

The Logic of the Critical Process

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Hegel said that his *Philosophy of Right* "is to be nothing other than the endeavour to apprehend and portray the state as something inherently rational. . . . The instruction which it may contain cannot consist in teaching the state what it ought to be; it can only show how the state, the ethical universe, is to be understood. . . . Philosophy always comes on the scene too late to [give instruction as to what the world ought to be]." (PR Preface)¹

On the other hand, from his early discussions of his home city's government, and throughout his career, to his late essay on the English reform bill, Hegel makes normative statements and critical judgments about current events and political structures.² His lectures on aesthetics contain critical remarks about contemporary literature and art, about bourgeois education, and so on. Is he ignoring his own advice about philosophy's role?

And how could Hegel ever develop critical principles, since he famously says, in effect, that whatever is, is right? He says in the that philosophy should "reconcile us to the actual" (PR Preface) since "what is rational is actual and what is actual is rational."³

Of course, the claim that whatever is *wirklich* is *vernünftig* depends on what you mean by 'is.' To borrow from Plato, whatever is really real, truly actualized or acting, is rational. But also, what is rational is actual and actualizing. Hegel wants criticism without utopianism. He criticizes as he describes what is already actualizing itself. In his descriptions of the legislature, the king, etc., he describes the rational form that can be seen at work in the still imperfect daily reality. In the *Philosophy of Right* he makes it sound as if the rational form were largely complete, but any contemporary reader would have been able to see the distance.⁴

The most obvious normative relations in Hegel's accounts emerge from the relation of civil society and state, since this relation provides critical principles that limit both sides. True political community is more than a cash or contractual nexus, but on the other hand the economy and contract put brakes on any ideal of an overly "organic" community. Hegel applies this in criticisms of concrete institutions, but also of theories, such as Rousseau's or von Haller's.

Our usual image of the critic is of someone who speaks from an established critical position outside of the item being criticized. The literary critic knows what literature should be, and explains why the poem does or does not measure up. The political critic knows how society should work, the economic critic has a model for the economy. These ideas and models are constructed or derived separately, whether empirically or a priori, then applied to the object or institution being criticized. The critic has a privileged perspective from the heights of an established critical watchtower.

When Hegel talks about contemporary events or institutions, it appears that he is making the same maneuver. However, given his remarks about philosophy's role it is not so clear where he would base his watchtower. How can Hegel develop his normative judgments on concrete social determinations and

structures? How can he know what "is"?

A superficial misconception about Hegel's procedure is that he consults the career of some overwhelming big entity or process of history that overrides individual choices. Here is a typical example, from a writer on urban planning.

Urbanists, economists, and historians divide, very roughly, into two main groups. There are, first, the chroniclers of the vast movements of history, which those who work in Hegel's wake--from Karl Marx to Joseph Alois Schumpeter, and right down to Francis Fukuyama and Jean Baudrillard--have seen as shaping our fate, and which we need to scry if we are to act in harmony with their dynamic, since any attempt to change and reform them may act against history. . . . preaching a form of impotence. . . . I propose to suggest, on the contrary, that these vast and seemingly impersonal historical and/or economic 'forces' have always been the aggregate products of the choices that were made by individuals. (Joseph Rykwert, *The Seduction of Place* (New York: Pantheon, 2000), 8-9)

If this is wrong about Hegel, as it is, and if the invocation of individual choice begs the important questions, which it does, then we can ask whether there is a way to develop a critical perspective that relies on neither Big Forces nor Individual Choice.⁵

A deeper misconception arises because Hegel's procedure looks like a version of Platonic essentialism. For instance: in commenting on Plato Hegel does say that there is a true form for a political constitution, and that it *will* be realized.

Deswegen ist es wesentlich, zu wissen, was die wahre Konstitution ist; denn was ihr widerstreitet, hat keinen Bestand, keine Wahrheit, es hebt sich auf. Es hat ein zeitliches Dasein und kann sich nicht erhalten: es hat gegolten, aber kann nicht fortwährend gelten; daß es abgeschafft werden muss, liegt in der Idee der Konstitution. Diese Einsicht kann allein durch die Philosophie erreicht werden. (GP 113)

This "essentialism" includes a claim that the inevitable essence is accompanied by a level of superficial detail that need not be rationally necessary but may be judged in connection with the rational norms.⁶

How is the list of norms and essences developed? Hegel says that we must derive "each particular concept from the self-originating and self-actualizing universal concept, or the logical idea." (E 379z) In his history of philosophy lectures Hegel praises Plato for his ideas on an internally articulated social whole, and for emphasizing the importance of the social universal. But then he goes on to say:

Dies ist im allgemeinen ganz richtig, doch erscheint es mehr als äußere Notwendigkeit, weil sich solche Bedürfnisse vorfinden; es ist nicht aus der Idee des Geistes selbst entwickelt. (GP 116)

Plato's dialectic is not pure enough; it is too often tied up with sensible images and representations. (GP 62)

Diese hat Platon nicht geleistet: diese abstrakten Gedanken [Sein, Nichtsein, Einheit,

Vielheit] fortzuführen zur Schönheit, Wahrheit, Sittlichkeit; diese Entwicklung, Verpilzung fehlt. (GP 85)

So it appears as if Hegel is basing his own criticism on an essentialism even stronger than Plato's, derived from some a priori deduction or intuition. If this too is wrong about Hegel, as it more or less is, then we must ask just how he does derive, if that is the right word, his concrete guidelines for criticism. Where does criticism stand, if it comes neither, as in the superficial misconception, by some big divine entity's career, nor by an aggregate of individual choices, nor, as in the deeper misconception, by a Platonic essentialism or rationalism based on acquaintance with given necessary essences?

