The Sublation of Dialectics: Hegel and the Logic of Aufhebung

by

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ABSTRACT

THE SUBLATION OF DIALECTICS:
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This dissertation is a study of the concept of Aufhebung, or sublation, as it arises in G. W. F. Hegel’s dialectical logic. Its chief contention is that this concept not be understood to function simply as a mere negation of negation, where that would mean an assimilatory determinate negation of a prior moment of abstract negation. Instead, it is argued that both abstract and determinate negation function at the level of sublation as such and that the concept should thereby be understood not only as a synthesis that combines a term with its antithesis, i.e., a unifying third term, but also as a fourth that treats these terms in their difference, holding them apart as oppositional. The quadruplicity of sublation here is discerned through analyses of the figure of servile self-consciousness in the Phenomenology of Spirit and the concepts of becoming and the Absolute in the Science of Logic and the Encyclopaedia Logic. This reinterpretation of Hegel’s theory of negation is contrasted with the critical responses of a few of his critics, especially Jacques Derrida and Georges Bataille, which are shown to fail both as critiques of Hegel and as philosophical alternatives to dialectics.
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## Contents

Introduction

Chapter One:
The Path to Becoming

1.1 Dialectical Logic: A Presuppositionless Science
1.2 Beginning with Pure Being
1.3 A Presupposed Relation?
1.4 From Being to Nothing
1.5 The Deficiency of Immediacy
1.6 From Being and Nothing to Becoming
1.7 The Expressions of Becoming: Coming-to-be and Ceasing-to-be

Chapter Two:
The Shape of Sublation

2.1 Falling Short of Sublation: Problematic Translations of *Aufhebung*
2.2 The Form of Sublation
2.3 Determinate Being
2.4 The Motor of the Logic: The Repetition of *Aufhebung*

Chapter Three:
The Deconstruction of Hegel’s *Aufhebung*

3.1 Heidegger and the Critique of Ontotheology
3.2 Derrida’s Close Reading
3.3 Bataille on Restricted and General Economies
3.4 Abstract and Determinate Negation
3.5 The Dialectic of Lordship and Bondage
3.6 Sovereignty, *Différance*

Chapter Four:
A Critique of the Critique

4.1 The Dislocation and Silencing of Meaning
4.2 The Propriety of Nonsense
4.3 The Beyond of the Wholly Other
4.4 Fideism
4.5 An Alternative Derrida?
Chapter Five:
Dialectics and Quadruplicity

5.1 The Slave’s Dread 200
5.2 The Absolute 215
5.3 A Triangle Open on its Fourth Side 224

Conclusion 239

Bibliography 241
INTRODUCTION

This dissertation argues that, unlike the common representation of G. W. F. Hegel’s concept of \textit{Aufhebung} or sublation as ultimately constituting a return of appropriative identity after an initial encounter with its negation, a greater identity of identity and difference, sublation actually represents both this identity of identity and difference and a difference of identity and difference. With this understanding we discover that the role of negation is not confined in dialectical logic to a mere step toward the end of a fuller system closed by sublation, but that sublation itself is defined by the tension produced by such negativity, and that any system that immanently emerges as a result must be thereby internally split with itself. This, we will see, comprises the very project of dialectics rather than undermining it.

When someone unversed in the history of German Idealism or perhaps even philosophy asks for a definition of dialectics or a brief summary of the ideas of Hegel, the most intuitive response starts by reenacting his logic and demonstrating how it propels us to move from thinking one philosophical concept to another. Hegel’s philosophy is, after all, inextricably the philosophy of dialectical logic. In explaining how this logic operates, one might call up a particular transition, such as when Hegel explains in his \textit{Science of Logic} how we end up at pure nothing from thinking the concept of pure being, and then
from the thought of these two concepts end up at the thought of becoming. Whether one’s
description carefully attends to the subtleties of Hegel’s texts or instead invokes the
popular caricature of a simple thesis-antithesis-synthesis methodology to explain this
conceptual movement, any account of this process will necessarily imply an
understanding of the concept of sublation. The concept of sublation is the motor of all
dialectical logic, the “fundamental determination” of its movement.¹ Thus, the
characterization or mischaracterization of this concept will consequently carry significant
hermeneutical consequences for comprehending the implications of dialectical logic.

Our contention is that this concept of sublation has been often misunderstood, not
simply in its layman descriptions, but more significantly by some of Hegel’s most
important critics. A common verdict on Hegel was reached by many of the otherwise
disparate jury in the 20th Century trial of Hegelianism, from Martin Heidegger to Jean-
Paul Sartre to Jacques Derrida: indispensable to the development of philosophy conceived
as the metaphysical pursuit of disclosing the absolute, but regrettably limited by the
problems inherent in this very project, such as the progressive overcoming of ontological
difference. We will argue that the force of the latter part of this judgment, the point of
critical contention, has in at least a few cases been informed by a mischaracterization of
this central feature of Hegel’s dialectics, sublation. Indeed, we will claim that, beyond
being an issue of mere methodological consideration, the status of sublation carries the
utmost importance for how the entirety of Hegelian metaphysics is to be perceived. And
the ultimate proximity between Hegelian dialectics and the alternative these critics
submit in its place will, likewise, depend on the implicit picture of sublation with which
the latter is working.

The following study will thus be an explicit treatment of the concept of sublation as it emerges in Hegel’s logic. To account for the emergence of such a concept, we start where Hegel does in his *Science of Logic*, with the notion of pure being, which he takes to be the simplest and most suitable of all possible starting-points for philosophy. From here we follow the ontogenesis of dialectical logic through to the concept of pure nothing and then to the initial instance of sublation in becoming. Chapter One outlines this transition and exegetically illustrates the relation that sublation has to its preceding and subsequent concepts at this early stage. Particular emphasis is placed on the form of becoming’s two modes, coming-to-be and ceasing-to-be, with the former constituting the identity of the identity of being and the non-identity of nothing and the latter constituting the non-identity of the identity of being and the non-identity of nothing.

From here we are already able to sketch out the shape of sublation and distinguish the concept from certain problematic definitions. Hence, Chapter Two builds upon our analysis of becoming in the *Logic* in order to distance sublation from the incorrect interpretations of it as mere union, mere disunity, and simple overcoming. From the concept of becoming we are able to discern some general characteristics of sublation (such as *betweenness*, the structure of an *either/and*, and a fourth element that frustrates the oversimplified, traditional picture of synthetic unity in a third term), each of which will contribute to a preliminary definition of the concept. In so doing, this section will give a preview of the form sublation will take as we later encounter it in the *Phenomenology*’s master-slave dialectic and the *Logic*’s conclusion with the Absolute.

In Chapter Three we turn to the critique of sublation. Of the many criticisms of Hegel we mentioned above, we will mostly focus our attention on those made by Georges
Bataille and Jacques Derrida. In both thinkers there exists the idea that one of Hegel’s senses of negativity, negation as oppositional difference, or abstract negation, is ultimately enveloped into another sense of negativity, the negation of this negation of difference, or determinate negation. Moreover, these critics identify this latter logical negation as Hegel’s concept of sublation, full stop. Both thinkers submit a further type of negativity intended to break free of the negativities depicted by dialectical logic, an abstract negativity impervious to the usurping nature of a further determinate negativity (“sublation”). This negativity is taken to both disrupt sublation (understood, by Bataille and Derrida, as determinate negativity) and indicate a move beyond the scope of dialectics itself (understood as the logical process of sublation). This argument is explored through the famous figures of the master and slave in the *Phenomenology.*

Chapter Four gives a negative argument for Hegelian dialectics via a refutation of the two features of the alternative, ostensibly non-dialectical negativity introduced in Chapter Three. With respect to the first trait of non-dialectical negativity, we make the argument that any possible example of such a disruption to dialectics would nevertheless be logically conceptualizable and thereby able to be accounted for under a dialectical framework. With respect to the second trait, we contend that any example that was assumed to be non-conceptualizable under such a framework and thereby incommensurable with it would lack the determinability necessary to insist on its existence, thereby opening up the defense of it to the charge of fideism, epistemological access through faith alone. John D. Caputo’s interpretation of Derrida is taken as an example of a fideistic defense of such non-dialectical negativity. Martin Hägglund’s interpretation of Derrida is taken as a non-fideistic rehabilitation of Derridean negativity,
but is thereby found to be insufficiently different from the Hegelian account of negativity to count as truly non-dialectical (i.e., beyond sublation), as Derrida and Bataille had originally contended.

Returning to Hegel in light of this critique, we undertake in Chapter Five a close reading of the sublation of the master-slave dialectic and the sublation of the Absolute to offer a positive argument for Hegelian dialectics. Careful analysis of these sections produces a portrait of sublation that is not reducible to the determinate negation of negation to which Bataille and Derrida opposed their non-dialectical negativity. Instead, we find here a re-emergence of abstract negation, not simply as a logical moment toward sublation, but at the level of sublation itself. In other words, if sublation as determinate negation could be understood as a triplicity, as the unifying third (the identity of identity and non-identity) that would unify a concept and its abstract negation, sublation can equally be considered a quadruplicity, as the fourth that keeps alive the initial opposition or non-identity between this concept and its negation. We reveal how this fourth is a necessary feature of sublation, identified by Hegel yet missed or underemphasized by his critics, and recount how it could already be seen in becoming’s mode of ceasing-to-be. We end our study by concluding that if this subtler conception of sublation unseats the idea of a negativity beyond dialectics as well as the pernicious idea that dialectics is “closed” (in the sense of being wholly reducible to the appropriative side of its determinate negation), then the metaphysical system that emerges with it is, accordingly, neither inflationary nor deflationary.
CHAPTER ONE:
THE PATH TO BECOMING

1.1 DIALECTICAL LOGIC:
A PRESUPPOSITIONLESS SCIENCE

Though the full expression of Hegel’s dialectical logic is nothing less than the *Science of Logic* taken as a whole, the manner in which it immanently moves via the emergence, dissipation, and transformation of concepts is already available to the reader of the first few pages, that is, the first chapter, “Being,” of the first section, “Determinateness (Quality),” of the first book, “The Doctrine of Being.” The “immanent activity”\(^2\) of this science and its claims to exclude from the beginning any externality, *viz.*, its rejection of any theoretical and foundational presuppositions imported from outside of what proceeds via logical necessity, means that any study of the nature of the dialectic, the forms of its negation, and, particularly, the shape of sublation, has no choice but to start at the beginning. This is because, rather than being a series of independent concepts, the *Logic* proceeds by demonstrating each concept as organized by a structure of logical unfolding and thus unthinkable in its *mere* independence. As with any concept preceding another, every movement taken alone is but a sketch, underdeveloped from the

perspective of what follows. Nevertheless, thinking a concept through to its end unveils a discernible logic to the *Logic*; a basic methodology emerges from the outset but is not at the beginning yet evident as a methodology because “the beginning remains immanent in its scientific development,”\(^3\) with science defined as “the refusal to intrude into the immanent rhythm of the Notion, either arbitrarily or with wisdom obtained from elsewhere.”\(^4\) So, unlike a pre-logical or extralogical methodology or an empty formalism that might be simply applied to a given content, Hegel’s methodology is the product of this content’s conceptual history.\(^5\) Whatever pattern or formal structure emerges from this will be nothing more or less than the structure inherent in the very concepts themselves, nothing but the effect of “the freedom that abstracts from everything and grasps its own abstraction,”\(^6\) as Hegel puts it later in the *Encyclopaedia Logic*.

It is *after* the fact, after following the movement from the most abstract to the least abstract, that we can retroactively posit the systematic necessity of a particular concept, of a moment in the history of the concepts’ relations, and of a schema that illustrates this history. At the outset of a particular concept we do not yet have the means to say what (or if) it will become or how it will figure logically in what is to come, if it should become anything; but we can say that what had been had invariably led to this point, to what it has become. This is simply to say that if we attempt to think what can be thought in its most basic form and follow Hegel’s Cartesian-styled reduction, informed by the insight that pure science, which presupposes no earlier science, must begin entirely

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from the most abstract and freest of determination, then it becomes necessarily question-begging to treat something that is the product of something else as if it were not. For example, one can discuss the interplay between the dialectic of finitude and infinity without being committed to exegetically running through the entire course of how immediate being leads to determinate being and then the movement within determinate being that eventually leads to this specific dialectic before they say anything about the topic at hand specifically. But to discuss the dialectic of finitude and infinity as if independent of this unfolding, denying the background weight of what logically precedes it, is to unscientifically presuppose a specific determination and thus commit oneself to speaking about something other than the science of dialectical logic. As Stephen Houlgate has explained, “[e]ach category constitutes an irreducible element of our fundamental ‘conceptual scheme’ yet none by itself defines or exhausts what is to think.” 7 Let us, accordingly, suppose we intend to discuss sublation, the sublation of being’s immediacy and essence’s mediation of this immediacy in conceptual thinking, for instance. This discussion of the sublation of the doctrine of the Concept remains a scientific and, by Hegel’s definition, a properly philosophical discussion only on the condition that its relation to sublation’s initial emergence or primary instantiation—which is, in the Logic, the introduction of sublation at the level of becoming—is explicitly or implicitly acknowledged. Therefore, taking sublation as our topic, we will opt here to explicitly acknowledge the primary movement of sublation by retracing it in full.

7 Stephen Houlgate, The Opening of Hegel’s Logic (West Lafayette: IN, Purdue University Press, 2005), 47.
1.2 BEGINNING WITH PURE BEING

Hegel begins with the least positive of all possible positive statements, at the point where “we cannot really extract any further determination or positive content.” We do not choose to start with being, but in our critical efforts to begin with a fresh start, without dogmatic assumptions or the presuppositions borne of inner revelation, sensation, intellectual intuition, etc., we find it is the absolute minimum that can be. The remainder with which we are left after this philosophical reduction is an indeterminate immediate that is not yet some thing, some being, but is rather being as such, which, since there is no other to compare it to, can be referred to alternately as being in itself and being in general. This is being as a universal, stripped of any of its particular attributes or any presumed, particular attributes, which over the course of its development we see later come to be attributed to it in a scientifically justified fashion. What follows in the course of this development constitutes part of an ontology insofar as it has as its ground being and contributes to the account of what is. Hegel stipulates that “the beginning of the Logic itself…is not made arbitrarily and with a categorical unconsciousness,” but with an “extremely simple nature,” dependent upon no prior being, determination, or category.

And in our typical usage of the term, as something to which determinations are attached, we use being unscientifically and in the company of unproven presuppositions.

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In contrast to this, Hegel starts his section on being with a simple sentence fragment: “Being, pure being, without any further determination.”

Contra our ordinary non-philosophical usage, here we are confronted only with nouns, with the objective, the assertorical immediate—empty nouns, nouns without the power of signification, of determinacy. To introduce a verb would be to introduce movement that cannot be introduced at this point, for this would mediate this immediacy and being is without the means, at this point, to achieve such an action. It follows that our very conditions of sense are jeopardized from the beginning. Limited to pure being, we are left with meaninglessness. Significance relies on some multiplicity, some mediation, on a differentiation not yet introduced. Hence, insofar as being “has the significance and form of abstract universality” it has no true significance. Thus, nothing can be said or meant at the level of the purest immediate; to say “being is” is to say nothing whatsoever, (i.e., nothing in particular). So, this is precisely what is said or what it characterizes: “nothing, and neither more nor less than nothing.” Thus the transition to nothing is quick. The moment sheer being is thought nothing appears on the scene. This nothing is not the

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12 G. W. F. Hegel, *Science of Logic*, 827. Hegel contrasts this fragmentary assertion to the full proposition Plato puts forward in his *Parmenides*—”the One is”: “[T]he One is’ contains more than when we only say: the One. It is through their being different that the moment of negation contained in the proposition is demonstrated. It is evident that this course has a presupposition and is an external reflection.” *Science of Logic*, 101. Earlier Hegel claimed that “For being which is the outcome of mediation we shall reserve the term: Existence,” i.e., the determination of the “is” that Plato here introduces. *Science of Logic*, 93. In this sense, starting by defining Being as a mediated reflection is analogous to starting with the conditioned “I=I,” to recall the phrasing of Fichte, rather than the mere unconditioned “I” and then moving to expound on this “I” by later moving to the position of “I=I.” On this comparison, see *Science of Logic*, 95. We will resume discussion on the upshot of a reflexive starting-point for ontology in the next section.
15 We do not initially start with nothing, but with being that turns us to consider nothing. Thus, the issue of some logical interval becomes an important one, but one that, we will see, is only fully discernable when both terms are given and able to be determinately contrasted to one another. As we will discuss below, when we start again with nothing, we are required to take it not as the second, but initially as another first, another starting point.
negation of any particular being, as being is still indeterminate and thus not a particular at all, so it should be clear that to think this transition is not to think that a particular being, such as an atom, a human, a table, or a galaxy, is reducible to pure nothing.

Hegel accredits the first enunciation of being in this simplicity to Parmenides: “only being is, and nothing absolutely is not.”\(^\text{16}\) This exact phrasing is not Parmenides’, but a reference to Aristotle’s paraphrase of the fourth paragraph of “The Way of Truth” from *On Nature*, where Parmenides’ goddess says, “it is…impossible for it not to be.”\(^\text{17}\) The goddess goes on to suggest that the way of being, of “it is,” is the “only” way to proceed, having determined the only other alternative, the way of “it is not,” to be fruitless for any knowledge. Although the goddess starts with two options, she reduces these options to one, excluding “is not” as an option. Thus, being is defined as all-inclusive one: “All inviolably is.”\(^\text{18}\) This one is without movement, “all at once, a continuous one,”\(^\text{19}\) inasmuch as it is defined as having no limit to move past. That is, for Parmenides, movement is impossible for that would entail a move into something and the one exhausts all options, barring anything outside of its circumference. As Hegel puts it in his *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*, “Parmenides says, whatever form the negation may take, it does not exist at all. To consider the nothing as the true is ‘the way of error in which the ignorant and double-minded mortals wander…’.”\(^\text{20}\)

And here lies the Hegelian problem with Parmenides: with the introduction of the two options, the way of truth and the way of error, true being and the untrue “is not,” the

one is already fractured and ceases to be the one at all, or at least ceases to be the one for which nothing can be compared. We here have the end of the whole and self-identical one-all or one-all-alone (l’Un-tout, l’Un-tout-seul), to use Jacques Lacan’s terms, as opposed to the countable one (l’Un comptable).\(^{21}\) As soon as it is admitted that nothing can be compared with being, being-one, it is equally admitted that a comparison can be made with nothing and that the grasp of the one is that of a countable one. This relation via limitation remains unarticulated, in what we have left of Parmenides’ work. What we find instead is the claim that “The youth [in front of the Goddess]…is forbidden to think either of or beyond this boundary.”\(^{22}\)

But this boundary, this most simple of limits, is precisely what Hegel thinks. Earlier in the Lectures on the History of Philosophy he writes that, “the opposition between Being and non-being makes its appearance…more clearly with Parmenides [than with Xenophanes], though still unconsciously.”\(^{23}\) Parmenides implicitly admits this opposition, his goddess naming the boundary, yet he cannot admit to its consequences, which would signify an internal tension. By defending the one against such a disruption, the thought of its limit is nevertheless presented and its purity is overturned. However, with Hegel we see that the one, at even its most basic level, leads to the emergence and elucidation of a division, and we can readily admit as much.

Once the conditions for a pure science are met, once we start without presuppositions, there are no such prohibitions to what thought can think, provided it arises immanently from the thinking of pure being. And for Hegel, the way this one-all-alone transforms into the countable one, and thus the ontogenesis of their very

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\(^{22}\) Lisa Atwood Wilkinson, Parmenides and To Eon, 101.

\(^{23}\) G. W. F. Hegel, Lectures on the Philosophy of History, Vol. 1, 250; emphasis added.
relationality, is not ignored or set out of mind and left unconscious. To be sure, it quickly becomes clear that this process of establishing the nature of the relation between concepts defines the Logic’s precise method of functioning.

1.3 A PRESUPPOSED RELATION?

The questions that arise here, however, are when does he think this boundary and whence does this difference arise, since “the beginning ought not itself to be already a first and an other; for anything which is in its own self a first and an other implies that an advance has already been made.”24 We can imagine someone opposed to our account asking whether, by taking up this line of abstraction, taking each side first on its own, without uniting them, even to the extent of situating them in their shared commonality by addressing them within the context of the same sentence, we do not have already the undoing of presuppositionless science. That is, our critic asks, does not the very position of pure being (and later pure nothing) depend on a prior relation of opposition? Is it not the case, as Daniel Guerriè re submits, that “the beginning of science is—in an awkward but accurate term—Being/Nothing, or even, Being=Nothing”?25 And, if so, does there not arise a logical impasse, whereby Hegel, by taking sheer being in its immediacy (and then sheer nothing in its immediacy), must harbour Parmenides’ assumption of being (and nothing) as dependent on a primordial contrast. The challenge to us here would be the claim that what is, here, is not simply pure being but also already the negation of nothing, just as nothing will be the negation of what is. Another way of putting this is to ask if

24 G. W. F. Science of Logic, 75.
being taken in its immediacy is, in fact, secondary to a differential relation, the product of a process of mediation that defines itself against its opposite, rather than the only, as Hegel puts it.

Dieter Henrich is one such critic and has made this complication the focus of his well-known study, “Anfang und Methode der Logik.” In this essay, Henrich suggests that a logically earlier category of relation between concepts must be, for Hegel, already present to think pure being in its unmediatedness. He argues that being’s immediacy is the negation of mediation and thus is as such mediated and determined through this concept necessary to articulate its immediacy: mediation. According to Henrich, Hegel’s being is never being on its own, then, but rather is always already implicitly contextualized as the negation of nothing, reaching beyond its current position (of immediate indeterminacy) in order to define itself via contrast; likewise, negation is never legitimately open to consideration in its immediacy because it is already contextualized by being as the negation of being. This leads Henrich to claim that pure being’s absolute identity is not a simple identity, but must be already a more complex form of inner self-acquaintance (Selbstvertrautheit), by which, on this topic, means pure being’s relation to itself qua being a negation of what it is not (nothing). Manfred Frank summarizes Henrich’s thesis on this issue:

Hegel believed he could derive unity and difference from a single conceptual structure…Unity, or the Universal…. We note…the Universal as well as that of the particular, employ the category of reference. In the first case it is a matter of

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27 Dieter Henrich, Hegel im Kontext, 85.
the reference of One only to itself; in the second case the referential relation mediates between elements that are different from one another… In the first example the reference is the “immediate,” for what does not refer to something other than itself…[‘Being’ in the Logic]… in the second case we are dealing with something mediated, with mediation: one element refers to another, and the reference between the two establishes a bond or a commensurability between the different elements.29

For Henrich and Frank, the immediacy of Hegel’s being is an immediacy that must be scare-quoted as an ostensible immediacy: “immediacy.” “[P]ure Being,” Henrich writes, “cannot be satisfactorily understood on its own terms”30 for, described as it is as being “without any further determination,”31 it already starts with negating nothing, which has not yet appeared within the consideration of pure being; being, according to Henrich and Frank, can only start by referring to itself as a negation of nothing.

Compare this to the following from David Gray Carlson:

To be equal to oneself…[is] not always true by definition, as in A=A…Here A is not equal to itself. Rather, it is equal to another A, with different time-space coordinates than the first A. One cannot even express true self-equality using an equal sign, because an equal sign is a mediating term between two other terms. So far we have only one term – Pure Being, which is ‘self-identical.’32

29 Manfred Frank, What is Neo-Strucutralism? (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989), 264; emphasis added. In Lecture 17 Frank summarizes Henrich’s reading of Hegel on reference and addresses the similarities between Hegel and Jacques Derrida.
30 Dieter Henrich, Hegel im Kontext, 86.
31 G. W. F. Hegel, Science of Logic, 82; emphasis added.
On this account, Henrich’s concept of self-relation or self-acquaintance (A=A) falls short of the immediacy of our beginning. And, as we mentioned, Guerrière’s formulation of Hegel’s starting-point as A=B (being=nothing) went even further than Henrich’s self-relation, smuggling in the concept of mediation (the equal sign) as well as a second term, nothing, before it had been shown to have logically developed out of immediate being.\(^3\) Contrast this claim to Hegel’s own definition of pure being: “it has no diversity within itself nor any reference outwards.”\(^3\) Whether Hegel is ultimately correct or not, this definition clearly distinguishes his own assessment of immediate being from Henrich’s “diversity within itself” and Guerrière’s “reference outwards.”

But then how can we defend Hegel’s use of the terms without, un-mediated (immediate), and in-determinate, without submitting to Henrich or Guerrière’s readings, given that each of these terms used to describe being appears to be a term that points to something else in contrast? Stephen Houlgate interprets this ostensible reliance on the category of reference (e.g. ‘immediacy’ as implicitly referring to mediation via its negation) as chiefly a problem of language and not one with Hegel’s ontology or the scientific character of his starting-point. According to him, Hegel “needs to use these term[s] [‘immediacy’ and ‘indeterminate’] because he is addressing an audience that usually thinks of being…not just as pure but as specified and qualified…mediated by all manner of differences and contrasts.”\(^3\) That is, the terms only refer to the almost Cartesian, preparatory move we undertook of putting aside presuppositions, such as our typical understanding of being, in order to begin. The im- or in-, then, do not here carry ontological connotations that would force us to suppose negation and its logical negation.

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\(^3\) David Gray Carlson, \textit{A Commentary to Hegel’s Science of Logic}, 12n23.

\(^3\) G. W. F. Hegel, \textit{Science of Logic}, 82.

\(^3\) Stephen Houlgate, \textit{The Opening of Hegel’s Logic}, 80.
The manner in which Hegel uses these terms is such that their prefixes do not suggest an earlier negation, as their everyday usage might suggest, but, rather, allow for the thought of being’s purity to surface. They are thus meant to be employed for pedagogical reorientation rather than as terms that direct thought to consider the ways in which they harbour their own determinacy (and thus their opposite) in their very usage. The moment one takes being’s *immediacy* to mean the negation of mediation, one should recall that it is also indeterminate and that the introduction of this distinction (i.e., as something mediated) would be a determination. Likewise, if one brings attention to the fact that being’s *indeterminacy* implies the negation of determination and thus is in itself a type of determination, the qualification of *immediacy* reminds us that this indeterminacy is not a mediated indeterminacy, thus dissuading one from thinking indeterminacy in this (indeterminacy-as-a-determinant) fashion.

Hence, the problem with words: they admit to a mediation/determinacy that can say too much, and can be considered not entirely appropriate for the discussion of indeterminacy/immediacy, in the same way as phrasing such words in sentences, as we mentioned above, betrays the problem of the relation between subject and object and is thus not entirely appropriate for discussing these terms independently or discussing anything entirely ignorant of their (forthcoming) relation. According to Houlgate, the intention was that “[t]hese categories,” indeterminacy and immediacy, “not identify

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36 They can also say too little. For example, at the beginning of the section on becoming, where Hegel wants to emphasize the process of taking pure being and pure nothing together, he writes “Pure being and pure nothing *is* [ist], therefore, the same.” G. W. F. Hegel, *Science of Logic*, 82; emphasis added. Many commentators change this “is” to an “are,” to bring the sentence in accordance with the typically appropriate manner in which we refer to a multiplicity. But Hegel’s point could also be to demonstrate the lack of suitable terms in this instance that express two ostensibly contradictory meanings *at once*, as *Aufhebung* does.
reflexive structures in pure being; on the contrary, they were employed, despite their ambiguous prefixes, in order to articulate pure being as free of a pre-established relational structure. In the *Encyclopaedia*, Hegel attempts to clarify this ambiguity:

That which lacks determination, as we have it here, is the immediate, *not a mediated lack of determination*, not the sublation of all determinacy, but the lack of determination in all its immediacy, what lacks determination prior to all determinacy, what lacks determinacy because it stands at the very beginning. But this is what we call being.\(^3^8\)

Houlgate is correct to claim that it should follow from this that these terms are clearly intended to

not lead us to conceive of pure being as the explicit negation of the many ordinary and reflexive senses of being. They direct us toward the thought of being as

‘something *unanlysable…*in its simple unfilled immediacy.’\(^3^9\)

On the decision between pure being’s (linguistic) unanalyzability (i.e., its frustration of all dialectical analysis) versus being understood (linguistically) as primordially relational, Slavoj Žižek subverts the position of the latter by demonstrating the manner in which we must characterize being in the terms of the former. That is, he responds to Henrich’s critique of Hegel not by directly opposing it as such, but rather by agreeing against Henrich, specifically by displacing it, questioning its status as a legitimate critique:

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\(^3^7\) Stephen Houlgate, *The Opening of Hegel’s Logic*, 81. On page 80, Houlgate qualifies his usage of ‘reflexive’ as that which “refer[s] to meanings or logical structures that are defined by opposition to other such meanings.”

\(^3^8\) G. W. F. Hegel, *The Encyclopaedia Logic*, §86A1; emphasis added. An “A” denotes hereafter a citation from the text’s *Zusätze*.

the vicious circle of reflection cannot be an argument against Hegel, since Hegel—like Henrich—is not ignorant of the necessity to presuppose some surplus which eludes dialectical mediation. Their crucial difference lies elsewhere, it concerns the fact that Hegel locates this surplus on the opposite end from Henrich: not in an ‘inner self-acquaintance,’ prior to reflective, self-objectivizing distance… from itself, but in a radically contingent externality of some material, inert, nonrational remainder… an inert, immediate, nonrational ‘piece of the Real.’

This is to say that Henrich is right to suggest that there is something to the idea that Hegel’s beginning presents itself as a disruption, a resistance to integration into a relationality (when interpreted from the later point of mediated determinacy), but not that this resistance is problematic and accidentally asserted, such that it would entail some prior ontological structure of relation that would undermine its presuppositionless. Rather, it is this immediate, not-yet-dialectical/rational excess that allows this logical science to begin in the first place; of course, its position in relation to other concepts is quickly integrated into dialectical relationality as soon as these other concepts emerge.

The “presupposition” Žižek refers to here should not, of course, be mistaken as something that confronts Hegel’s thesis of a presuppositionless science, which would obfuscate the very difference Žižek is trying establish between Hegel (viz. his interpretation of Hegel) and Henrich’s interpretation of Hegel. It should rather be taken as a scientifically proven, immanently arising indeterminacy that, from the later stage of mediation, which cannot but see the dynamic of being and nothing in relation to one another, understands this immediate starting point as a necessary (and scientific, logical)

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presupposition or prior moment for its determinacy. It should thus not be taken as an
alternative to dialectical logic conceived as self-constituting and autonomous of external
considerations and categories.

The truly scientific starting-point of dialectical logic must be an irrational (i.e.,
non-rational or not-yet-rational), unmediated ground, the exception or remainder to
dialectical mediation. Yet this does not exempt being from the logical system it grounds,
for the exception is being, rather than, as the late Schelling had it, some “‘unprethinkable
non-ground,’ a pure facticity without determination, [which] precedes being.”41 This is an
exception in the sense of an illegal foundation that founds law itself, the law that cannot
be justified avant la lettre, but only later, from the standpoint of the system it will go on
to found. Indeterminate being is both the necessary foundation and exception to the
dialectical relationality of all rational systematicity, but in this way not an excess that
remains outside of the immanent system as such. Being must be that which cannot be
initially thought (in the terms of reason); it must be what Hegel called the “unanalyzable”
in the sense of not in itself being analyzable in terms of dialectical relationality, which it
precedes, but it nevertheless demands a move into this reflexivity upon being thought in
its purity. It is only (rationally) understood later, yet the thought that puts immediate
being into context itself requires this immanently-arising, unanalyzable, unfilled,
immediate purity to get going. The Logic does not begin with (determinate)

41 Espen Hammer, “Review of Mark Gabriel & Slavoj Žižek’s Mythology, Madness, and Laughter:
Subjectivity in German Idealism,” Notre Dame Philosophical Reviews, 24 August 2010,
December 2012). On this point, consider as well Hegel’s use of the phrase zu Grunde gehen, which should
be understood as a polysemantic phrase in German, open to meaning both “to go to the ground” or
foundation of all science, but also to perish. Cf. G. W. F. Hegel, Phenomenology of Spirit, §60. For a
review of the differences between Schelling and Hegel on the development of a philosophical logic from
the initial category of being, see Alan White, Absolute Knowledge: Hegel and the Problem of Metaphysics
meaningfulness but with the exception to this sense.\textsuperscript{42} The thought with which we must begin is not meaningful in the sense of being \textit{dialectically contextualizable}, even (initially) within the context of dialectical logic itself.

But this reading should be instantly distinguished from a Kantian reading that might suggest some realm that precedes or remains external to the immanent development of dialectical logic. To be sure, Žižek criticizes Henrich on exactly this point when he points out that “they [the Dieter Henrich-Manfred Frank school] tried to save the Kantian legacy,”\textsuperscript{43} inasmuch as they attempted to interpret Hegel in a Kantian fashion by not starting with immediate being but, instead, with a pre-logical or pre-immanent category. We do not start the \textit{Logic} with the duality of determinacy and indeterminacy, but determinacy and distinction logically arise later as the only avenue open to absolute indeterminacy’s claim to all-encompassing universality.\textsuperscript{44} Yet, as Hegel will repeat in the shorter \textit{Logic}, “in the case of being distinction has no basis, and, precisely because of this, it is no distinction, since neither determination has any basis.”\textsuperscript{45}


\textsuperscript{43} Slavoj Žižek, \textit{The Parallax View} (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2009), 408-9n46.

\textsuperscript{44} See also Maker’s critique of Henrich’s Kantian interpretation of Hegel in William Maker, “Beginning” in \textit{Essays on Hegel’s Logic}, ed. George di Giovanni (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1990), 27-44, especially 40-43. However, it remains somewhat unclear the extent to which Henrich and Frank do, in fact, interpret Hegel in this transcendental manner. On the one hand, Frank anticipates and dismisses this interpretation when he claims that “we are not dealing with a unity that imprints its unity onto the manifold of given experience from outside (as is the case with transcendental self-consciousness in the \textit{Critique of Pure Reason}).” Manfred Frank, \textit{What is Neo-Structuralism?} 262. Yet, on the other hand, a few pages later the transcendental presupposition of a logical externality does seem at work in his suggestion that the \textit{Logic} develops according to some pre-established, external \textit{goal}: “Hegel’s \textit{Logic} approaches its \textit{goal} in three steps: from Being, to essence, to concept.” Manfred Frank, \textit{What is Neo-Structuralism?} 266; emphasis added.

\textsuperscript{45} G. W. F. Hegel, \textit{The Encyclopaedia Logic}, §87A1.
1.4 FROM BEING TO NOTHING

Before any relation or transformation between being and nothing can appear to thought (as the determination of indeterminates) it is the operands (the pure indeterminates) involved that must emerge, not simultaneously, but first the first operand and then the next. That is, out of pure being we immanently arrive at pure nothing, but the conjunction that would explicate the manner in which the two are related does not appear until we have thought pure being on its own and pure nothing on its own. It is only later in the section on becoming that we can start with a full sentence: “Pure being and pure nothing are, therefore, the same.”\(^{46}\) So, before we approach the sentence, we have those components of which the sentence is composed. Before we have “being and nothing” we have being and we have nothing (which emerged from our thought of being). We have, as we mentioned earlier, the following fragmentary parts, respectively: “Being, pure being, without any further determination,” “Nothing, Pure nothing.”\(^{47}\) The conjunction, plus or the operator of addition, in the equation “A plus ¬A,” for instance, would fail to demonstrate anything without the emergence of the second operand, ¬A. Without the two individual operands, without a binary, addition operates as a mere unary operator and has no effect on its operands.\(^{48}\) To discuss the relation between the terms, we must be able to refer to the terms themselves, lest mediation prefigure rather than arise from immediate being, thereby calling into question the science’s presuppositionlessness. That is to say that “&A” is simply “A”; likewise, “A&” would be

\(^{46}\) G. W. F. Hegel, *Science of Logic*, 82.

\(^{47}\) G. W. F. Hegel, *Science of Logic*, 82.

simply “A.” Thus, to be able to consider their dialectical relation, that is, the entire statement with the operands conjoined by their operator (A & ¬A), we must be able to point to the operands by themselves: (A), (¬A), with each bracket here designating a self-contained concept, taken on its own, and admitting no operand external to it, including the other operand. This is not to suggest that there are originally two unrelated operands, but, simply, that a second operand emerges from a first and that the possibility of discussing the relation or distinction between the two only arises once this emergence has occurred.

As Angelica Nuzzo observes, in regard to the “dialectical deduction of logical forms… in terms of the process of their ‘genesis,’” form (including the formal relation) is empty without working upon something because “the dialectical process in its logical formality is content-determined; logical form is always objectively specific.”49 All that is meant here is simply that whatever the formal relation between being and nothing is, it must be a relation of being and of nothing, operands that must have already arrived on the scene. By considering A on its own (a noun outside of a sentence held together by a conjunction) we are led to consider ¬A, without considering the operator of addition and without taking A to have already presupposed the existence of ¬A. If the consideration of A leads to the emergence of ¬A, and the consideration of ¬A is dependent upon there being no A, then considering A leads to the exclusion of A and the consideration of ¬A on its own: nothing, in its own indeterminacy.

In the terms set before us, this development runs as follows: Being in its absolute indeterminacy is nothing, but before the relation or transformation between being and

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nothing is articulated, we first assess nothing on its own as, now, the only position, one that excludes all other positions, including the previous one, thus ostensibly expelling being. Just as we considered being in its immediate indeterminacy, we consider nothing in its immediate indeterminacy. The implicit relation between the two concepts (each taken on their own as the exclusive one) requires the thought of the “second” as an only-one (as a new first, a new ground) before the character of its relation to and its very transformation can be explicitly thought and dialectically contextualized. At this point, Hegel writes,

The transition is still concealed; because being is posited only as immediate, therefore nothing emerges in it only immediately. But all the subsequent determinations… are more concrete.50

We cannot start with being and nothing, “we are concerned first of all not with the form of opposition (with the form, that is, also of relation).”51 Rather, we start with being and then move to nothing and then have being and nothing. As Crawford Elder puts it, “pure Being would be pure Nothing if it were not a further feature of our use of Being that we contrast it with Nothing, and claim it is wholly different from Nothing.”52 That is, “we can meaningfully use the idea of Transition only where we have two end-points which are themselves genuinely distinguished.”53 The transformation of being into nothing cannot be conceptualized or presupposed from the outset. If the thinking of the one entailed the thinking of something else, we think this something else in its indeterminacy

50 G.W.F Hegel, *Science of Logic*, 99; Hegel later repeats this stance in a remark on these early operations, claiming that prior to being posited in the other, “It is… inadmissible to employ more developed forms of mediation here and to hold being and nothing in any kind of relationship—the transition in question is not yet a relation” (and thus, properly, a transition). *Science of Logic*, 103.
before we consider the relation between the two.\footnote{It should go without saying that describing it as such, something contra something else, foreshadows the determinations of something and other and thus goes beyond the vocabulary available to indeterminate being, hence Hegel’s brief and limited treatment of being at the level of indeterminate immediacy. As mentioned, the movement is expeditious—logically, not temporally, expeditious—as there is little to say before being led to determinacy.} That is to say that we treat the concept of nothing on its own, as if completely apart from being. At first there was the one, and then there was another one. To take up this other seems to exclude the former, so that is what thought in its current configuration does. This configuration is the understanding \textit{(Verstand)}, the pre-rational thinking that separates, fixes in place, and considers in terms of this fixity.\footnote{“Thinking as \textit{understanding} stops short at the fixed determinacy and its distinctness \textit{vis-à-vis} other determinacies; such a restricted abstraction counts for the understanding as one that subsists on its own account, and is.” G. W. F. Hegel, \textit{The Encyclopaedia Logic}, §80.}

It was the significatory emptiness of being as absolute that led it to the standpoint of nothing. The Parmenidean immobility of immediate being represented the understanding’s attempt to establish and exhaust all meaning by securing an absolute position, but in this initial paralysis there is no meaning to secure, so it is forced to try another position. The only position available to it is to take up this emptiness of meaning. Nothing cannot yet see itself in relation to being, for it too is taken in its immediacy—hence the manner in which Hegel starts the section in the same fragmentary way as he had for being. Nothing too takes itself to be sufficient on its own, without an other. From the perspective of nothing, there is not in front of it an account of how being has in itself led to nothing, but, rather, \textit{simply} nothing in its emptiness. Its lack of referentiality has left it without the linguistic means of articulating this movement in a meaningful, determinate way. Instead, it takes its standpoint, the result of being, as an entirely new ground for science: nihilism, starting from nothing.
As conceived by the understanding here, restricted to how it appears in its indeterminate simplicity, nothing is treated as the absolute. Just as being had been treated as pure identity, without the suggestion of any alterity, such is now the case with nothing or nonbeing taken not explicitly as the negation of being, as “non-being” or “no thing,” but as a (inverted) positivity. Remarkning on how thought initially conceives the two poles that have been introduced at this point, Hegel remarks that

The understanding, through the form of abstract universality, does give them, so to speak, a rigidity of being such as they do not possess in the qualitative sphere and in the sphere of reflection; but at the same time through this simplification it spiritually animates them and so sharpens them.  

Such rigidity does not, however, bring the conceptual development of the logic to a halt. As Catherine Malabou points out, “abstraction does not mean unambiguously that something is dying, for it can appear just as strongly as a force of animation, of life.” It is this taking of being and then nothing alone in their abstract immediacy—not an intended move, of course, but simply that which science qua science demands—that allows for the possibility of logical movement. Taking each as a point (initially, each as the only point), a standpoint, rather than a fluid flow that bleeds into another, paradoxically sets the conditions for consciously, explicitly conceptualizing such seepage; the not-yet-rational here imparts force to the life of reason. As Malabou puts it,

58 See the section “Force and the Understanding” in G. W. F. Hegel, Phenomenology of Spirit, §135, for an account of the expression of force as the transition from the undivided one of abstract being into the diversity of the also.
it is the point which makes it possible to follow a phenomenon until the very end, to bring it to completion in at least some sense, and that may well mean for it to die in becoming its concept. Moreover, the terms rigidity and point also evoke a ‘steep slope’ (l’abrupt), a ‘point’ in the logical sense reached when a decision is reversed, as when we say ‘from this point on…”59

The immobility of being’s point and nothing’s point set the terms for the consideration of their relation or, to adopt and adapt Malabou’s phrasing here, the “death” of their rigidity in becoming their concept, which in the case of being and nothing is becoming, their concept. Each term taken in its claim to all-encompassing immobile fullness provides the conditions (two separate terms) for destabilizing its autonomy (via introducing separation, difference), opening to a movement, and thus “Being as such is not firm and ultimate, but rather something that overturns dialectically into its opposite.”60 And likewise for nothing.

1.5 THE DEFICIENCY OF IMMEDIACY

So, the new ground of nothing also lacked a permanent fixedness that would be exclusive to its side—being’s emptiness taken up as an autonomous nothing was still meant to lay a claim to be the position of the all. As Julie E. Maybee points out, “the course of the logic has hit an impasse with our current logical strategy. There is nothing more that can be said about each of these concepts by itself. We have exhausted the

strategy of defining them each on their own.”’⁶¹ Taking pure being and pure nothing on
their own, in their respective indeterminacies, was, in a sense, to begin with a certain
failure, but a necessary one. As Hegel phrases it, “the immediate of the beginning must
be in its own self deficient.”’⁶² It was the only position from which we could begin, but it
nevertheless showed itself to be insufficient in itself, because being without any
determination is being nothing. Being nothing in particular, being denied of all
particularity, is nothing. Nothing is, but it is not anything in particular. Thus, for anything
to be, this immediacy must be negated. We must have, by starting with immediacy,
demonstrated the failure of immediacy such that there can be any thing at all. That is to
say that we must, via a presuppositionless philosophy that demands that we start with
immediacy, demonstrate the emergence of determinacy, the first determination of which
is to differentiate this from that. Thus, we move from nothing to something:
indeterminacy undermines itself, unable to go any further, and gives rise to
determination, which enables all further conceptual distinctions and the determination of
everything that can be determined.⁶³ We can progress in the disclosure of concepts only
by translating this failed attempt to proceed, this impasse, into the very means by which
we are able to proceed. And it is only by doing so that we can endow being and nothing

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⁶³ G. W. F. Hegel, *Science of Logic*, 99. This transition or process of “giving rise to” has often been translated into English as an “emphatic emergence” or as a “bursting forth.” The term Hegel uses to describe this transition or “giving rise to” is *hervor* not *hervorbrechen*, the latter term introducing the addition of *brechen* (or “to break”), which suggests a definitive severance from the past. For a depiction of this move in terms of this latter sense, see Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Hegel’s Dialectic: Five Hermeneutical Studies*, trans. P. Christopher Smith (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1982), 87.
“with a true, i.e., concrete meaning.” And in this sense, the end of being and nothing in their purity speaks to their power or influence beyond their purity.

Starting with a beginning that is, in Hegel’s own words, “deficient in itself” and “unanalyzable” in the sense of frustrating all terms to define it in its purity, instantly pushing beyond its immobile immediacy, does not mean that it would have been philosophically sounder to have begun elsewhere. As Clark Butler puts it, “Hegel’s great originality was to have claimed, contrary to Aristotle, that an inquiry starting from a false assumption, could be a science, and indeed was alone qualified to be a science.” Indeed, Hegel admits that being in its immediacy is meaningless and without “validity” or wrong in the sense of having no sense whatsoever. But the move he makes is to demonstrate how such a “wrong choice” is the necessary wrong—and thus right—choice. “One has to begin by making the ‘wrong’ choice,” Žižek remarks, and thus “the true speculative meaning emerges only through repeated reading, as the after-effect (or byproduct) of the first, ‘wrong’ choice.” In this way initial senselessness is the very condition for its corrective; the move to mediation is a product of senseless immediacy and could not be explicated in the manner it is without in turn being understood as springing from this frustration, the inability to hold onto pure immediacy.

This repeated reading is the making explicit what has already been introduced at the level of indeterminacy where the operands’ relation was not yet able to be

64 G. W. F. Hegel, The Encyclopaedia Logic, §87.
65 Clark Butler, “Dialectical Method Today: A Lesson in Analytical Hegelianism, unpublished manuscript (2003), 49, quoted in David Gray Carlson, “The Antepenultimacy of the Beginning of Hegel’s Logic,” Hegel’s Theory of the Subject, ed. David Gray Carlson (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 220n40. Given what we have mentioned about the presuppositionless starting-point of the Logic, we have reason to hesitate before adopting the term “assumption” in any sense other than that of a proposition taken apart from an argumentative demonstration on the basis of any prior facts, for there is precisely nothing to argumentatively demonstrate prior to being.
established. Another way of putting this is that the operation of bringing the two together can only be undertaken by a concept that enables both to be thought and to be thought at once. But at the stage of abstract being and abstract negation this thought cannot be truly thought in this manner. To be sure, immediate nothing is “the same empty intuition or thought as pure being,” but, like immediate being, it cannot be understood as thought in the sense of dialectical cognition. This is a point that Hegel will make at the end of the Logic, where he claims that “cognition is thinking by means of notions,” and the notion (or “concept”), in its most elementary form, only appears in the move beyond abstraction, in mediation, where we have the “elevation of ordinary thinking…to the standpoint of thought.”

