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Clark Butler

Hermeneutic Hegelianism

1. *Ontological Historical Materialism*. The Hegel-Marx relationship remains an issue both for Hegel scholars aware of underlying world historical causes of the recent Hegel Renaissance and Marx scholars attentive to the philosophical roots of Marxism. It may be questioned, however, whether the relation is merely historical and circumstantial or necessary and internal as well. Marx claimed to have overturned the Hegelian system.¹ Yet the classical formula, according to which Marxism shares with Hegelianism its method but not its system, that the Hegelian system contradicts the dialectical methodology it shares with Marxism² has exercised wide influence. On numerous issues, e.g., the state, the universal class, the alienation of labor, Hegelian and Marxist doctrines are admittedly not only different but contradictory. To this extent Engels's classical formula is correct. But surely the more important consideration is method, though doctrine has so overshadowed methodological considerations in both Marxism and Hegelianism that it has been rare to define either school except in terms of specific tenets. Doctrinal definition of any *movement* resembles a death warrant. If either Marxism or Hegelianism is scientific and thus capable of breaking loose from nineteenth-century chains, it must be defined methodologically, programmatically. Contrary to Engels's formula, I shall distinguish between Marxist and Hegelian methods, but shall argue that the methods are not only compatible but complementary.³

I do not suggest that Hegel's method can be defined independently of any doctrinal beliefs. Proper definition of Hegel's method requires correction of common misinterpretations of his system, including the Marxist misinterpretation. On one point, unrecognized by Marx, Marx and Hegel were in agreement: Hegel was an ontological, if not methodological, historical materialist. Joachim Ritter has shown that Hegel knew that the modern state was conditioned by the emergence of industrial civil society which it sought to regulate.⁴ More generally, Hegel recognized that geography and natural history condition all rational dialectical progress in institutional and cultural history.⁵ The entire Hegelian system has as its material basis the greatest of all ecological and economic mutations: the patriarchal herding agricultural revolution, bringing the decline of primitive animism and the Fichtean-Cartesian alienation of humanity from nature as the basis of common sense. The system is the self-criticism and self-transcendence of that alienation in favor of reconciliation with nature.⁶ The pastoral agrarian revolution, the labor of capital accumulation after the ice age, established the self-abstraction and self-absolutization of the thinking self—the standpoint of pure thought in the *Logic*—in a position of lordship over against a nature accordingly emptied of divinity. It was thus a causal condition of the problem of the analytic understanding which Hegelian reason claims to solve.

But if Hegel is an ontological historical materialist in this sense, “nature” for Hegel cannot, as in Engels's Hegel interpretation,⁷ simply mean the self-alienation, or other, of the idea. If nature conditions thought, it has ontological status distinct from thought. Matter cannot causally condition the form it assumes if it is merely the self-externalization of that form. “Nature” is in fact ambiguous for Hegel. The nature whose dialectic is constructed in his philosophy of nature is indeed the self-alienation of the idea. Metaphorically, this nature is “created” by the thinking subject. The subject's abstraction and absolutization of itself apart from the primordial nature of

the primitive animist, in which it was previously immersed, call forth an alien world of objects, of obstacles devoid of subjectivity. The emergence of created nature thus presupposes a more primitive nature as a causal condition of the self-absolutization of pure disembodied thought. Before the fall into the inescapable alienation of labor, there was an undifferentiated animal-like oneness with the soul life of nature. Primitive gatherers and hunters live before creation, before the despiritualization of the world into the other of thought. But any eternal nature preceding the self-opposition of the thinking subject to a fallen nature is not encompassed by the system. It rather encompasses the system as the basis on which thought abstracts itself to construct the system of categories, and as the home to which it returns.⁸

2. *The Three Hegels: Panlogist, Platonist, and Hermeneutic.* That nature primordially overreaches the system precludes common panlogist, essentialist, or exaggerated Platonic realist construals of the system. Exaggerated Platonic realism predates Hegel, and “essentialism” was not used by Gilson to refer specifically to Hegel,⁹ but “panlogism” was coined by Johann Eduard Erdmann specifically to designate Hegelianism as a philosophy that “admits nothing as actual except reason, attributing to what is not rational a purely fleeting, self-cancelling existence.”¹⁰ By “reason” he means the dialectical system of categories, including those of the philosophy of nature and spirit as well as those of “logic” in the narrower sense.¹¹ The Absolute is equated with a categorical system. An existing particular is but a passing moment in the life of reason, and is self-contradictory if assigned actual reality on its own. Understanding Hegel in this way, Erdmann upheld Hegelianism. But the panlogist Hegel interpretation is far more commonly used to reject Hegelianism. In either case, the term designates a Hegelian version of essentialism — and a Hegelian heir to exaggerated Platonic realism.

