Since the Absolute is relative to nothing, it cannot stand in contradiction with something else, for it is relative to nothing<sup>28</sup>.

<sup>25</sup> Bordignon, *A Dialetheist Reading of Hegel's Dialectic*, p. 313.

<sup>26</sup> Bordignon notes that: «Each determination corresponds to the absolute, since it is a constitutive moment of the absolute, and thus it is true, but it also does not correspond to the absolute as a whole, and therefore it is also untrue» (*ibidem*). However, I am hesitant to separate the true from the untrue in this way for it seems to make a determination true in one respect and false in another, so that it separates the true from the untrue, thereby undermining the contradiction. Rather, in virtue of being an absolute determination, in virtue of being true to the Absolute, it is a merely relative moment, and is thereby untrue to the absolute determination. For instance, finitude is absolute, and because it is absolute, it is not absolute, it is relative. As Hegel notes, each moment of the whole is the whole itself. See Engl. trans. by G. di Giovanni, *Science of Logic*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2015, 529, GW 12.32.

<sup>27</sup> Hegel formulates the principle in these terms. He explicitly uses this form. See GW 11, p. 258; Engl. trans. by G. di Giovanni, *Science of Logic*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2015, p. 354.

<sup>28</sup> Bordignon sees the speculative contradiction not to consist in the identity of truth with falsehood, but *truth with untruth*. Despite recognizing the complexities regarding the relation between negation and falsehood, I am hesitant to

Bordignon asks:

However isn't the notion of true contradiction at the basis of this conception of the absolute underlining some limits of other notions of true contradiction unwilling to face the challenge of thinking the absolute itself?<sup>29</sup>

Taking her question seriously, we should seriously interrogate whether Speculative Dialetheism is too weak a thesis to articulate Hegelian truth. As I stated in the opening reflections, even 'Speculative Dialetheism' is an incomplete description of Hegel's conception of truth. In the *Phenomenology of Spirit* Hegel claims that «the Absolute alone is true»<sup>30</sup>. He echoes this again in the *Science of Logic*, where he claims that «the absolute idea alone is being»<sup>31</sup>. If the Absolute alone is true, and the Absolute is inherently contradictory, it follows that truth is inherently contradictory. Thus, Hegel's speculative Idealism commits him to the view that *only contradictions are true*. There are no purely consistent truths. To set it apart from other accounts of truth (including Dialetheism), I call this position the 'Trans-Consistent Theory of Truth'. Hegel states this most baldly in his famous dissertation where he proclaims contradiction to be the form of truth itself:

separate falsehood from untruth. If we conceive falsehood as the *opposite of truth*, namely as *the lack of complete self-correspondence*, and the relative is not Absolute, then the relative is that which does not correspond to the Absolute. Since the Absolute alone is true, the relative is exactly what is false, for it is that which lacks complete self-correspondence with the Absolute (the true). By being true to itself, the Absolute relativizes itself, and for this reason the Absolute is not true to itself. The Absolute is false in virtue of its very truth. For this reason, I do not see compelling reasons to multiply concepts here. By my lights, untruth is just falsehood. If we were to maintain these terms, what Bordignon calls «false» I would call «purely false» while «untrue» would mean «false and true» (Bordignon, *A Dialetheist Reading of Hegel's Dialectic*, p. 311).

<sup>29</sup> Ivi, p. 315.

<sup>30</sup> GW 2, p. 54; Engl. trans. by T. Pinkard, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2018, Introduction, Paragraph 75, p. 50.

<sup>31</sup> GW 12, p. 236; Engl. trans., p. 735.

«*Contradictio esta regula veri, non contradictio falsi*»<sup>32</sup>. Naturally, this neither means that everything that is contradictory is true, nor that there are no falsehoods. It only means that contradiction is a *necessary condition* for any truth whatever.

Where does this leave Absolute Dialetheism? First, we note that if all truths are contradictory, then it is also true that *some truths are contradictory*. Thus, while Dialetheism is true, it is only true because the Trans-Consistent Theory of Truth entails it. Absolute Dialetheism – thought through to the end – calls us to transcend even the Speculative Dialetheism of *Hegel's Foundation Free Metaphysics*. In *Absolute Dialetheism: Hegel, Schelling, and the End of Alterity* I mean to heed this call not only to think the absolute inconsistently, but to absolutize contradiction itself.

### 3. Reply to Bonutto: *The Empirical Absolute*

Bonutto gives an astute reconstruction of the dialectical thrust of the book, both the problems it addresses and the solutions it offers. While he is on point that I offer a reading of Hegel that is inspired by Neo-Platonism<sup>33</sup>, the book means to show how Hegel improves upon Neo-Platonism, by overcoming all foundations (including the One). Hegel also improves upon Neo-Platonism through his discovery of self-particularizing concepts, without which the relation between the infinite and the finite remains a total mystery that can only be described by appeals to metaphors such as 'emanation'.

Bonutto rightly observes that *Hegel's Foundation Free Metaphysics* advances a form of *Speculative Monism*<sup>34</sup>. Speculative Monism and Speculative Dialetheism go hand in hand: without them one either falls into a dualistic metaphysics or a Parmenidean

<sup>32</sup> GW 5, p. 227.

<sup>33</sup> M. Bonutto, *The Quest for Monism: On the Unity and Contradictoriness of Hegel's Concept, infra*, pp. 287, 297.

<sup>34</sup> Ivi, p. 287.

Monism<sup>35</sup>. Both the dualistic metaphysics and the Parmenidean Monism fall victim to the six *aporias* discussed in the book and briefly summarized by Bonutto. Here I only mean to add some brief supplements to Bonutto's descriptions<sup>36</sup>, in order to indicate the systematic and interconnected nature of these problems – especially their deep connection to the problem of the missing difference.

