How to Actualize the Whole Possibility: The Necessity-Contingency Dialectic in Hegel’s *Science of Logic*

by

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ABSTRACT

HOW TO ACTUALIZE THE WHOLE POSSIBILITY: THE NECESSITY-CONTINGENCY DIALECTIC IN HEGEL’S SCIENCE OF LOGIC

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Do unactualized possibilities exist in any significant way? Do they contribute to the basic constitution of reality? My work explores Hegel’s answer to these questions by offering a close textual analysis of the “Actuality” chapter in the Science of Logic. By presenting his argument as a series of twenty-seven premises, I attempt to persuade my reader that Hegel’s modal ontology requires i) that unactualized possibilities really do exist, ii) that when a possibility remains unactualized, this status propels it towards actualization, iii) that an actuality can have higher or lower concentrations of possibility within it, and iv) that reality always tends towards the greatest expression of possibility in one actuality. The final chapter of my dissertation develops these conclusions of Hegel’s thesis by situating his modal theory within a debate that Deleuze attributes to Leibniz over the nature of compossibilities, incompossibilities, and the problem of how to actualize the best of all possible worlds.
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Bibliography
Introduction

The “Actuality” chapter of Hegel’s *Science of Logic* has received significant attention in recent years, primarily because one can find in it the controversial claim that “contingency is necessary.” One of the main reasons why scholars have been drawn to the chapter is because, if contingency is necessary to Hegel’s system, the case can then be made that the categories of the *Logic*, far from being permanently fixed by the design Hegel had initially proposed for them between 1812 and 1816, contain within them a certain dynamism, alterability, and propulsion to-be-otherwise. There are those who believe that the system is mostly closed, that necessity dictates the organization of the categories, and that, with the exception of a few minor revisions and points of clarification, the *Logic* is an already complete ontology of *being* and *actuality*. But then there are those who believe that what Hegel has built in the *Logic* is a system of necessity that is at the same time open to further contingencies. From this standpoint, the *Logic* offers a system of thought that cannot be otherwise but that is equally propelled in this necessity toward contingency. In this sense, the *Logic* offers us an ontology of *becoming* and *difference*, as much as an ontology of *being* and *actuality*.

Like others who were drawn to the chapter before me, I also find the claim that contingency is necessary to be of central importance. But my motivation comes as much from the question of whether “unactualized possibilities” exist in any significant sense as part of the basic constitution of reality, as it does from the relationship that Hegel seems to establish between systematization and contingency. By presenting his argument as a series of twenty-seven premises, I attempt to persuade my reader that Hegel’s modal ontology requires i) that unactualized possibilities really do exist, ii) that when a possibility remains unactualized, this status propels it towards actualization, iii) that an actuality can have higher or lower
concentrations of possibility within it, iv) that reality always tends toward the greatest expression of possibility in one actuality, and v) that there are ways to demonstrate how thought can come to think the whole possibility as one actuality (i.e. how to give a complete reflection of the possible qua the possible). To many readers, familiar or unfamiliar with Hegel, the idea that one could actualize the whole possibility might sound unfeasible. To actualize a possibility is normal, but to actualize the whole possibility might seem contradictory and impossible. But I believe that Hegel has a rational explanation for this, one that brings him from the immediate actuality of factual existence to the absolute actuality of substance. I claim that the problem of how to actualize the whole possibility is the “motor” behind the dialectic in the chapter.

While I would not maintain that Hegel’s Logic altogether disregards that most basic and obvious of all principles, the law of non-contradiction, one can see in his argument from modality a more complicated treatment of this theme. The role that contradiction plays in the chapter is one not only of impossibility and absurdity, as with the traditional method of reductio ad absurdum, where a theory is shown to be untenable because one of its aspects contradicts another. For Hegel, contradiction also functions as a source of movement, both preserving the actual against what would be impossible, but also spurring the actual to become otherwise and to express the possible qua the possible. In coming to terms with Hegel’s theory of modality, one must take his remarkable statement from the contradiction passages of the Logic to heart. “Contradiction,” he writes, “is the root of all movement and vitality; it is only in so far as something has a contradiction within it that it moves, has an urge and activity.”1 I ask my readers to keep this more complicated treatment of contradiction in mind as they read.

Hegel’s Logic is a book about the basic forms of thought and reality. Like Kant’s

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1 Hegel, Wissenschaft der Logik, 286. Hegel’s Science of Logic, 439.
Critique of Pure Reason, the Logic aims to expose the necessary conditions of possibility. But the Logic presents these conditions in terms of being rather than in terms of experience. In this sense, Hegel’s method can be viewed as a speculative version of transcendental philosophy. By analyzing the conditions of experience, Kant discovers in the transcendental deduction of the First Critique the twelve necessary categories for the possibility of any experience whatsoever. This makes his method transcendental. However, by analyzing the basic conditions of being, Hegel reveals hundreds of categories through his exploration of the nature of thought and reality. The Logic can be viewed, in this respect, as one of the most comprehensive books of ontology because it aims to begin a deduction of the categories of being from being alone. Because the deduction of the categories has no point of reference outside of being, Hegel claims that the Logic must begin without presuppositions. This is why, in beginning the Logic, Hegel does not presuppose even the most basic of axioms, such as the law of identity or the law of non-contradiction. This makes the method speculative, referring to a treatment of logic that takes the negative into account rather than the purely positive identity of propositions and things. Since his analysis of being is immanent to being, each category already contains the material for other categories as part of what each is. The method is then analytic in the sense that each category already implicitly contains what follows from one relationship to another, but this also makes the method synthetic in the sense that the reality of “what is” becomes determinate only by reckoning with the negative, with the other.

As its most basic distinction, the Logic contains three doctrines: the Doctrine of Being (Sein), the Doctrine of Essence (Wesen), and the Doctrine of the Concept (Begriff). The forms of thought and reality range from the simple structures of immediacy, the initial determinations of being, of quality, limit, and finitude, as well as the basic determinations of quantity and measure
such as indifference, standing-beside-one-another, number, and arithmetic, to the more complex determinations of essence, where a thing has properties and can maintain a consistent identity throughout various fluxuations; relationships of reflection, identity, difference, contradiction, appearance, existence, part and whole, possibility and actuality, cause and effect, and reciprocity. If the *Doctrine of Being* offers us an analysis of “that” which being is, and the *Doctrine of Essence* offers us an analysis of “what” being is, as the reflection but also the alienation of being from itself, then the *Doctrine of the Concept* can be viewed as the resolution of this alienation, as the recognition that the essence of being is nothing other than being’s own self-comprehension.² To comprehend “what” being is does not thereby posit a second world that stands beyond being as something other than what being is. On the contrary, by determining “what” being is, we become able to anticipate in a more significant way “that” being is. The *Doctrine of the Concept* attempts to analyze the *act of thinking itself* in order to explore how the categories of being can be deduced from being without further reference to something that is outside of being. To this end, Hegel begins the third doctrine from “subjectivity” (*Subjektivität*), from the judgment and the syllogism, and then turns to “objectivity” (*Objektivität*), to mechanism, chemism, teleology, life, cognition, and the absolute idea as the conclusion for the argument that the act of thinking is at the same time the objectivity of reality. But to establish how thought can think itself and how being can be its own reference, one must recognize not a disposition where things are inherently separate from other things, or from a logic where propositions are only identical with themselves,

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² The chapter called “The Categories of the Absolute” of Hyppolite’s *Logic and Existence* gives a detailed exposition of this important distinction in the *Logic* between being, essence, and the concept. Hyppolite claims that the determinations of being are the immediacy of the concept, the concept *in itself*, that the determinations of essence are the negation of being, its alienation from itself, and in this respect, the concept *for itself*, whereas the determinations of the concept are these same determinations of being and essence once it is exposed that they “constitute themselves.” This means that the concept is both *in itself* and *for itself*. It is being when it has comprehended itself as essence. It is the movement of being when this movement has been realized as self-movement. Hyppolite goes so far as to claim that the “concept” should be translated as “sense.” See especially, 169–176.
but rather a disposition where things and propositions are both themselves and the opposites of themselves.

“Actuality” is one of the culminating chapters of the *Doctrine of Essence*. It comes after the “Appearance” and “Existence” chapters, and it comes before “Substantiality,” “Causality,” and “Reciprocity,” which in turn lead to the “Subjective Concept.” “Actuality” belongs to the *Doctrine of Essence* because what is actual has emerged from a prior source in possibility. This source presents us with the modality of essence, that “what is” as simple immediate being has nevertheless come forth into actuality from the negativity of the possible, that “what is” could not have been. Although for this reason the category “actuality” belongs to the *Doctrine of Essence*, actuality is also already on the way to being the concept in the sense that because an actuality maintains the contraries of itself in possibility, it is both itself and the opposite of itself. This dissertation focuses primarily on the detailed argument Hegel offers for why what has emerged into actuality from possibility is not only some positive existent, but is at the same time the totality of its essence, the possible as both what can and can not be. The only reason then why the category “actuality” is distinct from the concept is because actuality has not yet explicitly realized that it is the possible itself. One must, rather, begin the argument from modality, as we will see, from an immediate actuality, which, although it has emerged from possibility, has not yet made this explicit, but seems instead to be only one instance of what is possible.

I have divided this dissertation into four chapters. Chapter 1 is about formal modality; Chapter 2 is about real modality; Chapter 3 is about absolute modality; and Chapter 4 is about conditions and incompossibility. But the first three chapters are different from the fourth chapter and should not be taken separately. I have divided them into twenty-seven premises and seven
remarks. Each premise functions like a sub-chapter, and each remark either situates Hegel in terms of another philosopher, or explores a moment of Hegel’s theory in more depth than the premise-structure could sustain without losing the thread of the argument. Because I have divided this work twice, once into chapters and once into premises, there are two different ways to read. The reader can start at the beginning of Chapter 1 and read all the way through, as I recommend, or the reader can start at Chapter 4 and then read the premises of the first three chapters for clarification.

I recommend the first way of reading because I believe that the close textual analysis I offer in the premises helps to contribute to a growing body of literature about the logical nature of the dialectic. Hegel himself does not illustrate this division of the premises, at least not officially, so it is up to us to recognize the important transitions of his argument and to “discover” the dialectic as it unfolds. By standardizing his argument, I have attempted to avoid preconceptions about how the dialectic is supposed to work, whether this means forming a triad or finding a synthesis behind a thesis and an antithesis. I often attempt to anticipate the best version of Hegel’s position by analyzing how his various insights could be true. I also attempt analysis as “critique” by looking for gaps in the argument, by testing his claims, and by exploring examples. Each premise begins with a passage from Hegel’s chapter, which I quote in German and in English. I have also taken the liberty of writing long footnotes, devoted primarily to detailed discussions of the various commentators. I feel that if I were to include these discussions in the body of the premises, this would distract the reader from the central argument, and might cause unnecessary confusion about the trajectory of the analysis. Although I have attempted to discover the argument in the course of the dialectic, I admit that certain transitions are quite difficult to explain, especially when Hegel turns to absolute modality. I also realize that
my reader might propose that the argument should go somewhat differently, that one should
either add, subtract, or otherwise replace one premise with another. This, I contend, is the
interpretive nature of the analysis.

The reader who begins from Chapter 4 does gain the advantage of a certain gratification.
Chapter 4 rehearses what I think are the most pivotal and contentious steps of Hegel’s argument
by focusing on further implications from his theory of conditions and this theory of inclusive
necessity. I situate these two theories within a debate that Deleuze attributes to Leibniz over the
nature of compossibilities, incompossibilities, and the problem of how to actualize the best of all
possible worlds. I claim that one can find in Hegel’s “Actuality” chapter an outline for the very
exciting concept of “possibility-concentration,” the notion that there can exist greater or lesser
quantities of possibility in one actuality. Since conditions are immediate actualities that are
equally the possibilities of other actuals, I argue that actualizing across conditions leads to a
greater concentration, or a maximum amount, of possibility, and that this is Hegel’s version of
what Leibniz would call perfection. This notion of possibility-concentration as a quantitative
maximum is the final conclusion of the dissertation, and it is, at the same time, the clue to the
solution for how to actualize the whole possibility, since the greatest concentration of possibility
would contain the existence of all possible permutations in one actuality.

I realize that because this work is a monograph of the “Actuality” chapter, some readers
might wonder why I have chosen to analyze the modality passages of the Logic instead of other
passages, such as “measure” or “causality,” or the book in its entirety. But I contend that this is
the sort of issue that everyone who works on Hegel’s Logic has to face. The Logic is a
complicated, powerful, endless book. One can attempt to approach the book in its entirety, but
one can also attempt to approach the book thematically. I have chosen to do the later, partly
because I want to analyze the nature of dialectical argumentation at a microscopic level, and partly because I want to analyze “possibility” as a concept. I realize that the limited scope of this work might seem problematic to readers who want to engage the book more broadly, but I maintain that only by limiting the scope as I have done are we able to expose the intense detail in the text that the *Logic* demands of us.

**Hegel’s Argument from Modality (The Short Version)**

Hegel’s argument begins from two self-evident premises, that on the one hand, *what is actual is existence* (premise 1), but that on the other hand, *what is actual is possible* (premise 2). Although each premise is self-evident, when thought attempts to think both premises together, a certain complication arises. If what is actual is existence, and yet what is actual is possible, then it would seem that the possible *exists* in the same way that the actual *exists*. However, this is problematic because what is merely possible (e.g., a unicorn, a world in which gravity goes up, a science-fiction story, etc.) does not seem to have the same ontological status as concrete actuality does. But since Hegel is committed to the reconciliation of both premises, he presents an argument for why we look to existence for the nature of possibility just as we look to existence for the nature of actuality. This calls for a revision of what it means to actualize possibility. Thought must come to think of an actuality of the whole possibility.

Hegel acknowledges that in an immediate sense it would be contradictory, and therefore impossible, to actualize the diversity of possibility in one actuality (premises 3-7). If something is possible, it can and can not be; however, there is no way to actualize this contrariety without falling into contradiction. To overcome this problem, Hegel first proposes reflected actuality (premise 8), and then formal contingency (premise 10), as two different solutions for how to posit the existence of possibility *in actuality* without removing the contrariety of the possible.
But reflected actuality does not work because it can only express the existence of mere unactualized possibility (premise 9). Contingency works better, but still not perfectly, because while it holds together the contrary sides of possibility through the actualization of one actuality, it can only contain this contrariety by way of indifference, in the sense that unactualized possibilities could have been (premises 11-12). Hegel then turns to formal necessity as the complete coincidence of the actual and the possible together (premise 13). On the one hand, this necessity is like the principle of non-contradiction (from premise 7), in the sense that it restricts the possible to only what is actually possible. However, on the other hand, this necessity is the only form that actualization can take up to actualize the whole possibility.

Hegel then turns from formal modality to real modality because there is no way from the formal structure to actualize the whole possibility. Real modality can more appropriately express the whole because, by actualizing across content and not only across form, immediate actualities find their possibilities dispersed in others, and then literally find themselves in these others even though they are not these others. Hegel posits real actuality (premise 14) and real possibility (premise 15) in a relationship of existing multiplicity (premise 16), which leads in turn to his argument that each contextual thing has its possibilities dispersed in the actualities of others (premise 17). The advantage of dispersed actuality over the earlier formal solutions comes from the recognition that immediate, contingent actualities are the conditions for the further actualizations of others (premise 18). This is an advantage because a condition is both actuality and possibility together. However, since conditions begin as actualities with the possibilities of themselves as others embedded in their content, Hegel claims that real necessity is required to draw the possibility out of them (premise 19-21).

Once thought recognizes that real necessity is relative necessity, and that this process of
actualizing across conditions begins from contingency (premise 22), Hegel proposes a third version of modality, “absolute modality.” Absolute modality is an advancement upon real modality because it can include the contrariety of the possible as constitutive of reality. This version of modality begins from an initial description of many substances as absolute actuality (premise 23). What is absolutely actual includes all permutations of possibility as part of what the actual is. But since this actuality already contains all of its possibilities, it has necessity, not possibility, over against it, and can no longer be otherwise (premise 24). However, the reason why absolute actuality can no longer be otherwise is because it includes possibility rather than restricts it. Hegel calls this disposition of inclusion “absolute possibility” (premise 25). By introducing absolute possibility, thought comes to recognize that what had seemed to be the many substances of absolute actuality is really the one substance of absolute necessity (premise 26). Because absolute necessity is the inclusive necessity of absolute possibility, it is as much contingency as it is necessity (premise 27). From this disposition, thought actualizes the whole.

**Overview of Commentaries**

There are by now a number of excellent commentaries on Hegel’s “Actuality” chapter. Marcuse’s 1934 *Hegel’s Ontology and the Theory of History* and Dieter Henrich’s 1971 “Hegel’s Theorie über den Zufall” are both pioneering studies that have prompted further lines of investigation. The analyses of Hegel’s argument that I have found most compelling include Jay Lampert’s 2005 essay “Hegel on Contingency, or, Fluidity And Multiplicity,” John W. Burbidge’s “The Necessity of Contingency,” originally published in 1980 in *Art and Logic in Hegel’s Philosophy*, Stephen Houlgate’s 1995 essay “Necessity and Contingency in Hegel’s *Science of Logic,*” George di Giovanni’s 1980 essay “The Category of Contingency in the Hegelian Logic,” Pirmin Stekeler-Weithofer’s chapter “Hegel on Reality as a Modal Notion” in
Hegel’s Analytic Pragmatism (unpublished), and Béatrice Longuenesse’s book Hegel’s Critique of Metaphysics, originally published in 1981 in French as Hegel et la Critique de la Métaphysique. I will briefly discuss each of these.³

My primary motivation in writing this analysis of the “Actuality” chapter comes from Lampert’s essay on contingency. I see my thesis of how to actualize the whole possibility through the structure of inclusive necessity as directly influenced by and as directly responding to Lampert’s claim that because of the necessity of contingency, the truth of each thing is in the possibilities of others, which, when recognized from the disposition of the absolute, presents us with a system of “fluidity” and “multiplicity.” For Lampert, the “Actuality” chapter is about how the “external differences” that seem to exist between things become a complex network of “internal multiplicity” and “free movement.”⁴ Lampert begins from the theory that things are only possible if they can express the totality of the absolute from their own perspectives. He concludes from this that because each thing is not only itself, but is an expression of the whole, everything must interact in every possible way.

Burbidge’s book Hegel’s Systematic Contingency is a major contribution to the literature on Hegel’s “Actuality” chapter. In “The Necessity of Contingency,” Burbidge claims that the conclusion from Hegel’s modal argument is that “contingency is absolutely necessary.” He sees the three moments of the thesis that “contingency is necessary” as the primary dialectical “motor” that motivates the transition points of Hegel’s argument – first, the formal version of the thesis, that whatever happens to be actual (contingently) is nevertheless necessary simply

³ Other works that I have found helpful include Baptist, “Ways and Loci of Modality”; Carlson, A Commentary to Hegel’s Science of Logic; Harris, An Interpretation of the Logic in Hegel; Hoffmeyer, The Advent of Freedom; Macdonald, “Adorno’s Modal Utopianism”; McTaggart, A Commentary on Hegel’s Logic; Mure, A Study of Hegel’s Logic; Ng, “Hegel’s Logic of Actuality”; Taylor, Hegel; Yamane, Wirklichkeit; and Yeomans, Freedom and Reflection.
⁴ Lampert, “Hegel on Contingency,” 75.
because actuality has always already happened and cannot be undone – second, the real version, that relative necessity requires contingency as its starting point – and third, the absolute version, which states that the whole picture requires contingency as the basic feature for the recognition of a disposition on the totality. Burbidge also makes a second outstanding contribution when he emphasizes why Hegel consistently begins from actuality. Burbidge claims that one can only give an account of possibilities after one gives an account of actuality. This is especially important for the surveying of what is really possible from the actuality of what already exists.

One objective of Houlgate’s essay, “Necessity and Contingency,” is to clear up a misconception about Hegelian necessity. Houlgate rejects the notion that Hegel is a determinist, claiming that there is “no independent power of necessity in Hegel’s universe which determines all that occurs.” Houlgate’s analysis of the relationship between systematization and contingency is distinct from other commentators because he believes that absolute necessity generates its own special type of content without, however, dictating what can or cannot come into existence. Because of absolute necessity, being always prevails over nothing. Houlgate sees this as the primary stance of necessity, that being itself cannot be contingent. I am especially sympathetic to the inference Houlgate makes from Hegel’s passages about absolute necessity, that all finite things necessarily perish. The inevitability of the destruction of determinateness is at the same time the expression of contingency, that things cannot do otherwise than to be otherwise. Ultimately, Houlgate finds in absolute necessity not the restrictive “blind necessity” that we commonly conceive of as the antithesis of spontaneous freedom. He finds, instead, a theory of necessity that is the foundation of freedom, in the sense that because things cannot be

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5 Houlgate, “Necessity and Contingency,” 45.
8 Houlgate, “Necessity and Contingency,” 47.
otherwise than being, this lets them go free as being.

In “The Category of Contingency in the Hegelian Logic,” George Di Giovanni focuses on the “contingency” passages of Hegel’s argument. Di Giovanni begins from a definition of contingency as an object that is ambiguously both actuality and possibility. Contingency is the disposition of an object that is “neither quite actual yet, nor possible.” This treatment of contingency relies heavily on a Kantian reading of Hegel’s argument. Di Giovanni’s reading is Kantian in two senses: 1) He interprets Hegel as following Kant’s method of taking an object and then ascertaining whether it is actual or possible (most other commentators do not follow this method, at least not explicitly). 2) He sees Hegel’s modal theory as an account of the “reflective awareness of the nature and the limits of the experience.” Although I find (1) problematic because it obscures the discovery of certain important premises of Hegel’s argument, di Giovanni’s final conclusion about the role of contingency is quite insightful. Against what he posits as the “classical metaphysical” position, which views contingencies as disturbances or digressions of reality, he proposes that for Hegel contingencies belong to the property of reality, no matter how unpredictable or inconsistent they may appear to be. This can be seen as di Giovanni’s version of the thesis that contingency is necessary.

One of Stekeler-Weithofer’s main insights in his commentary of the Actuality chapter in Hegel’s Analytic Pragmatism comes from situating Hegel’s modal theory in terms of formal modal logic. He says that the modal logicians follow the Tractarian concept of possibility as “truth functionally composed on the basis of logically elementary propositions.” But Stekeler-Weithofer believes that Hegel’s project is about modal reality, how things, rather than

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12 Stekeler-Weithofer, Hegel’s Analytic Pragmatism, 219.
propositions, are constituted in terms of modality. We can think of this distinction from Stekeler-Weithofer as the difference between *de dicto* and *de re* consequences (broadly construed). An analysis of possibility and necessity from the terms of *de dicto* consequences gives access to certain projects that concern logic and language. But if we think of possibility and necessity from the terms of *de re* consequences, this leads to modal insights about the nature of reality, such as how to conceive of something as both an instance of essence and the essence itself.

Béatrice Longuenesse has a particular way of dividing the formal, real, and absolute sub-chapters of Hegel’s text. She claims in the “What is Rational is Actual” chapter of *Hegel’s Critique of Metaphysics* that with formal modality, Hegel rejects the classical axioms and definitions of modality, which she says come mainly from Aristotle. With real modality, Hegel then takes up Kant’s modal theory. And finally with absolute modality, he develops his own theory.\(^\text{13}\) While this is certainly a plausible interpretation of Hegel’s design for the division of the sub-chapters, I think this presents the reader with an opposition between the sub-chapters which I doubt Hegel had fully intended. In contrast to Longuenesse, I treat the “Actuality” chapter as one argument, where the premises and conclusions of the formal and the real sub-chapters eventually give way to the premises of absolute modality. Longuenesse’s analysis is especially adept at integrating and contrasting Hegel’s theory with Spinoza (153-158), Leibniz (132-133), and Kant (she sustains a contrast of Kant with Hegel throughout her entire chapter). By interpreting Hegel’s absolute necessity as the relationship between being and thought, Longuenesse effectively demonstrates the transition that Hegel discovers from the *Doctrine of Essence* to the *Subjective Concept*. While Lampert has emphasized “multiplicity,” Houlgate has emphasized “absolute necessity,” and Burbidge and di Giovanni have each emphasized “contingency,”

\(^{13}\) Longuenesse, *Hegel’s Critique of Metaphysics*, 119
Longuenesse sees the development of Hegel’s argument as based on how to give a complete account of “actuality.” In contrast, my thesis is that the motivation of Hegel’s argument comes from the problem of how to actualize the “whole” of possibility, in other words, of how to give a complete reflection of the possible *qua* the possible.
Chapter 1: Hegel’s Formal Modality

I offer this short version of Hegel’s theory of modality as a way to outline the basic argument in the chapter. This version is designed both to give the reader an overview of the argument and at the same time to act as a point of clarification about certain important details within each premise.

1) **What is actual is existence.**
   a. Premise one is the self-evident starting point that appears when thought thinks modality. Look to existence to recognize what is actual.
   b. Existence means both the immediate fact of existence but also the totality out of which something emerges.
   c. If existence is actual, then actuality is both the immediate and the totality.

2) **What is actual is possible.**
   a. Premise two is also self-evident. If something is actual, then of course it is possible that it be actual.
   b. But this also means that the actual is identical with the possible in the sense that neither mode adds anything to the content of things.
   c. Hegel’s entire argument refers back to these two self-evident premises. All subsequent premises can be viewed as equivalences, inferences, and conclusions built upon these two premises.

3) **If what is actual is possible, then the possible is the reflection of the actual into itself.**
   a. Premise three shows that premise two is the affirmation of premise one.
   b. Possibility is truth-affirming in the sense that if something is actual, then it is possible, which affirms its existence.
   c. If possibility reflects actuality into itself, then the actual is not only immediate, but is also mediated by possibility.
   d. But this mediation is nothing other than the actual’s own identity-into-self.

   **The sub-argument from possibility as necessary but not sufficient:**
   i. If what is actual is possible, then what is not possible is not actual.
   ii. If what is not possible is not actual, then possibility is the most basic and necessary condition for any actualization whatsoever.
   iii. However, because possibility is only the affirmation of actuality into itself, what is actual is necessarily possible but what is possible is not necessarily actual.
   iv. Therefore, possibility is a necessary but not a sufficient condition for actuality.

4) **But if the possible is only the reflection of the actual, then it lacks itself and requires its completion in actuality.**
   a. As long as thought fixates upon the actual, the possible is only the affirmation of the actual into itself and nothing more (equivalence of P3).
b. However, since the possible affirms the actual, thought can also fixate upon the possible and not only upon the actual.
c. When thought fixates upon the possible, the possible is still the identity of the actual, but of the actual when it is not itself.
d. Therefore, because the possible affirms the actual in existence, it is also the actual when it lacks itself.
e. Therefore, what is actual is complete and what is possible requires its completion in actuality.

5) If it only completes itself in the actual, then the possible is the comparing relation between the actual and the negation of the actual. Then the possible A contains the possible not A.
   a. If A is possible, then A is A (equivalence of P3).
   b. But A is A if and only if -A is -A (equivalence of P4).
   c. If A is possible, then both A is A and -A is -A.
   d. Therefore, possibility is the comparing relation between the A and the -A.
   e. Therefore, the possible A contains the possible -A.

   Problem: If what is actual is possible (P2), and what is possible contains the opposite of the actual (equivalence of P5), then does the actual also contain the opposite of the actual?

6) If the possible A contains the possible not A, then everything is possible but everything together is impossible.
   a. If A is possible, then A can or can not be (equivalence of P5).
   b. This means that if A is possible, then not A is also possible.
   c. Therefore, because the possible is both the actual and the opposite of the actual, everything is possible if it is identical with itself.
   d. But this also means that if something is not identical with itself, then it is impossible.
   e. Therefore, everything is possible that does not contradict itself.
   f. However, because what is possible is both the actual and the opposite of the actual, possibility contains diversity.
   g. Since this diversity is both the actual but also the opposite of the actual, the diversity contains opposition.
   h. Since what is actual is also possible (P2), but what is possible contains diversity, to actualize the diversity of the possible would turn the opposition into contradiction.
   i. Therefore, everything together is self-contradictory and impossible.

7) Actualization cannot maintain the contradiction that what is actual is identical with the possible, where the possible is both the actual and the negation of the actual as one unity.
   a. This conclusion comes directly from the self-evidence of premises one and two.
      i. Existence is actual (P1).
      ii. What is actual is possible (P2).
iii. But what is possible contains both the actual and the opposite of the actual (equivalence of P5). In this sense, “to contain” means to hold together both the positive and the negative relation of possibility as one unity.

iv. It would be a contradiction if something were to exist both as itself and as the opposite of itself.

v. Actuality contains possibility, and possibility is both the actual and the opposite of the actual.

vi. Therefore, to actualize possibility would be to actualize contradiction.

8) Since actualization cannot maintain this contradiction, it becomes “reflected actuality.” Reflected actuality is an actuality of possibility itself.
   a. To actualize both the can and the can not of possibility would be to actualize contradiction (equivalence of P7).
   b. However, to actualize only one strand or another of the possible, either the positive or the negative alone, would reduce the actual to a mere moment of the totality.
   c. But since reflected actuality is an actuality of the possible itself, it is neither self-contradictory nor only a moment of the totality.

9) The problem with reflected actuality is that since it is the possible itself, it is an actual that cannot become actual. It lacks itself but cannot find its completion in actuality since it already is this.
   a. Reflected actuality is an actuality of the possible itself (P8).
   b. However, the possible can only become complete in the actual (equivalence of P4).
   c. If reflected actuality is of the possible itself, then it lacks itself and requires its completion in actuality.
   d. But since reflected actuality is already actual, it is already complete in its state of incompleteness, and therefore remains indeterminate.

10) Since reflected actuality lacks itself and cannot become complete, Hegel turns instead to “contingent actuality,” where the actual as what is immediately given equally posits its other as what could have been.
   a. It would be a contradiction to actualize both the can and the can not of possibility in one unity (equivalency of P7).
   b. However, to actualize only one strand or another of the possible would reduce the actual to an instance of existence, rather than to its totality.
   c. However, to let the actual take over the function of reflection as if it itself were the possible would make the actual incomplete and indeterminate (equivalency of P9).
   d. But since contingent actuality is an immediate existent that posits the opposite of itself along with itself, it is not self-contradictory, nor is it merely an instance of the totality, but it is also not incomplete or indeterminate, as with reflected actuality.
   e. Therefore, since it posits the existence of its opposite along with itself, contingent actuality more effectively renders the possible in existence.
11) If the other of the actual equally exists, there is no reason why this actual is and why its other is not. Therefore, contingency has no ground.
   a. An actual is contingent if it posits the equal existence of its opposite.
   b. However, it would be a contradiction if something were to exist both as itself and as the opposite of itself.
   c. Therefore, a contingent actuality maintains a relationship of *indifference* between its own existence and the existence of its opposite.
   d. Therefore, a contingent actuality is an existent that is not its opposite, but that could have been its opposite if it were not itself.
   e. Therefore, there is no reason why a contingent actuality exists and why its opposite does not exist.

12) However, since the contingent is an actual of a possible, its existence as an actual is dependent upon the non-actuality of its other that could have been. Therefore, contingency has ground.
   a. If an actual is contingent, then the opposite of the actual could have been (equivalence of P11).
   b. But this means that the actual is contingent only insofar as its opposite could have been.
   c. Therefore, the contingency of the actual is dependent upon the equal existence of its opposite.
   d. Therefore, contingency has ground.

13) Formal necessity is the realization of these two arguments as one disposition, where contingency is both groundless because its other could have been (P11) and grounded because its other could have been (P12). This necessity is the only way to actualize possibility.
   a. If the actual depends upon the equal existence of its opposite (equivalency of P12), then there is not only an *indifferent* relationship between the existent actual and the existent opposite, but also one of *coincidence*.
   b. Formal necessity is the coincidence of the possible as the actual.
   c. This necessity is the only way to actualize possibility.
1) What is actual is existence.

“1. Die Wirklichkeit ist formell, insofern sie als erste Wirklichkeit nur unmittelbare, unreflectirte Wirklichkeit, somit nur in dieser Formbestimmung, aber nicht als Totalität der Form ist. Sie ist so weiter nichts als ein Seyn oder Existenz überhaupt.”

“1. Actuality is formal in so far as, being primary actuality, it is only immediate, unreflected actuality, and hence is only in this form-determination but not as the totality of form. As such it is nothing more than a being or Existence in general.”

Hegel’s theory of modality begins from the premise that what is actual is existence in general. This premise can be interpreted in one of two ways. If Hegel is making a claim about actuality, then the point is that we should look to existence to recognize what is actual. However, if he is making a claim about existence, then the point is that what exists has the character of being actual, in other words, that existence is actuality. I retain the first interpretation as the premise heading because Hegel is clearly talking about actuality in terms of existence, and not the other way around. That we should look to existence to see what is actual is also an important thesis that Hegel will develop over the course of his argument from modality. This first interpretation of the claim helps us to answer the question, what is actuality? Actuality is existence.

To understand why we should look to existence to recognize what is actual, we will need to establish more about what Hegel means by “existence” (Existenz). In the “Existence” chapter (BK 2, SN 2, CH 1), which precedes the “Actuality” chapter, Hegel refers to existence both in its specificity, as the thing-emerging-process from which something comes into existence when it completes the totality of its conditions, but also in its generality, as the fact of existence. Hegel’s initial premise “what is actual is existence” relies on both of these meanings of

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14 Hegel, Wissenschaft der Logik, 381; Hegel’s Science of Logic, 542 (hereafter cited as WL/SL followed by the English/German pagination). Unless otherwise noted, I have used Miller’s translation of the Logic and Geraets, Suchting, and Harris’ translation of The Encyclopaedia Logic throughout.

existence. Actuality is existence when it emerges from essence\(^\text{16}\); however, at the same time, actuality is primary, immediate, and unreflected because it is “mere existence,” the immediacy of what is “simply there.”\(^\text{17}\)

We might assume that because the categories of “existence” and “actuality” are part of the *Doctrine of Essence* and not of the *Doctrine of Being*, existence then should only refer to essence, to what things really are, to what emerges out of this immediacy, to *Existenz*, literally to “ex-istere,” but not also refer to what is “simply there,” to *Dasein*, literally to “being-there.” It might seem inconsistent that Hegel initially defines actuality as immediate and unreflected (*unmittelbare und unreflectirte*). However, as we will see in the course of his argument, this is not merely an inconsistency in Hegel’s writing. The reason why the argument begins from an immediate, initial, unreflected actuality is because that which exists emerges out of immediacy, and yet it does not emerge as something other than this immediacy itself. Actuality is therefore immediate because it is an existence that has emerged *out of itself*, that has emerged as nothing other than the immediacy from which it began.

In this sense, formal actuality is the modal version of pure indeterminate being, the

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\(^\text{16}\) In the chapter “Relation of Outer and Inner” (BK 2, SN 2, CH 3, DV 3), Hegel defines “actuality” as the manifestation of something in its externality, which is the total completion of itself as what it is. This means both that the inner is not really distinct from the outer, in the sense that the inner is what will become manifested, but also that the outer is not really a position that stands beyond the process of making the inner manifest. The category distinction between inner and outer vanishes into the one category “actuality;” this initiates the topic that essence and existence are one unity, but also that what appears to be the outside is not truly “outside” since this is manufactured by the process of manifestation. WL, 364-366/SL, 523-526. Yeomans also discusses the connection between actuality and inner/outer. He calls Hegel’s category of “actuality” shorthand for “the problem of integrating the unity of the inner and the outer with the form of reflection by which the inner is translated into the outer.” *Freedom and Reflection*, 141.

\(^\text{17}\) In Hegel’s *Ontology and the Theory of Historicity*, Marcuse notices these two meanings of existence as simply being-there and as emergence: “Actuality is simply being-there, being-at-hand, being-present; yet at the same time it is nothing simple. All that is actual is always something more, something other than what is exactly there, at hand and present” See, 93. Di Giovanni also discusses the first of these meanings in his essay “The Category of Contingency in the Hegelian Logic.” What I am calling the “facticity of existence” Di Giovanni calls “phenomenal existence.” “By “phenomenon” I mean any event or state of affairs precisely as it occurs or is given. A phenomenon does not make pretense of revealing any reality but its own.” 199 (endnote 18). In “Necessity and Contingency,” Houlgate emphasizes these two meanings as well when he writes, “although being *is* immediacy and *is* there, it is not *just* that, but – in being what it is – is in fact the process of emerging and of actualizing what it is.” 38.
presuppositionless starting point at the very beginning of the *Logic*.\(^{18}\) The modal version of *to be* is *to be actual*. This initial actuality refers to the fact of existence as what is “merely given” without offering any further reason for why it is.\(^{19}\) If I look out at the landscape, I see the trees, the hill, and the river as “simply there,” as part of the landscape, as a fact of existence, without their offering further recourse for why these features are what they are. But whereas existence is distinct from pure indeterminate being in the sense that its correlate is “essence,” actuality is distinct in the further sense that its correlate is “possibility.”\(^{20}\) In other words, the category of actuality is the same as the categories of being and existence, with the one exception that while indeterminate being implies nothing (*Nichts*) and existence implies essence (*Wesen*), actuality contains the further implication that it has possibility (*Möglichkeit*) over against it. While the trees, the hill, and the river are “merely given” as part of the landscape, these features have equally emerged into actuality from possibility. Because it is pure immediacy, actuality is as self-evident as indeterminate being. Being *is*. Likewise, actuality *is*. To think of reality in terms of modal-relationships is to begin from the self-evidence that actuality simply *is*. However, this actuality that simply *is* equally implies possibility, as a source that is both prior to the actuality, and yet is nothing other than the actuality itself.\(^{21}\)

\(^{18}\) Similar to his starting point at the very beginning of the *Logic*, there is a way in which Hegel’s modal argument also attempts to begin internally without presuppositions. Two excellent books that analyze what it means to begin from a presuppositionless starting point are Houlgate, *The Opening of Hegel’s Logic* and Winfield, *Hegel’s Science of Logic: A Critical Rethinking in Thirty Lectures*.

\(^{19}\) This is why Hegel says that “[this actuality] is nothing more than a *being* or *Existence* in general.” WL, 381/ SL, 542.

\(^{20}\) Burbidge explains this in “The Necessity of Contingency” when he writes: “That the actual incorporates the possible specifies its difference from the apparently synonymous terms: ‘being’ and ‘existence.’” Burbidge, *Hegel’s Systematic Contingency*, 17. Also see Burbidge, *The Logic of Hegel’s Logic*, 75.
2) What is actual is possible.\footnote{Marcuse calls “what is actual is possible” the first premise of Hegel’s argument. But I recognize “what is actual is existence” first because this establishes Hegel’s starting point in actuality, not possibility. Marcuse is still right to point out that the argument only begins to make sense as an argument once Hegel introduces the relationship between actuality and possibility. Hegel’s Ontology, 93.}

“Aber weil sie wesentlich nicht blosse unmittelbare Existenz, sondern, als Formeinheit des Ansichseyns oder der Innerlichkeit, und der Aeusserlichkeit ist, so enthält sie unmittelbar das Ansichseyn oder die Möglichkeit. Was wirklich ist, ist möglich.” (WL, 381)

“But because it is essentially not a mere immediate Existence but exists as form-unity of being-within-self or inwardness and outwardness, it immediately contains the in-itself or possibility. What is actual is possible.” (SL, 542)

Since actuality is both immediate existence and also existence that is at the same time essence, actuality contains possibility. In saying this, Hegel most likely means that actuality and possibility are not two distinct categories. Even if we view the Logic as a complex exposition of the necessary categories of thought, much in the same way that Kant’s twelve categories in the Critique of Pure Reason constitute the basic conditions of any experience whatsoever, Hegel here suggests that actuality and possibility are not separate categories in their own right, but are rather aspects of the same category. This is important to Hegel’s argument, as we will see at premises 6 and 7, because of the contradiction that will emerge from what is initially an unsustainable identity between actuality and possibility. Rather than forming a distinct category, possibility is the implicit in-itself of actuality, and actuality is then the explicit externalization, or the outwardness of what it already implicitly is. However, Hegel is also saying that actuality is not only the externalization, but this whole process altogether, both the inwardness and the outwardness. The relationship between actuality and possibility is thus already quite complicated. While actuality and possibility are not simply one category, and in this way completely identical, they are also not obviously separable. Hegel says that “actuality contains possibility.” The verb “to contain” (enthalten) is an appropriate choice because it exposes the
complication. If possibility is what actuality implicitly is, then actuality always already contains possibility within it. Actuality holds within it all that possibility is.\footnote{If the claim “actuality contains possibility” implies that actuality is logically prior than possibility, then we can assume a certain affinity between this passage from Hegel and Aristotle’s various accounts of the logical and ontological priority of actuality. In division 8 of \textit{Metaphysics} Theta, Aristotle says that actuality is prior to potentiality in terms of account or definition (\textit{logos}) and in terms of substance (\textit{ousia}), and that it is prior in one sense and posterior in another sense in terms of time (\textit{chronos}). Actuality is prior in account because knowledge of the potential presupposes knowledge of the actual. Actuality is prior in terms of substance because actuality is the end or goal of potentiality. Just as what is in a state of becoming naturally moves toward the full maturity of its form, likewise potentiality is the state of movement or change toward the goal of actuality. Actuality, then, is the principle of potentiality; it is that which potentiality intends to be; it is the teleological goal of potentiality. In terms of time, actuality is \textit{posterior} in the sense that immaturity is the point-of-beginning and maturity is what the immature moves toward. But actuality is still prior to potentiality both in the sense of species and in the sense that a capacity is impossible if time is not spent to acquire the capacity. \textit{The Complete Works of Aristotle}, 1049b4-1050a16.}

First, Hegel says “actuality \textit{contains} possibility,” but then he says “actuality \textit{is} possibility.” He might be using \textit{zu enthalten} and \textit{zu sein} interchangeably, but I think there is an important tension between \textit{to contain} and \textit{to be} in this respect. Hegel has begun to expose the problem of the absolute relation, of how to think existence and essence together as one unity, which he will discuss in the “Absolute Relation” chapter that follows “Actuality.” On the one hand, if actuality \textit{contains} possibility, there is no position for possibility that is not already within actuality. This is why Hegel claims that possibility is the in-itself, and why actuality is both the inward and the outward. But on the other hand, if actuality \textit{is} possibility, then possibility is the “what,” the content, of actuality, and actuality is only the manifestation of that which possibility already implicitly is. The point is to think these two verbs together, to think the outside of possibility as within the actual, and to think existence and essence together as one unity. This problematic will become more clear as Hegel’s argument unfolds.

The last sentence of the quoted passage is particularly significant. “What is actual is possible.” It helps to translate this into a conditional: if something is actual, then it is possible.

We make a simple inference from the immediate, self-evidence of actuality, that whatever is
given immediately in actuality must have been possible. If I am actually reading the newspaper that sits on my desk, then reading the newspaper must have been possible, and cannot have been impossible. I am reading it (this is actual), so I must be the sort of person who can read, and the newspaper must be the sort of thing that can be read. All immediate actuality has this authority. Its possibility is obvious and cannot be contested. What is immediately actual is “already there,” and in this sense it must have been possible. This is why we attribute a certain status of truth to the immediate presence of what is “already there.” To attest to the actual existence of something is to expose that, prior to its being actual, this state of affairs was already possible. In this sense, that immediate actuality is “already there” adds logical depth to the initial position, that what is immediately actual is “merely there.” We can see in this way how premise 2 lends support to premise 1. By recognizing that everything actual is possible, we affirm the obvious truth of premise 1. Possibility is, in this sense, truth-affirming. Although we had already recognized actuality to be an existent, it is nevertheless the role of possibility to affirm this, that is, to offer evidence for why actuality exists.

But it is equally apparent that what is possible is not necessarily actual. Actuality entails possibility, but possibility does not in the same manner entail actuality. This is one of the basic points Fitting and Mendelsohn make in their book First-Order Modal Logic. “Now, \( p \supset \Diamond p \) (i.e., It’s actual, so it’s possible) is usually considered to be valid – Hughes and Cresswell (1968) call it the “Axiom of Possibility” – but its converse, \( \Diamond p \supset p \) (i.e., It’s possible, so it’s actual) is not.

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23 Hegel does not mention “experience” (Erfahrung) in these passages of the “Actuality” chapter because this is not how the Logic defines its subject matter. Nevertheless, I think it would be worthwhile to anticipate the logical analysis he sets up in the “Actuality” passages of the Logic with the “Science of Experience” project of the Phenomenology of Spirit. Such an analysis would, however, extend us beyond the scope of this current study. Two excellent books that analyze The Phenomenology of Spirit as a science of experience are Harris, Hegel: Phenomenology and System and Russon, Reading Hegel’s Phenomenology.
The entailment from actuality to possibility does not work in the reverse direction. The statement “if p, then possible p” is only a conditional, not a bi-conditional. While the statement “it rains” necessitates “it possibly rains,” the statement “it possibly rains” does not necessitate “it rains.” This is the case not only for truth functional sentences, but for entities and things in the world as well. Many things are possible that are not actual. Although I might buy a house next week, this possibility does not necessitate that I will actually buy a house. That this entailment does not work becomes even more obvious when we think of examples of what is merely possible, where the possibility as such has never been demonstrated as actual. Fantasy and science fiction stories offer countless examples of what is merely possible, of what has not yet and of might never become demonstrated in actuality. While we can speculate about these various possibilities, their mere projection in possibility cannot entail their actuality.

Later, at premise 10, Hegel will argue that everything possible exists, and in the way that actuality exists, which will in effect re-instate the question of whether possibility also necessarily entails actuality. But from Hegel’s discussion at premise 2, it is important only to establish the obvious absurdity of the inference from possibility to actuality. The advancement of the argument, especially at premise 18, where a “condition” is a possible that entails further actuals, nevertheless depends upon the initial self-evidence that possibility does not necessarily entail actuality. The main force of development behind premises 3 to 9 is to expose why thought must come to revise the relationship between actuality and possibility, to the point at which possibility

For an explanation of the “axiom of possibility” and the related “axiom of necessity,” see Hughes and Cresswell, An Introduction to Modal Logic, 28. “If p, then possibly p” holds only in systems with reflexivity built into them, such as S4 and S5, but does not hold in systems such as K4, where the only frame condition is transitivity. Systems without reflexivity, such as K (no frame conditions), D (only the serial condition), and K4 (only the transitivity condition), cannot establish “if p, then possibly p” because there may not be access to the actual world. In First Order Modal Logic, Fitting and Mendelsohn discuss this in terms of the related necessity axiom, “if p is necessary, then p is actual.” Once accessibility relations are brought in, this says that if P is true at every accessible possible world, then it is true at the real world. For this to remain valid, the real world must be accessible to itself... But we could have defined the accessibility relation differently, so that the real world is not accessible to itself. In such a setting this formula is not valid.” 9-10.
does exist in the way that actuality exists. This will become apparent as we proceed.
3) If what is actual is possible, then the possible is the reflection of the actual into itself.

“2. Diese Möglichkeit ist die in sich reflectirte Wirklichkeit. Aber diß selbst erste Reflectirteyn ist ebenfalls das Formelle, und hiemit überhaupt nur die Bestimmung der Identität mit sich oder des Ansichseyns überhaupt.” (WL, 382)

“The possibility is actuality reflected into itself. But even this first reflectedness is likewise formal and therefore in general only the determination of identity-with-self or of the in-itself generally.” (SL, 542-543)

Hegel claims that the first and most primary function of possibility is only to be the reflection of actuality into itself. Actuality is already existence, so the role that possibility plays is then only to affirm this existence after the fact. It is obvious that if I am actually reading the newspaper, then this is possible. There seems to be a kind of redundancy here. It would seem that the possible does not add anything to the actual. It just affirms the identity-with-self of the actual, which is already there. This works for entities as well as propositions. If I am actually reading the newspaper, this could not be impossible. Look at the horse over there in the barn. Horses are possible. “A”, so “A” is possible.

But this simple role as identity-with-self is more significant than one might think. If there were no such thing as reflected determinations, that is, if we were unable to infer possibility from actuality, we would think of actuality only in terms of the immediate surface, as in the Doctrine of Being, the actuality that simply is. While this is right, actuality simply is, we recognize in the found authority of the actual, not only its surface immediacy, but equally its emergence into itself through the process of its actualization. The problematic of whether possibility exists arises precisely from this seemingly circular claim that actuality emerges into itself from the process of actualization. At this point in the argument, there should seem to be no position for possibility, as if actuality were emerging directly out of itself.
The reason why Hegel places the “Actuality” chapter in the *Doctrine of Essence* and not in the *Doctrine of Being* is because the immediate actuality of what is “already there” appears as the process of actualization from a prior source, from what is possible. If actuality did not have possibility over against it as its reflected determination, we would be unable to recognize from this that actuality has emerged into itself from a prior source, and then actuality would be much more like surface-level being than a category that belongs in the *Doctrine of Essence*.