The panlogist interpretation, shared by Marx along with other Hegel critics, construes the system to be the original and objective self-construction of the divine mind. But, however widespread, this is not the only Hegel interpretation. It seems to me that three general types of Hegel interpretation are possible: (1) panlogist Hegelianism, which recognizes only pure thought and thought objects and dissolves particulars into such objects; (2) Platonized Hegelianism, which recognizes the empirical world as well, but only as an accidental fall away from pure thought and center of striving for reunion with it; (3) hermeneutic Hegelianism, which sees in the empirical world the nonaccidental or necessary expression of thought. The Platonic interpretation, recently presupposed by Hegel critic Michael Rosen,¹² argues in a theistic vein that Hegel’s system is an imperfect simulation of a complete and eternal vision enjoyed by a transcendent divine mind. Hermeneutic Hegelianism agrees with the panlogist interpretation that the system is the objective and original self-construction of the divine spirit, but it recognizes a second, formal, subjective, and methodological sense of “system” in which it is reconstructive. The divine spirit and its systematic self-construction, not restricted as in panlogism to a realm of pure thought, exists objectively in and through empirical history. Though not denying ontological status to the material basis of dialectical thought, its methodological goal is not to weigh the impact of material conditions on the life of thought but rather to interpret thought through its resultant, materially given expressions. Formal Hegelian philosophy thus becomes a reconstruction not only of divine self-construction but, by virtue of the logical tie between inner thought and its outer expression, of the inner meaning of empirical history as well. Yet because empirical history expresses not only pure thought but also natural causes which can interfere with thought, it is marked with “contingency”; its reconstruction is ideal, not always factual.

Panlogist Hegelianism attributes process to God, though it is a purely conceptual process. Platonized or theistic Hegelianism attributes process to the human systematic simulation of the divine, but not to that mind itself, so that the simulation as a constructive process remains external to what it constructs. Since the divine mind is not self-constructive, systematic philosophy is not reconstructive. Hermeneutic Hegelianism attributes process both to the objective spirit in history and to the empathetic reconstruction of divine self-construction. On this view, philosophy becomes a humanistic discipline devoted to the interpretation of empirically given relics, monuments, documents, art, texts, and other works—recreating and internally criticizing the original thought of the creator. Because every interpreted expression is an empirical phenomenon, the thought of its creator must be empirically expressed. Unexpressed thought is uninterpretable. If the Absolute is panlogistically construed merely as pure thought, it cannot be reconstructed because it cannot be expressed or communicated. If the Absolute is understood in Platonic theistic fashion as an immutable divine vision, it cannot be reconstructed because it is devoid of creative process. But recreation, reliving, reenactment—in the specific form of rethinking—is the essence of the Hegelian method. Humans are thinking beings, and to reenact human life is to rethink it. Hegel himself, I take it, is an hermeneutic Hegelian. Though for himself he disowned the Romantic ideal of creative genius, as a member of the Romantic tradition of German hermeneutics he cultivated scholarly interpretation and criticism of such genius. Hegel’s hermeneutic method was merely used by Hegel himself; we must reflect on it, so that a programmatic Hegelianism controlling and even correcting Hegel’s results becomes possible.

3. *Refutation of Hegelian Panlogism.* Though Platonizing interpretations of Hegel have been advocated by right Hegelian scholars sympathetic to Hegel, such as J. N. Findlay and Quentin Lauer,¹³ and have called forth Hegel critiques by such writers as Michael Rosen, the panlogist interpretation is most responsible for the anti-Hegelianism of the past century. Tillich wrote that the essentialist trend of modern philosophy culminated in Hegel’s attempt to interpret all reality in terms of “a system of essences.”¹⁴ Feuerbach, Marx, Kierkegaard, Dewey, Russell, and Moore all began as Hegelians, but all “went beyond” Hegel and helped found major non-Hegelian movements after concluding that Hegel illegitimately reduced all reality to an “unearthly ballet of bloodless categories” (Bradley).¹⁵ James assumed the panlogist reading in his denunciation of the block universe,¹⁶ while Russell assumed that Hegel reduced the rich hues of reality to something “thin and logical.”¹⁷ The panlogist reading of Hegel continues in scholars such as Hypollite, Bernstein, Wartofsky, and Manfred Frank.¹⁸ But it is quite impossible to go beyond any philosopher if one never really enters his position. Refutation of the panlogist interpretation of Hegel is essential for the sake of a cooperative, intersubjectively corrigible, empirically informed Hegelian interpretation capable of leading beyond Hegel’s own results. Panlogism prescribes a nonsocial method of transcendental self-construction which makes it hard to see how we can come to understand and repeat Hegel’s thought and impossible to see how we can understand dialectically the data of history and nature by our own independent inquiry, confirming or disconfirming Hegel. If the empirical data are resolved into universal thought objects constructed by the thinker, there is no alien subjectivity expressing itself in empirical expressions to be discovered and interpreted.

The panlogist view seems to be supported by some Hegelian texts. I will not discuss the assertion of the rationality of the actual in the *Philosophy of Right*, since Knox has clearly pointed out how

the panlogist interpretation of the assertion confuses the “actual” and the “existent.”¹⁹ But I will say something about the first chapter of the *Phenomenology* on particulars allegedly dissolving into universals, and the fifth chapter on reason certain of itself in all reality. The first chapter really justifies, I think, the view that Hegel is a conceptualistic nominalist, not an essentialist, while the fifth chapter justifies ascribing to Hegel an Aristotelian understanding of “reason” as an essential property.