Take two examples: the problem of nihilism and the problem of absolute empiricism. The problem of nihilism is in fact an application of the problem of the missing difference to Being itself. If Being cannot differentiate itself, then the principle of difference must come from nothing, which appears to annihilate the existence of all differentiated beings. Likewise, the problem of absolute empiricism is born from that same problem of the missing difference: if universality cannot differentiate itself, the principle of difference must be sought in some *non-conceptual* experience. By solving the problem of the missing difference, Hegel's philosophy is well-poised to solve the others too.

In his closing remarks, Bonutto raises a very difficult problem concerning the opposition between empirical concepts (representations) and absolute concepts. This same problem has been raised before by Karen Koch in her excellent review of the book in *Hegel-Studien*<sup>37</sup>. Bonutto writes:

If a criticism were to be raised, the main concern would be that an interpretation that posits, as it appears, two different forms of contradiction, one *false*, the other *true*, runs the risk of reconstituting an aporetic form of dualism<sup>38</sup>.

The dualism consists in the opposition between the self-referential truth of the concept and empirical representations which lack the form of self-reference. The latter are false insofar as they do not live up to the *self-referential form of the Absolute*, which is the true as such:

<sup>35</sup> Ivi, p. 290.

<sup>36</sup> Ivi, pp. 288-290.

<sup>37</sup> See Koch's review in «Hegel-Studien», LV, 2012, pp. 271-273.

<sup>38</sup> Bonutto, *The Quest for Monism*, p. 294.

On the one hand there is the self-referential truth of the Concept, and on the other hand the falsity of the heteroreferentiality of representational conceptuality<sup>39</sup>.

If the concrete universal cannot account for empirical conceptuality, then would there not be «an excess, an otherness, that denies its status as an absolute universality»?<sup>40</sup> If the concept is absolute, but it cannot account for empirical universality, then the absolute is no longer absolute:

That which opposes the whole, contradicts its essence and does not share its status, is still something that, by being placed beyond it, by the mere fact of being, prevents its actual existence<sup>41</sup>.

In *Hegel's Foundation Free Metaphysics*, in response to such worries I argue that empirical concepts exist as *self-alienated forms of the concept*. While the concept of one hundred dollars is not itself one hundred dollars, the concept of the concept is a concept. The former is an alienated expression of the latter. Bonutto argues that this solution would have «uncontrollable consequences», for the concept would be

Both universal and not universal, both particular and not particular, so that profound doubts would then arise regarding the actual status of the Concept<sup>42</sup>.

However, this is not a problem, but the solution, for the concept is the singularity which is both universal (not particular) and particular (not universal). What is more, we cannot say that this is an «*ad hoc*»<sup>43</sup> solution, for if the concept is self-contradictory, it ought to negate its self-referential form and determine itself to be a concept that – like the concept of one hundred dollars – lacks self-reference.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>41</sup> Ivi, pp. 294-295.

<sup>42</sup> Ivi, p. 296.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibidem*.

And yet, Bonutto puts his finger on the insufficiency of this appeal to self-externality by arguing that there are *two forms of self-externality*: internal and external: «the universality of the Absolute would be denied by a particularity that is not internal to it, but rather external»<sup>44</sup>. The concept negates its self-referential structure, determining itself to be the Absolute that is not self-referential. Quantity is such a concept – it is absolute, but it lacks the form of self-referential conceptuality (this is why Hegel rejects mathematics as a model for philosophical method). However, empirical concepts, despite their lack self-referential structure, do not apply to everything. Hence, Bonutto is on point that the

Dimension of finiteness in the empirical world, when considered in this manner, could hardly be identified with the particularity emerging from the self-referential structure of the concept examined earlier<sup>45</sup>.

While it is not wrong that both the empirical and the quantitative are alienated forms of absolute conceptuality, for *both* lack the self-referential form of absolute conceptuality, the

the representative content could not be deduced from the concept of universality alone and it appears, instead, that a specific presupposition is required solely to ensure the intrinsic contradictoriness of the Idea<sup>46</sup>.

Bonutto's intervention is welcome, for it grants us an opportunity to delve more deeply into the problem and further develop the account of empirical form as the self-alienation of absolute being.

There is no denying the existence of empirical singularities and empirical concepts. Speculative thinking is presuppositionless, for it operates by purifying itself of everything empirical. Because it purifies itself of the empirical, speculative thinking cannot produce the empirical out of the concept of alone. Whereas quantity can be account for *a priori* (and cannot be accounted for by appeal to

<sup>44</sup> *Ibidem.*

<sup>45</sup> *Ibidem.*

<sup>46</sup> *Ibidem.*

experience), empirical concepts operate otherwise. They are nothing without perceptual experience. Having detached from perceptual experience, speculative thinking withdrawals from the ground of the empirical concept. While quantity is an absolute concept that applies to all, empirical determinations are relative forms that cannot be deduced from the concept *per se*. Bonutto's critique lands well: if «truth has only the concept as the element of its existence»<sup>47</sup>, and the concept is self-particularizing, then particularizations of the concept ought to be the *only truths*. Since the concept alone is the form of truth, and «The Absolute alone is true, that is, it is the true which is alone the Absolute»<sup>48</sup>, by Hegel's lights the *absolute concept alone is true*. Since the concept is not a relative empirical being or concept, there ought not be any truth to empirical beings or concepts, for they cannot be dialectically or speculatively discovered from the concept alone. They are neither Absolute nor do they conform to the structure of the concept. It is evident enough that we cannot solve the problem by denying the opposition between empirical and absolute concepts. Hegel requires this distinction for his critique of Kant:

This so-called concept of a hundred dollars is however a false concept; the form of simple self-reference does not belong to such a limited, finite content itself; it is a form on loan to it, like a dress, by a subjective understanding; a 'hundred dollars' is nothing self-referring but something alterable and perishable<sup>49</sup>.