I want to argue that for Hegel there is no separate critical watchtower. The development of a set of norms, as well as their application, occurs in one process which is not separate from the concepts of the items being criticized. Hegel wants no "critical perspective."

Roughly speaking, what Hegel does in criticizing an opinion or a political institution is take its apparently basic categories and revise them. Hegel's more topical writings on politics and society and culture rely on his more systematic treatments. Those treatments themselves do not follow the Platonic arc of an ascent to the universal and a descent back to the particular. They have a different pattern, one that looks more like a narrative.

Sometimes we are given what looks at first glance like a historical story. However, I think it is wrong to see Hegel as creating a narrative justification; some works, such as the logic and the philosophy of right, do not have any temporal narrative, while in others the temporality may be curiously distorted or redoubled, as in the *Phenomenology* and the *Lectures on Aesthetics*. When there is narrative, as in the philosophy of history, it depends on something else, a logical progression of categories, which may look like a narrative but is not.

Hegel's writings trace progressions that run from simple beginnings (for example, symbolic art, the notion of being, early religion, sense certainty, abstract right) to complex final categories. In dealing with concrete issues, overall, Hegel will *reculer pour mieux sauter*. It is a process of retreat and advance: a retreat to simpler categories then an advance to more complex ones. Hegel's progressions start "before" ordinary categories, claiming necessity from an inevitable beginning, and once the progression generates conceptual momentum it criticizes ordinary categories by passing beyond them to more complexly mediated categories for politics and society and culture.

For Hegel the usual categories used to think about citizens and law and rights (such as the individual versus the state), or about art and artists and nature (such as imitation or romantic expressionism), or about being and reality (such as appearance and reality, cause and effect), mix images and overly fixed categories taken from different spheres of logic. Some involve polar dualities, some involve supposed independent units, mixed with invocations of forces, essences, and other relations. To criticize them Hegel will retreat to simpler, more immediate notions (will, abstract right, symbolic art, being -- and there are similar 'retreats' in dealing with particular arts or spheres of right). He goes back to categories that lack polarities, but which soon show themselves to be unstable, in their transformations developing new relations and developing a momentum that will carry the progression up to revised versions of the usual

categories, and beyond them to truly adequate categories.

There is nothing, whether in actuality or in thought, that is as simple and as abstract as is commonly imagined. A simple thing of this kind is a mere presumption that has its ground solely in the unconsciousness of what is actually present. (WL 239/829)

We arrive, in the aesthetics, at romantic art as a communal embodiment of inner and outer that goes beyond classical balance, but loses its former cultic role. We arrive, among logical categories, at the absolute idea that presents its own mediated emergence. In social philosophy, we arrive at notions of right and government as triple mediations of universal, particular, and individual. Governments and institutions can be criticized for not embodying these mediations properly.

In these progressions, exclusive polarities break down and mediating third terms are introduced. What appear as immediate, given, definite identities for individuals or institutions become mediated results. What are taken for simple or immediate categories or items (individual selves, individual property, isolated art works and styles, concepts of quality or quantity, and so on) turn out to be abstract or isolated aspects of more complexly mediated unities. Their immediacy and isolation turns out not to be their primal state but rather the result of an operation within the larger unity.

Consider a concrete example from Hegel's aesthetics. Form and content, inner and outer, are harmoniously balanced in classical art, which Hegel says is the most beautiful art. But Hegel also says that the resolved dualities of classical art could not be the first form of art. First there had to be posited abstract or isolated versions of those moments that will be united in classical art. The classical must be preceded by the imbalances of symbolic art, which asserts the independence of form and content from one another. These moments must be posited in their separation and their abstractness so that they can be picked up into the motion of the spiritual totality. Classical art unites them in a more concrete mediation.

[Classical art's] appropriate content is the spiritual individuality which, by being the content and form of what is absolutely true, can appear in consciousness only after complex mediations and transitions. The beginning is, as a beginning, always abstract and indeterminate. But spiritual individuality must be concrete in and for itself. It is the adequate actualization of the Concept that determines itself out of itself, which can be grasped only after it has sent ahead [presupposed, vorausgeschickt], into their one-sided development the abstract aspects whose mediation it is. Once this happens, the Concept makes an end of these abstractions together by its own appearance as a totality. (A 317)

In Hegel's progressions, the independent and immediate unities have to be there so that they can be mediated into the whole.⁷ The partial, independent, one-sided, immediate have to be asserted in their (seeming) independence and immediacy, so that they can be mediated into a whole that is concrete just because it contains these distinctions and interacting moments as posited rather than as absorbed. But we are also told, which is my second point, that the independence and immediacy of the moments are not absolute. They are posited as immediate and independent. That's the twist: immediacy and independence are results, not beginnings.⁸