Hegel’s lectures on ancient philosophy given while composing the *Phenomenology* attribute the critique of sense certainty in chapter one with the Megarian Stilpo. On the panlogist interpretation we would expect Hegel to agree with Stilpo, but in fact he disagrees.²⁰ He, of course, rejects “crude” nominalism as well, but he approves the “non-crude” nominalism or conceptualism of Locke.²¹ The conceptualist distinction between thought and things is stated in the *Encyclopaedia*: “in thinking things we transform them into something universal; but things are singular.”²² The critique of sense certainty establishes essentialism only if we forget that the *Phenomenology* records the experience, not of all spirit, but of *thinking* consciousness. Certain forms of spirit—preconscious feeling or sentience treated in the *Encyclopaedia*—precede the abstraction of thought. But sense certainty, though the lowest form of thinking consciousness, is still a form of thought and not of mere sensation. It is the thinking abstraction and absolutization of the sensory particular. It is thus hardly surprising that sense certainty turns out to encounter nothing but universals or thought objects. Thought produces universals out of the singular entities encountered by preabstractive mentality.

Chapter five seems to suggest in a panlogist vein that the *Phenomenology* moves toward confirmation of reason’s certitude of being one with all reality. Since for Hegel, the “real” includes more than the “actual,” reason’s identity with the real seems to support panlogism more strongly than the more often quoted preface to the *Philosophy of Right*. But the rationality of the real is properly understood in a nonpanlogist Aristotelian sense. Reason is the eternal essence of the Absolute because it is its highest potential, not because no nonrational empirical reality has ever existed:

In what he (Aristotle) teaches respecting the soul we shall find him recurring to this speculative thought (that thought is the absolute Idea only through activity, not as unmoved); but to him it is again an object, like other objects, a kind of condition which he understands empirically, such as sleep, or weariness. He does not say that it alone is truth, that all is summed up in Thought, but he does say it is the first, the strongest, the most honorable. We, on the other hand, say that Thought, as that which relates to itself, has existence, or is the truth; that thought comprehends the whole truth, even though we ordinarily represent to ourselves sensation and so on, besides thought, as having reality. Thus although Aristotle does not express himself in modern philosophic language, he has yet throughout the same fundamental theory.²³

That the real is rational means that reason is the highest potential and manifestation of the real—presupposing and including all lower potentials. Rationality is the eternal essence of the Absolute because the Absolute’s rational self-comprehension is its highest manifestation, not because there never was a state of the Absolute in which such comprehension was absent. Hegel’s difference with Aristotle is that, since he views all reality as a self-actualizing substance, he does not hold that actualization must be passively received by a first substance from a second

substance already in act. He is a process philosopher for whom process generates novelty—though a novelty which first reveals what was always essential to the substance. In the end there is no substance viewed as an inert material substratum, but only spirit, an infinite self-movement of subjective acts.

Even when the Absolute achieves systematic self-comprehension, it is never the whole in the sense of exhausting its empirical richness, whether ontologically or even descriptively. An infinite series of dialectical cycles, each defining the Absolute more concretely, would have to be completed before thought could surrender its congenital abstraction and grasp the Absolute exhaustively. This is a Hegelian version of the necessary incompleteness of description. Yet just as the principle of a mathematical series can be understood without completing the series, so an infinite dialectical series could be grasped by grasping the rules for generating new dialectical moves from previous ones, without going through all the moves. But the purpose of the dialectic is real definition of the Absolute, not complete description. Thought does reach the conclusion of the dialectic. It reaches a fully concrete definition of the Absolute, not a fully concrete Absolute, nor a complete description of the Absolute. In form thought grasps the whole, but not in all its content. The system is not the Absolute. From the standpoint of hermeneutic Hegelianism, empirical content is the interpretable outer expression of inner thought and cannot be dissolved into thought without generating a solipsistic concept of understanding without interpretation, meaning without a text.

Hegel's own criticism of Neoplatonism²⁴ is sufficient to cast doubt on Platonizing interpretations of his work. But he himself—perhaps more by tone than assertion—contributed to the panlogist misreading of his work. Such a tendency was noted within his lifetime by several students and critics other than Schelling. Hegel replied in a crucial but still untranslated 1829 review of Göschel, conceding that his work erred through insufficient attention to the claims of imagination, love, and heart.²⁵ He explained the panlogist one-sidedness of his work on pedagogical/polemical grounds. Hegelianism was not the dominant philosophy of Hegel's era. Jacobi's Romantic philosophy of feeling, which denied that the Absolute could be grasped conceptually, was most influential. Hegel, protesting perhaps too forcefully that the Absolute could be so grasped, gave the impression of reducing the Absolute to the system. The paradox, we shall see, is that Hegel did not practice his own hermeneutic method of empathetic internal criticism in treating the rival philosophies of his time. He practiced a nondialectical method of external, polemical criticism. And his philosophizing thus acquired—especially with respect to neo-Jacobians such as Fries and Schleiermacher—a personal edge inconsistent with his own deeper methodological impulse.