While the concept of finitude itself is finite, the concept of one hundred dollars is not itself one hundred dollars. On the one hand, we do not understand Hegel if we deny the self-referential nature of categories, since Hegel is explicit that the concept is the «creative power as self-referring absolute negativity»<sup>50</sup>. On the other hand, we do not understand Hegel if we import self-reference into empirical form either, since Hegel is adamant that self-reference is not

<sup>47</sup> GW 7, p. 10; Engl. trans, p. 4.

<sup>48</sup> Ivi, p. 54; Engl. trans. p. 50.

<sup>49</sup> GW 21, p. 75; Engl. trans., p. 65.

<sup>50</sup> GW 12, p. 36; Engl. trans., p. 533.

necessarily endemic to such determinations. Just as redness is not itself red, the concept of water is not itself water.

If we cannot solve the problem by denying the distinction, the problem might arise because we have endowed Hegel's concept with too much power. If Hegel only aims to provide an account of the conceptual *intelligibility* of the Absolute, not a theory of the existence of being themselves (such as Pippin's reading or a non-metaphysical version of foundation free philosophy would have it), then the problem never arises<sup>51</sup>. However, their views are not true to Hegel's philosophy, for Hegel claims that the real is derived from the concept<sup>52</sup> and that «the concept is all and that its movement is the universal, absolute activity, the self-determining and self-realizing movement»<sup>53</sup>. What is more, without re-thinking the concept as self-realizing, the classical paradoxes remain unsolved – from the problem of the missing difference to the problem of nihilism.

Far from solving the problem of dualism in Hegel's philosophy, by denying that the concept is the absolute self-realizing power in virtue of which everything exists, such interpretations *reintroduce the very dualism* we aim to avoid. If we deny the concept its self-realizing power, the concept cannot account for the existence of empirical singularities. Since these empirical singularities exist, either they have no reason for their being, or there must be a separate principle of existence in virtue of which such singularities exist. Thus, any concept, e.g., finitude, that is instantiated in empirical singularities would not be a self-particularizing or self-instantiating concept, for the instantiation of such concepts would depend upon a separate principle of existence. Thus, not only would the concept lack the power of self-particularization, the concept would not be everything, for it would only exist as something *relative* to another principle of existence. As a result, by denying the absoluteness of the

<sup>51</sup> See R. Pippin, *Hegel's Realm of Shadows: Logic as Metaphysics in the Science of Logic*, Chicago, Chicago University Press, 2018, p. 188 or W. Maker, *Idealism and Autonomy*, «The Owl of Minerva» XXXIV (1), 2002, pp. 59-75, p. 66.

<sup>52</sup> GW 12 pp. 24-25; Engl. trans., p. 522.

<sup>53</sup> Ivi, p. 238; Engl. trans. p. 77.

concept and its self-realizing power, the very same problem of dualism arises again.

To summarize briefly: the opposition between absolute and empirical concepts in Hegel is a real (and justified) opposition that cannot be ignored, blurred, or glossed over. What is more, denying the self-particularizing power of the absolute concept cannot solve the problem of dualism, for such readings only serve to re-introduce the very dualism that we meant to evade. Since we have the problem no matter how we read Hegel, it is better to stay true to Hegel's text: given that *the concept is all*, and it is self-particularizing, we can ask: how can empirical determinations exist without compromising the absoluteness of the concept?

Rather than attempt to answer the question straightway, we ought to ask a *critical question about the question itself*. If we answered the question, we could demonstrate how each empirical determination would be dialectically produced from the absolute concept itself. But this would absolutely negate *the contingency* of such beings. The empirical order could be otherwise than it is. But if we could answer the question by providing a dialectical transition, positing, or self-development out of the concept, then they would no longer be contingent, but absolutely necessary. As it turns out, Hegel himself rejects the attempt to read the existence of such empirical singularities, such as Krug's pen, out of the concept: «the most inappropriate thing to do is to demand form the concept that it comprehend such contingencies»<sup>54</sup>.

In the *Science of Logic*, the category of contingency dialectically determines itself to be absolute necessity in which the thing is what it is in virtue of itself alone<sup>55</sup>. Nonetheless, this does nothing to

<sup>54</sup> See S. Houlgate, *Necessity and Contingency in Hegel's Science of Logic*, «The Owl of Minerva», XXVII, 1995, pp. 37-49, p. 42. See Hegel's *Philosophy of Nature*, Paragraph 250 (GW 9, 35). Houlgate also makes the same point. He writes: «Hegel does not claim to prove that thought can prove by itself that certain particular things – such as Herr Krug's pen – have to exist (though he does believe it can prove that there is and must be being as such)». See S. Houlgate, *Schelling's Critique of Hegel's Science of Logic*, «Review of Metaphysics» LIII (1), 1999, pp. 99-128, p. 118.

<sup>55</sup> See Houlgate, *Necessity and Contingency in Hegel's Science of Logic*, p. 47. See N. Brown, *Hegel on Possibility*, New York, Bloomsbury, 2020, for an in-depth treatment of these categories.

explain the fact of empirical existence. In order to preserve the contingencies, it remains important that he does *not* sufficiently explain them.