In the logic Hegel is dealing with the preconditions for determinate thought and meaning. He is trying --

among other things -- to refute the claim that thought begins with given atoms of sense that get related into larger wholes. But he is not replacing this view with the idea that there is some big molecule of sense that is a huge coherence structure of relations among atoms, or even of items that get their meaning only from their coherence in the whole. He is not arguing for some direct absorption of immediate independent units into a relational whole, though this is how some English Hegelians and some critics of Hegel read him. Such a coherent whole would still be a given immediate item. Rather he is arguing that sense and meaning (and so the principles we might invoke in criticizing social institutions or culture) are generated in a complex progression and motion that is not any kind of static structure, though it does have a pattern or method of its own.

We can understand this better this by returning to the essentialism question. Doesn't it still seem that Hegel is consulting a kind of Platonic essentialism? Even if they are in a progression, aren't the categories still a set of given abstract objects?

The categories are not given as a set of items linked (or constituted) by internal relations. Rather they arise from one another in a progression that uses their inner instabilities and connections. We cannot express this emergence in straightforward judgments about combination or relation. Speaking about the final stage of the logic, Hegel says that

Es ist ebensosehr Unmittelbarkeit als Vermittlung, - aber diese Formen des Urtheils; das Dritte ist Unmittelbarkeit und Vermittlung, oder es ist die Einheit derselben, sind nicht vermögend, es zu fassen, weil es nicht ein ruhendes Drittes, sondern eben als diese Einheit, die sich mit sich selbst vermittelnde Bewegung und Thätigkeit ist. (WL 248/837)

It is equally immediacy and mediation; but such forms of judgment as 'the third is immediacy and mediation,' or 'it is the unity of them,' are not capable of grasping it; for it not a quiescent third, but, precisely as this unity, is self-mediating movement and activity. (WL 248/837)

Die Logik stellt daher die Selbstbewegung der absoluten Idee nur als das ursprüngliche Wort dar, das eine Aeusserung ist, aber eine solche, die als Aeusseres unmittelbar wieder verschwunden ist, indem sie ist; die Idee ist also nur in dieser Selbstbestimmung, sich zu vernehmen, sie ist in dem reinen Gedanken, worin der Unterschied noch kein Andersseyn, sondern sich vollkommen durchsichtig ist und bleibt. (WL 237/825)

Hence Logic exhibits the self-movement of the Idea only as the original word, which is an outwardizing or utterance, but as an utterance that in being has immediately vanished again as something outer; the Idea is, therefore, only in this self-determination of apprehending itself; it is in pure thought, in which difference is not yet otherness, but is and remains perfectly transparent to itself. (WL 237/825)

But even granting this, we can still ask: even if the particular "essences" have a kind of logical "becoming" and "motion," and are not just "given" as static Platonic forms, isn't Hegel at least providing a static *second-level* "view" of an essence, the "form" of that *process* of derivation or emergence?⁹ Isn't Hegel's critical watchtower, his critical position, established by some meta-level investigation of the structures of the processes of thought, and so of being?¹⁰

We have arrived at the central issue: Hegel's critic has no separate perspective. His "pure thought" is not the contemplative eye of a Platonic observer. What is going on in Hegel's progressions is not the building of some separate critical "position" or "perspective." The items criticized are relocated within a process that also locates the critic herself.

The critic is not observing, in a separate process, the process of the production of the logical categories. The thinker does not stand on a secure watchtower viewing the progression of concepts. There is no metalevel observation or production, because there is no movement to a higher level. The thinker's own "position" is described within the progression. As its end the progression describes its own method, but that description of the method or pattern of the progression is itself a term in the progression. It is part of the sequence, not a view (from somewhere else) of the logical sequence.

Die Bestimmtheit der Idee und der ganze Verlauf dieser Bestimmtheit nun, hat den Gegenstand der logischen Wissenschaft ausgemacht, aus welchem Verlauf die absolute Idee selbst für sich hervorgegangen ist. (WL 237z/825)

The determinateness of the Idea and the entire course followed by the science of logic, from which course the absolute idea itself has come forth for itself. (WL 237z/825)

Nor is this final move something new; such internal division and self-positing is the "move" underlying the whole progression. We saw this pattern in the example from the aesthetics: what seems to be isolated and independent stands opposed to some unity that combines it into a concrete whole. The isolation and independence of symbolic art works -- and now of simpler logical categories -- (abstractions in Hegel's sense) are opposed to yet both made possible by and overreached by a richer mediated process. This pattern is found in the movement throughout the logical series, as more mediated and more universal process is conceptualized are developed, and the pattern is repeated with the whole sequence of categories over against its own unity in one mediated process, in the positing of its own "universal" method.

The manifestation of itself to itself is therefore itself the content of spirit and not, as it were, only a form externally added to the content; consequently spirit, by its manifestation, does not manifest a content different from its form, but manifests its form which expresses the entire content of spirit, namely, its self-manifestation. (E 383z)¹¹

However, the situation is not quite the same with the logical categories as with the separate and "independent" art forms or political institutions posited in "the real world."