4. *Hegel's Nominalism and the Hermeneutic Tradition.* Once the nominalist interpretation of the *Phenomenology's* first chapter is taken seriously, Herder appears as a more natural source of Hegel's nominalism than Locke. In Herder nominalism is closely linked to the secular hermeneutic tradition which he helped found in Germany. Hegel started out under the influence of the pragmatic-Enlightenment concept of historiography,²⁶ but in the 1790's he fell subject to Herder's Romantic critique of pragmatic historiography.²⁷ According to Herder's concept of the empathetic method, interpretation requires suspension of the interpreter's historically and personally conditioned perspective: "...the computations of history are so perplexed...that it requires a mind wholly free from hypothesis to trace the clue. This clue is most easily lost by

one, with whom a particular race of the people is a favorite.... The historian...must see with eyes as impartial as those of the creator...and judge altogether uninfluenced by the passions.”²⁸ Yielding to the thing itself, abstracting from certainty of self,²⁹ the interpreter clears his mind as a stage on which to reenact the unfolding of the foreign standpoint according to its own immanent nature. The interpreter is an actor, impersonating an alien role on the emptied stage of his own mind. Though interpretation begins with detachment, with an act of hermeneutic self-alienation, the understanding it achieves is objective but not detached, not theoretical observation. For understanding is an empathetic reliving which engages the interpreter’s feeling—what Herder calls a “wandering” or “roaming about” among the countless peoples of the past. Each subject of interpretation is unique. “No two leaves on any one tree in nature are to be found perfectly alike; and still less do two human faces...resemble each other.”³⁰ Herder understands this uniqueness nominalistically through the Romantic concept of individuality: each subject has a unique quality, and is not merely a unique co-instantiation of universal qualities. Pragmatic historians ignore the individuality in favor of abstract essential types, and thus can find in history something like the universal causal laws of natural science—laws promising explanation of the present and even prediction on the basis of induction and historical parallels.

Hegel’s nominalism in the tradition of Herder implies a rejection of mechanistic determinism. To treat an individual “mechanically” is to treat it abstractly, to ignore its individuality.³¹ Determinism assumes that events can be subsumed under causal laws correlating abstractly defined antecedent conditions with abstractly defined consequent conditions. But if every event displays a nonuniversal, totally concrete quality not open to multiple instantiation, no event can be caused deterministically because none is really subsumable under any abstract universal concept defining an effect in any causal law. When the *quale* of every unique event is beyond complete description, and when causal laws correlate describable and repeatable causal and resultant conditions, causal determination is limited merely to general features of the effect. The Hegelian model of science is thus not classical deterministic natural science even within his treatment of nature. Spirit—unique, individual, and productive of historical novelty—is the truth of nature, which is cyclical, repetitive, and subject to causal law.³² Mechanistic determinism is a disguise concealing the indeterministic spiritual character of nature. And spirit can be grasped only on a hermeneutic model of scientific understanding.

5. The Dialectical-Hermeneutic Method. The hermeneutic method as Hegel used it differs in significant respects from the method of Herder. Hegel was not a Romantic vainly seeking to bring back to life the irrevocably lost individuality of the past. Despite Hegel’s widely admired power to empathize with a great range of perspectives, a frustrating experience some readers have had is trying to guess the individual literary text or historical subject from which he has abstracted a given standpoint in his system. Such frustration is based on a misunderstanding, since his systematic works do not attempt ordinary literary criticism or history. Rather, he uses a series of concrete historical or literary standpoints to abstract a series of ideal typical standpoints. Thus lordship for Hegel is limited to neither feudal lordship, or imperial lordship, nor divine lordship. Ideal typical standpoints are selected according to their contribution to the self-constitution of the present. The ideal typical standpoint, not the past literary or historical individual, is preserved in the present as a transcended moment in the present standpoint’s self-constitution. The past cannot be restored to full individuality, but it can be remembered and rethought in ideal typical forms. A pragmatic interest reasserts itself in Hegel’s post-Romantic,

post-Hellenistic maturity. Hegel's concern in his system was to interpret the past through its fruition in the present, to explain the present dialectically as a triumph over the contradictions of past standpoints. He did not explore the past for parallels to the present but for its ingredients.

The apparent contradiction between hermeneutic self-alienation and the inescapability of the present—between methodological self-abandonment to the life of the historical object³³ and the impossible leap out of one's own century³⁴—is removed by seeing that the life of the past to which the interpreter surrenders, itself issues in the interpretive present. One abandons oneself to the seemingly alien life of the past only to find that this life is not really alien, that one's own life is implicit in it. The interpreter's own selfhood is constituted by an internal self-critique and self-transcendence of past standpoints, so that hermeneutic self-alienation, pressed to the limit, cancels itself. The interpretive standpoint finally intervenes in interpretation by being constructed dialectically out of the standpoint understood through interpretation.