To someone who “might want to say that being and nothing are still both thoughts, and so to be a thought is what is common to them both,” suggesting a prior, shared basis in mediation presupposed from the beginning, a note in the Encyclopaedia Logic responds: “this would be overlooking the fact that being is not a particular, determinate thought…Becoming is the first concrete thought and hence the first concept, whereas being and nothing, in contrast, are empty abstractions.” Hegel repeats the point in his Lectures on the History of Philosophy: “The recognition of the fact that being and non-being are abstractions devoid of truth…the first truth is to be found in Becoming.”

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67 G. W. F. Hegel, Science of Logic, 82.
70 G. W. F. Hegel, The Encyclopaedia Logic, §87A1, §88A1. One might suggest that insofar as both being and nothing are abstract, abstractness is indeed shared, thereby establishing a relation prior to the introduction of mediation proper. Yet even this abstractness is not explicit as abstract before we have the concreteness of becoming. Furthermore, at the level of pure being and pure nothing, their abstractness cannot be articulated as shared for an immediate operand is by definition without the means to consider itself in relation to another without overturning this very immediacy.
71 G. W. F. Hegel, Lectures on the History of Philosophy, 283.
The first thought that is concrete, determinate, dialectical, and true, then, is the thought of becoming.\textsuperscript{72}

From the perspective of determination beyond the understanding, only the transition can count as a truly dialectical thought, for it is determinate and properly rational. The indeterminate relata are dialectical thought’s excess, its exception, though an exception upon which all determination will come to be supported; they are, of course, included in this transition but only as necessary conditions and not sufficient for meaningful thought when taken individually. Unlike its indeterminate predecessors, becoming’s definition does not require terms that its purified position inherently frustrates, for it admits to no such purity. There was not even a sentence to be said of being or nothing on their own, no sense to be given to these terms alone, which is why Hegel qualified his discussion of being with the preface of “if one can speak here” (of being) and “[i]n so far as intuiting or thinking can be mentioned here”\textsuperscript{73} in the section on nothing. It is only at the stage of becoming that Hegel finally can write, “pure being and pure nothing are, therefore, the same.”\textsuperscript{74} This “therefore” represents the movement to a place beyond the individual terms taken by themselves and to a place where we have both positions (rather than the initial absolute and the second position taken as the new initial absolute). It is at this point where both poles are represented that we can perform a second, repeated reading, the taking account of what has been introduced and the making explicit of the relation between the terms. That is, it is only at this stage where we have means to articulate reflexivity, to simultaneously posit the dialectic of being and nothing.

\textsuperscript{72} G. W. F. Hegel, \textit{The Encyclopaedia Logic}, §88A.
\textsuperscript{73} G. W. F. Hegel, \textit{Science of Logic}, 82.
\textsuperscript{74} G. W. F. Hegel, \textit{Science of Logic}, 82.
1.6 FROM BEING AND NOTHING TO BECOMING

We began the *Logic* with an initial reading, the only one available to a presuppositionless science: taking being alone and thinking it through. We were then led to start over, taking nothing alone. Being had given birth to nothing (a one birthing another one, which brought the total to two), but the truth of their relation or distinction was yet to be determined, unable to be made explicit, until we had a third category that could itself think both terms in-themselves (as a one and as another one), as well as in their relation to each other (as two). This is what becoming does, and it is with becoming that we have relation, we have difference, and we finally have the conditions for dialectical thought. Becoming (*Werden*) undertakes a repeated reading, or what Hegel calls a “recollection,”\(^\text{75}\) of what has logically preceded its overview. The condition for becoming is the existence of ostensible opposites; the function of becoming is to look at how each of these terms, taken in their indeterminate immediacy, moves to the other through the relation of *exclusion*, which they nevertheless together share in *common*, amounting to a mediation by one another.

Prior to having both terms taken in their relationality, this mutual opposition—and, as such, equally its commonality—could not be articulated, so what becoming accomplishes is the articulation of this prior structure, but it must also in some sense be understood as a move away from the self-sufficiency of this (implicit) logical configuration of the understanding. The implicitness (rather than explicitness) of the initial relation of opposition was the consequence of taking being and nothing in their

\(^{75}\) G. W. F. Hegel, *Science of Logic*, 99. On the same page he also refers to this operation as one of unconcealment or disclosure.
purity, but beyond becoming the relationship between each concept is decidedly more determinate, for we already have the two terms, the requirements for transition and determinacy. Yet through this determinate articulation, becoming gives shape to the logic of the understanding, which was implicitly present at the level of pure being and nothing, but as symbolic fallow. The boundary of being and nothing remains senseless but absolute when thought (as understanding) is still attempting to address each standpoint on its own, in its indeterminate immediacy. But after determination, with the terms to articulate this relation now available, it is the non-dialectical separateness of the understanding that remains present, however without an exclusive claim to self-sufficiency. Becoming holds onto the understanding, but it is also able to think these terms in their proximity, in their relation, and thus in their sameness. It is only at this level that we are oriented toward the conceptual brackets, so to speak, holding together our two absolute beginnings, our first and our second first: \( [(A), (\neg A)] \).° And in our orientation to these brackets, we are able to speak of their corresponding copula set up between the included operands; we can speak of the comma, now able to be seen as defining the (implicit) oppositional operation of the understanding, as well as see this comma as a shared border, an “&”: \( [A \& (\neg A)] \).

The logic of understanding becomes the logic of what was implicitly at play in the opposition of the two terms before becoming, and becoming becomes both the explication or embodiment and the alteration of this structure, a two-sided process about which we will say more shortly. Indeed, without the brackets, per se, without both

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° As mentioned earlier, the parentheses here designate what was originally thought as a self-contained concept. In this instance, A symbolizes pure being and \( \neg A \) symbolizes pure nothing. The square brackets represent the further move, available only at the level of determinacy, of taking these formerly indeterminate, self-contained concepts together in their relation to one another.
different terms taken simultaneously as a single thought, the difference that determinacy
depends upon was not yet available and thus could not render explicit their relations of
difference or commonality. At the level of either pure being or pure nothing the
movement from being to nothing could be performed, but it could not yet be fully
expressed, that is, taken for what it is, taken as mediation. With becoming, being and
nothing “have a different significance.”

Whenever a concept is introduced into the logic, it is because it has immanently
or internally arisen by following its preceding concept to its logical conclusion. It is in
this way that the conclusion explicates its beginning. For Hegel, the truth of something or
some concept is just that logical result which emerges out of something or some concept
taken as what it is in itself. At the level of the indeterminacy of being and nothing no
such truth (of something or some concept) can be spoken of, for such concepts are
initially taken to be the absolute, having exhausted all logical possibilities, and of which
there is no further, prior truth. For to have another concept’s truth expressed in a self-
sufficient, absolute starting-point would amount to admitting to some prior concept that
serves as a self-sufficient, absolute starting-point and, in turn, undermining the beginning
as beginning. Thus, as it is only when they are taken together, in becoming, that their
transition and aspects of their relationship can be fully articulated, it is this which allows
us to say that becoming, as the truth of indeterminate immediacy, can be considered the
first logical truth. As we have mentioned already, it is the making-explicit of this relation,
the dialectical truth of both indeterminacies. And this means that becoming is the truth of
difference, the difference of the abstract opposition between being and nothing, albeit a
difference that could not be recognized as such at the level of either being or nothing.

Hegel is describing becoming as this recognition when he writes, in his Lectures on the History of Philosophy, “the first truth is to be found in Becoming, which forms a great advance.”

But we can account for this description without being forced to accept Hans-Georg Gadamer’s conclusion, that what one finds in this passage is evidence of Hegel admitting that becoming was, in fact, the proper beginning to the Logic, with the (unintended) consequence that the project of science is but another presupposition. There is indeed a sense in which, as we have explained, we do begin with a “failed” beginning, with a failure to be dialectical. But agreeing with Gadamer that “[b]ecoming can easily be seen to be the proper truth for thought” is not equal to the position that Gadamer suggests, that “Being and Nothing exist solely as…Becoming,” at least in the sense that dialectical science must begin with an assumed relation, that of being to nothing (and vice versa). To say becoming is the truth of thought is neither to deny the logical ontogenesis of becoming from taking being and nothing individually in their indeterminate immediacy nor is it to attribute to these indeterminate immediacies the status of mere presuppositions existing prior to the starting-point of becoming. Of course, Gadamer’s interpretation is in keeping with his suspicion of the project of any science, including the science of dialectical logic, that makes claims to presuppositionlessness. But instead of assessing the many merits of Gadamer’s philosophy on its own, we need not go further than follow the progression of Hegel’s own argument, as we have been

78 G. W. F. Hegel, Lectures on the History of Philosophy, 283.
79 Hans-Georg Gadamer, Hegel’s Dialectic, 89. For another stance that accepts Gadamer’s interpretation on this point, see David Gray Carlson, A Commentary to Hegel’s Science of Logic, 33.
80 We will return to this conflict in our next chapter, where we will assess the relation between the conditions for Hegel’s dialectical ontology and Heidegger’s (and Gadamer’s) non-logical (i.e., in Hegel’s sense, as in conflict with the Logic’s scientific prerequisite of presuppositionlessness) idea of conducting philosophy from the pseudo-transcendental condition of the “always already.”
doing. In it we see, instead, that to say that becoming is the first truth is simply to say that becoming should be understood as that which dialectically contextualizes and gives true shape to the formlessness of being and nothing. In other words, being and nothing are not retroactively created by becoming, but rather retroactively discerned in their relationality; becoming “form[ing] a great advance,” as Hegel put it, not a beginning. Indeed, they both must emerge individually before they can be fully explicated in their fullness—it is, as we have already noted, therefore difficult to capture the pure abstraction of the earlier moments in language, as indebted as language is to the simultaneous movement and fixity of becoming.

Becoming makes this relation explicit through reorienting the view of the preceding moments, which is the point of “definition,” or, inverted, “[t]his pointing out and derivation is a matter of mediation.” And in this sense, mediation can also be understood as a matter of abstraction. That is, “pointing out” is the means of definition, articulating the “inner meaning” of an abstract assertion. Recalling what we said earlier when employing Malabou’s reading of the life of an abstract point through its “death,” here we have becoming as the mediation that breaths life into abstraction, retrieving the living kernel in the abstract through the activity of pointing out the points. This inner meaning is not something that should be understood as a hidden presupposition for thinking being in its immediacy but that which is evident through the self-transformation of this abstraction, unleashed by taking it in its abstractness all the way down. This is the

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meaning of Hegel’s claim that “becoming is simply the positedness of what being is in its
truth.”83 And such could equally be said about nothing.

Becoming is simultaneously the product and the tracking of this transformation,
which gives shape to being and nothing’s truth by defining it, determining it,
authenticating it. Looking back on these first steps and preemptively addressing the
Gadamerian interpretation, Hegel writes at the end of the Logic that “[t]he authentication
of the determinate content with which the beginning is made seems to lie behind it; but in
fact it is to be considered as an advance, that is, if it belongs to philosophical
[begreifenden] cognition.”84 Thus, becoming is the first logical truth, the beginning of
dialectical thought, though it is dependent on its earlier, necessarily non-dialectical,
“untrue” constituents, which should be understood as implicit (now explicated)
conditions, or in the German, Gewordensein, meaning that which has been, being having
been (through becoming).85

1.7 THE EXPRESSIONS OF BECOMING:
COMING-TO-BE AND CEASING-TO-BE

Becoming, as the making-explicit of the relation between being and nothing,
operates by splitting itself into two expressions of this relation: coming-to-be and
ceasing-to-be. From the standpoint of becoming, the standpoint of both terms being
present to us, we can look back and judge the relation between the two from the

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83 G. W. F. Hegel, The Encyclopaedia Logic, §88A.
85 As a perfect passive auxiliary term, Gewordensein is well suited to our point here, in that it contains a
tense of becoming, speaks of being from the standpoint of the repeated reading of becoming, and also
means the necessary conditions or situation of something.
perspective of either one. Becoming, representing both of these moments after they have already emerged, is itself thus the form of seeing the relation of being and nothing through the outlook of being as well as seeing the relation of being and nothing through the outlook of nothing.

Coming-to-be, which we could as easily call “ceasing-to-not,” describes this relation, reread by becoming through the perspective of being. From the view of becoming, being can be understood as non-differentiatedness. Thus, becoming as coming-to-be “yields the notion of the unity of being and nothing—or, in a more reflected form, the unity of differentiatedness and non-differentiatedness, or the identity of identity and non-identity.”86 Emphasizing being, coming-to-be reads the difference that has appeared to us at this point, and attempts to move it back into indistinguishability, into “the unseparatedness of being and nothing.”87 Coming-to-be is the movement between the two of negation into the absoluteness of a united one, overcoming the opposition of the terms represented by nothing(-for-becoming). It is the emphasis on the two terms’ equality in their separation. In recognizing itself within the context of what it is not, pure, immediate being performs the activity of holding-together, affirms the fluidity that runs through both, and undermines the division of the two itself. In other words:

Thoughts become fluid when pure thinking, this inner immediacy, recognizes itself as a moment, or when the pure certainty of self abstracts from itself—not by leaving itself out, or setting itself aside, but by giving up the fixity of its self-positing…Through this movement the pure thoughts become Notions, and are

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only now what they are in truth, self-movements, circles, spiritual essences, which is what their substance is.\(^88\)

As we will further describe and assess later, this characteristic of becoming as unity is not unfamiliar, but has, at the expense of its other expression, been used by a majority of interpretations as a definition of becoming \textit{in toto}, as well as the concept of sublation, of which becoming is the first instantiation in Hegel’s \textit{Logic}. But before we address the details and perpetuators of this one-sided interpretation of becoming, let us turn to examine its second expression.

Looking back from the position of becoming’s dialectical second reading, we can now see that nothing represented the negation of being, introducing distinction (however a distinction not logically present until pure nothing was taken otherwise than solely on its own terms, as the second first, so to speak—that is, not until becoming). In other words, nothing-for-becoming represents opposition; it represents, from the perspective of becoming, the oppositional relationship being and nothing have implicitly with one another before becoming. Ceasing-to-be can then, in the same language we used to describe coming-to-be, be said to yield the concept (i.e., notion) of the disunity of being and nothing—or, in a more reflected form, the disunity of differentiatedness and non-differentiatedness, or the non-identity of identity and non-identity. In ceasing-to-be, which could also be translated as coming-to-not, “determination starts from nothing which relates itself to being.”\(^89\) It is only at this stage that Hegel can speak of the relation nothing has with being, just as coming-to-be was the stage where being could have a relation to nothing. Because it is the stance of nothing now at issue, it is a relation of

\(^88\) G.W.F Hegel, \textit{Phenomenology of Spirit}, §33; emphasis added to ‘fluid.’
negation, specifically the movement from the one of being (or the unity of being-for-becoming) into the separated two. This is the emphasis of the shared relationality or equality in their separation.

Here, nothing remains the outside issued from within, produced by but defiantly irreducible to being’s tautological count from one to one. Nothing-for-becoming is the outside inside or interior alterity, which turns the interiority of being into an interconceptual division.\textsuperscript{90} Becoming requires both being and nothing, first taken in-themselves, as separate, and this separation remains an integral part of its account for their nature. Despite becoming’s other expression of holding-together, what is held together depends on terms that must, in some sense, also remain split off from one another. To emphasize nothing at this point is to also emphasize nothing’s distinguishability from being. That is, the unity of being-nothing co-implicates the activity of splitting the absoluteness of the unified. It is impossible to speak fully of a relation between two without simultaneously separating what is related—the function of holding-apart.

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\textsuperscript{90} For the sake of elucidation, our description here admittedly makes use of concepts (inner and outer, something and other) that arise only later in the Logic. These concepts are meant to be used in the same manner as Hegel occasionally does, as an interlude that previews what is to come. Because of our commitments to following the dialectic’s immanent unfolding we must state that the scientific process of logic does itself not require such references, and to read these statements as properly introducing new concepts would be seriously misleading. Nevertheless, they are sometimes helpful to grasp the trajectory of these early sections, which lack the conceptual resources as well as the concrete determinacy of the later sections. For example, such is the case in the “Property” section when Hegel gives the example of the properties of herbs, even though the quantitative, particular thing is introduced in the Doctrine of Essence, much after the section on something as such (Science of Logic, 114). Insofar as Hegel does not detail the way in which property is quantitative, it is safe to assume his use of the herb was not meant to introduce quantity as such at this point. Likewise, in our case we suggest seeing nothing-for-becoming in the sense of otherness, despite Hegel not using these concepts to articulate this relation, in order to foreshadow our interest in the idea of negativity’s later ability to function as oppositional externality without a transcendent outside, a matter we will explore in the next chapter. Here, nothing-for-becoming sits in opposition to being-for-becoming, yet it is still included in the ontological system of concepts that follow from being, thereby constituting an implicit otherness that has yet to be explicitly defined in these terms.
Of course, Hegel’s characterization of sublation as a *negation of negation* indeed means what it is typically taken to mean, as a new unity achieved through the negation of negation’s division. Yet insofar as this first negation is borne of being taken in itself to its fullest extent, the negation of negation also constitutes the negation of being, thereby reinstating the distinguishable elements that constitute its unity. This nothing, from the perspective of becoming, “is a non-being but as a result which had its origin in being.”\(^91\)

Or, as Jean Hyppolite will paraphrase a remark made in the last chapter of the *Logic*, “every negative is the negative of that of which it is the result.”\(^92\) That is, though nothing stands in a negative relation with being, from the perspective of becoming we see that negation is also *of* being, meaning that the negation of negation must in part be appreciated as a negation of being.

If coming-to-be can be represented as a fluid line, ceasing-to-be will serve as the points the line depends upon to make it a line at all, with its role in the logic of becoming as that place where “the dialectical point gets sharpened.”\(^93\) A little later in this section, Hegel traces the history of this insight and approvingly attributes it to the ancient atomists:

> With the first thinkers the atomistic principle did not remain in…externality but besides its abstraction had also a speculative determination in the fact that the void was recognized as the source of movement, which is an entirely different relation of the atom and the void from the mere juxtaposition and mutual indifference of these two determinations…The view that the void constitutes the

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ground of movement contains the profounder thought that in the negative as such there lies the ground of becoming, of the unrest of self-movement.\textsuperscript{94}

The movement of becoming, or of dialectics itself, depends upon the movement of being’s unity into nothing’s split. The force of this speculative dimension of abstract negativity or the logic of separation is explained in another passage in the preface of the \textit{Phenomenology}:

The \textit{analysis} of an idea...[is] to break an idea up into its original elements...to return to its moments...But what is thus separated and non-actual is an essential moment; for it is only because the concrete does divide itself, and make itself into something non-actual, that it is self-moving. The activity of dissolution is the power and work of the \textit{Understanding}, the most astonishing and mightiest of powers, or rather the absolute power. But that... what is bound and is actual only in its context with others, should attain an existence of its own and a separate freedom—this is the tremendous power of the negative; it is the energy of thought...\textsuperscript{95}

The grounding of the movement of speculative philosophy, the energy of thought: these describe the constitutive and thereby lasting power of being and nothing’s separability, the second of the two freedoms achievable via becoming, the freedom to develop through refusal, not just through identification. As Theodor Adorno rightly notices, “this is where

\textsuperscript{94} G. W. F. Hegel, \textit{Science of Logic}, 166. The central claim at the end of this passage could also be translated, as Mladen Dolar has, as “the cause of becoming pertains to the negative.” See G. W. F. Hegel, \textit{Werke in zwanzig Bänden: Theorie Werkausgabe}, eds. E. Moldenhauer and K. M. Michel (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1970), Bd. 5: \textit{Wissenschaft der Logik}, 185-6. Dolar interprets this section to mean that “the speculative insight of ancient atomism [was that] at base we always have not a unity, but a unity split into something and a void, so that we have to include the void as ‘the other half,’ ‘the missing half’ of firm being.” Mladen Dolar, “One Divides into Two,” \textit{E-Flux} 33 (March 2012). http://www.e-flux.com/journal/one-divides-into-two/ (25 March 2012).

\textsuperscript{95} G. W. F. Hegel, \textit{Phenomenology of Spirit}, §32.
the claim of their identity obtains that restlessness, that inward shudder, which Hegel calls Becoming.  

Freedom, for Hegel, means self-determination. We already know that for him the concepts that emerge do so as the creations of pure thought rather than via any external compulsion. But there is also a sense of self-determination to be discerned in these concepts contrasted to one another. This is perhaps easiest to see when discussing more concrete concepts, such as those that directly pertain to volitional subjects or politics. But we can also see how in coming-to-be being determines itself by identifying with nothing, lest it determine it. That is, being(-for-becoming), in its pursuit to identify itself with everything, continues via identifying itself with that which would oppose it, including it within its realm. In the case of ceasing-to-be and the logic of the understanding, we see self-determination in the shape of a severance from that which determines it. Elsewhere, Hegel will refer to more concrete modes of this type of self-determination, such as the more passive retreat into self found in the Stoic ascetic, and an active attempt to destroy the determining other, as found in Jacobinism.  

To these two freedoms, these two aspects of becoming (or of the negation of negation) collectively, Hegel assigns the term Aufhebung, sublation. Aufheben, “one of the most important concepts in philosophy,” is said to have “a two-fold meaning…on the one hand it means to preserve, to maintain, and equally it means to cause to cease, to put an end to.” Even “to preserve includes a negative element, namely, that something is removed from its immediacy.”  

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97 For an account of the concept of freedom, especially on the relation between necessity and freedom, see G. W. F. Hegel, The Encyclopaedia Logic, §35A1.  
negation of negation does not mean resting upon the platform of total unification, but, rather, the transformation of being’s side through negation. Sublation is the expression of becoming, the truth of being and nothing.\textsuperscript{99} If becoming is the first dialectical thought, insofar as it is the point where the relations internal to the logic are able to be made explicit, then the \textit{Aufhebung} is the formal structure that makes explicit the double movement of dialectical thought. It makes explicit the movement of concepts in both their internal unity and disunity. Becoming represents two moments in

\begin{quote}
\textit{distinguishedness} as a unity with the \textit{other}. Becoming therefore contains being and nothing as \textit{two} such unities, \textit{each} of which is itself a unity of being and nothing; the one is being as immediate and as relation to nothing, and the other is nothing as immediate and as relation to being; the determinations are of unequal values in these unities.\textsuperscript{100}
\end{quote}

\textit{Aufhebung} is the process that points to both of these processes at once, as if logically concurrent. It is here that it reflects on their relations as a problem, but not one to be solved or eradicated by the privileging of one side.

\textsuperscript{99} Refer to pg. 34 above for the precise sense in we are using expression “truth of....”
\textsuperscript{100} G. W. F. Hegel, \textit{Science of Logic}, 105.
CHAPTER TWO:
THE SHAPE OF SUBLATION

2.1 FALLING SHORT OF SUBLATION:
PROBLEMATIC TRANSLATIONS OF *AUFHEBUNG*

We must ask what does it mean exactly for the *Aufhebung* of becoming to not privilege one side, whether it be ceasing-to-be or coming-to-be. It signifies resistance to certain inappropriate (or, more likely, only partially appropriate) descriptions whose role would serve to prematurely exhaust its meaning or cause any unsupported equivocality beyond the real, explicated tension it is taken to hold. Identifying such ill-suited determinations is a means of defining sublation through negation, which we will do now.

It will have been observed that we have already decided on the word “sublation” to signify *Aufhebung*, as opposed to the other options that various translators for various reasons have suggested in its place.\(^\text{101}\) Considering that the term is notorious for its lack of direct equivalent in English, we have decided to stick with the most common term in the secondary literature if for no other reason than the pragmatic one: it is a serviceable term that avoids the particular problems that certain other terms, which we shall examine below, run into.

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\(^{101}\) Some examples include “perseverance,” “cancellation,” “suspension,” and “transcendence.”
While sublation was originally a term from chemistry, meaning “the middle region of the supernatant of a sample of urine standing in a vessel,” 102 J.M. Stirling’s *The Secret of Hegel: Being the Hegelian System in Origin, Principle, Form, and Matter* introduced it as a suitable substitute for *Aufhebung*. 103 One could say that seeing as it is seldom used in English outside of technical discourse, it lacks the everyday familiarity that *Aufhebung* has in German. Yet, without a fitting equivalent, one might see this reduction to a technical term as arguably barring the ambiguous and non-philosophical associations a term with more vitality in spoken English, such as “lifting up” might suggest. 104 In any case, we will keep the term “sublation,” where we do not use the original German term itself. While admitting that the choice of terminology can influence the interpretation of what this term signifies, we are here not particularly interested in analyzing the strengths and weaknesses of the many attempts to find another term to encompass *Aufhebung’s* multipolarity. As Jean-Luc Nancy rightfully enjoins of us, “[o]ne must mediate these [translations] and try to penetrate the thing.” 105 And to cut to the heart of the matter, we must first push aside the obstacles that obscure our access.

a) *Synthesis, Mere Union*

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104 For example, Jacques Derrida’s translation of the German into French as *relève* connotes a sense of lifting up, relieving, and relaying. But translating *relève* into English as “lifting-up” misses the sense of relay and relief and, further, defining *Aufhebung* as “lifting-up” is, as we will argue below, also problematic in its own right (and not just for lack of polyvalence).
One such obstacle is the depiction of sublation as a synthesis. It was Heinrich Moritz Chalybäus who bequeathed Hegel scholarship the triad of “thesis-antithesis-synthesis” and it has not been uncommon to find the Hegelian Aufhebung translated as synthesis since.\(^{106}\) Chalybäus explicitly points to the section in front of us, the opening chapter of the Science of Logic, as an example of this triad, when he writes that “[t]his is the first trilogy, the Unity of Being, Nothing, and Becoming,”\(^{107}\) with becoming an example of synthesis. Indeed, at first blush it might appear here, as well as elsewhere in the Logic, that Hegel is outlining a straightforward triadic process, but further analysis of the passage itself (such as the one we just undertook) exposes this simple schema as unsubtle and misleading. Allen Wood, for one, does not esteem this contribution very highly:

The regrettable tradition of expounding this theme in the Hegelian dialectic through the grotesque jargon of ‘thesis-antithesis-synthesis’ began in 1837 with Heinrich Moritz Chalybäus, a bowdlerizer of German idealist philosophy, whose ridiculous expository devices should have been forgotten along with his name.\(^{108}\) Whether or not Chalybäus be considered a bowdlerizer or not, the manner in which he depicts Aufhebung is one that misrepresents the formulation given by Hegel. Indeed, this term “synthesis” has two not unrelated implications that will prove to be problematic.

First, synthesis can suggest a concept divorced from the full force of the relation of difference. In an early remark that outlines certain terminological decisions that will

\(^{106}\) Of course, before Chalybäus, Fichte had employed this formulation in his own philosophy but not to describe Hegel’s philosophical system.


hold throughout the Logic, Hegel distances the sublation of becoming from synthesis by associating the latter term with what he calls an “unfortunate word, unity.”\textsuperscript{109} Synthesis, in this precise sense of a unity, which takes a bit from one side and a bit from the other and concludes with a more stable but compromised determination, would imply a process of eroding dialectical oppositionality, an “injustice” that would make the concept of sublation “one-sided.”\textsuperscript{110} And, thus, it is after having made this association that Hegel writes that “the name synthesis, \textit{synthetic unity}, has been rightly dropped.”\textsuperscript{111} We saw that what prevents the sublation of being and nothing from devolving into a mere synthesis, thus defined, into the reign of mere coming-to-be, is the persistence of ceasing-to-be’s opposition, the energy of negation that forces its opposite to arm itself in a conceptual duel. In privileging one of these meanings, the appellation of synthesis falls short of sublation, which is “one and the same word for two \textit{opposed} meanings,\textsuperscript{112} one of which is itself this mode of negative oppositionality. But this is not to suggest that this opposition has us stuck at a standstill; surely, a transformation, an introduction of the new, occurs at the point of sublation. Yet this transformation occurs as the result of a mutual lack that is shared, one that is not to be understood as the harmonious complementing of one another, whereby the process of sublation would indicate some moderate third-way, but rather as the articulation of a common difference, the affirmation of the truth of both sides—together, but together in their incompatible negation of one another as well.

\textsuperscript{109} G. W. F. Hegel, \textit{Science of Logic}, 91; emphasis added.
\textsuperscript{110} G. W. F. Hegel, \textit{Science of Logic}, 91.
\textsuperscript{111} G. W. F. Hegel, \textit{Science of Logic}, 96; emphasis added.
It is the unmediated preference for synthetic unity’s holding-together that is at issue in “Remark 2: Defectiveness of the Expression ‘Unity, Identity of Being and Nothing,’” where Hegel writes the following:

the result of considering being and nothing, as expressed in the statement: being and nothing are one and the same, is incomplete. The emphasis is laid chiefly on their being one and the same…Consequently, the sense seems to be that the difference is denied…but, in fact, [becoming] equally contains them both as distinguished.\footnote{G. W. F. Hegel, \textit{Science of Logic}, 90.}

Here, Hegel already anticipates Chalybäus who, as we saw above, used unity in the sense Hegel disparages. But along with Chalybäus, he also anticipates some of his future critics, certain “philosophers of difference,” who take issue with the central role sublation, as unity, plays in dialectics.\footnote{We will respond to a few of these critiques in Chapter 3.} Anticipating this misreading, in a long passage in the \textit{Encyclopaedia}, Hegel qualifies the resemblance sublation might initially have to any oneness achieved through the total resolution of opposites:

It remains to be noted, however, that the expression: ‘Being and nothing is the same,’ or ‘the unity of being and nothing’—like all other unities of this kind (the unity of subject and object, etc.)—can fairly be objected to, because it is misleading and incorrect insofar as it makes the unity stand out; and although diversity is contained in it (because it is, for instance, being and nothing whose unity is posited), this diversity is not expressed and recognized along with the unity. So we seem only to have abstracted quite improperly from this diversity, and to have given no thought to it. The fact is that no speculative determination
can be expressed incorrectly in the form of such a proposition; what has to be grasped is the unity in the diversity that is both given and posited at the same time. As their unity, becoming is the true expression of the nothing, but it is inward unrest – a unity which in its self-relation is being and nothing which it contains, is inwardly turned against itself.¹¹⁵

And to make himself absolutely clear, he further summarizes the point of this passage in a note: “The unity of becoming cannot leave out the distinction, for without that we would return once more to abstract being. Becoming is simply the positedness of what being is in its truth.”¹¹⁶ What being is in its truth is becoming, but becoming is also what nothing is in its truth, and as the relation of both of these terms it is, as we have seen, coming-to-be and ceasing-to-be. To unduly stress unification is to commit the error of treating sublation as a simple return to pure being, albeit one that passes through definition. But it is not simply the first term. Sublation, as the negation of negation, does not equal a mere positive. Nothing also emerges out of being, and once emerged, it does not neatly fall back into the position of a Parmenidean One-All, “the crucible and fire through which the loose plurality… is consumed and reduced to unity,”¹¹⁷ swallowed without remains. The repeated reading of becoming does not simply pass through being, but also through nothing, and thus is irreducible to the unity signified by coming-to-be or being-for-becoming. Instead, becoming “contains being and nothing as two such unities,

¹¹⁶ G. W. F. Hegel, The Encyclopaedia Logic, §§88A1; emphasis added.
each of which is itself a unity of Being and Nothing.” 118 That is, it is not a simple (as in unitary) unity or synthesis at all.

A second reason we might consider the term synthesis misleading is the sense in which this term connotes a conjoining that is external rather than immanent. In Hegel’s words, sublation, or “synthesis, which is the point of interest, must not be taken as a connection of determinations already externally there; the question is partly of the genesis of a second to a first, of a determinate to an indeterminate first principle, partly, however, of immanent synthesis.” 119 But it because of this immanence and “because [the term] synthesis suggests more than anything else the sense of bringing together of mutual external things already there,” 120 that he decides against adopting it as a fitting substitute for the concept of Aufhebung. On this point Hegel makes reference to Kant’s transcendental idealism, namely his synthetic unity of apperception. 121 Hegel’s understanding of Kant’s transcendental method is that, first, you must infer what would be necessary structures that enable sense of real phenomena, rather than bracketing such prior considerations and instead following the immanent logical development from a presuppositionless starting place in order to establish what is. Kant refers to this condition as a “transcendental presupposition,” a “ground without which it would be impossible to think any object for our intuitions” 122 or any concept. In order to account for the possibility of logical categories, Kant must secure proof of their necessity, which would

120 G. W. F. Hegel, Science of Logic, 96.
ensure their possibility.\textsuperscript{123} In Kant’s own words, such a unity requires the deduction backwards of a ground, “those \textit{a priori} rules of synthetical unity,”\textsuperscript{124} beyond and constitutive of what has been immanently demonstrated via the logico-ontological movement itself, that is, “a condition which precedes all experience, and which makes experience itself possible.”\textsuperscript{125} Thought is thus taken to be bound to this transcendentally proposed synthetic rule. This externality, “regarded as an absolute \textit{beyond} for cognition,”\textsuperscript{126} outside its own \textit{Begriffsgeschichte} or conceptual history, is thus something other to dialectical immanence and unverifiable through it confined to these terms. It is this presupposition of a beyond that inspires Hegel to describe the Kantian structure as betraying a dualism:

On one side there is the Ego, with its productive imagination or rather with its synthetic unity which, taken thus in isolation, is formal unity of the manifold. But next to it there is an infinity of sensations… a formal idealism which in this way sets an absolute Ego-point and its intellect on one side, and an absolute manifold, or sensation, on the other side, is a dualism.\textsuperscript{127}

In contrast to this, Hegel never introduces this duality of heterogeneous spheres and thus does not need to suggest that we try to \textit{find a way} to synthesize, to find the necessary, external conditions that would make such synthesis possible. He proposes that there is another option available.

\textsuperscript{123} Immanuel Kant, \textit{Critique of Pure Reason}, A97.
\textsuperscript{125} Immanuel Kant, \textit{Critique of Pure Reason}, A109.
\textsuperscript{126} G. W. F. Hegel, \textit{Science of Logic}, 785.
Sublation, instead, is the internal product of following logic’s steps. Hegel *comes to* sublation, rather than having to look for it because he needs it to unify things that are already there (“as a connection of determinations already *externally* there”\(^\text{128}\)). Whereas, Hegel refers to the Kantian synthesis as a “neutral unity,” a “unity of things that are originally separate and only externally so conjoined,”\(^\text{129}\) (a configuration that leads to the further problem of accounting for the precise way in which this conjoining is possible), sublation, however, is not neutral in this sense of being externality unaffected by the “synthesized” terms themselves.

b) *Mere Negation, Mere Disunity*

Just as Hegel notes the danger of equating sublation with *mere* unity, accepting that it does signify a certain uniting but is not exhausted by representation, he also states that reducing sublation to the negativity of *mere* disunity is equally erroneous. To be sure, there is, as we have just explained, an extremely important sense of opposition that is retained in the term *Aufhebung*, however the necessity of this negativity cannot stand in as a sufficient condition for sublation. That is, that “the meaning of [sublation] is to be clearly grasped and especially distinguished from *nothing*…what is sublated is not thereby reduced to nothing,”\(^\text{130}\) seems for the most part to have been grasped. Of course, in “Remark 3: The Isolating of these Abstractions,” Hegel points out the mistake one might make in treating sublation as merely nothing or nothing-for-becoming, ceasing-to-be. And to overturn such a temptation he emphasizes unity to challenge mere disunity,


just as he had emphasized disunity to challenge mere unity in “Remark 2.” The opposition between being and nothing is a shared one, and thus their subsistence in becoming is relative and not entirely independent. \(^{131}\) On this front he accuses Friedrich Heinrich Jacobi of remaining “fixed in the abstractions in order to maintain the impossibility of the synthesis.”\(^{132}\) But this critique of Jacobi is admittedly not based on Jacobi mistaking sublation for an outright rejection of what we have here called its holding-together side. Rather, it is targeting Jacobi for denying the possibility of sublation having a holding-together side at all.

This mistake could come from privileging a particular sense in which the everyday, non-technical usage of the term *Aufhebung* seems to imply, as in the case of *Aufhebung der Regulierung, Aufhebung der Zwangsbevirtschaftung, Aufhebung einschränkender Bestimmungen, Aufhebung von Beschränkungen*, etc., each common phrases that roughly translate to the “abolishment of restrictions/regulations.” And despite its uncommonness in ordinary English, “sublation” might also suffer from this initial misleading overemphasis on negativity. We see evidence of this in a preliminary note on translating the *Encyclopaedia Logic*, where W.A. Suchting suggests that,

\[\text{[A]ccording to the OED, the term first appears in the English about the mid-sixteenth century, with the meaning ‘remove,’ including removing by destroying. It appears again in the nineteenth-century logic books (as early as 1838) where it means ‘deny’, ‘contradict.’ Stirling simply imposed on it the extra semantic}\]

dimension of ‘include,’ ‘preserve,’ for the sole purpose of having an English word
with a meaning to match the dual meaning of aufheben.\textsuperscript{133}

Thus, according to Suchting, Stirling needed to mediate the exclusive negativity that the
term divorced from its dialectical context might on its own suggest.

A.V. Miller occasionally succumbs to this mistake of privileging the common
negativity where the subtler, technical usage is more suitable. To pick an example, in his
translation of the \textit{Phenomenology of Spirit}, Miller translates a note on our predicament
within the ethical order as “ethical action contains the moment of crime, because it does
not do away with [\textit{nicht aufhebt}] the \textit{natural} allocation…[and] remains within the sphere
of natural immediacy.”\textsuperscript{134} The more appropriate translation for describing the difficulty of
reorienting our perspective beyond this relatively abstract initial attachment would be, as
H.S. Harris has noted, “did not sublate” rather than “do away with.”\textsuperscript{135} And then, to mark
one more similar instance, Miller translates a claim about the existence of the transition
within the moral view of the world where the initial assumption of a disharmony between
morality and happiness is displaced, as the operation of “nullification.”\textsuperscript{136} In place of this
particular logical operation, Harris suggests sublation or its semantic equivalent as the
more fitting substitution.\textsuperscript{137} And there are numerous other places in Miller’s translation of
the \textit{Phenomenology} where sublation is substituted for “negation,” “nullification,”

\textsuperscript{133} W.A. Suchting, “Translating Hegel’s \textit{Logic:} Some Minority Comments on Terminology,” G. W. F.
Hegel, \textit{The Encyclopaedia Logic}, xxxv. Suchting appears to be either mistaken or simply referring to the
first time the English term was applied to matters outside of its technical scientific usage, which the OED
locates in William Painter’s \textit{Palace of Pleasure}, vi. f. 43, 1567. The OED traces its specific meaning in
medicinal chemistry at least as far back as Thomas Elyot’s \textit{Castell of Helthe}, IV. ix. f. 82, 1537. Stirling’s
decision to apply it to metaphysics and employ it as a translation for Hegelian \textit{Aufhebung} comes much
later, in 1865, in \textit{The Secret of Hegel}.

\textsuperscript{134} G. W. F. Hegel, \textit{Phenomenology of Spirit}, §468.

\textsuperscript{135} H.S. Harris, “Corrections and Revisions made to the A.V. Miller translation of Hegel’s ‘Phenomenology
http://pi.library.yorku.ca/dspace/handle/10315/2541 (1 December 2012).

\textsuperscript{136} G. W. F. Hegel, \textit{Phenomenology of Spirit}, §625. The untranslated term Hegel uses here is “aufgehoben.”

\textsuperscript{137} H.S. Harris, “Corrections and Revisions,” 33.
“suppression,” etc. Such errors can be expected in the fallible process of translation and have here been highlighted not to nitpick, but to suggest that there is a risk that the negativity of the term’s everyday usage can creep in, take hold, and occasionally influence the direction of its interpretation. Perhaps such usage is occasionally not even guilty of error as much as open to equivocation. One might be tempted to call sublation “negation” in the same way as one might call becoming “ceasing-to-be.” Were it reversed, it would stand closer to the truth: negation expressing a mode of sublation. In such cases a note of clarification is required, for we must insist that the term when taken on its own still addresses the concept as a whole. It is, in any case, obvious from the context in which Hegel uses Aufhebung to describe the concept itself, inclusive of its particular modes, that he intends to exclude from its general definition all lopsidedness, which also includes the favouring of negativity.

c) Loftiness, Overcoming, Supersession

Aside from Hegel’s distancing of sublation from the “horizontal” one-sidedness of mere unity or mere opposition, sublation is, lastly, positioned against any premature “verticality” that would leave the material of its constitution forgotten. In other words, sublation is not some stable platform where, upon arriving, one throws away the conceptual ladder’s steps. It does not push this away, for it is the ladder itself. This puts out of service the definition of sublation as “loftiness” or straightforward “overcoming” or A.V. Miller’s preferred “supersession,” all suggesting some third higher term that
transcends the struggle below, raised up above and outside of the antinomy. Of course, with the verb *Heben* (in English, “to lift”) contained in *Aufheben*, this mistake is understandable. Yet the risk of conceptual amnesia, of forgetting the Logic’s own *Begriffsgeschichte*, is what motivates Hegel to distinguish *Aufhebung* from mere *Heben* and reject terms that stress this loftiness, such as the Latin term *tollere*. As he writes, “The Latin *tollere* (which has become famous through the Ciceronian pun: *tollendum est Octavium*) does not go so far; its affirmative determination signifies only a lifting up.”

Supersession and overcoming also both carry connotations of setting aside what has come before it, displacing or replacing the terms rather than embodying the process of taking these terms to their end. When used in exclusivity of its role to preserve, to hold its condition precedents in place, lost is the necessary role of sublation to have developed out of these terms and to have performed a dialectical positing of them in their truth. Becoming is hence not the supersession of being and nothing, but the logical means of their expression.

It is with this being said that we must contrast our position to the inflection Michael Inwood ascribes to the term, when he claims that “despite Hegel’s silence on the matter, it is reasonable to see… ‘elevation’ as an ingredient in its [sublation’s] Hegelian meaning” because sublation is “the truth of the items sublated.” Inwood is correct that sublation is the truth of its preceding terms, but the manner in which he describes the

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138 Take the following from the “Lordship and Bondage” section of the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, one of many possible examples of Miller’s preference for “supersession,” where another translation of *Aufhebung* might have been clearer: “[Self-Consciousness] must supersede this otherness of itself. This is the supersession of the first ambiguity, and is therefore itself a second ambiguity. First, it must proceed to supersede the other independent being in order thereby to become certain of itself as the essential being; secondly, in doing it proceeds to supersede its own self, for this other is itself.” G. W. F. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, §180.


term as a “kick upstairs,” stressing its break from what came before it, risks misrepresenting the Hegelian position, if exaggerated. Surely sublation is an advance, so to speak, in the sense of not being trapped in previous moments, but it is equally not a complete departure or elevation above these moments. As Jeanne Schroeder puts it, “[T]he earlier concept is at one moment always already the subsequent concept, but simultaneously the very existence of the latter concept requires that the earlier concept is not yet the later concept.”\textsuperscript{141} The constitutive terms conditioned by the movement have “only lost [their] immediacy but [they are] not on that account annihilated.”\textsuperscript{142} It is clear that, for Hegel, “elevation” is one-sided insofar as it signifies “only a lifting up.”

Sublation is neither a return to mere unity nor a simple overcoming of opposition. Against complete overcoming, Hegel tells us that “the beginning,” the concept of being and then of pure nothing, “is the foundation which is present and preserved throughout the entire subsequent development, remaining completely immanent in its further determinations.”\textsuperscript{143}

Of course, each of these definitions carries an undeniable element of truth, each emphasizing a certain characteristic that sublation does, in fact, embody. It is this truth that allows Hegel to occasionally use these terms, albeit in a qualified sense, to stand in for sublation. The point of this exercise, however, has been to demonstrate the insufficiency of taking any of these terms as sufficient, treating them \textit{alone} as representative of the entirety of sublation’s character.

\textsuperscript{142} G. W. F. Hegel, \textit{Science of Logic}, 107.
2.2 THE FORM OF SUBLATION

What, then, is sublation, if it is not mere unity, mere disunity, or the complete overcoming of its developmental past? From describing those definitions that fall short of encompassing its intended multipolarity, already we have a fairly clear indication of what we are here taking sublation to represent. Yet, there is still more we can say to this end of clarity. We characterize sublation as a conjunctive-disjunctive concept and this will further situate its real location in the place of betweenness. These further determinations are useful insofar as they provide us with a measure against which we can compare philosophical endorsements or critiques of Hegelian sublation and dialectical philosophy more generally.

a) Either And

When analyzing becoming’s expressions, coming-to-be and ceasing-to-be, we saw that it was not sufficiently precise to describe becoming as simply the movement between indeterminate being and indeterminate nothing. If Hegel demonstrates the logic as progressively eschewing any one-sidedness, the manner in which he shows this to unfold is not via some obvious reconciliation between being and nothing. Instead, it is through a more reflective being-nothing and being/nothing, or the movement between the identity of being and nothing and the separation that splits the terms into being or nothing. As Thomas J. Bole III describes it, the sublation that is becoming reflects “both
the indistinguishability and the intended distinction of being and nothing.”¹⁴⁴ That is, it
does not mean simply the and of the unity and synthesis or the exclusive or of
oppositional negativity and disunity that we dispelled above, but both simultaneously:
either and. And insofar as sublation simultaneously functions as the conceptual
continuity of identity and difference and the conceptual dislocation of identity and
difference, we can determine this concept as one that is both conjunctive and disjunctive.

Yet what is this “And-Or” if not “that befuddling, nameless thing, that Janus-faced verbal monstrosity, neither word nor phrase, the child of a brain of someone too lazy or too dull to know what he did mean,”¹⁴⁵ as Wisconsin Supreme Court Justice
Chester Fowler so polemically described the term in 1935? Is this concept not a
contradictory one? To be sure, there does here arise expressly the shape of what will later
be discerned as a certain contradiction, but not at all for lack of rigour. A thorough study
of the problem of contradiction as it arises throughout Hegel’s work would take us
outside our chief focus, but insofar as we are proposing sublation be understood as
holding two opposite, conflicting directions simultaneously, we must consider some of
what he says on the issue.