What is crucial is that the movement in the progression to the logical Idea that is the progression taken as a unity is not a movement from one "thing" (the sequence as separate categories) to another (the sequence as a single unity). Likewise, the opposite movement from the Idea as the universal to the categories as determinate self-expressions is not a movement from one thing to another. In the Idea there is no otherness separating the progression from its self-conception. Neither side has primacy.

Die Entwicklung dieser Sphäre wird Rückgang in die erste, wie die der ersten ein Übergang in die zweite ist; nur durch diese gedoppelte Bewegung erhält der Unterschied

sein Recht, indem jedes der beiden Unterschiednen sich an ihm selbst beträchtet zur Totalität vollendet und darin sich zur Einheit mit dem andern betätigt. Nur das Sichaufheben der Einseitigkeit beider an ihnen selbst läßt die Einheit nicht einseitig werden. (E 241)

The development of this sphere becomes a return into the first, just as the development of the first is a passage into the second. It is only through this double movement that distinction gets its due, since each of the two that are distinct consummates itself, considered in itself, into the totality and works out its unity with the other. Only this self-sublating of the one-sidedness of both [sides] in themselves prevents the unity from becoming one sided. (E 241)

But we can ask once again: Even if we admit that the logical progression is not some static relational net, nor some big entity going through the changes in its career, and even if we see how there is no second level meta-position demanded or established, still, isn't that self-conception of the progression providing its own essentialism, namely the form or method of the progression? Hegel does, after all, talk about "form" in this connection:

Als Form bleibt hier der Idee nichts als die Methode dieses Inhalts, -- das bestimmte Wissen von der Währung ihrer Momente. (E 236)

All that remains here as form for the Idea is the method of this content -- the determinate knowing of the currency of its moments. (E 236)

To understand why there is no final essentialism here, we need to ask what it is that becomes *für sich* in the final self-coincidence of the logical process. Hegel's point is that there is no separate content, only the action of self-grasping: Thought thinking itself.

Ontologically speaking, being and thought exist through an inner negative relation, a self-distancing held in self-relation.

Der negativen Beziehung auf sich, der innerste Quell aller Thätigkeit, lebendiger und geistiger Selbstbewegung, die dialektische Seele, die alles Wahre an ihm selbst hat, durch die es allein Wahres ist (WL 246/835)¹²

It is the simple point of the negative relation to self, the innermost source of all activity, of all animate and spiritual self-movement, the dialectical soul that everything true possesses and through which alone it is true. (WL 246/835)

At the end of the logic that negative relation to self gets a negative relation to itself. It becomes for-itself. There is no separate entity or rule or essence being "grasped" in the final unity of the logic. What is grasped or self-presented or for-itself is, expressed propositionally, *that* the determinateness (*Bestimmtheit*) of the logical categories is a determining (*Bestimmung*), which is the action of self-presentation or becoming for-itself.

How does this work? The logical categories appear and disappear in the unity or motion of the logical Idea.

Das ursprüngliche Wort dar, das eine Aeusserung ist, aber eine solche, die als Aeusseres unmittelbar wieder verschwunden ist, indem sie ist; die Idee ist also nur in dieser Selbstbestimmung. (WL 237/825, quoted above)

The original word, which is an outwardizing or utterance, but as an utterance that in being has immediately vanished again as something outer; the Idea is, therefore, only in this self-determination. (WL 237/825, quoted above)

The logical categories exist only within the motion of separation and unity, not as settled items subject to some surveying vision or second motion. The motion of thought *is* the motion of self-presentation.

While thought thinking itself is thought thinking its own form or motion, that form is not opposed by a given passive content. It is the form of its own activity, made for-itself *in* and *as* the movement already happening which is producing the Idea. Insofar as form stands opposed to a content, that form is the action or movement of determining the series, aufgehoben into a unity. It's content is just its own movement and its stages taken as a totality.

Die absolute Idee selbst hat näher nur dieß zu ihrem Inhalt, daß die Formbestimmung ihre eigene vollendete Totalität, der reine Begriff, ist.

The absolute Idea has for its content only this, that the form determine-ing is its own fulfilled totality, the pure Concept. (WL 237/825)

Die Methode ist auf diese Weise nicht äußerliche Form, sondern die Seele und der Begriff des Inhalts, von welchem sie nur unterschieden ist, insofern die Momente des Begriffs auch an ihnen selbst in ihrer Bestimmtheit dazu kommen, als die Totalität des Begriffs zu erscheinen. Indem diese Bestimmtheit oder der Inhalt sich mit der Form zur Idee zurückführt, so stellt sich diese als systematische Totalität dar, welche nur Eine Idee ist, deren besondere Momente ebensowohl an sich dieselbe sind, als durch die Dialektik des Begriffs das einfache Fürsichsein der Idee hervorbringen. Die Wissenschaft schließt auf diese Weise damit, den Begriff ihrer selbst zu fassen, als der reinen Idee, für welche die Idee ist. (E 243)