6. *Dialectical Necessity as Rational Deducibility.* The reconstruction of the past is the self-construction of the present. But to explain the present in light of its dialectical self-construction is at once to understand the past through its dialectical potential. This potential is the series of further standpoints rationally deducible from it. Hegel's polemics against the deduction and the "geometric method"³⁵ do not imply that the dialectic is not deductive. Any set of premises entails an infinity of alternative lines of deduction. Most alternatives are arbitrary and unmotivated apart from assurances from the argument's author that an interesting conclusion awaits us at the end. Such blank check deduction, called *Rasonnieren*, is criticized by Hegel. The consumer of the argument is externally motivated by faith in the argument's originator. Dialectical deduction is distinguished from this usual sort of deduction precisely through being internally motivated. "Refutation must not come from the outside": "immanent deduction," not "authority,"³⁶ provides the only confirmation for a concept. The dialectical-hermeneutic method hypothesizes a single line of deduction, eventuating in the present standpoint, which thought—moved by internal reflection on a position adopted through self-abandonment to the past—would be rationally motivated to follow if it could develop free of external material impediments. The method introduces material conditions to explain cases where history fails to express rational dialectical necessity, but not to explain why history does express such necessity. The hypothesis of merely a single line of rationally necessary deduction cannot be confirmed without examining the results of the method's systematic use. Short of such an examination, however, the hypothesis can be confirmed by a simplified model of a complete dialectical cycle. Such a model is innocuous as long as it is not taken as a universal schema or formalism to be imposed on all conceptual developments.

The dialectic in simplified model moves from abstract to more concrete definitions of the Absolute. It is a thought process in which a finite aspect *a* of an organically related whole of internally related aspects is abstracted and absolutized in negation of some correlative aspect *b*, in which the absolutization of *a* discovers the contradiction (self-negation) of affirming *a* to exist without *b*, and in which the recognition of self-contradiction is overcome by dropping the absolutization of *a* to the exclusion of *b* (negation of the negation). The dialectical steps are: abstraction of *a*, absolutization of *a*, abstraction of *b*, negation of *b* to maintain the absolutization, self-negation of the recognition of contradiction, and negation of the negation (or

b). The deductive necessity of the dialectic depends on construing step two as the introduction of a false assumption in indirect proof.³⁷

But deductive necessity is not yet rational deducibility (“immanent deduction”). To show rational deducibility, we begin again with the abstraction of *a*. Since nothing else has been abstracted, it is impossible to define *a* as relative to any *b* to which it may be internally related. Thus thought is rationally moved to view *a* as nonrelative, to absolutize *a*. The fear of error being the very first error,³⁸ reason is exhibited in the heuristic postulation of possibly false assumptions. If *a* is internally related to *b*, to think *a* is implicitly to think *b*, for *a* exists in inseparable oneness with *b*. The explicit abstraction of *a* rationally motivates a transition from the implicit to explicit thought of *b*. But when the contradiction lurking behind absolutization of *a* first becomes explicit, the psychodynamics of reason justifies reabsolutization of *a*. To yield at once to counterevidence is as counterrational as refusing to yield to its accumulation. A heuristic assumption must become a heuristic dogma if it is to generate the pathos and pain which, for Hegel, are essential to reason as a dialectical learning process.³⁹ Fixated on *a*, thought notes *b* only to deny its existence. Yet *b* is inescapable; far from vanishing, it returns to negate the absolutization of *a*, to force from thought an admission of contradiction. Only then is thought rationally moved to escape its self-caused negation at the hands of the negated other by abandoning its absolutization of *a*, thus allowing the more concrete *a-b* to enter as a new definition of the Absolute.

7. *Hegel's Systematic Works as Dialectical-Hermeneutic Treatises*. The Hegelian method leads neither to empirical history nor to an original and complete self-construction of a monistic Fichtean divine mind, but to an ideal reconstruction of empirical history. Yet this reconstruction is the philosophical completion, on the level of absolute spirit, of the historical self-construction of the Absolute. Hegel's lectures on world history and the history of philosophy stay close to what is to be interpreted, while his systematic works present the dialectical understanding of historical standpoints which results from interpretation. The *Encyclopaedia*, expressing the system as a whole, is reenactment of all world history, from the patriarchal self-abstraction of pure logical thought, through the consequent reduction of nature to an alien other, to the reunion of subject and object in spirit. The philosophy of nature reconstructs the history of science from mechanistic physics through the rise of chemistry to biology. But insofar as nature is deficient in thought, the philosophy of nature constructs rather than reconstructs natural evolution.