Hegel defines contradiction generally as the holding at once of opposites, which
simultaneously, in a “here,” “at once is and is not.”¹⁴⁶ Later, when the concept is
explicitly treated as a proper concept on its own, Hegel writes that it denotes a
determination that also “contains the opposite determination, and is self-subsistent in

¹⁴⁴ Thomas J. Bole, III, “The Cogency of the Logic’s Argumentation,” Hegel Reconsidered: Beyond
Metaphysics and the Authoritarian State, eds. H. Tristam Engelhardt Jr. and Terry Pinkard (New York:
Springer, 1994), 111.
virtue of this inclusion.”¹⁴⁷ In other words, what makes a concept a contradiction and not a mere “difference” or alteration between “likeness” and “unlikeness,” is the “negative unity” of two terms held within the contradiction, the simultaneous inability to isolate each term’s co-implication in its other.¹⁴⁸ There are two ways in which such a contradiction can be thought: subjective contradiction and objective contradiction. Subjective contradiction, the contradiction of a thought, is less controversial insofar as one can consider a statement simply wrong or limited from seeing what is true of the concept or object in itself if it is contradictory. Such is the case in the Kantian antinomies, characterized as the unavoidable, subjective, epistemic limitations to seeing the real as it really is. Yet the contradictions that we are more interested in are the objective contradictions, those said to be in the concepts that emerge from being; or, in non-dualistic, Hegelian terms, the antinomies of the real. It is Hegel’s contention that contradiction is not simply an erroneous, subjective occurrence, but is an essential part of reality, in every objective, “concrete thing, every Notion itself.”¹⁴⁹ Contradiction is not an epistemic limitation to the ontological real, not something merely in an external reflection but in themselves…not to be taken merely as an abnormality which occurs here and there, but is the negative in its essential determination, the principle of all self-movement, which consists in nothing else than an exhibition of it.¹⁵⁰

¹⁴⁹ G. W. F. Hegel, Science of Logic, 442.
¹⁵⁰ G. W. F. Hegel, Science of Logic, 440; Quotation partially adapted to Inwood’s translation in Inwood, Hegel, 449.
That is, assuming that Hegel’s starting-point is properly scientific and that he has not made unjustified assumptions or added any extraneous elements into this logic, such contradiction must be treated as inherent within the ontological fabric of being itself.

The concept of becoming as sublation, a concept that we are describing as an “and” and as not an “and” (namely, an “or”) and one that is equally an “or” and is not an “or” (namely, an “and”), is a concept whose nature is itself contradictory. Yet instead of resolving it for good, dialectical thinking “holds fast [to this] contradiction, and in it, its own self.”\(^{151}\) If the contradiction inherent in the concept of sublation cannot be something introduced from the outside, whereupon one might challenge as problematic this addition for an accurate account of reality, then this particular sort of contradiction must be structurally constitutive of determinate reality itself. As Charles Taylor writes, we are not talking about a simple contradiction within the meaning of an expression, such as we have with ‘round squares’, for instance. Rather we are concerned with a contradiction which shows up when we use the concept as a categorical one, that is, as a concept which applies to reality in general…Reality is in contradiction…we are thus not dealing with a dialectic of illusion where we cut through false conceptions which are justly consigned to oblivious once we arrive at the truth; but rather with a dialectic of reality…The Logic shows a necessary conceptual structure of reality based on contradiction. It shows that contradiction belongs to the very nature of our categories.\(^{152}\)

Thus the presence of contradiction need not lead us to conclude that what has led us to this point must be trivial or false. Exactly the opposite is true, in fact. The contradictory


identity of the *Aufhebung* emerges requisitely, and, therefore, its ostensible ambiguity “cannot be regarded as an accident nor yet as a reason to reproach language as if it were a source of confusion.”153 That such seems to be an impediment to a harmonious reality should, rather, be understood as the expression of the resolutely non-harmonious logical real itself.

Taylor is also quite right when he attributes to Hegel the idea that “[d]ialectical movement is based…on contradiction…. Contradiction is the motor of things. And it touches everything, so that everything is swept along in perpetual becoming.”154 And inasmuch as sublation is the motor of all things dialectical and the truth of becoming, the movement between this *and* and this *or*, we can see how the contradiction between these two procedures drives reality, on Hegel’s account. Yet, agreeing with Taylor that the contradiction is constitutive of the speculative rationality offered through becoming itself, caution is nevertheless warranted before jumping to accept his interpretation that each [category] is necessarily related to another which *resolves* the contradiction at its level… and that this contradiction can only be *resolved* (or, in fact, *reconciled*) by seeing [the contradiction of our categorical concepts] as linked in a rational structure.155

As *and* and *or*, it is clear that Hegel does not intend for this contradiction a consignment to the “‘either-or’ of mere understanding.”156 Yet our hesitancy with Taylor’s description is, of course, dependent on how strongly one is to read its implication of harmony here;

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the crucial point being that sublation, as our analysis of synthesis would suggest, admits to no complete reconciliation, after all.

Our critic might respond: immediately following the section in the Essence chapter, where Hegel most clearly explicates contradiction, we move on to the concept of ground. Do we not have an indication here that Hegel demonstrates the ceasing of contradiction, that he shows how contradiction is itself mediated in a way that subdues its original tension? In fact, no, for if it at first seems that the ground is the smoothing over of the contradiction, ground’s very emergence, as the self-erasure of the very terms of contradiction (the unity of positivity and negativity and the self-subsistence of their opposition), implies as well the self-erasure of its own autonomous sufficiency. That is, ground, as Hegel shows through an investigation into its different expressions, must ground that which is (phenomena that is grounded), as well as be that which is grounded by that which is.157 Thus, there is a sense in which ground, in its positing of what it is in itself, must posit what it is not. And here we have contradiction again redoubled at the level of ground. This is what Hegel means in his review of this transition:

contradiction is not all there is to it… contradiction sublates itself by its own doing. Sublated contradiction [ground], however, is not abstract identity, for that is itself only one side…the proximate result of opposition posited as contradiction is the ground, which contains within itself both identity and distinction as sublated.158

Ground is not a smoothed over identity after the tension of contradiction proper, but is itself also contradictory, holding within itself identity and distinction, but not as a simple

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identity of identity and distinction. So, “in order to counter this misunderstanding, we can also say that ground is not only the unity but equally the distinction of identity and distinction too,” the result of which is that “Ground, which we encountered first as the sublation of contradiction, therefore makes its appearance as a new contradiction.”  

That is, as an instance of sublation, it holds an identity and distinction of identity and distinction, “the positive, [that which is] identical with itself…and the negative…distinction as such…the inward distinction of distinction itself.”

The tension between sublation as a holding-together and a holding-apart is already part of the identity of sublation, its non-unified resolution, if you like. Said otherwise, this “‘contradiction’ is not opposed to identity, but is its very core,” the core of becoming—an identity that refuses pure coincidence, that admits distinction. As Catherine Malabou has suggested, this redoubling of the refusal to entirely coincide within the very definition of sublation has gone underemphasized or entirely unnoticed in many of the most significant works on Hegel and dialectical logic:

Every translator tries to convey the twofold sense of aufheben: to suppress and to preserve. But—and this in our opinion is the most important question—why has no translator or interpreter of Hegel dreamt of applying to the terms aufheben and Aufhebung the very meanings for which they stand? The efficacy of the dialectical

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159 G. W. F. Hegel, The Encyclopaedia Logic, §121A1; emphasis added.
161 Slavoj Žižek, Less than Nothing: Hegel and the Shadow of Dialectical Materialism (New York: Verso, 2012), 629. What they have in common is their difference. Both being and nothing assert themselves against their difference, but becoming takes up the denial common to both. The process of securing a self-identity through the denial of difference undermines self-identity insofar as it is shared in common. Indeed, “posing the distinction ‘as such’ already is the looked for reconciliation.” Slavoj Žižek, The Parallax View, 21. Opposition is thus a type of reconciliation, what leads Žižek to consider the negation of negation in terms of a “parallax view,” the name of a form able to hold opposites together in their opposition: “This is what the negation of negation is: the shift of perspective which turns failure into success.” Slavoj Žižek, The Parallax View, 27.
logic assumes the Aufhebung must itself be susceptible to a dual suppression-and-preservation; it must itself be susceptible to transformation. The Aufhebung evolves, as a term, within the same process[,] which it regulates and measures. If one considers this process as a logical movement for which Hegel has already fixed and determined the direction, then there is no way to escape from the vicious circle. Indeed, if ‘sublation’ is always the sublation of something other than itself, then it would remain always something relative: then we would have to admit that absolute knowledge is an invention by force which arbitrarily suspends the bad infinity of relation. In actual fact, and in the entire course of spirit’s development, there is no perfect identity between preservation and suppression; they are neither unchangeable nor undifferentiated. What must be demonstrated is the fact that Hegel does indeed restore the essential dialectical performativity of the aufheben and Aufhebung, that he in effect sublates Aufhebung into Aufhebung. The possibility of a new reading of Absolute Knowledge emerges from this truly plastic operation.\textsuperscript{162}

This definition of a self-sublating or, shall we say, internally split Aufhebung, is the crux of our project. We will later have more to say about what Malabou alludes to here, the precise manner in which the absolute relates to the Aufhebung. But it has been the aim of this particular section to stress the role of differentiation at the heart—not just of mere understanding (as is uncontroversial) but—of the Aufhebung itself, thusly rejecting any surreptitious re-identification of sublation with one of its sides: identity, and.

b) Betweenness

\textsuperscript{162} Catherine Malabou, \textit{The Future of Hegel}, 144-5; emphasis added.
Identifying this internal split of sublation situates the place of Aufhebung itself in the position of betweenness. More specifically, the Aufhebung embodies the betweenness of dialectical identity between preservation and suppression (and) and the dialectical excess of differentiation between preservation and suppression (or). One might contest that, like synthesis, betweenness (the between, das Zwischen) itself has an overly conjunctive resonance. However, this would miss the manner in which Hegel interprets the phrase. In the Logic, for instance, he locates the between as the position of transition, not with a stabilized identity: “one tends to think of the two terms, from one of which transition is made to the other, as at rest, apart from each other, the transition taking place between them.” Transformation happens at this juncture, between the two; a new form is created through this dual pull between holding-together and holding-apart. And one can talk of finding a similarity between or distinguishing between, but in either case betweenness is not left neutral or unaffected by the sense called to attention. And it has no sense without its components, which thereby always makes betweenness a betweenness of. This is the sense in which we should understand references to the “sublation of,” say, being and nothing; namely, in a sense completely otherwise than a simple overcoming, a clean break or an escape from…. And the term can as easily be invoked to represent that betweenness between the difference-between and the similarity-between, as we are proposing here. Indeed, this polyvocality is contained in the term itself, zwischen, which means both to cut into two different parts [zwei-scheren] as well as a border [from the Dutch, zwet], which links two sides as that shared in common.

Complete separation and final reconciliation are avoided in the adoption of such a

\[163^\text{G. W. F. Hegel, Science of Logic, 93.}\]
translation. If we were to suppose the conjunctive sense of betweenness, it would only pertain inasmuch as it is treated as the specific conjunction of a gapped relation, the kernel of oppositional excess in all togetherness, with each Aufhebung being an Aufhebung between these relational expressions.

In the Logic, betweenness can be found most explicitly later in the first book in the section on the limit, “in so far as something in its limit both is and is not.” That is, a limit is that (objective or subjective) betweenness which divides an outside from an inside, but what, in itself, also is shared between the two. A limit can be neither exclusively inside, nor exclusively outside, and is both simultaneously. Yet, despite the charge of ambiguity that could accompany such a concept, it is precisely thanks to this double role that it can determine exactly either side as what it is in itself—which is, more accurately, what it is itself through another. An inside is not an inside without an outside. The inside is demarcated by the line that divides it from what it is not, meaning that the inside is not what it is without what it is without. Being cannot be understood in its fullest sense without tracking the way in which it necessitates the emergence of nothing. The conceptual determination of this quest for self-identity and its discovery of it in something that is truly other to itself is the product of sublation, the logical embodiment of the double-directionality of betweenness. The limit-between accomplishes such a mediation without its sides disappearing, without collapsing both sides into one another but, rather, precisely by identifying two sides.

It is with this specific idea in mind that Hegel can say that “Limit is the middle between the two of them in which they cease…The limit as the non-being of each is the

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other of both...Limit is, however, *equally* their common distinguishedness, their unity and distinguishedness.\(^{165}\) Hegel even introduces another term, limitation (*Schranke*), to determine a more reflective level of the limit, the limit between the limit(s) (*Grenze*); that is, Hegel moves from limit as the boundary between two things or concepts to limitation as the limit between limit-as-distinguishing and limit-as-unifying.\(^{166}\) To use our example, limitation would be the internalization of the role of the limit to make an inside and an outside continuous, as well as the role of a limit to make an inside and an outside discontinuous. We can clearly hear in this definition of a limitation-between the echo of Hegel’s earlier definition of sublation as “a union which can only be stated as an unrest of incompatibles, as a movement. The commonest injustice done to a speculative content is to make it one-sided, that is, to give prominence only to one of the propositions into which it can be resolved.”\(^{167}\)

There hardly exists a commentator that does not refer to sublation (exclusively) as the third term. Indeed, while Hegel certainly does not subscribe to the basic thesis-antithesis-synthesis framework, much of the *Logic* is organized in such a way that makes it understandable were one to identify certain tripartite micro- and macrostructures throughout. Yet so frequently has Hegel been read as the philosopher who constantly counts to (and only to) three that it has become something of an unexamined truism that this is the rule of dialectics itself (*per* Chalybäus). But how can this third account for sublation as a betweenness? If it is not already clear by now, in defining becoming as a restlessness that excludes all privileging of unity over disunity, resolution over tension, coming-to-be over ceasing-to-be, it is our contention that sublation is only a third insofar


\(^{166}\) G. W. F. Hegel, *Science of Logic*, 131-133.

as this third is split. In other words, sublation, as a conjunctive-disjunctive betweenness is both 3A and 3B, or, if we like, a third and a fourth. Sublation is positioned (as the) between (of) the third and the fourth. With respect to becoming, the third and the fourth represent becoming’s two expressions of the relation between being and nothing, the one and the two that precede becoming.

c) A Fourth

So, what is this fourth? In the terms of the well-worn Chalybäusian pattern, if the “thesis” is the first and the “antithesis” the second, then “synthesis” is the third and this third is typically understood as combinatory, as holding A and B under a new higher position, C, that unites and resolves the struggle between the two contraries (A or B).168 Insofar as sublation is indeed combinatory and combines something not itself present at the level of the first “thesis,” say, pure being, its function as a negation of negation or “double negation[,] does not bring us back to some primordial positivity,”169 back to being. Yet, if there is a more positive, rather than negative, sense in the holding-togetherness of becoming, and the third can be understood as the first and second seen through the perspective of the first, then the fourth would be the remainder, at the level of becoming, of the negative holding-apartness, the first and second understood through the perspective of the second. In a sense, then, the third is the redoubling of the first at the level of sublation and the fourth is the redoubling of the second at the level of sublation,

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168 See Michael Forster’s position below as an example of this simply combinatory interpretation of sublation.
169 Slavoj Žižek, Less than Nothing, 3. See also, Slavoj Žižek, For They Know Not What They Do: Enjoyment as a Political Factor (New York: Verso, 2008), 180-1.
but because these perspectives were wholly unavailable at the moment of the first or the second, of being or nothing, we cannot quite speak of any “bringing back to” or “return to” either term. Sublation itself, such as it is found in becoming, is thus discernable as a quadruple form, both this third—coming-to-be, and—as well as a fourth—ceasing-to-be, or.

This form remains unnoticed or less than explicit in many of even the most careful commentators.¹⁷⁰ For example, David Gray Carlson reads these terms through the lens of their Parmenidean/Heraclitean vitality, claiming, “From the beginning, then, Hegel’s logic is a play between (a) stasis, (b) movement, and, in addition, (c) the unity of stasis and movement. Becoming is the first name of that unity.”¹⁷¹ But does this conclusion of unity go far enough in demonstrating the “simple rest as well as bacchanalian revel” that Hyppolite correctly highlights as “the very duality constitutive of the dialectic” and thus, we might add, of Aufhebung?¹⁷² Nearer to this characterization would be the addition that also at play is (d) the disunity of stasis and movement. H.S. Harris makes this explicit without overemphasizing (c) at the expense of (d) when he correctly identifies that

their unity is thus a perpetual oscillation, a perpetual timeless activity or discursus, which requires the self-identity of each, their mutual opposition and their mutual identity, all at once. It is the dialectical movement per se, in a word,

Becoming…. Hence, it is no static, blank self-identity but an eternal restlessness

¹⁷⁰ Hegel was quite cognizant of this quadruple form. While it is already present at the level of becoming, as we are suggesting, Hegel does, in fact, explicitly name it as such at the end of end of the Logic. It will, however, be more appropriate for our discussion to wait until Chapter Five to deal with the significance of these particular passages, the context in which they emerge, and the manner in which they contribute to a theory of the Absolute.
¹⁷¹ David Gray Carlson, A Commentary to Hegel’s Science of Logic, 16.
¹⁷² Jean Hyppolite, Logic and Existence, 61.
or oscillation….The preservation of the difference in the identity is of paramount importance. If it is neglected, the identity is simply a reversion to the original thesis.\footnote{Errol E. Harris, An Interpretation of the Logic of Hegel (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1983) 95; emphasis added.}

Yet from Michael Forster we find in the following passage another instance admitting the hegemony of the uniting third in its blank self-identity:

Hegel seeks to show that upon conceptual analysis, category A proves to contain a contrary category, B, and conversely that category B proves to contain category A, thus showing both categories to be self-contradictory. He then seeks to show that this negative result has a positive outcome, a new category, C…. This new category unites—as Hegel puts it—the preceding categories A and B…it renders them no longer contraries.\footnote{Michael Forster, “Hegel’s Dialectical Method,” Cambridge Companion to Hegel, ed. Frederick C. Beiser, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 132-3.}

Here again we have a straightforwardly triadic description of dialectics and the reinstatement of a resolving positivity through the one-sided overcoming of negativity. In subtler terms, Houlgate comes close to claiming the same when he suggests that in sublation “distinction is undermined.” Yet when he continues, he adds a necessary qualification to this collapse, observing that “[i]n the analysis of being, the operations of understanding-as-distinguishing and dialectical reason…actually coincide.”\footnote{Stephen Houlgate, The Opening of Hegel’s Logic, 65.} For if this were truly a coinciding of distinguishing and coinciding would the difference of understanding not in some way be allowed to remain at the level of Aufhebung as \textit{distinguishing}? And in this persistence do we not once again see the threads of coincidence coming apart at the seams, thereby disrupting the exclusivity of the third and
demonstrating this coincidence to be not, in fact, a complete coincidence? True mediation means as well its disruption, or the mediation of the mediated and immediate. As Michael Rosen has claimed, “immediacy itself is no more illusory than its mediation. Hegel’s point is that mediation and immediacy go together.” Likewise, and as a result of this truth, we are suggesting that sublation-as-opposition (opposition of what were previously understood to be two immediates) is no less necessary than sublation-as-unification.

As we noted earlier, the movement of dialectics is performed through the logic of becoming, “the principle of all change, all movement, all activity in the actual world,” and the mobility of becoming is motivated rather than overturned by the negativity of this fourth, the or. Hegel proposes that

through this movement the path by which the Notion of knowledge is reached becomes likewise a necessary and complete process of becoming…this pathway…will encompass the entire sphere of secular consciousness in its necessary development.

The motor responsible for movement through this path is becoming as the process of philosophical thought. And this becoming motivates the entirety of logical activity. With sublation being the motor of dialectical philosophy, this fourth, the often-underemphasized second aspect of the sublation’s “thirdness,” is positioned as the key concept of conceptual transformation.

Highlighting this fourth, functioning in as crucial a manner as this, as the remainder of oppositional negativity at a more reflexive level, we are in a good position to understand the following claim from the Phenomenology that forges a connection with

177 G. W. F. Hegel, The Encyclopaedia Logic, §81A.
178 G. W. F. Hegel, Phenomenology of Spirit, §34.
the earlier opposition of the understanding: “Thus the understanding, too, is a becoming, and as this becoming it is rationality.” At the level of becoming we have both the dialectical rationality of sublation as combinatory, and the excessive oppositional “rationality” that dialectically accompanies this dialectic. And we find further support for this dialectical diversity at the level of sublation’s determination in the latter part of the following quotation from the *Encyclopaedia Logic*:

> [F]or the understanding, the proposition: ‘*Being and nothing is the same,*’ appears to be such a paradoxical statement… being and nothing are the antithesis in all its *immediacy*, i.e., without the prior positing of any determination in one of the two which would contain its relation to the other. But as was shown…they do contain this determination; i.e., the one that is precisely the same in both….But correct as it is to affirm the unity of being and nothing, it is *equally* correct to say that *they are absolutely diverse too* – that the one is not what the other is.  

It is clearly true that an “underlying problem, for Hegel, is that the understanding takes the very categories of reflection—identity and difference—as one-sided abstractions put into opposition to the neglect of their complementarity.” But true as this is, it is our contention here that it is equally true that many *readers of Hegel* take the Hegelian category of *Aufhebung*—as identity through difference—as the victory of complementarity to the neglect of *Verstand*’s persistence as abstract negativity at the level of the *Aufhebung* itself. To summarize, perhaps it is accurate to say, as Carlson does, that “Dialectical Reason embarrasses the Understanding by recalling the history of

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the concept…remember[ing] that the supposedly immediate concept was mediated after all.”¹⁸² But in this recollection, in this repeated reading of its conceptual history, it not only remembers that it was, in fact, mediated, that there were two terms which can only be situated (at the level of determinacy) in relation to the other, but it also remembers that it had also thought this relation in its separateness and that through this memory its separateness is still kept alive. The embarrassment of Verstand is thus a constitutive embarrassment that cannot be forgotten, dismissed, or merely overcome, but one that must in some sense be embraced for what it has taught and continues to teach. And it is this exercise of “tarrying with the negative,” that Hegel assigns to the nature of philosophy itself in the preface of his Phenomenology.¹⁸³

2.3 DETERMINATE BEING

We have now described the genesis and function of becoming and have arrived at and described the concept of our examination, Aufhebung. We are thus equipped with the determination necessary to respond to a couple of Hegel’s more significant critics who target this concept in particular as a means of challenging the philosophical system he proposes. And we will undertake this in the next chapter. But before moving to the comparative section of our study, let us first say something about “determinate being,” the section that immediately follows the section on becoming.

Addressing determinate being is important for our project of defending the picture of sublation just offered, as one could presumably suggest that what this subsequent

¹⁸³ G. W. F. Hegel, Phenomenology of Spirit, §32.
concept represents is nothing less than the undoing of the persistence of the negativity that we tried to demonstrate at the level of sublation, the complete stabilization of the negative tension that existed between becoming’s coming-to-be and ceasing-to-be.

According to this rebuttal, determinate being would emerge as a separate category, the consequence of privileging one of becoming’s modes, coming-to-be. That is, becoming, when understood only in the sense of coming-to-be and apart from ceasing-to-be becomes determinate being. We have argued that to interpret becoming as exhausted by one of its particular determinations is a mistake. Nevertheless, this interpretation would suggest that determinate being is the negation of the negative movement of negation of negation. As such, in this lopsided emphasis on holding-together, it would be contended that Hegel has proposed an end to the restlessness of sublation’s betweenness.

Cynthia Willett is one proponent of this interpretation. “The dialectic advances,” she writes, “only because Hegel implicitly chooses to privilege one of the opposed categories, in this case being, over the other category.”\(^\text{184}\) Negation, it is contested, while initially present prior to becoming as well as in ceasing-to-be, is de-emphasized as soon as we reach determinate being. Willett suggests that this lopsidedness is the consequence of a particular interpretation of Heraclitus’ contribution to the topic of becoming and a partiality for but one of the two senses he assigns to the term. On the one hand, Heraclitus considers becoming a *polemos*, warlike destruction, shot through with tension. On the other hand, one could understand becoming through the metaphor of the flowing, ceaseless continuity of a river. This latter interpretation would present becoming as *fließen*, emphasizing a process of progression.

Unlike our take, which suggests an interpretation of becoming that admits both the destructive and developmental spirit of becoming, Willett takes Hegel as unduly emphasizing this latter, supposedly Aristotelian sense of becoming as progressive continuity, fluid relationality, the togetherness of becoming.\textsuperscript{185} And interpreting \textit{Werden} as primarily coming-to-be, at the expense of its negative manifestation, ceasing-to-be, carries the consequence of proposing “\textit{Dasein as presence},”\textsuperscript{186} disregarding the lineage of becoming’s propulsion toward absence and fleetingness, as well. In other words, Hegel resolves \textit{Werden}, signifying also growing, into \textit{Dasein}, which signifies existence but also \textit{life}… [it] cannot account for natural death, or destruction, except by rendering it an accident…. [Becoming,] by initially giving priority to being over nothing, orients itself toward a return to being. This spiral upwards must forget its double pointed downwards…the shadow of the \textit{Logic}.\textsuperscript{187}

Alain Badiou traces this interpretation of Heraclitus further back than Willett’s Aristotle, to Plato, and suggests that Plato’s reversal of the discordance of Heraclitus’ becoming motivates Lacan, the self-described anti-philosopher, to side with Heraclitus \textit{against} Plato and Aristotle and emphasize death against life in his concept of “death drive.” For instance, in “Aggressivity in Psychoanalysis” Lacan writes that death drive is a vital dehiscence that is constitutive of man, and which makes unthinkable the idea of an environment that is preformed for him, a ‘negative’ libido that enables

\textsuperscript{185} For a critique of Willett’s reading of Aristotle, see George di Giovanni, “Reply to Cynthia Willett,” \textit{Essays on Hegel’s Logic}, ed. George di Giovanni (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1990), 93-98, which contests that the ascription of this account of becoming to Aristotle is a misleading simplification.
\textsuperscript{186} Cynthia Willett, “The Shadow of Hegel’s Science of Logic,” 91.
\textsuperscript{187} Cynthia Willett, “The Shadow of Hegel’s Science of Logic,” 92; emphasis added.
the Heraclitean notion of Discord, which the Ephesian believed to be prior to harmony, to shine once more.\textsuperscript{188}

On this basis, Badiou produces the following assessment:

In Lacan's work, the negative libido is constantly connected to Heraclitus. In short, the connections between love, hate, truth and knowledge were established by Empedocles and then radicalized by Heraclitus, the originary thinker of discord, of non-relation…Plato could be said to have lost sight of this line of argument, since he removed the possibility of identifying difference within the identity of the Idea. We could say that the Pre-Socratics differentiate identity, while Plato identifies difference. This is perhaps the source of Lacan’s preference for Heraclitus…what Heraclitus allows us to think—and what Plato, on the contrary, prohibits—is the death drive.\textsuperscript{189}

But if Lacan’s Plato or Willett’s Aristotle (or, perhaps most accurately, Parmenides) reduces death’s difference to the supremacy of a living identity, and Lacan and Willett’s Heraclitus instead finds difference at the root of identity, in a death drive that serves as the constitutive condition of life, then would Hegel not be the culmination of both Heraclitus and Parmenides, \textit{splitting the difference} (i.e., redoubling the negativity) between both of them? Inasmuch as we can say that Hegel identifies a stabilized identity


\textsuperscript{189} Alain Badiou, “Lacan and the Pre-Socratics,” \textit{Lacan.com}. http://www.lacan.com/badpre.htm (1 December 2012). It should be mentioned, however, that \textit{The Sophist} and \textit{The Statesman} could be seen to problematize Badiou’s reading of Plato’s distinction between being and difference a bit, especially in the sections where Plato claims that being is said to be itself by itself (\textit{auto kath hauto}) as well as relative to others (\textit{pros alla}) and, likewise, that difference exists in being – where he writes that “Change is, because it partakes in being,” for example. Plato, \textit{The Sophist} in \textit{Plato in Twelve Volumes, Vol. 12}, trans. Harold N. Fowler (Cambridge, MA, Harvard University Press, 1921), 256a. See 254d as well.
through the movement of difference by emphasizing continuity as opposed to opposition in determinate being, we must simultaneously admit that this very continuity is dependent upon an opposition, the opposition to opposition. This movement of becoming is not forgotten under the term determinate being, but is expressed through it.

In fact, the hard distinction is itself dubious. We already had determinacy at the level of becoming; one definition Hegel gave to becoming was the “determinate unity in which there is both being and nothing.”\(^{190}\) Determinacy is what emerges when holding onto the mutual exclusivity of the indeterminate immediacy of pure being and pure nothing is demonstrated to be no longer logically tenable. Becoming is the determination of the differentiation of identity and the identification of difference. In other words, “Determinate Being is simply another name for Becoming,” as Carlson puts it.\(^{191}\) Indeed, determinate being is simply the name for the no-longer-indeterminate category that identifies the processes of the relation (including the relation of difference) elucidated through becoming. The “being” named in determinate being designates the truth of being and nothing in their (self-)relation (of difference) and therefore could just as equally be considered determinate nothing. The determinate identity of determinate being is, as Hegel writes, “equally to be posited in the determination of nothing, when it will be posited as a differentiated, reflected determinateness, no longer as immediate or in the form of being.”\(^{192}\)

In this way, we see that determinate being is not the undoing of becoming nor is it the consequence of exaggerating becoming’s positivity, or of settling becoming by stressing its terms’ togetherness, but is rather becoming’s ‘what’ or the what that has

become—the concrete or determinate product of this determination, what is made explicit, what has become through becoming. What was becoming has become (become determinate), but it is still becoming. What we have at this stage of determinate being is the ability to say what is (and what is not) through becoming’s sublation of what is (and is not). With respect to a stabilized identity, we can talk about an undeniable togetherness, the identity of being made possible through determination through an explication of negativity. But the means of this identity as the determination of indeterminate being means it is also determinate being. And thus the stability of its identity, of what it is, is also disrupted by the lingering conditions of its determination. As we know from Spinoza, “all determination is negation” and, following this insight, Hegel likewise locates in the negative side of determinate being “the determinate element of a determinateness.” The stability of its identity, the “-ness” of “determinateness” makes up the positive side, what it “is” through negative determination. But insofar as determinate being is defined as quality, its stability is achieved only through the identification with an unsettled multiplicity of qualitatively options, the qualitative difference between leiende Bestimmtheit and bestimmtes Sein.

These qualities or, as Hegel puts it, “accents” of the what that determinate being is said to determine are as follows: an affirmative quality, “quality, taken in the distinct character of being, is reality,” and a negative quality, “qualitative negation.” As Houlgate points out, determinate being or “Quality is thus not simply undifferentiated

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193 Hegel claims Spinoza’s line is “Omnis determination est negatio” in the Science of Logic, 113, and the Zusätze of The Encyclopaedia Logic, §91A1, but the closest Spinoza comes to expressing this sentiment is in Epistle 50, where he writes, “Figure is nothing else but determination and determination is nothing [et determination negatio est].” See The Encyclopaedia Logic, §326n15.
194 G. W. F. Hegel, Science of Logic, 111.
195 See John McTaggart and Ellis McTaggart, A Commentary on Hegel’s Logic (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1910), 21-22.
196 G. W. F. Hegel, Science of Logic, 111.
determinate being after all but is reality or negation.”197 And, of course, it is both: And-Or. Determinate being is thus not exhausted by the straightforward continuity feared by Willett, but is itself internally split between these two qualities. Neither reality or negation betray a logical bias toward pure being or pure nothing, but are instead different “qualities” of that which has emerged from the shared conceptual history of sublation. Reality taken as if apart from negativity “is to do away with all determinateness,” while negative quality taken apart from reality “is as little an ultimate for philosophy as reality.”198 Determinate being is thus not the product of forgetting the discordance of Heraclitean becoming, for just as we said about coming-to-be, reality is here clearly not to be understood as the full expression of determinate being, as if through some lopsided advance.

Is it, then, an advance at all? That is, is movement possible without a lopsided privileging? Another way of putting this is to ask the ancient question, as old as at least Zeno’s paradox of Achilles’ race with the tortoise, of whether contradiction— simultaneously insisting upon coming-to-be and ceasing-to-be, holding-together and holding-apart, qualitative reality and qualitative negation—prevents movement. On this point, Hegel’s answer is made plain: “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.”199 He writes that, while “[t]he ancient dialecticians must be granted the contradictions that they pointed out in motion…it does not follow that therefore there is no motion, but on the contrary, that motion is existent (daseiende) contradiction

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That is, contra Willett, we do not need to lopsidedly privilege the “resolved” holding-together side of becoming, lest we be stuck in the deadlock of a contradiction that would render it impossible for us to move to other concepts. That ceasing-to-be and coming-to-be have equal influence in becoming does not stop the logic from transforming itself, nor does it force us to choose a side in order to escape contradiction for the sake of conceptual movement. If one instead sees contradiction in concrete, determinate being itself, that “everything is inherently contradictory,” and hence discerns the negativity that reality itself depends upon, then contradiction ceases to be seen as a barrier to getting to the real in all its vitality, in its logical unfolding, but is rather transformed into the real in its very conceptual becoming.

That there is logical movement does not, in fact, pose a problem for dialectical contradiction. To be sure, any idea of movement said to be incompatible with dialectical contradiction would depend upon an alternative conception of reality divorced from negation, a conception that is indeterminate and empty (nothing could be said of it, contrasted to it, brought into relation with it) and thus unrealistic insofar as it fails to describe anything at all. Reality, instead, “contains the moment of the negative and is through this alone the determinate being that it is.” Along these lines, Žižek writes Zeno strives to prove the existence of self-identical, immovable Being beyond the false appearance of Movement; yet this Being is in itself empty, so the passage beyond the appearance of Movement fails; one can only describe the self-

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202 We are simply making the point that the fact of movement is not reason enough to make dialectical contradiction an illogical concept, nor is the fact of contradiction sufficient on its own to rule out the idea of logical movement, as it might first seem to one following Willett’s philosophical trajectory. We are not, however, making the further claim that movement is particularly unique in its inseparability from dialectical contradiction.
sublation of Movement, i.e., notional movement of self-suppression of movement, which is why the Heraclitic movement is the truth of Eleatic Being.  

This “Heraclitic movement” is not the reduction to being claimed by Willett, but the recognition of a destructive instability as the necessary condition for any sort of continuous fullness. The recognition of becoming’s positing of this frustration to a full, immovable resolution is what constitutes a “progression.” The logic proceeds through these “frustrations,” through the necessary defiance of the understanding. We move beyond this instability not by moving beyond it at all, as if deciding upon the side of conciliation to correct the antinomy, but by embracing it for the ground that it represents. “Something moves, not because at one movement it is here and another there, but because at one and the same moment it is here and not here, because in this ‘here’, it at once is and is not.”

And in this manner Žižek is able to find in [Hegel’s] work something [Žižek is] tempted to call a ‘downward synthesis’: after the two opposed positions, the third one, the Aufhebung of the two, is not a higher synthesis bringing together what is worth maintaining in the other two, but a kind of negative synthesis, the lowest point.

The motor of the middle term between, this Aufhebung, the And-Or, is a progression of increased complexity and determination only through the achievement of the negative,

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204 Slavoj Žižek, *Tarrying with the Negative: Kant, Hegel, and the Critique of Ideology* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1993), 120.
206 Slavoj Žižek, *Puppet and the Dwarf*, 3; Such a “synthesis” obviously has little to do with the “synthesis” dispelled by Hegel, yet it is also not meant to imply that Hegel is proposing a mere return, the return to abstract simples, to the analysis of indeterminates. Žižek’s point here is precisely that in this very “downward” movement, in the Aufhebung’s preservation of the understanding, we have the retroactive positing of opposition from the standpoint of becoming (in a misleading, crude term, “synthesis”), and that this, in itself, constitutes a move forward rather than a simple backtracking.
falling short of being able to entirely exhaust itself. Sublation’s *identification through a negation* establishes its direction, per se, as both “upward” and “downward” (i.e., not merely a simple “elevation,” to use terminology introduced earlier). Or, to put it another way, “the unity of being and nothing is not a state but a *disappearing* as well as a becoming, only the middle or the unity itself constituting the truth of the matter.”

And this middle between is equally a disunity, the disappearing that is the return of the negative in sublation, the fourth. In this way it could be, as Carlson writes, also “possible to view the entire path of Speculative Reason as a downward *collapse*.” Thus, to designate contradiction, the very means of movement, as the chief impediment to movement, recalling Zeno, would be to altogether misconstrue reality as empty and devoid of any identity (achievable through another, through negation) whatsoever. This would be to take the dance of dialectical logic in the terms of a race and reality’s two-step pivot back and forth as pointless rather than the very point itself. But “the pointlessness of contradicting oneself would surely be removed if the world itself were contradictory.”

Thus, we can agree that Willett is right to note that by privileging coming-to-be we would be undermining ceasing-to-be and, further, becoming itself. We have argued, however, that she is incorrect to attribute this problem to Hegel rather than those who read his concept of determinate being as the stabilization of becoming via a return to or privileging of the side of being and the conciliatory melding together of opposites.

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2.4 THE MOTOR OF THE LOGIC:

THE REPETITION OF AUFHEBUNG

Through a review of the movement to becoming, we described the manner in which Aufhebung functions as the logical operator of dialectics, the operant term of the Logic, the definitive structure of activity. Sublation is, as John Burbidge has called it, Hegel’s “most distinctive move.” But this move is not limited to its first logical instantiation, the concept of becoming, but describes instead “a fundamental determination which repeatedly occurs throughout the whole of philosophy.” There are a few things we can say about this statement of Hegel’s.

First, if we are to limit our suppositions to what has been demonstrated up to this point in the development of the Logic, this claim about repetition is indeed premature—from what has so far been shown to be true, it is impossible to know that the Aufhebung will in fact repeat itself. Starting from a presuppositionless starting-point we were led to the process of Aufheben, but we had nothing available to us at that point to state that sublation will reoccur as we progress. What we have in this statement is thus a preview meant simply to orient our undertaking, an instance of Hegel giving an overview of what is to come from the perspective of what will have already become. This is, however, not the same as the assumption one might make that the reader of the Logic must already have this information available to her and have made an assumption of something beyond what has been thus far demonstrated to be true, in order to understand the progression.

Following the content of the Logic in the same way as one does in the Phenomenology,

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211 G. W. F. Hegel, Science of Logic, 107; emphasis added.
letting it “move spontaneously of its own nature…[and] then to contemplate this movement,”\textsuperscript{212} we can understand this remark on sublation’s repeated pattern as a remark of this latter, contemplative kind. As he says of his introductory previews, they are “not intended, as it were, to establish the Notion of logic or to justify its method scientifically in advance, but rather by the aid of some…reflections to make more accessible to ordinary thinking the point of view from which this science is to be considered.”\textsuperscript{213}

We need not, then, assume that logical repetition requires the implementation of a form to be repeated. Whatever form emerges does so out of the subject matter itself, not through an attempt to have the Logic’s content submit to a prior ideal of systematic organization. On the idea that systematic philosophy start out with preset configurations into which thought can be categorized, Hegel writes, “the repetition of it becomes as insufferable as the repetition of a conjuring trick already seen through. The instrument of this monotonous formalism is no more difficult to handle than a painter’s palette having only two colours.”\textsuperscript{214} At issue for Hegel is not formalism itself or the laws of thinking. Nor is it the deficiency of the very notion of repetition. Rather, what he finds problematic is the external imposition and lifeless repetition of a specific, unsubstantiated, dogmatic methodology conceived prior to any scientific observation of the immanent emergence of a real repeated form. This is made clear a few lines later in the following passage:

\begin{quote}
It is in [the] nature of what is to be in its being its own Notion, that logical necessity in general consists…in so doing it raises itself to logical form, and exists in its essentiality; its concrete existence is just this movement, and is directly a logical existence. It is for this reason unnecessary to clothe the content in an
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\textsuperscript{212} G. W. F. Hegel, \textit{Phenomenology of Spirit}, §§35-6.
\textsuperscript{213} G. W. F. Hegel, \textit{Science of Logic}, 43.
\textsuperscript{214} G. W. F. Hegel, \textit{Phenomenology of Spirit}, §51.
external formalism; the content is in its very nature the transition into such formalism, but a formalism which ceases to be external, since the form is the innate development of the concrete content itself.\textsuperscript{215}

We find here the rejection of external formalism, which assumes beforehand a form to be repeated, as well as the notion of reducing philosophical logic to some formless, unsystematic array of ruminations, which escape the structure of formal repetition.

From this, we can draw the second point that, although Hegel enjoins us to follow the determinations of the formerly indeterminate abstract concept (being) as it unfolds itself, once we have already followed these moments, we see in this claim about sublation’s repetition that we can confidently state that there is some identity held together by the term Aufhebung, such that every sublated term in its character as Aufhebung expresses the same determination of Aufhebung itself. That is, Aufhebung is not unrecognizably Aufhebung from one moment to the next, lest the term lose the coherence afforded by a certain continuity. We can give the term a definition that holds together, despite the specific and different determinations of the concepts, which it is, so to speak, working on or between. This is in keeping with the exercise of contemplating the characteristics of these moments, their formal consistency, “determining the rhythm of its movements.”\textsuperscript{216} Sublation has a form, a formal determination that repeats itself throughout various determinations. “[W]herever and in whatever form being and nothing are in question, this third [or, split third, or third and fourth, viz. sublation] must be present.”\textsuperscript{217} But, given its immanent development, the presence of this determinable form is not something given beforehand, but is only retroactively discerned (as we will see

\textsuperscript{215} G.W.F Hegel, Phenomenology of Spirit, §56; emphasis added after the ellipsis.

\textsuperscript{216} G. W. F. Hegel, Phenomenology of Spirit, §35.

\textsuperscript{217} G. W. F. Hegel, Science of Logic, 93; emphasis added.
later in our analysis of the Absolute). So, since the whole of the logic is the playing out of
the implications of this original interplay, sublation is present throughout the entirety of
philosophical logic, though it must be stressed that “this third has many empirical
shapes.”

Indeed, while this form persists as a “this,” with a certain identity, its persistence
depends on movement, depends on differentiation, and thus this very identity depends on
certain shifts. In other words, repetition is not a synonym for ossification because a
difference always emerges through replication, even in the case of a complete
reproduction. Of course, with Hegel we are dealing with something far removed from a
crude facsimile of the same chapter, over and over. Yet even in extreme cases of basic
duplication, repetition still remains irreducible to static self-sameness. Consider Borges’
story “Pierre Menard, Author of the Quixote,” whose contemporary protagonist
undertakes the “mysterious duty of reconstructing literally [Cervantes’] work,” aiming,
moreover, to write it “without falling into a tautology.” As the context shifts, its
determinations shift. The Menard work depends upon the Cervantes work in a way that
Cervantes’ work did not, yet Menard’s work has the power that only a recreation has, the
power to retroactively impart upon the original work the status of “originality.” Thus, the
exact same form carries between each instance a different meaning, the second informed
by what has occurred between the first and second instantiation—Quixote’s preference
for arms over letters, is, in the Cervantes work, attributed to Cervantes’ experience as a

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examples that come to mind of this theme of the peculiar differences borne of the repetition of form include
Gus Van Sant’s shot-for-shot remake of Hitchcock’s *Psycho*, Silas Flannery’s copying of *Crime and
Punishment* in Italo Calvino’s *If on a Winter Night a Traveler*, or Michael Haneke’s shot-for-shot remake
of his own *Funny Games*.
soldier, while in the Menard work it is taken to be a celebration of the force of the will
and traceable to the influence of Nietzsche. The repetition gains what has happened in the
interim, the space between the two, yet it simultaneously loses some of the proximity
enjoyed by the former—we are told there is something comfortable about reading the text
as Cervantes’, while there is something archaic and affected if we take the words as
Menard’s. Thus, while this short story emphasizes the gains (in, at least, complexity) of
the process of repetition, it also identifies the opening of a gap in this same process, the
disparity at the core of identity. Borges’ project is an entirely different one than Hegel’s,
but what is most important for us here is that we see through even this example of
complete repetition of form through different content both a progressive gain via
incommensurability and an incommensurability via progression. Sublation’s repetition
therefore constitutes a process of transformation, the shifting and multiplication of
shapes.

Thus, we can claim that the very suggestion of sublation’s repetition leads us to
the conclusion that those who would claim that there is not an identifiable pattern to the
Logic are mistaken (or will be shown to be mistaken if sublation is not shown empirically
to re-emerge throughout the Logic). The prohibition of an external model established and
then applied to each and every component in advance need not imply that the constant
movement and transformational nature of dialectics prevents a model from internally
generating out of one moment in such a way that is identifiable in the moments that
follow. This model, however, cannot within the strictures of science be anticipated to be
necessarily true of all or any future moments, which could be then categorized
accordingly. Taking our first and second point together, we arrive at the following: Such
an identity exists but can—and can only—be established retroactively to have been the case. Thus, the philosophical exercise of revealing and subsequently commenting on the logical form of the processes of sublation in their various instantiations, and the recognition of a post-facto formal consistency throughout the history of these instantiations, should at once be contrasted with the activity of interpreting dialectics in terms of a logic assumed beforehand to be consistent.