In this way, the method is not an external form, but the soul and the Concept of the content. It is distinct from the content only inasmuch as the moments of the Concept, each in itself, in its determinacy, reach the point where they appear as the totality of the Concept. Since this determinacy, or the content, leads itself back, along with the form, to the Idea, the latter presents itself as a systematic totality, which is only One Idea. Its particular moments are in-themselves this same [Idea]; and equally, through the dialectic of the Concept, they produce the simple being-for-self of the Idea.--As a result the Science [of Logic] concludes by grasping the Concept of itself as the Concept of the pure Idea for which the Idea is. (E 243)

There is an opposition between the logical content as a progression of moments and the logical Idea as the form or method of that progression. But the unity of the Idea brings that opposition to be for itself in an overarching unity of self-distancing and retrieval.

Durch die aufgezeigte Bewegung hat der Gegenstand eine Bestimmtheit für sich selbst erhalten, die ein Inhalt ist, weil die in die Einfachheit zusammengegangene Negativität die aufgehobene Form ist, und als einfache Bestimmtheit, ihrer Entwicklung, zunächst ihrem

Gegensätze selbst gegen die Allgemeinheit, gegenübersteht. (WL 249/838)

Through the movement we have indicated, the object [of logic] has obtained for itself a determinateness that is a content, because the negativity that has gone together into simplicity is the sublated form, and as simple determinateness stands over against its development, and first of all over against its very opposition to universality. (WL 248/838-39)

Paraphrasing: the logical progression has become determinate for itself, can be grasped as having an overall shape, which is both its form and its content, because the opposition between universal unity and detailed evolution of categories stands over against the basic negativity that has as a result of the movement gone into itself as *aufgehoben* form of the movement.¹³ In this double overcoming of the distinction of form from content there is no distinction between an essence and an examining gaze. Hegel's critical perspective is an examination of the act of critical thinking itself.

Summary

Hegel's principles for critical thinking do not come from any given set of essences.¹⁴ They do not rest on a separate foundation or express a separate critical perspective.¹⁵

The process provides a set of critical tools, in the movement of the logical progression, whose momentum can catch up the categories of social institutions and definitions and drag them into more adequate versions of themselves. The doctrine of the syllogism provides useful tools for analyzing just how fully actualized this or that social institution really is, and making recommendations for judgment and change. So, the progression of categories develops guidelines for the criticism of concrete institutions.¹⁶

Hegel provides what have become standard tools for many critical theorists today: an articulation of what aspects and mediations are needed in a social whole, a process grasping itself and the structure of its movements, the idea that all moments have to be posited self-consciously, and the idea that we are in a process that cannot be adequately described in form/content terms.¹⁷

Brief Criticism

I have been trying in this essay to clarify the nature of Hegel's critical project, and show that his mode of criticism does not depend on a separate critical perspective. Criticism is inherent in the motion of thought to its own self-presentation. But in closing I would like to make a few remarks as to whether Hegel really proves his case. Does it all work?¹⁸

For the most part, that question has to be answered by examining the logical progression in detail, but several more or less standard criticisms of Hegel are relevant to this issue; I will mention them, and then suggest a way in which some contemporary developments have continued this strategy of Hegel's.

Several problems exist even if Hegel's logical progression works as proclaimed. Supposing that Hegel's logical progression involutes and succeeds, and provides the basis for criticism of institutions or social practices, still, applying Hegel's critical principles will demand a hermeneutical act discerning what kind of institution we are facing, and so what categories are appropriate. Disagreements could arise, for instance, about what kind of mediations a given governmental or economic institution "should" be

performing. Hegel does not consider this discernment enough.

Implied in this hermeneutical moment is the larger issue of the temporality of the act of criticism and of the logical progression itself. The underlying issue here is the relation between the self-coincidence of the logical Idea and the temporality of our living. Which is derived from which? In what way is the self-presentation of the Idea enacted in time?

The logical Idea is not yet absolute spirit, so we are not dealing with a self-conscious act of self-presence of the absolute idea to itself. The idea is still logic, not an Act of presence but a Way or structure of the process of self-presence. What then is the temporality of our appropriation of the logical idea? Can the logical Idea's self-coincidence in distension be related to that self-dispersion in coincidence that is lived temporality? Does temporal existence refuse the absolute idea's self-coincidence? Or, if the self-coincidence occurs over and above temporal existence, how do we know we enact it?

Hegel says of fully accomplished philosophy that

Dieser Begriff der Philosophie ist die sich denkende Idee, die wissende Wahrheit, das Logische mit der Bedeutung, daß es die im konkreten Inhalte als in seiner Wirklichkeit bewährte Allgemeinheit ist. (E 574)

This notion of philosophy is the self-thinking Idea, the truth aware of itself -- the logical system, but with the signification that it is universality approved and certified in concrete content as in its actuality. (E 574)

Could we, then, have the idea in its completion but never succeed in the fully self-conscious finding of the Idea's structures in the "real world"? Could spirit have its actual self-presence in history always delayed? Might that self-presence always be a result of fallible self-interpretation, even if it were guided by a completed Logic? Further discussion of this issue would get us into the "end of history" issues surrounding the completion of Hegel's system.