The *Philosophy of Right* illustrates the reconstructive dialectical understanding of spirit—of history from the Roman Empire to the present, from the Stoic transcendence of Oriental lordship and bondage. The first section on natural law treats the spirit of Roman law.⁴⁰ The second, on morality, elaborates the medieval distinction between the heavenly and earthly cities, virtue and the way of the world.⁴¹ The third section, on the family, states the principle of the postmedieval state: the Prince's claim to a territorial family domain based on private law⁴² opposed to papal pretensions. The fourth section, on civil society, thematizes the industrial revolution which superseded absolute monarchy, while the final section, on the state, treats the modern welfare state which regulates civil society. The whole work is an ideal reconstruction of Western history. If it succeeds, contingent history reveals a rationally necessary development.

The *Logic* also gives reconstructive understanding of history—in this case the history of philosophy viewed as the unfolding in the realm of external contingency of the rationally deductive thought process of defining the Absolute.⁴³ Hegel abandons himself to the dialectical life of the Parmenidean standpoint. The conceptual self-movement takes him from the ancient metaphysics of Being, through the modern reflective epistemological turn (“Essence”), to the speculative concept upheld by Hegel himself. An interpretation of pre-Socratic texts, the *Logic* draws on the entire record of philosophy’s history. Yet the contingent historical order can deviate from the ideal order, so that speculative thought can be anticipated by Aristotle and a reversion to an abstract metaphysics of being (sense impressions) can be found in Hume. Still, contrary to theistic interpretations of Hegel even God cannot attain the comprehension of Himself, which we attain through reading the *Logic*, without understanding that text Himself, and this is possible even for God only at the end of philosophy’s empirical history, only in and through us. Despite reversions and inconsistent anticipations, empirical history has progressed; otherwise the Hegelian method would be unusable. And, though the *Logic* does not fully replicate empirical history, the dialectical history of the rational implications of Parmenides shows his *significance* better than the empirical history of philosophy. For insofar as empirical history diverges from dialectical history, the *Wirkungsgeschichte* of an historical position is logically external to that position. Yet empirical history in its full religious, aesthetic, institutional, and natural context is more concrete than the *Logic*. The system begins with the *Logic*, an idealized version of the history of philosophy; it ends with the same history empirically situated in absolute spirit. Both logic and the philosophy of nature turn out to be branches of the philosophy of spirit—logic because it is an ideal reconstruction of a movement of absolute spirit and the philosophy of nature because it either reconstructs the history of natural science (“observation” in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*) or constructs a thought-deficient evolution of spirit slumbering in nature.

8. *Strength and Deficiency of Hegel’s Method.* The strength of the dialectical-hermeneutic method is highlighted by comparison with related methods in recent social philosophy. Rawls and Nozick employ methods resembling Hegel’s. Both methodologically project themselves into an immediate, natural, or original standpoint and dialectically derive an institution’s legitimacy from that standpoint. Nozick justifies an ideal minimal state by projecting himself into the state of nature and exhibiting the self-transformation of that standpoint into citizenship.⁴⁴ And Rawls urges justification of constitutional arrangements by detaching oneself from one’s particular interests to adopt the original position of a rational general will and then negotiating such arrangements from that position.⁴⁵ Unlike Hegel, both philosophers project themselves into a nonhistorical, purely hypothetical standpoint. The dialectic proceeding from that standpoint thus can legitimate no concretely existing standpoint, which always preserves, and is constituted by, the transcended stages of its own emergence. A state’s present constitution is internally related to the process of its emergence, much as any event for Whitehead is so related to its causal past. Nozick’s legitimate state cannot actually exist, while Rawls’s just constitutional proposals remain pure Kantian “oughts” in the absence of any historical dialectic which actualizes them. Because Hegel alienates himself into an historical standpoint, reason exists objectively in history, not merely subjectively in the philosophical imagination.

Yet Hegel’s method is subject to a limitation. It yields an interpretive understanding of the past as contradictory and a deductive-genetic explanation of the present as reconciliatory. Marx, by

contrast, gives a dialectical understanding of a contradictory present in the light of future reconciliation; his *materialistic* Hegelian method aims at transformation, not mere understanding, of the present. Since past dialectical progress for Hegel is a given fact, he does not need to investigate material conditions which failed to interfere with that progress. The Marxist concern with the problematic future, however, requires an historical materialism which is methodological, not merely ontological. He cannot merely allow in general that the dialectic is materially conditioned, but must show actual conditions facilitating dialectical progress. The transcendence of a contradictory position is rationally deducible. But the premises that logically imply a conclusion do not logically or even causally imply that the conclusion will be drawn. Whether a dialectical insight is not only drawn by an isolated thinker but is also publicly recognized and even institutionalized, depends on the material base. This fact explains the inadequacy of dialectical-hermeneutic understanding of present contradictions if unaccompanied by rational praxis informed by knowledge of the material base and its laws of motion.