Hegel recognizes that such contingencies exist. For this reason, we cannot think we have solved the problem by citing Hegel's proclamation that «the finite is not truly an existent»<sup>56</sup>. While Hegel is an Idealist, he never denies the existence of empirical singularities, and often uses them as examples in his teaching and writing<sup>57</sup>. In short, Hegel never denies the fact of empirical existence, nor does he deny their contingency. What is more, Hegel cleverly recognizes the importance of *not* comprehending such singularities, not sufficiently answering the question. In one important respect, not answering is necessary for preserving the contingency of empirical concepts.

On the one hand, the concept is all, and the concept is the self-particularizing power in virtue of which everything exists. On the other hand, empirical singularities and empirical concepts cannot be dialectically produced from the concept alone. If we read Hegel as a dialetheist or better – as a trans-consistent theorist, then we can accept some true contradictions. But *why accept this particular contradiction as true?* How can we acknowledge both facts without falling into an untenable dualism?

There is a Hegelian answer to this question, I believe, but I will leave it to Hegel scholars to decide if it Hegel's own answer<sup>58</sup>. On the one hand, the Absolute alone is true, for Hegel is clear that

The absolute idea alone is being, imperishable life, self-knowing truth, and is all truth. It is the sole subject matter and content of philosophy<sup>59</sup>.

<sup>56</sup> GW 12, p. 142; Engl. trans., p. 124.

<sup>57</sup> For instance, see McNulty's discussion of Hegel's discussion of the empirical concept of a horse in J. McNulty, *Hegel's Logic and Metaphysics*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2023, p. 226.

<sup>58</sup> The following is a truncated version of the same account in *Absolute Dialetheism*. See G. Moss, *Absolute Dialetheism. Hegel, Schelling, and the End of Alterity*, Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press, 2026, pp. 58-97. For more details, see pp. 166-122.

<sup>59</sup> GW 12, p. 236; Engl. trans., p. 735.

Since empirical forms exist, they cannot exist as *other to the Absolute*. If they were other to the Absolute, then the Absolute would be relative to empirical existence, and the Absolute would not be the *sole* truth. Thus, the Absolute must be realized in each empirical form. But since the empirical form lacks the self-referential structure of the Absolute, the Absolute is not true to itself in the empirical, so the empirical is the Absolute that is untrue to itself – it is *the alienated absolute*. So far, we are still thinking with *Hegel's Foundation Free Metaphysics*.

And yet – we can only discover the Absolute within the empirical if we begin from *the fact of empirical existence* – we cannot discover the empirical in the Absolute by beginning with the Absolute alone. This just means that the empirical is *contingent* – it could just as well not have existed – but the fact that it exists means that it cannot be other to the Absolute – the Absolute (and the necessity of the dialectical process that constitutes it) expresses itself in the empirical as its self-alienated form. No one can say – neither Hegel nor anyone else – why this particular empirical order exists and not some other – but the fact that it exists means that the Absolute expresses itself in this very contingent way.

The inability to 'deduce' empirical form out of the Absolute itself is *necessary* to preserve the contingency of empirical existence. But this implies that there is no conceptual explanation for *how* the concept particularizes itself as this empirical form. But *the how* – that very process of self-particularization – constitutes the Absolute as such. Thus, it appears that empirical conceptuality is born from a *trans-conceptual absoluteness*. One might argue that Hegelian thinking cannot tolerate this, since «the concept is all». However, Hegel himself declares that the «realization of the concept is the loss of the concept»<sup>60</sup>. Fascinatingly, it is not the empirical that threatens the absoluteness of the concept, but the concept itself.

Because the concept of the Absolute is not relative, it cannot exist as relative to relative existence. Therefore, the concept of the Absolute must exist in a relative way. Given that the absolute concept is relative, and what is relative is not Absolute, *the absolute concept is not Absolute*. Since the absolute concept is relative, it is no

<sup>60</sup> Ivi, p. 51; Engl. trans., p. 548.

longer an absolute concept – since what is relative relies upon a principle of existence that exists beyond it, the concept of the Absolute depends upon a principle of existence that transcends it too.

Although the absolute concept is its own principle of existence, by determining itself to exist in a *relative* way, it negates itself as that which is its own principle of existence. Thus, the concept of the Absolute, *qua* relative, depends upon a *non-conceptual* principle of existence. Since every absolute concept determines itself not to be absolute, and the Absolute is not relative, the Absolute transcends not only every relative, but also every absolute concept. Thus, *the Absolute transcends all concepts*: the Absolute is the *trans-conceptual principle of existence* in virtue of which any concept exists. Such concepts exist *without why*, and are thereby contingent, for since each is grounded in the trans-conceptual Absolute, there is no conceptual necessity that motivates their specific being – each is as conceptually ungrounded as the other.

Since the Absolute is totally trans-conceptual, and the absolute concept is relativized as that which exists in virtue of the trans-conceptual Absolute, there should be no surprise that there are relative concepts that cannot be ‘deduced’ from the Absolute, for one cannot deduce the conceptual out of the trans-conceptual. Thus, such contingent forms of existence are in fact necessary: empirical concepts exist as the Absolute that has relativized itself in the form of those *relative concepts* whose origins cannot be deduced, for they have their origin in a trans-conceptual Absolute that precludes such a deduction. No complete system can dialectically ‘deduce everything’. In fact, a system can only be complete insofar as it demonstrates why there must be ‘non-deducible’ factors – contingent existences whose contingency is engendered by the self-relativizing and self-particularizing power of the absolute concept.