It is appealing to suggest that even for Hegel the interpretation of any concrete reality is always hermeneutically questionable. But this might force the logic itself to be incomplete or uncertain, and, while this sounds like it could avoid some of Hegel's more extreme claims, it destroys the whole endeavor. For without the perfect two-way movement of the Idea and its content, without that perfect transparency and adequacy and completion and *fürsichsein*, form separates from content. Hegel would be forced into the common position of having to erect some sort of meta-level watchtower that oversees a specially available form of thought, with all the problems of foundationalism and essentialism the logic worked to avoid.

In the relation between the self-coincidence of the logical Idea and the temporality of our living, you hear, of course, the voices of Kierkegaard and Heidegger. If the self-coincidence that guarantees the logical progression remains a temporal act of self-interpretation, it is never complete. Subject positions have not been escaped. Critical perspectives remain unavoidable. The logical process, as enacted in time, retains a hermeneutical moment that questions its meant-to-be-perfect self-coincidence. Whether this objection is serious or not depends, in part, on an analysis of that other progression, the purification performed in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*.

There are further and deeper objections that would need to be discussed; I merely indicate here how they attach to the topic we have been discussing.

One is a more complete examination of the general Heideggerian objection. This can be approached by asking how the logic can end, why there is no infinite regress of for-itselfness of for-itselfness of for-itselfness, etc. An answer is that for Hegel such an endless series would be constituted by external reflection, whereas in the third part of the logic all divisions and self-relations are inside the idea, which is just the idea of self-division and self-relation as for itself. There is no true otherness in the Idea; everything is transparent, and for that very reason, Hegel says, the Idea stands as a form that insofar as it is in opposition to a content, is "in sich gegangene und in der Identität aufgehobene Formbestimmung." But what Heidegger criticizes about Hegel is a presupposed normative meaning of being as full presence and self-coincidence. Which, Heidegger argues, is a historically limited meaning of being and a presupposition not accounted for in the system. So Hegel's derivation of the critical principles would be localized within another kind of thought, a reception of meanings of being, which the logic and system have failed to comprehend.

In defense Hegel would argue that the full self-presence is not a prior meaning of being but is worked out in the logical sequence. This gets to the second major issue, the question of the necessity of the logical progression. Does what Hegel says about mediating structures depend on a very strict view of the necessity of determinate negation to provide a firm list of moments to be posited.

I have argued elsewhere that we should take seriously the fact that each one of the variants of the logical progression that Hegel developed can be read as insightful and useful. But their variation raises the issue: How do you know when it goes right? A standard defense is: "Well, pure thought is difficult and can go wrong; you have to really purify your thinking, and examine carefully, and then . . . you just know it's done right." But then Hegel would be making something like an ultimate appeal to intuition, with all the problems that entails, and we recall Husserl's endless attempts to get his beginnings right so that everyone would see the same intuitions.

Would we then end up with multiple versions of the logic and system? What happens to the critical power of the concepts if their necessity is compromised? Perhaps we turn to John McCumber's multiple retrospective-critical narratives?

If we claim, with a wave of our hands, that such objections are serious enough to weaken Hegel's program, we can still ask whether, even if it doesn't work totally, it can work in part. Is Hegel's sequence and method all or nothing, or can critical tools such as the triple mediation of universal-particular-individual, or the civil society/state division, be detached and used as critical tools? People certainly do take things from Hegel. But can be any normative force for concepts plucked out of the system, for such picking and choosing puts criticism on a separate standpoint needing its own prior justification.

I wonder, though, if such picking and choosing might be located differently. Could we hold on to Hegel's insights that there is a process of thought that turns on itself without moving to a meta-level? Could there be a motion of thought that generates subject positions without itself being one or being observed from one, because it is the motion of thought itself? However, unlike Hegel, could that the motion be self-

referential without closure or self-transparency? Which would mean that it was always involved in a hermeneutical relation to itself. Could we play up further Hegel's comment about the lack of peaceful unity (WL 248/837) and find ourselves within a motion that enfolds and originates dichotomies and concepts and critical principles, yet without being able to provide a necessary sequence or definitive logical analysis of that motion? That was self-interpreting, but without the Idea's total transparency?

This would modify Hegel's insight that the form of the motion becomes its own content, because the overarching process would not have a proper form. This kind of thinking appears in deconstruction and hermeneutics, and so into debates with Heidegger, with Derrida, and with Ricoeur.¹⁹

In such a case criticism would still not be from a separated critical watchtower; it would become a loosening up, deconstructing, contextualizing, living in and with structures and processes while not identifying with any one of them, even those that are more formal and free. This is very close to Hegel's positing them as moments, except without a self-transparent rational totality.

¹Hegel's works are quoted (with occasional modifications) from editions indicated by the following abbreviations:

A: *Hegel's Aesthetics*, translated by T. M. Knox (Oxford: Clarendon, 1998), vol. 1.