If actuality entails possibility, then possibility is the most basic condition for any actuality whatsoever. Possibility is in this sense a necessary requirement for actuality. Take the possibility away, and there goes the actuality as well. Just as actuality entails possibility (by modus ponens), in the sense that if we suppose something is actual, then it must be possible, likewise something that is not possible is not actual (by modus tollens), in the sense that if we suppose something is not possible, then it is not actual. Again, if it is not possible to read the newspaper, this cannot be actual.

Nevertheless, possibility is not a sufficient requirement for actuality. If it were both necessary and sufficient, then possibility would entail actuality because the mere possibility of something would be sufficient enough to secure its actuality. This is why Hegel does not say that possibility is the identity of actuality, but rather of actuality when it is reflected into itself (*in sich reflectirte Wirklichkeit*). As the process of reflection, possibility is only the affirmation that actuality is itself. Possibility lets actuality be, like a mirror that reflects and affirms the identity of that which looks at itself through it. Possibility is like an endless mirror that has no edge; it stands against the self as an other only to show that the self is itself. Possibility is not the sort of other that stands against actuality and affirms its own identity as something that actuality is not. Rather, possibility is just the mirror-other of actuality, an other who is not an other, but is only
the reflection-into-self of actuality. Possibility is this outside that is inside, an echo, a mirror, an affirmation.

Since it is a necessary but not a sufficient requirement of actuality, possibility has no status other than as the operation of actuality into itself. It would seem then that possibility is only the “yes” of actuality as existence, but that it does not itself exist. Immediate actuality simply appears before us, and we affirm the truth of this in possibility. I go to the barn and the horse is simply there in actuality. I affirm the truth of this, and at the same time give authority to “what is,” by reflecting that what is actual has emerged into actuality from possibility.

However, there is something quite significant to this seemingly innocuous point. From what would seem to be the redundancy of possibility’s function for actuality, Hegel discovers an important point-of-transition. If possibility is the reflection of actuality into itself, this is because actuality must “risk” that it is not what it is. Possibility is then both the “yes” of affirmation, but equally the risk of the “no.” Actuality obviously entails possibility. But the non-existence – that this actuality could not have been – is equally entailed in the affirmation. Hegel discovers that in affirming the actual, the possible exposes the actual to the other that it is not, and in this way is the “maybe” of the actual, both the “yes” and the “no” together.
Remark 1: Kant’s Argument from Modal Experience

In *The Critique of Pure Reason* under the heading the “Postulates of Empirical Thinking in General,” Kant thematizes the modal categories by arguing that what is possible is that which stands in agreement with the formal conditions of experience. Possibility does not extend beyond experience, but rather exists as the coincidence of the actual and agrees with it in every case. To this end, Kant defines all three modal categories (leaving the category of contingency out of his analysis) in terms of experience:

1. Whatever agrees with the formal conditions of experience (in accordance with intuition and concepts) is **possible**.
2. That which is connected with the material conditions of experience (of sensation) is **actual**.\(^{25}\)
3. That whose connection with the actual is determined in accordance with general conditions of experience is (exists) **necessarily**.\(^{26}\)

Although it might seem plausible to assume that possibility does not need to agree with actuality, in the sense that many things do seem possible that are not actual, Kant claims that this notion of mere possibility which would seem to operate beyond any experience whatsoever leads only to the dispositions of dogmatic metaphysics. To assert that possibility does not need to agree with actuality is to engage in those debates about the nature of reality which Kant finds quite misleading, whether this is the realist who attempts to investigate what things are “really like” beyond the subject’s experience, or the material idealist (such as Kant attributes to Descartes and

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\(^{25}\) At the end of “The Postulates of Empirical Thinking in General,” Kant states this definition of actuality again but in terms of perception. A234.

\(^{26}\) Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, A218/B265-6, Guyer 321. Cf. Kant’s modal definitions in his description of the twelve categories. In the first table of categories, Kant lists possibility under the “problematic,” actuality under the “assertoric,” and necessity under the “apodictic.” Here he says that while the categories subsumed under quantity (the universal, particular, and singular), quality (the affirmative, negative, and infinite), and relation (the categorical, hypothetical, and disjunctive) each contribute to the concept of the judgment, the categories subsumed under modality are different in that they do not contribute anything to the content of the object, but rather effect only the copula of the judgment. Although Kant defines possibility as arbitrary, contrasting this with the actual, which he defines as truth, he also recognizes that some merely problematic judgments, which are themselves false, nevertheless contribute to the “conditions of the cognizance of truth” (209) since by giving an account of false paths, possibility can help to orient us to the truth. A71/B96- A77/B103, Guyer 206- 210.
Berkeley) who rejects all *a priori* knowledge claims as either indemonstrable or impossible.\(^{27}\)

Attempts to recognize possibilities that are not grounded in actuality present us only with what Kant calls “figments of the brain,” which, while they are not formally self-contradictory, cannot establish the necessary *a priori* conditions of experience in terms of possibility. Mere possibilities appear only through the conflation of the *a priori* with the *a posteriori*. From within experience, many things seem to be possible that exist beyond any agreement with actuality.\(^{28}\)

But Kant goes on to claim that the modes of modality require the subject’s experience,\(^{29}\) not in order to expose empirically how things could have been otherwise, but to evaluate the necessary modes of modality, which do not exist in the constitution of things, but only in the subjective synthesis.\(^{30}\)

Hegel probably had Kant’s modal definitions in mind when he initially drew up the steps of his argument in the “Actuality” chapter. When one contrasts the two texts, what stands out most obviously is that Kant lists the definitions from the outset, whereas Hegel begins from formal actuality, and only then deduces possibility, contingency, and necessity. Throughout the *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*, Hegel generally rejects the strategy where a philosopher

\(^{27}\) See Kant’s “Refutation of Idealism,” which is included in the B edition as part of “The Postulates of Empirical Thinking in General.” Material idealism is “the theory that declares the existence of objects in space outside us to be either merely doubtful and indemonstrable, or else false and impossible; the former is the problematic idealism of Descartes, who declares only one empirical assertion (*assertio*), namely I am, to be indubitable; the latter is the dogmatic idealism of Berkeley, who declares space, together with all the things to which it is attached as an inseparable condition, to be something that is impossible in itself, and who therefore also declares things in space to be merely imaginary.” Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, B274. Guyer 326.

\(^{28}\) Three examples that Kant offers of this kind of mere possibility include something that is between matter and a thinking being, such as that which is present in space but which does not fill it, someone who can see the future and not only deduce it, and someone who can read others’ minds. Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, A222-223/B269-270. Guyer 324.

\(^{29}\) Kant revolutionized conceptions of modality, as Longuenesse puts it, because he “no longer defined it from the point of view of God, but from the point of view of the cognizing subject.” Hegel’s *Critique of Metaphysics*, 161.

\(^{30}\) “The principles of modality are not, however, objective-synthetic, since the predicates of possibility, actuality, and necessity do not in the least augment the concept of which they are asserted in such a way as to add something to the representation of the object. But since they are nevertheless always synthetic, they are so only subjectively.” Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, A233/B286. Guyer 332.
begins from a set of axioms or definitions and then goes on to demonstrate various conclusions. However, since Kant offers such a detailed exposition of each definition, we can assume that his intention is not to presuppose axioms but only to state the results of his analysis at the very start of the chapter for clarity.

Whether Kant assumes his definitions of the modal categories from the outset is one type of question, but whether he performs a deduction of the modal categories as Hegel proposes one must do is yet another type of question. If Kant were to perform a deduction, then the order from which he analyzes each modal category would be important. Then it would be significant that Kant begins from possibility whereas Hegel begins from actuality. But I doubt Kant had this intention. He rather talks about possibility, actuality, and necessity as if they were each three exclusively different ways to present an object. An object is always either possible or actual. If the object is actual, it is either necessary or not necessary. In this sense, it does not matter whether Kant begins from possibility, actuality, or necessity since with each category, the subject undergoes a different mode with the object. For Hegel, on the other hand, that actuality comes first, and that possibility arises from this, is quite important to his project. An object is not only possible or only actual or only necessary. By claiming that thought discovers possibility from immediate formal actuality, and that formal contingency and then formal necessity must follow from this, Hegel has committed himself to a deduction of the modal categories that neither presupposes axiomatic definitions nor a predetermined separation of each category from the

31 Hegel objects to Spinoza’s strategy in the Ethics far more emphatically than he objects to Kant’s. On Hegel’s account, Spinoza’s initial argument for the one substance begins from a complex network of unsupported and unjustified definitions. Before he begins his argument, Spinoza lists eight definitions, then seven axioms, and only from these does he attempt to demonstrate his conclusion from the singularity of substance. See the “Spinoza” chapter in Hegel’s Lectures on the History of Philosophy, 252-290 (especially 263-264).
32 For an explanation of why Hegel would reject Kant for beginning from possibility rather than actuality, see Longuenesse, 121. “It is wrong, according to Hegel, to start with the definition of the possible, for this is never where thought begins. Even Kant…incurs the reproach of having fallen into “empty representation” and defined the possible before the actual.” Longuenesse then refers as evidence to a statement Hegel makes in the Lectures on the History of Philosophy: “Possibility should come second. But in abstract thinking, empty representing comes first.”
others.33 Of course, this Hegelian-style deduction offers all sorts of other problems and complexities. These include problems of method that the deduction must face straight away, such as why Hegel begins from actuality rather than possibility or necessity, and how he comes to justify the exact order of the deduction as he proposes it -- first formal modality: actuality, possibility, contingency, and necessity; second real modality: actuality, possibility, necessity, and contingency; third absolute modality: actuality, necessity, possibility, and finally necessity and contingency together. These also include certain complications that extend beyond the issue of how to justify the order of the deduction, such as the contradiction between actuality and possibility that we will soon discover with Hegel at premise 7.

33 Cf. Di Giovanni. Throughout “The Category of Contingency in the Hegelian Logic,” Di Giovanni treats Hegel’s modal theory from the Kantian strategy. An object is at first given and then thought attempts to ascertain whether the object is actual or possible. I am critical of this reading because I do not see how to establish Hegel’s argument from the categorical separation of actuality and possibility that Di Giovanni proposes. See 182, 185, and 186.
4) But if the possible is only the reflection of the actual, then it lacks itself and requires its completion in actuality.

“Die Möglichkeit enthält daher die zwey Momente: erstlich das positive, daß es ein Reflectirtseyn in sich selbst ist; aber indem es in der absoluten Form herabgesetzt ist zu einem Momente, so gilt das Reflectirtseyn-in-sich nicht mehr als Wesen, sondern hat zweyten die negative Bedeutung, daß die Möglichkeit ein mangelhaftes ist, auf ein anderes, die Wirklichkeit, hinweist, und an dieser sich ergänzt.” (WL, 382)

“Possibility therefore contains two moments: first, the positive moment that it is a reflectedness-into-self; but since it is reduced in the absolute form to a moment, the reflectedness-into-self no longer counts as essence, but has, secondly, the negative meaning that possibility lacks something, that it points to an other, to actuality in which it completes itself.” (SL, 543)

This first, primary function of possibility, as the mere reflection of actuality into itself, leads to the further inference that what is merely possible lacks itself and requires its manifestation as actuality in order to complete itself. Premise 4 is a slight development upon premise 3. It gives evidence for why the inference from actuality to possibility is not simply tautological. “What is actual is possible” is not tautological because the status of something possible is the status of something actual when it is not itself.\(^\text{34}\) Possibility serves a double function. On the one hand, it is the most basic condition for any actuality whatsoever, in the sense that something actual, if it were not possible, could not be actual. This is what Hegel calls the positive moment of possibility, the simple reflectedness-into-self of actuality. But on the other hand, since possibility is only the in-itself of actuality, to recognize something as possible is always to recognize it as incomplete, as the other of what it is.

Hegel separates possibility into these two moments, but the separation is misleading. Possibility does not “contain two moments,” one positive and one negative, in the way that we might think of a person’s character as being in one way genuine, in another way flawed, or in the

\(^{34}\) Di Giovanni says this well. Possibility is actuality when it is merely adumbrated. “The Category of Contingency,” 183.
way that a table might be blue on its surface but brown underneath. On the contrary, Hegel must mean that it is precisely because possibility is the in-itself of actuality that possibility is also the incompleteness of actuality. This is the incremental development from premise 3 to premise 4: while possibility reflects actuality into itself, and is thus the affirmation of its self-certainty and truth, left on its own, possibility presents only the incomplete status of actuality, of actuality when it lacks itself. Possibility is in this sense not its own end but only the means toward its end in actuality. This is why Hegel says that as reflectedness-into-self, possibility “no longer counts as essence” but is only a reductive moment of the actuality, which is the complete totality.

The difficulty in the argument is to understand why the truth-affirming function of possibility is not only tautological, but rather requires the negative moment of possibility as the other of the actual. If something is actual, then of course it is possible, but this leads Hegel to conclude that in affirming actuality, possibility posits the opposite of the actual. In other words, the affirmation of the possible requires the falsifiability of the actual. The difficulty is to think the positive truth-affirming function of possibility as at the same time the negative function of possibility, as actuality when it is the other of itself.

Hegel does not properly explain why the possibility that affirms and the possibility that lacks each come out of the other, but we can assume that his point depends upon a theory of identity in non-identity. Whereas a classic theory of identity might begin from the seemingly self-evident assumption that something simply is what it is, and simply is not what it is not, the negative function of possibility suggests that Hegel has a more complicated theory of the affirmation of identity in mind, one that requires the co-positing of identity and non-identity. Just as the identity of something depends upon the non-existence of a difference that the identity must exclude so that it is what it is – likewise, actuality is existence only if the non-existence of what it
is not set against it in possibility. This is why possibility posits both the affirmation and the negation of actuality, and this is why actuality requires both of these moments to be itself.\(^{35}\)

It would seem then that by the positive and negative moments, Hegel means that possibility affirms the truth of actuality only if it equally affirms the falsifiability of the same actuality. In this sense the category of possibility is both what the actual could be, but also the exact opposite of the actual, what it itself could not be. Again, if reading the newspaper is possible, this means both that I can actually read it, but also that I can not read it. The reason why Hegel then claims that possibility “lacks itself” and “requires actuality to complete itself” is because the co-positing of the affirming and the negating function place the possibility at a far distance from its result in actuality. From this distance, the possible is the actual, but the actual that is not yet, and might not become, what it is.

\(^{35}\) Cf. L. E. J. Brouwer’s theory of Intuitionism, which critiques the assumption that there is an equivalency between the principle of identity and the principle of double negation, the law of the excluded middle, and the principle of non-contradiction. For his account of the debate, see Brouwer, “Intuitionism and Formalism,” 55-64.
5) If it only completes itself in actuality, then the possible is the comparing relation between the actual and the negation of the actual. Then the possible A contains the possible not A.\(^{36}\)

There is a slight gap in Hegel’s argument at this point in the text. He begins from the uncontroversial inference that if something is actual, then it is possible, but that left on its own, the possible is the incompleteness of the actual. From this double-function of possibility as both affirmation and lack, Hegel then turns to what would seem to be a further definition of possibility. Possibility is the comparing relation (die vergleichende Beziehung) between the actual and the negation of the actual. It is, however, not obvious from the text why this further definition develops from possibility as affirmation and lack. Hegel had called the positive and negative moments the moments of possibility, but if possibility is the comparing relation, then the positive and negative moments turn out instead to be the moments of actuality, and possibility turns out to be that which contains these moments. On my reading, that possibility lacks itself establishes a certain distance between the categories of possibility and actuality, and this distance re-positions possibility as the comparing relation between the actual and the negation of the actual. Possibility is then both the actual and the exact opposite of the actual. Let us return to the text, where Hegel posits the “A”, and begins to discuss how possibility leads from form to content. Here, he begins once again from the claim that if something is merely possible, then it is self-identical, but then (in the further paragraph) explains that if something is possible, it can be

\(^{36}\) Longuenesse discusses premise 5 (possibility is the comparing relation between A and not A) but in a different order. She attempts to place premise 5 after premises 6 and 7, as if Hegel’s definition of possibility as comparing relation were the result of the contradiction of actualizing A and not A as one unity. *Hegel’s Critique of Metaphysics*, 125. On my reading, premise 2 (what is actual is possible) and premise 5 (possibility is both A and not A) infer the contradiction at premise 7 (actualization cannot actualize the contrariety of possibility without contradiction), and this impossibility of actualizing the totality results in formal contingency at premise 10 and formal necessity at premise 13.
“A ist möglich, heißt so viel als A ist A. Insofern man sich nicht auf die Entwicklung des Inhalts einläßt, so hat dieser die Form der Einfachheit; erst durch die Auflösung desselben in seine Bestimmungen kommt der Unterschied an ihm hervor. Indem man sich an jene einfache Form hält, so bleibt der Inhalt ein mit sich identisches und daher ein Möglicher. Es ist aber damit eben so Nichts gesagt, als mit dem formellen identischen Satze.” (WL, 382)

“A is possible means only that A is A. In so far as nothing is done to develop the content, this has the form of simplicity; not until it is resolved into its determinations does difference emerge in it. So long as one sticks to this simple form, the content remains something identical with itself and therefore something possible. But to say this is equally to say nothing, just as in the formal law of identity.” (SL, 543)

Modality is *formal* if the relationship between actuality and possibility is only about identity and does not change the *content* of something or introduce difference. The possible is the self-integrity of the actual. If the sea battle is possible, then it would not break the logical coherence of the event if it were to become actual. In this sense, the possible is already predisposed to become actual. There is no difference added to the content of the possible when it becomes actual. But to say that the sea battle is possible is only to say that if it were to become actual, this would not be impossible — which is to say nothing at all. To say “A is possible” is to express only the most empty of determinations, that what is possible can be, because if it were to become actual, this would be no different than this content as possibility.


“Possibility as form determination posited as sublated possesses a content in general. This, as
possible, is an in-itself, which is at the same time a sublated in-itself or an otherness. Because, therefore, it is only a possible content, another and its opposite is equally possible. A is A; equally, -A is -A. These two statements each express the possibility of its content determination. But as these identical statements they are mutually indifferent; it is not posited in the one that the other too is added to it. Possibility is the comparing relation of both; in its determination as a reflection of the totality, possibility implies that the opposite too is possible. It is therefore the relating ground, that because A= A, therefore also -A = -A; in the possible A the possible not -A is also contained and it is this very relation which determines both as possible.” (SL, 544)

Hegel had just explained possibility in terms of self-identity, that if A is possible, then A is A. But directly after this, he claims that if A is possible, then it is not only identical-to-itself, but the opposite of its identity is equally possible. As the most general projection of content, possibility is then the relating ground between the two equally true yet empty articulations of the law of identity, that A= A but equally -A= -A. All possibilities of content are contained within these two articulations of the law of identity. The statement “if A is possible, then A is A” thus marks the initial transition from form to content, from formal modality to real modality. Because possibility relates the equally true and empty form determinations, A is A and -A is -A, the form itself contains all possible formulations of content-difference.

If A is possible, then -A is equally possible. Hegel claims from this that the possible A contains the possible -A within its own concept. The question, then, is whether the actuality of A, insofar as it is possibility, also contains in its own self-coherent identity the content of -A. This is precisely the problem that will drive Hegel’s deduction.

If Hegel were to propose at this point in the text that actuality and possibility are different kinds of categories, then it would be insignificant enough to conclude that the possible A contains the possible -A since this difference, which is a difference in kind, would rule out the further inference, that the actual A contains the actual -A. What is unusual at this point in the argument, however, is that he does not uphold this difference between actuality and possibility.
If what is actual is possible, and if the possibility of the actual contains the negation of the actual within its own concept, then the actual also contains the contrariety of the actual in its own form. This is what results because possibility is the relating ground between the actual and itself.

Obviously, the actual is only itself and not the opposite of itself; however, since what is actual is possible, the affirmation of the actual contains the equal possibility that it is the opposite of itself. Hegel thus draws his reader into a difficult paradox. Premises 6 and 7 will expose this paradox, and then premise 8 will discuss Hegel’s initial and inadequate resolution, which he calls “reflected actuality.”
Remark 2: Agamben on the Ability Not to Be

Hegel’s definition of possibility as the relating ground between the actual and the opposite of the actual can be viewed as a precursor to Giorgio Agamben’s work on potentiality, especially in terms of Agamben’s analysis in Nudities of the ability not to be. Here, Agamben argues that the ability not to be is as constitutive of possibility as the ability to be.\(^{37}\) Similar to Hegel’s claim that possibility is always both the can and the can not of actuality, Agamben claims that every potentiality (he uses the term potentiality rather than possibility) is also impotentiality. By “impotentiality,” he does not mean “not being able to” but rather “being able not to.”\(^{38}\) Agamben sees the “can not” as a potentiality in its own right. Just as someone might have the ability to build, this person can also exercise the ability not to build. Exercising the ability not to be is, for Agamben, how to undermine the traditional authority that something must become actual.\(^{39}\) We have the ability to withhold actuality. The strength of potentiality lies not

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\(^{37}\) The Chapter “On What We Can Not Do” contains one of Agamben’s contributions to theories of potentiality, but there are many other contributions as well. The “Potentiality and Law” chapter of Homo Sacer offers an ontological-modal basis for the political sovereign paradox, in the form of an analysis of Aristotle’s Metaphysics over the constitutive ambiguity between whether actuality or potentiality is the more primary category. For an explanation of this argument, see my essay “The Modality of Sovereignty.” Agamben also emphasizes the importance of “the can not” in various related concepts throughout his corpus. It appears in the “whatever” (The Coming Community, 9), in the relation between example and exception (Homo Sacer, 21-23), in the concepts of “inoperativeness” and “openness,” and in the “As if” and “Exigency” sections of The Time that Remains, as the concept of “messianic modality” (35-39). It also appears prominently in his collection of essays Potentialities. Leland De la Durantaye, a major commentator of Agamben, goes so far as to call Agamben the philosopher of potentiality. Giorgio Agamben: A Critical Introduction, 4.

\(^{38}\) Agamben here seems to conflate the terminology between the impotent and the potential not to be, that is, between the cannot and the can not. For example, Agamben writes, “[Today’s man] has become blind not to his capacities but to his incapacities, not to what he can do but to what he cannot, or can not, do.” By “incapacities,” Agamben probably means “the capacity not to be.” However, it is not clear whether his equation of the two terms is for some reason intentional. But since he does not conflate the conceptual distinction, but in fact maintains this distinction consistently throughout the essay, whether he writes “cannot” or “can not” is only a minor distraction to his argument. For an explanation of the conceptual difference between the cannot and the can not, see Aristotle’s De Interpretatione (chapter 12: 21a34- 22a12), and my discussion of this at premise 6.

\(^{39}\) Agamben likes to illustrate this strategy through Melville’s character Bartleby. Bartleby effectively suspends the potential from its end in actualization by employing the modal undecidability of the “I would prefer not to.” See “Bartleby, or on Contingency” in On Potentiality. Also see the “Potentiality and Law” chapter of Homo Sacer. For Melville’s story, see Great Short Works of Herman Melville, 39- 74. For an article on Agamben’s appropriation of the Bartleby story, see Jessica Whyte’s “I Would Prefer Not To: Bartleby and the Potentiality of the Law,” 309-24.
only in the position of becoming-actual, but equally in the position of not-becoming-actual.

This insight works against the assumption that if there is potential, this is the potential only to be actuality, as if the potential not to be were really not a potential at all, but only a deviation in the process towards actuality. Agamben thinks that human beings are different from other animals precisely in this respect. Human beings can “see darkness.”\(^\text{40}\) They can choose not to do or be. He writes, “while fire can only burn, and other living beings are only capable of their own specific potentialities – they are capable of only this or that behavior inscribed into their biological vocation – human beings are the animals capable of their own impotentiality.”\(^\text{41}\)

The main argument from “On What We Can Not Do” then comes in the form of a prognosis about the contemporary age. Although human beings are the animals who are capable of not acting, we have become alienated in the contemporary age from this capacity. We now act as if we can do “anything.” But this is precisely the loss of what makes us human, the potentiality to resist in actuality the process of actualizing this or that ability. Agamben prescribes that in this age we need to become sensitive again to the “can not” of potentiality and to our ability to resist. He writes, “those who are separated from their own impotentiality lose… first of all the capacity to resist.”\(^\text{42}\)

While Hegel often discusses possibility as the possibility to become actual, we can see in his statements about possibility as the relating ground between “the can” and “the can not” a certain affinity with Agamben’s argument. Certainly, for Hegel, the possible on its own is incomplete and requires its end in actuality. But this does not rule out the equal possibility that

\(^{40}\) In “On Potentiality” Agamben writes, "If potentiality were, for example, only the potentiality for vision and if it existed only as such in the actuality of light, we could never experience darkness (nor hear silence, in the case of the potentiality to hear). But human beings can, instead, see shadows (to skotos), they can experience darkness: they have the potential not to see, the possibility of privation" Potentialities, 181.

\(^{41}\) Agamben, Nuditities, 44.

\(^{42}\) Agamben, Nuditities, 45.
what requires its end in actuality might nevertheless resist this end by exercising the equal possibility that what can become actual can not become actual. After all, Agamben is not claiming that what is of potential \textit{does not have its end in actuality}. He is only claiming that this potential is equally the potential not to be. Likewise, it would be a misinterpretation to infer from Hegel’s statement - that possibility is always only \textit{the possibility to be actual} - that he does not recognize the possibility “not to be” as constitutive of possibility itself.
6) If the possible A contains the possible -A, then everything is possible but everything is impossible.

“So ist sie der verhältnißlose, unbestimmte Behälter für Alles überhaupt. – Im Sinne dieser formellen Möglichkeit ist alles möglich, was sich nicht widerspricht; das Reich der Möglichkeit ist daher die grenzenlose Mannichfaltigkeit. Aber jedes Mannichfaltige ist in sich und gegen anderes bestimmt und hat die Negation an ihm; überaupt geht die gleichgültige Verschiedenheit in die Entgegensetzung über; die Entgegensetzung aber ist der Widerspruch. Daher ist Alles eben so sehr ein widersprechendes und daher unmögliches.” (WL, 382)

“As such it [possibility] is the relationless, indeterminate receptacle for everything whatever. In the sense of this formal possibility everything is possible that is not self-contradictory; hence the realm of possibility is a boundless multiplicity. But each of these manifold entities is determinate within itself and as against another and contains negation; in general indifferent diversity passes over into opposition; but opposition is contradiction. Therefore everything is just as much something contradictory and therefore impossible.” (SL, 543)

If something is possible, then it can be but equally it can not be; therefore, everything is possible. The can be and the can not be are equally possible. When we hold the concept of possibility together as one unity, we move between the particular level of “something” and the general level of “everything.” As this unity between being and non-being, possibility is a relationless, indeterminate receptacle, open to the being, the nothing, and the becoming of anything and everything, of any content whatsoever.

Possibility is the relationless, indeterminate receptacle for everything whatsoever – with one exception. Nothing is possible that contradicts itself. Possibility is the mere form determination of identity-with-self, or A= A, which means that possibility can receive everything and anything that is not self-contradictory. The self cannot be both what it is and what it is not in the same place, at the same time, or in the same manner.43 In this way, Hegel begins from the

43 For Aristotle’s discussion of the principle of non-contradiction, see Book IV of the Metaphysics. At the end of division 3, Aristotle says that the principle of non-contradiction is the most evident of all principles. He defines non-contradiction in terms of impossibility when he writes: “It is impossible that contrary attributes should belong at the same time to the same subject.” Aristotle, The Complete Works, 1005b 26- 27. In division 4, Aristotle entertains the
classic definition of possibility as whatever does not entail contradiction.\footnote{Houlgate points out that because it is the identity of actuality into itself, possibility equally exposes the non-contradictoriness of $-A = -A$. “Surely, the possibility of not-$A$ rests just as much on non-contradictoriness (namely, that of not-$A$) as does the possibility of $A$.” “Necessity and Contingency,” 39-40.}

The equivalent of this is that if something is both identical-with-itself and not identical-with-itself, then it is not possible. If $A$ is both $A$ and $-A$, then $A$ is not possible. However, as Hegel had just established (at premise 5), if something is possible, then it can be \textit{and} it can not be. If $A$ is possible, then both $A$ and $-A$ are possible. Herein lies the formal problematic between actuality and possibility, which will lead to Hegel’s argument that actualization cannot sustain the terms of possibility. On the one hand, everything is possible that does not entail contradiction; but on the other hand, the possible itself is the actual in its contrariety, both the actual and the opposite of this as one unity. How can possibility be both contraries if it does not entail contradiction?

To investigate this question, we will need to understand what Hegel means by “boundless multiplicity.” He claims that boundless multiplicity is the result of the formal contrariety of possibility, that what is possible both can \textit{and} can not be. But although it is boundless, this multiplicity retains a certain determination because it is Hegel’s term for possibility where the only limit is contradiction. This limit is what creates the determination in the first place. Hegel has explained this movement between limit and determination early on in the \textit{Logic}, in the chapter on “Limit” in the \textit{Doctrine of Being} (BK 1, SN 1, CH 2, DV 2) when he claims that the limit between something and its other determines each in relation to one another. Likewise,
limit “if something is possible, then it cannot contradict itself” is what determines possibility as **multiplicity**. But this means that multiplicity is both the boundlessness and the boundedness of possibility, boundless in the sense that formal possibility is like an empty container that holds all sorts of things together without changing the content of what it contains, bounded in the sense that the diversity of possibility is a determinate diversity set against opposition. Since the term multiplicity retains both the connotation that “everything is possible” and also that “everything that is possible is a determinate entity,” we discover a certain tension between the boundlessness of possibility and its boundedness. How can the boundlessness and the boundedness of possibility come from the same source? This is another version of the question, how can possibility be both contraries if it does not entail contradiction?

To understand what “formal multiplicity” means and how it could retain both connotations of boundlessness and boundedness, we will need to understand in what sense non-contradiction restricts possibility. It is important to recognize that the difference between the “can be” and the “can not be” of possibility is not the difference between possibility and impossibility (the cannot be). We should be careful not to conflate the negative moment of possibility with impossibility. Aristotle anticipates the conflation of the “can not be” and the “cannot be” in *De Interpretatione* \(^{45}\) when he explains that the opposite of “it is possible for something to be” is not “it is possible for something not to be”, but rather “it is not possible (impossible) for something to be.” Aristotle uses the example of walking. If somebody has the capacity to walk, then this person can choose “to walk” or “not to walk.” It would be a mistake to say that when this person chooses not to walk, then this person “cannot walk.” There is a difference between the **contrariety** of the possible and the **contrary** of the possible. What is

possible is of contrariety in the sense that it both can and can not be. But the contrary of the possible is the impossible, the cannot. Possibility itself contains both the “yes” and the “no” of actuality; it contains contrariety in its own concept; the “yes” and the “no” are one unity, and it is this unity of being and non-being that actuality actualizes. Impossibility, on the other hand, is the opposite of possibility, a seizure or erasure of being and non-being. Self-contradiction is the limit of possibility, a limit that something possible cannot transgress. What is possible can and can not be, and in this way it is open to everything; however, there is no way to transgress this relating ground between being and non-being.

Both the positive and negative moments of possibility are equally possible. This means that everything is possible. However, on the other hand, what is possible cannot be both itself and its other without making a determinate other of the self and positing diversity. So, everything is possible, but “the” everything is impossible. If I can walk, then either I walk or I do not walk. Either is possible. Yet both together are equally impossible. If I can walk, then I cannot both walk and not walk. The limit of contradiction shows that everything is as certainly impossible since everything cannot happen together. Both walking and not walking are equally impossible when taken together as one unity.

When Hegel concludes that “everything is just as much something impossible and self-contradictory,” we can assume that he means “everything” is possible but that “the” everything, if taken together as one actuality, is impossible since this would mean the actualization of contraries, which would be contradictory.\textsuperscript{46} We can assume he does not mean that each

\textsuperscript{46} Commentators have offered a great deal of explanation to justify Hegel’s seemingly paradoxical claim that “everything is possible” and “everything is just as much something contradictory and therefore impossible.” The main branch of this comes from Burbidge, who suggests that Hegel means everything together is impossible, stressing the universality of everything, while at the same time “everything” is possible, stressing the mere possibility of each particular thing. \textit{Hegel's Systematic Contingency}, 19. Stekeler-Weithofer makes a similar observation when he calls this passage a “title sentence,” objects that Hegel’s choice of words makes the passage
individual thing is just as certainly impossible as it is possible. However, I think it is still important to keep this other textual interpretation in mind. While each actual-existent is possible and non-contradictory, each is possible because the contrary of the existent is equally possible. In this sense, possibility posits “diversity” as the expression that it ought to be “the” everything. But since actualization cannot maintain “the” everything, because what is actual cannot be both itself and the contrary of itself, what becomes actual has against it a diversity of others. Opposition thus occurs as the inner-structure of the diversity because the positive and the negative moments of possibility are both actual-existents, but cannot maintain themselves together as one unity. This opposition, in turn, is contradiction because the diversity is just an expression of possibility as the reflection of actuality-into-itself. In other words, the opposition-diversity of something set against another something is an external expression that possibility ought to be the totality of form, and that as the totality of form, possibility is the indivisible unity of A and -A, i.e. the complete actuality, not only one side or the other.

The reason why possibility falls into diversity, why diversity falls into opposition, and

sound more paradoxical than it is, and then, like Burbidge, distinguishes between “the” impossibility of everything and the possibility of each individual thing. Hegel’s Analytic Pragmatism, 222-223. McTaggart also says that Hegel’s language is misleading. On McTaggart’s account, Hegel means that possibility is only impossible if it contains no reference to actuality whatsoever. A Commentary on Hegel’s Logic, 164. While I think this branch of commentary is right, I also claim, as I will demonstrate at premise 6, that Hegel intends the passage to be paradoxical since the contradiction between the possibility of every particular thing and the impossibility of the possible itself is a motor for the rest of Hegel’s argument. In this respect, Lampert really interprets Hegel well when he emphasizes how polemic the passage is, arguing that “the function of a possibility is to express the totality, but that no one possibility can express everything the totality expresses without generating contradictions. Each possibility thus fails to express all that it itself expresses.” Hegel on Contingency,” 75. Similarly, Longuenesse claims that the controversy in the passage is what leads Hegel beyond the initial definition of possibility as the mere principle of identity to a definition of possibility that introduces contradiction. Critique of Metaphysics, 123-124. Hegel calls possibility the ought-to-be of the totality of form when he writes: “The possible is the reflected reflectedness-into-self, or the identical simply as a moment of the totality, and hence is also determined as being not in itself; it has therefore the second determination of being only a possible and the ought-to-be of the totality of form.” WL, 382/SL, 543.

Lampert’s reading of possibility as the “totality of form” suggests that things are only possible if they can express the totality, and that things are not possible if they cannot do this. If Hegel means that there are only certain types of content that can express the totality, this would complicate his initial point about boundless multiplicity, that everything and anything is possible as long as there is no contradiction. But if Hegel only means that the form must be such that what is possible expresses the totality, one can still recognize boundless multiplicity in this.
why opposition falls into contradiction, is because Hegel treats actuality and possibility as one unity rather than as separate categories. He presents us with what Zizek describes in *Tarrying with the Negative* as the logic of “oppositional determination.” This is the term Zizek attributes to Hegel for the passage from opposition to contradiction, wherein we recognize the essence as one instance of itself, and the instance as the essence.\footnote{“We pass from opposition to contradiction through the logic of what Hegel called “oppositional determination”: when the universal, common ground of the two opposites “encounters itself” in its oppositional determination, i.e., in one of the terms of the opposition.” Zizek, *Tarrying with the Negative*, 132.} The relationship between actuality and possibility produces a similar logic. Hegel’s point is not that each existent actual is self-contradictory in the sense that each gains its determination by excluding the contrariety of its other, and thereby indirectly including its other as its own content. If actuality and possibility fall into contradiction under the logic of “oppositional determination,” this means, rather, that each actual-existent is self-contradictory because each is “the” everything, or it is not possible.

The point, then, is not simply to claim that the actual A contains the actual -A in its own concept (in the way that the A and the -A are contained in possibility), but rather to establish that if the actual A is possible, it is the complete totality of “the” everything, and it is really this totality that makes it possible as one instance of itself. Obviously, something is what it is and is not what it is not. The horse greeting me from the barn is a horse and not a cow or a tree. The horse is not both a horse and not a horse. This would make no sense. However, what is equally obvious is that this particular horse is the actuality of a possibility, and that as possibility, the horse carries the form of totality and not only a moment of the totality. This is why “actuality” in the larger sense of Hegel’s meaning (“actuality is the name of the section as well as the chapter) is the transposition of existence and essence together as one unity.
7) Actualization cannot maintain the contradiction that what is actual is identical with the possible, where the possible is both the actual and the negation of the actual as one unity.

“Als diese Beziehung aber, daß in dem einen Möglichen, auch sein anderes enthalten is, ist sie der Widerspruch, der sich aufhebt. Da sie nun ihrer Bestimmung nach das Reflectirte, und wie sich gezeigt hat, das sich aufhebende Reflectirte ist, so ist sie somit auch das Unmittelbare, und damit wird sie Wirklichkeit.” (WL, 383)

“This relation, in which the one possible also contains its other, is the contradiction that sublates itself. Now, according to its determination it is the reflected, and as we have seen, the self-sublating reflected; it is therefore also the immediate and thus becomes actuality.” (SL, 545)

Since possibility contains both the identity of the existent-actual and the contrary of the existent-actual, and contains both equally as one unit (as contrariety), everything is possible that does not contradict itself; however, the totality of everything is just as much something impossible and self-contradictory. This is the case because possibility harbors self-contradiction within the function that it serves as actuality’s identity-with-self. If something is possible, then it can be but equally can not be. Actuality cannot hold together what is for possibility one unity. This is why Hegel claims provocatively:

“Die Möglichkeit ist daher an ihr selbst auch der Widerspruch, oder sie ist die Unmöglichkeit." (WL, 383)

“Possibility is therefore in its own self contradiction, or it is impossibility.” (SL, 544)

We can deduce this straight away from the self-evidence of premises 1 and 2. On the one hand, actuality is immediate existence, which means that everything is actual, and that the category of possibility is only a reflection contained completely within the totality-existence of actuality. However, on the other hand, what is actual is a possible that contains the identity of actuality by way of its negation. To actualize possibility, in the strictest sense, would be to actualize both being and non-being as one unit. But then actualization would be impossible. The
actualization of possibility would be the actualization of contradiction. After all, the function of
the negative “can not” of possibility is supposed to be the function of identity, and possibility is
supposed to serve as the identity-reflection of actuality, not as that by which the actual reflects
itself as self-contradictory, as both identical and non-identical. The negative “can not” of
possibility is supposed to serve as the essential canceling-process which posits what does not
exist so that actuality does exist. But in the process of canceling out the contrary of what does
not exist, actuality appeals to the nature of possibility, as if it could actualize both the affirmation
and the negation contained within possibility. If possibility is merely the reflection process of
actuality into-itself, then possibility is just an account of actuality. Then actuality must contain
possibility completely within it, not as a category separate from the actual, that is merely held
within, but as precisely what the actual is.

Since actuality cannot maintain the contrariety of possibility, actuality would seem to
break off from itself. This means that the actuality of possibility is both everything and less than
what it is. Actuality is everything in the sense that it is the immediate existence of essence, and
less than everything in the sense that it cannot maintain the contrariety of possibility. This shows
that possibility is also less than what it should be. It is both the essence and merely a moment of
this essence. It is both the totality of all actual formations of content, yet it lacks itself and
requires its completion in actuality.

To avoid this contradiction, an un-Hegelian theory of modality would attempt at this
point to separate the category of possibility from the category of actuality. By establishing
axiomatic definitions for actuality and possibility (that are pre-given, not produced from each
other), this view would attempt to dismiss the contradiction by closing each category off from
the other. Actuality would remain the more concrete, particular, primary side, and possibility
would remain the more spectral, hypothetical, subservient side of modality. Relations between the two categories would sustain only the most minimal contact, just enough to produce conversions and transitions. Further concessions of contact between the two categories might establish Hegel’s initial point about modal-identity, that the opposition generated from possibility between being and non-being does secure the concrete, particular primacy of actuality; but the view would attempt to block any further transgression of the separate regions of actuality and possibility.

Hegel assumes no such separation. An actual is a possible, and this produces not just minimal conversions and transitions between existence and essence, but rather the constitutive contradiction that the actual is the existence of the possible, that the possible is both the essence of the existence and at the same time just a moment of this essence. In other words, the relationship between actuality and possibility shows that what is essential of actual existence is not something separate from actual existence, but rather exists just as it does, as a moment of the essence. This means that when possibility posits a diversity, whose inner-structure is a determinate opposition that is immediately contradiction, the contradiction that the possibility posits is not just a superficial contradiction of actuality being what it is by canceling out what it is not. The contradiction is much more substantial. That which calls actuality into being, and stands against it as its true essence, is just the process of actuality becoming itself. If actuality is possibility in this way, then actuality is its own other in the radical sense that the negative is its

50 By assuming axiomatic definitions of modal terms, modal logicians thereby avoid the contradiction at premise 7. Conventionally, if a proposition is possible, this means that it can be true or false, but that it is not necessarily false. On the other hand, if a proposition is necessary, then it cannot possibly be false. Yet, if a proposition is merely contingent, then it can be either true or false, but neither necessarily; in other words, it is possible that it is true but also not necessary that it is true. However, how the modal logicians come to these axioms can be viewed as problematic. Stekeler-Weithofer claims that by assuming definitions from the outset, “formal modal logic misses our real practice of talking about real possibilities and objective reality.” Hegel’s Analytic Pragmatism, 219. Stekeler-Weithofer claims that for Hegel reality depends upon the real existence of possibility. He also claims that the modal logicians cannot approach modal reality in a meaningful way because of the axiom assumptions that come along with possible worlds semantics.
own positive. This makes possibility not just the relating ground between A and -A. This makes possibility the A and the -A as actuality’s own self movement.

The conclusion that possibility is self-contradiction causes Hegel to revise both categories. Actuality becomes the truth of possibility and the extensive openness of possibility becomes an existent-actual. Because of the importance of the bind between actuality and existence at premise 1, Hegel calls this revision of both categories “reflected actuality.” Because possibility is self-contradiction, he returns to the initial actuality of what is immediately given as existence, and attempts to think the full extent of possibility.
8) Since actualization cannot maintain this contradiction, it becomes “reflected actuality.” Reflected actuality is an actuality of possibility itself.51

“3. Diese Wirklichkeit ist nicht die erste, sondern die reflectirte, gesetzt als Einheit ihrer selbst und der Möglichkeit. Das Wirkliche als solches ist möglich; es ist in unmittelbarer positiver Identität mit der Möglichkeit.” (WL, 383)

“3. This actuality is not the primary but the reflected actuality, posited as unity of itself and possibility. The actual as such is possible; it is in immediate positive identity with possibility.” (SL, 544)

At premise 7, thought discovers why the actual cannot be the possible in the full sense of the possible, because this would produce the contradictory position that something actual is and is not itself. While the possible can be and can not be, there is no way to translate this unity into actuality. If swimming is possible, then I can swim and not swim – but this could never appear strictly as a conjunction in actuality. Always only one or the other appears in actuality. The possibility of swimming is the possibility in actuality of only swimming or only not swimming. It would seem then that the next significant step for Hegel would be to establish the relationship between actuality and possibility in terms of “disjunction.” This, however, is not his next move.

51 Most commentaries skip over the “reflected actuality” steps of the argument, justifiably I think, since Hegel has not properly emphasized the role that these steps play in the chapter, and since from the outset “reflected actuality” looks like an inadequate and unsustainable position. I maintain, however, that reflected actuality is an important transition-point for Hegel. By attempting to establish an actuality that is itself possibility, and by explaining why this does not work, Hegel is able to re-expose the contradiction at premise 7 from another disposition. He is also able to discuss possibility qua possibility and the possible as the unactualizable. Although Burbidge includes an analysis of reflected actuality, he sees reflected actuality as disjunctive actuality: “Whenever we try to complete the picture in our understanding of ‘possibility,’ then, we discover that we have to move to an actual which is not just the being of possibility pure and simple, but rather excludes some possibilities even as it realizes others.” Hegel’s Systematic Contingency, 22. Houlgate discusses “suspension,” a term closely related to “disjunction,” but does not discuss reflected actuality directly in his essay. Whereas I write, actualization divides and removes the can not of possibility so that the actual can become actual, Houlgate describes this process as the actual insofar as it suspends the possible by actualizing “one possibility rather than its opposite.” “Necessity and Contingency,” 40. Di Giovanni begins from the Kantian stance that an object is either actual or possible. But in doing this, he changes the parameters of the debate from the disjunction in actuality of possibility (i.e. if possibly I swim, then either actually I swim or actually I do not swim), to the division of an object into one of these two modes (either actual or possible). Di Giovanni’s reliance on the thesis that an object is either actual or possible is problematic because he is not able to establish from this one of the most important transitions in the chapter, that it would be a contradiction to actualize both contraries of possibility. For his account of disjunction as actuality or possibility, see Art and Logic, 182-183 and 195.
Rather than turn to the actual as what is disjoined and breaks off from the possible, he turns instead to what he calls “reflected actuality.”

Hegel ventures into a necessary but problematic experiment: to let thought attempt to think of actuality as possibility itself. Reflected actuality reveals that his initial theory of simple actuality (P1) is insufficient because it does not explain the “can not” of the possible. The contrariety of the possible cannot simply become one actuality, nor can the possible become divided in the actual, without becoming merely a fraction of the complete totality. This is the state of affairs that leads Hegel to deduce “reflected actuality,” an actuality that is itself possibility.

The most plausible reason for why Hegel responds to the contradiction at premise 7 with the actuality of “reflection” rather than the actuality of “disjunction” is because actuality is about complete totality, not division and fraction. Still, it will be helpful to visualize why it might seem intuitive to respond to the contradiction at premise 7 with disjunction rather than reflection. It will also be helpful to anticipate why Hegel has chosen not to propose disjunction at this point in the argument, and also to establish that disjunction is quite important to Hegel’s argument on the whole.\(^{52}\)

It would seem that by accepting a certain divisibility of the possible, one would be able to avoid the contradiction at premise 7 altogether. That I can swim and not swim would then translate into actuality as I swim or I do not swim. This is quite intuitive. What becomes actual is only one strand of many alternative possibilities. After all, the contradiction only arises if we attempt to actualize the contrariety of the possible as one actuality. By accepting that the actual

\(^{52}\) Even when Hegel does turn to “disjunction” under the “Disjunctive Judgment” section of the *Doctrine of the Concept*, his main point is still one about inclusion, not exclusion. He claims that in the proposition “A is either B or C,” the judgment exposes the universality of the claim, not only that one side or the other of the disjunction must become excluded, but that taken as one whole judgment, the disjunction reveals the differences contained within the universality of genus and species. WL, 80- 83 (Band 12)/ SL, 653- 657.
breaks off from itself in disjunction, we would avoid the whole complication of how to retain the contrariety as one unity. The disjunction would then cause many sides of the possible never to become actual, but we could explain this away by organizing the possible into two sub-categories, the actualized-possible and the unactualized-possible. As actualization occurs, this would divide the possible into the actual, and what would fall on the other side of the disjunction would drift off into the nether of the merely possible.

What is unusual about Hegel’s theory at this point in the text is that he responds instead with an actuality that attempts to be the full presence of possibility, rather than with an actuality that is only a division of possibility. He claims that reflected actuality “is in immediate positive identity with possibility.” Why does the initial actuality of what is immediately given in existence need to be revised? Because what is actual is possible, but what is merely given as an existent-actual cannot render the status of itself as possibility without contradiction or disjunction. What thought requires, then, is a conception of actuality that can make itself manifest as the possible qua the possible. In this sense, the experiment of “reflected actuality” shares something with theories of “negative theology,” where any attempt to define God in actuality ultimately fails to express the infinite and pure possibility of God. Because reflected actually attempts to express the possible as the actual, all that it can render in actuality is the impossibility of the possible itself.

