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The “Open Closure” of Hegel’s Method and System: A Critique of Terry Pinkard’s Naturalized Hegel

Open readings of Hegel—as recently exemplified by Terry Pinkard’s *Hegel’s Naturalism* (2012)—are becoming more common. According to Pinkard’s Hegel, theoretical and practical interchange between agents never reaches a final end. Rather, “the ‘true infinity’ the agent seeks is to be found within the ongoing interchange itself, insofar as that interchange is oriented to truth.”¹ Furthermore, the only “absolute” is that we are alone

1. Terry Pinkard, *Hegel’s Naturalism: Mind, Nature, and the Final Ends of Life* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2012), 186. Hereafter cited as *Hegel’s Naturalism*. Pinkard’s book has received favorable reviews. One reviewer finds Pinkard’s development of a “disenchanted Aristotelian naturalism” to be the strongest part of the book (Richard Eldridge, review of *Hegel’s Naturalism: Mind, Nature, and the Final Ends of Life*, by Terry Pinkard, *Notre Dame Philosophical Reviews: An Electronic Journal* [2012], accessed February 3, 2015, <http://ndpr.nd.edu/news/35128-hegel-s-naturalism-mind-nature-and-the-final-ends-of-life/>), while another highlights its importance in the discussion of the relationship between nature and spirit in Hegel as well as the discussion of the question of reconciliation. See Jean-Philippe Deranty, review of *Hegel’s Naturalism: Mind, Nature and the Final Ends of Life*, by Terry Pinkard, *Critical Horizons* 13.2 (2012): 275–87. Pinkard is a representative of deflationist readings of Hegel, which emphasize the human side of spirit rather than the cosmic, which was more prevalent in Charles Taylor’s influential interpretation. Deflationist readings tend to take a naturalist stance, understanding spirit at most as human society. Other representatives of the deflationist view include Robert Pippin, John McDowell, and Robert Brandom. These scholars also have been called the “normative Hegelians,” in that they focus on the practical aspects of the constraints of conceptuality (see Markus Gabriel, *Transcendental Ontology: Essays in German Idealism* [New York: Continuum, 2011], viii–ix). Until now, the normative Hegelians have completely ignored Hegel’s philosophy of nature. Pinkard’s book signals a new turn in its direct engagement with Hegel’s view of nature. It also signals an interest in developing a Hegelian philosophy that is fully up

and that this will remain a problem to us (186). Axel Honneth's *Das Recht der Freiheit* (2011) is a recent example of how to use a Hegelian framework to approach contemporary issues. Honneth, however, explicitly rejects Hegel's monist conception of spirit, stating that it is not really a conceivable option for the children of an age of enlightened materialism.² Consequently, Honneth does not aim at developing a comprehensive Hegelian philosophy that is up to date. Such an aim is, however, a special quality of Pinkard's latest work, and he wants to realize it exactly by attempting to make Hegel compatible with enlightened materialism.³ One can ask if this is possible while staying true to Hegel, if it is not a reading that exaggerates the openness of Hegel's philosophy.⁴

Closed readings are, however, also still viable. For example, in Kristin Gjesdal's exploration of the relationship between Hegel and Hans-Georg Gadamer, Hegel is presented as a thinker of closed totality.⁵ Such a thinker is one who believes that the process of the interpretative articulation of tradition indeed can achieve a final end. When spirit "has reached identity with itself in absolute knowledge"⁶ the interpreter can "get beyond the limitations of her own horizon."⁷

My claim is that if we attempt to locate Hegel on either side of the divide between "open" and "closed," then we fail to do justice to his notion of speculative thinking. Hence I agree with the sentiment that "the ways in which and the extent to which Hegel's system is closed have been greatly exaggerated and

to speed with the developments of science, in particular with regard to the widespread view that the human being is fundamentally rooted in nature.

2. Axel Honneth, *Das Recht der Freiheit: Grundriß einer demokratischen Sittlichkeit* (Berlin: Suhrkamp, 2011), 17.

3. For a discussion of Pinkard and Honneth, in particular in relation to their approach to practical philosophy and the concept of recognition, see Jean-Philippe Deranty, "Hegelian Recognition, Critical Theory, and the Social Sciences," in *Recognition Theory as Social Research: Investigating the Dynamics of Social Conflict*, ed. Shane O'Neill and Nicholas H. Smith (Houndmills, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 39–61.

4. Another attempt at using Hegel's dialectical method on the development of history after Hegel has been undertaken by Clark Butler in *The Dialectical Method: A Treatise Hegel Never Wrote* (Amherst, NY: Humanity Books, 2012).

5. For more on Pinkard's characterization of Gjesdal's reading, see *Hegel's Naturalism*, 202n57.

6. Kristin Gjesdal, *Gadamer and the Legacy of German Idealism* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2009), 148.