The consequence of a movement, which includes the identity forged between what it initially is and what it logically comes to be, is something only attributable to a movement once it has occurred. Or, as Houlgate puts it, “the ultimate (and purely) logical ground of the category of being—what makes that category absolutely necessary—is the thought of the Idea (or the concrete, rational unity of all the categories) that thought ultimately proves to be.”220 Any teleological presupposition, such that X should move to a pre-established Y, is delimited by the dialectical logic’s internal spontaneity; “the nature of the content itself spontaneously develops itself in a scientific method of knowing.”221 From any given moment there is no goal or final category that can be set out beforehand. But in whatever spontaneous development that does take place, the steps are retroactively discovered to be neither formless nor arbitrary:

not as is the case with the proof of a theorem in geometry, where it becomes apparent only afterwards in the proof that one took the right course in drawing just those lines and then, in the proof itself, in beginning with the comparison of

220 Stephen Houlgate, The Opening of Hegel’s Logic, 49.
221 G. W. F. Hegel, Science of Logic, 27.
those lines or angles; drawing such lines and comparing them are not an essential part of the proof itself.\(^{222}\)

Hegel’s point here is not to contrast geometrical proofs and dialectical logic on the basis of the retroactive discernibility of their respective truths, the backwards determination of the earlier operands. Rather, what is primarily at issue here is whether the very steps that bring us to the proof are essential to its truth – for dialectics they are. The path dialectical logic ends up taking is not negligible to its determinations, but these are, instead, its very content. As Fichte puts it, “The Science of Knowledge should in no way force itself upon the reader, but should become a necessity for him, as it has for the author himself.”\(^{223}\)

Even the dialectical method and the dialectical form that does spontaneously or contingently emerge and repeat itself as the necessary structure of reality cannot be presupposed to be dialectical. To be sure, the dialectical method turns out to be “the method proper to every subject matter,”\(^{224}\) but at the level of pure being, for instance, we did not have such a determinate dialectical form, nor would such a form have emerged in the way that it did had we not limited ourselves from presupposing the necessity of its dialectical counterpart. Houlgate elucidates this:

Dialectic may well turn out, therefore, to be the proper method for philosophical thought. Indeed, as we shall see, Hegel believes this to be the case—but this is only because thought is required to become dialectical by the concepts it is led to

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consider, not because dialectic is assumed in advance to be a ‘higher’ way of thinking.225

Yet, as much as Houlgate—one of the foremost proponents of reading Hegel as following the exclusively immanent development of being as it unfolds and as explicitly rejecting the importation of the extraneous considerations of a transcendental methodology—stresses this anti-dogmatic openness, he too must admit to a veritable pattern, in the sense in which we are here suggesting: the determinable presence of a formal generality persisting amidst the irreducibly specific differences of its many logical steps. He claims, “The precise reason why a specific category entails its own opposite varies in each case, but the general idea remains the same: each category in being what it is contains within itself its negative.”226 According to him, it is thus not the case that because of their obvious differences one category has a specific relation to its opposite while the next turns out, by simply following its internal implications, to be without this relation to its opposite. This is what was previously alluded to as a certain consistency persisting through repetition. Yet the procedure of identifying this “general idea” is the product of the complex work of conceptual exposition alone.

Nevertheless, there remains some reason to distance ourselves from the conclusion Houlgate derives from this. He not only defines sublation as the process whereby “two ostensibly opposed concepts settle into the single thought of their unity,”227 but, further, construes sublation as nothing but this speculative unity. It is only upon this interpretation that he can reject the idea of “the concept of becoming itself generat[ing]

225 Stephen Houlgate, *The Opening of Hegel’s Logic*, 34.
226 Stephen Houlgate, *The Opening of Hegel’s Logic*, 43; emphasis added.
227 Stephen Houlgate, *The Opening of Hegel’s Logic*, 64; emphasis added.
its own opposite, with which it would then need to be reconciled.

The target of Houlgate’s comment are scholars like Forster, who proposes this latter reading, becoming as not simply accounting for reconciliation but as also generating an internal excess that resists such reconciliation, but only as a means of exposing a crucial misstep in Hegel’s supposedly triadic pattern. When presented with evidence of the persistence of the negative these proponents blame the negative side of the method as flawed in principle or practice. Forster, for his part, claims that Hegel

    deviates from the intended general structure of the method in more or less extreme ways…. Where instead of showing Becoming and a contrary category to be mutually implying and then showing them to be unified in Determinate Being, Hegel tries to find a contradiction between two component concepts contained in the category Becoming and then argues that these two component concepts are unified in Determinate Being.”

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This is problematic for Forster because of the definition of sublation he is working with, i.e., because becoming’s split between coming-to-be and ceasing-to-be frustrates his idea of a straightforwardly triadic form. But could we not accept the grain of truth in Houlgate’s rejection of Forster’s claim that a triadic pattern must be presupposed and mapped on top of the content of the Logic, yet nevertheless come to see that the immanent genesis of dialectics does lead to a repeated form, and that this repeated form would be not a simply triadic one in the unifying sense that Houlgate (on this point, with Forster) suggests, but, rather, as we have demonstrated, one in which the third is split, producing its own opposite (fourth) internal to its form? This is precisely what has been

228 Stephen Houlgate, The Opening of Hegel’s Logic, 64; emphasis added.  
229 Michael Forster, “Hegel’s Dialectical Method,” 155. See also, 154-56.
proposed here. And in this way we discover in the appearance and re-appearance of sublation a formalism that is neither an extralogical structure nor, pace Robert Pippin, some heuristic strategy for talking about logical development, as if we needed a strategy for thought to enter a pre-established system.

The modest intention of this chapter was to be able to say something about the operation of dialectical logic without importing external considerations that would interfere with its natural propulsion. Yet, with this in mind, this exercise is not simply exegetical and, as such, must also restrict itself to retracing only some of those specific steps in order to say something about dialectical ontology itself and elucidate how it is itself structured in terms of negativity and sublation. Moving forward, we will make a transition from this first and definitive example of the pure logical form of Aufhebung, becoming, to a more concrete case of sublation as it arises in the Lordship and Bondage section of the Phenomenology. And in this trajectory one should hear the echo of the following passage from Hegel:

[T]he exposition of what alone can be the true method of philosophical science falls within the treatment of logic itself; for the method is the consciousness of the form of the inner self-movement of the content of the logic. In the Phenomenology of Spirit I have expounded an example of this method in application to a more concrete object, namely to consciousness.230

CHAPTER THREE:

THE DECONSTRUCTION OF HEGEL’S *AUFHEBUNG*
3.1 HEIDEGGER AND THE CRITIQUE OF ONTOTHEOLOGY

Picking up on our promise to attend to the trepidations of some “philosophers of difference” surrounding the concept of sublation, this chapter will focus primarily on Derrida’s reading of Hegel and Derrida’s reading of Bataille’s reading of Hegel, especially of the *Phenomenology of Spirit*. Given its direct targeting of our chief concept, perhaps there is no better place to begin than with the following excerpt from one of Derrida’s sustained treatments of Hegelian dialectics, *Glas*: “[t]he *Aufhebung*...articulates the most traditional phallocentrism with the Hegelian onto-theo-teleology. Production, differentiation, opposition are bound to the value activity.”

Let us first focus on Derrida’s attribution of onto-theo-teleology, which has as its reference Heidegger’s essay on Hegel’s *Logic*, “The Onto-theological Constitution of Metaphysics.” There the concept of ontotheology is given as the product of the following premises: a) that the truth sought by the project of metaphysics is the *knowable that is known* with a knowledge that is *absolutely certain* of itself, and b) that this science of “the absolute, self-knowing knowledge” is the science of *theology*, for it must take for its foundation, its beginning, a being whose absolute knowing is self-certain: God. Heidegger’s point here is not about the god of any particular religion (as much as one could possibly relate it to one), but rather concerns the idea of a robust, foundational concept that would have already enclosed within itself every notion ahead of its finite

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231 Jacques Derrida, *Glas*, trans. John P. Leavey, Jr. and Richard Rand (London: University of Nebraska Press, 1986), 113a. Our citations of *Glas* correspond to the following format: a page number followed by an “a” refers to text from the left-hand column of the page; a page number followed by a “b” refers to text from the right-hand column of the page.

determination.\textsuperscript{233} Thus, having forged a connection between the science of the truth of beings as a whole (metaphysics) and the science of knowledge founded upon an absolute omniscient being (theology), Heidegger proposes that the project of metaphysics is inherently theological, the science of being \textit{qua theo-logos}. This god, absolute being, is said to figure as “the \textit{unity} of the \textit{all} that accounts for the ground, that is, of the All-Highest”\textsuperscript{234} and the “wholeness of this whole…the \textit{unity} of all beings that \textit{unifies} as the generative ground.”\textsuperscript{235} As the consummate metaphysician, Hegel is for Heidegger also the consummate ontotheologian. And as an ontotheologian, Hegel’s philosophy is said to admit God in as the ground, as its source. God, this foundational concept, the being of everything (all beings), is here interpreted as the \textit{causa sui}, the absolute presupposed before the presuppositionless starting-point of the \textit{Logic}:

Hegel understood being as absolute, in advance and without question…this absoluteness and infinity never became a problem for him because they could never become a problem...the absolute, in which the manner, extent, and the range of the first point of departure and of the concluding sentence of speculation (which returns to that starting point) are determined…it is the essence of God as spirit in general that pre-scribes the essence of the concept and thus the character of the logical.\textsuperscript{236}

In other words, Heidegger claims that the ontotheologian or metaphysician presupposes a first principle on which “the universe and nature depend.”\textsuperscript{237} This

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{233} Martin Heidegger, \textit{Identity and Difference}, 53-4. We will return to this topic in Chapter Four. \\
\textsuperscript{234} Martin Heidegger, \textit{Identity and Difference}, 58; emphasis added. \\
\textsuperscript{235} Martin Heidegger, \textit{Identity and Difference}, 54; emphasis added. \\
\textsuperscript{236} Martin Heidegger, \textit{Hegel’s Phenomenology of Spirit}, trans. Parvis Emad and Kenneth Maly (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1994), 74, 100, 98. \\
\textsuperscript{237} Aristotle, \textit{Metaphysics}, 1072b13-14. 
\end{flushright}
theological first principle undergirds the logic of metaphysical philosophy and, for Heidegger, this takes the shape of an assumed absolute subjectivity in Hegel. We already dealt with this accusation of being’s absolute presupposition or presupposed absolute before the immanent development of concepts, ahead of the beginning of the Logic, when we drew from Houlgate to explain that Hegel’s starting point, abstract being, is necessarily undeveloped at the outset rather than “thought of in advance as the grounding ground.” If we were to call pure being God (and in our secular day, the religious baggage harboured within such a term might convince us to choose another), the conditions are strictly as follows: “We leave out everything determinate, and, in consequence, have only absolute emptiness instead of absolute fullness. The same applies to the definition of God as mere being.” Emptied-out immediacy is hardly the traditional description for God. And, indeed, it is not entirely dissimilar to Heidegger’s characterization of his own attempt to think being “in its widest and least definite general” sense.

However, forced to admit that Hegel indeed does think being “in its most empty emptiness,” Heidegger hastens to add that Hegel also thinks it “in its fully completed fullness,” alluding to the end of the Logic. That is, sidestepping the claims to immanent development, Heidegger endeavours to relocate Hegel’s presupposition, the idea of a theo-logic fullness informing the beginning of dialectical philosophy, in a predetermined

238 Martin Heidegger, *Identity and Difference*, 58. Compare with Stephen Houlgate, *Opening of Hegel’s Logic*, 56. John Russon highlights this rejection of a pre-established map as a point of close proximity between the dialectical and deconstructive projects: “Dialectic and deconstruction must precisely let go such methodological presumptions. Such ‘letting go’ is precisely what is accomplished through Hegel’s great scientific works, the *Phenomenology* and the *Logic.*” John Russon, “Reading: Derrida in Hegel’s Understanding,” *Research in Phenomenology* 36 (Leiden, The Netherlands: Koninklijke NV, 2006), 195.


goal, its conclusion. Here, the development of dialectical logic is taken to be teleologically
(or “onto-theo-teleo-logically”) directed toward—that is, its end already assumed as the
goal it attempts to reach—Godly omniscience, the “wholeness of this whole,” the
“theology of the Absolute.”242 Thus, the target shifts from abstract being to the final
absolute toward which abstract being is supposedly oriented beforehand. To think the
Hegelian absolute is, for Heidegger, to think the whole and “when metaphysics thinks of
being as such as a whole, that is, with respect to the highest being which accounts for
everything, then it is logic as theo-logic.”243 Divinity is henceforth characterized as a
“final accounting”244 or what Derrida called in the quotation with which we opened this
discussion, the differentiation bound to a value activity, an evaluation. Heidegger backs
away from the final record of the accountant in order to think difference in what is, the
thinking of “being thought in terms of difference.”245 What is problematic about
introducing a theo-logic into the task of thinking thought, then, is not the concept of God
as such, but the manner in which this particularly ontotheological figure of absolute
closure exhausts being at the exclusion of the real difference of finitude. If difference for
Hegel turns out to be a mere step to be overcome, flattened by the system’s closure, then
to actually think difference is to think of it on its own, apart from its subjugation to this
closure. We will argue that Hegel is not guilty of this, and that the dichotomy is itself

242 Martin Heidegger, Off the Beaten Track, trans. Julian Young and Kenneth Haynes (New York:
Cambridge University Press, 2002), 152, 97.
243 Martin Heidegger, Identity and Difference, 70-1.
244 Martin Heidegger, Identity and Difference, 60. As we will further discuss in Sections 4.3 to 4.5, it is
important not to mistake Heidegger and Derrida’s critique of so-called ontotheology with the critique of the
faith of religion. In fact, one should be able to discern in their language the influence of Kierkegaard’s
many admonishments of Hegel’s rationalist, “scientific” image of “God” (e.g. in Concluding Unscientific
Postscript).
245 Martin Heidegger, Identity and Difference, 65.
problematic, but this is Heidegger’s criticism, a serious one for the Hegelian to grapple with:

[F]or Hegel, the matter of thinking is the idea as the absolute concept. For us, formulated in a preliminary fashion, the matter of thinking is the difference as difference…. For us, the character of the conversation with the history of thinking is no longer Aufhebung (elevation), but the step back. Elevation leads to the heightening and gathering area of truth posited as absolute, truth in the sense of the completely developed certainty of self-knowing knowledge. The step back points to the realm which until now has been skipped over, and from which the essence of truth becomes first of all worthy of thought.”

This step back that “moves out of metaphysics into the essential nature of metaphysics” is contrasted with thinking in service to the absolute concept, the project wherein the ontological difference inherent in whatever is thought is lost to a scientificity that smooths it over. The dialectical presentation of merely phenomenal knowledge is the path of natural consciousness toward science. And because the semblance of untruth falls away more and more along the way, this path is a path of the soul’s purification into Spirit. The presentation of merely phenomenal knowledge is an itinerarium mentis in Deum.

In other words, Hegel’s path is thought’s road to God, or a “theo-logic.”

But the particular process, the precise moves in the immanent genesis of logical disclosure, matters here. Conflating Hegel’s presuppositionless starting point with what

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246 Martin Heidegger, Identity and Difference, 47, 39.
247 Martin Heidegger, Identity and Difference, 51.
emerges in the process of conceptual ontogenesis will not afford us any clarity on the supposedly ontotheological character of dialectics. Indeed, as John Russon remarks, Hegel does not claim

that he now [at the end of the Logic] possesses the ‘inner’ of all reality in such a manner that all reality is now understood in advance, and such that the philosopher has effectively made himself the ultimate reality: the one whose act of knowing is now the ground of the real.²⁴⁹

And this leads us to our contention: that if it can be demonstrated that in Hegel’s project neither a self-united God (as per Heidegger’s definition) is presupposed nor that the final absolute amounts to a united wholeness in the manner Heidegger has here presented it, an untethering of dialectics from ontotheology, an undoing of this underlying unity, becomes possible. Perhaps, then, it has been premature to include Hegel amongst those who presume the closure of an ontotheological project. Perhaps “the re-assertion of Hegel’s speculative thought is thus not what it may appear to be, the denial of the post-Hegelian break, but the bringing-forth of the dimension whose denial sustains the post-Hegelian break itself,” as Žižek puts it.²⁵⁰

²⁴⁹ John Russon, “Reading: Derrida in Hegel’s Understanding,” 195; emphasis added. Christopher M. Gemerchak makes a similar point related to importance of precision and the sloppiness involved in equating the idea of a concept coming to express something as its inner truth to the idea of a preordained conceptual universe designed by God: “Now, it is one thing to view Hegel’s thought as an ennobling, harmonious narrative of nature, humanity, and culture coming to artistically express its internal (Aristotelian) form as it climbs the ladder from raw existence to self-realization; it is another to realize that, as Aristotelian, there is a teleological guidance of this raw form to its actualized perfection; and it is still another to claim that this teleology is not one of human self-development, but rather is the working out of a rational cosmic plan underlying the whole of reality, a ‘designed universe’ whose architect—Geist, God, or Nature, works out the plan in the world through its ‘vehicles’ who, in all freedom and without knowing the outcome of this plan anterior to its expression, come to realize themselves as the very self-awareness and self-perfection of Geist.” Christopher M. Gemerchak, The Sunday of the Negative: Reading Bataille Reading Hegel (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 2003), 32.

Yet, our own “step back” from this critique of Hegel, directed toward uncovering what has been missed in these readings, should not be confused with bringing Hegel into total accorda

nce with this line of criticizing the inflationary metaphysics of ontotheology. In fact, it will be equally necessary to contrast Hegel’s ontology from those deflationist, supposedly post-metaphysical projects that privilege being’s withdrawal, prioritizing the “way in which It, Being, never gives itself.”

This means that we will need to highlight what differences exist between dialectics and deconstruction, for it is especially Derrida who takes up this idea of withdrawal or deferral and pushes it to its limit. Indeed, this summary of Heidegger’s short essay can be seen as a sketch of the arguments Derrida will more extensively develop in his own critiques of Hegel, the response to which will be the focus of the following chapter; which is to say that when dealing with Derrida’s deconstructionist reading of Hegel we should keep in mind the Heideggarian considerations that we have already broached: the critique of the dialectical employment of the concepts of difference and negativity, which are said to be subsumed under the practice of final accounting; the idea of a post-metaphysical thinking of difference and negativity that frustrates the sufficiency of the science of dialectical logic; and the positing of a space unable to be articulated by recourse to dialectical reason as the site of such thinking.

3.2 DERRIDA’S CLOSE READING

So, why choose Derrida as Hegel’s interlocutor? The answer to the question can similarly be traced to the influence of Heidegger. In this same essay on Hegel’s

251 Martin Heidegger, Identity and Difference, 66.
ontotheology, Heidegger makes a distinction between two ways of thinking a text: to think something *identically* is to repeat it in a way where the difference between the thought and what is thought is entirely erased. To think it in the *same* way, however, is to think the thought while preserving this difference.\(^{252}\) It seems rather dubious that thinking identically would even be possible (as we observed earlier with our example from Borges) but, while Derrida does not title his attempts at thinking through the Hegelian system in these terms, it is clear that his is an attempt at the latter, an “attempt [at] a thinking conversation with Hegel, speak[ing] with him not just about the same matter, but about the same matter in the same way”; his close readings are in keeping with Heidegger’s claim that one can “stay with its matter only if it becomes ever more rigorous in its constancy, only if the same matter for it becomes for it ever more sharply contested.”\(^ {253}\)

At first the claim that Derrida thinks Hegel in the same way might strike one as odd. What could be further from a systematic science of logic than the disseminating text or the deconstructive strategy of writing in the margins? Yet Derrida, who Peter Sloterdijk calls “a radical partisan of non-one-sidedness,”\(^ {254}\) refuses to *react to* or merely negate Hegel. One does not move out from the shadow of Hegel’s dialectical logic in an effort to establish some un-dialectical resistance to dialectics by merely opposing dialectics. Any philosopher who is familiar with the way dialectical logic proceeds is well aware of this. For this type of opposition, dependent as it is on what it opposes, plays an important and necessary role in the very structure of dialectics. Thus, the issue for anyone

\(^{252}\) Martin Heidegger, *Identity and Difference*, 45.
with reason to distance their own philosophical intervention from the Hegelian imagination squarely lies with the logic of negativity itself and, more precisely, with the dialectical process of internalizing such opposition. That is, if external opposition strengthens rather than weakens the dialectic, then the task of unsettling dialectics (assuming such a task to be desirable or even possible) must be a properly Hegelian, that is, a properly immanent, unsettling of Hegel himself, one that comes from within the system and exploits what dialectical logic itself puts forward in its presuppositionless development.

Hegel sets out the possibilities of critique in a remark on the immanent system of Spinozism:

[T]he refutation must not come from outside, that is, it must not proceed from assumptions lying outside the system in question and inconsistent with it. The system need only refuse to recognize those assumptions; the defect is a defect only for him who starts from the requirements and demands based on those assumptions… The nerve, therefore of the external refutation consists solely in clinging stubbornly to the antitheses of these assumptions…. The genuine refutation must penetrate the opponent’s stronghold and meet him on his own ground; no advantage is gained by attacking him somewhere else and defeating him where he is not. The only possible refutation…must therefore consist in the first place, in recognizing its standpoint as essential and necessary and then going on to raise that standpoint to the higher one through its own immanent dialectic.255

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So, on the conceptual level there is no escaping Hegel, and Derrida is the first to admit that “[o]ften that which purports to be a surpassing of Hegelianism and sometimes a science free of metaphysics, still conforms to it.”\(^{256}\) Elsewhere, he makes a similar point:

> the step ‘outside philosophy’ is much more difficult to conceive than is generally imagined by those who think they made it long ago with cavalier ease, and who in general are swallowed up in metaphysics in the entire body of discourse which they claim to have disengaged from it.\(^{257}\)

So, if “[o]ur age can justifiably be characterized as the desperate attempt to be a post-Hegelian culture,” as Stuart Barnett has claimed, “to truly overcome Hegel, then, it is necessary to begin to understand the extent to which we still stand before Hegel.”\(^{258}\)

Derrida echoes this sentiment when he claims that “it is still a question of elucidating the relationship to Hegel—a difficult labor, which for the most part remains before us, and which in a certain way is interminable,”\(^{259}\) and when he characterizes his own project as nothing but a reading of Hegel: “We will never be finished with the reading or rereading of Hegel, and, in a certain way, I do nothing other than attempt to explain myself on this point.”\(^{260}\) Against evaluating the ground upon which he stands before Hegel, as if still from some external position, Derrida’s gambit is to “spen[d] the night with [dialectical]


reason”\textsuperscript{261} in order to ultimately displace it and not simply “overturn the hierarchy, or…reverse the direction of the current.”\textsuperscript{262}

His task is to discover in this similitude, in this overlap, something that is both required by Hegel and must be left unthought by his philosophy, an “abundance” lying on the margins of this thought, unable to be included or systematized. However, Derrida believed that this project of reading Hegel the same in order to discern “something that has not been thought, and from which what has been thought receives its essential space”\textsuperscript{263} had been already started by Georges Bataille. Given the above stipulations for reading the same, the only justification, therefore, for turning to another, to Bataille, for continuing his project, can be that “all of Bataille’s concepts are Hegelian,”\textsuperscript{264} that his reading is not an external critique but a subversive repetition, and that the assistance he provides Derrida be that of a deeper exposition of Hegel’s philosophy and not derived from where Hegel is not.

3.3 BATAILLE ON RESTRICTED AND GENERAL ECONOMIES

Bataille claims his “efforts recommence and undo Hegel’s Phenomenology.”\textsuperscript{265} The recommencement first starts with the claim that Hegel has given us the necessary philosophical framework for comprehending all that is and stands as the central reference to which all transgression of philosophical frameworks must respond. As Christopher M.

\textsuperscript{261} Jacques Derrida, \textit{Writing and Difference}, 252.
\textsuperscript{262} Jacques Derrida, \textit{Margins of Philosophy}, 75.
\textsuperscript{263} Martin Heidegger, \textit{Identity and Difference}, 48.
\textsuperscript{264} Jacques Derrida, \textit{Writing and Difference}, 253.
Gemetchak puts it, without this reference “Bataille’s insubordination would have all the significance of a child crying that its immediate wishes were not being fulfilled.” But his actual insubordination lies in saying that as much as Hegel has said all there is to say, this is not enough, that we nevertheless must remain unsatisfied with that which fits into this framework of the sayable; we must move beyond our comprehension of what is. Yet by challenging the comprehensiveness of the system’s sense, the recommencement is still intended to be recognized and make sense as an undoing. This introduces a problem that we will address in the next chapter, but first we must outline the manner in which Bataille organizes his subversive repetition: namely, by economizing Hegel’s ontological structure, framing his discourse of what is, what is not, and what becomes, into the terms of economic systems—labour, value, accountancy, utility, profit; expenditure, squander, excess, gifts, sacrifice. The foundational operation here is the division between ontological systems and their excess; in other words, between metaphysical, viz. ontotheological, restricted economies and general economies. And this serves as the model Derrida uses to attempt his dislocation of dialectics.

a) Restricted Economy

Restricted economy is meant to describe the system of “value activity” to which we made reference at the beginning of our chapter. That is, while it would be obviously false to deny that there is a persistent emphasis on negation present throughout Hegel’s

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266 Christopher M. Gemerchak, The Sunday of the Negative, 27.
267 Writing on Kojève’s reading of the Phenomenology of Spirit, a reading Bataille endorses in almost its entirety, Bataille says, “it is always easy to perceive that the present ‘theory’ is always rigorously founded on the analysis of economy.” Derrida quoting Bataille in Jacques Derrida, Writing and Difference, 334n7. Likewise, Derrida’s own reading follows suit as an economic analysis.
writings, it is Bataille and Derrida’s contention that such negation or detachment is nevertheless, in the end, converted into another sort of attachment, stockpiled, returned with interest, and put to positive, profitable, valuable use. Derrida lists the attributes of this conversion as that of the maintenance of what it has produced, upkeep, work, and the continued growth of profit from an investment. Described from the other side, by what it limits, the onto-economic system that clings onto such attachment is one that restricts or inhibits negativity, defers desire, and delays disappearance or death. It is an “economy of life.” And such clinging is said to lead to a preoccupation with suppressing any excess, with a rush to finality, where the risk of leaving something unaccounted for ceases to be.

The clear correlate to Derrida’s description of Bataille as a Hegelian without reserve is the counting of Hegel as a philosopher with reserves, unable to follow his own insight of radical negativity (difference as difference, as Heidegger called it) to its end. According to Derrida, where Hegel supposedly retreats from this relinquishment in the end, Bataille does not cower from the prospect of ruin via excess, but makes a “headlong rush into death pure and simple.” Consider the following from Inner Experience:

Hegel’s construction is a philosophy of work, of ‘project.’ … Ipse having to become everything does not fail, does not become comic, insufficient, but the private individual, the slave engaged in the paths of work, gains, after many a detour, access to the summit of the universal. The only obstacle in this way of seeing…is what, in man, is irreducible to project: non-discursive existence, laughter, ecstasy, which link man—in the end—to the negation of project which

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268 Jacques Derrida, Writing and Difference, 255, 257.
270 Jacques Derrida, Writing and Difference, 255.
he nevertheless is—man ultimately ruins himself in a total effacement—of what he is, of all human affirmation. Such would be the easy passage from the philosophy of work—Hegelian and profane—to sacred philosophy.²⁷¹

In fact, Bataille will question whether sacred philosophy is even the best term for this alternative economy of wanton expenditure, seeing as he insists that the safeguarding of reserves is not incidental to philosophy’s theo-logical injunction to put its concepts to work:

Philosophy is work itself according to Bataille…. Philosophy, in completing itself [sets out to] include within itself and anticipate all the figures of its beyond, all the forms and resources of itself by simply taking hold of their enunciation.²⁷²

Bataille’s claim is that philosophy produces an excess which it is unable to count as its own and “in order to understand that it does not, at this point, enter into work and phenomenology, one must exit from the philosophical logos and think [this] unthinkable.”²⁷³ Thus, there surfaces the need for an economy that exceeds the restrictions of the restricted economy of philosophy, an economy that accepts (but, by its definition, cannot account for) the unaccountable, unthinkable spill-over, all the while without preserving it for or even as anything: a general economy.

b) General Economy

²⁷¹ Georges Bataille, Inner Experience, 80; emphasis added inside dashes.
²⁷² Jacques Derrida, Writing and Difference, 252.
²⁷³ Jacques Derrida, Writing and Difference, 273. The next chapter will examine Bataille’s (and Derrida’s) arguments for a negation not recuperated in a result and contest as problematic the conclusion that such an excess could even count as a step beyond philosophy.
In *Glas*, Derrida decides to approach Hegel’s thought through an analogy with the structure of the family, the law of the “concept family,” as he puts it. “The concept family very rigorously inscribes itself in the system”\(^{274}\) and, indeed, the system is taken to be nothing but this inscription of everything within itself—the law that includes all it recognizes as related, as part of its family. Framed in this way Derrida gets to his chief concern: “is there a place for the bastard in ontotheology?”\(^{275}\) That is, is there anything that lies outside the system’s recognition, the recognition of its own law, or is everything to be taken as included? Is there any concept that, try as it might to disguise itself and pretend it has a rightful place within the system nevertheless maintains a certain exteriority from it, existing on the other side of the lines of proper inclusion? The supposed response is that Hegel must suggest that there are no “bastards” in the concept family and to this Derrida puts forward the idea of the general economy as the place made for the unacknowledged “bastard” concept (or outsider to conceptuality itself), which not only marks the other side of the line but calls into question the pretense of the proper, of the family unit.\(^{276}\) In other words, the general economy both exceeds and disrupts the sense insured by the “ontotheological,” restricted economy. Or, as Bataille defines it, “The general economy, in the first place, makes apparent that excesses of energy are produced, and that by definition, these excesses cannot be utilized.”\(^{277}\) And when the “excesses cannot be completely absorbed in [a system, a restricted economy’s]

\(^{276}\) As Alan Bass notes, by “the proper” Derrida intends all the sense of the word at once, as in “le sense propre (proper, literal meaning), and that which is one’s own, that which may be owned, that which is legally, correctly owned—all the links between proper, property, and propriety.” Jacques Derrida, *Margins of Philosophy*, 4n1.
growth, it must necessarily be lost without profit; it must be spent, willingly or not, gloriously or catastrophically.” 278

These excesses or remainders are said to elude proper determination, escaping or being beyond a determinate place within a process or system that could bestow them with such an identity, ipse. It is for this reason that Derrida calls it an economy of the “absolute loss of meaning.” 279 In the place of the preservation of meaning, this economy is said to evoke a radical effusion, a total otherness, a bursting from the binds of significance. 280 Within the restricted economy one might weigh the cost of the loss of a life, however, the “gay reaction” to death in the funeral vigil of *Finnegans Wake*, to use one of Derrida’s examples, is said to exemplify a way in which something is able to rend itself from the laws of the proper, of conceptual consideration, and exist in the unmannered realm of the general, extrinsic to the appropriate. 281 In this particular example, the gaiety serves to show us something that ostensibly finds itself without a place in serious rituals and is assumed to disrupt our neat idea of what is appropriate in this moment. Yet, Derrida’s example is of questionable forcefulness insofar as we can call up numerous ways in which these rites, such as the Rites of Tara, *work*, i.e., are chock full of significance in the Irish pagan traditions that inspired Joyce’s novel and hardly count as exploding the idea of the funeral or, moreover, escaping the bounds of rational signification. 282 But even if this particular example is insufficient to demonstrate

280 Jacques Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, 256, 258. We return to the idea of absolute otherness in Section 4.3.
the necessity of excess, Derrida and Bataille’s intentions in their insistence on a necessary
overflow is clear enough. That is, even if we imagine that they would accept that
expressing joy at a funeral, though uncustomary within certain traditions, fails to be an
exact parallel with an excess pushing beyond the proper limits of logic (indeed, their
works often highlight how easily restricted economies co-opt what superficially appears
as excess), their theoretical reasons for wanting something that truly exemplifies the
actuality of the latter, of this beyond, are interesting to us. But we will need to push
harder on this question of *what* counts a bit later.

As is evident above, it is difficult to describe the division Bataille sets up between
restricted and general economy without reference to the logical categories of negation,
which is how Hegel construes this problematic. Let us, then, translate the categories we
have introduced in this manner. Our question thus becomes: what has happened to
negativity in Hegel’s so-called restricted economy of life? Is the negativity that drives the
dialectic a sham negativity? Žižek summarizes this line of questioning:

[This reproach] to Hegel is that his radicalization of negativity is a fraud: as
Georges Bataille put it, the Hegelian ‘work of the negative’ remains within the
constraints of the ‘restricted economy,’ with an in-built mechanism guaranteeing
that the radicalized negativity will convert into the subordinated moment of a new
mediated positive order…[but] the Hegelian ‘negation of negation’ is far from
being the simple sublation of negativity in a new positive order. 283

Indeed, Derrida too will join Bataille in claiming that the restricted system relies on the
negativity that it denies, and when it tries to account for it within the new positive order it
comes up short: “Sa [Savoir absolu, Absolute Knowing] leaves things out, then, when it

actually does try to leave them out, and fails, and thereby fails to have contained them.”

But is it as simple as a facade, conscious or not, which amounts to returning us to a positive, restrictive order, or is Žižek right that Hegelian negativity is far from being so simple? To put it in another way, as Jay Lampert has, “do the traits of univocal signification really belong to systematic dialectics, and the traits of flowering little jerks really not?” Is it not the case that “dialectics does expect ideas to unfold in jerks, violent breaks, and movements between margins and centers,” movements that are powered by a negativity that is not simply a farcical mask for a progressive positivity? The answers to these questions will depend on what exactly is meant when we talk about Hegelian negativity or, more accurately, negativities, for “the method of speculative science is propelled by two negations” — abstract negation and determinate negation.

3.4 ABSTRACT AND DETERMINATE NEGATION

As Lisabeth During has pointed out, “the interplay between ‘abstract’ and ‘genuine’ or concrete negation is the very dynamic of dialectic itself.” The Derridean perspective on how these negativities function in Hegel’s philosophy runs as follows:

There is an immediate relation to alterity, ‘abstract negation,’ through which any immanence or immediacy is brought into distinction and formal differentiation.

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284 Jay Lampert, “The Resurrection and Dissemination (From the Pillar of Cloud Toward the Aporia)” *Joyful Wisdom* 6 (1997), 191. Derrida uses the term Sa in order to make a pun of its contrast with the indeterminacy of “oblivion” or philosophy’s excess, which he sometimes calls simply “it” or ça, i.e., Sa [Absolute Knowing] but with a difference that makes the difference, or, rather, that makes difference different than (prior and posterior to) difference, to foreshadow what we will come to in Chapter 4. On this name, see Jacques Derrida, *Glas*, 242a and Simon Critchley, “A Commentary upon Derrida’s Reading of Hegel in *Glas*,” *Hegel After Derrida*, ed. Stuart Barnett (New York: Routledge, 1998), 25.


However, at each transition in the progression of the dialectic, the abstract negation of the previous moment of immediacy reveals the essentiality of that movement that maintains and repeats itself in and through this destructive power. In a second speculative form of negation, the immediacy of the previous moment is transcended through the appropriative movement of *Aufhebung* that interiorizes abstract negativity. This movement thus negates, as its proper contradiction, the initial wholly abstract negativity and, in and through this now ‘determinate negation.’

Important to note here is the move of equating this second, determinate negation (or, depending on the author, variably “dialectical,” “speculative,” “concrete,” or “genuine” negation) with the *Aufhebung in toto*. This will be a move that we will challenge, but it is one that plays a crucial role in Derrida’s own representation of the conceptual unfolding of the dialectic. The end result will be Derrida’s lamenting of the placation of the oppositional resistance to assimilation of the first negation by the resolution of the second. Translated back into the Bataillean categories that Derrida relies upon, abstract negation’s relation to absolute otherness and the warring conflict of difference, when pushed to the limits of an “unbridled explosion of fury,” embodies the “spectacular violence” of the general economy. Additionally, as the logical operation of value activity, which Derrida claims underlies the drive of the restricted economy to accumulate and preserve, determinate negation is that which reaps the benefit of the


losses that occur under abstract negation, all the while holding itself up as a sort of negativity, a negation of negation.

Derrida and Bataille claim that it is Hegel’s introduction of the concept of abstract negation (alongside determinate negation) that makes him such an important figure for their philosophies of difference, and not merely as someone to oppose. To their minds, this insight constitutes the key contribution of dialectics. But the concept of abstract negation is a contribution that, they argue, is equally undone by Hegel. It is, for Derrida, also “the blind spot of Hegelianism,” neglected in the sense of not being taken seriously on its own terms, and taken too seriously as a subsidiary stratagem in the service of a greater conceptual architectonic. Bataille even goes to the extreme of calling this negativity of differentiation “an accident in the ascent” of Spirit. “Hegel saw this without seeing it, showed it while concealing,” Derrida writes, and “[h]e did not know to what extent he was right.” They claim the insight was retracted, though surreptitiously, by the move to absolute negation. Eventually, the determinate negation of the entire history of these retractions is taken to conclude the system of dialectical logic and ultimately surpass the provisional and oppositional difference contained in every moment of abstraction. Whatever is initially negated, whatever expenditure is made, comes back with interest in the absolute negation of the negation. The dead does not stay dead, but is revived again in a resurrected or zombified form, culminating in the Absolute. By eliminating the tension between the living and the dead, the disunity of the

290 Jacques Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, 259. Or, from the same page, “Hegel…blinded himself to that which he had laid bare under the rubric of negativity.”
thesis and the antithesis, as it were, Hegel is taken to have transformed the initial event of death into a farce.

To continue the Derridean story, with these two negativities initially vying for conceptual control Hegel finds himself left with an unwitting inconsistency that he cannot account for. “In effect I believe that Hegel’s text is necessarily fissured,” Derrida admits, “that it is something more and other than the circular closure of its representation.”

Yet, for him, this fissure represents an obstacle to the dialectic’s greater ambitions, an unconscious slip that occurs behind its own back, rather than being the necessary articulation of the system, up to the level of the Absolute, itself. This roughly corresponds to Adorno’s own estimation, which was that this dialectic of negativity “oscillate[s] between the profoundest insight and its corruption” and that this corruption, the greedy impulse to squelch this back-and-forth, eventually “takes the upper hand.”

It is the very aspiration to systematicity that is said to force Hegel to privilege resolution, for “he could not have developed his system without assuming that conflicts between contrary determinations are necessarily resolved.”

To recall Heidegger: “Philosophy, insofar as it is ab-solute, un-condition, must incorporate negativity in a particular way, and yet by doing this, that is, it ultimately does not take it seriously.”

Pointing to the fact that determinate negativity is essential to dialectical logic is not, however, a sufficient demonstration that the sway of abstract negativity need be entirely effaced by the science. But that is Derrida’s wager, that dialectical negation, which is conflated with Aufhebung, is represented as taking the upper hand, as the chief negativity, and carries pretensions to

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294 Jacques Derrida, *Positions*, 77
overcome the fissuring, to stabilize, domesticate, normalize. “The assimilation digesting the objective debt and abstract exchange, the devouring of the limit is then the \textit{Aufhebung’s economic} effect…no longer subject to any outside interdiction.”  

Derrida describes the product of this effect, the product of philosophy, as  

\textit{oikos,} house, habitation, apartment, room, residence, temple, tomb, hive, possessions, family, race, etc. If there is a common same in all this, it is the guardianship over the ‘proper’: which retains and inhibits, consigns absolute loss or consumes it only the better to watch it return into self, even as the repetition of death.  

Since that which is “proper” to the general economy is the “improper,” the system of dialectics does not respect the radical difference of the dead \textit{because} it respects it, it preserves it in its shroud, bestows it with meaningful properties such as “death as cause of grief.” The system of determinate negation as a tomb:  

\begin{quote}
The tomb is the life of the body as the sign of death…But the tomb also shelters, maintains in reserve, capitalizes on life by marking that life continues elsewhere. The family crypt: \textit{oikēsis}. It consecrates the disappearance of life by attesting to the perseverance of life. Thus, the tomb also shelters life from death. It warns the soul of possible death, warns (of) death of the soul, turns away (from) death…preserved, maintained, kept in maintenance, present, signified…It was indeed necessary for death to be at work – the \textit{Phenomenology of the Spirit}
\end{quote}

\footnotesize
describes the work of death – for a monument to come to retain and protect the life of the soul by signifying it.\textsuperscript{300}

Thus we see the key role that abstract negativity plays for those philosophies that emphasize pure difference and its manner of opposing rather than assimilating. “It is in the name of anti-Hegelianism,” Malabou writes, “that difference is promoted to the rank of a guiding concept. Indeed, difference is…not looking for its resolution.”\textsuperscript{301} So important is the purity of this difference to Derrida and company that even abstract negation seems compromised when confined to its Hegelian form, given its placement in a so-called restricted economy. It is claimed by Karin de Boer that, to escape giving opposition the same (or more) prominence given to assimilation, Hegel “conceives of abstract negativity as a particular moment, guise, or determination of absolute negativity itself.”\textsuperscript{302} Therefore, such critics demand what we might call a hyperabstract negativity, an abstract negativity taken on its own and apart from any dialectical schema. And given that such a schema defines the movement and limits of logical thought, Hegel is said to not be able to think real negativity, but can only intend to.\textsuperscript{303}

Having introduced the requisite vocabulary and given an initial assessment of how a certain critique from difference proceeds with respect to Hegelian negativity, let us look at how it could apply to a concrete case, perhaps Hegel’s most famous one: the

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item If you are referring to Jacques Derrida, \textit{Margins of Philosophy}, 82-83.
\item Catherine Malabou, “The Eternal Return and the Phantom of Difference,” trans. Arne De Boever, \textit{Parrhesia} 10 (2010), 2. Compare the notion of difference as a guiding concept to de Boer’s claim that “that which philosophy has usually regarded as mere secondary moments might turn out to be more principle-like…than that which purports to be the true beginning and end of whatever it is that actualizes itself”—Or, moreover, her intention to “retrieve the tragic strand of Hegel’s conception of tragic conflicts so as to raise it, in its turn, into a basic philosophical principle.” Karin de Boer, \textit{On Hegel}, 28, 3; emphasis added.
\item Karin de Boer, \textit{On Hegel}, 73; In other words, actual “[abstract negativity] eludes Hegel’s distinction between abstract and absolute negativity. Hegel established this distinction precisely in order to efface the self-undermining at work in conflicts between contrary determinations.” Karin de Boer, \textit{On Hegel}, 3-4.
\item “Derrida slowly came to feel about the Hegelian categories that, like those of Husserl, they were not really forms of thinking but only served notice of the intent to think, without finally doing so.” Fredric Jameson, \textit{Valences of the Dialectic} (London: Verso, 2009), 103.
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
Phenomenology’s lordship and bondage (or master and slave) dialectic. It is in this explicit case that we can more fully explore the association that we have made above between negativity and death, that association so favoured by Bataille.

3.5 THE DIALECTIC OF LORDSHIP AND BONDAGE

This particular dialectic arises as Hegel follows the logical transition between the structures of the most basic, immediate experience of consciousness and the development of self-consciousness; the shift from natural sense-perception, Selbstgefühl, to Selbstbewußtsein, the awareness of the self. This encounter marks the process by which consciousness starts to take account of its relation to this objective world and thus to “what consciousness knows in knowing itself.”\textsuperscript{304} But though it has now become cognizant of itself, “the whole expanse of the sensuous world is preserved in it,”\textsuperscript{305} which amounts to a pull back-and-forth between the demands of the objective world, which appears to its perception (Erscheinung) and had formerly exhausted its entire horizon, and the truth of its recognition of self, self-affirmation, the possibility of autonomy. We might cast this struggle as that between the experience of the outer and the experience of the inner.\textsuperscript{306} Desire (Begierde) is the term for the interest in the self’s autonomous identity via destruction, it “is the movement in which self-consciousness supplants

\textsuperscript{304} G. W. F. Hegel, Phenomenology of Spirit, §165. For an excellent account of the steps Hegel makes that are relevant to our discussion here, see John Russon, Reading Hegel’s Phenomenology (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2004), especially chapter 4, but also chapters 5 and 6.

\textsuperscript{305} G. W. F. Hegel, Phenomenology of Spirit, §167.

\textsuperscript{306} Leslie Anne Boldt takes the title of Bataille’s 1954 text Inner Experience to evoke Aquinas’ Summa Theologiae, given its initial inclusion in a 1943 collection called La Somme athéologique (Georges Bataille, Inner Experience, ix). But it could equally apply to a celebration of the independent desire for the detachment of death over the mediated life of external recognition.
appearance with this truth,” the movement where the objective realm around it is negated. This is the movement from a positive attachment to nature (need) to its active negation informed by a yearning for the non-natural. This yearning is for the power of the negative, for the unattached. That is, it is a desire for desire, the desire of another, “different, independent individual.” Since it was the comprehension of its relation to the objective world that spurred this desire, the desire for desire is the desire for that autonomous something within its scope that has similarly come to the same truth, that which is similarly moved to negate: another self-consciousness. Joseph Navickas summarizes this nicely:

As Desire, the subject is pure negating-negativity without content, and the object desired and subsequently negated determines the nature of the desiring subject...If desire is to lead to self-consciousness, it must be directed toward a

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308 G. W. F. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, §176. From the intersubjective language of §186, of a self-consciousness confronted with an other self-consciousness, and of the recognition of a different, independent individual, it appears that Hegel is talking about two separate desiring figures (one desires the independence of another desirer). There have, however, been interpretations that suggest that one understand this other to be, rather, that which emerges from an internal split within one consciousness (one’s desire turns out to be a desire for that part of one self that is free, one’s own desiring self). Jonathan Rée, for example, interprets it along these lines, not as involving two individuals, but as a “reworking of the myth of Narcissus.” Jonathan Rée, *Philosophical Tales* (London: Routledge, 1987), 91. In the more common former account the question becomes where we can find in this story an account of the origin of multiple autonomous subjects. In the latter the problem becomes one of understanding the intersubjective “we,” the recognition of desire, and later the dialectic of the master and the labouring slave as the interior struggle of the same self-consciousness. Either interpretation may lead to respective sociopolitical and psychological conclusions, not to mention different consequences for a phenomenology of intentionality (consider both options alongside Husserl’s “Fifth Meditation,” for example). Yet in our focus on the logical form of dialectics, we are primarily concerned with how this story functions as an analysis of the development of abstract and determinate negation, how the figures of the master and slave designate a certain notion of attachment and detachment and, especially, how this relates to the concept of sublation. With this in mind, we contend that the logical structure examined in this section would apply even if, instead of taking the structure of alterity and desire to apply to two consciousnesses, intersubjectivity in this larger sense was understood to emerge at some other point in the *Phenomenology.*
non-natural object, something capable of transcending its given reality, capable of negating itself, dying to itself….toward another desire.\textsuperscript{309}

This other self-consciousness thus becomes necessary for the first self-consciousness to properly relate to itself as self-consciousness. “The logically necessary result of the experience of desire is thus the doubling of self-consciousness,”\textsuperscript{310} as Houlgate says. Hence, we have the conditions for intersubjectivity, the “I that is We and We that is I.”\textsuperscript{311} But, from the perspective of the desiring consciousness, this returned recognition of the other as an independent self-consciousness with its own self-identity (i.e., an other with a self-affirmative desire for our first self-consciousness’ desire), appears as a retreat to yet another attachment. Put otherwise, this other still appears as a thing embedded in the objective world for consciousness, as part of the natural order of need rather than the self-affirming order of the negative. Self-consciousness’ desire is, by definition, self-interested, it is the desire only for another self-consciousness’ desire. And since self-consciousness desires independence from attachment, it is reluctant to accept the prospect of re-establishing a dependency by recognizing back that which recognizes it. Both self-consciousnesses have this problem, wanting to impose their will (to be recognized) on another without conceding anything and this leads to conflict where both “are opposed to one another” and the prize is “one being only recognized, the other only recognizing.”\textsuperscript{312} Hegel describes the early stage of this dialectic of recognition as “two

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\textsuperscript{310} Stephen Houlgate, \textit{Hegel’s Phenomenology of Spirit}, 88.
\textsuperscript{311} G. W. F. Hegel, \textit{Phenomenology of Spirit}, §177.
\textsuperscript{312} G. W. F. Hegel, \textit{Phenomenology of Spirit}, §185. With negation in mind, it is worth noting that in this section Hegel describes this relation as oppositional and split.
\end{flushright}
selves rigidly and unyieldingly confronting each other,“313 since neither begins ready to
give up their desire for desire, the terms of their self-consciousness.