53 For an excellent survey of texts from the 19th Century on “negative theology,” see volume 2 of Franke’s On What Cannot Be Said, 53-138.
9) The problem with reflected actuality is that since it is the possible itself, it is an actual that cannot become actual. It lacks itself but cannot find its completion in actuality since it already is this.

“Aber [reflectirte Wirklichkeit] hat sich bestimmt als nur Möglichkeit; somit ist auch das Wirkliche bestimmt als nur ein Möglicheres. Und unmittelbar, darum weil die Möglichkeit in der Wirklichkeit unmittelbar enthalten ist, ist sie darin als aufgehobene, als nur Möglichkeit. Umgekehrt die Wirklichkeit, die in Einheit ist mit der Möglichkeit, ist nur die aufgehobene Unmittelbarkeit; - oder darum weil die formelle Wirklichkeit nur unmittelbare erste ist, ist sie nur Moment, nur aufgehobene Wirklichkeit, oder nur Möglichkeit.” (WL, 383)

“But [reflected actuality] has determined itself as only possibility; thus the actual too, is determined as only a possible. And immediately because possibility is immediately contained in actuality, it is contained in actuality as sublated, as only possibility. Conversely, actuality which is in unity with possibility is only sublated immediacy; or because formal actuality is only immediate, primary actuality, it is only a moment, only sublated actuality, or only possibility.” (SL, 544)

Try to think the A and the -A as one unity. Try to think “swimming” and “not swimming” as one activity. These formulations make no sense. They are obviously impossible. Even with the pure conjecture of the imagination, thought cannot visualize the A and the -A together without transposition. Certainly, I can transpose the A and the -A. I can think one and then the other, and then join both into one thought. But transposition requires a certain mediation between the A and the -A, a distinction of “time,” “manner,” or “place.” To attempt to render in actuality the immediate status of the possible qua the possible is to present only the indeterminateness, incompleteness, and vagueness of the possible that has no relation to the actual. This is why “reflected actuality” is a failed experiment. While the possible A contains the possible -A in its own concept, immediate actuality cannot present this with any distinctness. Reflected actuality is
then the actuality of the unactualizable and the unpresentable.\(^{54}\) What appears in actuality is the total absence, the “nothing,” of the possible that has no further relation to the actual. To think reflected actuality as possibility that has no relation to itself in actuality is to think the white plains of the nothing. Try to think the “is” of the “can not.” This is the darkness of the darkness.

There is a technical reason for why reflected actuality is insufficient. When we attempt in formal terms to expose the possible as it is in itself (as both the can and the can not together), we expose an actuality that lacks itself and requires its completion in actuality. Reflected actuality has in a sense returned us to the exposition of premise 4, where the possible lacks itself and requires its completion in actuality. Reflected actuality has in a sense returned us to the exposition of premise 4, where the possible lacks itself and requires its completion in actuality. But the difference is that, while at premise 4 it was possibility that lacked itself, now at premise 9, it is actuality that lacks itself and requires its completion in actuality. But since it is already actual, it is already complete in this state of incompleteness. It cannot go to its end in actuality because it is already the actual. This is why reflected actuality fails to render what possibility is.

There is a slight advancement however. What results from this experiment is the actualization of “mere possibility.” This is the actualization of possibility that has no relation to actuality whatsoever. This is the actuality of the incomplete, which could never become complete because it has already come to its end before it could begin.

There is a lesson as well. We realize that if we attempt in the immediate formal sense to render the possible itself, we grasp nothing but the merely possible, which has no relation to

\(^{54}\) The notion that possibility is impossible appears in Derrida’s 1968 essay “Differance.” Spelled with an “a” rather than an “e,” *differance* marks off in the negative the unpresentable “middle voice” between the positive existence of one difference from another. “Differance” in *Speech and Phenomena*, 129- 160. Hegel’s reflected actuality expresses a similar motif. Possibility appears only in the negative as the middle voice between one actuality and another. Every rendering of the actual in the possible is a decision that could never completely anticipate what possibility is. In this sense, possibility itself is *impossibility*. And yet what appears in the withdrawing of the possibility from every decision is the *undecidability* of the decision, the presence in the negative of the possible that will not come. For an excellent study of Derrida’s essay, see Hugh J. Silverman “Self-Decentering: Derrida Incorporated” in *Inscriptions*, 294- 315.
itself in actuality. We can thus anticipate (many steps ahead of Hegel’s deduction) that the actualization of the possible *qua* the possible will require “mediation.” While thought cannot think the A and the -A together as one unity, there might be a way through mediation to integrate the A and the -A together into one unity. This project of actualizing the totality will only become successful if the actual can complete itself as the contrariety of possibility, which will require its “becoming complete” through a series of mediations. We have thus already anticipated why Hegel must turn from “form” to “content”: because actualization cannot actualize the contrariety of the possible unless it finds a way to complete itself in the negative of itself, through the mediation of itself as content, by integrating its other as what it is. This will become more clear as Hegel’s argument advances.
10) Since reflected actuality lacks itself and cannot become complete, Hegel turns instead to “contingent actuality,” where the actual as what is immediately given equally posits its other as what could have been.

“Alles Mögliche hat daher überhaupt ein Seyn oder eine Existenz.” (WL, 383)

“Diese Einheit der Möglichkeit und Wirklichkeit ist die Zufälligkeit. – Das Zufällige ist ein Wirkliches, das zugleich nur als möglich bestimmt, dessen Anderes oder Gegenteil eben so sehr ist. Diese Wirklichkeit ist daher blosses Seyn oder Existen, aber in seiner Wahrheit gesetzt, den Werth eines Gesetzseyns oder der Möglichkeit zu haben. Umgekehrt ist die Möglichkeit als die Reflexion-in-sich oder das Ansichseyn gesetzt ale Gesetztseyn; was möglich ist, ist ein Wirkliches es in diesem Sinne der Wirklichkeit, es hat nur so viel Werth als die zufällige Wirklichkeit; es ist selbst ein Zufälliges.” (WL, 383- 384)

“Everything possible has therefore in general a being or an Existence.” (SL, 544)

“This unity of possibility and actuality is contingency. The contingent is an actual that at the same time is determined as merely possible, whose other or opposite equally is. This actuality is therefore mere being or Existence, but posited in its truth as having the value of a positedness or of possibility. Conversely, possibility as reflection-into-self or the in-itself is posited as positedness; what is possible is an actual in the sense of actuality; it has only as much worth as contingent actuality; it is itself a contingent.” (SL, 545)

One of the more suspicious-looking statements Hegel makes in the chapter is his claim “everything possible has a being or existence” (Alles Mögliche hat... ein Seyn oder eine Existenz.) If by this Hegel literally means that all possibilities entail themselves in actuality, the world that this describes would be quite absurd. We would be unable to distinguish the existence of what is from the existence of what is merely possible, of what can or can not be. Mere possibility would then mix together with what actually exists and cause a world of surreality, specters, and dreams. As the modal logicians point out, while actuality entails possibility, possibility does not necessarily entail actuality. However, in the Encyclopedia Logic, Hegel expresses this same sentiment, and emphasizes the absurdity of the immediate entailment from possibility to actuality, when he writes:

[E]ven the most absurd and nonsensical suppositions can be considered possible. It is possible
that the moon will fall on the earth this evening, for the moon is a body separate from the earth and therefore can fall downward just as easily as a stone that has been flung into the air; it is possible that the Sultan may become Pope, for he is a human being, and as such he can become a convert to christianity, and then a priest, and so on... Anything for which a ground (or reason) can be specified is possible.  

The statement “everything possible has a being or existence” is less problematic, however, if we interpret Hegel to mean that what actually exists posits the alternative of itself, and that when we take into account this state of affairs altogether, then everything possible has existence. In this sense, the possible is still grounded by what is actual, but then the possible entails from this further inferences into actuality.

It is in these terms that Hegel turns to formal contingency as the resolution of the problem of reflected actuality. Whereas reflected actuality is an actuality of the “merely” possible, and is in this sense empty because it lacks its end in actuality, contingency is an actuality that is truly actual, but whose opposite equally exists. In contingency, the contrary nature of possibility - that what is possible can and can not be - becomes the alternative nature of actuality - that although this actual is, its other could have been. Contingent actuality more effectively renders the status of possibility itself (and is thus a more effective actuality of the whole) because the “can not” of possibility appears through whatever happens immediately to exist in actuality, and in this way, possibility really does exist. If “A” is a contingent actuality, then “A” posits “-A” as what equally exists. Contingency thus presents, in a certain sense, the actual A as containing the existence of the -A within its own concept. The reason why this is no longer a contradiction is

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55 Hegel, *The Encyclopaedia Logic*, 216. A number of other commentators also refer to this famous paragraph from Hegel’s *Encyclopaedia*. Although Longuenesse builds heavily from Hegel’s statement, she also criticizes his use of examples (i.e., “the moon may fall upon the Earth tonight… the Sultan may become a Pope…”), calling him out for “attacking windmills.” She proposes, instead, an example based less on ironic contingency (which she recognizes might change Hegel’s meaning): “Motion X is possible, it is compatible (not in contradiction) with the general laws of motion. But what actually happens is not motion X, but motion Y. So only the latter turns out to be possible. One thus invokes the authority of the real… in order to resolve the contradiction reflection is powerless to resolve.” *Hegel’s Critique of Metaphysics*, 126. When Ng refers to this paragraph, she says that it “is only what actually exists which can determine what is actually possible” “Hegel’s Logic of Actuality,” 8.
because the A and the -A contain each other in a relationship of indifference. If A is actual, this posits the -A alongside it as what could have been if the A was not actual.\textsuperscript{56}

Let us visualize what Hegel has in mind. The actual world appears in its immediate givenness. This is the simple actuality of what is already there. The horse, for example, is greeting me from the barn. The other swimmer is already passing me in the lane. If I look at a map of the earth, I see the mountains and the lakes as “already there,” as what is “simply given” to their region. Yet, since this that just appears before me is itself possibility, I recognize that there exists something more than what is already there. The horse is actually greeting me, the swimmer is actually passing me – and yet I recognize with the same affirmation of truth that these events could not have been – the horse could not have greeted me, the swimmer could not have passed me.

This leads me to recognize two perspectives of the same disposition. I recognize alongside the actual-existent that the possibility of its opposite has of itself an existence, and that this existence could have been what is actual. But I also recognize not only that possibility exists, but also that the immediately existing actual only happens to be. While what immediately appears has the authority of truth, it appears at the same time as finite, since it appears with its other alongside it. Hegel does seem to suggest at this point that contingency is the only possibility for actuality, in the sense that the opposite of “what is” always appears alongside the simple givenness of “what is.” But since he does not yet determine that this other who is posited alongside must overtake this simple actuality, the connotations of “finitude” extend us further than what Hegel suggests at this point in the text.

\textsuperscript{56} Hoffmeyer also analyzes the indifference of contingency, but he does not emphasize that in contingency the opposite of the actual equally exists. He claims that each moment is the exclusion of the other, but not that there is an underlying co-existence of each in the other. \textit{The Advent of Freedom}, 23.
Still, it is important to understand how contingency revises the categories of actuality and possibility. Hegel is not only saying that in the contingent actual, the other appears too, and that these sides together express the possible in all of its contrariety. He is also saying that what the actual is depends upon the equal existence of the possible as what could have been. The horse greets me, and does not not greet me; still, the quality of the event is formed in the contingency and instability that “this that happens” could not have happened. I see in the expression of the horse, as I see in the body-movement of the other swimmer, not only the appearance of the “could not have been,” but the literal “texture” of the possible “can not” exists in the actuality of what is. Hegel will soon make this point again in the transition from formal contingency to formal necessity, when he argues that although the A contains the -A as an existent, it depends upon the non-actuality of the -A, because otherwise the A cannot be actual. But before Hegel deduces this transition, he argues that what is contingent is both grounded and groundless.
11) If the other of the actual equally exists, there is no reason why this actual is and why its other is not. Therefore, contingency has no ground.

“There is no space in reflected actuality between “actuality is” and “possibility.” Contingent actuality corrects this problem by uniting possibility as an actuality whose opposite equally is. However, contingency causes a further problem. An actual whose opposite equally is suffers from the indifference of its existence. Contingency is both “actuality is” and “the possible other exists”; if the contingent were to make the difference between these two modes explicit, then either we would have to retain the initial contradiction at premise 7, where actuality is both the can and the can not as one actuality, or we would have to retain the problematic position of reflected actuality, where the actual is merely a possible and otherwise lacks itself. It is only through “indifference” that contingency sustains the actuality of possibility.

However, for a contingent to be the unity of actuality and possibility in this sense, the contingent would need to be an actual “whose opposite equally is.” But the indifference here between the two modes “actuality is” and “the possible other exists” causes a discrepancy. A contingent is not an actual “whose opposite equally is” but rather an actual “whose opposite could have been.” What is possible could have been, yet the actual is. The indifference shows that there is no reason (or “ground”) for why the contingent is an actual that exists, and why its
opposite exists but is not actual.

The hypothetical other, which is not but could have been, is indirectly as present and immediate to the being of what is as its own actuality is present and immediate. The actual itself only is because its opposite is not. Equally, the actual only is because its other could have been. Since this is not a reason or explanation for why the actual is and for why its other is not, contingency is thus an actuality that has no ground. Contingent actuality appears as groundless, and in this way reveals the existence of possibility, no longer as an omission or remainder that escapes the actual, but now as the groundlessness of what is. Hegel’s point is not merely that the actual is arbitrary, in the sense that the opposite of what is could just as well have replaced what is without further effect. Hegel’s point is rather that actuality expresses the existence of possibility (that it is the actuality of possibility) only through its contingency.

At this initial stage, Hegel’s use of the word contingency (das Zufälligkeit) is quite similar to a conventional definition of contingency, that if something is contingent, then it could have been otherwise. It would seem that what he means by contingency is the opposite of a conventional definition of necessity, that if something is necessary, then it could not have been otherwise. But Hegel will show that the same process that makes contingency groundless also makes the actual grounded in its other. Hegel then claims that necessity comes out of these two sides, that, on the one hand, there is no reason why the actual is and why its other, which equally could have been, is not; but equally that, on the other hand, the actual is contingent upon the possibility that it could not have been, and is thus grounded upon a prior dependency with its other.
12) However, since the contingent is an actual of a possible, its existence as an actual is dependent upon the non-actuality of its other that could have been. Therefore, contingency has ground.

“Its Zufällige ist aber zweytens das Wirkliche als ein nur Möglicher oder als ein Gesetztseyn; so auch das Mögliche ist als formelles An-sich-seyn nur Gesetzteyn. Somit ist beydern nicht un and für sich selst, sondern hat seine wahrhaft Reflexion-in-sich in einem Andern, oder hat einen Grund.” (WL, 384)

“But secondly, the contingent is the actual as a merely possible or as a positedness; thus the possible, too, as the formal in-itself is only a positedness. Hence neither is in and for itself but has its true reflection-into-self in an other, or it has a ground.” (SL, 545)

It should seem strange that in his second argument from contingency, which comes directly after his first argument, Hegel claims the exact opposite about contingency. Whereas contingency’s first side presents an actual whose immediate existence rests in the groundlessness that what is could have been otherwise, the second side of contingency shows, to the contrary, that the actual only is if its other that could have been is not. Thus, Hegel’s second argument from contingency shows that the contingent and seemingly groundless actuality is really grounded in the prior conditions of its other. I call premises 11 and 12 Hegel’s two arguments from formal contingency; however, they are each in another sense two sides that come from the same source. Hegel’s final step in terms of Formal Modality is then to show that the two seemingly oppositional arguments from contingency - that on the one hand contingency is groundless because its other could have been, but that on the other hand contingency is grounded because its other, which could have been, is not – come from the same source and that this source is necessity.57

57 One of Burbidge’s primary motivations in his commentary is to establish an argument in favor of a “left wing” interpretation of Hegel, that indeed Hegel does leave space for contingency in the world. I take the “right wing” to argue that the system in the Logic is relatively complete, that the categories follow from necessity without much space for alteration, replacement, or significant revision. In contrast, the “left wing” argues for contingency in the
Hegel’s argument at premise 12 invokes the more classical definition of contingency, current in medieval modal theories, that what is contingent is caused by a condition that is prior than it. In contemporary English, we talk of “a contingency plan” as a premeditated option of what should happen in the case of an emergency where there is no further recourse. If a fact is contingent, then it is contingent upon prior conditions. These prior conditions let the contingent become an actuality. Contingency has ground in the sense that what exists only becomes actual when its conditions of possibility are met. But to understand the details of this process is to analyze, not just the form that modality takes, but also the content of something specific, since what becomes actual only becomes actual through the specific possibilities that act as conditions and make the actual what it is. Typical of Hegel, we are lead almost prematurely to the issues that will shape his theory of Real Modality. This is the case because his definition of contingency as the existence of prior conditions, as well as his definition of necessity which follows from this, both provide the transition from form to content.

The other that exists alongside the existent-actual is integral to the process by which system, either that Hegel provides significant space for new or alterable categories, or that he has built contingency directly into the categories and transition-points, thereby securing the open future of the Logic. (Lampert also calls his commentary a contribution to a “far left” reading of Hegel (74), and one can find a similar sentiment in Nancy’s book Hegel: The Restlessness of the Negative and in Malabou’s concept of plasticity in The Future of Hegel.) Burbidge claims that the securing of contingency in necessity is the main conclusion of Hegel’s argument in the “Actuality” chapter, and that the chapter itself contains an abundance of resources for the “left wing” position. Burbidge outlines three versions of this conclusion, the first two acting as transitions-points for the third. (1) The formal version of the argument states that whatever happens contingently to be actual is necessarily contingent in the sense that what is must be, simply because it is. Burbidge rejects this version because it leads to what he claims is the flaw of Megarian Actualism, the argument that only what is actual exists, and that what is possible but not actual does not exist. Hegel’s Systematic Contingency, 28–29. For Aristotle’s account of the Megarian School, see division 3 of the Metaphysics Book Theta, 1046b29–1047b2. (2) The real version of the argument shows how conditional necessity begins from contingency in the sense that neither the content nor the relation between the antecedent and the consequent are necessary. “Because of real possibility A,” Burbidge writes, “B must become actual. But that necessity is contingent on the specific determinations of A.” 40. (3) Ultimately, Burbidge claims that the disposition of totality requires contingency, and that this contingency is absolutely necessary. “Whenever we consider the actual world as a totality on its own, we find it to be a world within which determinate actualities emerge and become necessary and sufficient conditions for other actualities, but whatever does in fact emerge is permeated by contingency. This is the nature of necessity when we consider the total picture – what Hegel calls ‘absolute necessity’ – and it requires, as a defining feature of its complex dynamic, that there be contingencies.” 47.
something comes to emerge into actuality in the first place. This means that contingency is not only a relation of indifference between the actual and the existing opposite of this actual. It is also the sign that what is immediately given has emerged into actuality from a prior source. The “contingent upon another” version of contingency is still a category of contingency, for Hegel, because it shows that what is simply given is not just the surface of the actual, but equally posits within this immediacy the prior existence of something else. But in this case, what shows through the surface is the appearance of the process of actualization, that what appears in its immediate givenness as simply “there” has nevertheless gone through the process of actualization. The mountains and the lakes, while they appear as simply given to their region, reveal in their contingency that the earth must have come to form them from a position prior to their existence in actuality. In this sense, the “contingent upon another” version of contingency exposes the possible qua the possible, not only by including the equal existence of the can not, but by exposing the possible as what the actual has become.
13) Formal necessity is the realization of these two arguments as one disposition, where contingency is both groundless because its other could have been (P11) and grounded because its other could have been (P12). This necessity is the only way to actualize possibility.

“Das Zufällige hat also darum keinen Grund, weil es zufällig ist; und eben so wohl hat es einen Grund, darum weil es zufällig ist.” (WL, 384)

“Diese absolute Unruhe des Werdens dieser beyden Bestimmungen ist die Zufälligkeit. Aber darum weil jede unmittelbar in die entgegengesetzte umschlägt, so geht sie in dieser eben so schlechthin mit sich selbst zusammen, und diese Identität derselben einer in der andern ist die Nothwendigkeit.” (WL, 384)

“Das Nothwendige ist ein Wirkliches; so ist es als unmittelbares, grundloses; es hat aber eben so sehr seine Wirklichkeit durch ein anderes oder in seinem Grunde, aber ist zugleich das Gesetztszeyn dieses Grundes und die Reflexion desselben in sich; die Möglichkeit des Nothwendigen ist eine aufgehobene. Das Zufällige ist also nothwendig, darum weil das Wirkliche als Möglichs bestimmt, damit seine Unmittelbarkeit aufgehoben und in Grund oder Ansichseyn, und in Begründetes abgestossen ist, als auch weil diese seine Möglichkeit, die Grundbeziehung, schlechthin aufgehoben und als Seyn gesetzt ist. Das Nothwendige ist, und diß Seyende ist selbst das Nothwendige.” (WL, 384- 385)

“The contingent, then, has no ground because it is contingent; and, equally, it has a ground because it is contingent.” (SL, 545)

“This absolute unrest of the becoming of these two determinations is contingency. But just because each immediately turns into its opposite, equally in this other it simply unites with itself, and this identity of both, of one in the other, is necessity.” (SL, 545)

“The necessary is an actual; as such it is something immediate, groundless; but equally it has its actuality through an other or in its ground, but at the same time is the positedness of this ground and the reflection of it into itself; the possibility of the necessary is a sublated possibility. The contingent, therefore, is necessary because the actual is determined as a possible, hence its immediacy is sublated and repelled into the ground or the in-itself; and the grounded, and also because this its possibility, the ground-relation, is simply sublated and posited as being. The necessary is, and this that simply is, is itself the necessary.” (SL, 545- 546)

Traditionally, one tends to think of necessity as the opposite of contingency, in the sense that what is necessary cannot be otherwise, whereas what is simply contingent can be otherwise.
contingency, what is exciting about Hegel’s theory at this point in the argument is that *necessity literally comes out of contingency* as the result of contingency’s being both groundless and grounded. While contingency exposes the actuality of possibility, without falling into the contradiction of actualizing both the can and the can not as one actuality, it achieves this only by setting the contrariety of possibility beside itself *through indifference*. *This one* is actual *but its other* could have been. Necessity is then an advancement on this disposition because it takes away the indifference of content, and replaces it with the true coincidence of the actual as the possible.

Hegel’s description of formal necessity as that which unites the “absolute unrest of the becoming of these two determinations [of contingency]” may seem quite obscure. To understand what he means, we will need to reconstruct his argument based on the premises we have already outlined.

We know that Hegel is committed to the actualization of possibility in the full sense of this phrase, not as the actualization into disjunction, but as the actualization of the whole possibility. We also know that this is quite problematic, because actualization cannot maintain the whole possibility without falling into contradiction. Hegel proposes, first, reflected actuality, then, contingency, as two different solutions for how to posit the existence of possibility *in actuality*, without removing the contrariety of the possible. But reflected actuality does not work because, as we have outlined, it leads only to the actuality of the “merely” possible. Contingency works better, but not perfectly, since while it holds together the contrary sides of possibility through the actualization of one actuality, it can only contain this contrariety by way of *indifference*. On the one hand, contingency as indifference is a significant advancement on the problem (of how to actualize the whole of possibility) because thought is now able to recognize
the equal existence of the other possibility alongside the one that has become actual. What is significant is that we gain the other as a real existent. But, on the other hand, contingency as indifference is still problematic because, while the other possibility exists, it is not yet actual, and seemingly cannot become actual. Hegel’s second argument from contingency, then, begins to set up a relationship of difference, by presenting the other, which equally exists and could have been actual, as a condition for the possibility of the one that has become actual.

Now, we might conclude that Hegel’s subsequent move to necessity serves no other function than to formalize this implicit relationship of dependence through exclusion, that if this one is actual, then this other one (its opposite) cannot be actual. We might then define formal necessity as the impossibility of grasping the whole of possibility in one actuality. Formal necessity would simply formalize the law of non-contradiction, that while either contrary is possible, only one or the other is actually possible. However, we would find in this formalization of the law of non-contradiction a certain redundancy. After all, by premise 7, Hegel has already determined that in the most immediate sense actualization cannot actualize both the can and the cannot of possibility without falling into contradiction. If formal necessity

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58 Houlgate’s definition of formal necessity follows along these lines. Formal necessity is “simply the impossibility of possibility itself being anything other than actual possibility, the impossibility of possibility’s being mere possibility.” “Necessity and Contingency,” 41. Burbidge also defines formal necessity as the impossibility of actualizing both contraries of possibility. He writes, “[formal necessity is] the reflective impossibility of the opposite of any given actuality.” Hegel’s Systematic Contingency, 28. However, Lampert’s definition is quite different. Lampert defines formal necessity as “the totality out of which anything actual must be formed.” “Hegel on Contingency,” 75. He then presents three interpretations of the transition from contingency to formal necessity, all of which contribute to reading “necessity” as “movement,” as that force which propels the actualization of the contrary sides of possibility: “(a) that a possibility continues to generate contingent actualities until it has fulfilled its whole range, the completion of which is necessity; (b) that it is necessary that each possibility be actualizable; or (c) that an actuality is necessarily the content of some prior possibility.” 76. As I will outline in the progression of premises from 13 onward, I find the first of Lampert’s three interpretations particularly important because it offers a strategy for how to actualize the whole possibility, not only one or another contrary possibility, but the whole itself. The reason why possibility generates various permutations of contingent actualities is because possibility requires its total fulfillment of its whole range. Ultimately, I argue that this fulfillment is the actuality of possibility qua possibility. Formal necessity only begins to expose what real necessity will become, what I eventually call “compulsive necessity,” that force which both generates permutations and at the same time gathers together whole ranges of contingent actualities. I am in this sense quite indebted to Lampert’s excellent insights about generation, compulsion, and range-totalities.
were only that the possible *qua* the possible *cannot* occur, and that possibility itself is always only the possibility *of actuality*, then Hegel would have no reason to turn to content-modality. The solution to the problem of how to actualize the whole of possibility would simply be that thought cannot think the whole of possibility with any determinateness, but *must* always remove the contrariety of the possible so that the possible can become actual. This would be the solution from disjunction. But this is the solution that Hegel once again avoids.

The most plausible explanation of what he means by “formal necessity” is that there is a certain necessary form that actualization *must* accept in order to actualize possibility. If actualization *cannot* actualize the whole of possibility in the immediate sense, as we have already explained, then actualization will need to “find another path” into possibility. Since the insight from contingency shows us that the other possible exists as certainly as the immediate actuality exists, we can conclude from this that the other possible *can still become actual*, and that it is only a matter of revising the terms of actualization. Formal necessity, then, replaces the *indifference* of contingency (that the actual A contains the mere existence of -A alongside it) with a mode of actualization that can integrate the *differences* between the A and the -A.

This means that formal necessity is not only the impossibility of grasping the whole of possibility in one actuality. Formal necessity is also the force that propels the contrary side of possibility to become actual as well. Just as the form of actualization requires the removal in actuality of the other possibility, likewise it requires that this other side become actual through transposition and mediation. Why is it not enough for actualization to remove the contrariety of possibility so that actualization can occur? Because what it would then actualize would not be *possibility*, but only one shard of the possible. If Hegel is committed to actualizing the whole of possibility, and if this whole cannot be immediately introduced without contradiction, then the
form that actualization must take is one that actualizes through division, and then re-activates the side that was left behind.

It is formal necessity then that serves the double function. It “restricts” the totality of the possible by removing the contrary so that possibility is actualizable (rather than impossible). However, since the only reason why the necessity “restricts” the possible is so that the possible can become actual, necessity is really the condition for the actualization of possibility itself. This means that just as the necessity “removes” the contrariety from what is possible, at the same time it attempts “to gather” the side that it removes and take this as the actual as well. Necessity is thus both what “takes the possibility away,” in the sense that what is necessary is the possible with the contrary possible discharged, but also the force that spurs actualization to actualize the other side, and thereby gain the whole of possibility by way of mediation. Chapter 4 of this work will analyze this process of mediation in more detail by outlining a theory of “possibility-concentration.” Although there is no way to maintain the contrariety of the possible in one actuality, there are ways through mediation to express a maximum amount of possibility in actuality, in other words, to concentrate the possible in the actual. Formal necessity is the initial clue towards this quantitative version of possibility which contains higher or lower concentrations in actuality. In this sense, formal necessity is not only the law of non-contradiction, but is also the force that spurs actualization beyond the simple terms of self-identity and non-contradiction.

Hegel concludes that the formal structure of self-identity – that if A is possible, then A is A – does not have the resources to mediate between the negative and positive sides of possibility. There is no way from the formal structure to actualize the whole of possibility. What thought requires is a different model of actualization. Actuality becomes the actuality of internalizable
content because only in terms of content can actualization find its possibilities in other actuals. Rather than think possibility in the terms of something’s self-coherence, thought must think possibility in the terms of interrelations within a context of contingent multiplicities. We turn thus from the formal laws of identity and non-contradiction, to the contextual world of actuality and its complex web of possibility-relations, transfers, and conditionals.
Chapter 2: Hegel’s Real Modality

14) Real actuality is what results from the necessary form that actualization must take to actualize possibility.
   a. To actualize the diversity of possibility in one actuality would be to actualize contradiction (equivalence of P7).
   b. However, if formal necessity is the coincidence of the possible as the actual (P13), there is a way through mediation to actualize the diversity of possibility in one actuality.
   c. This mediation requires contextual opposition that can be overcome.
   d. Real actuality is the immediate existence of this contextual opposition.

15) Real actuality is real possibility.
   a. Real actuality is the immediate existence of contextual opposition (P14).
   b. But this means that the immediate existence can be overcome and that the actual can become the other of itself.
   c. Real possibility is both the reflection of this contextual opposition and the ability to overcome the opposition.

16) Real possibility is existing multiplicity.
   a. Real actuality contains real possibility (inference of P14 and P15).
   b. Real possibility is the reflection of contextual opposition (equivalence of P15).
   c. If real actuality contains real possibility, and real possibility is the reflection of this, then the actuality of this possibility generates existing bounded multiplicity.
   d. Therefore, real possibilities exist in the diversity of the contextual opposition.

17) If real possibility is existing multiplicity, then something’s possibilities are dispersed in the actuality of others. But then something’s possibilities are not its own but are always deferred to others.
   a. This conclusion comes directly from the self-evidence of premises one and two.
      i. Existence is actual (P1).
      ii. What is actual is possible (P2).
      iii. But what is possible contains both the actual and the opposite of the actual (equivalence of P5).
      iv. It would be a contradiction if something were to exist both as itself and as the opposite of itself.
      v. Therefore, there is no formal way to actualize the diversity of possibility in one actuality (equivalence of P7).
      vi. Since real actuality also contains real possibility (equivalence of P15), and real possibility is the contextual opposition of this actuality, the only way to avoid the formal contradiction (at P7) is to disperse the possibilities.
      vii. Therefore, real possibilities exist dispersed in the immediate existence of other actuals.
      viii. This dispersion is the realization of existing multiplicity.
18) Since the possibilities of dispersed actuality do not seem to reside anywhere at all, Hegel turns instead to something initial which becomes actual through possibilities that are dispersed in its conditions.
   a. If the possibilities of one thing exist in the actualities of others (equivalence of P17), then the existence of one’s own possibilities is always differed and never seems to reside in any actuality whatsoever.
   b. But if the possibilities in one thing are the “conditions” for the actualization of oneself in others, then the possibilities are both dispersed in others but also exist as one’s own possibilities.
   c. Therefore, immediate actualities are the conditions of possibility for the actuality of themselves in and as others.
   d. Therefore, conditions are both actualities and possibilities together.

The sub-argument from possibility completion:
   i. It would be a contradiction if something were to exist both as itself and as the opposite of itself (equivalence of P7).
   ii. To avoid this contradiction, existing multiplicity disperses possibility into other actuals (equivalence of P17).
   iii. Since its possibilities are in other actuals, something emerges through possibilities that are in other actuals (equivalence of P18).
   iv. Therefore, something is not only immediately actual, but becomes actual by completing the conditions of its possibilities.

19) What is initial can only become actual if it does not contradict the conditions that make it possible.
   a. Something initial can only emerge into actuality if it completes the conditions of its possibilities, which exist dispersed in other actuals.
   b. If something does not complete the conditions that make it possible, it cannot become actual.
   c. Therefore, it would be a contradiction if something were to emerge into actuality without completing the conditions of its possibilities.

20) But since each condition contains a multiplicity of other actuals, to become actual is to become in contradiction.
   a. However, since something only emerges into actuality through possibilities that at first exist in others, the actuality that emerges is equally the actuality of others (inference from P18).
   b. Since the actuality that emerges completes the possibilities of other actuals, to become actual through conditions is to become both itself and its others.
   c. It would be a contradiction if something were both itself and its others (equivalence of P7).
   d. Therefore, when something becomes actual through the conditions that make it possible, it becomes this in contradiction.
21) **Something initial becomes actual only if all conditions become completely present.** Therefore, what is really possible can no longer be otherwise. This possibility is “real necessity.”
   
a. Something can only emerge into actuality through possibilities that at first exist in other actuals (equivalence of P18).
   
b. If something has emerged into actuality, then it *must* have completed the conditions of its possibility.
   
c. Therefore, the conditions of possibility are really necessary.

22) **Contingency is nevertheless the reason behind why what is really possible can no longer be otherwise.**
   
a. Something initial only emerges into itself through possibilities that exist in others (equivalence of P18).
   
b. If it cannot find itself in and as others, then something cannot be itself.
   
c. Something must be able not to be itself in order to be itself.
   
d. Therefore, real necessity requires contingency as the more originary position.
14) Real actuality is what results from the necessary form that actualization must take to actualize possibility.

“In dieser formellen Nothwendigkeit ist daher die Einheit zunächst einfach und gegen ihre Unterschiede gleichgültig. Als unmittelbare Einheit der Formbestimmungen, ist diese Nothwendigkeit Wirklichkeit; aber eine solche, die, weil ihre Einheit nunmehr bestimmt ist als gleichgültig gegen den Unterschied der Formbestimmungen, nemlich ihrer selbst und der Möglichkeit, einen Inhalt hat. Dieser als gleichgültige Identität enthält auch die Form als gleichgültige, d. h. als bloß verschiedene Bestimmungen, und ist mannichfaltiger Inhalt überhaupt. Diese Wirklichkeit ist reale Wirklichkeit.” (WL, 385)

“In this formal necessity the unity is at first simple and indifferent to its differences. As immediate unity of the form-determinations this necessity is actuality; but one which has a content, because its unity is now determined as indifferent to the distinction between the form determinations, namely between itself and possibility. This content as an indifferent identity also contains the form as indifferent, that is, as merely diverse determinations, and is a manifold content in general. This actuality is real actuality.” (SL, 546)

Hegel describes the transition from form to content as the transition from one type of indifference to another. The necessary form that actualization takes to actualize the contrariety of possibility is one that is indifferent to “the distinction between the form determinations.” But this is a significantly new type of indifference from the initial indifference of formal actuality.

Formal actuality is indifferent to content differences. It is just the simple coincidence of something as identical-with-itself. But real actuality is indifferent to the form determinations, and this in turn opens actuality to the differences of content. Since Hegel has already used the term “indifference” (gleichgültigkeit) to account for how contingent actuality relates to the mere existence of its other, his terminology is overly complex, so it will be worthwhile to clarify these various usages.

When he writes, “so long as one sticks to this simple form, the content remains something identical with itself and therefore something possible (see premise 5),” Hegel means form as indifferent to content. If we do not take into account the differences of content, we remain at the merely formal level, where, if something is possible, then it is coherent-with-itself
(truth-affirming). Basic deductive symbolic logic functions from this same disposition. One often stipulates that the rules of the truth-functional connectives are indifferent to content differences, in the sense that only the form of the connective matters, but the actual content of what is being deduced does not matter. If we take the form of the disjunctive connective “p or q,” we can set up simple deductions such as:

\[
\begin{align*}
p \text{ or } q \\
\text{not } p \\
\text{Therefore } q
\end{align*}
\]

But from this form, we can deduce conclusions that are inappropriate to the content. For example:

Either horses are lizards or fish
Horses are not lizards
Therefore horses are fish

In this sense, everything is possible that does not contradict itself. As long as one remains at the purely formal level, the content itself does not matter. Although the form of the syllogism is correct, its conclusion is obviously inconsistent with the actual world.

Hegel’s insight at premise 14, then, is to recognize an actuality of content that is indifferent to form. What does it mean to become indifferent to the form determinations? This is to “set aside” or to “bracket off” the notion that what is possible is only what is coherent-with-itself. In becoming indifferent to the form determinations, thought becomes indifferent to the laws of identity and non-contradiction. To become “indifferent” is not to “destroy” or to “annihilate,” but merely to “withhold temporarily” and to see what will come of this. Hegel proposes that it is only by way of this indifference to the form that we become able to explain how to actualize possibility as one whole, to mediate between A and -A, to turn what would

59 This example uses quantifiers, but I am assuming a simplified form, where p is equal to “horses are lizards” and q is equal to “horses are fish.”
seem to be the opposition and contradiction of actualizing possibility into “affirmative
difference.” Since the form determinations lead only to a) the contradiction of actuality that is
itself the contrariety of possibility (P7); or b) the reflected actuality of “mere” possibility (P8); or
c) the contingent actuality that remains indifferent to the content of its other (P10) – what is
necessary is an actuality that “can act” from within the content-differences with others. But this
requires that thought accept not only the existence of the other as what is merely posited
alongside and as what could have become actual (as with formal contingency), but also the
actuality of the other as contextually integrated within the content of the given actuality. Rather
than “the other could have been, but this actuality is,” thought must accept that the possibility of
the actuality’s other is itself the existing actuality. This is why Hegel turns to the “manifold
content in general” and to “real actuality” which is the contextual world itself, a world of
“diverse determinations.”

When he claims that thought has become “indifferent to the distinction between form
determinations, namely between itself and possibility,” Hegel most likely means indifference to
the formal restriction that comes by way of premise 7, that thought cannot recognize both
contraries in one actuality. This indifference frees thought from the simple division of the
possible into the binary branches of actualized and unactualized possibility, and instead lets
thought establish in existence a contextual world of contraries, alternatives, and hypotheticals,
which exist together as one larger actuality of the contextual world. To establish contrariety in
existence, thought must think beyond the immediate formal impossibility of actualizing the
whole, and find a way through contextual mediation to let the negative and the positive sides of
possibility stand together. Hegel suggests in this a world of conflict, transition, alternation, and
becoming-other. While the tree has the possibility of setting its roots in the soil, the mole has the
possibility of burrowing a path where the roots would grow. This is no longer a case of thinking self-identity by erasing the possibility of the other at the point of actualization. These conflicts really exist in the soil and in everything that surrounds the action taking place. What the existing conflicts express is the contrary nature of possibility, no longer as what must be removed for any actualization to occur, but as the very fabric of the actualization itself.

“When real actuality as such is in the first instance the thing of many properties, the existent world; but it is not the Existence that resolves itself into Appearance, but, as actuality, it is at the same time the in-itself and reflection-into-self; it preserves itself in the manifoldness of mere Existence; its externality is an inner relationship to itself alone. What is actual can act; something manifests its actuality through what which it produces. Its relationship to another something is the manifestation of itself: neither a transition – the relation between something and another in the sphere of being – nor an appearing – where the thing is only in relation to others and, though a self-subsistent, has its reflection-into-itself, its determinate essentiality, in another self-subsistent.” (SL, 546-547)

When he says that real actuality is on the one hand “the existent world” and on the other hand “the thing of many properties,” Hegel exposes two dimensions, one general and one specific. It is difficult not to conflate these two dimensions because each dimension does seem to come from the other, and throughout his theory of Real Modality, Hegel often seems to ignore the distinction between them. Still, it is important to distinguish the sense in which real actuality is an actuality of content in general, the whole existent world, from the sense in which actuality

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60 For Hegel’s account in the Logic of “the thing with many properties,” see WL, 327-334/SL, 484-492. Cf. Hegel’s discussion in the Phenomenology, 67-79 (paragraphs 111-131).
is a specific thing endowed with properties that has potentiality, can act, and produce itself.

When he says that real actuality is the existent world, Hegel invokes the exposition from premise 1, the starting point of modality, that actuality is immediate existence. However, actuality is no longer immediate existence in this purely formal sense. Actuality is rather the existence of a contextual world. Here, Hegel no doubt makes use of the ambiguity of two connotations of the term “existence”: existence is both the immediate being of what simply is, and at the same time that which comes into being by satisfying the conditions by which it exists. Actuality is existence, and in a sense it does immediately appear as “merely given” and as “already there”; however, since what appears is a whole world of interlocking relations of real limitations, the immediacy of what exists at the same time produces its existence by preserving itself against the manifold of mere existence.

The two operative terms are “to preserve” (zu erhalten) and “to produce,” literally “to bring forth” (hervorzubringen). On the one hand, actuality “preserves itself in the manifold of mere existence.” On the other hand, “something manifests itself through what which it produces.” These are two process-descriptions for how real actualities relate in an interlocking structure of the contextual world. An actuality preserves itself against other actuals, in the sense that it establishes the real limits of what it is and what other actuals are not. But this preservation is also preservation for, in the sense that the actual preserves itself in the other as the integration of itself and the other. Likewise, an actuality produces itself, in the sense that it is at first only something that might come about, but must become itself in the possibilities of others. When something produces itself, it becomes the explicit version of what it already implicitly is.\(^{61}\)

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\(^{61}\) Burbidge claims that the reason why possibility consistently comes after actuality in Hegel’s argument is because one can only survey what is possible after one recognizes what is already here in actuality. I see this point as one of Burbidge’s main contributions to the scholarship on the chapter. He lists a formal version of this claim when he explains that for Hegel “possibilities arise from actualities, and not vice versa.” Hegel’s Systematic Contingency, 17.
Hegel claims provocatively that this actuality “can act.” He has not yet fully prepared us for the underlying meaning of this statement. We will first need to uncover more about the role of real possibility before we can make this clear. Still, we can anticipate in this statement the further course that his argument will take. Since real actuality becomes manifest from the possibilities that it produces, this actuality is no longer only abstractly identical with itself, but is identical with itself only insofar as it is action. This means that the identity of the actuality comes from the dynamic movements of the engagement of itself in others. Looking ahead at premise 17, Hegel will explain this identity as “dispersed actuality,” where the possibilities of one actuality exist in the actualities of others.

This insight gains a further dimension when we think of how real possibilities only come after real actualities. “The distinction between real possibility and the resultant actual is the result of reflection on the actual.” 41. Burbidge means that thought can only establish what is really possible from the stance of its having already become actual. One result of this is that possibility is not predetermined, but is rather contingent upon the actuality that precedes it. Since the actualities are contingent, they transform, and since they transform, the avenues that they lead to in possibilities also transform. We can think of many examples of this. With the invention of the automobile around the turn of the 20th Century, the roads that were already built for the horse and buggy led to further possibilities, but only from the terms of the automobile, and only after its invention. There is also a certain quality and way of life that is not as possible once the automobile replaces the horse. This, again, is because the actuality precedes what is really possible, because possibilities only appear as what could become of what already is. 62 Stekeler-Weithofer says that to do justice to the connotations of “action” and “work” associated with Hegel’s description, it would be better to translate energeia and Wirklichkeit as “reality” rather than actuality. “The German translation [of energeia] is ‘Wirklichkeit’, which has, as such, the correct inferential ring, if we think of an actualised generic ‘work’, ‘ergon’ or ‘act’ and the ‘energetic process’ in which a generic type shows itself in its ‘real’ appearance. However, in today’s use of the word, “reality” is a better translation of ‘energeia’ and ‘Wirklichkeit’ than “actuality.” Hegel’s Analytic Pragmatism, 238.
15) Real actuality is real possibility.

“Die reale Wirklichkeit hat nun gleichfalls die Möglichkeit unmittelbar an ihr selbst. Sie enthält das Moment des Ansichseyns.” (WL, 386)

“2. Diese Möglichkeit als das Ansichseyn der realen Wirklichkeit ist selbst reale Möglichkeit, zunächst das inhaltsvolle Ansichseyn. – Die formelle Möglichkeit ist die Reflexion-in-sich nur als die abstracte Identität, daß Etwas sich in sich nicht widerspreche. Insofern man sich aber auf die Bestimmungen, Umstände, Bedingungen einer Sache einläßt, um daraus ihre Möglichkeit zu erkennen, bleibt man nicht mehr bey der formellen stehen, sondern betrachtet ihre reale Möglichkeit.” (WL, 386)

“Now real actuality likewise has possibility immediately present within it. It contains the moment of the in-itself.” (SL, 547)

“2. This possibility as the in-itself of real actuality is itself real possibility, and first of all, the in-itself as pregnant with content. Formal possibility is reflection-into-self only as abstract identity, which merely means that something is not internally self-contradictory. But if one brings into account the determinations, circumstances and conditions of something in order to ascertain its possibility, one is no longer at the stage of formal possibility, but is considering its real possibility.” (SL, 547)

Hegel restates the argument from premises 2 through 5 now briefly in terms of real actuality as the contextual world. Just as formal actuality immediately contains possibility (P2) as the reflection of actuality into itself (P3), real actuality also contains possibility in the self-evident sense that what is actual is possible. But in this case, whereas formal actuality only contains possibility as its abstract identity, by way of positing the equal possibility of the actuality’s other, real actuality contains possibility as its concrete identity, as its determinate other. Hegel’s point is that whereas formal actuality contains both itself and the abstract negation of itself, both A and -A, real actuality contains both the positive moment of itself and the negative moment of determinate others. Because real actuality is indifferent to the form determinations, possibility now goes through the mediation of determinateness. This means that the relating ground between possibility as the “can” and the “can not” (P5) is no longer only the relation of something to itself, as the relation between A and -A. Possibility has become the
relating ground between something that is determinate against others that are equally determinate. Real possibility has become the comparing relation but between A and B.

What reason does Hegel have for why the impossibility of actualizing the whole of possibility (in the sense that the A cannot be both A and -A as one actuality) entails that the A become itself in the determinateness of B? This is the question that drives Hegel’s deduction from real modality forward. We can anticipate that it is precisely because actualization cannot take the whole of possibility as one actuality that content-diversity is produced from this, and that in this diversity things become themselves in others. This is Hegel’s further response to the “whole-possibility-as-one-actuality” problem. But we will have to discover the argument for this as it unfolds.

“A” is the immediate other of “A” in the sense that something possible can and cannot be itself. But “B” also signifies the other of “A,” only not in the abstract terms of whether something is or is not itself. B is rather the mediated other of A, in the sense that if what is really actual is really possible, this is established only from within an interlocking community of determinate others. The example Houlgate gives to distinguish formal from real possibility is particularly helpful at this stage of the argument: “It may well be possible in itself for me to be the tallest person in the world; however, it is clearly not possible for me to be the tallest person, to the extent that there are, and always will be, others who are taller than I.”63 We can see in this example from Houlgate the distinction between the initial formal possibility, the self-identical reflection of something into itself, the abstract possibility that Houlgate could be the tallest person in the world, and the real possibility, the possible relative to others in this real, contextual

63 Houlgate, “Necessity and Contingency,” 40. To make sense of this example, Houlgate would have needed to tell us what his actual height is, and also demonstrate that there are indeed others in this contextual world who are taller than he is.
world, where Houlgate is taller than some but shorter than others.

Hegel says that we observe this exposure of the content between things when we “bring into account the determinations, circumstance, and conditions of something.” To posit the real actuality of something is to posit along with this a whole field of “determinations,” “circumstances,” and “conditions.” These structure something’s possibilities in the contextual world. They reveal that something is only itself if it is understood in the terms of its possibilities with others. We can already anticipate Hegel’s next step, that if something is only understood in its relations with others, it is only itself insofar as it is these others, which it is not.

In the quoted passage for this premise, Hegel does not precisely define these three structures, which each explore how real actuality entails itself in the possibilities of others. On my reading, if one brings into account “the determinations,” this means to recognize the specific limitations between something and its other. But if one brings into account “the circumstances,” this means that real actuality is an existing multiplicity that contains many actuals within it. Yet if one brings into account “the conditions,” this means to describe how something becomes itself through possibilities that are dispersed in others. I realize that Hegel might not have intended to separate these three terms as I have just defined them. He might have listed them in a more off-
handed way, and he might think of all three at once as his explanation for the entailment from real actuality to real possibility. I also realize that Hegel seems to want to move directly to “conditions,” “dispersions,” and “actions-on” and that it might be a delay of his argument to investigate what he means by “determination” and “circumstance.” But I would still like to linger for a moment on this because I think the short detour adds important details, which Hegel himself should have explored.