Dialectical explanation of the present reveals the present as a resolution of past contradictions; dialectical understanding of the present also shows it to involve a new contradiction. Science, avoiding ideology, views the present as potentially both a resolution and a contradiction. Without an understanding of the present which is methodologically if not doctrinally Marxist, a Hegelian explanation of any present before the end of history is partial, ideological, and self-congratulatory. Hegel succumbed to this risk. Insisting that philosophy's task is to "comprehend what is" and that it is absurd to want to transcend one's own time,⁴⁶ Hegel congratulates Göschel for discovering "agreement" between Hegelianism and the existing Christian faith,⁴⁷ and boasts to von Hardenburg that he has demonstrated "agreement" between philosophy and the principle of the existing Prussian state.⁴⁸ Hegel is capable of recognizing existing contradictions ("...how poverty is to be abolished is one of the most disturbing problems which agitate modern society").⁴⁹ But the epic character of the idealistic dialectical-hermeneutic method assigns such recognition to footnotes and supplementary comments.

Yet the materialist dialectical method cannot replace Hegel's idealist method. The present need not be merely a world historical achievement, but it need not be merely a world historical problem either. Marx himself, who amply praised capitalism, used both methods. And Hegel knew the present was no mere end point,⁵⁰ but equipped himself methodologically only to understand the present. Even if the problem of defining the Absolute is solved, the problem of establishing—and not merely anticipating—a rational state in which a true definition of the Absolute is publicly shared remains without solution. Each method helps assure the nonideological character of the other. A methodologically Marxist explanation of the present can help an Hegelian explanation of the present achieve qualified rational identification with actual institutions. Without both an ever deepening reconstruction of past dialectical progress and a search for laws of motion facilitating dialectical progress toward a rational state, Hegelianism lapses into either ideology or purely scholastic scholarship divorced from any viable program of philosophical inquiry or social action.

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Notes

¹Karl Marx, *Capital*, Preface to Second Edition (1873).

²Friedrich Engels, *Ludwig Feuerbach and the Outcome of Classical German Philosophy*, Ch. 1.

³Emancipation of Marx's materialistic dialectical-hermeneutic method from the tyranny of Marx's classical use is advocated in "The Dialectic-Hermeneutic Method in Hegel and in Marx," *Dialectics and Humanism*, No. 4, 1983, pp. 117–27.

⁴G. W. F. Hegel, *Philosophy of Law*, #242, #245; Joachim Ritter, *Hegel and the French Revolution*, tr. R. D. Winfield (MIT, 1982); also, N. Waszek, *Owl of Minerva*, Vol. 15 (1983–84), pp. 51ff.; R. Plant, *Hegel* (Indiana, 1973), Ch. 3.

⁵G. W. F. Hegel, *Philosophy of History*, "Geographical Basis of History" in introduction.

⁶"The union between the two determinations (subjectivity and objectivity) is ... the *primal state of innocence*, where Spirit is identical with Nature... whereas the standpoint of the divided consciousness is the fall of man from eternal, divine unity.... But this unity of intelligence and intuition, of the inwardness of spirit and its relation to externality, must be, not the beginning, but the goal.... A natural unity of thought and intuition is that of the child and the animal.... But man must have eaten of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil and... gone through the labor and activity of thought in order to become what he is, having overcome this separation between himself and Nature." Hegel, *Philosophy of Nature*, #246,— 135 — Addition.

⁷Engels, *op. cit.*, Ch 2.

⁸G. W. F. Hegel, *Werke*, ed. H. Glockner (Stuttgart, 1927-), Vol. 20, p. 304, on the system stepping outside itself, thus overcoming the last remnant of abstraction.

⁹Etienne Gilson, *L'Etre et l'Essence* (Vrin, 1948), p. 291.

¹⁰Johann Eduard Erdmann, *Geschichte der neueren Philosophie* (1853), Vol. 3, p. 853.

¹¹Erdmann, *Outlines of Logic and Metaphysics* (George Allen & Unwin, 1896), p. 5.

¹²Michael Rosen, *Hegel's Dialectic and Its Criticism* (Cambridge, 1982), e.g., p. 179.

¹³J. N. Findlay, *Hegel: A Re-Examination* (Macmillan, 1958), Ch. 3, sect. 1; Quentin Lauer, *Essays in Hegelian Dialectics* (Fordham, 1977), pp. 69–74.

¹⁴Paul Tillich, *The Courage to Be* (Yale, 1952), p. 133.

¹⁵F. H. Bradley, *The Principles of Logic*, 2nd ed. (Oxford, 1922), pp. 590–91.

¹⁶Hegel "clung fast to the old rationalist contempt for the immediate given world of sense and all its squalid particulars...." W. James, *A Pluralistic Universe* (Longmans, Green, 1909), p. 93. Dewey sought to naturalize and thus de-logicize Hegel—putting aside the dialectic's logical necessity—in "From

Absolutism to Experimentalism,” *Contemporary American Philosophy*, ed. G. P. Adams and W. P. Montague (Macmillan, 1930), pp. 13–27, esp. p. 21.

¹⁷Bertrand Russell, “My Mental Development” in *The Philosophy of Bertrand Russell*, ed. P. A. Schilpp (Harper & Row, 1963), p. 12.