E: German: *Enzyklopädie der phphilosophischen Wissenschaften* (1830), in the *Philosophische Bibliothek*, Band 33 (Hamburg: Felix Meiner Verlag, 1959). English: *The Encyclopedia Logic*, translated by T. F. Geraets W. A. Suchting, H. S. Harris (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1991). The citation from the Encyclopedia philosophy of mind is from *Hegel's Philosophy of Mind*, translated by William Wallace and A. V. Miller (London: Oxford, 1971). Citations are by paragraph number.

GP: *Vorlesungun über die Geschichte der Philosophie*, Band I, in *G. W. F. Hegel: Werke in zwanzig Bänden*, Band 18 (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1971).

PR: *Philosophy of Right*, translated by T. M. Knox (London: Oxford University Press, 1952).

WL: German: *Wissenschaft der Logik, Zweiter Band, Die Subjektive Logik* (1816), in *Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel Gesammelte Werke*, Band 12 (Hamburg: Felix Meiner Verlag, 1981). The citation from the logic of being is from Band 21, *Erster Band, Die Lehre vom Sein* (1832) (Hamburg: Felix Meiner Verlag, 1985). English: *The Science of Logic*, translated by A. V. Miller (New York, Humanities Press, 1969). Citations are by page numbers, German/English).

²See Terry Pinkard, *Hegel: a Biography* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

³"The great thing is to apprehend in the show of the temporal and transient the substance which is immanent and the eternal which is present." (*Philosophy of Right*, Preface)

⁴In discussing Plato's philosopher kings, Hegel remarks that Plato's idea claims, rightly, that there should be general principles self-consciously placed at the basis of law and politics, and then Hegel goes on to say that modern states have achieved that, or are working on achieving it (GP 36) We're not all the way yet, but the principle is in operation.

⁵The individual gets its being-acting-space from spirit, the universal. "Das Recht ist Dasein der Freiheit, Wirklichkeit des Selbstbewußten, die reale Seite und Weise des Geistes. Der Staat ist objektive Wirklichkeit des Rechts. Das Recht ist das geistige Insich- und Beisich-sein, das Dasein will, tätig ist, --

Freiheit, die sich Dasein gibt; die Sache ist mein, d. h. ich setze meine Freiheit in diese äußerliche Sache. Der Geist ist einerseits erkennend, nach der andern Seite will er, d. h. er will sich Realität geben. *Die Realität, worin der ganze Geist ist, nicht das Mich-Wissen als diesen Einzelnen, ist der Staat.* Denn wie der freie vernünftige Wille sich bestimmt, sind es Gesetze der Freiheit; aber diese Gesetze sind eben als Gesetze der Staaten, da es eben der Staat ist, daß der vernünftige Wille existiere, wirklich vorhanden sei. Im Staate also gelten die Gesetze, sind seine Gewohnheit und seine Sitte; weil aber die Willkür ebenso unmittelbar dabei ist, so sind sie nicht bloß Sitte, sondern müssen zugleich auch Macht sein gegen die Willkür, wie sie in den Gerichten und Regierungen erscheint. (GP 107)

⁶Das wahrhafte Ideal soll nicht wirklich sein, sondern ist wirklich und allein das Wirkliche; . . . Soll eine Idee zur Existenz zu gut sein, so ist dies Fehler des Ideals selbst . . . was wirklich ist, ist vernünftig. Man muß aber wissen, unterscheiden, was in der Tat wirklich ist; im gemeinen Leben ist alles wirklich, aber es ist ein Unterschied zwischen Erscheinungswelt und Wirklichkeit. Das Wirkliche hat auch äußerliches Dasein; das bietet Willkür, Zufälligkeit dar, wie in der natur Baum, Haus, Pflanze zusammenkommen. Die Oberfläche in Sittlichen, das Handeln der Menschen hat viel Schlimmes; da könnte vieles besser sein. Erkennt man die Substanz, so muß man durch die Oberfläche hindurchsehen. Menschen werden immer lasterhaft, verderbt sein; das ist nicht die Idee. (GP 111)

⁷It follows from this that earlier thinkers such as Plato could not have accomplished the logic. A historical development is needed because reason and reality consist of moments in tension, which have to be posited both as separate and as mutually mediated. Because the moments need to be set out, there are historical preconditions for fully self-reflexive pure thought, and these preconditions include the positing of certain abstractions, and mediations, in concrete social structures, politics and personal identities. Plato's society could not be ours because his partial unity had to exist first. All the moments must be deployed and reunited. Plato's main thoughts overstress the substantive universal and neglect the subjective individual, because this was the spirit of his times and the deep structure of his society. "Es kann niemand seine Zeit überspringen; der Geist seiner Zeit ist auch sein Geist." (GP 111)

⁸In another context, Hegel says: "Ihre Unmittelbarkeit ist nur form, weil sie zugleich Resultat war; ihre Bestimmtheit als Inhalt ist daher nicht mehr ein bloß aufgenommenes, sondern abgeleitetes und erwiesenes." (WL 249/838) This claim, that empirical immediacy and immediate consciousness is a form for content, not an opening on basic content, or a secure starting point, sets the task for later Marxist and other analyses of false consciousness and ideology.