“Determination” (*Bestimmung*) is the term that Miller translates as “limitation” from the very beginning of the *Logic*. The limit dictates the content, or, in Hegel’s initial terminology, the “determinate being” (*Dasein*), between something and its other. We think of actual determinations as separate from each other and as having a limit. But insofar as each is the limit of an other, each is not only itself but a *going-over-into the other*. Limit is always that which is shared between that which is different. The limit both distinguishes each from its other, but at the same time makes the content of each dependent upon the differences of the other’s content. For example, the colour blue can be distinguished on the colour wheel from the colour green not only because it is an inherent property, but also because blue is not green. The wheel itself draws the limit between each colour. Without this “drawing up” of limits, each colour would dissolve into the others and become “grey.” It is the limit, then, and not only the inherent quality of the “this,” that produces the content-differences between each. Moreover, since each does not possess its own limit, but shares this limit with its other, each “this” is not only reversible (i.e., something is

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66 Here Hegel’s claim that possibility ought-to-be the totality takes on a further dimension, in the sense that if something ought-to-be, this posits both the limit that something is not its other, but also the trajectory that something should be both itself and its other. If something ought to be its other, then it is both not its other, but is also a going-over into its other. Hoffmeyer says this quite well. The ought is both the prevention of the other but also an elevation into the other. *The Advent of Freedom*, 30- 31.
67 On my reading, although Hegel’s analysis of limit (*Bestimmung*) begins in the *Doctrine of Being* as a discussion of determinate quality, this analysis is nevertheless applicable to the relationship between things and properties and also to the relationship between things and other things. I realize that such an analysis of the limit between things might seem to be more problematic, but I maintain that this usage of limit helps to posit what things really are.
the other of another something), but really exists in the other’s content. This means that the something exists as its other inasmuch as it exists as itself. The structure of “determination” will become more apparent at premise 16, where Hegel discusses the dispersion of actuality.

“Circumstance” (Umstand) is the term for existing multiplicity. On my reading, “determination” and “circumstance” describe a similar structure, only from different perspectives. While determination describes something’s relation to its other through limit, circumstance describes the contextual “world” surrounding the determination of each. Circumstance describes not only the limit between properties, e.g., between blue and green, but also between a multiplicity of background situations that all things share with each other. If we are asking about the circumstance behind something, then we are asking about the situation that sets the something into its specific position and produces its place in the community.

Circumstances might include specific collections, events, coordinates, genealogies, taxonomies, histories, etc. The linguist Ferdinand de Saussure (1857-1913) makes a case for this structure in terms of language. De Saussure argues that language is “a system of interdependent terms in which the value of each term results solely from the simultaneous presence of the others.” A critique of the assumption that the meaning of each word is contained within the boundaries of that word alone in isolation from others, de Saussure argues that meaning comes from the community of the words that surround it and that together form the circumstance of language. Each word holds the others in place, just as the others hold it and produce a place for it. “Within the same language,” de Saussure says, “all words used to express related ideas limit each other reciprocally; synonyms like French redouter ‘dread,’ craindre ‘fear,’ and avoir peur ‘be afraid’ have value only through their opposition: if redouter did not exist, all its content would go to its

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68 Ferdinand de Saussure, Course in General Linguistics, 114.
competitors.” He might have gone too far in claiming that the value of each is only in the opposition of others, or that if one did not exist, then all its content would go to the others. Even calling the others “competitors” might sound a bit too extreme for Hegel’s position. Still, there is something in the sentiment of de Saussure’s claim that helps to expose what Hegel means by “circumstance”: a co-dependency of each from the stance of others.

Finally, “condition” (Bedingung) is the term for actualities that are at the same time the possibilities of other actuals. Water is a condition for the seed becoming a plant. Of course water is an actuality as well, but it is also a possibility that creates a relay between something that is initial and something that results from this. While determination is about the limit that something shares with its other and circumstance is about how the context produces a place for others, the condition describes this same point from the disposition of something that becomes itself in external possibilities that are at first literally in the actuality of others. How something comes into itself as its other via conditions is, arguably, the most significant component of Hegel’s argument from Real Modality. Premises 17 through 20 will develop the “condition” steps of his argument. But first, Hegel will claim that real possibility is a multiplicity.

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69 Ferdinand de Saussure, Course in General Linguistics, 116.
16) Real possibility is existing multiplicity.

“We have already discovered in formal terms the “boundless multiplicity” that everything is possible as long as there is no contradiction. This is the case because, just as possibility shows the positive identity of actuality (that if A is possible, then A is A), likewise it presents actuality with the opposite of itself. Everything is formally possible, then, because what is actual can and can not be. This same process now happens in terms of real possibility. But now the process happens, not just between the actuality and its abstract opposite, its non-actuality, but between determinate actuality and other determinate actuals. Since what is really possible opens actuality to the determinations, circumstances, and conditions of itself, the relationship between actuality and possibility becomes one of “existing multiplicity.” Marcuse gives a vivid example of “existing multiplicity” when he writes:

The upright tree in the forest can be hit by lightning, can collapse, can dry up, can be sawn as wood and utilized as construction material. All these possibilities belong to the in-itselfness of the tree; its actuality can pass through all of them. All these possibilities are themesleves always already actually there: the electrically charged atmosphere, the woodcutters, the sawing mill, the building to which the planks will be transported, all exist somewhere. When they actually become possibilities of the tree, this plurality of possibilities also become an “existing multiplicity of circumstances” which “relate” themselves to the tree. The tree undergoes all its possibilities as actuality. It moves itself through them as “the same” tree.”

Marcuse, Hegel’s Ontology, 94.
On the one hand, the determinate possibilities of something lead one directly to what the actuality is. In Marcuse’s example, the determinate possibilities of the tree (that it can be hit by lightning, collapse, dry up, be sawn, be utilized) constitute the movements and transformations of the “same” actuality throughout. But on the other hand, these determinate possibilities carry the actuality out passed itself. This is the case because the real possibilities of something are both what allow this actuality “to act,” but also are what determine the limitations that stand against this particular actuality, disseminating its content and defining the parameters of its finitude. The tree cannot be anything and everything but must follow the path of the limitations that its determinateness presents it with. As we will see at premise 21, the limitations of something’s determinateness are at the same time its possibilities. Real actuality “can act” because the possibilities that it entails are not something abstractly opposite to what it is, as in the “sheer” other of the formally possible “can not,” but are now the determinate possibilities of what it can become insofar as it can produce itself. Nevertheless, real possibility still carries the negative charge of real actuality within its own concept, but it now carries this as the movement of the actuality, in the production of its action.

Whereas formal multiplicity is boundless in the sense that possibility is as open to the non-being of its actuality as it is to its being, existing multiplicity is rather just those specific circumstances that are connected to the something and make it possible. This real type of multiplicity, although it is certainly not boundless since it is in a sense generated from real limitations, is nevertheless a multiplicity that maintains the shape of the actuality’s negation. Existing multiplicity is the bounded diversity of the circumstances that surround something determinate. It is also the site where the action takes place, when the actual acts upon itself as upon an other.
If real actuality contains real possibility as an existing multiplicity, the consequence is that the possibilities of something are not simply its own. Since its possibilities exist in the circumstances that surround it, something is really itself only insofar as its content is simultaneously the content of others. The circumstances that surround what something is constitute an interlocking network of multiplicity. Many dispersed actualities, held together in possibility, constitute one “large” actuality of multiplicity. This large actuality presents the whole situation, the entirety of the circumstance, the complete interlocking network of relations between actuality and possibility. In this sense, real actuality is both a determinate thing that has properties, can act, and produce itself, but it is also an actuality of multiplicity, an actuality that presents the whole range of determinate possibilities, whose content is the content of others.
Remark 3: Heidegger’s Greek Temple and Existing Multiplicity

Heidegger’s description of the Greek temple in The Origin of the Work of Art presents us with an example of what Hegel means by “existing multiplicity.” The temple sets up a contextual world of real possibilities and dispersed actualities.\(^71\) Heidegger writes:

[The temple]... first fits together and at the same time gathers around itself the unity of those paths and relations in which birth and death, disaster and blessing, victory and disgrace, endurance and decline acquire the shape of destiny for human being. The all-governing expanse of this open relational context is the world of this historical people... Standing there, the building holds its ground against the storm raging above it and so first makes the storm itself manifest in its violence. The luster and gleam of the stone, though itself apparently glowing only by the grace of the sun, yet first brings to the light of the day, the breadth of the sky, the darkness of the night. The temple’s firm towering makes visible the invisible space of air. The steadfastness of the work contrasts with the surge of the surf, and its own repose brings out the raging of the sea. Tree and grass, eagle and bull, snake and cricket first enter into their distinctive shapes and thus come to appear as what they are... The temple, in its standing there, first gives to things their look and to men their outlook on themselves.\(^72\)

The temple is not merely a building inserted into the space of Greek society. It is not merely a thing among things that exists on its own and can be placed and replaced without transforming the internal content that constitutes what it is. The temple is the site of multiplicity. It sets up a contextual world. The storm that strikes above it appears in its violence because of its relationality with the temple. The stone carries with it the meaning of day and night, of light and darkness. Heidegger even claims that the different types of animals – “the eagle and the bull, the snake and the cricket” – gain their distinctive “shapes” because the temple sets each of them in their respective places against each other.

Although Heidegger focuses primarily on the temple as what sets up the world and gives

\(^{71}\) I realize that by invoking this analogy between Heidegger’s contextual “world” and Hegel’s “existing multiplicity,” I present the Logic as more phenomenological and experiential than it might appear to be. But I maintain that Hegel’s passages on Real Modality require phenomenological examples about real, contextual experience, that although the boundless multiplicity of the formal passages might indeed present us with a primitive logic that is essentially different from the experiential outlook that Heidegger’s temple provides to man, when it comes to real, existing multiplicity, the analogy with Heidegger is appropriate.

all things their meaning, we can assume that the temple is equally grounded in the world of Ancient Greece. Just as the temple sets up a world for the animals, shapes the destiny of humans, and brings context to the historical people of Greece, the Greek world and everything that surrounds the temple, from the plants and the animals to the sun and the rocks, all frame the temple as one actuality of existing multiplicity.

We see this point more clearly when we think of what it would mean to take the temple out of its context in the Greek landscape. What would happen, for example, if the Greek temple were “torn out of [its] own native sphere” and transported to the Metropolitan Museum in Manhattan? The temple would not carry the Ancient world to Midtown, as one might assume. It would no longer have the same meaning because it would no longer be the same temple as it had been in Greece. This is the case because the temple is not an isolatable thing that exists on its own without any relation to the context that surrounds it. When it becomes transplanted to Manhattan, it becomes displaced and no longer is what it is. Of course, when surrounded by the circumstances of the Metropolitan Museum, Central Park, and Midtown Manhattan, the “Greek” temple itself becomes another sort of thing. Its inner content becomes “shaped” with the circumstances of the museum. One important element of these circumstances is that when the stone blocks are reset piece by piece within the cold air-conditioned room of the museum, they still resemble in their displacement the temple as it once was, set on the hill in Greece. This displacement and replacement becomes part of the world that the museum opens for the destiny of humans.  

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73 Heidegger uses this phrase in a related example about the Aegina sculptures being transplanted to the Munich art collection, 40.

74 In *The Fate of Place*, Edward S. Casey says that one of the most important questions Heidegger asks in *The Origin of the Work of Art* is not about “what the work of art is” but rather “where it belongs.” “The what-is question,” Casey writes, “leads to a false essentialism, to mere definitions and formal features. The question as to where leads us straight to the work of art itself: to where it exists as a scene of primal conflict and unconcealment.”
17) If real possibility is existing multiplicity, then something’s possibilities are dispersed in the actuality of others. But then something’s possibilities are not its own but are always deferred to others.

“Diese Wirklichkeit, welche die Möglichkeit einer Sache ausmacht, ist daher nicht ihre eigene Möglichkeit, sondern das Ansichseyn eines andern Wirklichen; sie selbst ist die Wirklichkeit, die aufgehoben werden soll, die Möglichkeit als nur Möglichkeit. – So macht die reale Möglichkeit das Ganze von Bedingungen aus, eine nicht in sich reflectirte, zerstreute Wirklichkeit, welche aber bestimmt ist, das Ansichseyn aber eines andern zu seyn und in sich zurückgehen zu sollen.” (WL, 386)

“The actuality which constitutes the possibility of something is therefore not its own possibility, but the in-itself of another actual; it is itself the actuality which ought to be sublated, possibility as possibility only. Thus real possibility constitutes the totality of conditions, a dispersed actuality which is not reflected into itself but is determined as being the in-itself, but the in-itself of an other, and as meant to return back into itself.” (SL, 547)

Hegel describes existing multiplicity as a process of dispersion. The possibilities of something are not simply its own possibilities, but are rather the possibilities of other actuals. In this respect, dispersed actuality offers a significant advancement upon the earlier disposition of formal contingency. Formal contingency had presented the contrary sides of possibility only through indifference, by positing the equal existence of the non-actual other. This expressed the whole of possibility, but in an inadequate way, because the indifference of the contingency still held the contrary sides of possibility apart from itself. But dispersed actuality does seem to fix this problem. If the possibilities of something are dispersed in other actuals, then the

265. Casey emphasizes that the Greek Temple is the place where truth happens. However, in Getting Back into Place, Casey argues that the lived body is conspicuously missing from Heidegger’s account of the Greek Temple. If we were to also focus on the lived body, we would then recognize that there exist place-modal relations, “relations of inside-outside, alongside-around, and with-between,” and not only the site of the building and its environment. 131- 132. Lived bodies are a necessary condition for what Casey calls “leeway,” not to be measured by space-terms such as “feet, inches, or braccia” (131), but by place-terms as an existing multiplicity of relationality. Hegel also does not venture into the topic of lived bodies and the kinds of modal relations that might come from this, a topic which might seem conspicuously abscent from these passages of the Logic. For an argument that the lived body is an important theme in the Phenomenology of Spirit, see Russon, The Self and Its Body in Hegel’s Phenomenology of Spirit.
actualization of this as one process holds together the complete totality of possibility.\textsuperscript{75}

If the possibilities of something were simply its own, and not dispersed in others, this would return us to the contradiction at premise 7. The possibility of the “can not” would expose the actuality in an immediate way to the opposite of itself \textit{as itself}. Since this does not work, actualization goes through the \textit{mediation} of possibles in other actuals, which, when taken together as one process, should complete all possibilities in an actuality of multiplicity.

However, dispersed actuality presents us with a further complication. Since each actuality defers itself to the actuality of others, the possibility does not seem to reside in any one of these actuals, and therefore does not seem to have a place at all. If my possibilities are really in the actuality of others, it would seem then that my possibilities are not my own, but are always deferred into everything that I am not.\textsuperscript{76} From the model of dispersed actuality, there would seem to be no accountability for one’s own possibilities. If each can find itself only in the relay of its possibilities in other actuals, each actuality is then like a hollow shell that signals only that one would need to look elsewhere to realize what it itself is. On the one hand, possibilities would “slide around” in a vicious circle of deferral like a shadow that no longer relates to its owner. On the other hand, these actualities would be unable to give a stable account of themselves because the actuality of each would only be the possibility of others.

Hegel then turns to “conditions” because this explains why the process of dispersing one’s possibilities in other actuals is really the process of actualizing one’s own possibilities.

\textsuperscript{75} Under “The Relation of Causality” of “The Absolute Relation” chapter (BK 2, SN 3, CH 3, DV 2), which follows directly after the “Actuality” chapter, Hegel discusses the cause-effect version of “dispersed actuality.” He writes, “the actuality which substance has as cause, it has only in its effect.” WL, 397/ SL, 559. The cause only becomes actual insofar as it finds its resolution in the effect. This means that the cause itself, although it is truly the actuality, depends upon the effect because it is itself dispersed in it.

\textsuperscript{76} This is one of the main points Lampert makes in his essay on contingency. Lampert stresses how important the distinction is for Hegel between “the possibility X” and “the possibility \textit{of} X.” We often tend to think of possibility as an attribute of actuality, but what Lampert is suggesting is that if an actual has a possibility, this is the possibility of another. “The possibility of X is the possibility of Y.” “Hegel on Contingency,” 77. Lampert concludes from this that if each actuality is the possibility of other actuals, then “the truth of one thing is \textit{in} a different thing.” 77.
Before we discuss this next step, let us outline various models of dispersed actuality and test whether Hegel’s point about dispersion makes sense.
Remark 4: The Relativity of Determination as Active and Passive Possibility

When one takes into account “the determinations” of something, then real actuality has real limitations and stands against others, which equally limit and thus determine what the something itself is. We can describe this as a relation of external comparison. The cat is relatively big in relation to the mouse, who is small in relation to the cat. Each is determinate against the other because each is itself alone and not the other. Yet, each is determinate because of the other, in the sense that the qualifications “big” and “small” fill the cat and mouse with content only if each is measured against the other. Compared to an adult bear, the cat is quite small. The cat has claws and these are dangerous, but only against that which can be maimed by them. The claws are dangerous to the mouse, but merely annoying to the bear. The external comparison distributes the content to each. As the comparison changes, the content changes as well, even to the extreme point where, through one comparison, something has the opposite content from what it might have had were it compared differently.

But the truth of this external comparison is in its underlying immanence. The relativity of determination shows that the possibility of something really exists in the possibility of others. The comparison is in this sense “immanent” in the other, rather than located in the “external” relativity of the relation. If you want to know about the cat’s claws, look at the mouse or the bear because the strength of the claws really exists in them. If the comparison is immanent, then the relativity of determination amounts to a modal insight about the correlation between active and passive possibility. Something only has the power to act upon another, or upon itself as if it were an other, if that which it acts upon has a passive but reciprocal power to receive it. Aristotle
makes this point in Book *Theta* of the *Metaphysics*. Fire can only burn that which can be burnt. It can burn paper since paper has the passive power to be burnt; but it cannot burn a rock since a rock does not have the ability to receive the fire. The fire’s ability to burn the paper is in this sense dispersed into the paper’s ability to be burnt, because the fire’s ability only comes about if there is that which can receive it. If there were no passive power “to be burnt,” there would be no way to burn something, and burning as such would not exist.

The passive possibility to receive is the condition by which something active “can act.” But if it is the condition for the possibility of action, then the passive is truly active. Hegel calls this “solicitude.” The passivity of the other actively solicits the activity of something upon it. In other words, if something solicits, then it determines what is active to act upon it. This turns the passivity on its head.

In the “Mechanism” chapter of the *Logic*, Hegel adds that sometimes a determinate thing will have to prepare the other to receive it. Sometimes the passivity of the other is too weak to receive the activity. Such weakness effectively disarms the active agent. To become determinate, the thing must draw its other up to its dimension. Hegel gives a strange yet vivid example. If a bullet from a gun is to tear through a cloth sheet that is hung on a line and is fluttering in the wind, the cloth sheet must be made rigid by applying a shellac so that it becomes taut. The cloth must be prepared so that it can stand up against the bullet and receive it. This example contributes to Hegel’s point that there is always a correlation between active and passive possibility, and that this correlation is a dispersion of the possibilities of an actual into other actuals. If the possibilities where merely in the bullet, then it would not matter whether the cloth is too weak to receive the shot. But his point is that the bullet only has the possibility to pierce if

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78 For Hegel’s account of solicitude, see WL, 362-364/SL, 521-523.
the cloth is prepared to receive it. “If they were not in the same sphere,” Hegel says generally about objects in relation, “their relation to one another would be an infinite judgement, and no process between them would be possible.”79

79 WL, 141 (Band 12) / SL, 719.
Remark 5: Possibility Transference

We can also interpret Hegel’s use of the term “dispersed” (zerstreute) quite literally. If the possibilities of something are the possibilities of other actuals, then the something “gives away” that which makes it determinate. Other actuals carry out the possibilities of something. Now, either this means that the only way for something to access its possibilities is by the use of another, as with the master-slave relationship in the “Lordship and Bondage” passages of The Phenomenology; or this means that something places the legacy of its possibilities in another actual, as when a parent transfers possibilities to a child.

In the case of “Lordship and Bondage,” the slave carries out the master’s desires. The master channels her possibilities through the slave and forces the slave to shape the world for her. But since it is the slave who works to shape the world, it is really the slave who has possibilities and can act. The master has her possibilities dispersed into another actual, the slave, and it is only through this relationship of cohesion that the master is able to satisfy her desires. This means that the master’s possibilities are not her own, but only the possibilities of the slave. The analogy, especially in terms of the reversal of master and slave, shows that although it would seem that the something (the master) should have the possibilities, these possibilities are truly the possibilities of another actual (the slave). This means that the something does not have its own possibilities, but is merely what spurs the activity.

In the case of parent and child, the actuality of the parent has at least a portion of her possibilities in the actuality of her child. The legacy of the parent is acted out in the growing maturity of the child. The parent educates the child by transferring knowledge, habits, and customs. The parent hopes that she will live on in the actuality of her child, that what she has

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developed of herself will carry over into the other, who will mature and live beyond her. This type of transfer is not based on the dependences of the master-slave dialectic, where one lives through the use of the other. In this transference, the parent gains full maturity only when her possibilities become the possibilities of the child, another actual.\textsuperscript{81}

In certain other cases, by giving over one’s possibilities to another actual, something can gain access to entire regions of determinate content that would otherwise remain inaccessible. For example, Hobbes argues in \textit{Leviathan} that we ought to be civil and to transfer to the authority of a sovereign the natural ability that each of us has to kill the other. By this transfer, each of us gains the ability to trust that although the other equally can kill us, the other will not kill us. The sovereign then ensures that each of us is safe from the other by excreting punishment over those who transgress the law. This example shows that by transferring your possibilities in respect to another, there are other possibilities that can become transferred to you. In the case of Hobbes’ social contract, the power you receive, that by law the other must not kill you, is not a natural ability, but an ability that you can only access by way of giving up your power to kill another.\textsuperscript{82}

\textsuperscript{81} Lampert takes this point further when he suggests that possibility can be transferred between generations, as in the case where “having children is passed on to one’s children.” “Hegel on Contingency,” 75. Also see my account of Stiegler’s theory of “genetic” and “tertiary” memory as a theory of possibility-transference (Seventh Remark).

\textsuperscript{82} Hobbes, \textit{Leviathan}, 109-110.
18) Since the possibilities of dispersed actuality do not seem to reside anywhere at all, something becomes actual through possibilities that are dispersed in its conditions.  

“When alle Bedingungen einer Sache vollständig vorhanden sind, so tritt sie in Wirklichkeit; - die Vollständigkeit der Bedingungen ist die Totalität als am Inhalte, und die Sache selbst ist dieser Inhalt bestimmt eben so ein Wirkliches als Mögliches zu seyn.” (WL, 387)

“When all the conditions of something are completely present, it enters into actuality; the completeness of the conditions is the totality as in the content, and the something itself is this content determined as being equally actual as possible.” (SL, 548)

Actuality is dispersed, but not only in the sense of determination, where the actuality of something has its possibilities in other actuals. While this description of dispersion is not incorrect, it leads to the conclusion that one’s possibilities are not really one’s own, but only the possibilities of others. To amend this, Hegel then turns to dispersed actuality in the sense of

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83 Many commentators have insights about the role that conditions play in the “Actuality” chapter; however, no one examines this category in great detail. Lampert discusses how dispersion, transference, production, and various other movement-structures work in terms of multiplicity, and analyzes the function of conditions at the same time. He claims that “a possibility is not about its own actualisation but about conferring on an actuality the power to produce another actuality.” This analysis is quite helpful because it directs us to think about conditions as a category of movement and becoming. See “Hegel on Contingency,” 77. Houlgate says that the reason why immediate actuality is contingency is because it harbors within this concept “the possibility of something else arising,” i.e., the contingent actual is a condition. “Necessity and Contingency,” 43. See Chapter 4, Sections (b) and (d) of this study for my development of the theory that conditions are contingent actuals whose possibilities are “embedded” under the surface and only need to be “drawn out.” Burbidge presents the argument that conditions are always multiple and that no one condition can exist alone. This is a good insight on its own because it explains why conditions are always a multiplicity, but Burbidge does not thereby fully emphasize why a condition is a possibility and an actuality together. Hegel’s Systematic Contingency, 34- 37. Longuenesse discusses Hegel’s theory of conditions and Leibniz’s “complete determination of a thing” in the same breath. Hegel’s Critique of Metaphysics, 132. Ng claims that if Hegel’s “conditions of possibility” are full of content (not empty and formal), the consequence is that there can be no real distinction between the empirical and the a priori. Ng’s remark brings up the question of whether Hegel is playing on two senses of “conditions,” the first, the Kantian question, what are the a priori “conditions of possibility” for any experience whatsoever? – but the second, a more literal usage, the material “conditions of possibility” for something’s result in actuality. “Hegel’s Logic of Actuality,” 11. Taylor defines real necessity as the necessity of conditions. But then the conditions themselves are contingent. Hegel, 284. Marcuse discusses conditions in terms of “presuppositions.” Hegel’s Ontology, 96. On my reading, Hegel’s claim about conditions is one of the most important and controversial premises of his entire argument because this establishes a unit that is as much possibility as it is actuality. How to think “conditions,” and how to recognize why “substance” comes out of this unit that is both actuality and possibility together, is the main motivation behind Chapter 4 of this study. What I say in premises 18- 20 is therefore only preliminary.

84 Hoffmeyer notices that this sentence has an earlier iteration in the “Existence” passages of the Logic. The Advent of Freedom, 31. “When all the conditions of a fact are present, it enters into existence.” WL, 321/ SL, 477.
conditions, where something initial becomes actual through possibilities that are dispersed in others. Thought then thinks real actuality as the totality of conditions. This actuality is not just the actuality of one isolated thing that has properties and can act, but has become of itself the existing multiplicity. Its “dispersion” suggests that, as one whole, it has become spaced-out and divided by the plurality of possibility. It now carries the properties of all its others as its own property. Because it is the totality of conditions, dispersed actuality becomes an extensive actuality. It is by way of this dispersion as one unity that we begin to explore the whole of possibility.

Why must something initial go through the process of becoming actual by integrating possibilities that are in the actuality of others? Because actualization cannot hold together the negativity of possibility unless it undergoes the complete presence of the totality of its conditions. To enter into actuality, the something no longer presents just one side or the other, which happened in the formal section. Now something presents all of the sides together. But whereas formally all-sides-together leads straight away to the contradiction where the actual attempts to actualize both itself and its other, in real modality all sides do come together, but only if the something “enters itself” through the process of making each side present in turn, and by gathering everything together into one. The real version of actuality overcomes the failure of formal actualization by gathering together the contrariety of possibility into itself as itself. This means that the actuality of something is not just this determinate thing, but rather the totality of its conditions, itself and its other.

Conditions are both actuality and possibility. They are actual in the sense that they are immediately given as the fact of existence. For example, insofar as the stone is a condition for something, it is immediately actual and first appears as the earth itself. But conditions are also
possibility in the sense that they have latent within them the result of further actuality. The stone is given as prior, but it carries in its immediate content the further possibility of the statue. Conditions are actualities that are not just themselves. Hegel claims that they get “used up” (verbraucht werden) or “sacrificed” (aufopfern) in the process of actualization. They are immediate actualities but also the material for what can become actual if the conditions themselves get “used up” in the process of actualization.

It is from these terms that Hegel finds his initial solution to the formal problem of how to actualize the whole of possibility. Formally, possibility does not entail actuality because actualization cannot take up the contraries of possibility into one actuality. But if immediate formal actualities are the conditions for the possibilities of others, these actualities are really possibility, and as possibility, they directly entail actuality. Hegel's point then stands in stark opposition to the axiom of possibility as modal logicians describe it. Certainly, actuality entails possibility in the sense that if something is actual, it must have been possible, but possibility also entails actuality in the sense that what is immediately actual is the possibility of other actuals.

The possibility of something stands latent in the immediate actuality of the conditions. The actuality contains the possibility as latent within it, and this latency itself is the compulsion of the further entailment from possibility to actuality. One only needs “to draw out” the possibility from the actuality, and the further actuality will result from this.

However, this also means that the possibility nevertheless completes itself only in the resulting actuality. It would seem that not “any” possibility stands latent within the conditions, but only certain possibilities entailing certain actualities. The stone has its end in the resulting actuality.

85 Hegel states this in the addition of §146: “Immediate actuality as such is quite generally not what it ought to be; on the contrary, it is a finite actuality, inwardly fractured, and its destination is to be used up.” The Encyclopaedia Logic, 220.
statue. It can also be “used up” in the actuality of the house or in the cobbles of the street. But it would seem that the stone does not have within it the latent possibility of an adult elephant or of the glass window in the kitchen. The entailment from possibility to actuality would seem only to go in certain directions. Hegel will explain this point in greater detail in his discussion of real contradiction at premise 20.

What is important to highlight from this moment of the argument is that real actuality contains real possibility as the *latency* of further actuality. What immediately appears as the fact of existence carries within it the possibilities of others. But these others are not really “other” from what immediately appears. The stone, after all, does not become something other than the stone when it takes the form of a statue, but remains this same material throughout. Insofar as possibility is latent in the conditions, it is the comparing relation, no longer between what is immediately actual and the abstract opposite of this, but rather between what something initially is and what it could become.

We can read in the connotations of the term *possibility-latency* the same compulsion that Hegel has already established at premise 13 in terms of formal necessity. If what is actual is possible (P2), then actuality cannot only be one side or the other of the possible, but must come to form itself as the totality of possibility. The other, although it would seem to remain against the actual as what the actual is not, must become consumed in the process of actualization. This is why, although conditions are immediately actual, they are also the possibility of something initial coming to its end in actuality. Conditions “fall under” as actuality becomes itself. Although one’s possibilities are dispersed in the externality of other actuals, since these “actuals” are only the conditions for the possibility of something initial coming to its end in actuality, the thing in question nevertheless remains self-coherent throughout this process. By showing how
something initial results in actuality through the conditions of others, Hegel establishes the argument that the possibilities dispersed in other actuals nevertheless remain the something’s own possibilities throughout.
Remark 6: How to Make All Conditions Completely Present

In § 148 of the Encyclopedia Logic, Hegel divides conditions into three moments (in the Lectures on Logic, he calls these the three moments of necessity):\(^{86}\) 1) material conditions, 2) the thing in question and 3) activity.\(^{87}\) The conditions (die Bedingung) are the material requirements, the immediate actualities, that get used up in the process of the actualization. These actualities begin as external limitations that stand against the actualization, but if they are consumed, they help to constitute the materiality of the developed actuality. However, we should also recognize that there are various senses of “condition.” Hegel tends to focus on conditions as that which gets used up and consumed, but there are also conditions that can be “used” but not “used up,” as in the case of a hammer,\(^{88}\) which when “used” for mounting a picture on the wall, does not become “used up” in the way that the nail disappears as it is hammered into the wall.\(^{89}\) The thing in question (die Sache) is the initial possibility of what could become actuality. It represents the entire process that there is something initial which has the possibility, if it satisfies certain conditions, of coming forth into actuality. And third, activity (die Thätigkeit) is the active agent that uses or uses up the passive conditions at the point of material actualization. There is also in a

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\(^{86}\) Hegel, Lectures on Logic, 161-164.
\(^{87}\) Hegel, The Encyclopaedia Logic, 224.
\(^{88}\) In his inquiry about the relationship between equipment and art, Heidegger also discusses the distinction between “using” and “using up.” He says that, for example, when we make an ax from stone, we use the stone up in the sense that it disappears into what the ax is. However, in his famous example of the Greek Temple, Heidegger claims that the material of the temple is not “used up” in the same way, because the material lets the world of the temple to “come forth,” and in this sense, the material does not “disappear.” Heidegger, “The Origin of the Work of Art,” 44-45.
\(^{89}\) I describe conditions as “material” but Longuenesse suggests that conditions can also be “spiritual.” By “spiritual” she means historical, economic, social, geographic, and climatic conditions. See Hegel’s Critique of Metaphysics, 135. When I say “material” I do not mean to exclude these strictly non-material versions of conditions. I recognize that by “conditions” Hegel includes anything necessary for the mediated actualization of something initial into something actual, whether this is strictly “material” (e.g., stone, wood, blood, etc.) or “spiritual” (e.g., the disposition of mutual respect, the conditions for an economic boon, the deed to build a house, the license to drive a car, etc.). By “materiality” I only mean to emphasize that prior to resolving themselves in actuality, each condition is similar to unformed (or semi-formed) matter. Certainly, each condition is an immediate actuality on its own, and in this sense already contains order and form (e.g., the stone itself is form and not just the matter of the house), but inasmuch as each condition is the possibility of another, each appears first as materiality and then becomes the formation of others as a result in actuality.
sense a fourth moment, which Hegel describes in § 147 as the developed actuality (*die entwickelte Wirklichkeit*).\(^90\) This is the final result, but also the complete reality, of the thing in question.\(^91\)

Since the passage quoted with premise 18 is quite intricate, let us analyze the mechanics behind this process of actualization, which Hegel describes as something “entering into actuality” only when “all of its conditions become completely present.” What does he mean by “completely,” “all,” “presence,” and “to enter into?” I will discuss each of these in turn:

1) **What does he mean by completely (*vollständig*) when he says that all of the conditions become completely present?**

If there are many conditions and each is completable, this suggests both that they are finite but also that they belong in various sets. They are finite in the sense that they are exhaustible, in the sense that they get used or used up in the process of actualization. But they are also finite because they belong to one another, as a member belongs to an exclusive set. While the actuality of the house is latent in the possibility of the stone, the stone itself is insufficient to entail its end in the house. This actualization requires a whole set of other conditions: other material such as wood, nails, brick, plastic, cement; but also active agents such as builders, plumbers, carpenters; and even immaterial conditions, such as a permit from the city, a loan from the bank, a deed to the land, etc.

In the same passage, Hegel calls real possibility the circle of conditions. “When [real possibility’s] *immediate* Existence, the circle of conditions, sublates itself, it makes itself into

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\(^90\) Hegel, *The Encyclopaedia Logic*, 220-221.

\(^91\) For Longuenesse’s treatment of this same passage from *The Encyclopaedia Logic*, see *Hegel’s Critique of Metaphysics*, 151-152. She focuses on the role of “activity,” dividing this into both agency (e.g., “a man, a character”) but also the “movement” from conditions to the thing. She claims that “activity” is the main transition-point from real necessity to absolute necessity, and from this into the concept (*Begriff*). In her conclusion, she supplies us with reasons for why Hegel’s category of “activity” is a direct development upon the Kantian “I think.” 160-162.
that in-itself which it already is, namely the in-itself of an other.”

Various conditions come together to form a “circle.” The completion of all conditions together in one “presence” is what it would take to release the possibility from its containment in the immediacy of each actuality.

Now, of course, this process of gathering together the various conditions of something is made more complicated by the fact that each condition contains within it a multiplicity of other possibilities, which could in turn result in actuality. The stone itself has a seemingly indeterminate amount of possibilities latent within it. Certainly, the stone house is a possibility in the stone, but the statue, the street, the arrowhead, and innumerable other developments also exist within it, and only need to be drawn out. Moreover, since these possibilities often stand in opposition to one another (e.g., the dirt of the earth is both a condition for the roots of the tree, but also for the mole’s burrow), Hegel returns again to the problematic of premise 6, where the boundless multiplicity that everything and anything is possible leads to diversity, which leads to opposition, then to contradiction. We can anticipate that this will present us with the same issue of disjunction, but this time it is an issue of real disjunction, where a multiplicity of possibilities latent in the material must be reduced to only one, and not the other, in actuality.

2) If all conditions become completely present, does this mean that they must become present, or only that actuality results from them if they all happen to be present?

Is Hegel saying that the process of actualization must find all of the hidden and obscure corners of an actualizable set in order to bring out the possibility? Or is he merely saying that all the conditions would need to become completely present for the possibility to result in actuality? If he means the former as a prescription, then the obscure and the hidden would be of great importance, since only by uncovering what is obscure of the range could the process of actualization come to complete itself in actuality.

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92 WL, 387/ SL, 549.
This is why designers of board games “test” the structure of the game before they release it to the public. They look for the most obscure and unusual variations for how one might play the game. Only by coming to terms with the abnormal inconsistencies that a given set of rules might have within it do the designers come to realize exactly what the game is. They can then adjust and change what it is in order to strengthen its design. We can conclude from this example that there is something important about uncovering all conditions, and not only those which are the most prominent and obvious for a given set. But whether this is always the case or not remains difficult to answer from what Hegel has written.

3) What does it mean to make all conditions present (sind vollständig vorhanden)?

Hegel says that something initial becomes actual when all of the conditions are completely present. We can think of this in terms of part and whole. The whole appears as complete only if all of its parts are assembled in the right order. If any of the parts are not “present” or do not connect in the right ways, the whole would remain incomplete, in other words, the thing in question would not become actual. Presence (vorhanden sein) is Hegel’s term for the process of preparation where strands of determinate possibilities come together into a formation prior to their actualization. By making all conditions completely present, this turns the initial something into the resulting actuality.

For example, if all of the conditions of an internal combustion engine are completely present, this means that the engine has all of its integral parts, and that these parts all work together to produce the function of the engine. Again, this is why Hegel says that what is really actual “can act.” The engine then burns the gasoline and this sets the car in motion. But the engine can only act if the crankshaft turns the pistons back and forth from within the cylinder, if the sump surrounds the crankshaft, if the valves let in the fuel and release the exhaust, and if the
spark plugs ignite the air and make the combustion combust. Since these parts are integral, if any part is absent, the engine will not function, or at any rate, will not function properly.\textsuperscript{93} If the crankshaft were to turn the spark plugs instead of the pistons, or if the sump were to surround the cylinder instead of the crankshaft, or if the valves were to take in exhaust and release fuel – the parts of the engine would be present in the wrong order, and of course the engine would not work properly.\textsuperscript{94} While there is a difference between \textit{not working properly} and \textit{not working at all}, we can assume that if the engine is not identical with itself in parts, then it is not really an engine at all but only a heap of disassembled machine, which does not result in actuality because it cannot act.

Hegel has not yet entertained the question of why \textit{these} parts combine \textit{in this order} to form some determinate actuality (e.g. an engine from machine-parts). This question will come up in the transition from real necessity to real contingency as the investigation of whether there is an external reason or ground for why conditions join together into certain determinate sets and not into others. Here, we are concerned with what it means to make all of the conditions \textit{present}. While there might be a debate about what constitutes the integral parts of any given real actuality, and while there might be a lot of room for replacements of conditions, substitutions of order, alternatives of design, etc., Hegel’s point is that whatever is integral \textit{must be present}; otherwise, the thing in question will not find its end in actuality. But this also means that if the thing in question were to become “over-full” by the presence of what does not belong within the

\textsuperscript{93} This process is made more complicated by the fact that engineers often build into the structure a certain amount of redundancy which keeps the engine functioning even when the parts break down or go missing. Sometimes parts are also designed to replace or regenerate themselves. All of this complicates, but does not obscure, Hegel’s main point about “presence,” that the presence of certain conditions is integral to the process of material actualization.

\textsuperscript{94} There are at least two ways in which the intricacy of parts can lead to sustained positions of unactualized possibilities. The first is in the sense of resistance. The more intricate the parts are, or the larger and more obscure the range is, or the more the parts need to be just so – the harder it becomes to trigger the actualization. The second is in the sense of collaboration of function. The more intricate the parts are, the greater the chance that one part will take over while others remain under-utilized, and in this sense of under-utilization, they remain “untapped” and keep the status of unactualized possibilities.
circle of its finite set, then this thing would either become absent from itself, dismembered and
disorganized, as something falls into chaos, as the shape of form falls into matter, or another
determinate thing would rise forth in its place, take hold of the conditions, and turn itself into the
actual instead of what was originally proposed.

4) Usually, one enters a place or enters into a conversation. What does it mean for
something to enter actuality? (so tritt sie in Wirklichkeit.)

If something only enters into actuality by gathering together the parts of itself, the strands
of its possibility, one might assume that actuality-entrance is a gradual process. However gradual
and piecemeal this process might seem to be, Hegel suggests that at the point of completion, the
something enters into actuality all at once. In other words, we might use the logic of part and
whole when it comes to the gradual completion of conditions; however, this logic is no longer
appropriate when we talk about the exact point when something enters actuality. The word to enter suggests that something goes through this transformation in its entirety, that the
transformation from the conditions of possibility into actuality is immediate and indisolvable.95
Again, we find ourselves turning almost prematurely with Hegel to the disposition of absolute
actuality, where, not one and then another possible condition comes to form the resulting actual
in a successive way, but rather the whole circuit of possible conditions co-exist together as one
simultaneous actuality. But this will become more clear after we discuss Hegel’s theory of
relative necessity and how contingency stands at the base of this.

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95 Longuenesse makes this same point when she warns against inserting temporality into the process between conditions and the resulting actuality. See Hegel’s Critique of Metaphysics, 137- 138.
19) What is initial can only become actual if it does not contradict the conditions that make it possible.

“Was real möglich ist, ist also nach seinem Ansichseyn, ein formelles identisches, das nach seiner einfachen Inhaltsbestimmung sich nicht widerspricht; aber auch nach seinen entwickelten und unterschiedenen Umständen und allem, womit es im Zusammenhange steht, muß es als das mit sich identische sich nicht widersprechen.” (WL, 387)

“What is really possible is, according to its in-itself, something formally identical which, having a simple content-determination, is not self-contradictory; but, as self-identical, it must also not be self-contradictory in its developed and distinct circumstances and in everything with which it stands connected.” (SL, 547-548)

Hegel returns to his earlier definition of possibility as whatever does not formally contradict itself. But now he claims that real possibility must also follow the principle of non-contradiction and self-coherence. However, the restriction on real possibility is much more severe than what remains simply self-identical, because now one must not contradict the determinations, circumstances, and conditions that constitute what something is. Actualization becomes restricted not only to the possible as the non-contradictory, but also to whole regions of content that are not possible from the stance of the thing’s contextual environment. Hegel seems to be suggesting that if we fail to meet the conditions at a certain basic level, it would then be a contradiction for the actualization to result from this. Certainly, if I were to eat an apple but have no mouth, this would seem to contradict the necessary components of what it would take to ingest the apple. All determinate things are in this sense doubly-bound to the principle of non-contradiction. They cannot be themselves and the opposite of themselves, but they must also remain self-coherent within the context that makes them determinate.

There are at least two reasons why Hegel’s claim at premise 19 might seem problematic: a) it leaves us to wonder why he would choose to retain the term “contradiction” instead of simply calling this an “impasse,” and b) it leaves us to wonder why, if an actualization were to
occur without meeting its basic conditions, this would be a real contradiction and not simply a logical contradiction. As for the first of these, the debate amounts to the question of whether there is enough opposition and negativity in real possibility to call an actualization that fails to meet its conditions a contradiction. Those who are only willing to call it an “impasse” might still acknowledge the logical contradiction inherent in what is formally possible, since the contrary of this would be the abstract opposite of the actuality. But they would otherwise operate under the assumption that since the contrariety of real possibility has only the determinate other over against it, the negativity in its concept is not negative enough to make a contradiction of this. We can place Hegel at the other extreme of this debate. Although he might be over-emphasizing the role that contradiction plays at this point in the argument, we can also see why he would want to retain the strength of real possibility’s negativity. If it were only an impasse to eat an apple but to have no mouth, his further point about real necessity, which appears at premises 21, would make less sense since Hegel would not have set this up properly with his theory that real contradiction produces movement.

As for the second of these, although he continues to recognize logical contradiction at this point in the argument, Hegel also wants to establish that there is a further compounding of real contradiction on top of formal contradiction. If it were only a logical contradiction that I cannot eat an apple if I have no mouth, this would present us with the mere limitation that

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96 One can attribute this position to Kant. In the “Postulates of Empirical Thinking in General,” Kant acknowledges that what is formally possible cannot contradict itself; however, he maintains that what is really possible must act in accordance with the real context that surrounds it. Hegel claims that the real restriction is also a contradiction, but Kant says specifically that acting in accordance with the context that surrounds something is not a contradiction. Why does Hegel choose to retain the term “contradiction” instead of simply calling this an “impasse”? This is the sort of critique of Hegel that comes to mind from Kant’s short passage about formal contradiction and the non-contradictory restraint of something’s real context. Kant writes, “that in such a concept no contradiction must be contained is, to be sure, a necessary logical condition; but it is far from sufficient for the objective reality of the concept, i.e., for the possibility of such an object as is thought through the concept. Thus in the concept of a figure that is enclosed between two straight lines there is no contradiction, for the concepts of two straight lines and their intersection contain no negation of a figure.” Critique of Pure Reason, 323.
something is impossible if it is both itself and the opposite of itself. But by establishing real contradiction on top of logical contradiction, Hegel is able to explore a more detailed mechanics for how to think of something as both itself and the other of itself. It is this compounding of the two contradictions that lets us think about how something initial becomes actual by making all of its conditions completely present. The condition is the unit that mediates between actuality and possibility and entails each category in the other. But this process of mediation, where the possible equally entails the actual, requires the work of re-organizing the content so that something initial can become itself in others. In this sense, to be a “condition” is to be a “conditional.” Because there are conditions, something initial must conform to the determinateness of other actuals, which at first remain stubbornly “outside” the circle as raw exteriority, and only get “used up” if all conditions become completely present. This process of material actualization is the process by which something comes to adapt to the distinct circumstances with which it stands connected, on the one hand, turning itself into something that can accept the conditions, on the other hand, reshaping the conditions to make the parts harmonious at the point of actualization. Again, while everything and anything is formally possible, so long as there is no logical contradiction, what is really possible contains the further limitation that it must remain self-coherent within the environment that determinates it. In this sense, the threat of real contradiction shapes what things are and how they relate.

We might conclude from this premise that if it must submit both to the formal and to the real principle of non-contradiction, then what is really possible is a more restrictive and narrow set than what is formally possible. But Hegel will argue, contrary to this, that real necessity is not only a double-restriction (in the sense that something both cannot be the opposite of itself, but also must not contradict the context that makes it determinate), but that this restriction itself leads
to the only structural relation between actuality and possibility whereby something becomes itself in its other and becomes the other of itself. In this sense, real modality is more inclusive than formal modality because by submitting to real necessity, things become able to maintain what is otherwise formally impossible, that they are both themselves and their others. To see how this works, we will first need to understand why the resulting actuality that comes from the conditions of other actuals is in a different sense from premise 19 the demonstration of contradiction, and why it is the case that this demonstration leads to movement.
20) But since each condition contains a multiplicity of other actuals, to become actual is to become in contradiction.

“Aber zweytens weil es in sich mannichfaltig und mit anderem in mannichfaltigem Zusammenhange ist, die Verschiedenheit aber an sich selbst in Entgegensetzung übergeht, ist es ein widersprechendes. Wenn von einer Möglichkeit die Rede ist und deren Widerspruch aufgezeigt werden soll, so hat man sich nur an die Mannichfaltigkeit, die sie als Inhalt oder als ihre bedingende Existenz enthält, zu halten; woraus sich leicht ihr Widerspruch auffinden läßt.” (WL, 387)

“But secondly, because [what is really possible] is manifold within itself and has manifold connexions with an other, and because variety in its own self passes over into opposition, it is contradictory. If a possibility is in question and its contradiction is to be demonstrated, one need only fasten on to the multiplicity which it contains as content or as its conditioned Existence, and from this its contradiction is easily discovered.” (SL, 548)

Hegel finds the paradox from premise 7, now in terms of real possibility. Anything is formally possible that does not contradict itself. But if we take the whole disposition of possibility as one actuality, everything is equally impossible and self-contradictory. While “everything” is formally possible, the universality of “the” everything easily demonstrates the contradiction that actualization cannot maintain the contrariety of possibility as one actuality. The same problem recurs when one takes into account one’s real possibilities. The context that surrounds something and makes it determinate contains diversity, diversity contains opposition, and opposition contains contradiction. Hegel suggests that if we shift our disposition to the multiplicity of the contextual world, it is easy to discover real contradiction. This is the same problem that we found in the formal sub-chapter. Actualization cannot actualize the contrariety of possibility as one actuality. But the real version of this presents us with a contradiction that is at the same time movement.