The stakes of such a showdown are demonstrating that one’s power to negate the
objective particularities of the natural world (or negate the hold that the natural world has
on oneself) is greater than the other’s and thereby more deserving of recognition as an
independent self-consciousness. In other words, the conflict is staged as a demonstration
that one is truly free while the other remains at home (with all the sense Derrida gives to
the oikos) in the objective world, nothing more than another object for the true self-
consciousness’ mere sense-perception. To demonstrate this is to demonstrate putting at
risk one’s attachment to life sustained by the natural world. Sartre explains it like this:

[T]o the extent that the Other apprehends me as bound to a body and immersed in
life, I am myself only an Other. In order to make myself recognized by the Other,
I must risk my own life. To risk one’s life, in fact, is to reveal oneself as not-
bound to the objective form or to any determined existence—as not-bound to
life.314

Therefore, we have a contest deciding who, in the name of being a pure being-for-self, is
most willing to negate their attachment, a race to see who is first ready to die for the
glory of being recognized as free of debt to any thing that could determine one’s self.315

315 G. W. F. Hegel, Phenomenology of Spirit. §186. Although it should be stressed that Hegel is following the logic of experience, rather than giving some explicitly (pre-)historical, (pre-)political, or otherwise
As Hegel puts it in his earliest piece of writing, “[I]n death he can realize his absolute independence and freedom [for] himself as absolutely negative consciousness.”

The catch is that this reckless abandon cannot move beyond the mere taunting of death, for if either of the parties die, the contest is lost—if the other dies, your radical independence goes unrecognized; if you die, there is nothing to recognize: you are not independent, you are dead. He who recognizes this perilment as too risky and backs out of the contest first is deemed as having been unwilling to part with the crude world of things and sensuous need. The direct outcome of this forfeiture is the production of two characters and a new intersubjective arrangement: the uneven roles of the inferior slave, who had quit the struggle, and the victorious master, who had not. As H.S. Harris explains, “Serfdom is the dependence created by admitting that ‘thinghood generally’ is essential to the self because the preservation of life is its absolute imperative.” And lordship represents the inverse of this sentiment.

Wanting a distance between himself and the natural world, the master orders the slave to provide him with what he wants such that he is able to continue to immediately consume what he desires, while also continuing to receive the recognition that satisfies his self-consciousness’ desire for desire. He has something to intervene between him and the world, which enables a fleeting sense of freedom from the attachment that

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anthropological account—as much as such accounts might follow from it—the Hobbesian echo of this showdown should nevertheless not be missed, for what is this self-affirmation but the effusion “arising from imagination of a man’s own power and ability…that exultation of the mind which is called GLORING…[and] if grounded on the flattery of others or only supposed by himself…is called VAIN-GLORY”? Thomas Hobbes, Leviathan, eds. A.P Martinich and Brian Battiste (Toronto: Broadview, 2011), 72. For a study on the connection between Hobbes and Hegel on the dialectic of recognition, see Ludwig Siep, “The Struggle for Recognition: Hegel’s Dispute with Hobbes in the Jena Writings,” Hegel’s Dialectic of Desire and Recognition, ed. J. O’Neill, (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1996).


accompanies reliance on the objective realm. With this freedom, his relation to the world is one of consumption and wastefulness rather than need, as he freely negates (consumes, enjoys) the things that have been supplied for him to negate. With the basic necessities required to sustain the master’s life in mind, Hegel calls the slave’s provision of natural goods for consumption “labour.” But this labour need not be limited to harvesting food, for example, but extends to any type of activity or relation to the world that the master would have needed to partake in to satisfy his desires, were it not for the slave.

However, as it turns out, the master is not ultimately unlimited but lives a life of debt, dependent on the slave’s labour to the degree that “what really confronts him is not an independent consciousness, but a dependent one…his truth is in reality the unessential consciousness and its unessential action.” His negation is not absolute but is mediated. His initial victory is exposed as insufficient as soon as it sinks in that the master has not been recognized by an equal self-consciousness at all but by a slave, just another thing in and attached to nature.

Given that the slave accepted his necessarily intimate relation to the world by submitting to the master, he “cannot go to the length of being altogether done with it to the point of annihilation.” But what he can do is, through his labour (for the master), transform the things around him, turning them into something else. This labour might not be a freely chosen decision on his part, yet by undertaking his order he also takes control of his work and internalizes it, making it work for him, so to speak: he comes to see that through him and him alone he is able to change the world. Likewise, the task of

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labouring enables him to turn his situation on itself \([\text{sich umkehren}]\), using it not only for external, objective production, but also for the production of a new subjective significance, to some extent. The slave is now able to bring the achievement of the master’s negation together with the situation that initially committed him to privileging his attachment to nature. Here is freedom as a unity, a gathering, a profit. And his work “is desire held in check, fleetingness stayed off.”\(^{322}\) With this newfound internal power, this new freedom, we have a reversal of the lowly status of the slave. But having gone through the struggle for recognition and assumed a new relation to the objective world, this position of the labouring slave, this reversal, is not a return to the initial “thesis” of the attached consciousness. Instead, the particular independence gained from labour appears to be what we described as determinate rather than abstract negation, or what we earlier called the logical third.

So, if the slave is characterized through his labour and “the truth of independent consciousness is…servile consciousness,”\(^{323}\) then it seems simple enough to draw the conclusion that labour, the staving off of fleetingness, is wholly responsible for determining the real truth of self-consciousness. Moreover, the labour of the slave appears to stand for the \textit{Aufhebung} of the entire master-slave dialectic. This will not be the end of the story, and we will return to the rest of it to make some very necessary critical qualifications, but it does get at the theoretical significance that Derrida and Bataille take away from this section: The slave’s “preservation” and “overcoming” of the master’s negativity, of his “reckless expenditure of vital resources,”\(^{324}\) defines a restricted economy, an economy restricted to the reproduction of meaning, converting everything

\(^{322}\) G. W. F. Hegel, \emph{Phenomenology of Spirit}, §195.

\(^{323}\) G. W. F. Hegel, \emph{Phenomenology of Spirit}, §193.

\(^{324}\) Georges Bataille, \emph{The Accursed Share}, 71.
into productive form, into property. “Did [the slave] not stealthily aggrandize itself with every loss,” Rebecca Comay wonders, “snatch a victory from every fall?” To the extent that there is no alternative to the slave as presented here, “that of the slave who draws from the ‘No’ a phantom of an affirmation,” the slave as final victor, Derrida contends that the dialectical concept of the master—his position of domination, exemplary of his more authentic relationship to death, a relationship demonstrated earlier by his initial willingness to die, to be detached from the world—is simply a moment to be quickly overcome by dialectical negation. Due to this, “philosophy, Hegelian speculation, absolute knowledge and everything that they govern, and will govern endlessly in their closure, remain determinations of natural, servile and vulgar consciousness. Self-consciousness is servile.”

Another way of putting Derrida and Bataille’s point is to claim that Hegel’s fault is that he gives victory to the slave over the master’s willingness to die. The Hegelian gesture, according to them, is to look at death head-on without trembling in front of it. Hegel has “respect for death at the very moment [he] looks directly at it,” Bataille criticizes. What Bataille means by respect in this context is the attempt to grant it a place within his conceptual framework, whereby it might be thought, and taken seriously, rather than taken as a destabilization of philosophical systematicity itself. If Hegel had embraced (abstract) negativity in all its unproductive power, they contend, he would surely have avoided giving it a place (as the ultimately unvictorious master); that is, he

327 Jacques Derrida, Writing and Difference, 276.
329 Jacques Derrida, Writing and Difference, 255.
would have avoided systematically formalizing it, subjecting it to philosophical positing and its processes of recuperation. As Kojève writes, this “respect” “keeps and preserves the overcome-entity and, for that very reason survives the fact of being overcome.”

Taking negativity seriously and approaching it philosophically is said to always amount to the suppression or the domestication of the absoluteness of its detachment from dependency (on the natural world, etc.). Dialectics’ very structure of reappropriation thus seems to deny the possibility of any alternative economy that would avoid such formalization, that would, instead, insist on an endless abstract negation that could not be sublated. That is, to Derrida and Bataille, the victory of the slave appears to displace the ostensibly unrestricted character of the master, transforming his position, which was the result of an unflinching risk of death, into yet another attachment, such that we are left without an option (in the figures of either the slave or the master) for a truly authentic relationship to death’s negativity, autonomy from the economy of exchange.

Derrida treats this problem at the level of meaning, the economy of signification. According to Derrida, only by respecting the senselessness of death outside of the domesticated (oikeios) realm of respect and the onto-economic production of meaning do we actually approach death at all. That is, to philosophically explicate (“respect”) death’s (non-)sense would be to once again restore its sense and return it to its status of a mere ruse, translating it “from an end to a simple means.”

In *Glas*, Derrida discusses this

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331 Georges Bataille, “Hegel, Death and Sacrifice,” 26. In Section 4.6, we will discuss the notion of sovereignty, which is introduced as a figure that resists hedging bets before the risk, resists “respecting”
denial of “death,” (but still taken in its logical form and not simply in the restricted biological or typically anthropological sense we usually attribute to the term):

When one says ‘death is,’ one says ‘death is denied’; death is not insofar as one posits it. Such is the Hegelian thesis: philosophy, death’s positing, its pose…The Aufhebung is the dying away, the amortization of death. That is the concept of economy in general in speculative dialectics…The economic act makes familiar, proper, one’s own, intimate, private. The sense of property, of propriety, in general is collected in the oikeios…The Aufhebung is the economic law of the absolute reappropriation of absolute loss.

In “Hegel, Death and Sacrifice,” Bataille quotes the preface from the Phenomenology of Spirit in order to suggest that this exchange or transposition is not limited to a mere figure in a particular section, but that the slave illustrates the very project of dialectics (against which Bataille positions his own thought):

Spirit attains its truth only by finding itself in absolute dismemberment. It is not that (prodigious) power by being the Positive that turns away from the Negative, as when we say of something: this is nothing or (this is) false and, having (thus) disposed of it, pass from there to something else; no, Spirit is that power only to the degree that in which contemplates the Negative face to face (and) dwells with

(attempting to account for, conceptualize, and philosophically re-appropriate) death. We will return to the precise manner in which Derrida relates death to meaning or the lack thereof in Chapter 4.

332 Derrida departs from Kojève on this point, acknowledging that even the Phenomenology of Spirit “does not have to do with something one might simply call man. As the science of the experience of consciousness, the science of the structures of the phenomenality of the spirit itself relating to itself, it is rigorously distinguished from anthropology…. [and] [w]hat is true of the Phenomenology is a fortiori true of the system of the Logic.” Jacques Derrida, Margins of Philosophy, 117. H.S. Harris makes the similar point, “Just as Hegel presented the evolution of desire logically rather than empirically, so he now [in the Phenomenology] presents the evolution of recognition logically.” H.S. Harris, Hegel’s Ladder, Vol. 1, 351.

333 Jacques Derrida, Glas, 133a.
it. This prolonged sojourn is the magical force which transposes the negative into
given-Being.\footnote{Quoted in Georges Bataille, “Hegel, Death and Sacrifice,” 14; emphasis added. Miller’s translation is as follows: “[Spirit] wins its truth only when, in utter dismemberment, it finds itself. It is this power, not as something positive, which closes its eyes to the negative, as when we say of something that it is nothing or is false, and then, having done with it, turn away and pass on to something else; on the contrary, Spirit is this power only by looking the negative in the face, and tarrying with it. This tarrying with the negative is the magical power that converts it into being.” G. W. F. Hegel, \textit{Phenomenology of Spirit}, 19.}

In this “prolonged sojourn” of servitude, which Miller translates as “tarrying with the negative,” Bataille sees a path to perfection, a prosthesis that reverses the effects of the dismemberment.\footnote{Georges Bataille, \textit{Inner Experience}, 4.} On this path there is no place for deformation or transgression.

“Hegel’s triumphant narrative of the independence inaugurated in the reversal in the life of servitude is seen to point to an unspoken, tragic demise of the sovereign freedom of mastery and, in turn, to the rise of repression, mediocrity, and docility.”\footnote{Theodore D. George, \textit{Tragedies of Spirit: Tracing Finitude in Hegel’s Phenomenology of Spirit} (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 2006), 51.} Similar to what Deleuze and Guattari, in their own terms, remarked of capitalist economics, its deterritorializations quickly lead to correlative reterritorializations, the reappearance of lost values and a reserve of labour, albeit now under a new heading, able to be more smoothly integrated with some of the kinks ironed out.\footnote{See Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, \textit{A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia}, trans. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minneapolis Press, 2005), especially 508-10.} Hegel’s critics lament the loss of the Zarathustrian greatness of the master’s efforts to “show that it is tied to no particular existence, certainly not to the universal singularity of existence, that it is not tied to life.”\footnote{G. W. F. Hegel, \textit{Phenomenology of Spirit}, §187.} It seems that the master’s detachment turned out to be yet another attachment and, thus, the Nietzschean conclusion of these critics: that the dialectical process undoes the master’s initial sense of self-assertion, “which for the sake of its own ‘honor’ and nothing else…was prepared to face the extinction of life without flinching,
was indeed ‘manliness’ ([*andreia, virtus*]).”\textsuperscript{339} Instead, we are left with the master ultimately dependent on the slave and the slave accumulating pain as a victim *in order to* be rewarded for it later in some way.\textsuperscript{340} So, delimited by this perceived dialectical checkmate, between the slave and the master dependent on the slave, Derrida determines that the only move to make is, in fact, the impossible one.

3.6 SOVEREIGNTY, *DIFFERÂNCE*

With the mastery trivialized by the slave as resulting in another form of dependency, Derrida needs another option. He reasons that to disrupt the logical progression toward enslavement by simply reverting back to mastery would be “to stand this *Aufhebung*…on its head[,] would be to leave or put back in place the truth of the phallocentric dialectic.”\textsuperscript{341} If Hegel describes the master in terms of—what Derrida concludes to be a farcical—abstract negation, then this kind of abstract negation will be insufficient insofar as it is a negativity that always eventually gives in to determinate negativity. Instead, he looks for an alternative concept. The figure that represents the truly abstract negation of the general economy must be something other than the master or the slave; it must not be bound to the particular negativity of the master because then it would be reducible to the slave. In other words, a *truly abstract* or what we have called *hyperabstract* negativity will need to be an absolutely untethered abstract negativity.

\textsuperscript{339} H.S. Harris, *Hegel’s Ladder, Vol. 1*, 353.

\textsuperscript{340} See Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morality*, ed. Keith Ansell-Pearson, trans. Carol Diethe (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007), for the basic outline of this contrast, as well as his 1871 essay “The Greek State” for the contrast between Greek and modern, Christian views on labour and slavery specifically.

What he proposes is a master whose negativity will not be overturned by a slave, a master without reserve: a **sovereign**.

The notion of ‘sovereignty’ refers to the condition of the figure that is ready to choose freedom over life in the struggle with another for recognition. By contrast, ‘mastery’ refers to this same figure, but once she suddenly finds herself to be a master bound up in a relation to the servant.\(^{342}\)

The figure of the sovereign is said not only to overcome the limitations put on the master by the slave, but overcomes the limits of meaningfulness or sense itself. The master, in being ultimately bound to the slave, is not able to actually remain detached from dependency and thus is too much like the slave, living a life that makes sense—it makes sense not to *completely* negate. And it is this relation that “makes sense” that Bataille and Derrida wish to destabilize. Sovereignty, then, is proposed as “more and less than lordship.”\(^{343}\) It makes less sense than the objective order of (symbolic) utility, but only because it lies *in excess* of the limitations of this order.

He calls this the “repressed origin” of mastery.\(^{344}\) It is an *origin* because lordship cannot arise without it. If sovereignty cannot be taken into reserve, it speaks to something greater, more fundamental than anything able to be accounted for. Since it is claimed that sovereignty cannot arise from and be thereby traced back to the intersubjective sense of the master-slave relation, as it “is itself in violation of the structural dynamics of recognition that work to govern signification,”\(^{345}\) then it must precede it, as the external

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\(^{342}\) Theodore D. George, *Tragedies of Spirit*, 66. Sovereignty is understood as the radicalization of the negativity of the master (a “sovereign master”) rather than the slave (a “sovereign slave”), for it is the detachment from the world, which we initially saw in the master, that is sought here.

\(^{343}\) Jacques Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, 256.

\(^{344}\) Jacques Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, 255.

condition for lordship and servitude. However, the originary status of this origin and its causal genesis cannot be tracked via dialectical logic because of its *repressed* nature, its resistance to any recognition by the economy of signification. That is, it is taken to be inherent to the concept of sovereignty that it cannot be utilized for the purposes of conceptual explanation within the framework of recognition.

These characteristics point to the declared differences between the sovereign and the master. Although the master was willing to die, he must, in the end, stay alive. His very identity as master depends on his maintenance of the position he occupies because he did not have to go through with the threat. Whereas, “Sovereignty,” Derrida writes, “is totally other, Bataille pulls it out of dialectics.” To pull out is to be sacrificed: "Lordship…becomes sovereign when it…is lost as the absolute victim of its own sacrifice.” This is what Bataille has in mind in *The Accursed Share* when he claims “Sovereignty is NOTHING.” In addition to this, its absolute alterity (or what Bataille means here by nothingness) means that it escapes the bounds of semantic utility demanded by discursive thought: “The sovereign is only discernible in traces,” while Lordship has a meaning…. [P]utting at stake of life is a moment in the constitution of meaning, in the presentation of essence and truth. It is an obligatory stage in the history of self-consciousness and phenomenality, that is to say in the presentation of meaning.

The master’s consumption of things in the world is not the negation that falls under desire (which completely destroys), but is rather a still semi-attached enjoyment (*Genuss*),

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which depends on the slave as an intermediary. On the other hand, sovereignty is powerless and useless. Bataille “withdraws it [sovereignty] from the horizon of meaning and knowledge” because it does not “maintain itself, collect itself, or, collect the profits from itself, its own risk.”351 This is Derrida’s attempted move outside of the Hegelian edifice, understood to finally privilege determinate negation, and herald in its place actually abstract negativity. In Bataille’s words, “It is this useless, senseless loss that is sovereignty.”352 (Whether or not sovereignty defined in these terms can be anything but hyperbole, whether there can be any successful candidate of such senselessness, will be the subject of our next chapter.)

Another way one might describe the “Hegelian constriction of negativity,” whose supposed total encompassment it is the sovereign’s task to frustrate, is as “a moment appropriated within a teleological economy of absolute presence.”353 The language of presence is meant to attest to a self-relation that ostensibly diminishes difference, suggesting the seizure of transformation, such as when one refers to a thing apart from its possibilities, the self-sameness of being merely present to oneself. Derrida claims that in Hegel’s philosophy, “the epoch of onto-theology...the philosophy of presence, that is to say, philosophy itself,”354 complete difference or negation (of the same) always makes an appearance but is overcome, unlike with sovereignty; abstract negation and difference “always seem to make an apparent provisional, and derivative notch in the system of first and last presence,”355 but are never held in the same philosophical regard as the “desired presence” against which they are first schematized. As a philosophy, dialectics

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353 Kevin Thompson, “Hegelian dialectic and the Quasi-Transcendental in *Glas,*” 240.
supposedly “determines difference as contradiction only in order to resolve it, to
interiorize it, to life it up (according to the syllogistic process of speculative dialectics)
into the self-presence of an onto-theological or onto-teleological synthesis.”\(^\text{356}\) If the
master does not satisfy Derrida as unappropriated abstract negativity because of its
proximity and co-implication with the slave, then the difference he wishes to maintain is
not the difference between the master and slave as described by Hegel, but a more radical
difference without rapport, between dialectics (inclusive of the master-slave dialectic)
and a sovereign beyond and unpresentable through dialectical logic.

So pernicious does Derrida take this merely provisional status granted to
difference in (onto-theological) philosophy, that he introduces another term for the non-
dialectical logic of sovereignty: \textit{différence}. Thus, what we have proposed to us is a
master that is sovereign, an abstract negativity that is hyperabstract, and a difference that
is \textit{différence}. In the famous essay of the same name, Derrida describes \textit{différence} as
what makes possible the presentation of the being-present[.] [I]t is never
presented as such. It is never offered to the present. Or to anyone. Reserving
itself, not exposing itself, in regular fashion it exceeds the order of truth at a
certain precise point, but without dissimulating itself as something, the order of
truth at a certain precise point...\(^\text{357}\)

It is a term that has (or at least at the time Derrida introduced it, \textit{had}) not been inscribed
into philosophical discourse, a term that reserves itself from the philosophy of reserves.
“Neither word nor a concept,”\(^\text{358}\) \textit{différence} is the difference in difference, the difference

\(^{356}\) Jacques Derrida, \textit{Positions}, 44.
that could be mistaken for the same (i.e., it is not audibly distinguishable), but with a
barely discernible “a” that will not fit,
a barely perceptible displacement [that] disjoints all the articulations and
penetrates all the points welded together by the imitated discourse [Hegelian
dialectics]. A trembling spreads out which then makes the entire old shell

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crack.\[359\]

Différance is difference removed from difference conceived as some sort of
“differentiating relation,” which, he claims, is eventually subsumed under the “self-
referential unity of [the] concept.”\[360\] In other words, the “non-concept” of différance is
sovereignty looking like the master, but calling into question the master’s
(differentiating) relation with the slave. One cannot help but recognize in this trembling
through repetition a similarity with the Hegelian negation of negation, and Derrida
readily admits that, though it is “a kind of infinitesimal and radical displacement”\[361\] with
the system of the Aufhebung, différance bears an “almost absolute proximity”\[362\] to
sublation. Yet because of this close resemblance, this “most uncircumventable theme,”\[363\]
this “speculative concept par excellence”\[364\] must be hunted in all its forms and wherever
it might be found, becoming the “decisive target” toward which the defender of
negativity “must focus one’s critique.”\[365\] In fact, différance is nothing but the hunting

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359 Jacques Derrida, Writing and Difference, 260. Derrida is here describing the operation of différance as
that of reinterpreting and simulating the Hegelian discourse. For similarities between Hegel and Derrida see
John Llewelyn, “A Point of Almost Absolute Proximity to Hegel,” Deconstruction and Philosophy: The
360 Jacques Derrida, Margins of Philosophy, 11, 14. See also page 19 where différance is related to the
general economy disrupting the restricted economy.
361 Jacques Derrida, Margins of Philosophy, 14.
362 Jacques Derrida, Positions, 44.
363 Jacques Derrida, Writing and Difference, 320n.
364 Jacques Derrida, Writing and Difference, 257.
365 Jacques Derrida, Dissemination, 248n53.
and firing at this concept: “If there were a definition of différerance, it would be precisely the limit, the interruption, the destruction of the Hegelian relève wherever it operates. What is at stake here is enormous.”

We have attempted to show what is at stake in, and Derrida and Bataille’s reasons for taking aim at, ontotheological philosophy, sublation, the labouring slave, dialectical negativity, etc. What we have not yet described, however, is what exactly counts as putting sublation at stake. That is, so far we have outlined the structure of sovereignty, that of an unsublatable master incommensurable with the slave’s exchange, resistant to the latter’s work of conceptualizing or making sense of radical detachment. We have characterized the sovereign as the (hyper)abstract negativity that differs from dialectics as the systematic economy of differences. We have described what sovereignty takes itself to be the other of or alternative to, and what it takes itself to do to sublation. But what more can be said of its possible manifestations or the specific operations that succeed in getting outside the limits of dialectical thought? What is an example of diffrancerence demonstrated or can such an example even be given, given the very nature of this concept that is no concept?

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366 Jacques Derrida, Positions, 40-1.
4.1 THE DISLOCATION AND SILENCING OF MEANING

We will address the question of what is meaningless, that is, what is meant to “count” as sovereign (fully acknowledging meanwhile Derrida’s insistence that the identity of what is sovereign “is always in question”\(^{367}\)), before we examine sovereignty’s relation to so-called ontotheological discourse (a relation Derrida alternately calls one of opposition or “nonrelation”), that is, before we address the ontological category of meaninglessness, the outside itself. Derrida’s critique is programmatic in nature and thus the outline of his project of deconstruction emerges through his readings and attempted disruption of philosophy. This is a program that puts signs and signification, meaning and nonsense, at the forefront as thematic concerns. As we can recall from the first page of the Logic’s preface (to the second edition), the forms of thought are in one instance “displayed and stored in human language.”\(^{368}\) And as we


saw from Derrida’s reading of Hegel, the slave was taken to have imbued things in the objective world with significance, transforming external objects of negative consumption into things of a certain symbolic importance via his labour.

At this point in his analysis of the bondsman, the master, and the sovereign in “From Restricted to General Economy,” Derrida chooses (as he often does elsewhere) to refer to the particular shape that sovereignty takes under the consideration of this linguistic orientation as writing. “The putting at stake, the one which exceeds lordship, is therefore the space of writing.” We will follow him here by reading sovereignty in the way he suggests, but we hasten to add that writing here extends beyond mere physical inscription; indeed, the slave does not turn objects into words as such, but he does, Derrida contests, turn them into something that is meaningful for the master. So, just as a text, for Derrida, is taken to connote a more extensive textuality, more comprehensive than (although inclusive of) any physical text, something that “implies all the structures called ‘real,’ ‘economic,’ ‘historical,’ socio-institutional, in short: all possible referents,” it is with a similar breadth that the topic of writing is taken, rather, to expose the workings and unworkings of concepts, the conditions and disruptions of meaning, the constitution and frustration of syntax, the production and interruption of discourse. The deconstructive gesture in all of this is the retaking of the term writing,

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369 Jacques Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, 266. Consider as well what Žižek takes writing to mean here: for “post-structuralist deconstruction, with its emphasis on gaps, ruptures, differences, and deferrals, etc.,…the process of ‘writing’…stands for the deferral of self-identity, for the ‘dead letter’ in the very heart of the living spirit.” Slavoj Žižek, *Less than Nothing*, 581


371 Thus, Derrida will talk of writing in contexts outside of the written sign, such as when he claims that “what one calls a visual art is a form of writing which is neither subjected in a hierarchical manner to verbal discourse nor to the claim of authority that logocentric philosophy would like to confirm over the
or more precisely, a demonstration of how the regular, “restricted” sense of the term implies its own undoing, as well as pointing to a more “general” or “sovereign” space of writing beyond its usual confines of meaningfulness, beyond its philosophical utilization toward establishing logocentric fixity. Writing taken in its deconstructive sense, “writing as excrement” or “originary writing,” “must produce the space and the materiality of the sheet” upon which philosophical reason inscribes itself, meaning that Derrida takes the restricted sense of writing to itself be internally dependent upon that which has a “disdain” for such sense.372 With this redefinition in mind, Derrida writes,

Since the space which separates the logic of lordship and, if you will, the nonlogic of sovereignty neither can nor may be inscribed in the nucleus of the [Hegelian] concept itself…it will have to be inscribed within the continuous chain (or functioning) of a form of writing. This…writing will be called writing because it exceeds the logos (of meaning, lordship, presence etc.).373

This writing is said to break from “significative discourse,” thereby, “differing from Hegel’s Book, which was Kojève’s theme.”374 That is, if the movement of logic, the movement of the concept can be phrased in terms of a book, in terms of writing as the discourse of logos, then “nonmeaning which is beyond absolute meaning, beyond the closure of the horizon of absolute knowledge,” is writing redefined, redefined as sovereign writing, “the writing of sovereignty,” as the “transgression of meaning.”375 It is in this manner that Derrida characterizes what disrupts and exceeds the enslaved

372 Jacques Derrida, Writing and Difference, 230-1, 210, 199.
373 Jacques Derrida, Writing and Difference, 267; emphasis of “because” added.
374 Jacques Derrida, Writing and Difference, 267.
375 Jacques Derrida, Writing and Difference, 270.
376 Jacques Derrida, Writing and Difference, 268.
discourse of meaning as a sovereign writing that exceeds the logos of which Hegel’s philosophy is said to have entirely summed up. In other words, the difference between (sovereign) difference and (Hegelian) difference is a written one: “différance.” Indeed, in Of Grammatology Derrida makes the claim that all of Hegel can be read reinterpreted in these terms, “All that Hegel thought within this horizon…may be reread as a meditation on writing.”377 This rereading of Hegel is intended to subvert the tendency of dialectical mediation as an interception via philosophical concepts that operates to pad the blow of writing. Writing’s “concepts are not necessarily distinguished from classical concepts by marked characteristics in the form of essential predicates, but rather by qualitative differences of force, height, etc.”378 The two qualifications we can make out in Derrida’s remarks on sovereign writing, accordingly, differ in severity, one meant to frustrate the (onto-theo-)logos that Hegel’s philosophy is said to embody and the other meant to give an alternative to its power: a) words that slide (or, words that make philosophical discourse slide) and b) words that do not speak, mute words, silent writing. In the following chapter we will assess these two modes of writing. In the first case—let us call it, mode 1—we will examine Derrida’s characterizations of this sliding as a sovereign overturning of Hegel’s philosophy. Directing our attention to the way in which a link, a certain commensurability, is still at work between philosophical sense and its supposed disruption, we will interrogate Derrida’s claim that this first mode of dislocative writing

377 Jacques Derrida, Of Grammatology, 24. And earlier: “The history of (the only) metaphysics, which has, in spite of all differences, not only from Plato to Hegel (even including Leibniz) but also beyond these apparent limits, from the pre-Socratics to Heidegger, always assigned the origin of truth in general to the logos: the history of truth, of the truth of truth, has always been…the debasement of writing, and its repression outside ‘full’ speech.” Jacques Derrida, Of Grammatology, 3. See also Jacques Derrida, Margins of Philosophy, 104, and Levinas’ definition of logos in Emmanuel Levinas, Difficult Freedom: Essays on Judaism (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997), 176, as “the medium of all comprehension and of all understanding in which all truth is reflected.”


379 Jacques Derrida, Writing and Difference, 272.
counts as sovereignty rather than as another instance of the negativity of the master, which was said to fall short of sovereign negativity precisely because of its dependence upon this very relation to significatory discourse (of the slave). In so doing, we will suggest that this sliding carries with it its own sense of the proper that compromises its intended distinction from the supposed economy of dialectical philosophy. We will then turn to an analysis of another case—mode 2—where it is said, “sovereignty is absolute when it is absolved of every relationship, and keeps itself in the night of the secret…this night of secret difference.”

Here, we will contend that in the effort to satisfy the necessary requirements for a distance from Hegel, the absolute incommensurability of this second mode of sovereign writing can only do so at the cost of opening the doors to a type of exaggerated externality ultimately untenable to the deconstructionist. Finally, we will examine an alternative interpretation of deconstruction by Martin Hägglund, which will challenge the ascription of a theory of absolute incommensurability to Derrida, thus saving him from said untenable consequences, but in the process will also mitigate the force of Derrida’s critique of Hegel.

a) *Dislocative Writing*

With respect to its first mode, sovereign writing is meant not to merely enunciate but to enunciate “*in order to* make sense slide, to denounce it or to deviate from it” and to make the discourse of the slave, of meaning, the “Hegelian discourse[,] dislocate

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380 Jacques Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, 266; emphasis added.
381 Jacques Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, 272; emphasis added.
These are words, objects, etc., that occupy places of synonymity within servile metaphysical systems but nevertheless aim to disturb the semantic footing that organizes them. Lampert lists a sampling of the ways Derridean writing operates toward this end in *Glas*: a) by identifying passages of aesthetic rather than conceptual similarities, b) by emphasizing incongruities, c) by attacking the reader’s expectations, d) by distracting the reader from the philosophical argumentation, e) by drawing out the insufficiency of conclusions, e) and by demonstrating the provisionality of order(ing). In each of these examples, the words, etc., that fit as examples are ones that emerge from within significative discourse, within a philosophical mode, but are claimed to be not fully inscribed within what is said but instead “redouble language.” If logocentrism is, as John D. Caputo defines it, “letting logic lead the letter,” then these are the letters (the written “a” in “différance,” for instance) that “at a certain point” interrupt the logic (of dialectical “difference”). This “point” is the moment of semantic instability, where sovereignty, or what Derrida will sometimes call the contra-band, is momentarily inassimilable to the discourse it is taken to disrupt. Of course, “the contra-band necessarily becomes that,” the ruses, simulacra, and strategems that “un-work” (*disoevrement*) and prevent reconstitution are eventually understood to work in this manner, as bearing the intentional purpose of emphasizing a text’s arbitrariness, yet their momentary status as disruption is said to remain sovereign: “The contra-band remains (reste) something other than what, necessarily, it is to become.”

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386 Jacques Derrida, *Glas*, 244a; emphasis added.
strategies is, Derrida admits, “attached, so to speak, to the incessant falling of a
supplement to the code.”387 But it is this very attachment that is on trial here, since to
know this connection is to prevent it from absolute exteriority. As soon as particular
deficits are acknowledged, the restricted economy expands to account for them—
différance is defined, the form and function of its displacement (its “a,” so to speak)
understood. As it turns out, we are forced to press Derrida on the topic he raises in the
context of Levinas’ own anti-Hegelianism: “We are wondering about the meaning of a
necessity: the necessity of lodging oneself within traditional conceptuality in order to
destroy it.”388 And it is this remaining connection with dialectical reason that will lead us
in section 4.2 below to question whether “sliding” can, in fact, count as a non-Hegelian,
sovereign difference.

b) Mute Writing

A second, more severe “nonphilosophical” mode of sovereign writing is that
which proceeds not via discursive synonymity but via the offering of an alternative to
meaning in general.389 Rather than disrupting the metaphysical processes of accountancy
from within, such writing is portrayed as external to these very processes, refusing to be
accounted for, refusing to be something which could be taken into account—
ontologically organized—at all. These are words sworn to absolute secrecy, words that

387 Jacques Derrida, Dissemination, 52; see also page 3, where he uses “dissemination” to describe those
“writing processes [that]…in practically questioning that form [of the philosophical book], must also
dismantle it.”
388 Jacques Derrida, Writing and Difference, 111.
389 Jacques Derrida, Writing and Difference, 253.
amount to “an absolute renunciation of meaning…a total loss of sense.” As Derrida puts it, insofar as there is a mode of sovereign difference considered mute writing, “We must find a speech which maintains silence;” that is to say, develop a way to indicate this non-working “space of writing,” but without recourse to those terms that would reduce it to a topic for philosophical conceptuality. But where is one to find this? To this question, “The sovereign has a right not to respond; he has a right to the silence of this asymmetry.” Sovereign writing is here taken as guarded from needing to submit to philosophical (viz. ontological) interrogation, to answer to questions that require it to identify itself in terms of presence, identity, etc. Indeed, Derrida admits that the very idea of writing external to signification makes it impossible to concretely posit anything that would satisfy the requirements of such meaninglessness: “I cannot speak of an absence of meaning, except by giving it a meaning it does not have. Silence is broken because I have spoken.” Mute writing by definition excludes definition, excludes any articulation; “it cannot be inscribed in discourse, except by crossing out predicates….that then exceeds the logic of philosophy.”

One can see how under these limitations, asking the question “what exactly is impossible” is here disparaged as the wrong question. But then why would one assume there is the impossible at all, granting to it the existential status Bataille had when he

wrote that “it is this useless, senseless loss that is Sovereignty” (his emphasis)? Indeed, why assume that by insisting on the impossible’s impossibility that impossibility is thereby somehow made possible? In Section 4.4 below we will look at the means by which Derrida suggests we are able to point to a space beyond this philosophical logic, namely via faith. In that section, our challenge to the idea of absolute meaninglessness, we will argue that even this faith, even this “relation” understood to break from any logic of relation that would reduce alterity to its “proper” place within dialectics, can nevertheless be given a philosophical interpretation. But let us for the moment say whatever we can about the status of these two modes.

From this specifically linguistic delineation we can roughly extract the function and characteristics of the sovereign, such that we can bring forward a few other examples of it. From dislocative writing (or, mode 1) we can describe the immediate function as that of a mimicry that distracts from work, the disruption of the logos, of the law, of presence, but toward no greater telos than that, or, put in a different way, toward an end beyond purpose. It is characterized by its task of opening up philosophical discourse to the non-integratable excess of complete nonsense. “Negation [as an] action that results in disruption”395 can thus be considered a strategic bridge toward the absolute muteness that is the sovereign’s second mode. As Heinz Kimmerle puts it, “the concept of displacement … indicate[s] the transition…from thought of death to real sacrifice.”396 This might be considered the transition from un-working to non-working. Whether one takes it as an example of a structured overloading of conceptual connections that philosophy cannot contain or as a wild breaking of the connections philosophy has already set in place, one

might put forward the book *Glas*, with its lack of an index, introduction, or conclusion, its tangents and juxtapositions, its split sections and multiple metaphors, as a candidate of this dislocative attempt to write with philosophical concepts otherwise than philosophy. To be sure, this pulling in numerous directions and overlaying of images is what Derrida loves about metaphor and analogy: they distract us from getting down to business (*viz.*, the space of accounts, the marketplace of value and exchange), from getting to its point; they defer the question of what something is, of its identity, by overlaying it with multiple “as”es. Yet, at least generally, we do reach our intended destination. Derrida might continue re-naming these strategies, but a list is possible. He might force terms beyond their traditional meanings or invent new ones, like “tympanizing,” but a quick look at what a tympan is (a term in letterpress printing that refers to a frame-mounted paper placed over another paper) and its use-value (to create a mark via a discord in order to create a particular impression) make Derrida’s intentions fairly clear.

From *mute writing* (or, mode 2), however, we are meant to discern no functionality (however temporary, however strategic), no bridge toward, no working *in order to* un-work. Its characteristics, inasmuch as we can ascribe to it anything at all are absolute ineffability, complete alterity, total nonsense, ateleology. “It governs nothing, reigns over nothing, nowhere exercises any authority.” The first example of such sovereign ineffability is death: “Concerning the threshold of death, we are engaged here

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397 We will return to this example of *Glas* in the next section (4.3), where we demonstrate the philosophical contextualizability of its attempt to break from or overload philosophical connections. For an excellent account Derrida’s theory of metaphor see Wendell Kisner, “Erinnerung, Retrait, Absolute Reflection: Hegel and Derrida,” *The Owl of Minerva* 26, 2 (Spring 1995), 171-85.  
398 See Jacques Derrida, *Margins of Philosophy*, x; See also Simon Critchley, “A Commentary upon Derrida’s Reading of Hegel in *Glas*.”  
toward a certain possibility of the impossible.” As we already quoted Derrida as stating, the moment death is posited it is denied. Thus, the space of sovereign writing would need to be outside the scope of being, it would need to be its other, on the other end of it and its positing, outside its spirit or life, so to speak. In this second sense, “[w]hat writing itself…betrays, is life. It menaces at once the breath, the spirit, and history as the spirit’s relationship with itself. It is their end, their finitude, their paralysis.” Much can be said of dying as well as of the dead for the living, but nothing can be said of death itself. Yet Derrida still bestows it the status of an arrivant, that which is always to come, as well as enumerates two of its features: a) a complete neutrality to the order of determinate conceptuality or experiential phenomenality, and b) absolute singularity that bears no likeness to anything of this realm of determinability, that is, to the realm of the present and the realm of past and future presents (viz., the order of presence itself).

Since it is claimed that there is no game of equivalences or of calculated, rational exchange or of expected outcome when it comes to death, death is also described by Derrida in the terms of the pure gift or sacrifice: the gift of death, from no one, for no one. This is a gift that, in Given Time, Derrida again describes as an apophatic gift that

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400 Jacques Derrida, *Aporias*, trans. Thomas Dutoit (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1993), 11. Important to note here is the striking similarity the language of (im)possibility bears to a certain negation of negation, especially when Derrida describes it thus: “the impossible, the impossibility as…the deprivation of the pas (the privative form would be a kind of a-pas).” Jacques Derrida, *Aporias*, 23. In other words, a negation (a) of negation (pas).

401 Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, 25; To make things clear, Derrida explicitly claims that this “remain[ing] silent, secret and discreet [is]…différence, the economy of death,” the general economy, “an order which no longer belongs to sensibility [and] neither can it belong to intelligibility, to the ideality…of theorein.” Jacques Derrida, *Margins of Writing*, 4, 5. See also, Jacques Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, 227.


403 See Jacques Derrida, *The Gift of Death*, trans. David Wills (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), especially Chapter Two, entitled “Beyond.” It is worth recalling that Bataille himself almost went to the practical limit of this general economy of death by making a gesture of acephalic sacrifice, should
is impossible or, more exactly, the gift as the impossible, a gift without exchange, without meaning, without knowing recipient or knowing giver, without return or countergift.\textsuperscript{404} One must keep

in the gift only the giving, the act of giving and intention to give, not the given which in the end doesn’t count. One must give without knowing, without knowledge or recognition, without \textit{thanks} [\textit{remerciement}]: without anything, or at least without any object.\textsuperscript{405}

Elsewhere, Derrida describes the loss of parental hold on a child via the gift of education as a sort of giving:

In education the \textit{unconscious unity} of the child relieves itself, articulates itself in (itself), becomes \textit{formed, cultured} consciousness; the consciousness of the parents is its matter, at the cost of which, it is formed; they (the parents) are for the child an unknown, obscure presentiment of itself; they relieve its simple, contracted being-in-(it)-self; what they give the child they lose; they die in it; for what they give it is their own consciousness.\textsuperscript{406}

But as soon as the parents’ role or their lineage is discerned in this sacrifice, as soon as his knowledge is understood as “the knowledge of his parents,” the purity of the gift is lost to calculation, and, as Comay writes,
[w]hat such a society [that thinks in these terms of calculation, of familial patronage] cannot think (the logic of identity excludes it) is the possibility of an encounter that would upset the regulated equilibrium of accounts…the gift would mark a point of incommensurability which would challenge the ideology of adequation and reciprocity on which capitalism must depend. It would upset the homeostatic order of restitution and exchange, introducing a measure beyond calculation…

There are other examples that are not so easily placed into but one of these sovereign modes, strategic unworking or absolute incommensurability, but instead seem to waver between disruption and externality. A varied list of those that Derrida and Bataille put forward could include intoxication, erotic effusion, poetry, and laughter.

Consider for a moment, laughter. In the *Order of Things*, Foucault metaphorically describes laughter as “shatter[ing]…all the familiar landmarks of thought,” breaking the structures with which we categorize things, disturbing and threatening our rational models of distinction. He is invoking a comparison as old as Aristotle, who attributes it to Gorgias, that laughter is to meaninglessness as rational thought is to meaning. And it is this same characteristic of interfering with philosophical rationality that attracts Derrida to it as an image for sovereignty. With respect to whether it stands inside or outside of

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407 Rebecca Comay, “Gifts without Presents,” 67. “Calculation, logic, and even economy in the strict sense point precisely to what is at stake or what is suspended or epochalized in such an economy of sacrifice.” Jacques Derrida, *The Gift of Death*, 94-5.


this discourse—and we will contend in the next section that its communicative function is still able to be meaningfully discerned—its sides are as follows: On the one hand, laughter seems difficult to inscribe into a semantic grammar. It seems to escape the structural organization that would qualify it a place within a formal, meaningful sentence. As an outburst, a paroxysm, it disrupts this serious ordering, but not exactly internally, as if through a “simulated repetition” of its form, but ostensibly as an external remainder. “It remains perhaps to think of laughter, as, precisely, a remains [reste]. What does laughter want to say? What does laughter want?”411 What does it want to communicate? The implied answer here is nothing of sense, which would make it a contestant for the second mode of sovereignty, as something outside the realm of rational discursivity. Nevertheless, it is still linked to discursive comprehensibility by its directionality, Derrida claims that the sovereign “laughs at the Aufhebung,”412 implying a reactive, negative relation, perhaps a sliding or dislocation, rather than a complete otherness. As Bataille himself suggests when he remarks on his personal style, laughter seems to belong more to the strategy of ungluing (viz. the first mode of sovereignty, and thereby still attached to what it is glued to) than of the second mode, the absolutely singular realm that is neutral to the idea of sublation-gluing itself:

I start from laughter…a glass of alcohol…[not] professorial work [which] remains glued [collée] to results: what counts for me, rather, is the moment of ungluing [décollement] what I teach…is a kind of drunkenness, not a philosophy…413

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412 Jacques Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, 334; emphasis added.
413 Georges Bataille quoted in Rebecca Comay, “Gifts without Presents,” 72. With respect to the utility of laughter, compare our earlier remarks on the sovereign glorious in his willingness to die with the following from Hobbes: “sudden glory is the passion which maketh those grimaces called LAUGHTER, and is caused either by some sudden act of their own that pleaseth them or by the apprehension of some deformed
But perhaps the drunk philosopher is still a philosopher.

4.2 THE PROPRIETY OF NONSENSE

Our counterargument to this critique, to this proposal of non-dialectical writing, takes as its thesis the notion that sovereignty either a) does not go far enough to truly disrupt the dialectical logic it sets out to unsettle (we will make the case in the present section that this applies to the dislocative writing introduced in section 4.1.A above), or else b) it goes too far in the direction of ineffability by setting up a space where its very status as alternative, critique, or whatever else, is severely questionable (we will make the case in sections 4.3 and 4.4 below that this applies to the mute writing introduced in section 4.2.B above). In the case of the writing that slides or makes slide we contend that this line of critique suffers from the former. That is, disruptions of meaningfulness fail to succeed in achieving autonomy as disruptions insofar as they too rely on and can be accounted for within the structure of significance that they seek to disturb; they are at least somewhat commensurable with semantic relationality. In other words, the disruption of the movement of the concept is a move within conceptual thought.