To summarize: the fact that there is an (inevitable) opposition between the empirical and absolute conceptuality in Hegel’s philosophy does not imply a problematic form of dualism. To the contrary, the Absolute determines itself to be trans-conceptual, thereby relativizing all concepts – rendering their origin inscrutable and contingent, for each is *without why*. The absolute concept expresses itself in the form of its negation as the empirical – as that whose origin cannot be explicated and remains without explication.

The Absolute determines itself to exist as that which contains concepts that are without why. Without the contingent, the Absolute would not be true to itself.

Naturally, when we think with the complete system in mind, the self-relativization of the absolute concept is not the whole story. The Absolute must also *universalize itself*. The Absolute inevitably recovers its conceptuality, for having de-conceptualized itself, and determined itself to be trans-conceptual, there is no longer any conceptual difference between the conceptual and the trans-conceptual. For this reason, in virtue of its trans-conceptuality, the Absolute can recover its universality, and determine itself to be absolutely conceptual.

#### 4. *Responding to Tripaldi: Towards a Speculative Mysticism*

Absolute Dialetheism is the view that the Absolute exists as a *true contradiction*. In *Hegel's Foundation Free Metaphysics*, I explore Hegel's *Rational Dialetheism* according to which the Absolute can be successfully known by means of concepts. Insightfully, Tripaldi recognizes a one-sidedness in Rational Dialetheism:

As a practice of rational mediation of everything into a unitary principle, philosophy could at best be seen as embodying one side of the movement by which the Absolute exists, to which another movement, of self-repelling and resistance to mediation, should correspond<sup>61</sup>.

Tripaldi is on point: if the Absolute really is a true contradiction, and Rational Dialetheism advances a conceptual view of the Absolute, but denies the truth of its negation – Mystical Dialetheism – then the Absolute would not be contradictory, but would be consistent. By affirming the conceptual side alone, the Absolute would be *one-sided*, for every consistent claim only affirms *one side* of an opposition.

<sup>61</sup> E. Tripaldi, *Total Realism with Mystical Modesty: A Comment on Gregory Moss' 'Hegel Foundations Free Metaphysics. The Logic of Singularity'*, *infra*, p. 332.

Tripaldi's critique is motivated by a claim in the Introduction to *Hegel's Foundation Free Metaphysics*. There I argue that «each species of Absolute Dialetheism must integrate its negation»<sup>62</sup>. However, the book itself does not explore this implication to its final consequences. The modest aim of *Hegel's Foundation Free Metaphysics* is to show that the contradiction endemic to the Absolute cannot be evaded, and to motivate Hegel's Rational Dialetheism as a solution to perennial *aporias* in the history of Western philosophy. In *Absolute Dialetheism: Hegel, Schelling, and the End of Alterity*, I take up Tripaldi's demand to think through Absolute Dialetheism to its final conclusions.

If the Absolute is a true contradiction, and the Absolute is conceptual, then the conceptual structure of the Absolute ought to contradict itself. Since the Absolute is in contradiction with itself, the Absolute cannot remain purely conceptual and be true to itself. As we noted in our reply to Bonutto, exactly because the absolute concept must relativize itself, the absolute de-conceptualizes itself. As a result, Tripaldi is exactly right that there is «an Absolute which immediately escapes out of its own understanding»<sup>63</sup>. The Absolute cannot remain within the concept alone: the Absolute ought to be both *conceptual and trans-conceptual*. Without affirming the truth of Mystical Dialetheism, the view according to which the Absolute transcends the concept, the conceptual thinking of the Absolute remains one-sided and thereby untrue to itself. Accordingly, in *Absolute Dialetheism* I advocate for *Philosophical Religion*, according to which the conceiving of the Absolute is no longer divorced from the immediate intuition of the Absolute in religious experience. Absolute Dialetheism is only true to itself in *Philosophical Religion*<sup>64</sup>.

However, with this advance to *Philosophical Religion*, we may be developing a position with which Hegel would be uncomfortable. As we indicated in our response to Bonutto, Hegel's philosophy integrates the non-conceptual into the concept itself. However, in the final synthesis religion is negated and preserved in philosophy as

<sup>62</sup> Moss, *Hegel's Foundation Free Metaphysics*, p. 8.

<sup>63</sup> Tripaldi, *Total Realism with Mystical Modesty*, p. 330.

<sup>64</sup> See Moss, *Absolute Dialetheism*, Ch. 5.

the absolute form of Absolute Spirit. However, Philosophical Religion appears to call for the negating and preserving of religion within philosophy, as well as the negation and preservation of *philosophy within religion*. If the Absolute really is a true contradiction, we ought to earnestly interrogate the Hegelian position that philosophy ultimately transcends religion.

Tripaldi raises further worries about the relationship between the Absolute and our knowing of the Absolute. She asks:

What if we could fully rationally know the totality of the structure of the Absolute as self-differing, self-othering, and necessarily existing, without this having to mean that we know *all* of the Absolute, in all the ways in which it can (ever) manifest?<sup>65</sup>

Her question gives us an opportunity to clarify the nature of absolute knowledge. As Aristotle taught us, no one can know everything qua particular (one cannot know what Julius Caesar had for breakfast every morning), but we can know everything *universally*: whatever exists *realizes the universality* of self-differentiation, but that does not mean that we can enumerate every particular that has ever had (or will ever have) this self-differentiating structure or is the creative product thereof.

Tripaldi also worries that if the Absolute is only true to itself in our knowing of the Absolute, then this might severely undermine its absoluteness:

This seems to me as a limitation of the power of existential implication with which the Absolute should be endowed. We can grant that the Absolute exists also in thought, but we must admit that, if the Absolute must exist, it should be capable of existing in infinite many other ways – independently of the existence of anything, philosophers included<sup>66</sup>.