¹⁸Jean Hypollite, *Genèse et structure de la Phénoménologie de l’Esprit de Hegel* (Aubier, 1946), Vol. 1, p. 87; Richard Bernstein, *Praxis and Action* (Pennsylvania, 1971), p. 107; Marx Wartofsky, *Feuerbach* (Cambridge, 1977), p. 7; Manfred Frank, *Der Unendliche Mangel an Sein* (Suhrkamp, 1975), Ch. 6, pp. 17–18.

¹⁹T. M. Knox in translator’s notes to Hegel’s *Philosophy of Right* (Oxford, 1952), p. 302.

²⁰*Werke*, 18, pp. 143–44.

²¹*Ibid.*, 19, pp. 183, 423–34.

²²G. W. F. Hegel, *Encyclopaedia of Philosophical Sciences*, #246, Addition; #402, Addition.

²³*Werke*, 18, p. 332.

²⁴*Ibid.*, 19, pp. 99ff.

²⁵*Ibid.*, 20, pp. 302–09.

²⁶G. W. F. Hegel, “On the Religion of the Greeks and Romans,” *CLIO*, Vol. 9, No. 1, pp. 69–74.

²⁷The shift is already apparent in Hegel’s “On Some Characteristic Distinctions of the Ancient Poets,” *CLIO*, Vol. 7, No. 3, pp. 403–08. Regarding Herder’s influence, see Jose Maria Ripalda, *The Divided Nation* (Van Gorcum, 1977), pp. 2–10, 41–43.

²⁸Johann Gottfried Herder, *Reflections on the Philosophy of History of Mankind*, ed. F. Manuel (Chicago, 1968), p. 161.

²⁹*Werke*, 2, p. 35.

³⁰Herder, *op. cit.*, p. 3.

³¹“As the object ... in its determined being is a totality and yet on account of its determinateness— 136 — and immediacy is not the *negative unity* of that determined being, it is *indifferent* to the *determinations* as *individual*, as determined in and for themselves.... Consequently, a principle of self-determination is nowhere to be found; *determinism*—the standpoint (which)...takes the object, just as we have found it to be the truth—assigns for each determination of an object that of another object.” G. W. F. Hegel, *Science of Logic*, tr. A. V. Miller (Humanities, 1969), pp. 713–14; *Werke*, 5, pp. 183–84.

³²*Werke*, 11, pp. 89, 112–13; also, “each period is involved in such peculiar circumstances, exhibits a condition of things so idiosyncratic, that its conduct must be regulated by considerations connected with itself, and itself alone.” *Philosophy of History*, tr. J. Sibree, pp. 5–7; *Ibid.* pp. 30–32.

³³*Werke*, 2, pp. 50–51.

³⁴*Ibid.*, 7, p. 35.

³⁵*Ibid.*, 2, pp. 40–41.

³⁶*Ibid.*, 5, pp. 10, 13.

³⁷Cf. Clark Butler, “Hegel’s Dialectic as an Organic Whole as a Particular Application of Formal Logic,” *Art and Logic in Hegel’s Philosophy*, ed. W. Steinkraus and K. Schmitz (Humanities, 1980), pp. 219ff.

³⁸*Werke*, 2, pp. 68–69.

³⁹*Ibid.*, p. 23.

⁴⁰Michel Villey, “Das Romische Recht in Hegels Rechtsphilosophie,” *Materialien zu Hegel’s Rechtsphilosophie*, ed. M. Riedel (Suhrkamp, 1975), pp. 131–51.

⁴¹“The right of the subject’s particularity...is...the center of the difference between ancient and modern times. This right...is given expression in Christianity and it has become the universal effective principle of a new form of civilization. Among the primary shapes which this right assumes are love, romanticism, quest for eternal salvation of the individual; next comes moral convictions and conscience.” *Philosophy of Right*, # 124; *Werke*, p. 182.

⁴²Monarchy is “a constitution in which government is in the hands of a single individual and through heredity remains one with the family.” *Werke*, 3, p. 73. See also *Werke*, 11, pp. 504–05, on transition from feudalism to monarchy.

⁴³“In the history of philosophy the different stages of the logical Idea assume the shape of successive systems.” G. W. F. Hegel, *Logic*, tr. W. Wallace (Oxford, 1975); *Werke*, 7, p. 204. But in the *Logic*, “instead of surveying the process from the outside, as we do in history, we see the movement of thought clearly defined in its native element.” *Ibid.*, p. 19; *Werke*, 8, p. 60.

⁴⁴Robert Nozick, *Anarchy, State and Utopia* (Basic, 1974), Ch. 2.

⁴⁵John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice* (Harvard, 1971), Ch. 3.

⁴⁶*Philosophy of Right*, Preface.

⁴⁷G. W. F. Hegel, *Briefe von und an Hegel*, ed. J. Hoffmeister (Meiner, 1952–80), Vol. 3, #669.

⁴⁸*Ibid.*, Vol. 2, #376.

⁴⁹*Philosophy of Right*, #244, Addition.

⁵⁰*Briefe*, Vol. 3, #603.

Clark Butler, “Hermeneutic Hegelianism,” *Idealistic Studies* 15:2 (May 1985): 121–135.