In the elevation of the death of sense over the sense of death, have we not instead just set out the conditions for a sense of the death of sense, inflecting nonsense with a determinate meaning? Indeed, there appears to be another disingenuous discrepancy at work in this deconstructive reading of Hegel, where philosophical logic and argumentation are relied upon for their critical force, but abandoned when this force

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threatens to be turned on the critic himself. We find this, for example, throughout *Glas*, where Derrida attempts to read Hegel’s later work through the more explicitly Christian tone of his earlier works in order to demonstrate an underlying Christian concept of the family at work in his concepts, only to later criticize the teleology inherent in this strategy itself. After having thrown the boomerang of the “Christian” reading of Hegel’s “Christian reading,” he sidesteps its comeback by insisting on an alternative Jewish reading that differs from the strategy he just employed.414 This pattern can be extended to the *sense* his critique of sense appears to want to make. As Lampert points out, when Derrida is arguing that ‘GL’ is not a signifier, a phoneme, or a grapheme, but a mark; not a whole or part of a whole (*Glas*, 119-20b); not a concept but a spasm, he says it is ‘because the principle of reason perhaps is no longer at work. At least, the reason cannot be asked of the one who writes.’ (*Glas*, 125b).…But GL-writing…is perhaps rational in the sense of being motivated from some direction or other. The cunning of this reason may not be known by the one who writes, as Hegel too would say. ‘Perhaps’ reason is not at work, but only if we were to use ‘reason’ in a way much narrower than Hegel does. Otherwise, if reason meant what Derrida means by ‘motivation,’ then ‘perhaps’ reason is still at work.415

We have already addressed the question of a pre-established *telos* in our comments on the presuppositionality of the logic. And now we see that if this accusation of “teleology”

414 See Jay Lampert, “The Resurrection and Dissemination,” 188.
415 Jay Lampert, “The Resurrection and Dissemination,” 190n1. In Derrida’s text, the undefined “GL” constitutes a foray into the poetic, as a non-concept, a mark that is taken to have no sense on its own, at once a part of “Glas” but also the necessary spring from which *Glas* (the word and, more broadly, the text) and various puns or silly associations can emerge and proliferate (*Gallia, Gallien, Gallows, galalith, galley, galactic*, etc.).
were to be extended to the local telos inherent in any “function” or “reason” whatsoever, however contingent, then nothing, including deconstructive, sovereign writing, would be free of fault.

Take for example the following passage from Bataille’s *Accursed Share*, where he emphasizes the necessity that we realize certain activities that exceed the limitations of “work” or the drive to profit:

The industrial development of the entire world demands of Americans that they lucidly grasp that necessity, for an economy such as theirs, of having a margin of profitless operations…It expresses a circuit of cosmic energy on which it depends, which it cannot limit, and whose laws it cannot ignore without consequences. Woe to those who, to the very end, insist on regulating the movement that exceeds them with the narrow mind of the mechanic who changes a tire.\(^\text{416}\)

*Woe to them?* This suggests that Bataille’s point here is something not to be ignored without consequence; that is, it is tantamount to saying that there is a particular benefit (mitigating a particular cost) to not ignoring certain things that have no utility and thus no benefit to consider. This seems to be Bataille’s point: do not ignore the fact that some things cannot turn a profit, or you will risk losing something (a profit of another sense, the profit of living free of profit). It would seem here the stakes are very low to take the critic of serious thought seriously—if he is right, you lose something if these remarks on general economics are ignored or heeded. Bataille goes on to claim that

Neither growth nor reproduction would be possible if plants and animals did not normally dispose of an excess. The very principle of living matter requires that

the chemical operations of life, which demand an expenditure of energy, be gainful, productive of surpluses.\textsuperscript{417}

But then these surpluses are not so useless after all! Indeed, while this excess might not seem progressively profitable in the most straightforward or immediate of senses, they work toward the long-term sustenance of life. Temporary setbacks for evolutionary leaps forward. Sacrifice bunts to get players on base. Was this not what Bataille and Derrida considered the problem with \textit{Aufhebung}?

A few pages later Bataille will go as far as to say that “Under the present conditions [in service to a restricted economy], everything conspires to obscure the basic movement that tends to restore wealth to its function, to gift-giving, to squandering without reciprocation.”\textsuperscript{418} In other words, there is something to be gained if the function of loss or squander is not ignored but instead \textit{restored} (appreciated in its “basic movement’’). Comay responds with the appropriate question:

\textit{To what would one return}? ...There is no historic form of sovereignty which is not already implicated in the machinations of profane rationality. Even the most ‘primitive’ potlatches of the Tlingit and Kwakiutl were already contaminated by the calculus acquired by rank and power…Early potlatch was already caught up in the rational circuit of exchange…guaranteed to win through losing.\textsuperscript{419}

We should take Comay’s point about the absence of historic examples of \textit{truly} sovereign gifts alongside Sartre’s comment that, moreover, all examples of squander or excess can themselves be historicized, i.e., contextualized: “Unknowledge is essentially historical, since it can be designated only as a certain experience that a certain man had at

\textsuperscript{419} Rebecca Comay, “Gifts Without Presents,” 81-82.
We could add that such “unknowledge” is also conceptually contextualizable, since it can be described within a particular logical framework. We, the readers, can arguably make sense of what Derrida and Bataille are calling for: a prescriptive call for a new writing of dislocation that always eludes the grasp of the dialectician. We can account for the double entendres, we can notice the puns, and ascribe to their employment certain formal characteristics. *Glas* might be split into (at least) two columns, references to citations might be left out, there might be no proper beginning or ending, and the font sizes and margin spacing might be played with in unconventional ways. But as frustrating as this may initially be for the reader, its “potlatch of signs” hardly counts as exceeding rational logos. Indeed, *The Glassary*, a reference guide published alongside the English translation, deciphers and formalizes the difficult work, thoroughly outlining the “model of connections” that Spivak claimed “exist only by sleight of hand.”

To be sure, Derrida claims in the preface to this guide that it “has restored the references I thought I had to omit.” So easily can the rational organization to which deconstruction ultimately conforms be demonstrated. And, further, here lies evidence of Derrida’s own strategic attempts to mask the underlying conformity to metaphysics of his own commentaries, to purposefully blind the reader (via obfuscation) as a means to demonstrate some Hegelian blind spot. In fact, Derrida himself has gone on to note that as time passed, he lost interest in experimenting with these particular types of formats as technology made them easier to compile and navigate:

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422 John P. Leavey, Jr., *The Glassary* (Lincoln, University of Nebraska, 1986), 19.
It was well before computers that I risked the most refractory texts in relation to the norms of linear writings. It would be easier for me now to do this work of dislocation or typographical invention—of graftings, insertions, cuttings, and pastings—but I am not very interested in that any more from that point of view and in that form. That was theorized and that was done—then. The path was broken experimentally for these new typographies long ago, and today has become ordinary. So we must invent other ‘disorders,’ ones that are more discreet, less self-congratulatory and exhibitionist, and this time contemporary with the computer. What I was able to try to change in the matter of page formatting I did in the archaic age, if I can call it that, when I was still writing by hand or with the old typewriter.  

This formalization is not simply restricted to a particular style or text but can be extended to the deconstructive method as a whole, as Malabou does in her essay “Deconstructive and/or Plastic Readings of Hegel.” In this essay she writes that while “Derrida, as we know, refuses to consider deconstruction as a constituted theory from which one could extract axioms and formalize the method, it is nevertheless possible, as I shall attempt to do here.” And she does so by identifying Derrida’s tactic as the deliberate and structured exposure of “neglected corners” and “defective cornerstones” in every text he reads. Derrida himself organizes the process as follows: “One first locates, in an architectonics, in the art of the system, the ‘neglected corners’ and the ‘defective

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cornerstone,’ that which, from the outset, threatens the coherence and the internal order of the construction.”

Neglected corners are those elements of the text that play a fundamental role and hold it together, but are forgotten, excluded, underestimated, or kept hidden by (or from) the author or proponent. A defective cornerstone, on the other hand, is something assumed for the coherence of the construction but whose existence in fact problematizes the very architecture it is meant to ground. Our identification of the ways in which sovereign writing actually submits to rational organization, how it relies on determinate predication to determine the supplement to determination as indeterminable, could perhaps be understood as the highlighting of certain neglected corners at the heart of the deconstructive project itself. So, when Derrida claims that blindness is a supplement to the old laws of visibility, but that we do not force the supplement to “emerge out of its strange penumbra[,] [w]e speak its reserve,” we notice that despite his emphasis on silence and criticism of phonocentrism, he nevertheless chooses to say that we speak its function of supplementarity. And in the following passage we can stress the term “almost” to draw attention to the commensurability still at work:

[The supplement] promises itself as it escapes, gives itself as it moves away, and strictly speaking it cannot even be called presence. Such is the constraint of the supplement, such, exceeding all the languages of metaphysics, is this structure ‘almost inconceivable to reason.”

For what sort of escape is a near escape?

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425 Jacques Derrida, Memories of Paul de Man, 72.
426 Jacques Derrida, Of Grammatology, 149.
427 Jacques Derrida, Of Grammatology, 154. See also Ryan Krahn, “Gadamer’s Fusion of Horizons and Intercultural Interpretation” (M.A. thesis, University of Guelph, 2007), 64-77, for a more extensive critique of incommensurabilism.
And not only is this strategy in some way commensurable with its target, but its target must stand still for it to be disrupted as intended. The identity of the targeted stable meaning, ignorant of its excess, must remain stable and ignorant of its excess throughout the entire deconstructive reading. Yet, as Frank puts it, this “remains just an assumption whose necessity can be admitted only if [Derrida] relinquishes his position.”428 Indeed, as Peter Dews points out, to execute a deconstructive reading, Derrida must paradoxically lay claim to a form of Wesensschau, essential insight. He must argue that certain concepts have a necessary content, which cannot be modulated by the uses to which they are put. Thus, in Speech and Phenomena he states: ‘We have discovered the systematic solidarity of the concepts of meaning, ideality, objectivity, truth, intuition, perception, expression. Their common matrix is presence…’429

The result is that “the denegation, which is supposed to come forth at the end of a deconstructive reading as the paradoxical truth of a work…may itself be only a form of self-presence.”430 One sees this Wesensschau at work in Derrida’s counter to the aforementioned critique Sartre aimed at Bataille:

[Sartre’s] designation is only on its discursive economical, subordinated side, which can be seen and, more precisely, can be designated only within the reassuring closure of knowledge. The ‘edifying narrative’—this is how Sartre


429 Peter Dews, Logics of Disintegration: Post-structuralist Thought and the Claims of Critical Theory (New York: Verso, 2007), 45, quoting Jacques Derrida, Speech and Phenomena, and Other Essays on Husserl’s Theory of Signs (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1973), 99. His fixture or containment of the concept of Aufhebung (as “fixture” or “containment”) should, of course, be added to this list.

430 Catherine Malabou, “Deconstructive and/or ‘Plastic’ Readings of Hegel,” 140.
qualifies [Bataille’s] *interior experience* immediately afterward—is, on the contrary, on the side of knowledge, history, and meaning.\(^4^{31}\)

The flipside of this is another side of nonknowledge, apart from the history of meaning, which “then generates for Derrida the difficulty of explaining the point from which he himself is speaking.”\(^4^{32}\)

The problem of the position from which the deconstructive critic speaks again emerges when we examine *the propriety of nonsense*, or what *counts* as sliding or strategic disruption of sense. Consider, for example, *Chora L Works*, a collaboration between Derrida and architect Peter Eisenman, in which nine squares are cut through the entire book, making certain words impossible to read, as a “new disorder,” a disruption of meaning.\(^4^{33}\) We might ask about the work undertaken to create a (presumably) characteristically academic manuscript in order to transform it into unreadable obscurantism (which is easily recognized—rewarded—as unreadable). Of course, these cuts are relevant to the project itself, the attempt to represent an unrepresentable otherness at the level of architecture. But it is their *relevance* to any significant project that is the problem. In her essay “Derrida’s Garden,” Eleanor Morgan pokes fun at the “farcical air of the transcripts,”\(^4^{34}\) but the actual problem seems to be that they are not farcical enough and perhaps never could be—it is a serious, relevant, theoretical attempt. Indeed, as if to admit to the final indexicality of the project and the meaningful intentions that drove it, the monograph’s literal index remain present as solid pages, undisturbed by

\(^4^{32}\) Peter Dews, *Logics of Disintegration*, 45.
these squares.\textsuperscript{435} So, why write organized (even if, at the time, rebellious, inventive, and unordinary) theoretical pieces on or in order to demonstrate nonsense rather than adopt instead what we might call Hegel’s “Bullet at a Bedsheet” strategy, which requires none of the effort? We find this option of an ostensibly non-philosophical, non-communicative stance in a metaphor put forward in the section on the concept of mechanism and its relation to self-subsistence and communication, at the end of the Logic:

The weaker can be seized and penetrated by the stronger only in so far as it accepts the latter and constitutes one sphere with it. Just as in the material sphere the weak is secured against the disproportionately strong (as a sheet hanging free in the air is not pierced by a musket ball…) so the wholly feeble spirit is safer from the strong spirit than one that stands nearer to the strong. Imagine if you like someone quite dull-witted and ignoble, then on such a person lofty intelligence and nobility can make no impression. The only consistent defense against reason is to have no dealings with it at all.\textsuperscript{436}

With this example, Hegel has in mind, no doubt, those who would begin from whence philosophy or science must not begin, those “who begin…from their inner revelation, from faith, intellectual intuition, etc., and who would be exempt from method and logic.”\textsuperscript{437} Thus, we put the question to Derrida and Bataille: Why not quit rational argumentation accordingly? Quit making a sensible case for anything whatsoever, including the ultimate insufficiency of sense? The answer is that Derrida and Bataille

take care to importantly distinguish their move beyond meaning from the standpoint of naïve irrationalism. Theirs is, to borrow a phrase from Philippe Sollers, “A dislodging, but aware use of words.” In other words, they insist upon certain qualifications for a proper meaninglessness. Their transgression needs, for one, to sublate, it needs to do something to the bullet; it cannot be simply that of a naturalistic, animalistic, or unaware difference. As, Gemerchak notices “transgression is Bataille’s Aufhebung, maintaining the anguish of the prohibition through its overcoming.” Their “absence [of sense] is not rest.” Writing against Ernest Hemingway, Bataille emphasizes the distance of his invested attack on reason from the naïve unconcern with it:

I think this anti-intellectualism accounts for that which is basically very limited… I believe, in any case, that if the seduction of Hemingway, which is linked to ignorance, can be attained, it will be on one condition only: that we go to the extreme limit of knowledge. It is only beyond knowledge, and perhaps in that un-knowing which I have presented, that we can win the right to ignorance.

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438 It also could not look more different than the nihilistic, eliminative materialist assault on meaning that we find across Thomas Metzinger, *Being No One* (Cambridge, MA, MIT Press, 2004), Ray Brassier, *Nihil Unbound: Enlightenment and Extinction* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010) and James Ladyman and Don Ross, *Every Thing Must Go: Metaphysics Naturalized* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), to name but a few examples.


440 Christopher M. Gemerchak, *The Sunday of the Negative*, 65. To demonstrate this point, Gemerchak quotes a telling passage from Georges Bataille, *Erotism: Death and Sensuality* (San Francisco: City Lights, 1986), 36: “transgression…suspends a taboo without suppressing it…. It is only if some limit is maintained alongside the excessive desire that pushes one over that limit that transgression can take on its sovereign or ‘major’ sense— despite its senselessness.”


In other words, Hemingway’s anti-philosophical presentation is insufficiently oriented toward opposing the philosophical structures of ontotheological sense-making. So, it seems that there is some relevant way to oppose Hegel’s restricted economy, a more significant way to move beyond (rather than under) philosophy. This distance is at the heart of Bataille’s opposition to pastoralism and Romanticism,443 to the enthusiasm for the pre-philosophical that is taken to typify “Orientalism,” André Breton and the Surrealists, and even Proust at times.444 It is also what he takes as distinguishing his critical standpoint from “the poetic fallacy of animality” in naturalism,445 and the mindless hedonism of certain strands of sexual liberationism.446

Hence, the “drunkenness, erotic effusion, sacrificial effusion, poetic effusion, heroic behavior, anger, [and] absurdity”447 utilized to act “by contagion and by

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447 Jacques Derrida, Writing and Difference, 256.
mime...beyond the limits”⁴⁴⁸ (i.e., in ways unknowable, anonymous, and general) are, after all, still of a particular, restricted, intellectual variety. So, while we might wish to claim that “all is play, that being is play,”⁴⁴⁹ we must add that play is only intelligible within the bounds of determinability which make sense of play as play—to the contrary of Bataille’s remarks that thoughtful organization would preclude this freedom, that “thought is in essence the negation and the active contrary of play.”⁴⁵⁰ It is instead the case that Derrida too “subverts very determinate laws in very determinate ways”⁴⁵¹ and, in his own words, demands “the strictest possible determination of the figures of play, of oscillation, of undecidability,”⁴⁵² traits of the dislocative mode of sovereign writing. Compared to the feeble spirit or hanging sheet, Derrida and Bataille, much to their chagrin and to the contrary of their claims of excess, do not cease to take the learnedness proper to philosophical analysis quite seriously. In our particular case, their critique is one that requires as a qualification a familiarity with Hegel (in order to repeat and subvert his concepts), for example. Foucault perhaps put this best:

But to truly escape Hegel involves an exact appreciation of the price we have to pay to detach ourselves from him. It assumes that we are aware of the extent to which Hegel, insidiously perhaps, is close to us; it implies a knowledge, in that which permits us to think against Hegel, of that which remains Hegelian. We have

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⁴⁵⁰ Georges Bataille, Oeuvres Completes, Vol. XII, 122. And Bataille will elsewhere be forced to admit as much, as when he highlights a determinate relationality inherent to playfulness, for instance: “chance is defined in relation to desire.” Georges Bataille, On Nietzsche (London: Athlone, 2000), 110; emphasis added.
⁴⁵² Jacques Derrida, Limited Inc., 148; emphasis added.
to determine the extent to which our anti-Hegelianism is possibly one of his tricks directed against us, at the end of which he stands, motionless, waiting for us.\textsuperscript{453}

To return to Sartre, this awareness and necessary proximity is precisely what will lead him to see in Bataille’s laughter only a pompous academic laughter of one who “gets it.” It is an affected laughter and “He does not make us laugh.”\textsuperscript{454} Indeed, as Comay suggests, what [Sartre’s] charge [against Bataille] of bad faith amounts to is just that self-abandon may be hollow where it remains reactive: underlying the disintegrative posturing may be just the old longing for the One…self-loss is just the prelude to a higher recuperation—wanting to have one’s cake and eat it—the less-is-more complacency, the mystic’s \textit{qui perd gagne}.\textsuperscript{455}

Having argued that, on the one side (dislocative writing), Derrida and Bataille do not go far enough to actually disrupt the dialectical logic they endeavor to disintegrate, let us turn our focus to this term “mystic” such that we can determine to what extent it fits, on the other side (mute writing), as a description of their insistence on some “beyond” presumed to be absolutely other, absolutely incommensurable to thought.

\subsection*{4.3 THE BEYOND OF THE WHOLLY OTHER}

If the strategy to get outside remains, as we have argued, overly commensurable with the inside under fire, what remains of the notion of the outside itself? That is, if what

\textsuperscript{453} Michel Foucault, \textit{The Archeology of Knowledge} (New York: Pantheon, 1972), 235. Derrida makes a similar point when he writes, “The step ‘outside philosophy’ is much more difficult to conceive than is generally imagined by those who think they made it long ago with cavalier ease, and who in general are swallowed up in metaphysics in the entire body of discourse which they claim to have disengaged from it.” Jacques Derrida, \textit{Writing and Difference}, 284.

\textsuperscript{454} Jean-Paul Sartre, \textit{Situations 1}, 170.

\textsuperscript{455} Rebecca Comay, “Gifts without Presents,” 77.
is said to count as meaningless is not in the end meaningless, what of the very sphere of meaninglessness? We will suggest that the very idea of an alternative incommensurable realm of muteness, the ineffable realm proper to the second, silent (i.e., entirely non-functional, not strategically commensurable *qua* displacement) mode of writing, *arche*-writing, will prove to be problematic insofar as the transcendence it must maintain is incommensurable to the logos it deconstructs. We will contend that out of such incommensurability emerges a Kantian dualistic framework, which consigns the positing of pure sovereignty to a matter of faith.

In order to disrupt what was conceived to be the slavish project of ontotheology, metaphysics, philosophy, etc., and its theories of signification, its perceived efforts to anticipate full presence and reduce all relations—including subjective self-relationality, intersubjectivity, and alterity—to the presence of philosophical self-consciousness, another possibility, a principle of insufficiency, was required. Gemerchak writes,

> In short, insofar as the consciousness we have of ourselves is constituted by the dismissal of that which cannot be reduced to consciousness itself, then we can make no claim to full self-consciousness. And this is, the fundamental issue that Bataille addresses: we can only make a claim to have a conscious relation to ourselves, and a genuine relation to that which is beyond ourselves, if we admit that there is something … that escapes conscious knowledge, eludes our grasp, and calls our self-certainty into question. But it only escapes as the definitive point of non-knowledge, equivalent to the initial point of non-knowledge.\(^{456}\)

\(^{456}\) Christopher M. Gemerchak, *The Sunday of the Negative*, 4. See also Chapter 4, where Gemerchak contends that Bataille thematizes this “something” beyond thought’s grasp as god and death.
The point Gemerchak makes is not that all theories of relation—in particular, self-relation—need necessarily accept that there must be something outside of conscious knowledge to have (self-)conscious knowledge. It is, rather, the claim that if some principle of insufficiency is at work, which would stipulate the inherent failure of (“economic”) relation (its inability to actually account for difference or its propensity to lose difference by attempting to account for it via anticipation, etc.), then the difference it leaves out is one that must be taken to be necessarily beyond a relational account. And the irreducibility of this difference to the economy of relations means that it would be an a priori difference.

Recall that Heidegger’s “step back” similarly alluded to an initial point, “what is unthought” and “what gives us thought,” that is, “the difference as such”—“Das zu- Denkende is that which gives thinking to us.” And this gift was something that overwhelmed (Überkommnis) the conceptuality it enabled; its supposed “arrival keeps itself concealed,” deferred. Thus, the step back pointed to an unthought that always eluded disclosure through thought, whose non-knowledge lied in a mysterious realm (what he calls “the oblivion”) straddling both sides of thought: the primordial origin before the “self-keeping arrival” of thought, the withdrawn “always-already,” and the forever delayed “to-come” after thought.459

457 Martin Heidegger, Identity and Difference, 50, 50n. Thompson illustrates the point in the following way: “Geist’s self-relation, its parousia, is always assured precisely by that which it excludes…it calls into question and displaces the closure of this movement, its telos, at its very limit.” Kevin Thompson, “Hegelian Dialectic and the Quasi-Transcendental in Glas,” 251.

458 Martin Heidegger, Identity and Difference, 65; The theological ramifications of this overwhelming are developed in Jean-Luc Marion, Being Given: Toward a Phenomenology of Givenness, trans. Jeffrey L. Kosky (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002) and Jean-Luc Marion, God Without Being, trans. Thomas A. Carlson (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995). In the latter, he structures the attempt to disclose the giving by crossing the gap from gift to giver as the offense of idolatry.

459 Martin Heidegger, Identity and Difference, 51, 64, 67, 71.
Derrida endorses this Heideggerian structure as the (general economical) site of primordial donation, as
the gift of the es gibt [that] gives itself to be thought before the Sein in the es gibt Sein and [which] displaces all that is determined…the gift [don], the giving of the gift [la donation du don], the pure cadeau [that] does not let itself be thought by the dialectics to which it gives rise [donne lieu].

This anterior “origin of origins,” as Derrida calls it in Of Grammatology, gives birth to all conceptual relations and is thus the transcendental condition for concepts themselves and, by order of consequence, prior to everything: “the opening of the first exteriority in general, the enigmatic relationship of the living to its other and of an inside to an outside.” Or, from an essay on Levinas, in a paragraph describing our “strange certainty about an other absolute origin, an other absolute decision that has secured the past of the question,” he describes the condition as follows:

[T]he impossible has already occurred. The impossible according to the totality of what is questioned, according to the totality of beings, objects and determinations, the impossible according to the history of facts, has occurred.

In other words, what we have here is “an originary trace or arche-trace,” or as we have been putting it, an originary writing or arche-writing that precedes philosophical meaning.

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460 Jacques Derrida, Glas, 242a. In an effort to keep this “oblivion” indeterminate, Derrida often assigns it the simple name of “it” or ça, a term we described in the last chapter.
461 Jacques Derrida, Of Grammatology, 70. “The notion of a past whose meaning could not be thought in the form of a (past) present marks the impossible-unthinkable-unstatable not only for philosophy in general but even for a thought of being which would seek to take a step outside philosophy.” Jacques Derrida, Writing and Difference, 132.
462 Jacques Derrida, Of Grammatology, 70; see also, 219.
463 Jacques Derrida, Writing and Difference, 80. The realm of slavish conceptuality “would be only a dependent and circumscribed area,” dependent on this impossible-unthinkable-unstatable, that is. Jacques Derrida, Of Grammatology, 30. “Différance is the non-full, non-simple, structured and differentiation origin of differences… the basis of the present…the constitution of the present, as an ‘originary,’ and irreducibly nonsimple.” Jacques Derrida, Margins of Philosophy, 11, 13.
as well as the strategic (disruptive) writing meant to unsettle it.\textsuperscript{464} Next, he reconfigures the Heideggarian excess or \textit{Überkommenis} as the remains (\textit{reste}) of what arises from the gift that gives rise (to everything thinkable).\textsuperscript{465} This is exteriority depicted not as an origin, as we had it before, but as a posterior remainder, or that which escapes the bounds of cognition and becomes an addition to the world conceptualized by dialectical thought:

\textit{a departure out of the world} towards a place which is neither a \textit{non-place} nor another world, neither a utopia nor an alibi, the creation of a universe to be \textit{added to} the universe…this universe articulates only that which is in excess of everything…this excess is the very possibility itself of writing and of literary \textit{inspiration} in general.\textsuperscript{466}

First, we must pause to revisit our critique of the first mode of writing (strategic writing that functions to un-work) as we note that if this absolutely separate sphere was to map onto the second mode of mute writing (ineffable or \textit{arche}-writing that does not “work” in any sense, including “un-work”), it seems already to fail to satisfy its own condition of non-functionality. Indeed, as \textit{la donation du don}, which \textit{donne lieu} to thought (which

\textsuperscript{464} Jacques Derrida, \textit{Of Grammatology}, 61; emphasis added. See also, 70. Trace, it should be clear, is another word Derrida uses for writing. With respect to the arche-trace or arche-writing’s relation to logical form, consider the following from “Force and Signification”: “If there are structures, they are possible as a result of this fundamental structure by which the totality opens itself and overflows to create meaning in the anticipation of a telos which we must consider here in its most indeterminate form. This opening is certainly that which liberates time and genesis (even coincides with them) but also that which risks enclosing the movement toward the future—becoming by giving it form. That which risks stifling force under form.” Jacques Derrida, \textit{Writing and Difference}, 26. On this point, the following from Frank is worth considering: “a theory which can only sustain itself against the phenomenon it is to explain is absurd: it would only be right if the phenomenon were to disappear.” Manfred Frank, “Is Self-Consciousness \textit{présence à soi}?” 231.


\textsuperscript{466} Jacques Derrida, \textit{Writing and Difference}, 8; emphasis added, aside from “inspiration.” In Jacques Derrida, \textit{Disseminations}, Derrida refers to this structure as a “double,” philosophy and “the excrement of philosophical essentiality,” “the program and its left overs or extras.” Jacques Derrida, \textit{Disseminations}, 11, 54.
cannot in turn think it, cannot place it), it appears to have the biggest function of all, a 
transcendental donner lieu à…! So, to the extent that this is the case, our earlier 
comments about the commensurability of the supposedly incommensurable would also 
apply here. But, second, we must consider that, in the very idea of a beyond, excess 
beyond the whole, there remains a certain kind of Kantian transcendentalism. And that in 
the idea of the “blind origin of the work” of a thinkable universe there lies an origin of 
the origin of all origins, albeit one that is presented otherwise, given that it is taken to be 
other than any presentation whatsoever, anterior and irreducible to the positing of any 
metaphysical origin of origins.\footnote{467} We contend that Simon Critchley is right when he 
responds affirmatively to the same question: “Is Glas implicitly postulating a post-
Hegelian Kantianism?\footnote{468}

Consider the parallel between Derrida’s language of an unknowable beyond and 
the dualism at the heart of the Kantian noumena-phenomena distinction. To be sure, 
Derrida does not intend for his critique of dialectical reason to be seen as a “transcendent 
metalanguage,”\footnote{469} but as Norris points out, this is what we get, given the aforementioned 
position in which Derrida places himself, one that insists upon an ineffable excess of 
philosophical signification as well as a certain access [\textit{Wesensschau}] to this space of the 
impossible:

\footnote{468} Simon Critchley, “A Commentary upon Derrida’s Reading of Hegel in \textit{Glas},” 213. Norris notes that 
“Deconstruction is a Kantian enterprise in ways that few of its commentators have so far been inclined to 
acknowledge. Christopher Norris, \textit{Derrida}, 94. Joanna Hodge also echoes this sentiment, claiming that the 
“disruption of Hegelian dialectics [is] by a reversion to transcendental philosophy.” Joanna Hodge, 
\footnote{469} Jacques Derrida, \textit{Glas}, 115b.
Derrida is broaching something like a Kantian transcendental deduction, an argument to demonstrate (‘perversely’ enough) that *a priori* notions of logical truth are *a priori* ruled out of court by rigorous reflection on the powers and limits of textual critique. ⁴⁷⁰

Compare, then, what we have said about absolute sovereignty with how Kant describes the noumenal sphere. Kant writes, “by ‘noumenon’ we mean a thing so far as it is *not an object of our sensible* intuition and so abstract from our mode of intuiting it.” ⁴⁷¹ That is, the noumenal sphere should be taken to be a “field quite different from that of the senses,” categories, concepts, etc., and “no part whatsoever of our faculty of knowledge.” ⁴⁷² Indeed, since “we have no intuition, indeed not even the concept of a possible intuition, through which objects outside the field of sensibility can be given…the objective reality of [this] concept [i.e., noumena] cannot be in any way known.” ⁴⁷³ Nevertheless, “the concept of a noumenon is necessary, to prevent sensible intuition from being extended to things in themselves.” ⁴⁷⁴ Without getting too entangled in the many possible debates Kantian scholars have had concerning this topic, it suffices to say that what Kant takes this to be here is at least in some sense the other to the known, “thought only under the title of an unknown something.” ⁴⁷⁵ One might interpret this other something as another thing, calling up Kant’s letter of December 11, 1797 to Johann Heinrich Tieftrunk, where he writes that “the sphere of non-sensible objects is…not quite empty, though from the standpoint of theoretical knowledge such objects must be viewed

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⁴⁷³ Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, B310, A255.


as transcedent.”⁴⁷⁶ However, we do not have to take Kant’s term “unknown something”
to imply a reversion to a dualism of the traditional metaphysical sort, a dual object view
where we would attribute to the noumenal realm other unknown things as such. Indeed,
we might interpret this noumenal “world,” as he sometimes puts it, as a limit-concept:
“that, therefore, which we entitle ‘noumenon’ must be understood as being such only in a
negative sense.”⁴⁷⁷ Here, the only function that the noumenal realm would have would be
“to mark the limits of our sensible knowledge and to leave open a space which we can
fill neither through possible experience nor through pure understanding.”⁴⁷⁸ Here, the
other world of which Kant speaks need not be taken as filled with other objects; one
could contest that it is rather the same world (which we know something about, think
about, sense, etc.) but from a perspective that we do not have. Even so, this “principle of
perspective” reading of noumena (contrasted with the “dual object” view) still sets up a
dualism between the theoretically knowable and the unknowable, such that one is
nevertheless committed to positing the possibility of another side of the unknowable, the
“space” from which this perspective (or cognition, or sensation, etc.) could occur (under
whatever conditions or freedom from conditions it may have there, to put it in the most
abstract way possible). In any case—another world or another side of the same world, an
ontological unknown objectively filled or not—a radical alterity enters the picture. As
Carlson points out, “the in-itself as isolated…is Kant’s noumenal thing-in-itself…Thing

⁴⁷⁶ Immanuel Kant, Correspondence (Cambridge University Press, 1999), 538; emphasis added.
⁴⁷⁷ Immanuel Kant, Critique of Pure Reason, B309.
⁴⁷⁸ Immanuel Kant, Critique of Pure Reason, B345; emphasis added.
are ‘in themselves’ if all Being-for-other is purged,” if a radical unknowability is marked off from the scope of conceptual relationality.

Returning to Derrida, this mark is translated into the written inscription that limits thought’s own constrictions, what Derrida terms a

(con)striction…the transcendental transcendental….each time a discourse contra the transcendental is held, a matrix—the (con)striction itself—constrains the discourse to place the nontranscendental, the outside of the transcendental field, the excluded, in the structuring position. The matrix in question constitutes the excluded as transcendental of the transcendental…transcendental contraband. In short, a certain matrix plays a role comparable to the Kantian beyond, the “space opened up”; that is, in principle, one of limiting the scope of all systems that claim to constrain what falls outside their purview (i.e., all systems that bar any possible space apart from their internally borne claims to comprehensiveness), and thereby guarantee an externality. Both Kant and Derrida will thus agree on the structural certainty of that which can never be known with epistemic certainty. Hegel, by contrast, eliminates such certainty in a matrix of the unknowable—be it the transcendental condition of différance or a noumenal realm of the thing-in-itself—with the monistic claim that “Behind the so-called curtain which is supposed to conceal the inner world, there is nothing to be seen unless we go behind it ourselves, as much in order that we may see, as


that there may be something behind there which can be seen."\textsuperscript{482} There is one plane (of which, for instance, both the natural and mental are separate manifestations), one logical real.\textsuperscript{483}

However, Derrida, as if to back away from an association with a dualist architectonic, denies what he has seemed to have already betrayed. After listing various names for impossible sovereignty out of reach—the gift, the other, testimony—he writes, “I hope that I have convinced you my purpose was not to justify a passage beyond knowledge, anthropothanatology, biology, or the metaphysics of death toward a more radical, originary, or fundamental thought….\textsuperscript{484} We will later consider an alternative interpretation of Derrida by Martin Hägglund, which will emphasize this very type of reservation in order to dispute the charge of a dependency on a dualistic outside. But let us for the moment continue developing this possible Kantian interpretation and its consequences, keeping in mind the depiction in \textit{Of Grammatology} that we cited at the beginning of this section, of the wholly other as originary (to any origin of the origins); or, absolute sovereignty as described precisely as the beyond (of ontotheology or metaphysics, and its epistemological schema) in “From Restricted to General Economy”:

In sacrificing meaning, sovereignty submerges the possibility of discourse: not simply by means of an interruption, a caesura, or an interior wounding of discourse (an abstract negativity), but through such an opening, by means of an

\textsuperscript{482} G. W. F. Hegel, \textit{Phenomenology of Spirit}, §165. See also his remarks that being is being that appears (to thought), that is, “actuality.” G. W. F. Hegel, \textit{Science of Logic}, 395.


\textsuperscript{484} Jacques Derrida, \textit{Aporias}, 79.
irruption suddenly uncovering the limit of discourse and the beyond of absolute knowledge.\textsuperscript{485}

Insofar as an origin beyond our economic, philosophical access is posited, a fundamental transcendence is necessarily assumed. In other words, since the transcendental reflection on the conditions for sense (i.e., for Derrida, givenness anterior to the given, originary différance that the universe of significance depends upon) requires, ipso facto, an access beyond that which is given, transcendentalism must assume a certain transcendence (viz., a transcendent standpoint beyond the confines of the immanent ontogenesis of dialectical logic). Hence, Kant’s answer to the problem of epistemological access to the noumenal sphere: a “faith which alone may be possible for us, sufficient to our wants, and perhaps more salutary than knowledge itself.”\textsuperscript{486} Faith, we should stress, is what Kant defines as the “assurance of what is beyond the reach of theoretical knowledge.”\textsuperscript{487} What Kant means by “this expression of belief is, from the objective point of view, an expression of modesty”\textsuperscript{488} but perhaps we can stand this assumption on its head. Perhaps the charge of immodesty is misdirected at Hegel, with his Absolute Knowing, rather than at Kant and, with him, Derrida and Bataille. For it is the latter who claim to know what thought is and is not capable of from a standpoint outside its grasp (or, in its more subtle formulations, a standpoint with access to a space outside), as in the image, given by Žižek, of

\textsuperscript{485} Jacques Derrida, \textit{Writing and Difference}, 260-1; emphasis added.
\textsuperscript{486} Kant, \textit{Prolegomena To Any Future Metaphysics}, 120; emphasis added. See Stephen Palmquist, “Faith as Kant’s Key to the Justification of Transcendental Reflection,” \textit{The Heythrop Journal} 25, no. 4 (1984), 442-455; See also Chapter 5 of Stephen Palmquist, \textit{Kant’s System of Perspectives}, (Lanham: University Press of America, 1993).
\textsuperscript{487} Immanuel Kant, \textit{Critique of Judgment, Part II}, tr. J. C. Meredith (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1952), 145. It might be interesting to compare this notion with the Wittgenstein’s notion of the mystical, such as when he writes that “it is not how things are in the world that is mystical, but that it exists.” Ludwig Wittgenstein, \textit{Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus}, tr. D. F. Pears and B.F. McGuinness (London: Routledge, 2001), 73, Proposition 6.44.
\textsuperscript{488} Immanuel Kant, \textit{Prolegomena to all Future Metaphysics}, 25.
the proverbial ‘wise’ insight according to which we can only approach reality asymptotically. What Hegel’s absolute Knowing deprives us of is precisely this minimal self-distance, the ability to put ourselves at a ‘safe distance’ from our own location.  

4.4 FIDEISM

We should read the insistence on (a supposedly modest) incommensurability alongside the famous opening to the *Critique of Pure Reason*, “I have therefore found it necessary to deny knowledge, in order to make room for faith.” What is harboured in the “repeated reading” of Hegel through a Kantian lens coupled with Bataille’s claim that “Hegel reduces the world to the profane world [and] negates the sacred world” is, in short, the restoration of the split between the known and the ineffable unknown and the insistence upon the latter via faith. Gemerchak recognizes, at least in the case of Bataille, that this approach frequently resorts to dualism in the attempt to emphasize the otherness of the sacred…if Hegel ‘negates’ the sacred world, it is in the sense that it is made commensurate with the profane world, that the two ‘worlds’ are actually reconcilable moments in a single process of self-mediating Spirit.

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492 Christopher M. Gemerchak, *The Sunday of the Negative*, 59. Thus, for Hegel, it is not the case that the world of meaning is the total replacement of the world of desire, a world that Bataille calls sacred, in excess of the world of meaning, but that there is one world and both are included in it. Moreover, to ask Žižek’s question, does the theory that reduces the ontological domain of being to profane presence, not “[fail] to
Since absolute sovereignty, the unbridgeable gap of différence, the “object” of these efforts to keep-sacred, is both untouchable and structurally necessary for deconstruction itself, it is, as Caputo recognizes, actually taken to itself be undeconstructible, the condition that allows for the deconstruction of philosophical logos (by exposing the ways in which its work excludes radical alterity, etc.):

The unformable figure of the Messiah in deconstruction, has to do with something absolutely unpresentable and unrepresentable that compromises the prestige of the present, the absolutely undeconstructible that breaks the spell of present constructions.  

Again, the answer to how Derrida can suggest that there exists some je ne sais quoi that, as the an-arché that grounds all deconstructable archés of knowledge (a cause that somehow breaks from its own chain of causality), leads back to faith. Deconstruction embodies “the essence of faith par excellence, which can only ever believe in the unbelievable.”

Let us take for example the very idea, endorsed by Derrida, of “tout autre est tout autre.” How could we guarantee the internal alterity of the sphere of difference itself? That is, how would the difference between the difference of the other that precedes

raise the phenomenological question of how the divine dimension ‘beyond being’ nonetheless appears within a certain horizon of the disclosure of being?” Slavoj Žižek, Less Than Nothing, 325n.

John D. Caputo, Deconstruction in a Nutshell, 162. “Différance itself is not deconstructible for Derrida, and this is because it is too early for deconstruction, because it is the condition under which any such construction takes place in the first place.” John D. Caputo, “The Return of Anti-Religion: From Radical Atheism to Radical Theology,” Journal for Cultural and Religious Theory 11, no. 2 (Spring 2011), 68. The important question here is if deconstruction is aimed toward disrupting the self-sufficiency of the logos, why is it not equally directed toward disrupting the concepts of dislodging, insecurity, and insufficiency themselves? On this point, see “Interview with Catherine Malabou,” Groundwork (17 February 2012) <http://groundworkphilosophy.wordpress.com/2012/02/17/interview-with-catherine-malabou/> (15 November, 2013).

conceptualization (as *arche-origin*) and the difference of the other that spills over the bounds of the concept (as its remains) be verified? Could this “non-Hegelian identity” of sovereignty not submit to a sameness of the outside, of the other, just as the conceptualizable was said to be reducible to the metaphysical oneness of dialectical sublation (mischaracterized as synthesis)? There would then be two self-samenesses, a dualism of two self-contained and incommensurable wholes. We would have, as Sartre put it, simply replaced the one for the One. Anticipating this tautological alterity, Derrida claims in the *Gift of Death* that we should distinguish the homonyms of the phrase “*tout autre est tout autre*” from one another: one is a noun, the other is an indefinite pronominal adjective that acts as the supplement, the excessive contraband, to the noun. That is to say that *this* wholly other is not meant to be identical with itself, but that its very identity is defined by a difference from itself (wholly other-ness), such that it is never identifiable or self-identifiable as a *this*. *Tout autre est tout autre* is then not “wholly other is (identical to) itself (i.e., self-same),” but rather, “wholly other is wholly other (to itself).” The result of this split, between the wholly other and its determination as wholly other, is that “one no longer has a case of tautology but instead a radical heterology; indeed this introduces the principle of the most irreducible heterology.”

But if the mere hint of commensurability is sufficient to assimilate the wholly other to the same, then have we not once more found ourselves in the same predicament insofar as

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496 Jacques Derrida, *The Gift of Death*, 82-83. Frank’s comments on the impossibility of absolute incommensurability are also worth considering here. He writes, “without a moment of relative self-identity differentiation (shift of meaning, metaphorical redescription of meaning, change of psychic states) could not be established at all, differentiation would lack a criterion and would be indistinguishable from complete inertia: but terms can only be opposed to each other which agree with each other with regard to at least one moment of significance, in the same way as terms can only be identified with each other which diverge from each other with regard to at least one moment of significance.” Manfred Frank, “Is Self-Consciousness présence à soi?” 231.
the relationship of inclusion this determination enjoys (as something that is wholly other to itself) undermines the purely heteronomous nature of the noun, contextualizing it in a distinguished framework, with grammatical functionality to boot? Noting this, Derrida is forced to go further and attribute a mysterious alterity to the grammatical structure of this expression itself in order to preserve its heteronymity: the formal economy of the homonyms must itself be tout autre, such that “we have here a kind of shibboleth, a secret formula such as can be uttered only in a certain way in a certain language. As a chance or aleatory effect…[of] the untranslatability of this formal economy.”\footnote{Jacques Derrida, The Gift of Death, 88.} In short, when we come too close to reducing the irreducible, our tactic, should we wish to keep it irreducible, is to insist on its irreducibility, insist on a secret formula that makes it singularly resistant to semantic organization. This rings somewhat of the religious defense against secular contextualization of sacred texts, where the belief in the sacredness of a particular text is assumed to be enough to ensure that it is impervious to the efforts of any historical, rhetorical, anthropological, etc., critical analysis. The secret is secret because it is secret. Écriture as scripture.

In his book After Finitude, Quentin Meillassoux describes what follows from the combination of insisting on a transcendent beyond but circumventing conceptual thought’s ability to account for it via reason. The consequence that arises from the tout autre camp, when they radicalize the Kantian premise that to know this beyond is an illegitimate move and submit, further yet, that this other is itself unthinkable is that it becomes rationally illegitimate to disqualify irrational discourses about the absolute [other] on the pretext of their irrationality…To put it in other words: by
forbidding reason any claim to the absolute, the end of metaphysics has taken the form of an exacerbated return of the religious.498

Moreover, by divorcing the wholly other from the “logocentric” grips of philosophical conceptuality, the deconstructionist “has inadvertently justified belief’s claim to be the only means of access.” And so

The de-absolutization of thought boils down to the mobilization of a fideist argument; but a fideism that is ‘fundamental’ rather than merely historical in nature—that is to say, a fideism that has become thought’s defense of religiosity in general, rather than a specific religion.499

We started our outline of the critique against Hegel with the Derridean uptake of Heidegger’s accusation of an onto-theo-teleo-logical constitution underlying dialectics. There, an all-encompassing logic was targeted as a theo-logic and the science of logic became a roadmap to playing god. But is it not time to challenge the view that it is the proponent of presuppositionless philosophical scientificity who plays god? Is it not instead the critic of the immanent genesis of the concept who strives to go beyond what is thinkable through faith? Is not the contemporary theo-logic that of a Heideggerian theopoetics? And is it not this framework that informs a contemporary, variably apophatic, Eckhartian or Kierkegaardian, image of god, endorsed by the so-called turn to faith (found, for example, in the philosophies of Richard Kearney, Hent de Vries, and Jean-

499 Quentin Meillassoux, After Finitude, 46. In short, “the contemporary devolution towards the wholly-other (the otherwise empty object of the profession of faith) is the strict and inevitable obverse of interpreting the obsolescence of the principle of sufficient reason as reason’s discovery of its own essential inability to uncover an absolute.” Quentin Meillassoux, After Finitude, 48.
Luc Marion, to mention just a few)? Bataille jumps at this prospect, making the same qualification as Meillassoux noted:

Can’t we detach the possibility of mystical experience from its religious antecedents (a possibility which remains open, however it appears, to the nonbeliever)? Free it from the asceticism of dogma and from the atmosphere of religions?

Indeed, the faith that Derrida emphasizes in various places, for example in a conversation with Caputo, the “Villanova Roundtable,”

is not the determinable faiths of the various messianisms, but the very structure that inhabits everything we say and do, a faith that, if taken to heart by theology, would open up various messianisms themselves to a faith beyond their determinate sectarian dogmas and beliefs.