Indeed, she is on point: we would do well to remember that although the Absolute cannot be absolute if it is not realized in human knowing, this does *not* preclude its realization elsewhere. The Absolute can only be true to itself if it is *omnipresent*. For this reason, we

<sup>65</sup> Tripaldi, *Total Realism with Mystical Modesty*, pp. 332-333.

<sup>66</sup> Ivi, p. 332.

do not claim that the Absolute is *only* realized in the cognitive operations of rational animals. While the Absolute is omnipresent, it is not omnipresent everywhere *in the same way*. For instance, although water is an empirical expression of the Absolute, it lacks the *self-relation* endemic to the Absolute. It is for this reason that water is an alienated self-expression of the Absolute. In contrast, in the human knowing of the Absolute, that self-relation is *recovered*. Since the knowing of the Absolute cannot be other to the Absolute without relativizing the Absolute, the knowing of the Absolute is *the Absolute's knowledge of itself*. In Hegel's philosophical knowing of *The Science of Logic*, the Absolute *recovers its self-relation*.

Naturally, we do not mean to deny the finitude of the human being. To the contrary, Absolute Dialetheism affirms the contradiction affecting absolute knowledge: absolute knowledge is contradictory exactly because of our finitude. The finite and relative human being is *not* the Absolute, but insofar as they know the absolute, they are infinite and absolute. Thus, absolute knowing is constituted by the contradictory unity of finitude and infinite, as *true infinity* demands. Of course, the recovery of the self-relationality of the Absolute is not immediate, for it is a *mediated* process that traverses many forms, from life and desire to relative and absolute conceptual self-consciousness. The correlation of humanity with the Absolute is a process of recovery from *initial conditions* that do not involve finite, human subjects and therefore do not originally imply any correlation. For this I do not think the problem of ancestrality arises here, for there is in fact no «immediate identification of absolute existence with absolute knowledge»<sup>67</sup>. With the ultimate triumph of the correlation of being and thought, however, Being appears to be inexorably linked to rational animality. Tripaldi asks a good question: «is the appearance of humans on earth also a necessity entailed in the Absolute's existential implication?»<sup>68</sup>. If Hegel's method is not contingently developing from one category to another, but *Aufhebung* develops with necessity from *presuppositionless* Being to Absolute Spirit in art, religion, and philosophy, then Hegel appears to

<sup>67</sup> Ivi, p. 331.

<sup>68</sup> Ivi, p. 332.

think that Being necessarily implies the existence of some form of rational animality. Naturally, this may not be a human being, for there may be forms of rational, extra-terrestrial life that are not specifically human. So, while human life would not be a necessity, one can make a good case that for Hegel some form of rational life would be a necessary realization of the Absolute's self-development.

One might raise an objection: if evolution is true, and this implies that human life is a *contingent* development, then Hegel's philosophy is not true to our best biology. Even if it is an external concern, one ought to take it seriously, nonetheless<sup>69</sup>. One might reply by arguing that Hegel aims to give the validation of necessity to the content of the empirical sciences, such that Hegel would be rendering the contingent development of human beings into a necessary truth<sup>70</sup>. However, even if we are deeply sceptical of this claim (as we ought to be), and accept that human life does exist contingently, we can still adopt a *Hegelian* position on this matter without denying the centrality of such contingency.

Because the absolute concept relativizes itself, it renders itself contingent in the sense that the concept is now grounded in a trans-conceptual origin for which no conceptual ground can be given. We can think of the human being as a being that exists in this form – as a contingent expression of the Absolute in its self-alienation. But given that we do exist, and we are capable of Absolute knowledge, if the Absolute does not exist in the form of human thought, then it would remain untrue to itself. To be true to itself in its contingent form, the Absolute ought to be realised in the form of human knowing. Whether it comes to exist in the form of human knowing would depend on the *freedom* of the human being – whether we choose to preserve consciousness of the absolute in our individual lives and institutions, e.g. churches and universities. Whether the existence of rational animals is contingent or necessary, absolute knowing can

<sup>69</sup> See footnote 4 of Chapter 15 'The Singular Absolute' in Moss *Hegel's Foundations Free Metaphysics*, where I discuss correlationism as a result of a non-correlationist beginning, and the modal problems that this raises.

<sup>70</sup> See *ivi*, p. 491, footnote 4, where I discuss a possible textual basis for this idea in Hegel's *Encyclopedia*.

never be realized by those rational animals if their thinking of the Absolute remains divorced from the Absolute itself.

Finally, Tripaldi raises a more serious objection that the self-referential and self-predicative power of the concept (on my interpretation) «can only account for the existence [...] of the Concept as concept, [...] not [the] manifold finite beings [...] laying ‘beyond’ them»<sup>71</sup>. The objection depends on the premise that the instantiation of the concept precludes difference: «instantiation entails a relation of identity, rather than difference, between instantiation and what is being instantiated»<sup>72</sup>. As a result, «the Absolute, or the Concept, could only exist as identical to themselves, and cannot exist as what is other than themselves»<sup>73</sup>. Because we are too focused on identity, she worries that we read Hegel’s dictum that «Each element of the whole is the whole» to simply mean that they are equivalent<sup>74</sup>. Before addressing this critique head on, we should first clarify some interpretative misunderstandings concerning the relationship between the logic and essence and the concept that underly the objection.

Tripaldi writes that:

The understanding of the implication of existence in terms of instantiation is supported by the reading of difference as self-mediation and positing which drives Moss’ reading of the Doctrine of Essence as providing the blueprint for the structure of the Concept<sup>75</sup>.