Now, it is not obvious from the text whether Hegel means, i) thought can demonstrate the contradiction by fastening onto the multiplicity latent within each condition, or ii) the contradiction appears in the transformation when something initial results in actuality. Hegel
(i) Each condition has a multiplicity of possibilities existing latent within it, but it would be a contradiction to actualize everything that a condition could become. While the log of wood has all sorts of possibilities latent within it, from the fire in the furnace to the shingles on the house, only one or the other of these can become actual. This is why Hegel emphasizes that conditions “go under” when the actuality “comes forth.” If the fire were to become actual from the latent possibility in the wood, it would literally burn the wood to dust. While the shingles of the house still hold within them the real possibility of the fire, only one or the other of these can remain. If the fire takes the shingles in the night, this is because it has burned the wood out of them, and destroyed the form that they had become. There are of course various degrees of actualization. The shingles can become partly burned and remain partly intact, or in certain cases one condition can satisfy multiple possibilities at the point of actualization. But this only occurs when the contextual relationship happens to contain non-opposition and mutual exclusivity within its own content. And even this remains a unity of indifference and convenience.

Although they might seem to be the same at first glance, the problematic of real disjunction is significantly different from the principle of real contradiction that we had just outlined at premise 19. It is one thing to acknowledge the problematic of real disjunction, that each condition contains a multiplicity of real possibilities latent within it, but that only one or the other of these can become actual. It is quite another thing to acknowledge the conditionality underlying the conditions, which comes from real contradiction, that if something initial were to result in actuality, it would have to remain coherent throughout and not contradict the context that determines it. The apple (depending on its context) carries within it the possibility to be
eaten, the possibility to be smashed, the possibility to hang on the tree; while it would be a contradiction if the apple were to be eaten and to remain hanging on the tree *in the same manner*, it would be a contradiction of a different sort (as per premise 19) if I were “to eat” the apple with a banana or a truck rather than with my own mouth.

(ii) We can also demonstrate this contradiction in the very terms of how something initial results in actuality. I call this version the contradiction from developed actuality. On the one hand, what emerges is the same actuality throughout. The thing in question has become itself. The tree has grown from its possibilities in the seed. Someone’s moral disposition has developed from the habits she had formed as a child. However, at the same time and in a contradictory way, the actuality that results from this is something that none of the moments alone can complete, and that not even the summation of all moments together can properly expose. The developed actuality is in this sense the actualization into an other, but this is equally the actualization into oneself. Again, this is why Hegel emphasizes that the conditions “go under” as the actuality “comes forth.” Although they initially stand against the thing in question, as an external requirement that must be overcome, when the conditions are made present at the point of actualization, the possibility becomes realized and what began as only an external relation becomes a relation that is simultaneously external and internal.

This is not only a case of turning what is unlike into what is like. It is also a case of how to think of something as the other of itself. When the doe drinks the water of the forest, she digests the other. She makes it what she is. The water begins as an external contingent actuality. But because the actuality is contingent, it is not only what it seems to be. It is also the possibility of the doe. And the doe is not only what she seems to be. When she drinks the water, she turns this into what she is, but also only continues to be herself in this transformation. She sustains
herself in the contraries of possibility. By taking up the possibilities of her conditions which exist dispersed in others, the doe becomes the other that she is and sustains herself in this.

This is why Hegel says that from the completion of the conditions, “the something is... determined as being equally actual as possible.”97 The actual that results from the actualization of conditions is not a new distinct actuality emerging against the background of many contrary possibilities. Nor is it an actuality that entirely succeeds the initial actuality of its conditions. What results is an actuality that is both itself and possibility. This means that the contradiction that Hegel had discovered at premise 19 is not only restrictive, but also productive. The contradiction is restrictive in the sense that for the actualization to occur, one must follow the particular, determinate rules of one’s conditions and not do otherwise. Yet the contradiction is at the same time productive in the sense that by satisfying the necessity of one’s conditions, what comes of this is the realization of the contrary sides of possibility in one actuality. This is a reality that cannot be maintained formally. The real restriction that one must come to satisfy the conditions of one’s possibility releases thought from that initial formal restraint, that something cannot both be itself and be the opposite of itself. Looking back at premise 14, we can now fully recognize the reason why real actuality is action - because real contradiction has put it in motion.98

97 WL, 387/SL, 548. For my discussion of this sentence, see premise 18.
98 When I claim that to become actual is to become in contradiction, or that this version of contradiction is a contradiction of movement, I have Hegel’s remarkable statement from the contradiction passages of the Logic in mind: “As against contradiction, identity is merely the determination of the simple immediate, of dead being: but contradiction is the root of all movement and vitality: it is only in so far as something has a contradiction within it that it moves, has an urge and activity.” WL, 286/SL, 439.
21) Something initial becomes actual only if all conditions become completely present. Therefore, what is really possible can no longer be otherwise. This possibility is “real necessity.”

“3. Die Negation der realen Möglichkeit ist somit ihre Identität mit sich; indem sie so in ihrem Aufheben der Gegenstoß dieses Aufhebens in sich selbst ist, ist sie die reale Nothwendigkeit.” (WL, 388)

Was nothwendig ist, kann nicht anders seyn; aber wohl was überhaupt möglich ist; denn die Möglichkeit ist das Ansichseyn, das nur Gesetzteyn, und daher wesentlich Andersetseyn ist. Die formelle Möglichkeit ist diese Identität als Uebergehen in schlechthin Anderes; die reale aber, weil sie das andere Moment, die Wirklichkeit, an ihr hat, ist schon selbst die Nothwendigkeit. Was daher real möglich ist, das kann nicht mehr anders seyn; unter diesen Bedingungen und Umständen kann nicht etwas anderes erfolgen. Reale Möglichkeit und die Nothwendigkeit sind daher nur scheinbar unterschieden; diese ist eine Identität, die nicht erst wird, sondern schon scheinbar unterschieden; diese ist eine Identität, die nicht erst wird, sondern schon scheinbar unterschieden; diese ist eine Identität, die nicht erst wird, sondern schon scheinbar unterschieden; diese ist eine Identität, die nicht erst wird, sondern schon scheinbar unterschieden; diese ist eine Identität, die nicht erst wird, sondern schon scheinbar unterschieden; diese ist eine Identität, die nicht erst wird, sondern schon scheinbar unterschieden; diese ist eine Identität, die nicht erst wird, sondern schon scheinbar unterschieden; diese ist eine Identität, die nicht erst wird, sondern schon scheinbar unterschieden; diese ist eine Identität, die nicht erst wird, sondern schon scheinbar unterschieden; diese ist eine Identität, die nicht erst wird, sondern schon scheinbar unterschieden; diese ist eine Identität, die nicht erst wird, sondern schon scheinbar unterschieden; 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diese ist eine Identitä...” (WL, 388)

“3. The negation of real possibility is thus its identity-with self; in that in its sublating it is thus within itself the recoil of this sublating, it is real necessity.” (SL, 549)

What is necessary cannot be otherwise; but what is simply possible can; for possibility is the in-itself that is only positedness and therefore essentially otherness. Formal possibility is this identity as transition into a sheer other; but real possibility, because it contains the other moment, actuality, is already itself necessity. Therefore what is really possible can no longer be otherwise; under the particular conditions and circumstances something else cannot follow. Real possibility and necessity are therefore only seemingly different; this is an identity which does not have to become but is already presupposed and lies at their base. Real necessity is therefore a relation pregnant with content; for the content is that implicit identity that is indifferent to the differences of form.” (SL, 549)

As a response to the contradiction of developed actuality, Hegel claims that possibility and necessity only seem to be different. If by this he means that possible things are necessary, then this is one of the more provocative statements he makes in the chapter. Although most of us would agree to the basic axiom that if something is necessary, then it is also possible, the claim becomes much more controversial if we also mean that if something is possible, this makes it

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99 See premise 2 for my discussion of the necessity axiom and its related possibility axiom.
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necessary. In the passage quoted above, Hegel acknowledges traditional definitions of necessity and possibility when he writes, “what is necessary cannot be otherwise; but what is simply possible can [be otherwise].” Why would he claim at this point in the argument that possibility and necessity only seem to be different? Does he really mean that something can only be otherwise if it no longer be otherwise? This certainly looks suspicious. How can we make sense of it?

I will explore three variations on the theme that if something is possible, this makes it necessary. Each variation offers an explanation for how to think of the entailment from possibility to necessity without, however, falling into the logical form that most of us would find to be false, namely that what is merely possible in the boundless sense of formal possibility is necessary simply because it is possible. Rather, each of the following variations has this problematic thesis over against it: A) If something is possible, this makes it necessary, but not necessarily actual. B) It is necessary that if something has become actual, it must have become actual through other actuals, i.e., through conditions. C) It is necessary for a possibility to become actual, but not necessarily in any specific way.

A) If something is possible, this makes it necessary, but not necessarily actual. This variation assumes that all possibilities of a given determinate range necessarily exist, and that if

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Commentators have addressed this controversy in the chapter, but none have explicitly situated it in terms of real contradiction. Di Giovanni sees the necessity of real possibility as the inevitable and irreversible passage from possible conditions to the resulting actuality. “The Category of Contingency”, 190. Marcuse calls this unity of possibility and necessity a type of movement. “Necessity makes up the character of this movement. For actuality only unites itself with itself through its movement, and that into which it is “transformed” is no other than its own possibility, its own proper being (Ansichsein.)” His emphasis on the self-movement aspect of Hegel’s claim is quite helpful, but he does not address whether real contradiction is the source of this movement. See Hegel’s Ontology, 96. Carlton says something similar about necessity and movement when he defines real necessity as an event, rather than a thing, principle, or restriction. This is helpful for thinking of real necessity as an element in the process of actualization. A Commentary on Hegel, 409. Lampert makes a larger claim to this effect when he says that “necessity” is generally about multiplicity for Hegel: “Readers sometimes err in thinking of necessity in Hegel as a kind of identity rather than a kind of multiplicity.” The three variations of possibility entailing necessity that I will present in this premise are each already anticipated in Lampert’s essay. “Hegel on Contingency”, 75.
any one strand of this range were not to exist, the actualization could not occur. Now, if this is right, then we will need to posit a distinction, which we did not retain in the formal argument, between “existence” and “actuality.” Although only some possibilities become actual, all possibilities exist.

Hegel’s language of “presence” and “completion” suggests that all determinate possibilities must exist prior to their actualization and that this actualization depends upon the more original existence of unactualized-possibilities. This variation on the claim works well in the sense that we are able to establish the entailment from possibility to necessity while avoiding the controversy that mere possibility necessarily entails actuality. However, I believe that this variation will fit better in the absolute modality steps of Hegel’s argument, since there we discover an actuality that retains the existence of unactualized possibility as part of its constitution. At this stage, the entailment from possibility to necessity remains exterior to the actualization, which is construed more narrowly because this requires us to posit a distinction between existence and actuality, a distinction which will fall away in absolute modality.\(^{101}\)

B) It is necessary that if something has become actual, it must have become actual through other actuals, i.e., through conditions. This variation offers a further explanation of the claim “if something is possible, then it is necessary” because it reveals the necessity in the movement from conditions, insofar as they are units of possibility, to the resulting actuality. Hegel claims that if something is a condition for something else, then it is an immediate actuality

\(^{101}\) Although he does not directly say that all determinate possibilities of a range must exist, we can still take Houlgate’s point about war and peace as an example of variation (A), in the sense that if peace is to become actual, the possibility of war must also exist. Houlgate focuses on the claim that what is really possible must be replaceable with another, and that in this way its contingency exists. However, I maintain that the difficulty at this stage of Hegel’s argument is to recognize why possibility entails necessity. Cf. Houlgate: “What becomes clear in section B is that, for Hegel, the actual possibility of being or not being always takes the form of the real possibility of something else, that the sheer contingency of something is expressed in the fact that it itself contains the possibility of its being replaced by another. Peace is merely contingent, therefore, to the extent that it itself contains the possibility of war.” “Necessity and Contingency,” 43.
whose content as actual entails the possibility of other actuals. In this variation, we define real necessity as the “conditionality” of the condition, that if something initial results in actuality, this is because all of its conditions have become completely present.

At premise 18, thought had discovered material actualization, where something initial comes into actuality only if all of its possibilities (as conditions) are made present. The advancement at premise 20 is then to realize the conditionality behind this development from the initial to the resulting actuality. Something initial can only result in actuality if it can complete itself in others. This is no longer merely a claim about possibility, where something finds itself dispersed in the possibilities of others. This is now a claim about necessity.

An engine is not an engine if all of the conditions that make it work are not already in place. The cylinder, the crankshaft, the sump, the spark plugs – these are not merely suggestions. While they are conditions for the possibility of the engine, they are not possibilities that can be otherwise; they are rather possibilities that can no longer be otherwise since they are the integral conditions that make an engine run. If one of these parts were to go missing, we might say that the engine is broken or that it does not work properly, but we would also mean that the engine is not completely itself if it can “act out” the full range of its possibilities, both in the sense of the conditions that make it possible, but also in the sense that it must be able to “perform” the full range of its capacities (i.e., burn fuel, produce motion, etc.). However gradual and piecemeal this process of gathering-possibility might seem to be, since the something enters actuality all at once, from the very outset of the process, the something in question has begun the inevitable movement, what can no longer be otherwise, to emerge as the actualization of its being. Like a marble in the grooves of a downward-slanting maze, the implicit existence of something cannot but materialize (unless something else gets in the way and blocks the actualization) as the
explicit actuality of this existence. Therefore, real necessity is compulsive necessity. Once its actualization has become initiated, something can no longer do anything at all but must follow the course of its possibilities since these have become necessary.

One might object that this variation on Hegel’s claim “what is really possible can no longer be otherwise” makes him sound overly rigid, as if only certain determinate conditions and no others are essential to the resulting actuality. One can imagine, on the contrary, that even with something as complex as an engine, there are still a lot of alternatives and variations of conditions. For example, the engine in an electric car does not require the same conditions since it does not need to burn gas to produce motion. But while the variety of conditions, as with the variety of what results in actuality, complicates Hegel’s claim, it is still important to recognize possibility as necessity at this stage of the argument. To be clear, Hegel should have explained how some conditions are more integral than others, and that from the same set of conditions, there are cases where a variety of different actualities could result. But this only complicates and does not undermine his insight, that if something initial results in actuality, this requires necessarily, not anything at all, but only certain determinate conditions (with only some room for alternatives, replacements, additions, and erasures).

This variation on the claim has its flaws. It can effectively explain the entailment from possibility to necessity only if we accentuate the role of possibility for conditions. To the extent that each condition is a unit of possibility, the resulting actuality that this unit entails must go through the actuality of others. But since Hegel says that a condition is both actuality and possibility, this variation can offer us only an indirect version of the entailment from possibility to necessity, where possibility is necessary but only because it is immediately and contingently an actuality. For this variation to work, we must rely on a more basic connection between
actuality and necessity, one where conditions are immediate actualities whose possibility entails other actuals. This means that the further entailment from possibility to necessity presupposes that real actualities necessarily lead to other actuals, i.e., to conditions and results.

C) It is necessary for a possibility to become actual, but not necessarily in any specific way. This variation explains why something possible is necessary by proposing that although possibility must become actualized, there is no one determinate possibility that must become actualized over any other. The moment of necessity in this variation appeals to the basic assumption that there must be something rather than nothing. But the variation also avoids the controversy that what is merely possible is necessary, or similarly, that only certain determinate possibilities must become actual. Its strength relies on a level-distinction between two types of “determinateness,” one where something must be determinate because being is, but also where there is no specific determinateness that should or must become actual. Since actuality immediately appears before us as the fact of existence (as per premise 1), actualization cannot not happen; but this necessity where actualizing possibility cannot not happen makes no further claim about what exactly must become actual.

Or, Hegel might mean the more contentious claim that to posit a given determinate range of possibilities commits something of this range to become actual. This combines variation B and variation C in the sense that although there is no specific direction the condition must take, that it is a condition at all commits it to some further result in actuality, even if this is the actuality of failed conditions or of sheer, accidental contingency. A claim like this one is more contentious because of its proximity to the claim that if something is merely possible, then it must become just that determinate actuality and nothing else (as if the mere possibility of the unicorn were to necessitate actual unicorns). Still, if Hegel is saying that only something of a
given range of possibilities must become actual, but not that any specific possibilities must come about, then the distinction between “something must be determinate” and “this, not its other, must be determinate” remains in place. What is contentious, then, is not whether something merely possible must become actual. This claim is contentious because it brings up the question: how much unactualized possibility must there be of a given range to let possibility both entail necessity but also remain the category that allows things not to happen?102

Hegel probably has all three of these variations in mind when he says that what is really possible can no longer be otherwise. We can read variation A as the most conclusive of the three variations since it relies on the theory that unactualized possibilities exist and are constitutive of the contextual world. However, this variation also reaches too far ahead of Hegel’s argument into the terrain of absolute modality, drawing us prematurely to the theory that unactualized possibilities not only exist, but are a necessary component for the absolute actuality of substance. I think that variation B is the most suitable candidate for the state of affairs of premise 21, since it shows the necessity embedded in the possibilities of conditions. Here, possibility is only indirectly necessity, but this is probably right, as Hegel suggests by his choice of words “possibility and necessity are only seemingly different.” Variation C should seem more appropriate to the following premise (premise 22), where Hegel claims that contingency stands at the base of real necessity. Still, there is a way in which the insight from this variation is already at work even before we recognize the “relativity” of real necessity.

102 This is the same sort of question that Lampert asks about “fluidity”: “The challenge that multiplicity poses for the Hegelian system is not how the system can make room for single events, but how much fluidity and multiplicity the system requires in order for its reciprocal interrelations to be distributed.” “Hegel on Contingency,” 74.
22) Contingency is nevertheless the reason behind why what is really possible can no longer be otherwise.¹⁰³

“Diese Nothwendigkeit aber ist zugleich relativ. – Sie hat nemlich eine Voraussetzung, von der sie anfängt, sie hat an dem zufälligen ihren Ausgangspunkt. Das reale Wirkliche als solches, ist nemlich das bestimmte Wirkliche, und hat zunächst seine Bestimmtheit als unmittelbares Seyn darin, daß es eine Mannichfaltigkeit existierender Umstände ist; aber daß unmittelbare Seyn als Bestimmtheit, ist es auch das Negative seiner, ist Anschüsseyn oder Möglichkeit; so ist es reale Möglichkeit. Als diese Einheit der beyden Momente ist sie die Totalität der Form, aber die sich noch äusserliche Totalität; sie ist so Einheit der Möglichkeit und Wirklichkeit, daß 1) die mannichfaltige Existenz unmittelbar oder positiv die Möglichkeit ist; - ein mögliches, mit sich identisches überhaupt, darum weil sie ein wirkliches ist; 2) insofern diese Möglichkeit der Existenz gestzt ist, ist ie besimmt als nur Möglichkeit, als unmittelbares Umschlagen der Wirklichkeit in ihr Gegentheil, - oder als Zufälligkeit.” (WL, 388)

“But this necessity is at the same time relative. For it has a presupposition from which it begins, it has its starting point in the contingent. For the real actual as such is the determinate actual, and has first of all its determinateness as immediate being in the fact that it is a multiplicity of existing circumstances; but this immediate being as determinateness is also the negative of itself, is an in-itself or possibility, and thus it is real possibility. As this unity of the two moments it is the totality of form, but the totality which is still external to itself; it is unity of possibility and actuality in such a manner that (1) manifold Existence is immediately or positively possibility – a possible, a self-identical in general, because it is an actual; (2) in so far as this possibility of Existence is posited, it is determined as only possibility, as immediate conversion of actuality into its opposite – or as contingency.” (SL, 549)

If something is really possible, this makes it necessary. But directly after saying this, Hegel claims that the necessity in this is at the same time relative because it has its starting point in contingency. Now, he probably has a traditional usage of “hypothetical necessity” in mind, such as Aristotle presents in the Physics 2.9 when he says that “in all… things which involve that for the sake of which: the product cannot come to be without things which have a necessary

¹⁰³ It is worth noting that in the formal sub-chapter, Hegel discovers formal possibility from formal actuality, then contingency from formal possibility, and then necessity from contingency; however, in the real sub-chapter, while he continues to deduce real possibility from actuality, Hegel now discovers necessity from possibility, and contingency from necessity. In other words, in the real modality sub-chapter, Hegel reverses the order of the deduction between contingency and necessity.
nature, but it is not due to these (except as its material); it comes to be for an end.”104 In terms of conditional propositions, real necessity lies in the relationship between the antecedent and the consequent, but this relationship nevertheless has contingency at its base because one does not need to take up the conditional in the first place. We say, for example, that if the child were to drop a feather, and nothing were to impede its flight, the feather would eventually fall to the ground. But the necessity in this still relies on a presupposition of contingency simply because the child does not need to drop the feather in the first place. In other words, even if we assume that B must follow necessarily from A, it is still contingent whether one presupposes A or not. The engine, to use another example, burns gas and produces motion, but only if the conditions that make the engine function are already in place. Let us assume they are in place. Then the engine cannot not function. However, to assume this is to expose the relativity of real necessity, that because the conditions could have been otherwise, what follows of necessity is at the same time relative and therefore contingent.105

The problem with this reading of relative necessity is that it alludes to a kind of immediate freedom from determinateness. This would be the suicide-version for why necessity begins from contingency. All things would have the option or chance not to be determinate, some in the active sense that they might not choose to become what they already tend towards.

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104 Aristotle, the Physics in The Complete Works of Aristotle, 200a7-10.
105 We should keep in mind that different sets of conditions might all lead to the same result. From this it follows that the entailment of real necessity comes only from the relationship between the antecedent and the consequent, not from the presupposition of the antecedent, but also not from any form of entailment from the consequent to the antecedent. Hegel suggests this reading of relative necessity as “hypothetical necessity” in the Doctrine of the Concept under the heading “Hypothetical Judgment.” Here he writes that the hypothetical judgement “involves, not that A is or that B is, but only that if one is, then the other is.”105 Although in this passage Hegel does seem to presuppose the content of both A and B as independent of each other, plugging each into the basic formula of a conditional statement (If A, then B), he nevertheless claims that in a hypothetical judgment the conditionality of the conditional produces the content of each side, even suggesting that, in a contradictory way, the antecedent is both itself and the consequent. In the conditional statement, “if A, then B,” Hegel says that A is both A and B because if one were to assume A, then B must follow from this, not as something independent of A, but as integral to the content of A.
being (e.g., a talented child might not choose to become a professional pianist), others in the passive sense since it would be a mere contingency of chance whether they come about or not. But I doubt Hegel means *freedom from determinateness*. He seems to emphasize, to the contrary, that from the disposition of the determinateness, the thing cannot but take up the conditions that determine it. Rather than the sign of freedom from determinateness, Hegel probably intends real contingency to be the sign of danger and instability, that because we must assume the conditionality of the conditions, there is the risk that something might not become what it already tends to be.

The argument for this requires us to rethink the stability and identity-with-self of what is immediately actual. It is not simply the case that from material actualization, something *can or can not* come to actualize the contraries of possibility in one actuality. Hegel’s point is that if something does not maintain the contraries of possibility, *then it cannot maintain itself*. Its own identity fundamentally depends upon the actualization of possibilities that are initially in others. He claims that real necessity is “relative,” but not because something has the option to become itself in others, and the equal option not to do this. His point is the opposite. If contingency stands at the base of real necessity, then material actualization is the risk that something might not become itself because it cannot meet the requirements for the possibility of its activation in and as others. The “relativity” of real necessity is not *freedom from determinateness* but the requirement that something *must sustain the contraries of possibility to become itself*.

There are at least two inter-related reasons why the relativity of the necessity is an argument for the sustaining of possible contraries in one actuality, rather than an argument for freedom from determinateness. The first reason comes from the contingency of the conditions, in the sense that if something is a condition, it might or might not result in actuality. The second
comes from the contingency that results from the conditions, in the sense that something which none of the conditions alone could anticipate results from the material actualization. I call this second one “retroactive presupposition.”

1) Even if we assume that A is the antecedent of B, it is still contingent whether B will follow from this because it is still contingent whether the conditionality of the conditions will become satisfied or not. This is the case because conditions begin as immediate external actualities on their own and must become “sacrificed” (either used or used up) in the process of actualization. This is expressed foremost in the conflicts between one process of actualization and another. Since conditions are immediate contingent actualities that exist independently of their status in various “circles” of consequence, they are the possibility of one actualization, but they are equally the possibilities of others. The soil is both a condition for the possibility of the plant, but at the same time the possibility for the mole’s burrow. We can imagine conflicts from this: either the roots that the plant develops in the soil block the mole, who must build around them, or the mole cuts through the roots with her teeth, and destroys the process of growth in the plant. While in this case the stronger force will tend to win, that the conflict occurs at all is an expression of the contingency at the starting point of the necessity.

2) We can also construe from the relativity of real necessity a theory of retroactive presupposition. This means that the stable identity of the thing in question only appears as the starting point of the process at the very end of the process as the conclusion of the resulting actuality. We should not read freedom from determinateness into Hegel’s claim because then we would have to presuppose the determinateness and stable identity of things from a position prior to their actualization. Although the prior stable identity might seem intuitive, Hegel seems to be suggesting that the question of whether something initial will become actual is a question that
can only appear *after* the actualization has already occurred. Contingency is then the starting point of real necessity because none of the conditions alone can anticipate what the thing in question *is* that will result from them.

We can see the argument from *retroactive presupposition* straight away from Hegel's first definition of formal possibility as *the identity of actuality into itself* (premise 3). If what is immediately actual is identified in its possibility to-be, its identity only becomes stable in the instability that it equally can not be. This is just the superficial confirmation of something's self-coherence through the law of identity, that if A is possible, then A is A. But there is also a significant implication from this. If the doe must confirm the actuality of being a doe in the possibility of not being a doe, through the conditionality of whether her conditions will be met, she is not always already what she is but only becomes-doe from the contingency that she must also be able not to be this. That she is what she is presupposes that she can also not be what she is. Therefore, the necessity from premise 21 is the necessity of *contingency* in the sense that if something initial results in actuality, it must also have been able not to result in this.

Determinateness necessarily requires the negation of the determinateness as the more originary position from which something determinate can be. This is not to say that the doe only becomes a doe *after* she drinks the water, as if she is not already a doe as she enters the forest and begins to look for the pond. The point is that material actualization requires the contingency that things could not be what they are, so that they can be what they are. That she must drink the water to survive is itself an expression of the necessity of her contingency. Real necessity does not present things as predetermined to be what they are, as the connotations of “hypothetical necessity” sometimes suggest. Rather, it shows us that the stable identity of things lies in the more originary relation of contingency. Something must have been able not to be what it is in
order to be what it is. More than this, because it must risk itself to be itself, it must become otherwise, and this is what it is.
Chapter 3: Hegel’s Absolute Modality

23) Absolute Actuality is then the unity of contingency and real necessity as one disposition. It is both the actuality that results when all conditions are present, but also the actuality of this entire process.
   a. The possibility of something exists at first in the actualities of others (equivalence of P17).
   b. However, if something completes the conditions that make it possible, it emerges as itself in and as these others.
   c. Therefore, the possibilities only seemed to be dispersed in others.
   d. Absolute actuality is the existence of this self-relation.

24) Necessity, not possibility, is the reflection of absolute actuality into in-itself.
   a. Absolute actuality is the self-relation of possibilities that had seemed to be dispersed in other actuals (equivalence of P23).
   b. Because the possibilities in others are the self-relation of the actuality, all possibilities of the actuality have become necessary to the actuality.
   c. Therefore, necessity, not possibility, is the reflection of absolute actuality into itself (conclusion from P3 and P23).

25) Necessity is the in-itself because absolute actuality already includes all possibilities. This actuality is as much possibility as it is actuality. Hegel calls this possibility “absolute possibility.”
   a. Absolute actuality is the relation of all possibilities as an actuality (equivalence of P24).
   b. But this means that it is an actuality whose content is only possibility.
   c. Hegel calls this realization “absolute possibility.”

26) If absolute actuality is absolute possibility, then the necessity of this actuality becomes “absolute necessity.”
   a. Absolute actuality contains only those possibilities that are generated from the context of the relation.
   b. However, because the possibility of this actuality is “absolute possibility,” absolute actuality necessarily contains all possibilities whatsoever.
   c. Absolute actuality is in this sense self-contradictory. It contains only those possibilities generated from the context, and yet it contains all possibilities whatsoever.
   d. Hegel calls the resolution of this contradiction “absolute necessity.”

27) If absolute necessity is the totality of all possibilities, this necessity is the same as absolute contingency. Hegel calls this final result of modality “affirmative multiplicity.” This necessity is the “absolute conversion of actuality and possibility.”
   a. Since absolute necessity includes all possibilities, it includes even those possibilities that exist beyond the context of each absolute actuality (equivalence of P26).
   b. This means that absolute necessity includes all contingencies whatsoever.
c. Therefore, absolute necessity is as much contingency as it is necessity.
23) Absolute Actuality is then the unity of contingency and real necessity as one disposition. It is both the actuality that results when all conditions are present, but also the actuality of this entire process.

“Daher ist diese Möglichkeit, welche die unmittelbare Wirklichkeit, indem sie Bedingung ist, an ihr hat, nur das Ansichseyn als die Möglichkeit eines Andern. Dadurch daß, wie gezeigt, daß Andersseyn sich aufhebt, und daß Gesetztseyn selbst gesetzt wird, wird die reale Möglichkeit zwar Nothwendigkeit; aber diese fängt somit von jener noch nicht in sich reflectirten Einheit des Möglichen und Wirklichen an; - dieses Voraussetzen und die in sich zurückkehrende Bewegung ist noch getrennt; - oder die Nothwendigkeit hat sich noch nicht aus sich selbst zur Zufälligkeit bestimmt. (WL, 388)

An sich ist also hier die Einheit der Nothwendigkeit und Zufälligkeit vorhanden; diese Einheit ist die absolute Wirklichkeit zu nennen.” (WL, 389)

“Consequently this possibility which immediate actuality possesses in so far as it is condition, is only the in-itself as the possibility of an other. By virtue of the fact that, as was shown, this otherness sublates itself and this positedness is itself posited, real possibility does, it is true, become necessity; but the latter thus begins from that unity of the possible and the actual which is not yet reflected into itself – this presupposing and the self-returning movement are still separate – or necessity has not yet spontaneously determined itself into contingency. (SL, 549-550)

Here, therefore, the unity of necessity and contingency is present in itself or in principle; this unity is to be called absolute actuality.” (SL, 550)

Since the role of contingency as the base of real necessity exposes the instability of actuality, Hegel turns instead to “absolute actuality.” Real actuality is the manifestation of this or that determinate content. But with absolute actuality, Hegel has made explicit what he has already begun to explore, the “large” actuality that is itself the “whole” possibility, the entire state of affairs surrounding the content of each determinate thing. While he has already begun to explore this actuality as the bounded multiplicity of possibilities dispersed in other actuals, he can only now make this explicit as process-actuality once he has deduced contingency from real necessity.

If his argument were to end at premise 21, it would seem as if real necessity were to
come from an external source. Although conditions would remain the unity of the actual and the possible, we would only be able to comprehend the reason or ground for these conditions from a standpoint beyond the process of the conditions. The first attempt is to fix the reasons for material actualization from beyond the process of the actualization. Why does the plant grow from the seed? Because the soil is rich, the water is plentiful, and the sunlight is strong.\textsuperscript{106} This attempt at exteriorizing the reasons for actualization is no doubt a residual effect from the initial formal problem, that actualization cannot actualize the contrariety of possibility without falling into contradiction or disjunction. Soil, water, and sunlight seem to be the other of the seed, and only become integrated as the roots begin to absorb water from the earth and break into the light.

But this leads only to a kind of infinite regress where each condition supplies the reason for another, \textit{ad infinitum}. Ultimately, if the reason for the manifestation comes from a source exterior to the process of the manifestation, then there is really no good reason behind the necessity of the conditions. Like a child with too many questions, we would ask for the reason of the reason of the reason, and this would lead either to \textit{nothing} as the ultimate ground, or to \textit{undemonstrable presuppositions}, such as that God is the reason why the plant grows from the seed.

Hegel proposes instead that although the reason behind the resulting actuality might seem to come from a source external to it, it would be more accurate to describe this source as \textit{immanent} to the resulting actuality. After all, the lesson from contingency at premise 22 is not that all determinate things can “abort” from their determinateness because they can equally \textit{not} \textsuperscript{106} Other non-organic examples might work just as well - such as the moral disposition of a person’s character, the requirements of a legal solution to a property infringement, the reason why the internet social networking website “Facebook” has “status updates,” etc. I have chosen to draw from the example of the plant and the seed because this is a process that Hegel was particularly fond of invoking. For Hegel’s extensive treatment of “Plant Nature,” see §343–§349 of Hegel’s \textit{Philosophy of Nature}, 303-351. For an excellent study of contradiction and organisms, which offers an analysis of Hegel’s treatment of plants, see Hahn, \textit{Contradiction in Motion}. Also see Goethe, \textit{The Metamorphosis of Plants}.
become themselves. The lesson is rather that something is only itself if it can become itself in others and become the other of itself. The result of this is not so much the ever fluxuating becoming of ingestion and digestion of things with their others (although this is one byproduct), but rather that an actuality must supply its own immanent reasons for its manifestation. If one can find the reason only in another (or cannot find the reason at all), then real necessity remains an exteriority, and contingency remains separate from it. However, if the reason for these conditions is immanent to the conditions and to everything that develops from them, then the necessity has supplied its own sufficient reason;\footnote{Lampert also defines real necessity in terms of sufficient reason when he writes, “real necessity provides its own sufficient reason – its own process makes it what it is; it is and cannot be otherwise.” “Hegel on Contingency,” 75.} then when something results in actuality, it remains coherent with itself because it is of itself the whole possibility. Then the actual is the cause of itself. Its movement in possibility is the movement of itself. But this requires a significantly different disposition of modality. We must now think the identity of “actuality” as a “circuit” or a “process” rather than as a thing among others. This process-actuality is the absolute actuality of self-movement.

One route into Hegel’s argument from absolute actuality comes by way of collapsing the supposed distinction between “passive conditions” and “activation.” To distinguish between conditions and activation is to maintain a separation between necessity and contingency. Conditions are necessary \textit{in one sense}, but contingent \textit{in another sense}, because they begin as immediate actualities that stand against what something might become. They are then \textit{necessary} for the sake of the resulting actuality. But they are equally \textit{contingent} in the sense that they are the question of whether something will become itself.

However, these different senses of necessity and contingency presuppose that the conditions are \textit{passive} and require the further step that someone or something come along and
activate them. To build a house might require stone, wood, cement, monetary funds, a deed to the land, a zoning permit, etc. But these physical materials and social conditions cannot alone ensure that the house will come into actuality. What they require, in addition, is a builder who would come along and build the house from the material. Hegel calls the conditions “passive” because there is no active agent within them.\textsuperscript{108} The same conditions that the house requires, taken separately or in different combinations, are also the conditions for a variety of other things. Someone could use up the stone to build a wall instead, or spend the funds on the education of the youngest child. This is why Hegel’s distinction between “conditions” and “activity” is quite important; otherwise, it might seem that conditions could not be used for a variety of different purposes. In this sense, the contingency lies in the various directions of the activation.

But Hegel also argues that although the activation is different from the conditions, it is equally just another necessary condition. Like stone, funds, and permits, the house builder is also a necessary condition, or the house cannot come about. On the one hand, it is important to maintain the distinction between the material conditions and the agent who activates the conditions, since this distinction reveals that conditions are indeed conditions \textit{for the possibility of actualization}. Without the distinction between conditions and activity, the process of becoming actual would be an inevitable process and there would be no contingency at the base of the necessity.

On the other hand, the distinction between conditions and activation is a false, or at any rate misleading, distinction. For Hegel, anything is a condition if it is necessary to the process of becoming actual. That which gathers the material together and activates it is also necessary to the development of the actuality. If there is no builder to build the house, the material components

\textsuperscript{108} It is not hard to think of cases where the active agent exists \textit{in} the passive conditions, but this only complicates the point.
will remain in their initial state of proximal matter, and the possibility of the house will remain unfulfilled.

Absolute actuality is then the result of collapsing the distinction between passive conditions and activation. Absolute actuality is the actuality that comes forth from the conditions of possibility when all of the conditions are completely present, not only in the hypothetical sense of relative necessity beginning from contingent external actualities, but in the sense of total inclusiveness, where necessity and contingency are in principle the same. Real actuality took its possibilities to be equally determinate, external requirements, existing initially in other actuals, but one recognizes in absolute actuality that the possibilities are the “fluidity” of itself (its self-movement). In this sense, absolute actuality is the realization of real actuality. Real actuality only entertained the alien character of possibility so that this actuality could become itself. When real actuality overcame the conditions of its possibility, it included the other within itself. The conditions released themselves of externality, and what was initially possible became itself in the other. Absolute actuality is then the realization that real possibilities only seemed to be dispersed in other actuals, but that this process of satisfying external conditions is the self-same movement of actuality throughout. But this only works if the actuality includes the other as the constitution of itself (and if the other includes the self as the constitution of the other). If something enters actuality through the external conditions of possibility in other actuals, this actuality becomes itself through its other, and this other becomes included as the return into actuality.

We can summarize this point by rethinking how actuality “acts.” Hegel has already discussed in real modality the “action” of real actuality (see premise 14.) He says that what is really actual “can act.” Absolute actuality also “can act.” But whereas real actuality acts only by realizing itself through its possibilities in other actuals, the action of absolute actuality is its own
self-movement, not the realization of itself through the other, but the absolute unity of itself and its other. If some real existing thing can act, this is because it moves itself through its other. The buried seed breaks through the earth and opens itself into the sky only if it realizes its own possibilities in the possibilities of others. But the movement of absolute actuality begins from a different standpoint, not from the action of some thing and its properties that really exist in the world. Absolute actuality begins from the position that the self and the other are the same. This means that the movement of absolute actuality happens in the entire circuit between existing things. From this standpoint, a seed does not simply break forth from the earth and open itself to the sky. The seed that pushes upwards, the earth that splits apart, the sky that is opened upon – are each the entirety of the circuit, and this together, as one standpoint, is absolute actuality. While in Real Modality he invokes images of “production,” “ground,” and the movement between self and other, now Hegel invokes images of a different sort, “tracings” (Spur), “markings” (Maal), “reflexes” (Reflex), “absolute negativity” (absolute Negativität), and “freedom” (Freyheit). In premises 24–27, we will examine Hegel’s argument from this third type of modality, a modality where actuality can act but only upon itself, and where necessity, rather than restricting possibility, amplifies it.

109 Hegel probably has Leibniz’s theory of compossibility in mind when he writes about the interconnectedness of absolute actuality. In paragraph 61 of “The Monadology,” about composites, Leibniz writes: “Every body is affected by everything that happens in the universe, to such an extent that he who sees all can read in each thing what happens everywhere, and even what has happened or what will happen…” Leibniz, Philosophical Essays, 221. I will develop this connection between compossible monads and Hegel’s absolute actualities in Chapter 4 of this study.
24) Necessity, not possibility, is the reflection of absolute actuality into itself.

“This actuality, which is itself as such necessary, for it contains necessity as its in-itself, is absolute actuality – actuality which can no longer be otherwise, for its in-itself is not possibility but necessity itself.” (SL, 550)

Throughout this entire argument, Hegel has consistently called the in-itself (Ansichseyn) “possibility,” not “necessity.” At premise 3, he called possibility the “in-itself” of actuality because it simply reflects actuality into itself, and affirms the truth of what immediately is. Likewise, real possibility is the “in-itself” of real actuality because an existing thing can only manifest itself by realizing its possibilities in others. This possibility is, as Hegel says, “pregnant” (Inhaltsvolle) with the content of other actuals. However, the structure of absolute actuality works quite differently. Whereas formal and real actuality each in turn contain formal and real possibility as the in-itself, absolute actuality contains necessity straight away as the in-itself.

Notice what an unusual view of necessity Hegel maintains at this stage of the argument. While he does not yet call this “absolute necessity,” we can already anticipate the reason why this actuality can no longer be otherwise. Necessity is the in-itself of absolute actuality because this actuality is equally the negative extension of possibility (both the can and the can not). Since there is no longer the possibility of an other that the actuality is not, there is no longer any way for the actuality to be other than it is. Therefore, this actuality is the manifestation of necessity.

And yet the reason why this actuality cannot be otherwise is because it is already the other of itself, and this other is already what it is. Since absolute actuality constitutes the
disposition of the entire set of conditions, it embodies all permutations of possibility. This is an unusual usage of necessity because “the cannot be otherwise” structure comes from inclusion rather than exclusion. If the other is already included in the content of what something is, then as the something becomes other than it is, this is the process of its becoming the same self throughout. But this means that actuality includes what had been for formal and real actuality the non-actual. Formal actuality, as we discovered at premise 7, cannot actualize the negative side of possibility without falling into contradiction or disjunction. While everything is formally possible, I cannot swim and not swim as one actuality. Under the disposition of absolute actuality, I can swim and not swim, but only insofar as “I” am a perspective on the whole possibility and not only one instance or another. In this way, the disposition of absolute actuality requires a different way of thinking, one that no longer aims at determinate “things.”

At premise 23, we described absolute actuality as a “process” or a “circuit.” If the actual embodies all permutations of possibility, it reveals the identity of the relations between things in their context. It is, for example, the relation-process between the seed, its conditions, and the plant that it becomes. The actuality “resides” in every frame of its growth and in every condition that it requires; and yet although it resides in one frame, this does not exclude its being at the same time the actuality of all the other frames, the totality as one disposition.

But by emphasizing the necessity of this actuality, Hegel exposes something more at premise 24 than “process,” “circuit,” or “relation.” That necessity is the in-itself reveals the universality of absolute actuality. With every instantiation, the actuality remains itself because it is the universality of each possibility as one set. Thus, to think absolute actuality as the total inclusion
of all possibilities in a set is to think the large actuality of “genus,” but with one important qualification. Just as this actuality is the total inclusion of each individual within the set, it is at the same time the singular determinateness of each member alone.

The horse who greets me from the barn is an absolute actuality, but only if we recognize that her essence and her existence are the same. “Horseness” embodies all of her possibilities as a horse. She has no way to exceed herself in this. She is completely consumed in being a horse because each instantiation that she becomes and each way that she acts is an embodiment of her absolute actuality. There is no possible way for her to be otherwise. Each instantiation of what she is can be nothing other than her essence. This is because every possibility of being a horse is necessary to the set “horse.” This does not mean that the set is finite or exhaustable. There is a certain inexhaustible variety to her genus, which no one action from this horse, and no one permutation of a horse, could completely anticipate. And yet, at the same time, the horse who greets me from the barn is not merely a representation or instantiation of horses; she appears as her essence, not as a substratum standing below or beyond what she seems to be; but as the

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111 When he claims that necessity is the in-itself of absolute actuality, Hegel probably has Aristotle’s distinction between first- and second-order actuality in mind. In de Anima 2.1, Aristotle claims that there are two kinds of actuality, one primary and one derivative. The derivative kind presents what a thing is actually doing when it is in the exact position of doing it. For example, at this moment, I am actually sitting at my desk and writing. This activity is derivative because it is not as if I lose the ability to write at my desk whenever I stand up and cease to write. Aristotle calls derivative actuality the ‘waking’ side because it is the present position of ones activities. But these activities do not cease to be whenever the activities change or become dormant. It is not as if I cease to be who I am whenever I change activities. Although in some statements Aristotle calls primary actuality the ‘sleeping’ side, he really means that primary actuality is both sleeping and waking, since this type of actuality covers the whole of an organism’s abilities, in other words, the whole of an organism’s being. For Aristotle, substances are primary actualities because they simultaneously sustain all contraries of their possibilities, without turning these contraries into the contradictory, but equally, without losing the coherence of their own identity. If we were only able to give an account of living substances in terms of second order actuality, we would not have the resources to explain how substances sustain contrary dispositions without these becoming contradictory. The cat rests at this moment at the windowsill, and while it is of her possibilities to leap from the window to the floor, she cannot both be at the windowsill and at the floor. But just because her possibility of leaping to the floor remains an unactualized possibility does not mean that she cannot leave the window. If we were only able to give an account of the cat in terms of second order actuality, the cat would be a collection of stop-framed-actualities. We would have no resources to explain why she is the same cat throughout, why she is sometimes at the window, sometimes on the floor, sometimes on the bed. Aristotle, The Complete Works of Aristotle, 412 a1-413 a10.
whole possibility of what she is. This is why Hegel says that necessity is the in-itself of absolute actuality: because any possible permutation was already necessary to the set. Since absolute actuality is the actuality of itself and its other, any further permutation of the other is still the self-same actuality (and any further permutation of the self is, likewise, the other that is the self.) We can already begin to anticipate the question that Hegel will soon raise of how this necessity, where all possible permutations are already included, is compatible with freedom.

While this analysis of the necessity of absolute actuality does seem right, in the sense that an actuality of genus embodies every possibility of the genus, there is still a significant problem, which leads Hegel from absolute actuality to absolute possibility, and leads us to the further distinction from necessity as the in-itself to absolute necessity. The problem with thinking genus-actuality is that, while it includes all possibilities of its kind, it cannot include contingencies but must place these outside of the set. The contingency of death turns the living horse into a corpse. As the corpse degrades into the earth, we no longer call this a horse but only the bones of what a horse once was. Likewise, to add or subtract arms, legs, features of the face, etc. would cause the form of the body to fall apart into the chaos of mere contingency, i.e., formless matter. While a horse with only one leg might remain within the genus of “horse,” if the horse were to become re-organized in an even more radical fashion, it would eventually reach the threshold of contingency, and fall “outside” of its genus altogether. While defining absolute actuality as “genus-actuality” is a good way to begin to think the logic of absolute modality, if Hegel really means what he says - that absolute actuality literally embodies every permutation of possibility, and is thus the actuality of the whole possibility - he will need to explore an even “larger” version of actuality, one that can include all contingences that would seem to fall beyond it. But this means that he will need to approach a very difficult thought. He will need to think genus as
“being,” that is, as the necessity of total inclusion from which there is *no remainder*; he will need to think the absolute conversion of actuality and possibility.
25) Necessity is the in-itself because absolute actuality already includes all possibilities. This actuality is as much possibility as it is actuality. Hegel calls this possibility “absolute possibility.”

“Aber damit ist diese Wirklichkeit, weil sie gesetzt ist, absolut, das heißt, selbst die Einheit ihrer und der Möglichkeit zu seyn, nur eine leere Bestimmung; oder sie ist Zufälligkeit. – Diß Leere ihrer Bestimmung macht sie zu einer blossen Möglichkeit, zu einem, das eben so sehr auch anders seyn und als Möglichs bestimmt werden kann. Diese Möglichkeit aber ist selbst die absolute; denn sie ist eben die Möglichkeit, eben so sehr als Möglichkeit wie als Wirklichkeit bestimmt zu werden. Damit, daß sie diese Gleichgültigkeit gegen sich selbst ist, ist sie gesetzt als leere, zufällige Bestimmung.” (WL, 389- 390)

“But because this actuality is posited as being absolute, that is, as being itself the unity of itself and possibility, it is only an empty determination, or, it is contingency. This emptiness of its determination makes it a mere possibility, something which can equally be otherwise and can be determined as a possible. But this possibility is itself absolute; for it is precisely the possibility of being determined equally as possibility or as actuality. Since it is this indifference towards itself it is posited as an empty, contingent determination.” (SL, 550-551)

At this point in the argument, the reader might assume, from the description Hegel gives of absolute actuality, and from the connotations associated with the adjective “absolute,” that there is no good place for the other, or for difference, in Hegel’s theory. But his advancement from absolute actuality to absolute possibility shows that this is not the case. Hegel’s point is not simply that in absolute actuality the other has become completely subsumed within the one comprehensible actuality, in effect dissolving the other of its true “otherness.” His point is that

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112 We can find this sort of objection to Hegel in the first chapter of Levinas’ *Totality and Infinity*. Here, Levinas distinguishes between “ontology” and “metaphysics.” He defines ontology as an approach to knowledge that attempts to uncover what the “other” is in fact and in its totality, so that one might say, “I know what the other is and what the other can be.” Levinas rejects this approach because he sees it in an inappropriate seizure of the Other, a reduction to factual knowing of precisely that which cannot be known. In contrast to this, he defines “metaphysics” as a non-knowledge based approach that attempts to let the other be the appearance of an infinite, inexhaustible, and ungraspable beyond. Although Hegel’s “absolute actuality” might seem to follow the ontological approach as Levinas outlines it, I argue that because of “absolute possibility,” Hegel’s real intention is to posit an actuality that at the same time lets the possible *qua* the possible appear, without, however, exhausting the possible or rendering it as finite. For his definitions of ontology and metaphysics, see Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 42- 48. I see Hegel’s category of “absolute possibility” as a precursor to the good kind of solicitude that Heidegger describes as *vorausspringen*, “leaping-ahead-for-the-other,” where the approach is not to complete the other or to settle once and
absolute actuality yields a category of otherness that has become able to go free from the limitations of its determinateness. Hegel now discovers the category of possibility *qua* possibility, an other that is the negation of the limitations that had produced it as an other. Absolute possibility is a negation of real determinateness, which is already a negation of the form. In this sense, absolute possibility is the negation of the negation.