Fine, but of course we are not concerned with the moralism of the church or whatever, but that “deconstruction takes the form of a general or non-determinable faith in the impossible.” To be sure, we are concerned with the problem posed by the question of transcendent externality and with the guiding theses that allow Derrida to oppose the “vulgar tissue of absolute knowledge” to a revelatory “vision” originating from beyond

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502 John D. Caputo, Deconstruction in a Nutshell, 167. The transcript of this “Roundtable” make up the first half of this book. Earlier in this same text Caputo argues that “Deconstruction discourages religion from its own worst instincts by holding the feet of religion to the fire of faith, insisting on seeing things through a glass (glas?) darkly, that is, on believing them not thinking they are seeing them.” John D. Caputo, Deconstruction in a Nutshell, 159.

thought’s circumference.\textsuperscript{504} What interests us is what Jameson calls the undeconstructable “hope on which deconstruction itself is founded, yet it is ominous enough that we have to go through the entire Hegelian dialectic to reach it.”\textsuperscript{505} When Hegel treats theology, as the study of the theos, the highest being, its result is the overturning of the irrational, untouchable power it derives from an artificial divorce from (the more robust capacity of) philosophy.

Certainly, through his belief in a “mystical form of silence” Bataille (he who claimed to be “not a philosopher but a saint, maybe a madman”\textsuperscript{506}) is not introducing a new denomination of (orthodox or heterodox) Christianity or Judaism or whatnot. It may be true that his contrasting of the sacred to the logical does not maintain any irrational position, whether religious or poetic; it makes no positive pronouncements…no positive ground for any specific variety of religious belief, but it undermines reason’s claim to be able to disqualify a belief on the grounds that its content is unthinkable.\textsuperscript{507}

And this is where the ears of the postsecularists perk up. If the “god” that is no longer tenable is restricted to the ontotheological god of philosophy, the fideist is still able to insist on a god who is immune to philosophical comprehension (perhaps, some will say, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob).\textsuperscript{508} This is exactly how Heidegger set it up when on the god of philosophical proofs he wrote:

\begin{flushright}504 Jacques Derrida, \textit{Writing and Difference}, 276.  \\
505 Fredric Jameson, \textit{Valences of the Dialectic}, 112; emphasis added.  \\
507 Quentin Meillassoux, \textit{After Finitude}, 41; emphasis added.  \\
Man can neither pray nor sacrifice to this god. Before the *causa sui*, man can neither fall to his knees in awe nor can he play music and dance before this god. The god-less thinking which must abandon the god of philosophy, god as *causa sui*, is thus perhaps closer to the divine God. Here this means only: god-less thinking is more open to Him than onto-theo-logic would like to admit.  

This certainly pleases someone like Caputo, who remarks, “We cannot fail to notice that ‘God’ [of Philosophy] is not Yahweh, not the God of prophets like Amos or Isaiah, a God who wants justice.” This is a familiar juxtaposition. In fact, does it not bear some resemblance to the Western creation myth *par excellence*, the story of the Garden of Eden, where out of humanity’s foolish quest to know what is unknowable, to know what lies outside the scope of knowing, results the need for a sovereign sacrifice to the unknowable. Even if the eschatological payout at the end is not some (ontotheological) way out of a world of difference, it is an escape, a transcendence nevertheless. This, however, raises an ontological and ethical liability with which Derrida appears less than

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philosophical reason to open up such possibilities, consider Edith Wyschogrod’s exchange with Caputo. Speaking of those, including her self, who endorse, in particular, Derridean deconstruction, she writes, “Postmoderns whose thinking runs along the lines of recent French thought envisage instead a God of excess, restless—one who is more than can be encompassed by thought. To be in the image of God in this context means to express this superabundance as hospitality and as gift, a hospitality such as Abraham is described as having extended to the angels.” Edith Wyschogrod and John D. Caputo, “Postmodernism and the Desire of God: An E-mail Exchange,” *Cross Currents* 48, no. 3 (Fall 1998). <http://www.crosscurrents.org/caputo.htm> (3 December 2013). See also Edith Wyschogrod, *Saints and Postmodernism: Revisioning Moral Philosophy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), passim.


comfortable. In conversation with Merold Westphal he asks an important question about “some possible fundamentalism which could use the deconstruction of onto-theology for its purpose? That some fundamentalism could use strategically the tools of Heidegger in a deconstructionist critique of onto-theology?” And what is more menacing is that it would appear that the conceptual tools of logically assessing such a fundamentalism would be necessarily ruled out of play for fear of closing in on the incommensurable sacredness to which it attests.

This danger contributes to Derrida’s insistence that his Bataillean position is atheological, ateleological, and aneschatological. He exclaims that “that which indicates itself as mysticism, in order to shake the security of discursive knowledge, refers beyond the opposition of the mystic and the rational. Bataille above all is not a new mystic.” Of course, the Bataille of Inner Experience will beg to differ, inasmuch as he, after criticizing a version of mysticism he equates to religious, dogmatic servitude, affirms what in his own words he entitles a “new mystical theology” of the secret “which has only the unknown as object.” The object may differ from any particular sectarian messianism but the theological division remains. Strategic propaedeutic for metaphysical displacement or not, the fact that Bataille starts by acknowledging the conceptual power of the Hegelian enterprise, indicating that there is no “clean break” outside—only to then point to a place of absolute insecurity outside—is an insufficient reason to exempt him, or Derrida in his turn, from the charge of opening the doors to mysticism. Do not mystics

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514 Georges Bataille, Inner Experience, 102. “The New Mystical Theology” is the subheading to Part Four of this text.
also begin within the world before they attempt to ascend to the eschaton? This holding open the space of the elusive grail on the other side of the conceptually indicatable will sprout up again, for example, when Bataille distinguishes his take on negativity from Kierkegaard’s, which “can be inserted into the closed circle of Hegel’s system…[T]he negation I introduce takes place…beyond the domain of history.”

We must get to a place beyond, but of course there is no such place. We must speak, but let us not speak. What we witness here is a fetishistic disavowal. Žižek defines the term as “‘I know, but I don’t want to know that I know, so I don’t know.’ I know it, but I refuse to fully assume the consequences of this knowledge, so that I can continue acting as if I don’t know.” To affirm the pure outside is to do so in vain, but to shake the dialectic, one must insist upon doing just this. When one of the two modes of sovereign writing is either compromised or deemed untenable, defer to the other. Split between the “modes” of writing that we have analyzed, Derrida oscillates in [his] deconstructive analyses between two poles: on the one hand, he emphasizes that there is no direct outside (of metaphysics), that the very attempt to directly break out of the circle of logocentrism has to rely on a metaphysical conceptual frame; on the other hand, he sometimes treats writing and difference as a kind of general ontological category.…. [This category is] forever postponed, always to come, but nonetheless here as the ultimate horizon of our activity.

516 Slavoj Žižek, Violence (New York, Verso, 2008), 53.
517 Slavoj Žižek, Less Than Nothing, 642n, 127. Malabou highlights another disavowal, that of grammatology as the overturning of the notion of a science of meaningful symbols and grammatology as itself a symbolic science. There is, “in the shadows intentions that all the same are displayed very clearly in the work: despite everything, grammatology is indeed presented as a science, as a program, as the successor to linguistics and general semiology.” Catherine Malabou, “The End of Writing? Grammatology and Plasticity,” European Legacy: Toward New Paradigms 12, no. 4 (2007), 433. And recall the disavowal at work in the passage from Bataille’s Erotism that we quoted earlier, particularly the point about how
The ultimate commensurability to this frame that disruptive sliding still retained might have, for Derrida, have indicated the futility of deciding “to change the terrain, in a discontinuous and irruptive fashion, by brutally placing oneself outside, and by affirming an absolute break and difference.” But for him it still “goes without saying that these effects do not suffice to annul the necessity for a ‘change of terrain.’”\(^{518}\) If there is no space of absolute difference, there is no absolute sovereignty, no tout autre, no true gift. "Yet nevertheless…. There still remains the hope that the secret gift will not slip back into a commensurable system of exchange, that the potlatch will stay pure. There remains the promise of a new terrain to which Derrida “clings…as to an article of faith,”\(^{519}\) as Žižek puts it. “On the face of it,” Malabou astutely observes, “the fetish always occurs outside the operation of exchange, outside the market,”\(^{520}\) outside the so-called “restricted economy.” It remains just outside of reach, where it cannot be desacralized or divested.

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\(^{519}\) Slavoj Žižek, *For They Know Not What They Do* (New York, Verso, 2008), 73.

\(^{520}\) Catherine Malabou, *Plasticity at the Dusk of Writing*, trans. Carolyn Shead (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009), 77. As a side note, it is alongside this claim that we should interpret Malabou’s remark that “we have to admit that there is no alternative to capitalism; this is something that is, I think, inescapable today.” Noëlle Vahanian, “A Conversation with Catherine Malabou,” *Journal for Cultural and Religious Theory* 9, no. 1 (2008), 11. This claim need not, as critics might suggest, be interpreted as some conservative endorsement of the status quo, or representative of what Mark Fisher has called “capitalist realism.” Rather, it can be understood to suggest that any alternative will not suddenly emerge from an unrelated outside, but will need to emerge from within, from the transformation of form, of our (socio-economic) schema, this world. Indeed, could we not contend that the ideological kernel today is just this reliance on a belief in an ethical capitalism just outside the violence of actually existing “capitalism,” that is, in an exchange beyond exchange? Perhaps the more radical gesture then is to turn our attention to the way in which transformation and possibly destruction of the present form might be possible from within this very structure, rather than pointing to some external space. For a political position that could be interpreted along these lines, see Nick Srnicek and Alex Williams, “#Accelerate: Manifesto for an Accelerationist Politics,” in #Accelerate: The Accelerationist Reader, eds. Armen Avanessian and Robin Mackay (Falmouth, UK: Urbanomic, 2014), 347-362. Differing from the horizontalist strategy of setting up temporary and hyperlocal “non-capitalist” spaces that aim to operate outside of the market, the accelerationist is interested in a radical alternative to neoliberalism via the acceleration of its internal contradictions and the immanent genesis of a novel sociotechnical hegemony of the left; it is far from a politically complacent endorsement of the present or the gradual and piecemeal progression that characterizes reformism. We will return to this question of opposition within form in the next chapter.
from its function (which in our case means its demonstration of inoperability, its duty as
the caesura of all use-value). Take away this outside and we are, as Smith states, left with
the “forever questionable stance within poststructuralism to declare…without finding a
ground to challenge the ‘system,’ that Hegelianism must be superseded.”521

Of course, it is often claimed that the movements of deconstruction (its “close
readings”) come from within the architecture or “system” deconstructed—*There is no
hors-texte*. Despite passages about the beyond, or the wholly other, external space outside
of the realm of the thinkable, the Derridean position is usually taken to indicate “Neither
a plus nor a minus, neither an outside nor the complement of an inside, neither accident
nor essence, etc.”522 But the claim that follows from this, that the defective cornerstone of
any system is “already localized and already at work in the edifice,”523 seems to be
thrown into jeopardy once the necessary alternative of a beyond is evoked, as when
Derrida suggests that this cornerstone is “the best spot for efficiently inserting the
deconstructive lever.”524 But perhaps the entire lever of deconstruction is within the
system, so the “insertion” is not from outside the edifice itself but entirely from within it.
Perhaps the lever of deconstruction is inserted into the cornerstone, but not from some
place outside the system or systematic philosophy itself. But then what should we make
of the beyond? To put it otherwise, if there is a defective cornerstone in every work, what
is behind the language of exteriority that Derrida employs to describe *différance* as the
motor of any deconstruction? Derrida imagines just such a question being put to him:

Grammatology*, 24.
As we have seen, the condition of a deconstruction may be at work, in the work, within the system to be deconstructed [and]… one might be inclined to reach this conclusion: deconstruction is not an operation that supervenes…from the outside, one fine day: it is always already at work in the work.\textsuperscript{525}

But, he writes a few pages later, “the disjunctive schema [of a deconstruction]… compels us to complicate the schema I sketched earlier [of a completely internal deconstruction that does not supervene from the outside].”\textsuperscript{526} While there exists a point of defectiveness within any system, at which point the system is internally deconstructible, “it nevertheless cannot \textit{count for} the whole.”\textsuperscript{527} And as such, he concludes that the deconstructed system is not deconstruction itself and the deconstruction is equally not systematic. In this way, it, moreover, cannot be \textit{counted by} the whole of systematic philosophy, for this defectiveness points to a disjunction with the system (its systematic accounting), and this disjunction, by “articulating the limit [of the system], marks an excess…\textit{the other}.”\textsuperscript{528} Or, as he will call it a few pages later, “an unreachable anteriority.”\textsuperscript{529} Our contention, it should now be clear enough, is that (just as we identified certain “neglected corners” of the first mode of deconstructive writing earlier) we have (now in its second mode) located a “defective cornerstone” of the deconstructionist project: a faith in a supposedly “undeconstructable” exteriority. And that behind the claims that Hegel conceals a blind spot to keep his philosophy safe, it is rather Derrida and Bataille who attempt to secure eschatological safety in a pure

\textsuperscript{525}Jacques Derrida, \textit{Memoires of Paul de Man}, 73.
\textsuperscript{526}Jacques Derrida, \textit{Memoires of Paul de Man}, 76.
\textsuperscript{527}Jacques Derrida, \textit{Memoires of Paul de Man}, 76.
\textsuperscript{528}Jacques Derrida, \textit{Memoires of Paul de Man}, 79.
\textsuperscript{529}Jacques Derrida, \textit{Memoires of Paul de Man}, 82.
exorbitance that, in order to avow, they must disavow (and in order to disavow, they must avow).

4.5 AN ALTERNATIVE DERRIDA?

But perhaps there is another reading open to us here besides that of a fetishistic disavowal. Radicalizing the Derridean idea mentioned above, that there is no *hors-texte*, Martin Hägglund’s book *Radical Atheism: Derrida and the Time of Life* aims to shake any hint of a beyond from the project of deconstruction, whether it comes from critic or proponent. Indeed, Hägglund will maintain that such an attempt, to reverse the alignment of Derrida with the Kantian-flavoured interpretations of Derrida, places his reading against many (if not most) self-identified Derridean commentators, some of whom we have made reference to above (Caputo, Critchley, etc.), but with the great advance of being rid of a philosophically unsupportable emphasis on faith and any openness to any idea of mystical alterity.

Hägglund makes such a move by bringing Derrida closer to Hegel, such as when he gives the rather Hegelian argument against Kant in order to distance the latter from Derrida. For Kant, Hägglund claims, there must be “an Idea that is impossible to cognize for a mind that is bound by time, but nevertheless is possible to think and desire as an ideal.”530 However, Derrida “describes the trace and *différance* as conditions [that] should not be understood as ‘transcendental’ conditions of possibility in Kant’s or

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Husserl’s sense, “neither as external ideality nor external anything. In fact, if the condition of *différance* is originary, “if the trace is originary, the very concept of origin is contradicted from within” such that “origin” be taken not as implying a sort of transcendental outside, outside of that which it conditions; origin is thus redefined for deconstruction along the lines of an immanent pervasion. Making a point similar to the one we made earlier, Hägglund remarks that the transcendental “argument only makes sense if one presupposes that there are two realms: on the one hand the finitude of being, with its ‘human images,’ and on the other hand the infinite of God, which is beyond all such improper images…. [But] there is only one realm—the infinite finitude of *différance.*”

Contrast this with Caputo, who holds that “Derrida is dreaming of something unconditional, something that belongs to another order.” It is precisely this division that Hägglund is criticizing, concerned that “the unconditional and conditional would thus belong to two separate orders. This is the matrix for Caputo’s misreading of Derrida.” Hägglund notices as well what we pointed out earlier, that such a dualism of incommensurable alterity would invite at least the possibility of a self-sameness on the side of unknowable alterity, the internal purity of the wholly other (or, as Sartre warned, criticizing the metaphysical “one” only to introduce an other “One” beyond it). Hence, he pulls support for his non-Kantian interpretation of Derrida from *Of Grammatology,* where pure presence—the target of deconstruction—is described as a “determination of being

531 Martin Hägglund, *Radical Atheism,* 18-19.
532 Martin Hägglund, *Radical Atheism,* 211n8.
that has always superintended not only theological and metaphysical but also
transcendental questions, whether conceived in terms of scholastic theology or in a
Kantian or post-Kantian sense.”536 But Caputo fires back, employing this same text to
remind us that, as in the above description of the disjunctive schema of deconstruction as
an “unreachable anteriority”, différance, as the condition for all systems (linguistic,
logical, philosophical, etc.), cannot form a part of them, cannot “be situated as an object
in its field.”537 From this, Caputo finds the means to conclude that différance “must be in
some sense transcendental…But it is an odd kind of transcendental condition for it lacks
originary unity and does not impose formal unity on a multiplicity of data.”538

Thus, against Caputo’s demand for the space of différance as incommensurable to
presence, the relationality of sense, logic, etc., Hägglund gives a more mediatory reading,
which stresses deconstruction as the work of contamination and unsettling purities
(including the purely other) over that of sovereignty or the unconditional space in excess
of relation to the logos (of meaning, lordship, presence, etc.). We have a Derrida who
emphasizes the absolute other to the same in an effort to disrupt the idea of an
 uncontaminated pure presence up against a Derrida who emphasizes contamination all
the way down, rejecting the idea of a pure break, even if such a break is ostensibly in the
service of a disruption of purity.539

So, what can Hägglund make of death or of the pure gift, potential instances or
notions of sovereignty presumed to be beyond philosophical rationality and its economy
of exchange? Hägglund responds, arguing that when Derrida writes that “writing is

536 Jacques Derrida, Of Grammatology, 291.
537 Jacques Derrida, Of Grammatology, 60.
539 See Martin Hägglund, Radical Atheism, 37, compared to John D. Caputo, The Prayers and Tears of
death,” it is not to invoke some unknowable realm, but is instead to drive home the point that everything in this one and only realm (of infinite finitude) is infected with its own negativity, as Derrida alludes to in the *Specters of Marx*: “Life does not go without death, and that death is not beyond, outside of life, unless one inscribes the beyond in the inside, in the essence of the living.” This is Hägglund’s move, to move any talk of a beyond inside, and he likewise applies it to the language of the impossible and the figure of the gift:

The standard misreading of this argument is to understand the impossibility as a negative limitation that prevents us from having access to the pure gift… The relation between gift and economy should thus not be understood as an opposition, where the former is good and the latter is bad. Rather, Derrida analyzes why neither of these concepts can be pure and why they must be contaminated by each other.

This would mean that when Derrida speaks of a “pure” gift, it is only as part of an analysis of “the ideal purity of a given concept to show that the necessity of contamination is inscribed in the ideal purity of the concept itself.” That is, he wants us to be led to find it problematic, as we have throughout this chapter. Thus, *Radical Atheism* is filled with numerous critiques of the (the Caputoan) Derrida of the beyond that bear a similarity to ours (such as Hägglund’s claim that “wherever a gift is given or received, there is an economic relation, which contaminates the purported purity of the gift”). Hägglund takes the seeming affiliation with or endorsement of these

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541 Martin Hägglund, *Radical Atheism*, 37.
542 Martin Hägglund, *Radical Atheism*, 37.
543 Martin Hägglund, *Radical Atheism*, 36.
problematic concepts and passages as an attempt to deconstruct from the inside, with Derrida “in on it.” What we are supposed to be able to see is that the very idea of the gift spells out that there is no gift as such, since the gift can be what it is only by becoming other than itself… Accordingly, when Derrida asserts that the gift we desire exceeds the order of knowledge, it is not because the gift we desire belongs to a noumenal beyond.

And in those instances where it does seem that it is the “purity” itself of the gift that is being stressed by Derrida, Hägglund accounts for the confusion by suggesting these are simply “misleading” hyperbolic counterpoints to the idea of a pure economy of stabilized meaning and should not be read as structural determinations of the project of deconstruction itself. Rather, the only “pure” gift we can ascribe to Derrida is the purely contaminated gift. “So, [Hägglund] redefines ‘pure’ to mean purely contaminated, contaminated even in its purity as a concept,” Caputo remarks. If purity here means contamination, then the pure gift is neither pure identity or seamless exchange nor is it some pure otherness or a complete escape from the restricted economy, but, rather, it is an alternative to both. This alternative picture of a less-than-wholly-other gift Caputo deems that of a “stripped down version of the gift”:

[B]y pure, Derrida does not mean contaminated; if he did that would have been an odd choice of words. The pure gift for him is the gift, s’il y en a, the pure concept

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544 As Hägglund repeatedly points out, this part of his interpretation strays from what he believes to be the “largely assumed, but…untenable” “standard readings” of Derrida. The readings he lists are those he considers theological, from Richard Kearney, Kevin Hart, John D. Caputo, Jean-Luc Marion, etc., as well as those with a Levinasian, ethical bent, from Simon Critchley, Robert Bernasconi, Drucilla Cornell, et. al. Martin Hägglund, Radical Atheism, 37. We will turn to Levinas shortly.
545 Martin Hägglund, Radical Atheism, 38.
546 Martin Hägglund, Radical Atheism, 38.
of the gift that does not exist while existing gifts are always contaminated by economies. The pure gift is the gift which does not exist because the conditions under which it could exist have been removed, hence it is the gift in its unconditional and irreal purity.\footnote{549} For Caputo, this gift cannot exist for our cognizance, our articulation, our philosophizing, but remains completely other.

Hägglund understands Caputo’s idea of otherness to be more Levinasian than Derridean, and so will have to set up a fundamental distinction between the two French thinkers, opposing their respective usages of the language of the “wholly” or “absolutely.” Hägglund’s Derrida completely inverts the Levinasian thesis, so that absolute alterity would mean nothing more than that nothing can remain simply as such, including the other as such. The “wholly other” would then become a notion against a total incommensurability between the other and the same, or the pure gift and the restricted economy, turning it instead into a thesis about ceaseless becoming propelled by the absolutely necessary relationality of everything with its other—the contamination of the same with the other, the other with the same—and “not because the other is absolved from relations and reposes in itself.”\footnote{550} Hägglund takes Derrida’s claim that “the presentation of the other as such, that is to say the dissimulation of its ‘as such,’ has already begun,”\footnote{551} to indicate not some a priori, pure outside, but a commitment to an

\footnote{549} John D. Caputo, “The Return of Anti-Religion,” 95-6, responding to Martin Hägglund, Radical Atheism, 36.
\footnote{550} Martin Hägglund, Radical Atheism, 94. Along with Levinas, Jean-Luc Marion is another to whom Hägglund opposes Derrida insofar as the former construes the absolute other in such a manner as it is “undone from any relation, and therefore also from any thinkable relation, which would tie it to an absurd ‘other than it.’” Jean-Luc Marion, The Idol and Distance: Five Studies, trans. Thomas A. Carlson (New York: Fordham University Press, 2001), 141. “Marion,” Hägglund writes, “is thus as far as one can get from the deconstructive thinking of a general mortality.” Martin Hägglund, Radical Atheism, 7.
\footnote{551} Jacques Derrida, Of Grammatology, 47.
immanent world where nothing conceivable is not already infected by the alterity of différance. That is, the exact opposite of Levinas’ idea that “[o]nly a being that *transcends* the world can leave a trace.”

Raising a point similar to Sartre’s above, Hägglund notices that a Levinasian Derrida would be required to re-introduce a new purity, only now on the outside, an alterity “incompatible with a rigorous thinking of alterity,” as absolute contamination.

Of course, this alleged distance from Levinas could be held up against those moments where Derrida gives his blessing to “difference as the irreducibility of the trace of the other in Levinas” as an accurate definition of deconstructive différance, or those passages where Derrida insists upon a “gap between gift and economy” and a “relation without relation to the impossible.” Caputo takes this relation *without relation* across the gap or “distance between the two [that] is irreducible” as that of faith or a hope for the impossible, marking yet another point of contention between his reading and Hägglund’s:

A good deal of the good that could be done in *Radical Atheism* is undone by suppressing Derrida’s axiomatics of the beyond, of the *super, epekeina, hyper, über, dèlà*, all of which are analyzed in terms of what Derrida calls the *à venir*,

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553 Martin Hägglund, *Radical Atheism*, 85.
thereby suppressing the whole order of hope, expectation and aspiration in Derrida’s spectrality, which Derrida describes as his ‘hyperbolic ethics,’ and this because of Hägglund’s fear of contamination by Augustinian dualism.557 Indeed, Hägglund’s readings are impressive in their ability to take not unproductive liberties with the text in order to save Derrida from the hint of dualism, such as when he suggests that messianic hope must be for Derrida simply the hope in the continuation of the current plane of immanence, and that “faith is always faith in the finite,” and that even the “desire for God is a desire for the mortal, like every other desire.”558 But by revising what the absoluteness means with respect to the other, the meaning of our relation (without relation) to it via faith is also adjusted, so a remark like “the structure of confidence or of credence as faith [is the] break with calculable reliability and with the assurance of certainty—in truth, with knowledge,”559 is not taken to imply the wholesale undermining of philosophical reason, but can rather express the more modest claim that “we can never know for sure what will happen because experience is predicated on the unpredictable.”560 In this sense, “faith” would simply point to our experience in general, our experience of being shaped by another, rather than to some messianicity beyond and irreconcilable with it. Here, it is not that the absolutely other is what can never be grasped, but rather that “whatever one does, one is greeting the other, since nothing can happen without the coming of the other,”561 without transformation, with becoming something else.

558 Martin Hägglund, Radical Atheism, 11.
560 Martin Hägglund, Radical Atheism, 126.
561 Martin Hägglund, Radical Atheism, 129.
This bears a striking resemblance to the remarks made in our early chapters on Hegel’s presuppositionless logic of becoming and the retroactivity of meaningfulness, against a grand teleology of assumed sense. Along these lines, the apparent anti-philosophical bent of the concept of the wholly other is mitigated to suggest that it is only insofar as philosophical rationality is understood in the imprudent sense of protecting concepts from their transformation via alterity that deconstruction could be considered anti-philosophical. So, where Caputo’s Derrida will claim that faith in “the [pure] gift is not finally a matter of knowledge,” Hägglund will argue that “this necessity of faith is not due to a cognitive limitation [to think the impossible] but to the undecidability of the future, which opens both chance and threat at every moment.”

This does not seem much at odds with our presentation of dialectical logic. In fact, much of what is accomplished in a Hägglundian Derrida who circumvents dualism, fideism, anti-philosophical “mysticism,” etc., comes at the cost (or benefit) of diminishing Derrida’s self-proclaimed distance from Hegel. The reading of Derrida that we gave earlier, which shares much with Caputo’s (albeit ours was critical), was of a Derrida who used Bataille to suggest something philosophically problematic, to become a problem for philosophy, for Hegel—deconstruction that maintained a great difference from dialectical logic. When attempting to drive a wedge between Levinasian and Derridean conceptions and degrees of alterity, Hägglund critiqued “Levinas’s understanding of the absolutely Other as something ‘beyond history,’ which is ‘absolved’

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563 Martin Hägglund, “Radical Evil of Deconstruction,” 32.
from a limiting play of relations.⁵⁶⁴ But as we identified earlier, these very notions also arise in Bataille, upon whom Derrida relies to oppose the sovereign to the slave, the difference between abstract and determinate negativity. Hägglund’s book and related articles, on the other hand, conspicuously do not mention Bataille. In Hägglund’s work Derrida’s logic of contamination and Hegel’s logic of sublation appear quite similar.

The conclusion that can be drawn from all of this is that if, instead of a fetishistic disavowal, the language of sovereignty or the unconditional space in excess of relation to logos, meaning, lordship, etc., are to be considered as the intentional exaggeration or strategic implementation toward displacing the privilege of identity, of philosophical closedness, etc., then we no longer face the problems associated with what we called the second mode of writing. We had claimed that this mode was able to offer an incommensurable alternative to this relationality only on the basis of a faith in an unknowable outside. If there were no “outside” per se, no complete muteness on the other side meaningfulness, no space of nonsense at the limit of sense, etc., then mute writing would become simply a strategic hyperbolic way of speaking of the first mode, dislocative writing, writing that makes discourse slide. We had argued that insofar as its own logic remained discernible, with its own sense of the proper, this dislocation could not count as purely abstract negativity and was thus not entirely incommensurable with the determinate negativity it sought to dismantle. The outcome at which we now arrive is that, with respect to Derrida on Hegel, our interpretive options point to either a disavowed transcendence or a much closer theoretical proximity to Hegel than originally assumed. In any case, the deconstructionist critique of Hegel is consequently diminished.

⁵⁶⁴ Martin Hägglund, Radical Atheism, 87.
The question we are left with, given all of this, is what remains of Hegel? Does this mean that we are stuck accepting the slavish reversal of negativity that Derrida and Bataille had attributed to sublation and wished to move beyond, the restricted economy that ultimately excludes all alterity? What is the status of difference when the attempt to wrench it from its subordination to determinate negativity falters? To quote Jameson,

The concept of the incommensurable is at the very heart of contemporary philosophies of difference; and we would need to know whether the dialectic is not powerful enough to transform this affirmation of radical difference into a new form of relationship; whether thinking is not dialectical enough to stretch and expand in order to include the unthinkable (Hegel’s old reply to Kant, namely, that the setting of a boundary or a limit already exceeds and incorporates it).

To be sure, our critique of the idea of radically incommensurable sovereignty was certainly not meant to impoverish an emphasis on difference or diminish Derrida or Bataille’s contributions toward criticizing philosophies that would suppress its importance. This is another way of saying that our critique, importantly, does not commit us to advocating the caricatured Hegel who would perpetrate this type of conservatism, with Absolute Knowing signifying some ontotheological self-sameness, with the science of logic as some completed general semiology, with the Aufhebung as the impetus to react to transformation with only assimilatory closure, etc. To undertake Jameson’s challenge, then, we will return again to the site of critique of so-called dialectical slavishness, the lordship and bondage section, and particularly to the shape that the

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565 Fredric Jameson, *Valences of the Dialectic*, 36. Even if Hägglund’s Derrida would not himself count as a thinker of radical incommensurability in the sense that Jameson (and Caputo, et. al.) might mean it, even if dialectics was brought in closer relation to dialectics on this point, the question of what to finally make of negativity and the nature of sublation is still at issue.
Aufhebung takes at this point. Having argued against the move beyond dialectical
Aufhebung, we are now in the position to endorse a different reading of the slave that will
serve as a Hegelian response to his critics, a response that will actually bring him into
closer proximity with some of their key contentions.
5.1 THE SLAVE’S DREAD\textsuperscript{566}

In the last chapter we gave a negative argument in defense of Hegelian sublation that criticized the opposing conclusions drawn by a couple of its critics (or, in the case of Hägglund’s Derrida, we called into question its very status as opposition). In the current chapter we return directly to Hegel (drawing upon the preliminary sketch drawn of \textit{Aufhebung} in our first two chapters, and applying its significance to those passages examined in Chapter Three) in order to offer a positive argument for this concept and its role in dialectical logic. It was Bataille who wrote, “the operation [of the sovereign] takes place only if the urgency for it appears.”\textsuperscript{567} We have already argued that sovereignty taken as nondialectical departure from Hegelian logic proved to be either problematic in its own right or otherwise insufficiently dissimilar to dialectics and thus insufficiently “sovereign.” Further to this, we want to suggest that this urgency has not appeared and that the notion of nondialectical sovereignty was thereby unnecessary; that, as dialectics,

\textsuperscript{566} A sketch of some of the ideas in the following section can be found in Ryan Krahn, “Aufhebung and Negativity: A Hegelianism without Transcendence,” \textit{Cosmos and History: The Journal of Natural and Social Philosophy}, Vol. 7, No. 1, 142-154 (2011).

dialectics actually dialectically displaces itself, at least in its triadic, Chalybäusian form. To be sure, our model of sublation, which overturns the idea of sublation as reducible to the unifying operation of a third alone, should be understood as making gains toward bringing dialectics closer to deconstruction than the reader might have initially anticipated. As we will see, this displacement was not something overlooked by or in spite of Hegel either. Nevertheless, sublation’s deconstructive force is brought most fully into light when we return to Hegel after the Derridean reading of Hegel, and not to a Hegel unchanged by it. “To cause to return is not to repeat; it is not to mimic; it is not to reproduce,”568 Malabou writes of the prospect of a post-Derridean Hegel. It is certainly not to repeat the traditional picture of an ontotheological suppression of alterity that deconstruction rightly attempts to unsettle. It was because of this suppression that Derrida concluded, “Bataille is less Hegelian than he thinks,”569 but perhaps Derrida and Bataille are ultimately more Hegelian than Derrida thinks. Indeed, our picture of Hegel offers a more deconstructive deconstruction, dependent upon no a priori outside, no undeconstructible, no Wesensschau. This is a deconstructive dialectics whose internal otherness deconstructs itself, deconstructs the fixity of its concepts, including the proper role assigned to the negation of negation as simply an overcoming of abstract negation.

In Chapter Three we left off with a description of how labour transformed the slave’s attachment to his own natural existence, his life and its dependency on the objective world around him, into a new productive relation that was not simply subjugated to the desires of the master, but was also for himself. By internalizing the predicament in which he found himself and recognizing his ability to transform the

569 Jacques Derrida, Writing and Difference, 275.
objective world around him, the conditions of his existence took on a different subjective significance for him, an internal independence that effectively brought together the master’s desire with the slave’s mediated attachment to the world. “Slave-consciousness brings about the synthesis of being-in-itself and being-for-itself,” Hyppolite writes. Derrida and Bataille were right about this, that the labouring slave does represent the more unifying relation of determinate negation. And here it does appear that abstract negation is no longer absolute but is, instead, held together with the slave’s dependency upon a specific existence under the slave’s labour. As a worried Bataille observed, work promises to the slave an enriched position, a re-establishment of unity, augmented by the master’s ostensible independence from the world. “Work,” the Phenomenology states, is “fleetingness staved off.”

But this is only one side of the Aufhebung of the slave. The paragraphs in the Phenomenology that immediately precede and follow this remark on labour attest to another facet of the slave’s situation. This situation “has not only this positive significance that in it the pure being-for-self of the service consciousness acquires an existence; it also has in contrast with its first moment, the negative significance of fear.” The slave, in his initial unwillingness to die, to detach from the natural world, becomes intimately aware of his own radical finitude, the imminence of the absolute destruction of his world for him. As he considers how his labour for the master is essential to keeping his life under the circumstances, he imagines the possible alternative, “putting at stake his own life” as the master had, and is confronted with the notion of

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“death, the absolute Lord.” By gaining self-consciousness, he has “caught a glimpse of himself as nothingness,” as Kojève puts it, and thereby gained the sense of what it is to lose self-consciousness, to lose all sense, all meaning whatsoever. His coming-to-be-human, so to speak, has come at the cost of being “unmanned.” This is the term Miller uses to translate the “absolute fear” of innerlich aufgelöst. He has been “unmanned, has trembled in every fiber of its being, and everything solid and stable has been shaken to its foundations.” The absoluteness of this quake means that it extends to the slave’s very attachment to life, all the way down, to the very core of what it means to live. As Hegel had written earlier,

Death, if that is what we want to call this non-actuality, is of all things the most dreadful, and to hold fast what is dead requires the greatest strength…the life of Spirit is not the life that shrinks from death and keeps itself untouched by devastation…utter dismemberment.

To be unmanned means that one’s so-called “dismemberment” is neither deflected nor externalized (as if simply beyond rather than engendered by life itself), but encountered as an existential devastation, an internal identity crisis. That is to say that to reflect in such a manner upon one’s attachment to life is to recognize death at the heart of life, that living is being-toward-death, and that “the absolute melting-away of everything stable, is the simple, essential nature of self-consciousness.” As Houlgate notes, this realization, “the fear of death, in other words, is not just the fear of death, but the fear of actually

573 G. W. F. Hegel, Phenomenology of Spirit, §186, §194.
574 Alexandre Kojève, Introduction to the Reading of Hegel, 47.
575 G. W. F. Hegel, Phenomenology of Spirit, §194.
576 G. W. F. Hegel, Phenomenology of Spirit, §40.
577 G. W. F. Hegel, Phenomenology of Spirit, §194.
being dead—the fear of being, but having all that one is ‘inwardly dissolved’, and so being nothing.”  

As Hegel remarked earlier,

Without the discipline of service and obedience, fear remains at the formal stage, and does not extend to the known real world of existence…If it has not experienced absolute fear but only some lesser dread, the negative being has remained for it something external.  

What we have in all of this is nothing less than abstract negation reappearing within the figure of the slave itself, present at the level of sublation itself, and not simply as determinate negation enriched by the master’s position of opposition. This is not restricted negativity or the negativity that, as we previously mentioned, would preserve together in some harmonious unity within the slave both the slave’s initial attachment and the master’s detachment. Instead, such dread [Angst] fractures the slave’s identity, taking him as he was, clinging to the world for survival, and bursts this relation asunder, trivializing its significance, shaking him at his foundation. Abstract negation is, we will recall, “the sheer negative power for whom the thing is nothing,” the power of “death, pure negativity, immediate non-being.” And the slave “does in fact contain within itself this truth of pure negativity and being-for-self”—indeed, he experiences the force of this negative power “not of this or that particular thing or just at odd moments, but its whole being has been seized with dread.” That the figure of the slave will embody the negativity of pure detachment in this way, not simply through the master’s detachment but in his own being, shows abstract negation to be confined neither to a mere moment

579 G. W. F. Hegel, Phenomenology of Spirit, §119.  
580 G. W. F. Hegel, Phenomenology of Spirit, §191.  
582 G. W. F. Hegel, Phenomenology of Spirit, §194.
nor to the master. As Hyppolite says, in this “fundamental anguish, all the moments of
nature to which he adhered as a consciousness immersed in animal existence [are]
dissolved.”

It is equally not the case that labour should be taken to be an essential aspect of
the slave’s identity while this absolute loss of stability through trembling is understood as
simply incidental. Houlgate explains why this is not the case:

If the slave’s freedom were to lie exclusively in his ability to labour, therefore, his
sense of self, would be defined solely by the particular skills he displays in such
labour, and he would have no consciousness of being a pure self. These particular
skills would be everything to him and he would insist on being able to exercise
them. The ‘mind of his own’ that he acquires through his labour would thus
become a stubborn ‘self-will’: his eigner Sinn would become Eigensinn.

Furthermore, he would show himself to be wholly dependent on—and slave to—
those particular skills. In this sense, his freedom would be ‘a freedom that is still
ennmeshed in servitude’: he would evince a ‘skill which is master over some

\[583\] Jean Hyppolite, *Genesis and Structure in Hegel’s Phenomenology of Spirit*, 175. Though our reading of
the master-slave dialectic concerns the logical structure of sublation that unfolds through it, the
phenomenological point to be drawn from this myth is that consciousness can only be conscious of itself
(eigner Sinn) through another (fremder Sinn), and that this condition of freedom through relative
dependence describes every self-consciousness. But one could extend the logic of attachment and
detachment found here to other lived experiences beyond this myth and its respective characters, the master
and the slave. On the side of transformative attachment, one could, instead of the slave’s labour, consider
for instance the efforts in Jean-Luc Nancy, *Being Singular Plural* (Stanford: Stanford University Press,
the Miami Theory Collective (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991), to articulate the sense of
“community” that emerges when one recognizes the question of being (Seinsfrage) for self-consciousness
is in fact the question of our being-with others (Mitseinfrage). For a phenomenological picture of the logic
of detachment, aside from that of a slave contemplating his death at the hands of his master, one might
consider the example Sartre gives in *Being and Nothingness*, where a man loses all of his wealth, thinks
about his future, how he will be himself, and is overcome with a dizzying moment of vertigo. Here, his life
and its relation to others is unsettled, and his sense of being at home in the world and the fixtures of
meaning he used to navigate this world suddenly seem alien to him—“the consciousness of being my own
future in the mode of non-being.” Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 68.
things’ (Phenomenology of Spirit, §196) only…. His freedom is thus not tied definitively to the exercise of certain *particular* skills after all…but also the expression of the nothingness or ‘pure negativity’ that the slave in his fear feels himself to be … his fundamental freedom from things *as such*, his fundamental ‘no-thing-ness’ or ‘negativity *per se*’… his essential, freedom *from* particularity, or his pure being-for-self.\(^{584}\)

So, with the slave we have both labour and dread and through them both determinate and abstract negation.

Let us map out the relation between these two different but equally crucial aspects and the split nature of the *Aufhebung* that they are meant to represent:

*Fig. 1*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>C. 1. Aufhebung</th>
<th>C. 2. Aufhebung</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>[Productive Unity of Attachment (A) and Detachment (B); Slave’s labour as determinate negation, restricted economy]</td>
<td>[Opposition of Attachment (A) and Abstract Detachment (B); Slave’s dread as abstract negation, the internal rupture of restricted economy]</td>
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A. Attachment

[Slave, initially]

B. Detachment

[Master]

In this diagram C (both C.1 and C.2) represents the *Aufhebung* of the slave. There are two sides to this *Aufhebung*: the productive side (C.1), which unites attachment and detachment; and the unproductive side (C.2), which holds up in opposition this

attachment and detachment. The slave as labourer (C.1) shows the side of the slave able to recover, to productively unify his relation to nature with the master’s detached freedom, turning a profit from abstraction: Bataille’s (and, in turn, Derrida’s) definition of a restricted economy. Whereas, the slave as unmanned figure of dread (C.2) shows, instead, the side of the slave that remains in an absolutely negative, oppositional relation with his natural foundation, forming a crack in the economy of complete commensurability. This latter side is precisely that negative freedom from mere exchange that Derrida and Bataille lamented as ultimately undone by dialectics. As we saw earlier, for them the Aufhebung represented only C.1, the slave who works and productively brings together both A and B, as illustrated in the more traditional, triadic figure below:

Fig. 2

Such a one-sided account of Aufhebung functions as a model against which one can oppose abstract negation. Redrawing sublation, however, as a double negativity, per Fig. 1, recasts this opposition as immanent to sublation itself. For A and B to actually be
brought together in C, they must also be different—and this difference becomes a difference in C. Indeed, this tension at the heart of the sublation of the slave is like what we saw earlier at the level of becoming in the Logic, as the interplay between coming-to-be and ceasing-to-be: dread being comparable to ceasing-to-be and labour being comparable to coming-to-be. Insofar as sublation is the logical becoming of both A and B, it is thereby not simply a coming-to-be but must also represent the difference of B within itself. In other words, C cannot simply be C.1, or simply C.2 for that matter.

Derrida writes that deconstructive “writing itself…is the principle of death and of difference in the becoming of being”585 and that such a difference is the supplement to the economy of exchange, a difference that shakes the security of sublation (as mere determinate negation). “The supplement is dangerous in that it threatens us with death,”586 or perhaps less hyperbolically, threatens us with the death of our stabilized meanings, threatens our very identity, making our notions slide, displacing them with the tremors of dread. Likewise, deconstruction and dialectics reach an accord after all, insofar as this very abstract displacement, what we called the first mode of deconstructive writing, is discernable in Aufhebung, in the slave threatened by the idea of death.

Of course, this unsettling of the restricted economy of meaning does not mean that sublation itself amounts to a one-sided inversion of determinate negation. It is not as if the labouring slave dies when he is shown a glimpse (as Kojève put it) of death through dread. In other words, dread is a rupture in the exchange, but not the impossible or sovereign externality that Bataille and Derrida (per the Caputoan interpretation) posited: It is not the second mode of writing, then. And this causes Bataille to judge the slave’s

585 Jacques Derrida, Of Grammatology, 25; my emphasis.
586 Jacques Derrida, Of Grammatology, 155.
unmanning, his “déchirement absolu,” as insufficiently wholly other—“dismemberment is…full of meaning,” he will insist. But so were Bataille’s candidates for sovereignty, as we saw when we examined the sense of nonsense, or the propriety of that which was supposed to qualify as such. Whatever meaning develops out of the experience is only retroactively discerned and could not have been teleologically guaranteed as some sort of an investment beforehand. This would not have made sense at this point, because the significance of the moment was not yet conceptually determinable from the outset. Indeed, any idea of ultimate commensurability through negation was, as Kojève writes, in the face of death “melted internally, [the slave] shuddered deeply and everything fixed-or-stable trembled in it…absolute liquefaction of every stable support.” Hence, we have a real sense of detachment, abstract negation, that does not imply an incommensurability with self-consciousness nor is it reducible to a calculated bet for potential enrichment. Houlgate contrasts this sense of detachment with Derrida (and we could add Bataille), observing that it “would appear [he] regard[s] as an impossibility, namely, the emergence, through the loss of oneself of a form of self-consciousness and self-presence that can never have been the anticipated result of an investment in…death.”

Indeed, this is the very difference Derrida makes in Positions between deconstructive différance and dialectical difference, where the latter, Derrida claims, is resolved, interiorized, and “lifed up” (i.e., stripped of its negative, “deathly” inflection)

588 Alexandre Kojève, Introduction to the Reading of Hegel, 21.
“into the self-presence of an onto-theological or onto-teleological synthesis.” Yet throughout this event, whatever sense the slave had of himself, of his life, is entirely altered through dread, “infected by it through and through”; it is not the return of some earlier mere positivity, some self-same presence or unscathed self-identity, but just the opposite. Far from “lifing” him up, as it were, this anguish will linger with him for as long as he is, meaning that, as Theodore George remarks, he “is consigned to a life reigned by and shot through with the one thing [he] feared most.” This is a life fraught with the loss of certainty of who he is. Being-for-self is the life of self-consciousness as the “annihilation of itself as mere ‘life,’” the loss of “being certain” of one’s identity as fixed by the world around him, as Gadamer has phrased it. This is not something that is abided for the conciliatory payoff that its acceptance or internalization would promise. Or, as one of Hegel’s aphorisms has it, “Better a mended stocking than a torn one; not so self-consciousness.” That remains torn.

This is not, however, to say that the embedded conflict of dread and labour in the slave is all there is to say about self-consciousness. Indeed, in the slave’s acknowledgment of the negative significance of fear, in the un-manning seizure (abstract negation) that accompanies his awareness of the possibility of absolute destruction, the slave realizes he does not need to actually die to take up the standpoint of absolute

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590 Derrida, *Positions*, 44.
592 Theodore D. George, *Tragedies of Spirit*, 69. Hyppolite also makes the same point: “The whole of life appeared before him [the slave], and all the specificities of Dasein were dissolved in that essence…Human consciousness can take shape only through this anguish throughout the whole of its being. At that point, specific attachments, the dispersion of life in more or less stable forms, disappear.” Jean Hyppolite, *Genesis and Structure in Hegel’s Phenomenology of Spirit*, 175. See also, Slavoj Žižek, who recognizes that, through dread, “death in its ‘abstract negativity’ forever remains as a threat, an excess which cannot be economized [but] forever remains a threat to…subjective life, that madness always lurks as a possibility.” Slavoj Žižek, *Less Than Nothing*, 449-50.
negation. This realization, the internalization of this dread, Hegel will call “the pure movement of consciousness” and insofar as he is thus shaped by this awareness of his situation, he becomes a consciousness “which thinks, or is free self-consciousness.”