Tripaldi uses the language of the «blueprint» again when she writes about the Doctrine of Essence: «This movement provides the blueprint for the becoming-concept»<sup>76</sup>. As a point of clarity, in *Hegel’s Foundation Free Metaphysics* I do not claim that the Doctrine of Essence is the «blueprint for the structure of the Concept». Rather, I introduce the logical developments from Identity to

<sup>71</sup> Tripaldi, *Total Realism with Mystical Modesty*, p. 318.

<sup>72</sup> Ivi, p. 319.

<sup>73</sup> Ivi, pp. 318-319.

<sup>74</sup> Ivi, p. 320.

<sup>75</sup> Ivi, p. 319.

<sup>76</sup> Ivi, p. 327.

Contradiction in order to «motivate Hegel's dialetheism» and to «illustrate the identity of synthesis and analysis»<sup>77</sup>. In the chapter on *Forms of Ideality in Hegel's Logic* I argue that the logic of Being, Essence, and the Concept all have their own distinctive ways of overcoming otherness or achieving what Hegel calls *Ideality*. While the logic of essence is characterized by the persistent opposition of determiner and determined, e.g. ground and grounded, cause and effect, etc. the logic of the concept arises in virtue of the immanent *self-negation of the logic of essence*:

The subjective logic is the logic of the concept – of essence which has sublated its reference to a being or to its reflective shine, and in its determination is no longer external but something subjective, freely self-subsisting, self-determining, or rather the subject itself<sup>78</sup>.

Far from modelling the concept on the logic of essence, universality as such arises within logic only with the *self-overcoming* of the Doctrine of Essence. As a result, the logic of the concept is a *new synthesis*: it is «the mutual penetration of Being and Essence»<sup>79</sup>.

The confusion around this issue might stem from the fact that:

The concept is the process of conceptual development that has always been at work in the Logic, both in the logic of Being as transition and the logic of Essence as positing, yet never as itself, as self-differentiating development. For this reason, the Doctrine of the Concept is a 'turning back into itself' or a 'return into itself'<sup>80</sup>.

The relationship between the Doctrine of the Concept and the Doctrine of Essence is nuanced: while *the concept is all*, each division

<sup>77</sup> Moss, *Hegel's Foundation Free Metaphysics*, p. 255.

<sup>78</sup> GW 21, p. 49; Engl. trans., p. 42.

<sup>79</sup> Moss, *Hegel's Foundation Free Metaphysics*, p. 370. See GW 12, p. 33; Engl. trans., p. 530. Although positing is negated and preserved in the logic of the concept, I do not mean to be «accounting for» the concept «in terms of positing». See Tripaldi, *Total Realism with Mystical Modesty*, p. 323.

<sup>80</sup> Moss, *Hegel's Foundation Free Metaphysics*, p. 371.

of the concept is a self-differentiation of absolute conceptuality. In Being and Essence the concept is operative but is *not explicitly thematized* – in those divisions the concept does not yet appear *as the self-particularizing concept*. It is for this reason that we can discover the operations of self-particularization in the logic of objectivity. But this does not mean that we have modelled the logic of the concept on the logic of essence. Or as Bordignon puts it:

These logical dynamics are involved in the development of the whole *Science of Logic*, but they are transparently unfolded in the third part of Hegel's logical system, which is the logic of the concept<sup>81</sup>.

In the Doctrine of the Concept the concept is *true to itself as conceptual*. I worry that because Tripaldi appears to hold that the Doctrine of Essence is the blueprint for the concept, she appears to absolutize the Doctrine of Essence. As a result, the division between determiner and determined remains intact:

This image of the Absolute as never-ending self-repelling entails the idea of an Absolute that is always in the making, and always in the process of splitting and tearing itself apart in a variety of new, contingent happenings, *ad infinitum*<sup>82</sup>.

By this view, it seems that there is never a final synthesis nor an authentic transition to the logic of the concept, but every division of determiner and determined undermines itself only to re-instate that division again *ad infinitum*. Because the Absolute is conceived in terms of Essence, Tripaldi argues that

Hegel's Absolute is such because it has the capacity to produce true others than itself, as themselves 'absolute' in the sense of resisting reduction and mediation to a higher unity<sup>83</sup>.

<sup>81</sup> Bordignon, *A Dialectic Reading of Hegel's Dialectic*, p. 302.

<sup>82</sup> Tripaldi, *Total Realism with Mystical Modesty*, p. 330.

<sup>83</sup> Ivi, pp. 320-321.

These others are «self-sufficient, independent, or immediate»<sup>84</sup>. While the Doctrine of Essence contains the category of contingency, *Aufhebung* does not proceed contingently – each category is necessitated by the other. The Doctrine of Essence is not the last word: it is cancelled and preserved in the Doctrine of the Concept.

Regarding Tripaldi's reconstruction of the Doctrine of Essence, I follow her lead. I do not object to the order of categories as she articulates it – Essence begins with Positing, as she indicates<sup>85</sup>. What is of paramount importance for my work is the way that Essence overcomes alterity by preserving it. By presupposing, Essence presupposes a given – but the very act of presupposing transforms the given into a result. Now mediated by the act of presupposing, the given is no longer given, but mediated by the activity, and exists *as the presupposed* – a determination the given has only in virtue of the activity of essence. Likewise, the act of presupposing transforms the essence into that which presupposes, thereby transforming itself. The source can only be the source *if there is something of which it is the source* – until the result is established, the source cannot be truly described with the predicate 'source'. Essence cancels and preserves the otherness within itself *as other*. As Tripaldi notes:

Insofar as it is its realization, and not a qualitative other grounded in a different principle, the presupposition can be also seen as essence's posit – but only if by this it is understood that the fact that essence's *Dasein* is essence's realization, or its posit, precisely in its being truly other to it, or in its being its presupposition<sup>86</sup>.