By the advancement from absolute actuality to absolute possibility, Hegel has resolved the initial problem of formal modality. To understand his argument for this transition, we will need to review the contradiction from formal modality. Hegel presents formal modality as the problem of how an immediate actuality, which is only a “this,” is at the same time the totality of possibility. Formally, although what is actual is supposed to be that which is possible, there is no way (without mediation) to actualize the extensiveness of possibility. If something is possible, it can *and* can not be. But actuality turns this open conjunction into a disjunction because actuality cannot actualize both the positive *and* the negative sides of possibility without contradicting itself. Thus, formally, actuality is always falling short of what it is. I can stand *and* not stand. But if I am actually standing, I cannot *not stand*. Every gain of some determinate actuality is the loss of its opposite. But this means that by actualizing the possibility of something, what is really lost is not only the negative side of possibility, but the full extent of its openness (to be *and* not to be). In other words, what is lost is possibility alone, possibility *qua* possibility. The relationship between actuality and possibility then generates the categories of formal contingency (P10-12).

For all what the other *is*, as with the other extreme of solicitude, which Heidegger describes as *einspringen*, “leaping-in-for-the-other.” The approach is rather to comport oneself in such a way as to let the other “go free.” The modal version of this is to recognize an actualization that can express the possible *qua* the possible, to let the possible appear in the content of the actual, without reducing the possible to one side or another in disjunction. For Heidegger’s description of these two kinds of solicitude, see *Being and Time*, 158-159. While MacDonald offers a persuasive account for how to approach the possible *qua* the possible, he attributes the sort of analysis one might give of “absolute possibility” to Adorno rather than to Hegel, while rejecting Hegel for being a philosopher who cannot think possibility. But to give this reading of Hegel as an actualist, MacDonald has had to skip over the “absolute possibility” step of Hegel’s argument. See, “Adorno’s Modal Utopianism.”
and formal necessity (P13) in an attempt to unify actuality and possibility. Contingency does this by exposing that although some actuality is, equally its other could have been. Necessity does this by exposing that precisely because its other could have been, whatever is, by its very being, infers that its opposite is not. This necessity then initiates the further project of real modality because actualization must find a way to integrate the negative side of possibility and thereby re-establish the status of actuality as the totality of the whole. However, although both formal contingency and necessity are substitution categories for an actuality that is the full extent of possibility, since neither can expose an actuality that is itself and possibility (without indifference and mediation), formal modality can only pose the question of how to make actuality the full extent of possibility, but cannot solve this problem and in this way remains deficient.

The advancement of absolute possibility is then the solution to this problem. Absolute actuality is now both itself and possibility. This means that actuality is no longer the actualization of possibility as in the formal section. Actuality no longer falls short of itself. It can now hold together the full extent of possibility without falling into disjunction. To be determinate is no longer the loss of the other. By the advancement of absolute possibility, there is no longer the remainder of non-actualized possibility. Non-actualized possibility can only remain as a category if actuality is not itself and possibility. The formal version of actuality cannot actualize both itself and its opposite. What it cannot actualize remains non-actualized possibility. But by the advancement to absolute possibility, actuality becomes the negation of itself as itself. It becomes the negation of the negation, possibility qua possibility.

Although genus might fit the initial disposition of absolute actuality, in the sense that all possible members are included within the large actuality of genus, this becomes more
complicated with the advancement of absolute possibility, since a given genus can include only its own members and must exclude as contingent what does not belong within its membership. Although “horse” includes the possibilities of being a horse, reality is full of things that horses are not (cows, umbrellas, justice, etc.). Genus fits at premise 24 because at first absolute actuality is only the total inclusion of everything within a set. This total inclusion is the unity of possibility and necessity, since each possibility within the set is at the same time the necessity within the set. But if by absolute possibility, Hegel means the possibilities that one genus must exclude since they exist only in another genus, thought would then need to think of an even larger and more inclusive category of actuality, one that is an actualization across the differences between genera, one that comes to recognize contingency as possibility.113

If this is what he means, then absolute possibility significantly changes Hegel’s topic. Although a given genus contains within its concept every possible permutation, even an infinite variety of permutations, from within its membership, a genus must still follow the rules of exclusive necessity in the sense that if, for example, the horse is a horse, this necessarily excludes in a restrictive sense the possibility of becoming-cow or of becoming-umbrella, in other words, the possibility of becoming something that exists outside of the exclusive membership. However, because of absolute possibility, each individually existing thing has become a perspective on everything, as with the monad, an actual that is at the same time the whole possibility. Once Hegel advances to absolute possibility, he requires a necessity of total inclusion, a necessity of reality itself. Thus, the advancement from absolute actuality to absolute possibility is the advancement of necessity that is the in-itself of absolute actuality (as per

113 In Chapter 4 of this study, I will discuss a type of actualization that comes out of a debate on Leibniz, on whether thought can actualize across incompossible worlds. In particular, I see Sections D and E as a development on what I say here about absolute possibility.
premise 24) to necessity that is absolute necessity (as we will see at premise 26). In other words, once Hegel discovers absolute possibility, absolute actuality then becomes the set of all sets, and the necessity it contains becomes absolute necessity. This set of all sets is possibility itself, the possible qua the possible. Paradoxically, possibility qua possibility becomes a viable category in Hegel’s theory only when there is no place left for non-actualized possibility. Thought must now think the absolute necessity of “being” instead of the in-itself necessity of “genus.”
Remark 7: Stiegler and the Modality of Technoscience

In the sixth chapter of *Technics and Time, 3*, “Technoscience and Reproduction,” the contemporary French philosopher Bernard Stiegler claims that because of the advancements of what he calls “ternary memory,” our contemporary age has witnessed a reconception of modal reality. Stiegler posits, in what is probably an overly simplistic account, a threshold between a classic and a contemporary modal standpoint. In the classic age of metaphysics, which he attributes primarily to Aristotle, actuality is more primary than possibility, what is really possible is only constitutive of the static essences of being, and contingency is only an accidental property, not a primary, necessary property, of being. Stiegler calls this the age of stability. However, we have now entered, on his account, the age of “technoscience,” an age of instability where possibility, not actuality, has become the primary category, and where contingency is no longer a mere accident that exists below being-proper, but has now become, like necessary essences, part of the basic constitution of being.

There are a number of problems with Stiegler’s modal analysis, from his arguably unfair reading of Aristotle, to his imprecision about various modal definitions, such as what exactly he means when he claims that in technoscience “necessity” and “contingency” have become the same category. Nevertheless, I think Stiegler’s vision about the nature of contemporary modality can offer us certain new directions from Hegel’s argument. One can find in Hegel’s theory of “absolute possibility” and in his further conclusion that contingency is absolute necessity a precursor for Stiegler’s theory that in the contemporary age possibilities have become

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Stiegler actually outlines three historical periods – the classic period, which he attributes to Aristotle; the modern, which he attributes to Kant; and the contemporary, which he calls the age of technoscience. But since his distinction between the classic and the modern does not bear much significance on this remark, I will focus on the distinctions between the classic and the contemporary. For Stiegler’s account of what he calls the modern period of modality, which I also find too simplistic, see *Technics and Time, 3*, 202-205.
overabundant. With this in mind, I will briefly outline the difference, as Stiegler presents it, between the classic model and the contemporary.

From Stiegler’s classic viewpoint, “science” is the study of knowledge that articulates the actual from the formal terms of necessity. “Science describes nature as the stable soil of the real, or as the ideal identity of the real.” Being contains essential forms of actuality and these cannot be otherwise. The classic viewpoint establishes this stability by separating and excluding the contingencies of technics from being. Contingencies are the accidents of being, not being proper. They are what science must exclude in order to sustain being within the domain of necessity. Invoking Aristotle, Stiegler describes this stable viewpoint of the actual in terms of ensouled, living bodies who have a certain natural integrity. Horseness, as first-order actuality, precedes in substance and in definition the various possibilities of what a horse might become. Since the actuality of the horse precedes the possibilities of being a horse, the horse’s form remains relatively stable no matter what she does or how she becomes otherwise. Certainly, there are also contingencies to being a horse, such as the contingency of death or the contingency of genetic manipulation. But from this viewpoint, Stiegler maintains, whatever happens contingently to primary actualities cannot alter or reconfigure the essential characteristics of what things are in truth. The modal state of affairs from this viewpoint is one where primary first-order actualities are universal, stable substances, which contain within them a variety of real possibilities, which cannot, however, fundamentally change the actualities that precede them. “Contingencies” should not be confused with “possibilities” since contingencies cannot explain or exemplify what things actually are in essence, but can only describe the inessential and

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115 Stiegler, *Technics and Time*, 3, 203. Stiegler often uses the terms “reality” and the “real” to describe the “actual.”
116 This can be seen as Stiegler’s interpretation of Aristotle’s famous argument, in division 8 of *Metaphysics* “Book Theta,” that in terms of substance and definition actuality precedes potentiality. See Aristotle, *The Complete Works of Aristotle*, 1049b4- 1050a16.
accidental way that forms revert to matter.

However, once we enter into the contemporary viewpoint of technoscience, Stiegler believes that the roles of actuality and possibility have become reversed. Actuality is no longer the primary category, but has become what Stiegler provocatively calls “a launching pad” for the innovations of technics\textsuperscript{117} which he equates with contingency, and for the primacy and overabundance of pure possibility. Although Stiegler does not clearly explain where the threshold is between the classic and the contemporary viewpoints, he does offer two interrelated reasons for why the possible has emerged as the primary category.

The first reason has to do with his theory of tertiary memory. Stiegler distinguishes between three types of memory.\textsuperscript{118} There is the “nervous” memory of the individual organism, who comes to retain to a greater or lesser extent the life of being an individual. For example, I remember certain events that happened to me as a child, and I might come to retain these memories even as I grow older. Stiegler emphasizes that this type of memory dies when the individual dies. The second type of memory is the “genetic” memory of families and species. Through reproduction, organisms have the capacity to pass on species-traits and characteristics from generation to generation. This is the memory of species-retention, but it is also the memory of species-evolution, since the inheritance of genetic programs can over time alter the basic fabric of the organism. But it is the third type of memory, “tertiary memory,” which is quite special for Stiegler. What distinguishes the “human” from other organisms is the unique capacity to create marks in the exteriority of the environment, and to transfer these marks through human history, culture, and industrialization. The human appears on the scene as consciousness

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\textsuperscript{117} “Reality is of only secondary interest to technoscience; it is a launching pad for access to new possibilities.” Technics and Time, 3, 204.
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\textsuperscript{118} Stiegler’s definitions of these three types of memory are scattered throughout his corpus. For his version of these definitions in “Technoscience and Reproduction” chapter, see Technics and Time, 3, 206.
\end{flushright}
develops a retentional, inheritable technics-memory, extending beyond both the genetic memory of species program and the individual “nervous” memory. These marks in the exteriority begin with ancient technics, such as the flint or the alphabet, but Stiegler argues that with the eventual development of tertiary memory, we come to inherit non-lived experience through “cinematic consciousness,” and from this possibilities multiply and expand in a field of pure fabrication, to the point at which possibility begins to overwhelm the actual.

A second, closely interrelated reason for why the possible emerges as the primary category comes from what Stiegler calls “epiphylogenesis.” This is his term for the condition of exteriority that the inheritance and transference of tertiary memory requires. “Epiphylogenesis” is his term for the re-placement of organization from the category of the lived organism into the exteriority of non-lived, inorganic materiality. In his initial volume, *Time and Technics, 1*, Stiegler proposes that there exists a third category between the Aristotelian categories of organized life and disorganized materiality. While other living organisms follow the rules of their particular nature – the fish, for example, is expert at swimming in the water, the deer at running in the forest – the human has no particular nature *per se*, but is expert at imitating the nature of others, and ultimately at gaining access to a multiplicity of dormant natures, which at first exist only latently in the possibility of the material. The reason why the actual and the possible have become reversed is because, with the evolution of epiphylogenesis, the organized inorganic becomes animated and learns to reproduce itself, generating from self-movement and auto-reproduction further transformations of its materiality. The relationship between the human and the organized inorganic creates an exponential expansion in the variations of the possible, to

119 For the connection between “epiphylogenesis” and the “organized inorganic” see Stiegler, *Technics and Time, 1*, 177.
the point at which actuality-primacy becomes possibility-primacy. The dynamism of technics then overwhelms the actual, which becomes merely the means for the possible.

In the past, actuality had been the great orienter of possibility. On Stiegler’s account, as long as the possible had remained composed under the primacy of the actual, things had tended towards their natural places, living organisms had a natural integrity, the world had remained relatively stable and orderly, and possibilities did not stray from the domain of necessary being into the wilderness of free contingencies. But with the advancements of tertiary memory and epiphylogenesis, Stiegler’s point is that first-order actuality can no longer determine the order of things. The question becomes, not what is the natural order of reality and how do we describe it from the terms of necessity? The question becomes rather, how can we learn to gain orientation in a world that has broken the threshold between the actual and the possible?

One of Stiegler’s insights is that the possibility of disorder leads to re-organization, placelessness leads to a multiplicity of re-place-ability, and the dissolving of natural integrity leads to a resurgence of transgenetic reproducibility, all of which generate new directions for the possible. However, Stiegler’s conclusion also offers a darker premonition. He claims that in this age of technoscience, we have become disoriented by “too much possibility” and have fallen into a consciousness of “malaise.” There is certainly an ethical dimension underlying Stiegler’s analysis. His “critique” of contemporary modality is not only a description of how modality might work from the contemporary viewpoint; it is a “critique” in the sense that it attempts to diagnose the symptoms of a consciousness that can no longer find coherent identity because actuality has become merely the means to possibility. Although this premonition is a direction that one can read into Hegel’s transition from “absolute possibility” to “free contingency,” I think Stiegler has taken the theory of possibility-primacy into territory that Hegel would not
approach. Stiegler’s discussion of disorientation and maliase suggest more the earlier problematic of formal, boundless possibility, where the issue is that actuality cannot expose anything determinate about the possible *qua* the possible. But I doubt Hegel intends to return to the mere possible as the indeterminate. He aims instead at the actualization of “absolute possibility” whose content is as determinate as it is free. In this sense, although these steps of Hegel’s argument (from premises 23 to 27) help to set up Stiegler’s further line of investigation, Hegel’s conclusion is about “free determinateness” and “affirmative multiplicity,” as we will see, not an ethical diagnosis of how to gain orientation in an age of overabundant possibilities.
26) If absolute actuality is absolute possibility, then the necessity of this actuality becomes “absolute necessity.”

“Die absolute Nothwendigkeit ist also die Wahrheit, in welche Wirklichkeit und Möglichkeit überhaupt, so wie die formelle und reale Nothwendigkeit zurückgeht. – Sie ist, wie sich ergeben hat, das Seyn, das in seiner Negation, im Wesen, sich auf sich bezieht und Seyn ist. Sie ist eben so sehr einfache Unmittelbarkeit oder reines Seyn, als einfache Reflexion-in-sich, oder reines Wesen; sie ist diß, daß diß beydes ein und dasselbe ist. – Das schlechthin Nothwendige ist nur, weil es ist; es hat sonst keine Bedingung, noch Grund. – Es ist aber eben so reines Wesen, sein Seyn ist die einfache Reflexion-in-sich; es ist, weil es ist. Als Reflexion hat es Grund und Bedingung, aber es hat nur sich zum Grunde und Bedingung. Es ist Ansichseyn, aber sein Ansichseyn ist seine Unmittelbarkeit, seine Möglichkeit ist seine Wirklichkeit. – Es ist also, weil es ist; als das Zusammengehen des Seyns mit sich, ist es Wesen; aber weil diß Einfache eben so die unmittelbare Einfachheit ist, ist es Seyn.” (WL, 391)

“Absolute necessity is, therefore, the truth into which actuality and possibility as such, and formal and real necessity withdraw. It is, as we have found, that being which in its negation, in essence, is self-related and is being. It is as much simple immediacy or pure being as simple reflection-into-self or pure essence; it is this, that these two are one and the same. That which is simply necessary only is because it is; it has neither condition nor ground. But equally it is pure essence; its being is simple reflection-into-self; it is, because it is. As reflection, it has a ground and condition, but it has only itself for ground and condition. It is the in-itself, but its in-itself is its immediacy, its possibility is its actuality. It is, therefore, because it is; as the union of being with itself it is essence; but because this simple is equally immediate simplicity, it is being.” (SL, 552)

Hegel returns to the claim he had made at premise 24, that necessity is the in-itself of absolute actuality, but now he calls this necessity “absolute necessity.” Once thought discovers that the possibility of absolute actuality is absolute possibility, this actuality can be nothing less than the actuality of the whole possibility. Although we began by thinking genus-actuality because this includes all permutations of possibility within a determinate set, thought now requires an even “larger” actuality, one that is as extensive as absolute possibility. Genus does not take us far enough because it can only include determinate regions of quantity. The concept “horse” includes the possibilities of being a horse, but since there are many possibilities that exceed being a horse, the initial version of absolute actuality (at premise 23) does not contain
actuality and possibility in as extensive a way as Hegel now requires of absolute necessity.

It would seem that when Hegel discovers absolute necessity, he restates the category of being. Since being is the “whatever” of the “is,” it can include anything and everything within it. In this sense, the actualization of being contains possibility in the most extensive sense. Absolute necessity is being because being is that which nothing could exceed. There is no way around being, no possible remainder or outside. In this sense, being is absolutely necessary and could not be otherwise. However, it would be misleading to say that Hegel has simply returned to the category of being from the very beginning of the Logic, since this would bring along with it the connotations of “indeterminateness,” “emptiness,” and “stasis,” which I doubt Hegel intends. Although he claims that everything is formally possible, when he says that absolute necessity is both pure being and pure essence, Hegel most likely already means the one substance, and means this in the most inclusive of ways, as an actuality that is a disposition on everything. The reason why he re-invokes the category of being at this stage in the argument is because the actualization of absolute possibility requires the most inclusive disposition, i.e., that which in being otherwise has returned into itself. But Hegel probably also intends to introduce the connotations of “becoming” as much as he intends to introduce those of “being.” If substance is a disposition on everything, then the consequence, as we will see, is that this disposition must include in actuality the existence of unactualized possibilities as part of the constitution of what substance is, in the sense that whatever something becomes, it still is. However, the consequence

120 In the first introduction to Being and Time, Heidegger criticizes Hegel’s concept of Being as it appears initially in the Logic. He objects that Hegel has not properly exposed the question of Being, but rather begins from a presumptive answer to this question. Of the three interpretations that Heidegger lists in the passage, he attributes the connotation of universality to Hegel (the other two interpretations are “Being as indefinable” and “Being as self-evident”). One can recognize the connotation of universality not only in the initial passage of the Logic, between Being-Nothing-Becoming, but also in Hegel’s statements about how absolute necessity is being that relates only to itself. Being is absolute necessity because it is the most universal of all determinations, because nothing can be otherwise than being. Heidegger’s critique of Hegel is quite powerful, but to pursue this would bring us beyond the scope of the present study. 22- 23.
is also “becoming” as self-movement, since Hegel also seems to be suggesting that, if something is a disposition on everything, then it must become otherwise in order to be itself. Therefore, unactualized possibilities cannot simply retain their initial status as “the unactual,” but must also expand what the term actuality means, and include themselves as the actual. Before we examine these difficult consequences for how absolute necessity is a category of becoming in multiplicity (at premise 27), we will need to analyze what Hegel means by the “self-relation of being” and how self-relation allows for the inclusion of all determinate possibilities.

Hegel’s argument that absolute necessity is a disposition on everything comes from his theory that being relates only to itself. He says this when he writes, “[absolute necessity] is, as we have found, that being which in its negation, in essence, is self-related and is being.” If being were not related only to itself, then the reason why being is would stand outside of being. Then there would be an external source from which being is. Then we would say that being is because of another, because of God or the Sovereign or Nature. But this would be absurd. If the reason for being were something other than being itself, then the reason for being could not be. If we were to claim that God is the reason why being is, then either we would need to admit that God is, in which case this simply affirms that being is self-relation, or we would need to admit that God is something other than being. But if the latter were true, then God would have no authority as the reason for why being is because being would not be.

However, in saying this, Hegel has not simply returned to the opening of the Logic, and

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121 WL, 391/ SL, 552.
122 Houlgate discusses this same point but in terms of the being of nothingness. Although one might assume that being does not include the category of nothing, in the sense that if something is, then it is not nothing, Houlgate presents the case that if nothing is a viable category at all, then it itself must be. “Even if there were nothing, there would still be being, since nothingness would still be what there is.” “Necessity and Contingency,” 46. Houlgate argues that for Hegel, being itself cannot be contingent. It is not the case that either being or nothing could have been. If there is nothing, then equally there is being. This means that at the level of pure being, contingency cannot occur, since if being were otherwise, this would only be the relation of being to itself. In contrast to this, Burbidge claims that when Hegel introduces “absolute possibility,” he introduces the question of whether there could have been nothing instead of something, The Necessity of Contingency, 88.
to the pure being (\textit{Sein}) of everything and anything whatsoever. If it were simply indeterminate being, then the disposition of absolute necessity would include everything in only the most superficial of ways, as pure being passes over into pure nothing. Although absolute necessity is as all encompassing as pure being, Hegel’s point is that it is also \textit{full of determinateness}. How can thought think from the limitations of determinateness while at the same time present a standpoint on the whole possibility? How can something be a disposition on everything? How can absolute necessity be as inclusive as being itself and still remain a category of necessity and limitation? This is the line of investigation that will lead Hegel to claim (at premise 27) that absolute necessity and contingency are the same.

To understand the difficulty of these questions, it is important to recognize in exactly what sense absolute necessity is a type of “necessity.” If Hegel means the total inclusion of everything that “is,” why does he retain the term necessity with all of the connotations of restriction that come from this? Let us briefly review the earlier types of necessity and analyze how restrictive each is. This will put us in a better position to analyze how restrictive absolute necessity is.

Formal necessity is restrictive but only in terms of form, not in terms of content. Formally everything is possible, but if it is, then its other \textit{must not be}. This necessity is an expression of the law of non-contradiction against the endless multiplicity of possibility-options. This necessity does not limit the content of determinate being. It only shows that what exists \textit{must be determinate}, and that its other \textit{cannot equally be}. Hegel recognizes in this a double function. The same formal restriction, that something cannot both be itself and the opposite of this, exposes form to content because formal necessity is equally the imperative that actualization must overcome this restriction in order to actualize possibility (see premise 13.)
Real necessity is more restrictive than formal necessity because what is really actual must not contradict the specific content of its determinateness (see premise 19.) This means that from certain conditions of possibility, something else cannot follow. If a seed has enough water and rich enough soil, a large adult horse cannot follow from the seed, but only a plant. But Hegel explains that although real necessity is quite restrictive, since it begins from the contingency of external conditions, it is also relative necessity, and in this sense it is not restrictive. The necessity lies only in the bind between the antecedent and the consequent, not in the presupposition of the determinateness. If real necessity were not equally relative, existence would reveal only certain determinate entities and not others, which would stand against what exists as permanent impossibilities. In effect, the contingency of prior conditions would become elevated to the status of necessity. Existence would become confined to only small regions of determinate being. This is why the hypothetical character, generated from the openness of the possibility of whether this determinate thing will be, is as important to the conditions as the character of the necessity is. The relativity of the necessity shows that something determinate is always determinate against an other, that this other is equally determinate, and that if the other were to be, there would also be equally necessary, although different, conditions of its possibility.

Absolute necessity is the most restrictive type of necessity because it compounds the restrictions of both formal and real necessity. Formally, anything is possible that does not contradict itself. Even under the extra restrictions of what is really possible, there still remain certain real alternatives and various ways to actualize the possible, an openness to the “anything” from within the restrictions of content. But when it comes to absolute necessity, Hegel’s language becomes much more severe – then there are no alternatives and no unactualized
possibilities because there is no other who could have been but who is not. From the disposition of absolute necessity, there are no further ways to go, no choice of alternatives, no outstanding contingencies that might or might not come up. This, however, is not because absolute necessity restricts possibility, as if only certain possibilities can manifest themselves while others cannot. On the contrary, the reason why there are no further possibilities is because that which is absolutely necessary already contains every possibility whatsoever. In this second sense of the term, absolute necessity is the least restrictive of the necessities because it is the ground for the actualization of the possible qua the possible. What is absolutely necessary cannot be otherwise, not because there exists an other that it must not be, but rather because the actuality of this necessity already includes both the positive and the negative moments of possibility. This necessity is the expression of the whole possibility, not only one side or another, with the other side outstanding, but all sides together as one disposition.

The reason why Hegel retains the term “necessity” with all of these connotations of restriction is because thought must think both exclusion and inclusion, both the actuality that is “only this” and at the same time the possibility of the other. Being is all-present in anything that thought could possibly think. But determinateness is equally all-present. Anything that “is” is “just this.” But just as being is always only “this,” it must at the same time always be otherwise than it is. If being were not constantly becoming extended beyond “this,” then it would become “captured” by only one determinate region of itself, and this would restrict its possibility. On the one hand, being is always something determinate and is therefore always captured by one region or another of restriction; however, on the other hand, since being is the actualization of the whole possibility, the nature of being is both necessarily determinate and necessarily transgressive. The consequence of this is that being not only covers every possibility, but must embody every
If he had not written “absolute possibility” into his argument, one might assume that by “absolute necessity,” Hegel means that only certain determinate actualities are necessary while others are not. But this would lead to the bad result, much like exclusive disjunction, that only some possibilities can be while others cannot be. To assume this is to conflate absolute necessity with hard necessity. Although what is could have been otherwise, if there is hard necessity, then the possibilities of other determinate regions will have become “blocked off” from actualization, and will no longer be able to occur. The life-long prisoner, who sees the outside world from the window of her cell, but “cannot” leave the prison, is a case of hard necessity because the walls literally take her possibilities away. When something operates under hard necessity, there is the sense that other possibilities could have been, but there is no way, at least temporarily, for these other ways to come about. Hard necessity is an iteration of real necessity, not of formal necessity, since the restriction is in the content (e.g., in the walls of the prison cell), not in the formal law of non-contradiction. Nor is this necessity an iteration of absolute necessity, since

Lampert anticipates this difficult consequence when he claims that absolute necessity is “the interaction of all forces in every possible way – such that what is must continue to generate and envelop ever-differing possibilities.” “Hegel on Contingency,” 75. I believe that this is both the most difficult but also the most plausible interpretation of what Hegel means by “absolute necessity.” In my discussion of “possibility-depth” in Section D of Chapter 4, I attempt to develop Lampert’s reading by presenting reasons for why the movement of compulsive and inclusive necessity generates greater concentrations of possibility in actuality. Houlgate’s analysis of the relationship between being and absolute necessity has also influenced many of the points I make in premise 26, especially: 1) being and absolute necessity are the same; 2) being relates only to itself; and 3) absolute necessity shows that being must be. I think his reading is right, as I have attempted to explain throughout premise 26, but I think that he does not emphasize the movement of inclusive necessity enough. If in relating to itself, being is a disposition on the whole possibility, then being must go in “every possible way” as Lampert says. If absolute necessity were not this movement in every possible way, then being would not present the whole possibility, but only certain determinate possibilities at the exclusion of others. Like Houlgate, Longuenesse also cites the category of being, but in this she interprets absolute necessity as the necessary bind between being and thought. This supports one of her general projects, to situate Hegel’s modal theory within Kant’s transcendental idealism. Her definition is helpful because, by establishing the necessary self-reflection between the act of thinking and the thing that is thought, Longuenesse is able to demonstrate the next major transition in the Logic, i.e., from absolute necessity to the subjective concept. If thinking is absolute necessity, then “reason thinking itself in things” is the next logical consequence of Hegel’s dialectic, which gets played out in the subsequent “Judgment” and “Syllogism” chapters. See Hegel’s Critique of Metaphysics, 158. Also see Hyppolite’s analysis of absolute necessity in “The Categories of the Absolute” chapter of Logic and Existence, where he explains that “actuality is conceived necessity” because it can refer to nothing but itself. 174–175.
what is absolutely necessary, Hegel suggests, must transgress the determinateness that it itself posits.

The reason why being must be otherwise is because, if it were to remain contained within any one permutation of its possible range, this one permutation would become all that being could be. The one permutation would replace being itself. The determinate possibilities of the prisoner in the cell would replace the total possibilities of being. But then being would not be a disposition on the whole possibility, but only a disposition on that exclusive range of possibilities which it promotes, as against the possibilities of others. However, by returning us to the category of being, Hegel anticipates that we should not read hard necessity into the definition of absolute necessity. If something is absolutely necessary, the reason why it cannot be otherwise is because it already includes every possibility as the very constitution of what it is. This is why Hegel says that “[absolute necessity] is, therefore, because it is.”\textsuperscript{124} In this version of modality, it is no longer only the case that each thing is because others are. Now Hegel says that each is because it is. Because of absolute necessity, being refers only to itself, and this leads to all of the following: i) possibilities that are not immediately actual nevertheless exist as absolutely necessary, ii) the co-existing of unactualized possibilities becomes an affirmative field of multiplicity, and iii) being must perpetually move across itself.

\textsuperscript{124} WL, 391/ SL, 552.
27) If absolute necessity is the totality of all possibilities, this necessity is the same as absolute contingency. Hegel calls this final result of modality “affirmative multiplicity.” This necessity is the “absolute conversion of actuality and possibility.”

“Sie ist daher es selbst, welche sich als Zufälligkeit bestimmt; - in ihrem Seyn sich von sich abstößt, in diesem Abstossen selbst nur in sich zurückgekehrt ist, und in dieser Rücker als ihrem Seyn sich von sich selbst abgestossen hat.” (WL, 390)

“It is therefore necessity itself which determines itself as contingency – in its being repels itself from itself and in this very repulsion has only returned into itself, and in this return, as its being, has repelled itself from itself.” (SL, 551)

Necessity determines itself as contingency because being and determinate being are one. Being is the constant, perpetual generation of contingencies because it must be the “whatever” of everything and the exclusive determinateness of just this. On the one hand, every determinateness is the complete being of being. Not just one or another region of being, each determinate actuality is being itself. But this only makes sense, on the other hand, if each determinate actuality is a limit that must be overcome. In the quote above, Hegel says that being “repels itself from itself and in this very repulsion has only returned into itself.” He means that being is perpetually overcoming the determinateness of itself, while at the same time, whatever determinateness exists is being itself. Being is full of possibilities only if it repels these possibilities from itself, only if it finds itself constantly limiting and constantly transgressing these limitations. By discovering absolute necessity, Hegel has exposed the full-extent of possibility. He has shown how being moves across itself.

Necessity now determines itself as contingency. This is an unusual development from the necessity of premise 24. At first, although absolute actuality contains every possibility as the embodiment of itself in actuality, this necessity only arises by excluding all of those
contingencies that fall outside of the set. If we think of this actuality as genus-actuality, then the actuality includes all possibilities of the genus, while at the same time excludes as mere contingency all possibilities that fall outside of this (either because they belong to another genus or species, or because they embody the extreme deficiencies and excesses beyond the determinate limitations of the set). From the standpoint of premises 23 and 24, absolute actuality is necessity because it determines itself as all possibilities within the set; however, this necessity does not yet determine itself as contingency because contingencies are precisely that which do not belong to the actuality. Although the actuality of “horse” embodies every possibility of being a horse, the possibility of being a “frog” or of being a “goat” is from the disposition of the horse a mere contingency since these possibilities extend beyond what a horse is and can do.

But as soon as Hegel introduces absolute possibility at premise 25, thought can no longer distinguish the limited totality of possibilities that exist within any given set from the seemingly unruly contingencies that exist beyond the set. An actuality of absolute possibility must come to recognize every contingency as the possibility of being. Although possibilities are still defined by their ends in actuality, if this actuality is being itself, rather than one or another specificity of being, then possibilities go in every direction because they are no different than contingencies. While this conclusion might seem quite problematic, I believe that Hegel gives a reasonable explanation for how to think the unity of necessity and contingency in his two-sided consequence of affirmative multiplicity and absolute conversion.

\[\text{125} \] Di Giovanni calls this the contingency of classical metaphysics. “In classical metaphysics, contingency was thought to be the result of a discrepancy between possibility and actuality.” “The Category of Contingency,” 186. One of Di Giovanni’s main contributions to the literature is to establish Hegel’s theory of contingency as a critique of the classical. Di Giovanni argues that, for Hegel, reality would not be self-sufficient if it did not contain all irrationalities (i.e., contingencies) as part of its own constitution. 197. This means that contingency is not derivative of being, but is rather necessary for the self-relation of being. I am quite sympathetic of Di Giovanni’s reading in this respect.
“Die absolute Nothwendigkeit ist so die Reflexion oder Form des Absoluten; Einheit des Seyns und Wesens, einfache Unmittelbarkeit, welche absolute Negativität ist. Einerseits sind ihre Unterschiede daher nicht als Reflexionsbestimmungen, sondern als seyende Mannichfaltigkeit, als unterschiedene Wirklichkeit, welche die Gestalt von selbstständigen Anderen gegen einander hat. Andererseits da ihre Beziehung die absolute Identität ist, ist sie das absolute Umkehren ihrer Wirklichkeit in ihre Möglichkeit und ihrer Möglichkeit in Wirklichkeit.” (WL, 391)

“Absolute necessity is thus the reflection or form of the absolute: the unity of being and essence, simple immediacy that is absolute negativity. Consequently, on the one hand, its differences do not have the shape of the determinations of reflection, but of a simply affirmative multiplicity, a differentiated actuality which has the shape of others, self-subsistent relatively to one another. On the other hand, since its relation is absolute identity, it is the absolute conversion of its actuality into its possibility and of its possibility into actuality.” (SL, 552)

At premise 3, Hegel had claimed that possibility is the reflection of actuality into itself. Now, as the conclusion of his argument, he claims that absolute necessity has become this reflection. Although this is still the same reflection of actuality into itself, where the possible simply confirms the existence of the actual, the self-reflection of absolute necessity is no longer the abstract disposition of self-identity and non-contradiction, nor is it exactly that of real things, which are because others are. Absolute necessity is that disposition which includes both of these earlier dispositions, but now from the reflection of one standpoint. What is reflected is no longer that version of the possible where the negativity of the possible has become disjoined and removed at the point of actualization. And yet it is also not the possible whose negativity has been set aside and dispersed into other actuals. What is reflected instead is absolute possibility as the whole disposition. Whereas, earlier, possibility was a reflection on the identity of the actual, the simple confirmation of its truth over against its opposite, now absolute necessity is the reflection on the negativity of the possible, not just a fragment, but the complete possibility from one disposition.

That absolute necessity has taken over the role that possibility had played as the
reflection of the actual into itself leads to a two-sided consequence. The first side of the consequence is affirmative multiplicity. Affirmative multiplicity (seynende Mannichfaltigkeit) is the field of actualizability. This field is full of differentiated actualities (unterschiedene Wirklichkeit) whose own self-subsistent shape (Gestalt) is the shape of others. The second side of this consequence is absolute conversion. By absolute conversion (absolute Umkehren), Hegel explicitly acknowledges the complete actualization of possibility.

Affirmative multiplicity is a development from the boundless multiplicity of formal modality, as from the bounded multiplicity of real modality, because it is both the limitation of existing in one way or another and the full presence of essence, of all possibilities together. On the one hand, affirmative multiplicity is only a multiplicity if it contains formal and real differences within it. A is still not -A. A is still not B. If these distinctions were no longer in place, multiplicity would be just grey unity without diversity and with no compartments. Then nothing would be possible because everything would be one. But on the other hand, this multiplicity is affirmative because the differences that reside within this multiplicity no longer stand in opposition against others, nor can find the positing of themselves to be the contradiction of any other one. When Hegel says that these differences no longer have “the shape of the determinations of reflection,”126 he is referring to the dialectic between identity, opposition, and contradiction from early in the Doctrine of Essence. Although affirmative multiplicity still contains difference, this difference no longer carries over into opposition and contradiction. Hegel then describes this type of affirmative logic that is no longer influenced by contradiction when he says that “difference penetrates itself” and “makes itself transparent.”127

Each differentiated actuality, if it follows the logic of affirmative multiplicity, is the

126 WL, 391/ SL, 552.
127 WL, 551/ SL, 390.
absolute conversion of actuality and possibility. Take an individually existing organism, what Aristotle would call a primary substance, a goat grazing in the pasture, or a wolf hunting in the forest. Of course, the individual goat grazing in the pasture cannot go in every possible direction, nor make all of her possibilities actual. If she is in the pasture, she cannot possibly be playing with the other goats in the barn. If she is a goat, she cannot in the same manner not be a goat. If she is “here,” she cannot possibly be “there.” Hegel has already established these contradiction-limitations with his theories of formal and real modality. In this sense, actuality and possibility are not absolute conversion. Each category causes the other to fall short of itself.

But if we think about what this individual goat is, we establish her existence and her essence as one. In terms of her essence, the individually existing goat can go in every possible direction (relative to what a goat can be). She can graze in the pasture and play with the other goats in the barn. Her individual existence is like a metaphysical “gateway” that directly corresponds to all of her possibilities as her essence. As the existence of her essence, she can receive all sorts of contrary determinations. Since she is a goat, she is both always determinate (always on the hill, in the barn, at the pasture, always here or there) and yet free from the limitations of her determinateness (her being on the hill does not exclude the possibilities of contraries in her essence). She is free determinateness because her individual existence as “this” goat is at the same time the totality of her possibilities as her essence.

But by the absolute conversion of actuality and possibility, Hegel means even more than the metaphor of a “gateway” between existence and essence. In this way his theory is distinct from Aristotle’s theory of first-order actuality as the many substances. Hegel literally means that existence and essence are the same. What is this individually existing goat? She is a goat. Goats

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128 For Aristotle’s discussion of primary and secondary substances, see Chapter 5 of the “Categories,” the Complete Works of Aristotle, 2a13- 4b20.
can only appear in their existence. They are always “this one.” But each goat that appears is a goat. It is true that without existence, essence would be empty of determinateness, and that without essence, existence would have no movement or possibility. But Hegel means absolute conversion. The categories are the same, not only mutually dependent.

In the subsequent section of the Logic, the “Relation of Substantiality,” Hegel will call this relation of absolute conversion between actuality and possibility “actuosity” (Actuosität). Actuosity is a development upon the absolute conversion of actuality and possibility because it stresses not only the self-movement of substance, but also the tranquility of this movement. Because what is actual is possible (P2), and because what is possible contains contrariety and difference within its own concept (P5), being is this substance that is differentiated from itself; however, it is differentiated only as itself; it moves as if against an other, but this movement is the quiet, unresisting movement of itself across itself. In actuosity, Hegel stresses the tranquility of this self-movement. It is a soft movement because the opposition has been taken away from it, because contradiction can no longer have an influence. Yet, this quiet self-movement is nevertheless a movement that happens across affirmative differences. The differences in the substantiality of being are all the more pronounced, and the movement is all the more agitated, if in being other than itself, we recognize that each “thing” is the same “being” all the way through.

The absolute conversion of actuality and possibility therefore causes the most intense agitation of movement in every possible direction. Since the individual goat is its species-being, not just a member of its species, but the living existence of essence, the individual goat must receive all contraries as the totality of its possibilities. But only the logic of affirmative multiplicity could allow for the reception of all contraries; otherwise, the difference of each
contrary would cause contradiction. Goats move about because existence and essence are one. They grow and pass away because they must expose what they are. They are sometimes standing, sometimes sleeping, sometimes eating, sometimes playing. Goats must exhibit all of these positions to be what they are. If existence and essence are one, then each instance of existence is the totality of essence.

Existence and essence are the same only if all contingency has been removed from affirmative multiplicity. If any contingency were to remain, then the field would not produce free movement because the remainder of contingency would dictate the determinate order of things. This is why Hegel says that this field is absolute necessity. Necessity is thus the essence of the free play of differentiated actualities in the field of affirmative multiplicity. Hegel writes:

“Die Nothwendigkeit als Wesen ist in diesem Seyn verschlossen; die Berührung dieser Wirklichkeiten durch einander erscheint daher als ein leere Aeusserlichkeit; die Wirklichkeit des einen in dem andern ist die nur Möglichkeit, die Zufälligkeit. Denn das Seyn ist gesetzt als absolut nothwendig, als die Vermittlung-mit-sich, welche absolute Negation der Vermittlung-durch-anderes ist, oder als Seyn das nur mit dem Seyn identisch ist; ein Anderes, das im Seyn Wirklichkeit hat, ist daher als schlechthin nur Mößliches, leeres Gestztseyn bestimmt.” (WL, 391)

“Necessity as essence is concealed in this being; contact between these actualities appears therefore as an empty externality; the actuality of the one in the other is only possibility, contingency. For being is posited as absolutely necessary, as self-mediation, which is absolute negation of mediation by an other, or as being which is identical only with being; an other that has actuality in being, is therefore determined simply as something merely possible, as empty positedness.” (SL, 552-553)

At the same time, however, the field only removes all contingency if it includes all contingency whatsoever. Affirmative multiplicity is thus the most powerful structure of contingency, in the sense that everything within this field both can be and is the other of itself. By the free play of its determinateness, each actuality can give no reason but itself; its restrictions, self-imposed, come directly from being. Each actuality is only itself because each is the shape of all others. Although each actuality is inherently determinate, this determinateness is
open to all contingencies because it is grounded only in being.

The field of affirmative multiplicity makes everything necessary, but this structure only works from the most fluid of all contingencies. Hegel thus concludes that contingency is absolute necessity. He says that if necessity is the essence of these free actualities, this is the case because necessity and contingency are the same. Free movement happens only because there is nowhere to move.

If Hegel were arguing simply from the disposition of things, then the claim that everything moves in every possible direction would have to face a number of intuitive objections. It would have to face the objection that if something cannot be otherwise, it should not then be free to go otherwise. And it would have to face the objection that a thing cannot move in every possible direction, but only in certain directions, while leaving beside itself various unactualized possibilities that never become realized. Although one might come to agree with Hegel’s argument from real modality, that unactualized possibilities exist, one might still remain skeptical of the more controversial claim, that each thing must be the actualization of possibility as one totality. However, the disposition that Hegel now requires is not simply one of abstract things in their self-reflexive identities, nor is it that of real things that are because others are. Hegel is arguing not from the disposition on things, but from the disposition of inclusive, absolute necessity. He writes:

“Aber diese Zufälligkeit ist vielmehr die absolute Nothwendigkeit; sie ist das Wesen jener freyen, an sich nothwendigen Wirklichkeiten. Dieses Wesen ist das Lichtscheue, weil an diesen Wirklichkeiten kein Scheinen, kein Reflex ist, weil sie nur rein in sich gegründet, für sich gestaltet sind, sich nur sich selbst manifestiren, - weil sie nur Seyn sind. – Aber ihr Wesen wird an ihnen hervorbrechen und offenbaren, was es ist und was sie sind. Die Einfachheit ihres Seyns, ihres Beruhens auf sich, ist die absolute Negativität; sie ist die Freyheit ihrer scheinlosen Unmittelbarkeit. Dieses Negative bricht an ihnen hervor, weil das Seyn durch diß sein Wesen der Widerspruch mit sich selbst ist; - und zwar gegen diß Seyn in der Form des Seyns, also als die Negation jener Wirklichkeiten, welche absolut verschieden ist von ihrem Seyn, als ihr Nichts, als ein eben so freyes Andersseyn gegen sie,
als die Negation jener Wirklichkeiten, welche absolut verschieden ist von ihrem Seyn, als
ihr Nichts, als ein eben so freyes Andersseyn gegen sie, als ihr Seyn es ist.” (WL, 391-392)

“But this contingency is rather absolute necessity; it is the essence of those free, inherently
necessary actualities. This essence is light-shy, because there is in these actualities no
reflective movement, no reflex, because they are grounded purely in themselves alone, are
shaped for themselves, and manifest themselves only to themselves, because they are only
being. But their essence will break forth in them and reveal what it is and what they are.
The simplicity of their being and their self-support is absolute negativity; it is the freedom of
their reflectionless immediacy. This negative breaks forth in them because being, through
this its essence, is self-contradiction, and that, too, against this being in the form of being,
therefore as the negation of those actualities, which is absolutely different from their being,
as their nothing, as an equally free otherness over against them as is their being.” (SL, 553)

If absolute necessity is the necessity of all possibilities, then this type of necessity is
nothing other than contingency. We find the initial germ of this conclusion at premise 24. If
necessity - not possibility - is the in-itself of absolute actuality, then the otherness that absolute
actuality retains is otherness produced from the complete foreclosure of further possibilities. This
conclusion becomes more and more obvious as the argument progresses. At premise 25, we
realize that actuality can only become itself and possibility if there is no viable category left for
unactualized, or unactualizable, possibility. By absolute necessity, as the complete unity of
actuality and possibility, being must go in every possible way. This is indeed the final stand. All
possibilities become necessary. By absolute necessity, if being goes in every possible way, there
is nowhere further left to go. But Hegel then finds the strange but exciting result that the ability
to-be-otherwise is secured only from the complete foreclosure of otherness. The structure of
absolute necessity, because there is no further otherness or contingency, yields the most fluid
openness of movement, an absolute necessity that is just as certainly absolute contingency, a
whole field of differences and determinations whose narrowness has become so complete that
the restrictions this necessity had imposed upon actualization are no longer restrictive.

It is therefore necessity that generates the freedom to-be-otherwise. Each actuality is free
to be other than itself because in the process of being other than itself, each is itself. More than this, these actualities are only what they are if at the same time they are other than they are. It is the force of necessity that compels the freedom of their movement. Each actuality must be the freedom of itself in all others. This is the imperative of their freedom. They are completely taken by this imperative. They have no chance to opt out or to find another way. From the disposition of absolute necessity, each actuality can only be itself insofar as it is simultaneously the totality of everything whatsoever. If each is the totality of everything, then no matter what each becomes in terms of determinate content, each cannot be otherwise than “this” that it is. Yet, precisely because each is the totality, each is at the same time free from this determinateness because each is everything as it is itself.

But if the other of each actuality is what each actuality is, then this essence could only appear as the disappearance of what it is, or as Hegel says, this essence is “light-shy” (Lichtscheue). The metaphors of light and shyness in the quoted passage suggest, without much precision in Hegel’s language, that becoming-otherwise is the only true essence of “things.” The metaphor of “shyness,” in particular, suggests that “essences” are not determinate essences in the classical sense of particular laws or principles that could never be otherwise (such as eternal forms like “good” or “justice” or “goat”). Hegel claims that the reason why these essences are “shy of the light” is because they cannot refer back to anything determinate other than the self-same movement that they are, a point-of-reference that cannot extend beyond itself to anything external, but finds its stability and its reason-to-be in itself alone.