Hegel characterizes such a move accomplished through thinking as the “presence of self-consciousness in a new shape.” A certain detachment is thus afforded through the thinking of his own death, the slave realizes, a new way to insist upon oneself as against the mediation of the world. Yet in the process, we are instantly faced with the danger of repeating the shortcoming of the master.

This describes the figure of the stoic, which takes up this freedom of thought in an overly extreme way. As Robert Pippin writes, “Stoicism represent a ‘masterly’ attempt simply to negate the world, to realize the actual independence inherent in the slave’s position simply by a complete indifference to life, by retreating to ‘pure thought’...[T]here alone am I truly free, myself a Master.” By adopting a “lifeless indifference” to his dependency on his surroundings, “the liberty of [the stoic] is in effect defined by the negation of prior relations...pure form again separates itself from things...content and form are juxtaposed, not merged: they separate.” But by turning its back on everything except its thought and rational capacities, “the abstract thinking of Stoicism...turns its back on individuality altogether,” and ends up simply repeating “contentless thought.”

Although it sought to negate the world, it “in fact results in leaving things as they are and thus constitutes no genuine negation of the extraneousness

595 G. W. F. Phenomenology of Spirit, §197.
596 G. W. F. Phenomenology of Spirit, §197.
598 Jean Hyppolite, Genesis and Structure, 182, 183
599 G. W. F. Hegel, Phenomenology of Spirit, §216.
600 G. W. F. Hegel, Phenomenology of Spirit, §200.
of the world,” as Franco Chiereghin explains. In other words, “it has not achieved the absolute negation of otherness within itself”; it has imagined itself divided from this otherness, rather than acknowledging it at the heart of itself. This move to absolute freedom through pure and rational thought turns out to be, in Judith Butler’s words, “a defensive clinging, one that separates the activity of thinking from any content,” and in this separation a side of the previous Aufhebung is overlooked, that of the unity of detachment and attachment. Thus, stoicism represents the failure to come to terms with the full scope of the Aufhebung since it chooses to emphasize the formal relation at work in C.2 without C.1. This is something redressed later in the figure of the unhappy consciousness (where consciousness is frustrated by its struggle (holding-apart) to account for its freedom and its un-freedom, a struggle that nevertheless defines its very split identity (holding-together)). Unhappy consciousness “knows that it is the dual consciousness of itself… the awareness of this self-contradictory nature of itself…The Unhappy Consciousness is the consciousness of self as a dual-natured, merely contradictory being.” Importantly, the duality at this point ends up not implying an emphasis on the self in its unreconciled forms, but entails both the reconciled and unreconciled forms of the self.

602 G. W. F. Hegel, Phenomenology of Spirit, §201.
604 Still, while the unhappy consciousness arrives at the right determination of the gapped struggle that defines it, it remains ultimately dissatisfied with this struggle, as if such a struggle indicated the defect of a tranquil, harmonious All (the ataraxia or apatheia that the Stoics sought to attain). In this sense, the unhappy consciousness still remains trapped in the fantasy of betweenlessness, of an All outside this struggle.
605 G. W. F. Hegel, Phenomenology of Spirit, §206-207.
To return again to the slave, the holding in check of desire did not mean that desire’s negativity was entirely obliterated or overcome, but that it was given no privileged position in the Aufhebung, the betweenness of negativities. Recall how Derrida described the difference between dialectics and deconstruction in “From Restricted to General Economy,” as the “interval which separates meaning from a certain non-meaning.”607 Or, consider Thompson’s similar claim that the place of Derridean différance is found at that “precise moment within the structural logic of the Hegelian system somehow ‘between’ abstract and determinate negation.”608 What we see in revisiting the figure of the slave is this very interval, sublation as the interval between a certain meaning (the oneness of unifying self-sameness, the appropriation of difference) and a certain non-meaning (the dualism of oppositional abstraction, with the other being the other to sense). As Žižek will point out, sublation as the tarrying between the two, or more precisely, the relation and non-relation that the two have with one another, runs counter to the commonly held notion according to which the first negation is the splitting… and the second negation the overcoming of that split. No wonder that this notion caused many interpreters of Hegel to mock the negation of negation as a magical mechanism which guarantees that the final outcome of a process will always be happy….the Hegelian dialectical ‘synthesis’ has to be clearly delimited from the ‘synthesis-of-the-opposites’ model with which it is as a rule identified.609

607 Jacques Derrida, Writing and Difference, 254.
608 Kevin Thompson, “Hegelian Dialectic and the Quasi-Transcendental in Glas,” 242. We can see Thompson’s reading of Derrida bears a closer resemblance to Hägglund’s interpretation here than it does Caputo’s.
609 Slavoj Žižek, Less than Nothing, 300.
Or, rather, it must be delimited from the reduction to this “synthesis” model, for it still remains the case that the slave does make sense of his predicament through the interiorization of his world as possibilities for labour. However, it is also the case that terror of dread that exists as the internalized external within the slave (Lacan’s term “extimacy” gets at this rather nicely, meaning “something strange to me, although it is at the heart of me”610); though, to be sure, not as “interiorizable” in the sense of the “magical mechanism” of overcoming, of exchange into meaningful prospect, as mentioned above.

Thus, we are left with something strikingly similar to what Derrida (here, seriously scaling back from the tout autre beyond that Caputo emphasized) submits in Aporias, where the idea of death is portrayed as both a well of possibility for meaning (i.e., the slave who puts his near-death experience to use, to profit from it) and as the impossibility to find meaning apart from its internal disruption or instability (i.e., everything stable for the slave is shaken to its foundations via dread). This tension he calls the “possibility and/or impossibility of passage…. [with] the mobile slash between and/or, and/and, or/and, or/or [as] a singular border, simultaneously conjunctive, disjunctive, and undecideable.”611 Is this not exactly how we described the Aufhebung in our analysis of becoming? Indeed, Derrida will even call this form “a kind of a-pas,”612 nothing less than a double negation, a negation of negation. In the very same collection as

611 Jacques Derrida, Aporias, 23. See also Jay Lampert, “The Resurrection and Dissemination” for an account of the and/or disjunction/conjunction in Derrida.
612 Jacques Derrida, Aporias, 23. Indeed, we find in “Différance” a definition of the same concept that calls to mind this moment of the slave: “différance everywhere comes to solicit, in the sense that sollicitare, in old Latin, means to shake as a whole, to make tremble in entirety.” Jacques Derrida, Margins of Philosophy, 21.
Derrida’s Bataille-backed critique of Hegel, we find Derrida questioning Levinas’ own anti-Hegelianism:

Levinas is very close to Hegel, much closer than he admits, and at the very moment when he is apparently opposed to Hegel in the most radical fashion. This is a situation he must share with all anti-Hegelian thinkers, and whose final significance calls for much thought…as soon as he speaks against Hegel, Levinas can only confirm Hegel, has confirmed him already.⁶¹³

Yet, in light of our reinterpretation of the master-slave dialectic, perhaps the observation Derrida makes about Levinas must be applied to the author himself.

5.2 THE ABSOLUTE

To all of this, one must, however, imagine the following response: as far as we might go to free the slave from a reduction to determinate negativity, this is not Hegel’s final word—that would be the Absolute, with which we must still reckon. Such is the response implicit in the way Derrida appears to, as Butler recognizes, “center on a given reading of the master-slave section as indicative of Hegel’s entire metaphysics… [with] Aufhebung generally [being] a mode of domination and appropriation.”⁶¹⁴ For Derrida, the focus on the slave was not to be restricted simply to the particular moment of its consideration in the Phenomenology. Nor was the Bataillean conception of sovereignty intended as a rupture to determinate negativity as found in the transition from

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⁶¹³ Jacques Derrida, Writing and Difference, 99, 120.
consciousness to self-consciousness alone. Instead, Derrida took the manner in which determinate negation operated at the level of the slave as foreshadowing the greater restricted economy that gets its fullest expression in the concluding grandeur of the Absolute. Likewise, the concept of deconstructive sovereignty was taken as an alternative to the restricted economy of the slave (and the master, insofar as he would turn out to be insufficiently different from the slave) and, as Derrida says, “the limit of discourse and the beyond of Absolute Knowing.”

The question that connects these two sections is, if the slave was shown to be defined by both his labour and his dread, where is the negativity of the latter to be found in Hegel’s final statement, in the absolute, the “labour of the negative,” the labour of dialectical spirit?

Drawing a connection this direct, between the so-called economy of exchange at the heart of the slave’s Aufhebung and that of the Absolute’s Aufhebung, risks neglecting the numerous things that could be said about what lies between, about how the logic of sublation operates through each concept skipped in this jump ahead. But we will again take Derrida up on his own terms and move to the Absolute as he does, since if it is true that “it will have been philosophy’s task to know the Absolute,” as Hegel says in the Differenzschrift, then surely the account he gives of sublation at this point does bear considerable relevance to our considerations here. The question is thus asked one last

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615 Jacques Derrida, Writing and Difference, 261; emphasis added.
616 G. W. F. Hegel, Phenomenology of Spirit, §19.
617 Hegel, The Difference Between Fichte’s and Schelling’s System of Philosophy, 93. We should note that our usage of the term the Absolute is not meant to suggest a fixed oneness at odds with the dynamism of Absolute Knowing, as will become clear in the next section. To be sure, the Absolute that is known by the reader of the Logic is Absolute Knowing itself. In Adrian Johnston, Žižek’s Ontology: A Transcendental Materialist Theory of Subjectivity (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2008), 240, 15, a distinction that we accept here is made between the properly Hegelian notion of the Absolute defined as Absolute Knowing, as the flowing flux of being-as-becoming, and the mistaken notion sometimes attributed to Hegel of the Absolute as Absolute Knowledge, some static endpoint that, once reached, suspends the vicissitudes of the moments it contains. Our use of the term the Absolute obviously implies the former.
time: is this where sublation finally comes to mean the ultimate overcoming of
difference? Malabou recounts the traditional concern of those who might celebrate the
vitality of conceptual development but are alarmed by the perceived arresting of
transformation that arises at this stage. How is it, she asks, that “the mobility and the
dynamism of the dialectical processuality could be so brutally suspended and put to rest
by this final intervention.” 618

The Absolute is not something that we were oriented toward ahead of time (as
dogmatic theology, or onto-teleo-theology, might have it), but is what has emerged
through the development of each of the logic’s immanently unfolding concepts. Without
depending upon external resources for its content, the Science of Logic ends with what
has proceeded from its presuppositionless starting-point, arriving at nothing less than the
whole course of its concepts’ interconnections and oppositions. The Absolute, the
Absolute Idea, is the expression of the truth [Warheit] of these concepts, the truth of the
entire dialectical project. But Hegel distinguishes this truth from truth conceived as the
mere correspondence of a judgment to what it refers, as if one were to say that the dog is
black, and considered the grammatical correctness [Richtigkeit] of this statement to be
true if, in fact, the dog were determined to be black. This conception of truth concerns
“only the correctness of the knowledge of facts, not truth itself.” 619 The sense in which
Hegel uses truth here is much more difficult to satisfy, as it requires an account of every
conceptual determination, the full spectrum of possible relations and negations, the
implications of the complete mereonic structure, etc., at work in whatever is expressed as

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618 Catherine Malabou, The Future of Hegel, 143.
true. Only in this way is the Absolute the truth as the *Phenomenology* refers to it: “the true is the whole.”

As Russon remarks, this “truth” is not something simply “possessed”; if there is a sense in which the Absolute could be characterized as some settlement, it “is that the meaning of the situation can never be settled in advance: particularities must be allowed their own dialectic, which means their own redefinition of our very sense of rationality.” In other words, Absolute truth must be *shown* via a process of unfolding. Shortcuts independent of the process are simply not possible. To be inclusive of the dialectic of these particularities that emerge through this process, including the particular logical moment of the Absolute Idea itself, means that every facet and implication that has emerged through genetic development is co-implicated. Thus, if the Absolute is to express in a holistic manner the truth of its dialectical content, these particularities, it is forced to give a logically self-conscious account of itself, and thus of what is real, as demonstrated through the science of logic. It must take into consideration the distinctions at the core of this real, such as “the distinction between individuality and Notion, which continues itself as such in what is differentiated from it, and as an identity with it.”

*This* is what it means when Hegel says that the Absolute Idea has “for its content only

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621 G. W. F. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, §20. See also, Slavoj Žižek, *For They Know Not What They Do*, 164.

622 John Russon, “Reading: Derrida in Hegel’s Understanding.” 195.

[nur] this, that the form determination is its own completed totality,\textsuperscript{624} the truth as the whole. That is, the truth that emerges from following and reflecting upon the dynamic movement of dialectical content—each of the immanently developed concepts, each with their particular negative determinations—is the self-objectification or formalization of this content; the movement that knows itself as method, the shape of all its content.\textsuperscript{625}

The content that superficial reflection ordinarily distinguishes from form is not in fact formless and indeterminate in itself (in that case it would be a vacuity, for instance the abstraction of the thing-in-itself); rather, \textit{the content proves to be form in itself}; indeed it is only by virtue of form that it has animation and substantial content.\textsuperscript{626}

We might even say, as Lampert has, that content is specified “form formed for form.”\textsuperscript{627}

The Absolute Idea as this self-determined apprehension of itself, of its systematic structure, functions “to let thought become conscious of the \textit{logical} nature which animates spirit.”\textsuperscript{628} This apprehension is not external, but immanent; it is not the work of some absolute subject transcendently outside of the animated spirit surmounting the finitude and internal conflict of its particulars. Indeed, the Absolute too is shot through with this same tension, just as the slave was with dread. The Absolute must bear “within

\textsuperscript{624} G. W. F. Hegel, \textit{Science of Logic}, 825; second emphasis added.
\textsuperscript{625} G. W. F. Hegel, \textit{The Encyclopaedia Logic}, §236; G. W. F. Hegel, \textit{Science of Logic}, 834. As Harris writes, “The method of Logic (or of any science) is its formal aspect.” Errol Harris, \textit{An Interpretation of the Logic of Hegel}, 295. Its thought (of itself) is its form.
itself the highest degree of opposition.” The distinction, referred to above, which continues itself at the heart of this form is itself a distinction between itself as form and content, the discontinuity between the Absolute as the organization of the logic and a moment of it, the universal form and a part of that same form with a specific determinateness in which it appears as content. Thus, by giving a retroactive account of itself the Absolute must in this capacity effect a sort of self-diremption (als urteilend) or release of itself in order to account for the multitude of its parts. To be apprehended as a part of this organization, each of these parts must be taken in themselves as individuated and not in a crudely assimilable sense. The Absolute’s Währung (safeguarding), is thereby not possible without putting the uniform stability of its identity at risk. It, Hegel writes, “must be considered as a form, but it is a form that is infinite and creative, one that both encloses the plenitude of all content within itself and at the same time releases it from itself.” As we will discuss, a parallel becomes evident between the relation of the Absolute’s safeguarding and self-diremption and the slave who protected his life through his labour but was likewise unmanned by the entire experience through dread.

Errol Harris suggests looking at this internal tension at the heart of Absolute as a dialectic between the Absolute as means and result—or, the middle between them.

The negation of negation, which Aufheben effects, is not the total submersion or suppression of the first negation, but is its development. The opposites which are

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630 G. W. F. Hegel, *The Encyclopaedia Logic*, §160A1. “Form is both the whole story, and a mere part of the story it shares with content,” as Lampert says. And in that story, “there is at least as much genesis as structure in form.” Jay Lampert, “Hegel and Form,” 9-10.
reconciled are, in the reconciliation, still preserved. This is no less true of process and end than of any other opposition.\textsuperscript{631}

Arriving at what is ostensibly the end of the Logic does not erase the fact that this “conclusion” carries every earlier concept within it. Yet to truly account for this, it cannot forget the irreplaceable role of each of these given concepts, including of itself. Attending to the oppositional relations between concepts at play in the process, thereby, re-introduces some sense of discontinuity in the systematic entanglement of form and content. The fulfillment of the dialectical movement is the dialectical movement itself, throwing us back to the concepts in their transformation via negativity, a dynamic negativity that seems to elude reduction to systematic settling. “At the very moment in which the system confirms its structure as closure—or in other words, it reidentifies itself as philosophy (and thus necessarily a closed system),” Jameson writes, “it also reopens itself and begins all over again.”\textsuperscript{632} The absolute form as “the system,” Russon argues in a similar manner, is always a re-inscribing/re-reading of what has gone before. Every particularity then \textit{by definition} is ‘beyond the system,’ in that it can never be settled in advance. Yet equally ‘the system’ just is the recognition that the beyond always is the reinscription of the system itself.\textsuperscript{633}

So, if we were to compare the Absolute to the slave, as Derrida proposes, then we could not simply do so in the terms of the labouring slave, who unified the negativity of

\textsuperscript{631} Errol Harris, \textit{An Interpretation of the Logic of Hegel}, 293. In describing this moment of dialectic turning on itself, we might swap “end” for Hyppolite’s preference of “rest,” and consider it in its musical sense as just as important to a composition as any note: “Rest is not the end—as some would speak of an end of history—but the other of the movement, and movement the other of rest, and the Truth is their dialectic.” Jean Hyppolite, \textit{Logic and Existence}, 165.


\textsuperscript{633} John Russon, “Reading: Derrida in Hegel’s Understanding,” 196; See also, Slavoj Žižek, \textit{Tarrying with the Negative}, 156.
the master. That is, we could not simply take the Absolute as a unifying, all-encompassing form: Absolute attachment, the formal leveling of conceptual particularity. Rather, we would need to view it in the terms of the slave who dreads as well, the slave who was shaken to its core. Here, the identity of the Absolute is fractured by the internal opposition that has shaped it, and must release itself: Absolute detachment. Along these latter lines, we can recall Hegel writing in the *Encyclopædia* that the highest mode of nothing is found in the freedom of the Absolute or consider the claim made in *Faith and Knowledge* that “the nothing…is in its essence infinity, thought, absolute concept.”

Thus, together, with Absolute attachment and Absolute detachment, we arrive at the following:

> Out of this distinguishing, of course, comes identity, and the resultant identity is the truth. But it is not truth as if the disparity had been thrown away, like dross from pure metal, not even like the tool which remains separate from the finished vessel; disparity, rather, as the negative… is itself still directly present in the True as such.

We should note the term presence here. If negation is absolutely present in the Absolute *Aufhebung*, this Absolute truth, then the presence it reassembles is, importantly, not that which was in the crosshairs of deconstruction: presence as self-same *parousia*, as stability, as the closure of philosophy that does not cut itself open. It would, instead, be as Malabou has it, “presence which is not present to itself,” or what Nancy calls a

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636 Catherine Malabou, *The Future of Hegel*, 159; See also Catherine Malabou, “Like a Sleeping Animal,” 6-7, where she notes that Derrida cannot conceive of the value of presence apart from the salvation of a closed system or view dialectical regeneration outside the lens of redemption. This presence which is not immovably present “is therefore of the order Derrida calls a supplement, stranger to the value of presence. The problem is that this supplement exceeds or displaces the logic of [pure] difference as well.” She is
“presentation [that is] consequently the negation of every and all given presence, be it that of ‘object’ or of a subject.”\(^{637}\) The fulfillment or totality at which the dialectic arrives is not finally present in a triumphalist sense, since arriving at the Absolute means as much to be thrown back into the dialectical tension of its concepts. And “if, therefore, the fulfillment never occurs in the Present” (in the restricted sense), Žižek asks, then “does this not testify to the irreducible status of objet a” at the heart of dialectics?\(^{638}\) In other words, sans the Lacanese, does it not suggest a radical alterity within form, an “alterity without transcendence.”\(^{639}\) With the slave this otherness manifested itself as the innerlich aufgelöst. This experience of being detached from one’s own life “inwardly dissolved” the idea of a harmonious ipseity. Yet, at the same time, this otherness was not posted on the other side, some purely outside, for it was the development of self-consciousness itself that had engendered such a dissonance. Likewise, we encounter a similar alterity in the Absolute form’s als urteilend, its “free release” from itself as a closed system of mere reconciliation in the face of its content.\(^{640}\) Again we have otherness without the wholly other outside, without anarchic formlessness. Whether or not one takes this to be a challenge to deconstruction would depend on whether one sees the theoretical strategy better understood by Caputo or Hägglund. Indeed, this notion of an element other to the system but within the system, as Russon puts it, does bear a striking similarity to one

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\(^{638}\) Slavoj Žižek, *Tarrying with the Negative*, 156; See also, Slavoj Žižek, *Puppet and the Dwarf*, 140.

\(^{639}\) Catherine Malabou, *Plasticity at the Dusk of Writing*, 66. In G. W. F. Hegel, *Philosophy of Mind*, §463, Hegel will refer to the Absolute’s process of coming to fulfillment or self-identity via retroactive apprehension of its included particulars (inclusive of their activity of separation and thus the delimitation of a pure commensurability of form) as the Absolute’s “exteriorization in itself.” See also G. W. F. Hegel, *Science of Logic*, 841.

definition Derrida gives to *différance*, as “supplementarity as structure. Here structure means the irreducible complicity within which one can only shape or shift the play of presence and absence.”641 Indeed, Derrida recognizes the similarity in *Positions*, where he comes to a conclusion that, given our analysis, we could easily support: “In effect I believe that Hegel’s text is necessarily fissured: that it is something more and other than the circular closure of its representation.”642 However, Derrida treats this similarity as a necessary consequence unforeseen by Hegel, a symptomatic inconsistency, rather than a readily recognized and admitted result; an exception at work behind the back of dialectics and thereby an unconscious slip of the system’s pretensions. For Derrida, this fissure is an obstacle to the ambitions of pure presence as the fulfillment of the Absolute. But whether or not the dialectical depiction of a self-dividing form could be made commensurate with Derrida’s positive philosophy, our saying that Hegel’s picture of the Absolute embodies such an idea certainly represents a challenge to the critical picture of Hegel offered by him and Bataille.

5.3 A TRIANGLE OPEN ON ITS FOURTH SIDE

So, if the Absolute does, in fact, admit to some internal alterity in the manner just described, where does that finally leave us with respect to sublation’s relation to the system itself? In other words, how does the internal exteriorization of the system affect the idea of *Aufhebung* as a triplicity? This is one of Derrida’s chief concerns:

643 This title comes from Philippe Sollers, *Nombres* (Paris: Seuil, 1968), 45, and is a phrase Derrida uses in Jacques Derrida, *Dissemination*, passim, as a figure of dissemination, the supplement to dialectical triplicity.
In the end everything we have said about the system comes down to a question of the ‘third.’ This third term can be taken as the mediator that permits synthesis, reconciliation, participation; in which case that which is neither this nor that permits the synthesis of this and that. But this function is not limited to the form it has taken in Hegelian dialectic, and the third of neither-this-nor-that and this-and-that can indeed also be interpreted as that whose absolute heterogeneity the system does not close. It is, at the same time, the place where the system constitutes itself, and where the constitution is threatened by the heterogeneous, and by a fiction no longer at the service of truth. What particularly interests me here is that which participates in participation and non-participation.\(^{644}\)

What might that which participates in participation (or attachment, holding-together) and non-participation (or detachment, holding-apart) mean, if the sublation is taken as participating only in participation “internalized into a third term”? It would be that which emphasizes the role of what Derrida calls the “two/four.”\(^{645}\) What he means by two here, and what we have tried to explain throughout this study, is the (abstract) negation of the one. And the three is determinate negation’s negation of the two’s negation. The practices of sovereign writing, strategies of dissemination that we described in Chapter Four, appeared to be attempts to “seize the two in some way, the dialectical-ness of the Hegelian dialectic,”\(^{646}\) to borrow Badiou’s phrase. The four, “the fourth of three,” would then be that aspect of the two (abstract negation) that could not be contained by the three (dialectical negation):


Dissemination *displaces* the three of ontotheology along the angle of a certain re-folding [*re-ploiement*]. A Crisis of *versus*...[that] ‘add[s]’ a fourth term the more or the less...The supplementary four... (a fall with no return and with no restricted economy) which could no longer be taken up and comprehended within the logocentric, sublimating field of... the intersubjective dialectic, or even the intersubjective triad.\(^{647}\)

Derrida’s fourth is the “outwork” to the work of philosophy and its “final third,” the double or re-double (from two to four) that creates a fourth side to “the metaphysical triangle,” to the “path that is philosophical and more certain.”\(^{648}\) This was Charles S. Pierce’s complaint as well, that Hegel subsumes the “secondness” found in the awareness of distinctions to the “thirdness” of interrelations:

*Secondness* must somehow be *aufgehoben* [for Hegel]...[but] what is required for the idea of a genuine Thirdness is an independent solid Secondness and not a Secondness that is a mere corollary of an unfounded and inconceivable Thirdness.\(^{649}\)

Pierce’s point, expressed differently, is that if the *Aufhebung* is to express the truth of a first and a second within itself as a third, a third that unifies the attachment of the first with the detachment of the second, then in its unification it actually tends toward the side of attachment and has not done justice to the oppositionality of the second. There is thus

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the need for another “second” that is not subsumed under this unifying third. But what
Derrida (and Pierce) claim is required in this situation, a recuperation of the dialectical-
ness (difference) of dialectics, is exactly what we have argued as already the definition of
dialectics itself. In this way, it is not a platitude to stress that dialectics are dialectical and
that “the interplay between ‘abstract’ and ‘genuine’ or concrete negation is the very
dynamic of dialectic itself.” In fact, in the move to formalize the dialectic, Hegel
finally moves to formalize the count of sublation, which he had otherwise left to speak
for itself, and announces that the sublation of the Absolute is “not a quiescent third,” as
Derrida (and Pierce) took it to be. At the end of the Logic, in a passage summarizing
both the individuality of and communication between dialectic’s method and content
(what Hegel will also call “formal thinking”), he insists,

If one insists on counting, this second immediate is, in the course of the method as
a whole, the third term to the first immediate and the mediated. It is also,
however, the third term to the first or formal negative and to absolute negativity
or the second negative; now as the first negative is already the second term, the
term reckoned as third can also be reckoned as fourth, and instead of a triplicity,
the abstract form may be taken as a quadruplicity; in this way, the negative or the
difference is counted as a duality. The third or fourth is in general the unity of the
first and second moments, of the immediate and the mediated.652

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650 Lisabeth During “Hegel’s Critique of Transcendence,” 302.
652 G. W. F. Hegel, Science of Logic, 836. Of course, Forster is forced to claim that where quadruplicity emerges “there is hardly even a trace of the official method,” as if Hegel had not just said that this was the very truth of the immanently arising “method” as a whole. Michael Forster, “Hegel’s Dialectical Method,” 155.
The *Aufhebung* is three *or* four. It is three *and* four. It is either, yet not merely as an oppositional fourth. It is both, yet not merely as conciliatory third. It is between these. If this *Aufhebung* were compared with the master and the slave, it would share the shape of *Fig. 1* above, not *Fig. 2*, for quadruplicity means that C can be diagrammed as C.1 and C.2. Determinate and abstract negation make up the duality of negativities that represent C as a whole. The fourth (C.2) of this quadruplicity is an opening up of the restricted economy, but is not a departure from dialectics—it is, instead, a side (the holding-apart side) of its fullest expression. Thus, there is here at the very heart of the system, a formal undecidability or un-countability, a frustration of the strictly restricted “accountancy” that worried Bataille. As we outlined in our second chapter, the third is sublation via the attachment of the first; the fourth is sublation via the detachment of the second.

What we are undertaking here is importantly not some numerological exercise that would look to uncover every reference to any fourth as proof of a formulaic quadruplicity running through dialectics. We “insist on counting” only insofar as doing so will shed light on the logical structure of sublation. Thus, Hegel’s analysis in the *Lectures on the History of Philosophy* of Aristotle’s fourfold causal account of explanatory adequacy in *The Physics,* for example, would not be an example of the quadruplicity we are here highlighting, insofar as it does not seem to pertain to our particular question. Indeed, Hegel warns us to focus on the movement of the logic rather than the number of headings, which serve “to facilitate a preliminary survey and strictly are of only historic value.” Though this is, of course, not to suggest that every quadratic division or other invocation of a fourth beyond those discussed within the scope

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of this study (in becoming, in the slave, in the Absolute) are necessarily unrelated or
unrelatable to the question of sublation. For instance, alluding to a fourth in the Logic’s
earlier section on judgment, Hegel remarks in the Encyclopaedia that “the different
species of judgement derive their features from the universal forms of the logical idea
itself."⁶⁵⁵ That is, “when the Notion, which is the unity of Being and Essence in a
comprehensive thought, unfolds…it must reproduce these two stages in a transformation
proper to the notion.”⁶⁵⁶ Thus, their disunity must be emphasized as well, “differentiation
must be doubled.”⁶⁵⁷ As Žižek notices, “‘the lack of identity,’ between the subject and
predicate is posited as such in the fourth judgement (that of the [Judgment of the]
Notion).”⁶⁵⁸ In other words, the notion is itself, its other, the unity of itself and its other,
and, with this last judgment, also the disunity of itself and its other.⁶⁵⁹

Furthermore, we should distinguish our account of this passage where Hegel
explicitly mentions logical quadruplicity from a couple of competing interpretations. Like
us, Jeanne Lorrain Schroeder, recognizes the connection of Hegel’s dialectical fourth to
deconstruction. And like us, she submits that Hegel puts forward “not only the thesis and
antithesis and the moment of identity of synthesis, but also simultaneously the moment of
difference”⁶⁶⁰ between them. However, she takes this latter moment as a “moment that
resists sublation…(i.e., synthesis),”⁶⁶¹ thereby situating difference once again outside.

Departing from our assessment, which argued that this moment is not an “unsublatable”

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⁶⁵⁸ Slavoj Žižek, For they Know Not What they Do, 179.
⁶⁵⁹ For a much more extensive account of how the notion of quadruplicity operates in the judgment section
of the Logic, see David Gray Carlson, “Why Are There Four Hegelian Judgments?” Hegel’s Theory of the
Subject, 114-124.
⁶⁶⁰ Jeanne Lorraine Schroeder, Vestal and the Fasces, 26.
⁶⁶¹ Jeanne Lorraine Schroeder Vestal and the Fasces, 26.
beyond dialectics but is sublation itself, Schroeder suggests that at this late stage in the *Logic*, Hegel moves from an otherwise tertiary (synthetic) dialectical philosophy to also suggest a deconstructive philosophy of unsublatable difference. We have demonstrated, however, how this moment of difference had also emerged earlier (already in becoming) and constituted part of the concept of sublation itself. Schroeder’s move to name this moment unsublatable would not as much secure a place for difference in the *Logic* as it would leave this moment of quadruplicity open to the problems discussed in Chapter Four.

Julia Kristeva gave a similar interpretation sixteen years earlier in her brief treatment of the section in *Revolution and Poetic Language*. There she took Hegel as suggesting that the “logical functioning of the movement that produces the theses [of being and nothingness]” immanently gives rise to an excess that does not unify the two sides together in a third, but breaks from what she calls the logic of self-containment or autonomy. In its place arises a logic of heteronymity, a “negativity [that] prevents the immobilization of the thetic, unsettles doxy, and lets in all the semiotic motility that prepares and exceeds it. Hegel, moreover, defines this negativity as the *fourth term.*”

This fourth term she calls “poetic language,” in the Bataillean sense, that is, not restricted to poetry alone but to anything that breaks the restraints of philosophical logos, of philosophical reason. At this point Kristeva’s depiction of the Hegelian fourth looks quite similar to Derrida’s deconstructive writing, with the caveat that she recognizes this excess as readily admitted by Hegel. And here lies the similarity to Schroeder: this heteronomous fourth emerges out of the Hegelian system, but is taken to ultimately

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dissolve it. This type of excess necessitates understanding the self-movement of dialectics as otherwise defined by a conjoining triplicity, taken to stop at a self-same unification.\textsuperscript{665} We have argued, however, that this fourth is itself dialectical, not a disruption to dialectical logos as such, but dialectics’ disruption. Quadruplicity is not a move beyond dialectics inasmuch as dialectics is the logic of sublation and sublation can be reckoned as a third and/or a fourth, in terms of determinate and/or abstract negativity.

Another way of putting this is that sublation, it turns out, is the identity of non-identity and identity and the non-identity of identity and non-identity. In Malabou’s words, “Negation forms its own solution by doubling itself: dialectical negativity” and “negation differentiates itself and displaces itself without resolving anything through doubling, so that it traces its distancing in terms of the spacing of a pure dislocation: deconstructive [or abstract] negativity.”\textsuperscript{666} Consider this term deconstructive negativity for the return of abstract negation at the level of sublation. In this case, it would not be a wholly other negation or difference, as if external to dialectical logic (what we had termed the second mode of \textit{différence}, a mode stressed more in Caputo’s interpretation of Derrida than in Hägglund’s). Rather, it would constitute an internal otherness that would be irreducible to the appropriative nature of determinate negativity.

That the absolute \textit{Aufhebung} of the entire system can be understood as a quadruplicity leaves us with a very different picture of dialectical systematicity as such than the one Derrida interrogated. To be sure, there is no outside suggested here; the truth is indeed the whole. In this sense, the “thirdness” of sublation remains. But that this absolute sublation is the whole of what has come before us does not \textit{eo ipso} commit us to

\textsuperscript{665} Julia Kristeva, \textit{Revolution in Poetic Language}, 113.
\textsuperscript{666} Catherine Malabou, \textit{Plasticity at the Dusk of Writing}, 5.
the idea of a whole that would smooth over its internal difference, for this difference happens, as Hegel says, “directly ‘on the form.’ It is a contradictory continuity, not a rupture.” The form is itself transformed by its own difference, but without a clean break, without ascribing transcendent purity to this difference, without (fideistically) situating it outside the totality of philosophical conceptuality. What this means is that as a whole the absolute whole has its harmonious wholeness internally frustrated. “The infamous ‘closure of the Hegelian system,’” Žižek says, is thus “strictly correlative to (the obverse of) its thorough (self-)relativization,” its non-coincidence with itself. It is a whole that includes and, moreover, is its hole. That is to say, abstract negation does not pose a problem for the identity of the whole, but, rather, this “problem” is its “identity.” Abstract negativity is an ontological feature of the Absolute real.

Likewise, if we were to say, as Pierce liked to, that such closure or wholeness suggests that “Hegel is possessed with the idea that the Absolute is One,” then it must be qualified that such One-ness is not taken as a One-All but only One as a Non-All, as Žižek likes to put it—monistic, indeed, but a split or dual-aspect monism. “The One only becomes One by way of redoubling itself, by acquiring a minimal distance toward

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668 Slavoj Žižek, Less than Nothing, 391.
669 Charles Sanders Peirce, The Essential Peirce: Selected Philosophical Writings, 177.
670 As Johnston explains, the sense in which this description pertains to the Žižekian reading of Hegel must be distinguished from the sense it is ascribed to Spinoza’s theory of “attributes”; that is, the sense intended here comes “with the significant qualification that these ‘aspects’ and their ineradicable divisions (such as mind and matter, the asubjective and subjectivity, and the natural and the more-than-natural) enjoy the heft of actual existence (rather than being, as they are in Spinoza’s dual-aspect monism, epiphenomena deprived of true ontological substantiality).” Adrian Johnston, Prolegomena to Any Future Materialism: The Outcome of Contemporary French Philosophy (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2013), 180. See also, Johnston, Žižek’s Ontology, 284, and Adrian Johnston and Catherine Malabou, Self and Emotional Life: Philosophy, Psychoanalysis, and Neuroscience (New York: Columbia University Press, 2013), 201.
itself.” Errol Harris explains in his own way the idea behind this minimal difference or internal schism in the whole:

The self-externality persists even in the interconnexion of elements, for complete concentration and interpenetration would annihilate extensity. But this is the very nature of…any form of system—that it is unity in and through difference. The absence of system in sheer self-externality is the dissipation of extensity itself. Total externality of relations abolishes relation altogether. Consequently, self-externality requires interconnexion in order to be self-external; just as concentration and interpenetration requires diversity in order to unify.

Translated back into Žižek’s terms, then, if a system is understood as a One, and a system of pure concentration and interpenetration without diversity (or its diversity overcome) can be considered a One-All, then the Hegelian system would have to be a One that was not a One-All, a One that was Non-All.

Hegel agrees with Jacobi that a One-All, a sum-total unaffected by or stripped of the differentiation of its particulars, where everything “exist[s] altogether in a single, absolutely indivisible, infinite thing, and in no other way,” is neither desirable nor possible.

This concern was precisely what informed his critique of Spinoza:

As all differences and determinations of things and of consciousness simply go back into the One substance, one may say that in the system of Spinoza all things

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671 Slavoj Žižek, Less than Nothing, 474; see also 290, 473, 475, 847-8.
672 Errol Harris, An Interpretation of Hegel’s Logic, 291-2; Badiou says a similar thing in Alain Badiou, The Rational Kernel of the Hegelian Dialectic, 67.
are merely cast down into this abyss of annihilation. But from this abyss nothing comes out.\textsuperscript{675}

That is, much like his own deconstructionist critics, Hegel understands such an annihilation of difference to be the sort of negation of negation that would not (as per quadruplicity) recognize abstract negation at the level of the sublation of the Absolute. Indeed, the inability to see oppositional distinction via abstract negation of determinate entities in the Absolute and to, instead, declare that such distinctions are corrected and undone in the Absolute, that “there all is one,” is “the expression of empty \textit{tautology…without content} and leads no further.”\textsuperscript{676} The mistake lies in pitting the idea of the Absolute whole “against the full body of articulated cognition, which at least seeks and demands such fulfillment, to palm off its Absolute as the night in which, as the saying goes, all cows are black—this is cognition naively reduced to vacuity.”\textsuperscript{677} \textit{This} is real ontotheology, the true target of the Heidegger’s concern with the erasure of determinate finitude. This One-All, Hegel claims, could be found in former metaphysicians’ conceptions of the Absolute or God, where

God was defined as the sum-total of all realities, and of this sum-total it was said that no contradiction was contained in it, that none of the realities cancelled any other; for a reality is to be taken only as a perfection, as an \textit{affirmative} being which contains no negation. Hence the realities are not opposed to one another and do not contradict one another. Reality as thus conceived is assumed to survive when all negation has been thought away; but to do this is to do away with all

\textsuperscript{676} G. W. F. Hegel, \textit{Science of Logic}, 413.
\textsuperscript{677} G. W. F. Hegel, \textit{Phenomenology of Spirit}, §16.
determinateness... God as the pure reality in all realities or as the sum total of all realities, is just as devoid of determinateness and content as the empty absolute in which all is one. If, on the other hand, reality is taken in its determinateness, then, since it essentially contains the moment of the negative, the sum-total of all realities becomes just as much a sum-total of all negations, the sum-total of all contradictions.678

In other words, there is both abstract and determinate negativity at the level of the Absolute.

If the Hegelian Absolute can be taken to be as much the sum-total of all negations—and as little one at the expense of the other—then there likewise ceases to be reason to look for this radical negativity outside. Dialectic’s systematic form can, in this respect, be related to an observation Jodi Dean makes about the law. Where there is the notion of the all-encompassing (One-All) law, there is the accompanying notion of an impossible, anarchic place outside of the law that would allow the subject to “think it could get what it wants were it not for law’s prohibition.”679 With this story in mind, those subject to the law are able to suppress their own aversion to the static determinacy of the law through dreams of escape, dreams of freedom on the other side of such strictures. This notion consequently transforms all impediments to our transcendent fleeing into infringements and repression. Dean points out, however, that in reality true transformation occurs not through ideologically fantasizing about the suspension of the

678 G. W. F. Hegel, Science of Logic, 112, third and fourth emphasis added. Burbidge suggests that this is the Absolute Idea generating “its own incompleteness in the process of its elaboration.” John Burbidge, The Logic of Hegel’s Logic (Toronto: Broadview Press, 2006), 225n10. The reader should note that the picture Hegel is here critiquing completely conforms to the one Heidegger ascribes to Hegel in Martin Heidegger, Hegel’s Concept of Experience, 33.
679 Jodi Dean, Žižek’s Politics (New York, Routledge, 2006), 147.
law but, instead, through the subject’s radical identification with the seemingly closed law and recognition of the law’s own emancipatory potential, its internal short-circuits, its own contradictions. 680 Such would be to recognize that the law is not “One-All” at all, but is internally fractured in its closure. In Malabou’s words, “It is not a question of how to escape closure but rather of how to escape within closure itself.” 681 It is a question of bringing to attention the negativity, the alterity, already built into the system itself rather than situating it on the outside.

A similar idea exists in psychoanalytic therapy. There it turns out, to put it very crudely, that the cure is not going to come from the outside. The only “cure” to one’s pathologies, to one’s crises of identity, is the eventual understanding that there is no cure, at least in this sense of a harmonious resolution, the extinguishing of pathological elements. The outcome that emerges in its place is, instead, that one no longer sees this problem of identity as a problem for identity, but can identify the problem of identity as an integral part of their identity. And by abiding with this reality (“Mange ton dasein!” or eat your existence, as Lacan liked to say) the fantasy of a fixed, consistent identity is traversed. It is the lesson of Parsifal: the spear that smotes as the only one that will heal. Likewise with Aufhebung of the Absolute, it is only the whole when the “pathology” of negativity is not understood as some frustration to the whole, but rather as the whole’s internal frustration. In fact, Hegel will call it the “the supreme, most stubborn error” to see this negativity, “that which is its own essence” 682 as if extraneous or something to be overcome. What we have thus finally discovered is that “the failure of the Hegelian

680 Jodi Dean, Žižek’s Politics, 164
681 Catherine Malabou, Plasticity at the Dusk of Writing, 65. See also Jodi Dean and Paul Passavant, "Laws and Societies," Constellations 8, no. 3 (2001).
system,” its “eternal unfinished[ness] [inachevê]” and “infinite restlessness,” as Alexandre Koyré faulted it, are to be accepted as immanent features inscribed within systematicity itself. As Lampert asks, “how could there be a question of Derrida [or anyone else for that matter] finding a failure in Hegel’s system, given that the whole structure of Aufhebung is a structure of the failure effect?” It is in this sense as much its failure as its success—“the realization that only in such ‘failure’ is there success…is an achievement like no other,” as Pippin remarks.

And inasmuch as Hegelian dialectics is the logical genesis of everything (the Absolute whole) that immanently emerges from thinking pure being, concerned only “with what is,” it can be understood as “constitut[ing] metaphysics proper.” But since this dialectics is characterized by the logic of its sublation, its concern with what is includes as well the fracture of being and the immanent transformation of its very form. Insofar as we can call this metaphysics it is as a critical metaphysics that must be distinguished from the onto-theo-logical metaphysics that would assimilate difference into a smoothed over One-All Absolute. However, it is also the case that, as Gillian Rose stresses, “The ‘Absolute’ is not an optional extra, as it were.” What we are left with is not the supposedly post-metaphysical bracketing of Aufhebung, but with the

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684 Jay Lampert “The Resurrection and Dissemination,” 193n3. See G. W. F. Science of Logic, 611, where Hegel describes the Absolute, the highest maturity, the highest stage, as equally the greatest downfall (of the Absolute configured in terms of the merely positive sum-total). Or, G. W. F. Hegel, The Phenomenology of Spirit, §2, where he suggests that the fear of failure is the fear of truth.
687 Gillian Rose, Hegel Contra Sociology (London: Verso, 2009), 42.
characterization of *Aufhebung* that needs no unthinkable, sovereign beyond, no *tout autre*, to admit to the difference of the real. As Beiser notes,

> If Hegel abjured metaphysics as a science of the transcendent, he still pursued it as a science of the immanent. For Hegel, the problem with traditional metaphysics is not that it attempted to know the infinite, but that it had a *false interpretation* of the infinite.  

Accordingly, the picture of Hegel we have presented here, based principally on his account of sublation, cuts across the idea that Hegel is either a metaphysician who must ultimately emphasize determinate negation’s restricted economy of exchange or that, given the structure of quadruplicity and the return of abstract negation, his account fails on its own terms. What we have argued for is, instead, that dialectical logic is rather situated *between* its inflationary and deflationary interpretations.

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CONCLUSION

The purpose of this dissertation has been to determine the exact form of Hegel’s concept of sublation and evaluate its central importance for his dialectical logic. We undertook such a task by tracing a connection between individual instances of the concept as it emerged in his work, particularly in the sections on becoming at the beginning of the *Science of Logic* and the Absolute at the end of it, as well as in the figure of the slave in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*’s master-slave dialectic.

Through the process of analyzing these sections, where the operation of sublation is arguably most evident, we dealt with Bataille and Derrida’s substantial criticisms of the concept as a mechanism that ultimately amounts to an overcoming of ontological difference. Toward the end of establishing a negative argument for the sufficiency of Hegel’s concept of sublation, we criticized the standpoint and proposed alternative of this deconstructive appraisal. First of all, we determined the attempt to internally disrupt the activity or work of sublation to be overly commensurable with the rationality of the concept it was unsettling to truly comprise an alternative. Second, we found that the only alternative still available on these grounds, of a difference wholly indeterminable by dialectical logic, would necessarily assume a philosophically untenable exteriority only accessible via faith.
We followed this riposte with a positive argument in defense of sublation, which nevertheless confronted the valid apprehensions concerning difference raised by the deconstructionist opposition. Here we argued that the conciliatory aspects of sublation in becoming’s coming-to-be, the slave’s labour, and the conception of the Absolute as a triplicity and as a whole, needed to be tempered by the equally important other side of sublation found in becoming’s ceasing-to-be, the slave’s dread, and the Absolute conceived as non-All and as a quadruplicity. Sublation, we found, encompassed both of these aspects as the betweenness of abstract and determinate negativity. That sublation was found to be internally split between such negativities demonstrated that there was no further need to posit an outside to dialectics, some place of unsublatable otherness, in order to find genuine difference, nor did the discovery of such difference within Hegel’s system imply an undermining of it. The negative insight of dialectics claimed by Derrida and Bataille to have been lost in the unifying tendency of sublation showed itself to have been an integral side of this very same concept throughout the entirety of its logical movement.

Thus, the concept that finally emerged throughout our inquiry turned out to not have the same shape as that which was targeted by the deconstructive critique. And the fractured, critical metaphysics with which we were left, the system that emerged via the logic of sublation as we have defined it here, importantly stood apart from both the supposedly harmonious whole of ontotheological metaphysics as well as any post-metaphysical alternative that treats ontotheology as synonymous with metaphysics at large. We contend that it is this system, this science of logic, that remains alive today in the wake of Derrida and Bataille’s critique of Hegel.
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