But why is the Doctrine of Essence not the final word, and why is it the case that the self-referential and existentially implicative concept is not structure by identity alone? The Doctrine of the Concept arises insofar as the distinction between the determiner and the determined collapses. The cause is the cause of the effect, but without the effect the cause could not be a cause. Thus, the cause is *the effect of the effect*, which renders *the effect the cause*. As a result, the

<sup>84</sup> Ivi, p. 320.

<sup>85</sup> Ivi, p. 324.

<sup>86</sup> Ivi, p. 328.

determiner is determined, and the determined is the determiner. The result is exactly as Tripaldi envisions: there are many *self-sufficient* and *independent* beings, each of which is the self-determining totality. But note that this result ushers in *the concept*, and more specifically: the universal. What is the universal? The universal is that *common* form that *many particulars* have in common. With the transition to the Doctrine of the Concept, there are *many particulars that share self-determination is common*. It is for this reason that we cannot say that the many particulars are only «immediate» as Tripaldi describes. Insofar as each has the same structure of self-sufficiency, each is an instance of one and the same universal: each is *mediated by universality as such*. Each particular is *one in number*, and as such it excludes the others. But each has the same universal content. There are many universals, each instantiating universality.

Having shown that the Doctrine of Essence cannot be the blueprint for existential implication, why are particulars *existentially implied* by universality? With the transformation of Essence into Concept, the universality of self-determination is absolute. Since universality applies to everything, everything is a universal. If everything is a universal, universality itself must be *a universal*. Thus, universality is a *particular* instance of the concept of universality. Universality is itself one in number: it is counted alongside its particulars. Universality has its *own distinct and differentiated being* by which it is differentiated from that which instantiates the universal. If a concept is absolute, it must *apply to itself* – it must exhibit self-referential predication. And self-referential predication entails existential implication: the universal is a particular instance of itself.

As Tripaldi notes, it is true that each particular is indistinguishable from every other particular insofar as they all instantiate *one and the same universal*. Nevertheless, there is a difference that must be at play in order for this to be true: the difference between the universal and the particular<sup>87</sup>. The universal is what every particular has

<sup>87</sup> In footnote 28 Tripaldi notes my use of the term «illusion» in discussing particularity. My use of the term follows the Miller translation of «*Schein*». By no means should these terms imply that there is no difference. In each case there is a one-sidedness: either the particularity of the particular or the universality of the particular goes missing.

in common, while the particular is that which instantiates or realizes the universal. Unlike the universal, the particular is *this* – it is not shared in common. By particularizing itself, the universal determines itself not to be universal: universality negates itself as universal and determines itself to be particular. Because the universal particularizes itself by negating itself, the self-reference has the form of negativity. Exactly because the universal is a «creative power as self-referring absolute negativity»<sup>88</sup> Hegel infers that «the universal determines itself, and so is itself the particular»<sup>89</sup>. Indeed, Hegel claims that *the difference between universality and particularity exhausts all the species of particularity*:

With respect to completeness, we have just seen that the determinate moment of particularity is complete in the difference of the universal and the particular, and that only these two make up the particular species<sup>90</sup>.

Thus, instantiation, and more specifically, *self-instantiation*, does not reduce difference to identity: the universal differentiates itself into *the difference between universal and particular*. As a result, the universal exists in contradiction with itself: it is particular insofar as it is universal, a *contradictory* unity of universality and particularity that is ultimately nothing other than what Hegel calls *singularity*<sup>91</sup>.

Of course, any reconstruction of any categorial development in Hegel's logic will have a formal character. By explicating the form of the concept, we neglect that which differentiates each concept from the other. But that is the case for any reconstruction of any category and its development. For instance, by reconstructing what it is to be,

<sup>88</sup> GW 12, p. 36; Engl. trans., p. 533.

<sup>89</sup> Ivi, p. 38; Engl. trans., p. 535.

<sup>90</sup> Ivi, p. 39; Engl. trans., p. 536.

<sup>91</sup> What Tripaldi calls *double negation* (*infra*, p. 320) is central for the development of singularity. Universality negates itself as particular, but particularity must negate itself to be universal. This double negation engenders the singularity that is constituted by the return of universality to itself. The universal is true to itself when it exists as singularity – as the unity of universality and particularity, or the particularity that is true to itself as universal.

we abstract from the differences between beings. On the one hand, every conceptualization has a formal aspect, for it must abstract from certain differences. On the other hand, no conceptualization is merely formal, for it must conceive a particular content: in this case, it is the concept of the concept. I have given special focus to the concept, because «truth has only the concept as the element of its existence»<sup>92</sup>, for the «concept is all». By explicating the self-particularizing form of the concept we gain a glimpse into the whole structure of Hegel's system. *Hegel's Foundation Free Metaphysics* only means to think the universal self-particularizing structure of the whole process. Of course, to fully lay bare each logical difference, one must complete the system: from Being to Absolute Idea. And to systematically determine each absolute concept, one must think from Being to Absolute Spirit. When substance becomes subject, we are one voice with Tripaldi:

The Absolute needs to be understood as 'absolute negativity', or 'absolute difference', which means that it needs to be seen as always self-othering, or self-differing. Being 'absolute difference', the Absolute can only be realized in its continuous splitting into itself and its other<sup>93</sup>.

<sup>92</sup> GW 7, p. 10; Engl. trans., p. 4.

<sup>93</sup> Tripaldi, *Total Realism with Mystical Modesty*, p. 329.