⁹The relation of the logical categories to 'reality' is too large a topic for this talk, but we can at least point out that Hegel claims that the process of being-realized of the logical principles is not well conceptualized as the externalization of an essence. The categories are not quite externalized or realized. The categories of essence cannot grasp the 'being' and appearing of the categories themselves. That realization includes a return to immediacy, a doubled for itself, and the "supplements" involved in its self-positing, along with the triple mediations of logic, nature, and spirit. None of these are well described with the bipolar categories of essence and actualization.

¹⁰The work of pure thought is a steady deepening of what it means to be or think what it starts with: being. Hegel claims that the development occurring in the logic is not a flow from other to other, (WL 250/840) but a holding (self) within, towards a self-conception that is more complex and contextual. The categories of the logic, like Kant's categories, are the necessary intermediate structures that allow the unity and the diversity of experience. They define the dimensions that open the field of possibilities used to understand things: causal relations, temporal relations, sameness, inherence, and the self-reference that is experience itself.

¹¹The entire citation reads: "The manifestation of itself to itself is therefore itself the content of spirit and not, as it were, only a form externally added to the content; consequently spirit, by its manifestation, does not manifest a content different from its form, but manifests its form which expresses the entire content of spirit, namely, its self-manifestation. In spirit, therefore, form and content are identical with each other. Admittedly, manifestation is usually thought of as an empty form to which must still be added a content from elsewhere; and by content is understood a being-within-self which remains within itself, and by form, on the other hand, the external mode of the relation of the content to something else. But in speculative logic it is demonstrated that, in truth, the content is not merely something which is and remains within itself, but something which spontaneously enters into relation with something else; just as, conversely, in truth, the form must be grasped not merely as something dependent on and external to the content, but rather as that which makes the content into a content, into a being-within-self, into something distinct from something else. The true content contains, therefore, form within itself, and the true form is its own content. But we have to know spirit as this true content and as this true form." (E 383z)

¹²"Ihrer zur Allgemeinheit bestimmte Subjektivität ist reines Unterschieden innerhalb ihrer" (E 223) "Die betrachtete Negativität macht nun den Wendungspunkt der Bewegung des Begriffes aus. Sie ist der einfache Punkt der negativen Beziehung auf sich, der innerste Quell aller Thätigkeit, lebendiger und geistiger Selbstbewegung, die dialektische Seele, die alles Wahre an ihm selbst hat, durch die es allein Wahres ist; denn auf dieser Subjectivität allein ruht das Aufheben des Gegensatzes zwischen Begriff und Realität und die Einheit, welche die Wahrheit ist." (WL 246/835)

¹³"Die Negativität, welche die Dialektik und Vermittlung desselben ausmachte, ist in dieser Allgemeinheit gleichfalls in die einfache Bestimmtheit zusammengegangen, welche wieder ein Anfang seyn kann". (WL 248/838) "As simple self-relation it is a universal, and in this universality, the negativity that constituted its dialectic and mediation has also come together into simple determinateness which can again be a beginning." (WL 248/838)

¹⁴Hegel said that Plato lacked the proper construction of the categories he used to criticize Athens and propose an ideal city: "Dies Verhältnis des Begriffes zu seiner Realität ist bei Platon freilich nicht zum Bewußtsein gekommen. Wir finden bei ihm keine philosophische Konstruktion, welche zuerst die Idee an und für sich, alsdann in ihr selbst die Notwendigkeit ihrer Realisation und diese selbst auszeigt." (GP 108)

¹⁵The method and the large sections of the Logic are not the essence of anything in particular but are the notion of 'being' itself, fully developed, and, at the same time, thought thinking itself.

¹⁶In that progression Hegel provides the large defining movements of the system: in itself, for itself, in and for itself; being, essence, concept; universal, particular, and individual. These are elaborated in the doctrine of judgment and syllogism, then self-reflected in the discussion of method in the absolute idea, then involuted into one another and repeated fractally on different scales to provide more determinate content in various spheres, that content which is the manifestation of spirit's form, which is its process of coming to itself, which is its self-manifestation. These moments must first be posited in their separated or abstract, form, and then mediated into a whole in which they find their proper place.

¹⁷I note in addition the question of who is it that is supposed to perform critical thinking? Who is conscious of these patterns and movements as such? Is it only the philosopher who paints gray on gray? Here we would get into Hegel's ideas about the universal class of civil servants, and lawmaking, and the

role of constitutions as legitimating devices. Hegel does not have much hope for philosophically inspired public opinion. It would be interesting to pursue the question whether there is something like a universal class today, and how it matches up with social roles such public intellectuals, bureaucrats, academics, and the like.

¹⁸There are certain problems about just where we are now standing in order to criticize Hegel's mode of criticism. He could claim that we already been caught up in the progression? But that defense presupposes that the progression has already been established in its totality. If Hegel's work is not to be a gigantic begging of the question, we have the right to ask whether he succeeds in what he is trying to do.

¹⁹A self-determination that is not the imposition of a form on a formless motion, nor the discovery of a form that was statically there all along; a *Selbstbewegung*: this is close to Hegel, but also to Schelling, and it is still there in Derrida and Deleuze, in their own ways.