To continue with our example, when we recognize that this individual goat is a goat, we appeal to her essence, but we really appeal to her contingency. To be what she is, she must be other than this immediate facticity, other than this individual goat standing at the fence, chewing
at the grass. But this being otherwise is at the same time the original position of her immediate facticity as an individual. When we recognize her as a goat, we let the contingency “shine through” her. But what shines through the individual goat is more than her genus as an animal. Being itself shines through. This goat is. A goat cannot be other than this. But at the same time this necessity is the goat’s absolute freedom to be otherwise. Contingency shines through at the level of being. Being makes the goat, as Hegel says, inherently necessary and completely free to be otherwise. This is what he means by “free actuality.” The determinateness of being “this” is at the same time “free otherness.” All determinate things perish at the sign of this essence. The goat attempts to sustain herself against the sheer magnitude of her being. She follows the narrow path of her conditions. But just as she feels the force of her conditions, commanding her to eat and sleep and care for her own, she also feels the force of her ultimate necessity in being, and this is the force of her own destruction in contingency. This is why Hegel says that these actualities “perish” as they go free:

“This content is the mark impressed upon [these actualities] by necessity – which in its determination is absolute return-into-self – when it let them go free as absolutely actual; to this mark necessity appeals as witness to its claim, and, smitten by it, the actualities perish. This manifestation of that which the determinateness is in truth – negative self-relation – is a blind destruction in otherness; the illusary showing or reflection which breaks forth is, in that which simply affirmatively is, a becoming or transition of the actual into the possible, of being into nothing, is a union-with-self; contingency is absolute necessity, it is itself the

“Dieser ist das Maal, das die Nothwendigkeit, indem sie, welche absolute Rückkehr in sich selbst in ihrer Bestimmung ist, dieselben frey als absolu wirkliche entließ, - ihnen aufdrückte, worauf sie als den Zeugen ihres Rechts sich beruft, und an dem sie ergriffen nun untergehen. Diese Manifestation dessen, was die Bestimmtheit in Wahrheit ist, negative Beziehung auf sich selbst, ist blinder Untergang im Andersseyn; das hervorbrechende Scheinen oder die Reflexion ist an den Seyenden als Werden oder Uebergehen des Seyns in Nichts. Aber das Seyn ist umgekehrt eben so sehr Wesen, und das Werden ist Reflexion oder Scheinen. So ist die Aeusserlichkeit ihre innerlichkeit, ihre Beziehung ist absolute Identität; und das Uebergehen des Wirklichen in Mögliches, des Seyns in Nichts ein Zusammengehen mit sich selbst; die Zufälligkeit ist absolute Nothwendigkeit; sie selbst ist das Voraussetzen jener ersten absoluten Wirklichkeiten.” (WL, 392)
presupposing of that first, absolute actuality.” (SL, 553)

The metaphors in this last passage of the chapter are suggestive but difficult to interpret. Hegel says that necessity leaves a “mark” (Maal) like a “witness to a claim” (Zeugen ihres Rechts) and that these free actualities are “smitten” (ergriffen) at the sign of this mark and thereby “perish” (untergehen). On my reading, the point of these metaphors is to extend Hegel’s analysis of two separate dispositions. One is the disposition of things, a disposition that Hegel criticizes throughout the chapter, where if something is identical with itself, it cannot also be the opposite of itself. But the other is the disposition of affirmative multiplicity, Hegel’s primary conclusion and main focus in terms of “absolute necessity,” a disposition where the law of non-contradiction no longer has an influence because we have come to include all possibilities from one standpoint.

From the disposition of things, then, there is no good reason why things have the content that they have. This content appears upon them like a mark appears upon a body. They simply are because they are. When I look at a map of the earth, I see the mountains and lakes as “already there.” Certainly I can attempt to explain how they came to be from the earth’s formation at some prior point in time. But these reasons are always only relative. Ultimately, I can only say that the mountains and the lakes are because they are. This appeal to self-relation does not, however, diminish the force of their necessity. What it does, instead, is place the reason for things beyond the disposition of things. I can then only say that although what immediately appears as the fact of existence is given by the force of necessity, the determinateness of this content nevertheless comes from beyond the internal logic of the content, as if from nowhere, like a mark is left on a body as if from nowhere.

In this sense, as problematic as Hegel’s language might seem to be in this passage, the
metaphor of the mark presents us with the kind of free movement that Hegel probably has in mind. There is a certain freedom in the anonymity of content being left as a mark is left, rather than by content that is held within the frame of its contextual environment. If the absolute necessity in the determinate content of things comes from the relation of being alone, then each thing is bound to necessity but is also free to become otherwise because what makes each thing necessary is being alone. The bodies of these actualities carry on them the history of prior necessity, but this necessity no longer restricts them from being both themselves and all others. Each is both itself and the totality of possibility because the mark establishes their content as one and the other without restraining their movement.\(^\text{130}\) This relation where difference is maintained but no longer contains the restrictions of opposition and contradiction is the relation of affirmative multiplicity.

Now, Hegel’s language about the mark of necessity being like a “witness to a claim” might seem particularly obscure. In a local dispute over a piece of land, the judge presiding over the dispute might appeal to a person who acted as a witness when the property claim was first drawn up. This suggests that although these actualities are free contingency, they are still bound by a certain “right” (Rechts) that necessity maintains over them. They are free movement in the radical sense of an actuality that is itself the totality of possibility, but since each is also only “this” at the same time as each is the possible itself, these actualities thereby “perish” at the sign of their finitude and determinateness. When Hegel says that the mark is like a witness and that these actualities are “smitten” by it, he seems to suggest that being determinate and having a definite content is an indication of volatility and instability. This radical access to possibility –

\(^{130}\) Lampert’s description of free actuality is quite suggestive in this respect: “Otherness slides around in an actuality and has various effects on it, but without making it the same as the other.” “Hegel on Contingency,” 80. Something that “slides around” can go spontaneously in any direction. And yet the important point here is that this free movement does not erase difference or collapse the other into a relation of identity, but rather leaves the difference in place.
where each thing is an aspect on everything, where each actuality affirms possibility in its entirety – is at the same time the mark of destruction in sheer otherness. The mark allows them to disassociate themselves from the facticity of being only one or the other of what they are, and in this freedom, to be possibility qua possibility, but by this same mark, they have committed themselves as things to the unsustainable regions of self-contradiction.

Hegel concludes from this that from the disposition of things, being is self-contradictory. Contingency “breaks forth” from the determinateness of all things because contradiction is the nature of being. Just as species-essence receives all contraries of individual things, being receives not only the contraries of the species, but the contraries of everything whatsoever. Being commits each thing to the abyss of its freedom in all other things. Being commits each thing to the necessity of itself as all others. This is expressed foremost in the utter destruction of determinateness and in the transgression of every distinct actualization of itself. This radical possibility is at the same time access to the dark content of absolute negativity. The only stability things have is in the utter contingency of being itself.

Hegel’s conclusion that necessity and contingency are the same might, in this sense, seem too strong to be true. The dialectic between necessity and contingency that results from the formal and real premises of his argument presents us with the absolute conversion of actuality and possibility, where everything is necessary because everything is free to be otherwise. If modality leads to the utter instability of determinate being as the full presence of possibility in actuality, this is no doubt an indication that modality does not expose the ultimate truth about ontology. We can then view this extreme result, where everything is necessary because

131 In his discussion of absolute necessity as that which makes all finite things perish, Houlgate invokes an infamous passage from Hegel’s *Introduction to the Philosophy of History*: “There is nothing that history can be except ‘the slaughter-bench on which the happiness of peoples, the wisdom of states and the virtue of individuals have been sacrificed.’” Houlgate, “Necessity and Contingency,”48.
everything is otherwise, as the flaw of modality, and as the main reason why “substantiality,” “causality,” and “reciprocity” emerge as the next categories of the Logic. These categories explain more about the dialectical role of stability in the interactions of “affirmative multiplicity” than modality can explain. However, by showing how substance comes out of modality in the first place, Hegel has also solved the problem that he had stated at the outset of the “Actuality” chapter, of how to recognize the ontological status of possibility as constitutive of reality. This is one of the primary, self-contained results of the chapter, and can be taken to be quite significant in its own right.
Hegel’s Conclusion: The Necessity- Contingency Dialectic

Hegel’s conclusion is not only that possibilities necessarily exist as part of substance. His conclusion is also that because of the movement inherent to inclusive necessity, unactualized possibility is no longer a static category because actuality and possibility have become one unity. This leads to the consequence that contingency is inherently necessary to Hegel’s system, in the sense that free movement can only happen from within a structure where nothing can be otherwise because everything is already in play. But this also leads to the consequence that thought can express the whole possibility in one actuality.

The further implication of this is not so much that the “possible” has become simply another word for the “actual,” as with the initial experiment of “reflected actuality” at premise 8, where thought attempts to actualize the immediate form of possibility qua possibility, but from this can only express the emptiness of the “nothing.” The further implication is also not exactly that every possibility must become subsumed under the heading of actuality, which would suggest a reading of Hegel as one who cannot think possibility without actuality. What Hegel implies instead is that actualization can have greater or lesser concentrations of possibility, and that the more possibility there is in one actuality, the more inclusive the necessity has become, and the more things come to express their essence in their existence. The greatest concentration of possibility, then, is the one whose actualization contains the most inclusive necessity that can be thought, not only the many substances of individual things (as with premise 23 and 24), but the one substance that is both being and becoming together. The final chapter of this study will outline this further implication about “possibility-concentration” and “possibility-depth” by situating Hegel’s conclusion from inclusive necessity from within a debate that Deleuze attributes to Leibniz over the nature of compossibilities and incompossibilities.
Chapter 4: The Greatest Concentration of Possibility in One Actuality, Or Hegel’s Theory of Conditions

We can recognize in the results of Hegel’s argument from “Actuality” a theory of actualization that is not merely exclusive in nature, in the sense that if some “thing” is actual, this necessarily excludes the immediate actuality of this same “thing” as the opposite of itself. On the contrary, from the results of Hegel’s argument, we come to recognize a theory of actualization that includes rather than excludes negative, unactualized sides of possibility as part of the basic constitution of what “things” really are. But this means that things are not simply what they are and not what they are not, as traditional assumptions about the laws of identity and non-contradiction often lead us to believe. The disposition that Hegel proposes requires, instead, that “things” can also be the opposite of themselves, since what is actual is, after all, the actuality of what is possible, and since what is possible is both the actual and the opposite of the actual together. Ultimately, by recognizing a model of actualization that includes the negativity of the possible as part of the constitution of reality, we are lead to a critique of the notion that things are fundamentally identical only with themselves and are always exclusively separate from what they are not. One of the main insights from Hegel’s chapter, then, is that multiplicity and relationality offer a more accurate disposition than the disposition that “things” are identical only with themselves.

In the study that follows, I attempt to explain why actualization is inclusive and not only exclusive in nature. I also attempt to expose the underlying reasons Hegel has for why it would be better to think from the terms of this model rather than from a model that assumes that “things” are separate from “things.” I claim that this inclusive model leads to a more accurate conception of modal reality. I also claim that from the terms of this inclusive model, possibility
is not only about contrariety but is also about maximum quantity as well, that higher or lower concentrations of possibility can exist in one actuality, and that reality always tends towards the greatest expression of this possibility.

I aim to explore some of the most significant and complicated components of Hegel’s modal theory by situating the results of his argument within a debate that Deleuze attributes to Leibniz over the nature of incompossible worlds. Leibniz’s famous statement that God has actualized the best of all possible worlds raises an important question about the status of unactualized possibilities. Do worlds that are possible but not compossible with the actual world exist in any significant sense? We can construe in Deleuze’s work on Leibniz a more extreme version of this question. What would it mean to bring all incompossibles into existence as the basic constitution of reality? I present in Hegel’s theory of conditions and in his conception of compulsive necessity a similar line of inquiry as Deleuze’s, but one that leads to the affirmation of divergences only to a limited extent.

This study will rehearse some of the same premises from Hegel’s argument as we have already discussed, but with a different intention and with a different scope of analysis. I will focus primarily on the role that conditions play in his argument. Even though Hegel seems to de-emphasize it in the “Actuality” chapter, I claim that the condition is one of the most essential pieces of his modal project because it is simultaneously possibility and actuality together. This coincidence leads to the unusual consequence that, just as what is actual is possible, what is possible must also be actual. I claim that this consequence initiates a reconception of modality towards an inclusive notion of actualization. Hegel is thereby able to give a rational explanation for the claim that because something actual is possible, it is both itself and the opposite of itself.

The following chapter contains six sections. The first presents Hegel’s exposition of the
formal problem – that one cannot actualize both the positive and the negative sides of possibility together, but only one or the other by excluding much of what could have been. I want to emphasize that this formal exposition is not Hegel’s ultimate position, but one that we must pass through and criticize if we are to understand how actualization can become inclusive. The second section outlines Hegel’s initial solution to the formal problem – the unity of conditions and the theory of necessity as what compels movement rather than restricts possibility. Section three then poses a challenge to Hegel from Leibniz, and section four shows how Hegel might avoid this challenge by giving a more detailed account of conditions and by offering a concept of “possibility-concentration.” The final two sections focus on Deleuze’s analysis of Leibniz’s incompossibility theory and the question of how it would work if incompossibles were to come into existence all at once. I present Hegel’s theory of conditions in terms of Deleuze’s argument for the existence of incompossible worlds, claiming that, methodologies and terminologies aside, Hegel and Deleuze share a certain common vision about the nature of possibility and reality, which I describe as inclusive substance.
A. Hegel’s Exposition of the Formal Problem: There is no immediate way to actualize the contrariety of possibility as one actuality.

Hegel begins the “Actuality” chapter from a position that he ultimately criticizes, the immediacy of actuality, which he says is the same as existence, but with one noteworthy difference. What is actual has emerged into actuality from possibility. This process is then the immediacy of actualization, but what emerges from actualization, however, is not the simple one-to-one correspondence of actuality and possibility. What emerges is not what Hegel calls “the totality of form,”\(^\text{132}\) the actual in the complete sense of the possible, but only some limited actuality of content. The reason he gives for this is that while possibility contains the form of any actuality whatsoever, actualization must limit in actuality the contraries that possibility projects of the actual. Hegel gives the principle of contradiction as the reason behind why immediate actuality cannot be the one-to-one correspondence of itself as possibility.\(^\text{133}\) While every contingency is formally possible, actualization could never sustain the contraries that possibility projects. Certainly, what is merely possible can and cannot be. As far as contingent propositions go, if becoming a musician is possible, then both becoming a musician and not becoming a musician are equally possible. But what is actually possible would seem only able to express the compound of possibility as a disjunction instead of as a conjunction. If becoming a musician is possible, then either I become a musician or I do not become a musician. Although both are possible, it would be a contradiction if both being a musician and not being a musician were one actuality. It would seem then that possibility always becomes disjoined at the point of actualization. Possibility is thus both what actuality actualizes and what exceeds actuality in

\(^{132}\) "[Actuality] is only in this form-determination but not as the totality of form." WL, 381/SL, 542. See Premise 1.

\(^{133}\) For Hegel’s account of the relationship between formal possibility and contradiction, see Premises 5-6.
every case. And actuality is thus only possibility in this limited sense, once the possibility of the contrary is removed.

Robert Frost's 1916 poem “The Road Not Taken” is a good illustration of this. The poem begins:

Two roads diverged in a yellow wood,
And sorry I could not travel both
And be one traveler, long I stood
And looked down one as long as I could
To where it bent in the undergrowth

This traveler who comes across a divergence of roads sees both as possible, but must limit in actuality the possibility of going down both. Both roads are equally possible but only one or the other can become actual. The road not taken then stands against the traveler as unactualized possibility, that is, as possibility that exceeds actuality. Now, we can view this as a false disjunction in the sense that such a traveler might not go down either road at all. But the point remains that if the traveler takes one of the roads, then she cannot in the same manner take the other road.

Frost's remark is quite poignant: “And sorry I could not travel both.” There is literally no way, at least not formally, to actualize all permutations of the possibility in one actuality. To act at all is to lose that which could have been. Every gain of some determinate actuality is the loss of others. From this remorseful disposition, I might look back as I grow old at what I could have been and regret those various possibilities and directions that my life could have taken. While this disposition of remorse is one that Hegel ultimately rejects, just as he rejects the formal exposition of disjunction in the Actuality chapter, we can still see in the perversely remorseful, as in the formal impossibility of actualizing contrary possibles in one actuality, the starting point for Hegel’s further project of conditions and compulsive necessity.

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134 Frost, Mountain Interval, 9.
Even though Frost’s traveler might feel remorse for the road not taken, there is, of course, nothing good that could come from actualizing both roads as one traveler. Either this would lead to the actualization of death by contradiction, because the body would be torn apart by the actualization of too much possibility, or this would lead only to the unactualized possible as mere abstraction. Since the actualization of possible contraries would lead only to the contrary as the contradictory, we can barely even imagine the former, the traveler who literally, impossibly, goes down both roads as one traveler. This would be the actualization of the impossible, the traveler’s body torn apart by possibility.\[^{135}\] But the latter fares no better, and is equally unimaginable. As Burbidge explains in *He... Systematic Contingency*, one finds the meaning of the possible from the supposition of the actual, and not the other way around.\[^{136}\] One finds the meaning of “going down one road or another” from the supposition of actually going down one or the other road. If Frost’s traveler were able to go down both roads and be one traveler, this would collapse the variations and meaning of the possible.

This tension between actuality and possibility amounts to a problem about multiplicity. Actualization cannot actualize the multiplicity of the possible because it is precisely this multiplicity that harbors those contraries which, if taken together, would lead to contradiction.

\[^{135}\] For an account of Hegel on death, see Lampert, “Speed, Impact, and Fluidity at the Barrier between Life and Death,” 145- 156. Lampert analyzes three types of death from Hegel’s *Philosophy of Nature* - death by impact, death by superfluity, and death by indigestion. The point I make about how too much possibility can lead to death shares something with Lampert’s analysis of death by impact. Death by impact happens when two bodies (Lampert uses the example of a brick and a man’s head) assume the same place. Death by possibility happens when a body attempts to actualize without further mediation both the possibility to be and the possibility not to be, as if the traveler could be torn apart by taking both roads at once. In this sense, both possibilities assume the same place.\[^{136}\] "Hegel is saying that conceptually, possibilities arise from actualities, and not vice versa.” Burbidge, *He... Systematic Contingency*, 17. While it is not altogether clear from Burbidge’s commentary what evidence he offers for this claim - other than that Hegel does seem always to proceed from actuality to possibility and not the other way around - we can nevertheless anticipate from his commentary why Hegel would begin his argument with the immediacy of actuality, and why he would reject Kant’s starting point in the “Postulates” for beginning with possibility. For an explanation of why Hegel would reject Kant for beginning from possibility rather than actuality, see Longuenesse, *He... Critique of Metaphysics*, 121. For Kant’s theory of modality, see the *Critique of Pure Reason*, 321- 333 (approximately A218/B266- A235/B287). Also see my first remark “Kant’s Argument from Modal Experience” for my analysis of whether Kant really does start from possibility.
This is why Hegel says that everything (i.e., any one thing) is possible, but everything (i.e., all things together) is equally impossible (see premise 6.) Possibility itself is an open boundless multiplicity, but since its only access to itself is by way of actualization, this boundless multiplicity is at the same time the impossibility of actualizing possibility itself.

Two inferences come of this. On the one hand, actualization cannot instantiate every possibility and therefore cannot grasp the “whole.” To actualize possibility is to reduce the many possibles to the one actual. There is no way to actualize the whole possibility from this disposition because all contraries are latent in the multiplicity, and to actualize even two contraries at once would lead to contradiction. But on the other hand, it is only in terms of the one actual that the possible seems to be multiple in the first place.

The first inference exposes the contrary nature of the possible as the multiple. Actualization must reduce the multiplicity of the possible in order to actualize the possible. To actualize the possible is to create a limit in the face of the infinite variety of what could have been. If actuality were not to block off the multiplicity of the possible, the contrary that the possible harbors in the multiple would become full-blown contradiction, which would lead, not to the actuality of the multiple, but to the impossibility of everything.

The second inference then exposes the infinite and finite nature of possibility. It is not simply the case that the actualization of the possible removes the multiplicity from the possible. This multiplicity only appears in its unending variety because the one becomes actual. Frost’s two roads only appear as a multiplicity of diverging sides because the one that will become actual must make the possible conform to this. Our recognition of there being “directions” at all, or of there being a “multiplicity of determinate possibilities,” is one that appears because of actuality. The possible would be inconceivable, directionless, and indeterminate if it were not
always and already set down in the terms of the actual. This is the case because there would seem to be no way to think of the endless variety of possibility without thinking from the presupposition of the one that is actual. Hegel assumes from this that thought can only come to recognize a set of possible events from the immediacy of the actual as the fact of existence (see premise 1.) However, this does not exactly mean that of a set of possible events, thought must assume that something of this set must become actual.\(^{137}\) Hegel’s initial position is rather that something must already be actual for there to have been something possible. The road not taken, as well as the road taken, is only possible from the standpoint of the one who actually takes one road or another (or who actually does not take any road at all). We might conclude from this that possibility qua possibility is in a certain important respect unactualizable, that there is really no way to grasp the “whole” possibility in one actuality.

We can also explain this problem in terms of entailment. Actuality entails possibility, but possibility does not necessarily entail actuality. On the one hand, if something is actual, it must have emerged into actuality from possibility. Aristotle notices this modal inference when he explains, in book 13 of *De Interpretatione*, that it would be impossible for something actual not to have been possible. “From being of necessity there follows capability of being.”\(^{138}\) It would seem, however, that this entailment does not work in both directions. Although the actual entails the possible, the possible does not reciprocally entail the actual. Modal logicians call “if p, then possible p” the axiom of possibility. If p is actual, then p is also possible. But if p is merely possible, then it is not necessarily actual.\(^{139}\) The reason why this is the case is because if something is merely possible, there is the equal possibility that what could become actual could

\(^{137}\) See premise 21, in particular interpretation (C) of the claim “if something is possible, it is necessary,” for my analysis of the argument that when given a possible set of events, something of this set must become actual.


not become actual.\textsuperscript{140}

For Hegel, however, this seemingly one-sided entailment is not the end of the story. If it is the emergence of being into actuality that is really of issue, then the contrary that actualization removes is equally the \textit{content of being}, and this too ought-to-be the actuality of possibility. This is the case because to actualize only one strand or another of the possible would reduce the actual to an instance of existence, rather than to its totality. If the contrary that becomes disjoined at the point of actualization were not also part of the content of being, then actuality would not be the actuality of \textit{possibility} and would have had no way to become itself in actualization.

It is from these terms that Hegel deduces formal contingency. By formal contingency, he shows that even though what emerges in actualization is only some limited actuality of content, the contrary of this actuality equally could have been what exists. Formal contingency is itself the immediacy of actuality, yet what is posited in contingency is at the same time the hypothetical existence of non-actual possibility. Existence is still only actuality in the strict sense (see premise 1); however, formal contingency initiates a revision of the relationship between existence and possibility because it posits the contrary of the actual alongside the actual. Although the contrary that the contingent posits does not yet exist in the way that the actual exists, contingency nevertheless starts the process whereby the possible that is disjoined at the point of actualization becomes part of the constitution of reality.

When he claims, near the end of the “Formal Contingency” sub-chapter, that “everything possible exists,”\textsuperscript{141} he does not mean that every fantastical thought one might have,

\textsuperscript{140} Now, this one directional entailment only exposes that if p is actual, then p is possible. But this does not mean that if p is actual, then things other than p are also possible. We cannot conclude from this, then, that actuality is the more primary category, and that possibility is logically dependent upon actuality. Although the entailment only works from one direction, actuality and possibility are each primitive categories, neither arising from the other.

\textsuperscript{141} “Everything possible has therefore in general a being or an existence.” WL, 383/ SL, 544. See premise 10.
if it is possible, is actual. Just because I can think that a chimera might exist does not mean that it actually exists. Hegel’s point is rather that immediate actuality, precisely because it is the possible with all contraries removed, acts as a metaphysical gateway upon the existence of possibility *qua* possibility. Possibility appears through the limitation of immediate actuality. It appears in what Hegel calls the empty or superficial sense as the positive identity of the actual, that if something exists, then it can exist (see premises 3-4.) But it also appears in the negative sense, as the possibility of other actuals, and as the possibility of itself *qua* other. Contingency is the starting point of Hegel’s thesis that the actual is grounded, not only in the possibility of its own identity, but in the equal possibility of others. Hegel’s solution to the formal problem (that there does not seem to be any way to actualize the “whole” possibility) begins precisely from this revision of immediate actuality as “contingent actuality.”
B. Hegel’s Initial Solution: To actualize conditions is to actualize the contrariety of possibility as one actuality.

That “contingent actuality” comes out of what would otherwise seem to be an insurmountable impasse – actualizing possibility itself – exposes Hegel’s commitment to the conceptual project of how to recognize the whole possibility from the disposition of one actuality. In formal terms, Hegel tells a story about the relationship between actuality and possibility from which one might be led to believe that actuality is always only the possibility of something with its contraries removed, and that the notion of possibility itself is the source of everything impossible, that one blind spot which actualization could never approach. However, Hegel finds from within the terms of this impasse a way to reassess what “actuality” means and how actualizing possibility works. Because the formal terms reveal that it would be impossible to actualize possibility itself, Hegel asks instead about the conditional process between contextualized “things.” From this sort of investigation, he discovers an initial solution to the formal problem, an actuality that is constituted in the whole possibility because it has resulted from the mediation of contraries, because it has arisen from the possibilities of its conditions. Is there a way to conceive of “actuality” such that possible contraries remain included within the constitution of this actual world? Hegel answers this question by offering “conditions,” a unit of actuality that is as much possibility as it is actuality.

In the “Actuality” chapter, the category of conditions does not obviously follow from immediate contingency. Here, Hegel turns from contingency to formal necessity, and from this to his theory of content-related modality. But in the “Actuality” passages of the Encyclopedia Logic (§142-148), we see Hegel directly deduce conditions from contingency. “[Contingency] is

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142 Hegel has already uncovered “Condition” as a division of the “Ground” chapter. See WL, 314-322/SL, 469-478.
something-presupposed, whose immediate way of being is at the same time a possibility, and is
destined to be sublated - i.e., to be the possibility of an other: the condition.”¹⁴³ This step of his
argument is particularly important, and it is misleading that Hegel does not emphasize it more.
By turning from formal contingency to conditions, Hegel begins to explain how to think of an
immediate actuality as itself and possibility. The transition begins from the initial recognition
that in actuality something cannot both be and not be, but secures from this an actuality that is
both itself and possibility, not in the limited sense of disjunction, but in the full sense, that
something is both itself and its other.

Conditions are immediate actualities that get used or used up in the process of
actualization. He states this in the addition of §146: “Immediate actuality as such is quite
generally not what it ought to be; on the contrary, it is a finite actuality, inwardly fractured, and
its destination is to be used up.”¹⁴⁴ These actualities are not just themselves. They are the
window onto other actuals. Material conditions are the medium from which something initial
results in the actuality of something. This means that each condition is both actuality and
possibility. Each is actuality in the sense that each is immediately given as the fact of existence.
Even though the stone is a condition for something, it is immediately actual and first appears as
the earth itself. But each condition is also possibility in the sense that each has latent within it the
result of further actualities. The stone is given as prior, yet carries within its content the further
possibility of the statue (and of various other possibilities as well).

Hegel finds the solution to the formal problematic in conditions because conditions are

¹⁴⁴ Hegel, *The Encyclopaedia Logic*, 220. Hegel’s statement that conditions “sacrifice themselves” might make it
seem as if conditions always “go under” at the point of actualization. But I doubt this is the case. He probably also
means that conditions get “taken up,” that one must come to engage them to bring the actualization about, and that
once they are engaged, their status changes. When we use the conditions up, they cease-to-be at the point of
actualization. But when we simply use them, they turn from the exterior to the interior, but they also remain what
they are. See premise 18 for a more detailed account of this distinction.
both actualities and possibilities, and insofar as they are possibilities, they entail other actuals. Formally, possibility does not entail actuality because actualization cannot take up the contraries of possibility into one actuality. But if immediate formal actualities are the conditions for the possibilities of others, these actualities are really possibility, and as possibility, they directly entail actuality. Hegel’s position can be seen as a critique of the axiom of possibility as modal logicians describe it. Certainly, actuality entails possibility in the sense that if something is actual, it must be possible, but possibility also entails actuality in the sense that what is immediately actual is the possibility of other actuals.

Hegel thus proposes a different model of actualization than the initial formal model, wherein one or another possibility becomes actual while all contrary possibilities are removed. In the conditions model of actualization, contrary possibilities are no longer removed but rather propel the immediate actuality to develop into the actuality of others. This propulsion is what he calls relative necessity. B must follow necessarily if we suppose the contingent content of A. While it might seem that a contingent actuality is only itself and not others, Hegel proposes that immediate actuality is only itself insofar as it is a condition for the possibility of others. The seed in the soil, after all, is just the seed. But because the seed is contingent, it is really the possibility of other actuals. Its existence is a material condition for the bird who eats it, or for the tree that grows from it. In this sense, material conditions are implicitly both actuality and possibility. They are immediate actualities but their content contains the contrary sides of possibility.

Hegel’s theory would be uncontroversial enough if his only conclusion were that these immediate actualities are really possibilities that necessarily entail other actuals. The developed actuality would be a new distinct actuality grown out of the conditions. One could then visualize

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from this a successive pattern of entailment. Immediate actualities would lead to further actuals, which in turn would be the conditions for the possibility of even further actuals, and on and on. While this result is interesting on its own, Hegel also comes to a more controversial conclusion. He claims that when something makes its possibilities completely present, what emerges from this is not an entirely new actuality per se, but an actuality that is explicitly itself and possibility. If he were claiming only that what results is a new distinct actuality, his theory would expose a certain relay-process between actuality and possibility, a notable moment of possibility entailing actuality, but would not then establish that what results from conditions expresses the possible itself, not only the positive side, but the negative contrary, in one actuality. But the consequence from conditions is that material actualization comes to expose the one blind spot that formal actualization could never approach, the possible qua the possible, what Hegel ultimately calls substance.

Hegel claims that possibility qua possibility results from the actualization of conditions, that what emerges is not only a new distinct actuality, but also the same actuality throughout. This conclusion is unusual because it causes us to criticize that assumption about the exclusive nature of actualization from which we began. We began from the observation that for actualization to occur, the contrary side of possibility must become excluded from existence. This led us to the result that while the actual world exists, there are many unactualized possibilities that stand beyond this world but really do not exist in a significant way. However, if what results from material actualization is an actuality that is itself and possibility, then “actuality” must become able to absorb the contrary possibles, and thereby include rather than exclude the whole extent of possibility. This inclusivity changes the terms of modality.

To conceptualize an actuality that includes contraries, one must think of what results as
simultaneously the same actuality throughout and a new distinct actuality. One must think of the actuality as becoming the other that it already is. On the one hand, what emerges is the same actuality throughout. The thing in question has merely become itself. The tree has realized its possibility in the seed. The revolution has festered from social conditions that were already in place. But on the other hand, the developed actuality is something that none of the moments alone could complete and that even the aggregate of the moments does not properly expose. The developed actuality is in this sense the actualization into an other, but this is equally the actualization into oneself. One indication of this is that the conditions vanish as the actuality develops from them. While they stand initially against the thing in question, as an external requirement that must be overcome, the conditions are either consumed or integrated at the point of actualization; their possibility is released from their necessity; their exteriority becomes one with the interiority of the resulting actual. What results from the actuality of conditions is the same actuality from which we began, but one that has digested the exteriority of its other, one that has, equally, become the other of itself.

This is why Hegel says that from the completion of the conditions, “the something is... determined as being equally actual as possible.” The actual that results from the actualization of conditions is not a new distinct actuality emerging against the background of many contrary possibilities. Nor is it an actuality that entirely succeeds the initial actuality of its conditions. What results is rather an actuality that is both itself and possibility. Hegel calls this substance. “This identity of being with itself in its negation is now substance. It is this unity as in its negation.”¹⁴⁶ Substance requires us to think from the terms of a model of actualization that is inclusive rather than exclusive. The possibilities that come from this actualization no longer

¹⁴⁶WL, 392/ SL, 553.
diverge in the strict sense of non-existence. They diverge, but they also co-exist with the identity of what has become actual. More than this, the possibilities that diverge are not only existent iterations of what could have been; they are in a certain respect the origin of the actual world, the primary existence of what is. The theory of substance that Hegel promotes contains as its basic constitution a multiplicity of diverging possibles, not as what could have been, but as the primary being of substance. To be actual does not only come from the disjunction, exclusion, and the non-existence of unactualized possibilities, which fall away at the moment of actualization; to be actual now comes from the multiplicity that the process of actualizing possibility generates at the origin of the disjunction.

Substance is then an actuality that retains the negativity of the possible as part of what makes it actual. By retaining the negativity of the possible, substance expresses more of possibility than an actuality that does not retain this negativity could express. It is therefore in the demonstration of how conditions become actualized where we become able to explain why actualization is inclusive and not only exclusive in nature. But more than this, the condition offers us an explanation for why it would be better to include the negativity of the possible as part of the constitution of what is actual, because by including this negativity, we come to express the maximum amount of possibility in one actuality. In this way, Hegel’s position can be viewed as an argument for why reality tends towards the greatest expression of itself in possibility.

What we have not yet explored, however, is this further inference for how to conceptualize possibility in terms of quantity and not only in terms of contrariety. In order to expose the structure of this concept and also to demonstrate Hegel’s argument from inclusive substance for how to think of an actuality as itself and its other, I would like to take a brief detour
and anticipate a challenge that Leibniz’s related theory of incompossibility might pose for Hegel’s theory. I will argue that one can find in what is often referred to as Leibniz’s *Thesis of Maximum Possibility* the grounds for why the exclusion of the negative side of possibility is a problem to be overcome. However, one can also find in what is often referred to as Leibniz’s *Alternative Worlds Thesis* a challenge to Hegel in the form that God generates the most perfect set of compossibles *if and only if* God excludes all iterations of alternative worlds from existence. This detour is important for a clear understanding of Hegel’s project because by anticipating challenges from Leibniz, we become able to explain not only why the Hegelian substance must be inclusive, but also why this inclusivity is the expression of the greatest concentration of possibility in one actuality.
C. Leibniz’s incompossibility theory poses a challenge for Hegel’s initial solution.

Hegel argues that the impossibility of actualizing contrary possibilities in one actuality is a problem to be overcome. However, the reason he offers for this in the “Actuality” chapter needs more clarification. He claims that if being itself is the object of actualization, then the negative side of possibility that becomes disjoined at the point of actualization nevertheless retains the status of being, and in this sense, thought recognizes the equal existence of unactualized possibilities just as thought recognizes the existence of actualized possibility. In Leibniz’s famous statement that God has actualized the best of all possible worlds, one can find resources that support Hegel’s reasoning, namely, that if this is the greatest of all possible worlds, then it is the one with the most possible reality. However, one finds in Leibniz’s statement a second conclusion as well, namely, that all other possible worlds, since they are less perfect than this actual world, must remain excluded from this world and really do not exist. Although from Leibniz’s statement one sees the significance of Hegel’s project more clearly, the Alternative Worlds Thesis presents a substantial challenge for Hegel.\textsuperscript{147} I will begin by emphasizing a version of Leibniz’s Maximum Possibility Thesis that lends itself to Hegel’s problematic, and then I will explore that version of incompossibility that presents Hegel with challenging questions.

There are various ways to interpret Leibniz’s Maximum Possibility Thesis. One interpretation is simply that being is better than non-being, and that because this world is the one

\textsuperscript{147} Although Leibniz himself does not call these two theses “maximum possibility” and “alternative worlds,” these names are common in the secondary literature. For a detailed account of these two theses, see Messina and Rutherford, “Leibniz on Compossibility,” 962-977; also see McDonough, “Leibniz and the Puzzle of Incompossibility: The Packing Strategy,” 135-163.
that is, it is relatively better than other worlds which could have been but are not. Therefore, in actualizing this world, simply because it is the one that is, God has actualized the best of all possible worlds. The prescriptive basis of the claim, that it is better to be than not to be, establishes nothing more about what it means to maximize possibility than that actualized possibility is higher than unactualized possibility. From the terms of this interpretation, Leibniz is not claiming that the content of this world is any better than other worlds; he is only claiming that its status as “actuality” makes it relatively more perfect than any world whose status is “merely possible.”

There is another interpretation, however, which lends itself more directly to Hegel’s project. I call this the Essence-Must-Exist interpretation, the notion that by actualizing the most perfect of all worlds, God has brought into existence the most of essence as one can bring into actuality. This interpretation comes from Leibniz’s definition of “essence” and his theory of “perfection.” He defines essence in terms of individual substance, as that which can take on predications, but which cannot be the predicate of another subject. To recognize essentiality is to express clearly and without confusion that the predicate is contained immanently in the

148 The initial premise of this interpretation appeals to the same kind of axiom as St. Anselm appeals to in his Ontological Argument when he claims that it is more perfect to be actual than to be merely possible. St. Anselm’s argument can be rendered into the following premises: 1. Anyone can conceive of the possibility that God exists. 2. To conceive of God is to conceive of a being that is greater than any other being. 3. It is greater to be actual than to be merely possible. 4. Therefore, God is actual and not merely possible. Anselm, “Proslogion” in Basic Writings, 81-83.

149 For textual evidence of this interpretation, see Leibniz, “On the Ultimate Origination of Things,” Philosophical Essays, 151.

150 One advantage of this interpretation is that Leibniz thereby avoids the problem of evil - that if God has actualized the best of all possible worlds, then why does evil seem to exist in this world, and why do other possible worlds seem morally better than this one? In response to this, Leibniz writes in the Theodicy: “It is true that one may imagine possible worlds without sin and without unhappiness… but these same worlds again would be very inferior to ours in goodness… You must judge with me ab effectu, since God has chosen this world as it is.” 36.

151 Deleuze mentions this interpretation in the “Incompossibility, Individuality, Liberty” chapter of The Fold. “If this world exists, it is not because it is the best, but because it is rather the inverse; it is the best because it is, because it is the one that is.” 68.

152 “Of the infinite combinations of possibilities and possible series, the one that exists is the one through which the most essence or possibility is brought into existence.” Leibniz, “On the Ultimate Origination of Things,” Philosophical Essays, 150.
subject.\textsuperscript{153} Essence is about the expression of something insofar as it is the expression of everything, that is, insofar as each substance includes the whole universe within it.\textsuperscript{154} Perfection, then, has to do with the degree of essence in existence. An actuality is more perfect, the more of essence it contains in its existence. Leibniz also explains this in terms of possibility. That which is the most perfect contains as much of possibility as can be contained in its existence.\textsuperscript{155} It follows that since God is the only substance whose essence and existence are the same, God contains not only a degree of essence, but the entirety of essence, in one existence. Now, in the \textit{Being-Over-Nothing} interpretation, the only reason why this world is better than other worlds is because \textit{actualized possibility} is of a higher status than \textit{unactualized possibility}; but, in the \textit{Essence-Must-Exist} interpretation, the actual world is better than other possible worlds because the maximum amount of essence exists in this world. If the actual world is the most perfect world because it contains the most essence in existence, then there are many permutations of possibility, some with more essence, some with less essence, and God has actualized that one series of permutations with the most possibility in it.

Even though Hegel would probably reject the detached, external disposition of Leibniz’s God, who chooses among possible worlds as an observer might look through a window,\textsuperscript{156} the \textit{Essence-Must-Exist} interpretation still helps to support Hegel’s solution to the \textit{Whole Possibility} problem because it presents us with the notion that possibility is quantifiable, that one can actualize more or less of it, and that being is more perfect the better it can sustain the possible in

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\textsuperscript{154} “We could call that which includes everything we express our essence or idea.” Leibniz, “Discourse on Metaphysics” in \textit{Philosophical Essays}, 49.
\textsuperscript{155} In one of the most revealing sentences of “On the Ultimate Origination of Things,” Leibniz defines essence in terms of possibility and defines existence in terms of perfection or \textit{degree} of essence: “Just as possibility is the foundation of essence, so perfection or degree of essence (through which the greatest number of things are compossible) is the foundation of existence.” \textit{Philosophical Essays}, 151.
\textsuperscript{156} The final passage of his “Remark” on Spinoza and Leibniz is one place where Hegel rejects Leibniz’s theory of God as the external source of “concrete existence.” WL, 379/ SL, 539- 540.
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the actual. From Hegel’s formal exposition, one recognizes only two types of possibility, the possible that is actual and the possible that is unactual. Either I become a musician or I do not become a musician. Either Frost’s traveler takes one road or the other (or neither). The question of quantity or degree of possibility does not yet come up. But if the actual world has to do with perfection, as Leibniz suggests, and if perfection has to do with the maximum degree of essence or possibility in existence, then there is a further concept of possibility at work here, not only a disjoinable binary of actualized and unactualized possibility, but also a maximum amount of possibility in one actuality. This does not exactly mean in a literal sense that possibility can be partially actualized and remain partially unactualized, as if Frost’s traveler could go down one path to a certain degree and at the same time go down the other to a certain degree. Maximizing possibility has to do, instead, with expressing abundance, variety, and perfection.

Now, we might think of how an individual thing could have a maximum amount of possibility within it, but Leibniz suggests in many passages of his corpus that it is not a question of each individual thing being the best of all, but rather of the whole aggregate of things existing together as the best of all possible worlds.157 His discussion of the existence of sin in this world is particularly revealing. “Some adversary… will perchance answer… that the world could have been without sin and without sufferings; but I deny that then it would have been better. For it must be known that all things are connected in each one of the possible worlds: the universe, whatever it may be, is all of one piece, like an ocean.”158 Although in other possible worlds there might have existed individual things that are more perfect (or creatures that sin less), Leibniz maintains that the reason why God has brought this world into existence is because the best

157 In the Theodicy, Leibniz defines “world” as “the whole succession and the whole agglomeration of all existent things.” 35.
158 Leibniz, Theodicy, 35- 36.
possible aggregate of things exist within it. The question of maximum possibility is then not about how each individual thing expresses possibility in actuality, but rather, how this actual world expresses the most possibility as a series of things.\(^{159}\)

To bring about as much of essence in one existence, that is, to express as much of possibility in one actuality, Leibniz subscribes to the strategy of “Simplest Means for Maximum Ends.” “God has chosen the most perfect world,” Leibniz writes, “that is, the one which is at the same time the simplest in hypotheses and the richest in phenomena.”\(^{160}\) Perfection is in this sense as much about simplicity at the starting point as it is about complex variety in the result. In division 5 of the “Discourse on Metaphysics,” he offers a number of examples and metaphors for this strategy. He says that to act with perfection is like the geometer, the architect, the householder, the machinist, or the author who, each in their own way, produce the richest and most abundant outcome from the simplest means and with the least effort.\(^{161}\) In “On the Ultimate Origination of Things,” Leibniz says that if someone were to direct us to walk from place A to B without designating any specific path, we would prefer the “easiest or shortest” path. He proposes that if we were to think of the actual world as one single plot of land, we would prefer to build “the most pleasing building possible” on this land because this is the minimum cost for the maximum effect. And within this building (since there would only be one building), it would

\(^{159}\) As an alternative reading, one can see in “On the Ultimate Origination of Things” the argument that maximum possibility also stands at the origin of what makes each thing determinate and makes each thing exhibit the content that it has. This argument appears in Leibniz’s language about how each thing “strives to exist” with the most possible essence. In this sense, each determinate thing takes its form from the principle that it should express the most of its essence as can be expressed in one existence. The principle of maximum possibility is then the reason why each thing is what it is. The reason why the shape of the triangle exists is because this shape maximizes possibility. However, even if this reading is plausible, one can still maintain that the maximum possibility principle is about how one composite series of things is better than other incompossible series. It is then not the case that the isolated triangle that is not in relation to any world exhibits the most possibility; Leibniz’s point would remain that the determinate content of things exhibits the maximum amount of possibility only insofar as each thing is the expression in a composite of the whole world. For the passage that suggests such a reading, see “On the Ultimate Origination of Things” inPhilosophical Essays, 151.


follow that we should find a way to maximize the space within it, to build as many rooms as possible, and to make each room as elegant as possible.\textsuperscript{162}

We can find in Hegel’s theory of conditions a similar strategy of “Simplest Means for Maximum Ends.” One comes to maximize possibility by actualizing across the negativity of what is immediately present, thereby reaching an actuality of the whole process. As the conditions fall under, the actuality that rises up is both itself and possibility because it has come to include within itself the negative aspects of possibility. Actualization is of a higher status the more effectively one can actualize the negative side of possibility, and not only the positive. Since this process requires a certain precision, in his descriptions of real necessity (see premise 21), Hegel can be seen to explore a special version of Leibniz’s “Simplest Means for Maximum Ends,” one where only particular conditions lead to maximum effects, and where from the sacrifice and integration of immediate actualities, a rich actualization of the whole possibility-process appears before us. Like Leibniz’s single building with the most elegant rooms, Hegel’s material actualization follows the most precise directive in the conditions towards a certain concentration of possibility in one actuality. Even if we put aside Leibniz’s notion that God measures all things and brings only the best combination of these into actuality, we can still recognize in Hegel the theory that possibility is quantifiable and that certain concentrations of possibility are better than others.

However, although we can perceive an affinity between this interpretation of Leibniz and Hegel’s theory of conditions, Leibniz’s related \textit{Alternative Worlds Thesis} problematizes Hegel’s solution because the thesis retains that principle of exclusivity and disjunction which Hegel can be seen to critique. If God has actualized the best of all possible worlds, as Leibniz claims, then

there are other possible worlds which God could have chosen to actualize if they were as perfect as this one. Leibniz claims that not all possibilities can come into existence, but only those possibilities which form the most perfect series of composites. Compossibility has to do with converging series. In the *Monadology*, Leibniz argues that each “thing” is a perspective on everything. “Every body,” he writes, “is affected by everything that happens in the universe, to such an extent that he who sees all can read in each thing what happens everywhere, and even what has happened or what will happen.” But there is a limitation to this. Each monad expresses the whole world that comes along with it. But this means that each can express only that which converges with it. A monad does not express those other worlds which could have been but which diverge from this one. Incompossibility, then, has to do with series which diverge from this world. Leibniz claims that although God projects the possibility of these other worlds, they do not exist as anything other than as God’s projection. In this sense, the ontological status of unactualized possibilities is, for Leibniz, one of non-existence.

The challenge to Hegel then comes from Leibniz’s argument that the actual world is more perfect *if and only if* alternative possible worlds really do not exist as anything other than as God’s projection. Hegel can be seen to include as the maximum result, as the richest and most

163 In “On Contingency” Leibniz writes: “One must certainly hold that not all possibles attain existence, otherwise one could imagine no novel that did not exist in some place and at some time. Indeed, it does not seem possible for all possible things to exist, since they would get in one another’s way. There are, in fact, an infinite number of series of possible things. Moreover, one series certainly cannot be contained within another, since each and every one of them is complete.” *Philosophical Essays*, 29. In *Philosophical Papers and Letters* he writes: “[N]ot all possibles are compossible. Thus, the universe is only a certain collection of compossibles, and the actual universe is the collection of all existing possibles, that is to say, those which form the richest composite. And since there are different combinations of possibilities, some of them better than others, there are many possible universes, each collection of compossibles making up one of them.” 662.

164 Leibniz, “the Monadology” in *Philosophical Essays*, 221.

165 The reason why God projects an infinite variety of possible worlds, on Leibniz’s account, is because this demonstrates God’s freedom, and at the same time, allows for freedom and contingency in the actual world. See, “On Freedom” in *Philosophical Essays*, 94–98. However, although God projects other possible worlds, these possibilities do not exist with any ontological significance; otherwise, everything that is merely possible would be actual; otherwise, this world would not be the most perfect of worlds because it would include within it all sorts of
abundant variety, even those possibilities that at first seem to diverge from reality. To this end, he attempts to recover the negativity of the possible which he sees as integral for the greatest quantity of possibility in one actualization. But why would it be important to recover the negativity of the possible? If these other possible worlds are really less perfect, as Leibniz claims, then would it not be better to recognize a model of actualization that excludes them from reality, and thereby emphasizes that one set of most perfect compossibles?

To recognize the force behind the Leibnizian challenge, we will need to further analyze the nature of incompossibility. Compossible worlds are both possible and actual, but incompossible worlds are not exactly impossible. They are rather in-compossible, which shows that there would be no contradiction, only imperfection, if God were to actualize them instead of this world. For Leibniz, the principle of non-contradiction cannot be the direct reason why incompossible worlds diverge from this one; otherwise, God would be incapable of actualizing certain determinate content, which would go against the notion that God is all powerful.166

imperfect possibilities. Leibniz’s fine distinction between “projection” and “existence” might seem to be overly tedious. On the one hand, he wants to show that this actual world is not predetermined. This is why he claims that it would not be impossible if a less perfect world were to replace the actual world. But on the other hand, he wants to emphasize that incompossible worlds are not in any ontological sense part of this actual world. This is why he claims that although God projects their existence, other possible worlds do not exist. See, “The Source of Contingent Truths” in Philosophical Essays, 100.

166 Some Leibniz commentators, following the logical interpretation, have proposed that non-contradiction is the principle behind why some worlds diverge from this one. The logical interpretation is the position that the law of identity and the law of non-contradiction dictate what can and what cannot exist as this world. But if Leibniz’s point is only that it would not be impossible if other imperfect worlds were to have existed instead of this one, one can follow the logical interpretation and still recognize Leibniz’s theory of imperfection. If the emphasis is on the question of whether an imperfect world could have replaced this world, since one would exist instead of the other, there is no issue of contradiction, only imperfection. Commentators who have followed the logical interpretation include Hintikka, “Leibniz on Plenitude, Relations, and the “Reign of Law”,” 155- 190; Rescher, Leibniz: An Introduction to his Philosophy; and Mates, “Leibniz on Possible Worlds,” 335- 264. Alternatively, there is also the lawful interpretation, which establishes that while it would not be a contradiction for incompossible worlds to exist together, it would still go against certain laws of harmony if two incompossible worlds were to co-exist. Commentators who have followed the lawful interpretation include Hacking, “A Leibnizian Theory of Truth,” 185-195; Cover and O’Leary-Hawthorne, Substance and Individuation in Leibniz, 131- 141; and Brown, “Compossibility, Harmony, and Perfection in Leibniz,” 172- 203. For an alternative to the logical and lawful interpretations, see the “cosmological interpretation” in Messina and Rutherford, “Leibniz on Compossibility,” 962-977. Also see McDonough’s “packing strategy” in “Leibniz and the Puzzle of Incompossibility: The Packing Strategy,” 135-163.
To explain why worlds diverge, and why what diverges cannot exist, Leibniz relies on a distinction between two types of necessity. On the one hand, he defines metaphysical necessity (he also calls this absolute necessity) as that whose contrary would imply contradiction, such as the squaring of a triangle or the proposition that 2 plus 2 equals 5. However, Leibniz claims that much of our experience falls under the category of contingency, in the sense that it would not be impossible if the contrary were to exist instead. “Adam-the-sinner” or “Caesar-crossing-the-Rubicon” exist in this world, and yet there would be no contradiction if their contraries, “Adam-the-non-sinner” or “Caesar-not-crossing-the-Rubicon,” were to have existed instead. If their contraries were impossible, this would lead to the theory that all events must follow the strict course of fate, that God has already determined the future direction of all things without there having been any chance of contingency, a kind of hard necessity in “absolute fatalism.” But by claiming that their contraries are not impossible, Leibniz acknowledges a certain moment of freedom in his system and thereby complicates the theory that God necessarily brings only the best of all possible worlds into existence. On the one hand, contingent things follow a course of events that is certain, since God always knows what will happen; however, on the other hand, they are still contingent because God chooses them freely and because God lets them choose for themselves what is always the most perfect.

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167 See division 13 of Leibniz’s “Discourse on Metaphysics” in Philosophical Essays, 45.
168 While it might not seem obvious why 2 plus 2 equals 5 would be a direct contradiction, that is, why a world could not exist in which 2 plus 2 does not equal 4, Leibniz maintains that there are a set of basic truths which cannot be otherwise but for which no concrete reason could ever be given. For his distinction between basic and derivative truths, see “On Freedom” in Philosophical Essays, 96. Leibniz does offer a clear example in “On Freedom and Possibility” of how mathematics can demonstrate contradiction, such as that the part cannot be equal to itself and the whole: “[Suppose] someone were to look for a number which multiplied by itself is 9 and also added to 5 makes 9. Such a number implies a contradiction, for it must, at the same time, be both 3 and 4, that is, 3 and 4 must be equal, a part equal to the whole.” However, he seems to suggest that even the law of non-contradiction cannot be given as the reason for why basic truths must exist. See, Philosophical Essays, 21.
170 See division 13 of the “Discourse on Metaphysics” in Philosophical Essays, 45- 46.
One might assume from this that there is no concept of necessity behind why contingencies exist and why their contraries do not exist. However, Leibniz proposes that contingencies are nevertheless *contingent truths* which follow the logic of physical necessity (or what he calls hypothetical necessity).\(^{172}\) Although the contrary of physical necessity does not imply *contradiction*, it still implies *imperfection*. Since the actual world would be less perfect if “Adam-the-non-sinner” were to have existed instead of “Adam-the-sinner,” the contingent facts of existence are implicated in necessity after all because the world would be less perfect if these things were to have been otherwise. In “On Freedom,” Leibniz offers an explanation for this in terms of substance. He says that because each substance is a disposition on everything, any predication of a subject always exists analytically *in* the subject; however, contingency still arises because one is often unable to demonstrate that the predicate is *in* the subject. While contingent truths remain bound by the same relation of substantiality, they are still contingent in the sense that they cannot be expressed clearly in the subject, but seem to exist outside this, as a predication that is only synthetic in nature, and not analytic. Now, Leibniz’s explanation that only God can demonstrate these predications analytically might seem like a dogmatic appeal to the assumption of a viewpoint outside of any predication whatsoever, he nevertheless presents us with a kind of contingency that is at the same time a kind of necessity. If we put aside this assumption about God, Leibniz can still be seen to anticipate the primacy of contingency in the existence of things, infusing a conception of freedom into his system; however, at the same time, he establishes *the necessity in this contingency*, that although what exists could have been otherwise, in the sense that these projected imperfect worlds could have been the actual ones, if it is the case that these alternative worlds would be less perfect, then what contingently exists

It is therefore in God’s interest to exclude alternative possibilities, not because he is incapable of bringing these worlds into existence, but because the mere fact of their existence would mar the actual world and reduce it to imperfection. God brings into existence the best combination of compossible substances, and thereby the most possible reality in one actuality, if and only if God excludes all alternative worlds from existence. By projecting an infinite variety of alternative worlds that do not exist, Leibniz retains the concept of freedom and exposes the open multiplicity of the possible while at the same time arguing for the necessary exclusion of these projected worlds from existence, since their co-existence would throw the world into imperfection. This comes as a challenge to Hegel who proposes a model that actualizes across the negativity of the possible and finds in the result of this a category that is as much possibility as it is actuality.
D. Possibility-Concentration as Hegel’s Response to the Incompossibility Problem in Leibniz.

Would it not be better to recognize a model of actualization that removes contrary possibilities from existence for the sake of actualizing the most possible reality, rather than to establish a model that includes contrary possibilities in one actuality? This is the primary debate behind the Leibnizian challenge to Hegel as we have interpreted it. However, underlying Leibniz’s challenge, one can also find a certain version of the *Incompossibility Problem*, one that haunts the compatibility between Leibniz’s *Maximum Possibility Thesis* and his interrelated *Alternative Worlds Thesis*. Furthermore, one can find in Hegel’s theory of conditions not only a solution to the formal exposition as he situates it in the “Actuality” chapter, but also a specific answer to the *Incompossibility Problem* in Leibniz. First, I will present that version of Leibniz’s incompossibility problem that would prompt a response from Hegel, and then I will argue that modal transitivity and possibility-concentration are two inferences that come from Hegel’s response.

There are various ways to interpret the *Incompossibility Problem* in Leibniz. One version focuses on the nature of divergence. If the principle of non-contradiction is not the reason behind why worlds diverge from the actual, then by what criteria does God choose the world that is best? Is this simply a mystery of God’s “divine calculus,” one which relies on the principle of maximum efficiency, but without demonstrating any reasons for this? Or is there a way to recognize and distinguish the rules of divergence from the rules of convergence? Another version of the problem focuses on the nature of perfection. Incompossible worlds diverge because they are supposed to be less perfect than our world, and yet how often do we imagine counterfactuals that would seem to be relatively better than this world? This interpretation
focuses on the question of what combination of compossibles would lead to the greatest possible reality, whether certain determinate content is more perfect than other content.

The version of the problem that presents itself in Hegel has to do with the issue of incompatibility between two usages of possibility, one coming from the Maximum Possibility Thesis and the other coming from the Alternative Worlds Thesis. On the one side, there is the concept of possibility in terms of greatest quantity. God actualizes the greatest amount of possibility in one reality. On the other side, there is the concept of possibility in terms of contrariety. God actualizes the best of all possible worlds by excluding the contrary nature of possibility from actuality. This division of possibility is problematic because one is left to wonder why God would exclude possibility if the aim is to bring into existence the most of possibility as can be brought into one actuality. In one usage, Leibniz wants to include the possible to the greatest extent. However, in the other usage, he wants to exclude the possible, and exclude it entirely, from the actual. This version of the incompossibility problem arises, then, because it is not obvious upon what basis Leibniz has divided possibility into these two usages.

What is unusual about Hegel’s theory of conditions is that the further concept of possibility as greatest quantity develops directly from the initial concept of possibility as contrariety. Being able to express more or less possibility in one actuality comes as a result of the impossibility of actualizing the contrary nature of possibility. We can view this development

\[\text{173 Cf. McDonough claims that the Incompossibility Problem (he calls it a “puzzle”) appears as the incompatibility between three separate theses: The “thesis of maximalization” – which states that God creates as much being as he can; the “thesis of independence” – which states that substances are independent, receiving their existence from the essence of their form; and the “thesis of alternatives” – which states that because God is free, he chooses between an infinite variety of possible worlds. McDonough argues that although we can establish compatibility between any two of these theses, Leibniz’s theory requires compatibility between all three, and that it is in the incompatibility of all three from which the puzzle arises. While McDonough’s version of the puzzle is quite persuasive, and while I am not in disagreement about the importance of the “thesis of independence” in the puzzle, I maintain that there is a certain level of incompatibility between the two theses, Maximum Possibility and the Alternative Worlds, because I see the conflation of the two separate usages of possibility as what causes the problem. McDonough, “Leibniz and the Puzzle of Incompossibility: the Packing Strategy,” 139.}\]
as Hegel’s response to the Leibnizian challenge and to the incompossibility problem that underlies it. Hegel claims that to express more possibility in one actuality, one must find a way to actualize the formal contrariety of possibility. One gains more possibility, but not in the sense that one series of things is better than other series of things, or as one actual is better than other possible actuals. Rather, one gains more possibility by actualizing not only the one possible, while erasing all contraries from existence, but by coming to form an inclusive actuality through the terms of possibility’s negativity.

We find in the activation of conditions, for example, the inclusion of possibilities that at first remain under the surface of what is immediately present. We find in the relation between the seed and the water the further possibilities of being a plant. Although the seed is literally not the plant, we recognize through the mediation of conditions that the seed is both itself and the plant that it could become. In this way, unactualized possibilities really do exist; they are merely embedded in the dispersion of possibilities in other actuals, and need to be drawn out. And since they really do exist, although these possibilities are in a literal sense contrary to what is immediately actual, they nevertheless stand connected in a greater sense of reality.

Hegel can be seen to anticipate a solution to the Incompossibility Problem in Leibniz insofar as he finds in the concept of possibility as contrariety the concept of greatest quantity as well. Leibniz, on the other hand, can be seen to conflate these two concepts of possibility, excluding unactualized possibilities from existence, while at the same time claiming that God has actualized the world with the most possibility in it. Although Hegel agrees to the project of maximizing possibility, he sees the principle of maximization not from the exclusion of alternative worlds, but from the inclusion of possibility’s negativity in conditions. To bring into existence both the “can” and the “can not” of possibility as one actuality is to actualize a greater
quantity of possibility. Since conditions are both possibility and actuality together, to actualize across conditions is to actualize both the “can” and the “can not” as one actuality. The contrariety in the conditions, therefore, presents us with an inclusive actualization which holds within it the maximum amount of possibility in one actuality.

In the “Actuality” chapter, the question of how to actualize the greatest quantity of possibility comes up in the first place because formally actualization cannot actualize the negative along with the positive side of possibility. The negative side of possibility, precisely because it could never become formally included as actual, stands against the results of formal modality as a flaw and a weakness of the model, and as the primary reason why the theory of real modality must follow from the next steps of Hegel’s argument. In this sense, the reason why there is more or less possibility in actuality is because there is no formal way to actualize possibility qua possibility. Therefore, instead of actualizing the whole possibility, one actualizes a certain amount of possibility, as much of the totality as can be presented from one disposition. The concept of quantitative possibility (that there can be more or less possibility in one actuality) is then a development upon the concept of possible contraries, where one possibility becomes actual while its contrary becomes excluded from existence. What Hegel shows as the result of conditions is that once the quantification of possibility has been introduced as a concept, we can overcome the initial impasse, that formally there is no way to actualize the whole possibility, by maximizing the greatest amount of possibility in one actuality.

To explain how an actuality can come to form more or less possibility, we must present a criteria for how an amount of possibility can become released from, or produced by, the process of actualizing the conditions. Hegel suggests that the process of quantifying possibility requires a certain conception of necessity as movement. This conception of necessity is not only restrictive,
in the sense that if something is necessary, then its opposite cannot also be; it is more importantly *compulsive*, in the sense that the necessity compels the actual to become the other of itself, and thereby to realize the maximum amount of possibility, that because something *can be*, it also *can not be*.

I will illustrate how this concept of *necessity as compulsion* works by introducing a distinction between “access” and “production.” If we say that conditions are the “access-points” and that “possibility is released from them,” this suggests that the possibility *already exists in the thing in question* and that this possibility only needs to be “teased out” because it is already there. This necessity compels what is immediately actual by way of conditions to become otherwise and thereby to magnify possibility. However, “access” presupposes that the thing in question has a stable identity throughout, and that one only needs to find a way to make explicit what is already implicit. In contrast, if we say that the process of actualizing conditions “produces” possibility, this suggests that the process itself generates possibilities that were not otherwise there. If the necessity-access version is right, then the conditions already contain the further regions of possibility, and one only needs to find a method to access these. If the necessity-production version is right, then the possibilities are not already embedded in the conditions, but must be “produced” from the work of real necessity because they are not otherwise there. I will attempt to give concrete examples of each of these as we proceed.

**Necessity-Access:** To see how necessity-access works, it will help to borrow from the logicians’ concept of “transitivity.” In basic logic terms, if A entails B, and B entails C, then A also entails C (for all systems that presuppose the axiom of transitivity). Necessity brings access to possibilities in a similar way. What is immediately actual has embedded within it possibilities that only appear as possibilities when we realize that they are the conditions of others and of
themselves as others. Compulsive necessity is then the middle term, the conditionality of the conditions, the directive at B to which A would submit if A entails C. The point is not so much that the possibilities at C are *only* accessible through the middle term, but that when possibilities are embedded in the conditions, mediation is what draws them out. Of course, this example of transitivity is only a loose analogy, since there are almost always other ways to access possibility than by the specific content of any one middle term. Still, as a basic generality, the analogy explains the role of conditional mediation for possibility. Although C might be accessible by any number of conditions or sets of conditions (B₁, B₂, etc...), it is nevertheless the necessity of any one of these that brings access to the possibility.

While it has real possibilities of its own, the seed does not have access to the same region of possibilities as it would find in itself as the plant. The seed cannot bud seeds, grow green leaves, or reach out to the sun. In its immediate actuality, the seed is a little speck buried in the earth. But through transitivity, there is a sense in which the seed does carry in it the plant’s regions of possibility as well. Since these possibilities are only “latent” in the seed, the seed goes through the process of satisfying the conditions that would bring the plant about. By following the necessary conditions, the seed gains access to possibilities which are already there, but which remain embedded and unrealized unless the conditions come about. These “deeper layers” of possibility that underlie the immediate actuality are part of the constitution of what things *really are*. In this sense, although they are not literally actual in the most immediate sense, unactualized possibilities really do exist in the depth of the conditions.

“Depth” and “latency” refer to similar processes. “Depth” refers to the distance between something initial and the possibilities that it could come to access through conditions. Budding seeds or growing green leaves are immediate possibilities in the plant, which, however, maintain
a certain depth insofar as they are also, mediately, possibilities in the seed as well. “Latency” refers to the specific position in which possibilities exist but have not yet become realized in the conditions. Although growing green leaves is a possibility in the seed itself, this remains latent in the seed, as a standing reserve is at-the-ready but has not yet fully come about. It is important to recognize that “depth” and “latency” have a kind of “layering” effect insofar as not all potential actualities have the same amount of depth or carry the same latency within them. There is a certain layer of depth when the husk of corn grows from the seed in the field. But there is a deeper layer at work when the corn is ground into cornmeal, and this, in turn, gives energy and vitality to the people who eat it. We can say that the possibility of such vitality in the people is a possibility that already lies latent in the seed. However, to say this is to acknowledge that there are layers of depth that really exist in the conditions of things.

This structure of embedded-transitivity appears not only in natural teleological examples, such as in the seed as the possibility of the plant, but in a much larger sense, as the basic movement of any condition whatsoever. To be a condition is to be an immediate actuality that has embedded within it the mediate possibilities of other actuals. To be a condition is to be the state of affairs of a relay-process between actuality and possibility. The access-version of this supports the interpretation that while conditions are always only immediately this and not their others, in reality they are already disposed to be others, because in the immediate content of what they are lies the determination that they will become otherwise. In this sense, the possibilities embedded within conditions are merely dormant and contingent. By going through the work of activation, one comes to “awaken” the possibilities that are already there.

**Necessity-Production:** We can also think of compulsive necessity as productive in the sense that certain formal restraints generate the possibility of content. While the necessity-access
version assumes that the possibilities are already embedded in the conditions, the necessity-production version presents us with the thesis that necessity itself generates “new” possibilities. The locus of the possibilities then lies not in the thing in question as presupposed, but in the power of necessity to manufacture possibilities that are not otherwise there. A does not already entail C (assuming it can meet the requirements at \( B_1, B_2, \ldots \)); compulsive necessity produces possibilities in the process of material actualization *that are not otherwise there*. In this sense, formal logic cannot fully anticipate this version of necessity since an act of creation can go in many different directions, since the results cannot be presupposed as embedded in the initial “thing” in question, and since the semantics of “access” cannot fully explain how the possibilities come into existence.

If the necessity-production version is right, the seed does not automatically find the possibilities of the plant in the necessity of the soil, but risks that it might go in multiple directions from the soil. It finds in the soil the possibilities of itself that are the other of itself, to grow and change and adapt. In this sense, the seed does not already have the possibilities of the plant latent in its own possibilities as the seed. Compulsive necessity is rather the source of the transformation. This version is less teleological and more open to indeterminateness and random selection. Production is still about necessity, however, because there are only certain ways to establish a position that would lead to such indeterminate directions.

But this version is then more problematic because the connotations of “production” and “creation” suggest that immediate actualities can become anything whatsoever, that the seed, for example, can become not only a tree, but also a sheep or anything at all. But I contend that because certain formal restraints are necessary to produce indeterminate possibilities, necessity-production must still follow specific patterns, that not anything at all, but only specific
determinateness can be produced from actualizing across conditions, however indeterminate or open to randomness and contingency the production-process might otherwise be.

This version is less problematic, however, when we think of examples where formal restraints more obviously produce possibilities in the content of things. We can see how compulsive necessity leads to possibilities from the way that the formal restraints of the sonnet produce a type of aesthetic contemplation that might not otherwise emerge. The poet who wants to write an English sonnet cannot write in an arbitrary way but must restrict herself to the rules of the form, to the three quatrains and the one couplet, to the rhythm of iambic pentameter, and to the conventional rhyme scheme (abab cdcd efef gg). But by restricting herself to this form, the poet can be seen to produce possibilities for aesthetics that would not otherwise exist. The restriction produces a kind of beauty from the balance of the rhyme and measure. Although the precise coordination of rules might seem to go against the connotations of the merely possible as that which is open to anything and everything whatsoever, we can see how the formal restrictions of the sonnet lead the poet to a medium that one might not be able to approach by other means.

“The Vow of Chastity: Dogme Manifesto” presents us with an example of a more contemporary art movement that explores how formal restraints can lead to otherwise nonexistent possibilities of content. Dogme 95 establishes a set of 10 rules that filmmakers must follow to adhere to the form of the medium.¹⁷⁴ It is certainly up for debate whether restraints such as no artificial lighting, artificial music, genres or superficial plots could generate new possibilities for realism in film, but this, in any event, does seem to be the aim of the movement.

We can also see how necessity produces possibility from Hegel’s rejection of spontaneous freedom in the Introduction to Elements of the Philosophy of Right. In what might

seem to be an overly conservative position, Hegel rejects the notion that we are free only when we can act spontaneously and carry out any possibility that appears in our immediate purview. “The common man,” Hegel explains, “thinks that he is free when he is allowed to act arbitrarily, but this very arbitrariness implies that he is not free.”¹⁷⁵ In a state of nature, as Hobbes describes in *Leviathan*, we might assume that we are free to do anything. But precisely because there are no consequences or conditions embedded in this form of actualization, the range of spontaneous movement has little to no radius at all. Everyone is at war with everyone else but this means there are very few possibilities but brute force.¹⁷⁶

The problem with spontaneous freedom then is that one begins from the disposition of agency without, however, recognizing that one’s own possibilities are dispersed in the actuality of others, that one must limit oneself to recognize a greater range of possibilities. The social contract is like a circuit that re-directs the most immediate possibilities, transforms them in conditions, and returns them to us in a mediated form. What comes back to us through the necessary conditions of the contract are the possibilities of civil society: education, free passage when walking, the ability to build in a community, language, culture, etc. In this way, the social contract illustrates how the concept of possibility as contrariety can lead to a greater quantification of possibility. The social contract is, in effect, a condition that restricts the most spontaneous disposition to act freely, but through the actualization of this condition, this restriction in necessity produces some of the richest and most plentiful possibilities.

Hegel’s analysis of spontaneous freedom might seem to be overly conservative and paternalistic, requiring that free action can only come about through the limitation of rules, that

¹⁷⁵ Hegel, *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, 49.
¹⁷⁶ For a concrete example of why traffic rules are important for “free movement,” see Russon’s first-hand account of the driving patterns in India, and his analysis of the relationship between “rules” and “freedom” that comes out of his blog entry from February 19, 2012, entitled “On Rules and Family Life,” at http://johnrusson.com/?cat=4.
freedom depends upon certain necessary and sufficient conditions of rationality. But we can also recognize a more moderate stance than this. Although there are cases where hard rules might be the only option to establish a position from which we can produce possibilities, there are also many cases where something less severe than rules might also produce possibilities, such as in the sphere of intimate relationships, where a more porous and dynamic set of conditions helps intimacy to flourish. Likewise, there is a definite, strict adherence to rules when it comes to writing a proper English sonnet, but there are also many other forms of poetry which follow a milder set of conditions (or no formal restraints at all), and which still produce possibilities of aesthetic contemplation.

There is a strong ontological statement about the nature of possibility that underlies both the “access” and “production” versions of compulsive necessity. If immediate actualities are the conditions of other actuals, then being itself contains an immense variety of determinate possibilities within it. Most of what it contains, however, is either inaccessible from the given immediacy of factual existence or has not yet been produced from the formal structures that would generate this variety in the content of things. I call this ontological insight “possibility-concentration.” At the surface level of formal actualization, possibility is immediately disjoined from the actual. One part remains “outside” as the unactualized possible, separated and cast-off from the side that becomes actual. But material actualization exposes “deeper layers” of possibility. When we come to actualize these deeper layers through conditions, we express a greater quantity of possibility in one actuality. By expressing a greater quantity of possibility, we likewise express the contrariety of the possible as an affirmative multiplicity that is no longer overtaken by contradiction. We can tell that these deeper layers exist because we can see possibility in the content of everything that is. Like clots or folds in the thrown existence of the
actual, possibility *qua* possibility appears through the movement of compulsive necessity.

Now, a sceptic might maintain that propositions are either actual or possible or necessary, and that if they are possible, there is no reason for this extra step in order to access or produce them. We can express the proposition “it rains” in any one of these modes – “actually it rains,” “possibly it rains,” or “necessarily it rains.” Necessity is in this sense not a means to further actualizations of possibility, nor does a greater quantity of possibility come about through mediation and conditionality. This is all fine and good from the point-of-view of “propositions.” But when we take into account the real possibilities of “things” in their relations with others, Hegel’s thesis presents us with a way to conceptualize how the possibility in one thing is the actuality of others (which ultimately leads to the disposition of “affirmative multiplicity”). The real possibility of rain is at first dispersed in the actuality of condensation in the cloud formations, and only becomes realized when the atmosphere becomes saturated and causes precipitation. Although this can happen in many different ways and through many different constellations of conditions, the possibility of rain first appears in the conditions of other actuals. Likewise, it is in the actualization of the possibility of rain that the further possibilities of fresh water first emerge, bringing with them further conditions for the animals and plants who drink it. From the point-of-view of “propositions,” “possibly it rains” is just one of the modes of truth verifiable sentences. But from the point-of-view of real things in their relations with others, it is compulsive necessity that brings access to the possibility that it might rain, and it is the actualization of this that brings about the multiplicity of further, otherwise inaccessible possibilities. Although unactualized possibilities initially diverge at the point of actualization, they nevertheless exist in a more inclusive conception of actuality, as the conditions of others, and as the conditions of themselves as others. Although they do not exist at the immediate
surface in the way that actuality is always present before us, these possibilities still exist as accessible and producible “layers” embedded in the content of what is.

But when we offer this notion of “possibility-concentration” as Hegel’s solution for how to actualize across the negativity of the possible, we should keep in mind that the possible only becomes more concentrated once we recognize that the depth and producability, which seemingly lies beyond the immediate surface of actuality, is really immanent to the constitution of the surface. Concentration only happens because the contrariety of the possible becomes at the same time what the actual is. The language of “depth” and “surface” is misleading insofar as we think of depth as that which transcends the surface, or of production and creation as anything other than as part of the immediate identity of what things are. The reason why things are compelled in necessity to realize even those possibilities that seem to remain unactualized is because that which is embedded in the conditions really exists in an immanent way as the immediate fact of what they are.

In the next transition, Hegel turns to “substance” as the term for this greater notion of reality. Substance includes not only the immediate primary existence of actuality, but also the co-existence of unactualized possibilities as they diverge from the actual. Since Deleuze also offers a critique of Leibniz on the question of whether incompossibles exist, I will use his line of inquiry in the sixteenth and twenty-fourth series of The Logic of Sense as well as in the “Incompossibility” chapter of The Fold as a way to expose more about Hegel’s argument from inclusive substance. Although in his corpus one can find many direct passages rejecting Hegel’s philosophical method, I claim that in his treatment of Leibniz on “Incompossibility,” Deleuze shares with Hegel a powerful philosophical insight about the role of possibility and the nature of reality.
E. Deleuze and the Question of the Ontological Status of Incompossibilities.

Hegel’s theory of conditions anticipates a model of actualization that includes contrary possibilities within the same actuality. Under the logic of this model, something is both itself and the opposite of itself, yet this is no longer self-contradictory or impossible because the actualization has come to capture the conditional movement of compulsive necessity. Nevertheless, we can see why the term “conditions” carries for Hegel only that implicit actualization of contrary possibilities and not that explicit inclusion of all possible outcomes in one actuality. There are good reasons for this. Since they begin as immediate actualities whose content contains the further possibilities of other actuals, conditions can express the whole possibility only through the mediation of sacrifice and result. As the conditions “go under” and the resulting actuality “rises up,” the possible itself appears in the realization of this entire circuit. However, since this process requires sacrifices (Aufopferung), transfers (Übergang), and dispersions (zerstreuen) in order to “soften” the contraries and to let them stand momentarily together, conditions include the contrariety of the possible in only a fleeting, indirect, and unsustainable way. We might conclude from this that although Hegel’s unit of conditions establishes the existence of incompossibilities in the one sense that contrary possibilities become included within a greater notion of reality, this model of actualization can only actualize the incompossibles to a limited extent.

When we talk about the process of “softening” contraries, this describes how something can become both itself and the opposite of itself. Formally, something cannot become both itself and the opposite of itself since this would lead directly to contradiction. But if the contrariety in this opposition were to become “softened” to the point at which an actualization of these
contraries were no longer to lead to contradiction, this would affirm the differences that the opposition had contained without causing these differences to diverge. This is why Hegel outlines in his theory of real modality how through sacrifices, transfers, and dispersions, something can become both itself and the opposite of itself. To this end, we can define sacrifice as the loss or destruction of what is initially actual, as the “going under” that is also a “rising up,” a kind of Aufhebung which happens simply because what is immediately actual contains the possibilities of other actuals. Since the deer contains a possibility for the wolf’s vitality, that the deer is sacrificed in this process is one of the results of a successful hunt. A transfer describes a slightly different process for how to soften the contraries. The form of what is immediately actual sometimes remains intact even while it is at the same time the possibility of other actuals. Bank transfers are an example of this since the monetary value remains intact even though the money changes hands. In contrast, a dispersion describes the process in which an actual is literally the possibility of another actual without any further mediation. For example, the cat’s claws are dispersed in the actuality of others, in the mouse who finds the claws to be a fierce possibility, and in the bear who finds the claws to be a mild annoyance. Each of these processes shows that to soften the contraries is to mitigate the opposition to such an extent that an actualization of something as the opposite of itself is no longer self-contradictory.  

We can then interpret Deleuze as initiating an even more radically inclusive relation of affirmative multiplicity when, in criticizing Leibniz, he inquires about what it would mean to bring all incompossible worlds into existence. This line of inquiry is similar to the inclusive actualization of contrary possibilities that motivates Hegel’s theory of conditions in the sense

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177 In Book IV of the *Metaphysics of the Complete Works of Aristotle*, Aristotle says that it would be a contradiction if something were the opposite of itself at the same time, in the same manner, or in the same place. I think it is important to recognize that to soften the contrary, as Hegel suggests, is not the same as establishing that either “time,” “manner,” or “place” distinguishes something from its opposite. Hegel’s theory would lose its force if he were not talking about propositions and things as they stand in direct contradiction with themselves and others.
that Hegel and Deleuze both anticipate a model of actualization that recognizes the existence of alternative worlds as part of the constitution of reality. However, Deleuze’s version of this inquiry begins from the claim that pre-individual singularities, in a way similar to Leibniz’s monads, exist in a more originary position than individuated things do, whereas Hegel’s version arrives at this conclusion only in the result, as a way of undermining the assumption that the identity of something does seem to exclude its opposite. Deleuze claims that the law of identity and the law of non-contradiction are merely derivative principles, derived from incompossibility, that singularities take up the more primary position, and that this origin prior to contradiction affirms difference and lets contraries co-exist without exclusionary disjunction. Does Hegel place too much importance on the formal impossibility of actualizing contrary possibilities as what spurs his method towards inclusive substance? Or has Deleuze gone too far in attempting to actualize incompossibles all at once?

I claim that for a more complete understanding of Hegel’s project, it is necessary to analyze Deleuze’s argument for why actualization can happen across diverging worlds and not only across that which converges in a world. Although we can view their respective treatments of the role of contradiction as antithetical in the sense that Hegel seems to use the formal impossibility of actualizing contrary possibilities as a spur towards his inclusive theory of substance, while Deleuze treats contradiction as a mere derivation of pre-individual singularities, they both come to the same thesis, that modal ontology requires a disposition beyond the conception of “things” and towards a conception of “affirmative multiplicity,” where contraries co-exists without becoming excluded from one another. If Hegel’s theory of “absolute actuality”

178 In the “Incompossibility” chapter of the Fold, Deleuze describes this original relation as “vice-diction” rather than contradiction. “Between the two worlds there exists a relation other than one of contradiction… It is vice-diction, not contradiction.” 67. Cf. “The notion of incompossibility is not reducible to the notion of contradiction. Rather, in a certain way, contradiction is derived from incompossibility.” Deleuze, The Logic of Sense, 111.
(see premise 23) anticipates the relation of convergence in a world, his further analysis of the dialectics between absolute necessity and contingency (see premise 27) anticipates the argument that actualization can happen across diverging worlds as well, since even what diverges would need to be included in absolute necessity. To recognize this commonality, we will begin by explicating briefly from Deleuze’s sixteenth series of The Logic of Sense.

In the sixteenth series, Deleuze claims that there are two levels of actualization, one that actualizes across convergences, but another that actualizes across divergences. The first level is the more primary one (in the sense of genesis) because we can see in the actualization of convergences the basic constitution of what a world is and of how it functions. Each world is made up of an infinite series of singularities. Deleuze’s theory of singularities comes out of an argument that the transcendental field does not begin from the ego, the individual, or consciousness (as Husserlian phenomenologists often believe), but begins prior to this in a field of pure materiality from which “persons” and “objects of consciousness” are merely derivations. This is an important and complicated argument in Deleuze’s work, but for our purposes, we only need to establish that singularities exist at a pre-individual level, that each world is made up of an infinite series of these singularities, and that the definition of “world” is based on how each series converges.

The first level of actualization corresponds to Leibniz’s conception of compossibility as a converging series of pre-individual monads, where each monad expresses the whole world but from a limited perspective. One of Leibniz’s great insights, on Deleuze’s account, is that since the monad expresses the whole world with which it stands connected, there is a more originary

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179 There are a number of related concepts to incompossibility from Deleuze’s corpus, including the virtual, the dice-throw, and the desiring machine. For the virtual, see “Memory as Virtual Coexistence” in Deleuze, Bergsonism, 51-72. Also see Deleuze, Difference and Repetition, 208–214. For the dice-throw, see Deleuze, Nietzsche and Philosophy, 25–27. For the desiring machine, see Deleuze and Guattari, Anti-Oedipus, 8–50.
relation than that things are separate from things. This relation is one of comp possibility, not a relation that presupposes identity and non-contradiction, but one where each singularity is an aspect on everything with which it stands connected. The monad expresses the whole world; but since it cannot express this totality clearly, it offers only a certain perspective and not others. Only God can express the whole world with absolute clarity. Other monads express the world unclearly, based on their own perspectives and in terms of their own finitude. It is through the language of “expression” and “clarity” that Leibniz is able to explain how a monad can be both only itself and also the totality of everything that converges with it in a world. We can think of the logic of “expression” as replacing the logic of identity and non-contradiction. Because a monad can only express some of the infinite series clearly, it is both determinate and finite, yet at the same time, universal and infinite. “Expression” is not a relation of exclusion since even what the monad cannot express clearly is nevertheless included along with that which it can express clearly. Therefore, Deleuze discovers in Leibniz’s comp possibility an inclusive and non-exclusionary relation where differences co-exist without falling into contradiction.

One might think of the universe as an odd collection of independent objects, people, forces, colours, shapes, etc., but Leibniz suggests with his unusual relation of comp possibility that the universe is “all of one piece, like an ocean.” An ocean has an indeterminate variety of waves. Sometimes they break successively one after the other. Sometimes they come in short ripples and are barely apparent at all. They are of various sizes and strengths, and peak and crest at various tempos. But each wave is nothing other than the ocean itself. Certainly, each piece of a puzzle contributes to the puzzle as a whole, and there is a way in which a puzzle is nothing other than the totality of its pieces. But a wave is not just a piece of the ocean. Rather each wave is the

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whole ocean, only from one or another angle. The ocean is protean, but each form that it assumes is always the same ocean throughout. Similarly, Leibniz says that the series of things that constitutes the universe is all of one piece. Deleuze emphasizes that it is this relation that is so innovative in Leibniz. Compossibility is a relation that does not assume the law of identity and non-contradiction from the outset, but presents a logic where each monad expresses “everything,” and where the whole universe, insofar as it is a world, is all of one piece. Likewise, Hegel’s theory of “absolute actuality” presents us with a similar kind of logic, where each instance of a body is at the same time an expression of the totality (see premise 23).

Leibniz also describes the relation of the monad as a multiplicity of view-points on a single “town.” The people, the streets, the houses are each an expression of the town from a certain view-point. Insofar as each member of the town is an aspect on the town, each expresses the whole town from its own position in the town. After all, it is not as if the concept of “town” exists as anything other than as the town’s expression. On the other hand, each member is only an aspect of the town from a given point of view, and therefore cannot express the town clearly in its entirety. The view from Main Street is a view on the town, but also only one aspect of it; the view from the corner store is a view on the town, but again only one aspect of it. Just as each view-point is an expression of the whole town, the monad offers a view-point on “everything,” but only a clear view-point on certain aspects of everything.

However, when Leibniz says that the monad expresses “everything,” he only means that it expresses everything with which it stands connected as a world. The relation of inclusion that Deleuze attributes to Leibniz’s compossibility can only go so far. A monad does not express other worlds which are possible but not compossible, since these worlds diverge from this one.

181 Leibniz, “Primary Truths” in Philosophical Essays, 33.
and on Leibniz’s account, do not exist. Each world is defined by convergence, but the relation
between each world is defined by divergence. \(^{182}\) Deleuze finds in Leibniz’s compossibility an
unusual relation of inclusion - a monad that is both itself and everything - however, this relation
does not seem to continue between worlds but comes up against exclusion and disjunction
instead.

Compossibility is then both infinite and finite, infinite in the sense that each monad
expresses the infinite series with which it stands connected, finite in the sense that an infinite
amount of other worlds diverge from this one, exposing the limits of what this world can and
cannot be. In the “Incompossibility” chapter of The Fold, Deleuze invokes the image of a
summit to describe how each singularity is both the expression of an infinite series that
converges in a world but is equally the expression of the finite limitation that marks the
divergence between one world and an infinity of other worlds. Leibnizian actualization is like a
“pyramid that has a summit but no base, and that is built from an infinity of apartments, of which
each one makes up a world. It has a summit because there is a world that is the best of all worlds,
and it lacks a base because the others are lost in the fog.” \(^{183}\) Likewise, in terms of basic
mathematics, whole numbers can be divided into infinite series of odd and even sets. We can
imagine a scenario in which the infinite odds is compossible, and the infinite evens is also
compossible, but the relation between the two infinite sets of numbers is nevertheless
incompossible, which, in effect, posits a finite limit between two limitless series. This is the kind
of scenario that appears in Leibniz’s incompossibility theory. If the actual world is perfect, then
it contains an infinite variety of possibilities; however, infinite series of less perfect worlds also
diverge from this one. Leibnizian actualization is then infinite in the sense that each singularity

\(^{182}\) For his version of compossibility and incompossibility, see Deleuze, The Logic of Sense, 172.

\(^{183}\) Deleuze, The Logic of Sense, 61.
expresses the infinite series with which it belongs. It is at the same time finite in the sense that beyond the infinite series that converge in the space of the summit there lies an infinite alterity of diverging worlds.

But Deleuze takes exception to Leibniz’s point about the exclusion of incompossible worlds from existence. He claims instead that one can also actualize across divergences, initiating an affirmation of disjunction rather than a rejection of it. In one of the most revealing passages from the twenty-fourth series, Deleuze writes:

Leibniz... makes use of this rule of incompossibility in order to exclude events from one another. He made a negative use of divergence of disjunction – one of exclusion. This is justified, however, only to the extent that events are already grasped under the hypothesis of a God who calculates and chooses, and from the point of view of their actualization in distinct worlds or individuals. It is no longer justified, however, if we consider the pure events and the ideal play whose principle Leibniz was unable to grasp, hindered as he was by theological exigencies. For, from this other point of view, the divergence of series or the disjunction of members (membra disjuncta) cease to be negative rules of exclusion according to which events would be incompossible or incompatible.  

Deleuze claims that if we leave behind the assumptions about God as an external source who calculates and chooses the most perfect world, we come to recognize a second level of actualization, one that actualizes across divergences and therefore authorizes the co-existence of incompossible worlds. By taking God out of the picture, we extend the original relation of inclusivity to worlds that diverge as well as to worlds that converge.

What does it mean to make divergence “an object of affirmation?” Does this mean that the world in which Adam sinned can affect the world in which Adam did not sin? If we retain the assumption that, strictly speaking, our world is the only actual one, and that all other worlds which diverge from our own do not enjoy the same ontological status, then the answer must strictly speaking be “no.” Although the world in which Adam did not sin exposes the

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184 Deleuze, *The Logic of Sense*, 172.
185 Deleuze, *The Logic of Sense*, 114. Also, 172.
contingency of our actual world, offers us a sentiment of freedom insofar as things could have gone otherwise, this does not thereby significantly affect the *one* world that God has brought into existence. However, once we take God out of the picture and consider what Deleuze calls the “pure events” of pre-individual singularities, questions then arise. Why can we not include all of the worlds that diverge as part of the basic structure of reality? Why should we privilege one world over other worlds? What is the ontological status of the disjunction *between* worlds?

The affirmation of divergence can help us to explain how one and the same event can have many different futures. At the moment when Caesar pauses before the Rubicon, he can either cross the river or not cross it. No matter whether Caesar crosses the Rubicon or not, various compossible worlds come along with each decision. There is the world in which Caesar marches his troops across the river, Pompey flees to Greece, and civil war starts. There is also the world in which Caesar goes alone to Rome, and an entirely different set of events then occur. Now, from the stance of what has already happened, it might seem as if, no matter which event comes about, the opposite of this event cannot also have occurred. But from the stance of the future, that Caesar can *and* can not cross the Rubicon affirms a multiplicity of incompossible worlds. By affirming the divergence of the event, this lets the event be a “free act” that has an open future. If there is no God who can see everything that will ever happen, then one and the same event can have many different futures, then Caesar can *and* can not cross the Rubicon, and this is not determined ahead of time from some external source, but is instead a free act of contingency generated from multiplicity.

That Caesar crosses *and* does not cross the Rubicon only becomes self-contradictory once we assume that because the event has taken its course, the other worlds that diverge are then oppositional and cannot also have happened. But insofar as the event has a future, the
possibilities that diverge from the event nevertheless constitute the multiplicity of the event, in much the same way that each compossibility is made up, at the first level of actualization, not of an odd collection of disassociated “things,” but of the entire series of all things that come along with each. That Caesar crosses and does not cross the Rubicon exposes the event as having many futures, which, on its own, is not self-contradictory because the event itself is constituted by this divergence.

It is important to see that to affirm divergence does not mean to reduce all divergence to a series of convergence, as if this were a matter of making what diverges conform to the given principles of a converging series. To make divergence an object of affirmation is rather to include divergence as divergence, and to think from the terms of an actuality that can include the alterity between other worlds as part of the constitution of the event. Just as each singularity expresses the whole world with which it belongs, each likewise expresses a multiplicity of other worlds which diverge from it at the point of actualization. This means that each singularity belongs not only to that one infinite series with which it converges, but equally to that infinite set of series with which it diverges. Caesar’s decision to cross the Rubicon belongs not only to that world in which Pompey flees and civil war starts. The decision also belongs to those incompossible sets of worlds in which Caesar crosses the river alone or does not cross it at all. If the decision were not also to belong to innumerable incompossibles, the event itself would have no distinct differences in possibility, and the notion of “compossibility” itself would break down.

Deleuze ultimately claims that the disposition of “things,” “individuals,” “personhood,” and “consciousness,” results in a derivative way from the synthetic unity of actualizing across
divergences.\textsuperscript{186} While the first level of actualization yields the \textit{analytic} unity of pre-individual singularities, where each singularity is an expression of the whole series, the second level yields the \textit{synthetic} unity of indeterminate and what Deleuze calls “vague” concepts – not only the world in which Adam sinned or the world in which Adam did not sin, but also Adam the indeterminate who appears as the result of actualizing across the differences of Adam-the-sinner, Adam-the-non-sinner, and an infinite variety of others.\textsuperscript{187} In this way, the steps Deleuze outlines from the first level of actualization to the second are a kind of proof for why the principle of contradiction and the relation of exclusion that comes out of this are derivative relations, relations that presuppose the more originary relation of inclusion. Since the disposition of “things” appears only in the result of actualizing across divergences, the relation of contradiction appears as only one of many possible relations, and only after one recognizes the affirmation of difference. More than this, since the synthetic unity that makes indeterminate concepts possible is the unity of \textit{pre-individual singularities}, the indeterminate concepts that result from actualizing across divergence are concepts of these singularities, not generalities in the more traditional sense of genus and instance.

\textsuperscript{186} Turning to Husserl’s “Fifth Cartesian Meditation,” Deleuze proposes that while the first level of actualization presents us with \textit{die Umwelt}, the second level presents us with \textit{die Welt}. The second level discovers something that the first level cannot find, the ego whose consciousness transcends each serial grouping of converging worlds. “The Ego as knowing subject appears when something is \textit{identified} inside worlds which are nevertheless incompossible, and across series which are nevertheless divergent.” Deleuze, \textit{The Logic of Sense}, 113. But since Deleuze insists on returning to the language of Leibniz rather than analyzing the relationship between \textit{die Umwelt} and \textit{die Welt} in Husserl, and since Deleuze persistently rejects the notion from Husserl that the ego is the ground of the transcendental field, but maintains a material transcendental field instead, I contend that the details of this problematic between the actualization of incompossibles and the genesis of consciousness are beyond the scope of this study.

\textsuperscript{187} Deleuze, \textit{The Logic of Sense}, 114.
F. Hegel and the Incompossibility Problem in Deleuze.

Although Deleuze proposes a very different type of argument than Hegel does for a modal ontology that recognizes unactualized possibilities as part of the basic constitution of reality, we can also see in Deleuze’s starting point of pre-individual singularities and in Hegel’s conclusion from inclusive substance the same powerful insight about the nature of “affirmative multiplicity.” Hegel’s position begins from the formal impossibility of actualizing contrary possibilities within one actuality, that because something can be identical only with itself, it cannot be both itself and the opposite of itself, at least not formally. But since he then recognizes the insight that the possibilities of “things” are always contained in the context of others, literally as the immediate actuality of what these “things” are not, actualization happens, for Hegel, across contraries and from a disposition that is inclusive rather than exclusive. Since Deleuze offers a more direct, radical version of inclusion where incompossibles exist all at once and without mediation, it will be worthwhile for a clear illustration of Hegel’s theory if we briefly present what his theory might look like after we accept some but not all of Deleuze’s claims about incompossibility.

1) What aspects of Deleuze’s theory would Hegel have accepted? Methodologies aside. Hegel would no doubt have accepted the thesis that incompossibilities necessarily exist. Although common thought often assumes that the “actual world” enjoys a higher ontological position than the permutations of unactualized possibilities do, both philosophers present a case for why the possibilities that diverge nevertheless help to form our conceptualization of reality. Hegel would have also accepted Deleuze’s account of why each existent is the expression of the totality. Deleuze uses the language of “expression” and “clarity” from Leibniz’s definition of the monad, while Hegel retains the language of “existence” and “essence;” still, the relation of
inclusivity, where something is both itself and everything, is an important conceptual point in both of their arguments. Hegel would therefore have also accepted the claim that modality requires the inclusion of differences which are no longer strictly speaking contrary to one another. This results in a logic where contradiction no longer has an exclusionary influence.

2) **What aspects of Deleuze’s theory would Hegel have resisted?** Hegel would no doubt have resisted the theory that contradiction can only be derived secondarily from a field of pre-individual singularities. Contradiction is rather like a “motor” that motivates Hegel’s central argument. Actuality is possibility (premise 2), but what is possible both can and can not be (premise 4), and actuality cannot maintain this negativity without becoming self-contradictory (premise 6). Hegel ultimately derives from this state of affairs a logic of “affirmative multiplicity,” where the difference and negativity of the possible, although formally unsustainable, becomes incorporated into reality. But Deleuze’s theory of inclusion can be viewed as too extreme when he claims that modal reality begins from pre-individual singularities, and that identity and contradiction are laws that can only govern logic after “consciousness” and “thinghood” have been derived in a secondary sense from these singularities.

Hegel would have also resisted the thesis that incompossibles come into existence all at once and without further mediation. By describing a process of material actualization where contraries are “softened” to the point of non-opposition and non-contradiction, Hegel recognizes the actualization of incompossibles only to a limited extent. Hegel’s premises of Real Modality (premises 13-22) offer us strategies for how to overcome the formal impossibility of actualizing contrary possibilities. However, these strategies limit the actualization of incompossibles because they require mediation, where the reason why immediate actualities are the possibilities of other
actuals is because they are “conditions,” because they go through various “sacrifices,” “transfers,” and “dispersions” in order to sustain in a volatile and temporary way the negativity of the possible. On the other hand, Deleuze claims that because an event can have many incompossible futures, and because these futures really exist in the constitution of the event itself, there is a way in which incompossibles are actualisable all at once and without limitation. That Hegel would have resisted this version of incompossibility is clear enough from his choice to omit temporality from his analysis.

3) What Hegel’s views about modality might look like once some but not all of Deleuze’s ideas are incorporated into it? Prior to Deleuze’s work on incompossibility, it would have been nearly impossible to anticipate the kind of logic that Hegel seems to present in the “Absolute Necessity” premises of his argument. Under the logic of “affirmative multiplicity,” each thing is both itself and the other of itself, yet this no longer leads to contradiction because the negativity of the possible has become included as what the actual is. In this sense, affirmative multiplicity has removed all contingency from the field, but this only happens because it has come to include all contingencies whatsoever. This necessitates that each “existent” in the field is both a determinate thing, differentiated from all others, and yet at the same time everything that the field could possibly be. This reading of Hegel comes out of Deleuze’s ideas about the affirmation of divergence because Deleuze establishes a model for how to think multiplicity and difference that is not under the influence of contradiction. Although Hegel derives this type of multiplicity from an earlier conclusion about the contradiction of multiple possibilities in one actuality, he nevertheless finds as the result of his argument from modality the same position where difference no longer carries over into contradiction.
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