7. Gjesdal, *Gadamer and the Legacy of German Idealism*, 147.

poorly understood,”⁸ but I would add that the way in which Hegel’s system is “open” is equally poorly understood. Rather than choosing either one of the characteristics—open or closed—as a description of Hegel’s thinking as a whole, I believe one comes closer to its inherent nature with the term “open closure.” Such a term embraces the fact that we need to move through (apparent) contradictions in order to reach speculative truth, which has as one of its basic characterizations that it lies beyond a pair of opposites.

In part 1 of this investigation I will make a series of distinctions that seek to clarify what is meant and what is at stake in relation to the question of openness and closure in Hegel’s philosophy. There is a main divide between external and internal perspectives. The external ones are described first. I make an internal distinction between the different levels at which one can locate closure, namely at the levels of the method, logic, and system as a whole. These levels are then treated in separate parts wherein I develop a conception of “open closure” corresponding to each level. Then I return to how this impacts the external view. In the final section, I give an outline of a critique of Pinkard, claiming that he does not adequately present the notion of an “openly closed” speculative unity in Hegel’s philosophy. On Pinkard’s reading, spirit may be “one with itself,” but it is not “one with itself in otherness.” However, Hegel’s philosophy is itself susceptible to a similar critique. In critiquing Pinkard’s reading I will, therefore, simultaneously outline a way of developing a Hegelian critique of Hegel, which is based on the notion that the system does not live up to its own speculative ideal.

Throughout I will also state my reasons for believing that readings of Hegel as a thinker of closed totality are not tenable. I have deliberately left out the question of time in Hegel, due to complexity of this issue.⁹ I also have left out any consideration of the “open closure” of *The Phenomenology of Spirit* (1807), as it is clear that this is an introductory work to Hegel’s logic and

8. Kenneth R. Westphal, *Hegel’s Epistemology: A Philosophical Introduction to the “Phenomenology of Spirit”* (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2003), 46n.

9. See, however, Catherine Malabou, *The Future of Hegel: Plasticity, Temporality and Dialectic* (New York: Routledge, 2005), for a reading that has a similar starting point as mine, but discusses the notion of time in Hegel extensively.

system and, therefore, does not present any claim of *final* closure.¹⁰

Openness and Closure: Dimensions, Qualities, Levels, and Quantity

Hegel is perhaps *the* philosopher of grand systems. The level of detail and depth of his logic, philosophy of nature, and philosophy of spirit, which together make out the whole of Hegel's systematic philosophy, is unrivaled. However, many take Hegel's system to be one that imposes the speculative unity of thinking on the irreducible "otherness" of being. This critique of Hegel has been common since F. W. J. Schelling first leveled it. For Schelling, it was based on affirming the *radical difference* of being and thinking.¹¹ Since then, this critique has been repeated in different forms by Søren Kierkegaard, Emmanuel Levinas, Gilles Deleuze, Theodor Adorno, and Jacques Derrida: Kierkegaard stressed the difference between the individual and the universal;¹² Levinas found that there is no room for the other in Hegel's philosophy;¹³ Deleuze claimed that Hegel

10. Except, perhaps, in the sense of "absolute knowledge" as the science of the pure determinations of thinking, but in that case we have to turn our attention to the *Science of Logic*, as I will do in the following, to find out to what extent we are dealing with final closure.

11. See F. W. J. Schelling, "Philosophie der Offenbarung," in *Sämtliche Werke* (Stuttgart: Cotta, 1856–61), 2:3.163–65, and F. W. J. Schelling, "Zur Geschichte der neueren Philosophie aus dem handschriftlichen Nachlass," in *Sämtliche Werke*, 1:10.127–28. Compare Stephen Houlgate, "Schelling's Critique of Hegel's *Science of Logic*," *Review of Metaphysics* 53.1 (1999): 99–128; and Andrew Bowie, *Schelling and Modern European Philosophy: An Introduction* (London: Routledge, 1993). For a presentation that is sympathetic toward Schelling, see John Laughland, *Schelling versus Hegel: From German Idealism to Christian Metaphysics* (Aldershot, UK: Ashgate, 2007), and for a presentation that focuses on the common Kantian heritage of Hegel and Schelling, see Christopher Lauer, *The Suspension of Reason in Hegel and Schelling* (London: Continuum, 2010).

12. Søren Kierkegaard, *Furcht und Zittern* (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus Mohn, 1993), 58, 72; and Søren Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1968), 75. Kierkegaard also presents a variant of Schelling's critique of "mediation" in pure thinking (Schelling, "Zur Geschichte der neueren Philosophie [Aus dem handschriftlichen Nachlaß]," in *Sämtliche Werke*, 1:10.131–32), that is, the notion of an immanent transition between its determinations. See Søren Kierkegaard, *Søren Kierkegaards Skrifter* (København: Gads Forlag, 1997–2012), 7:196. For a critique of the common view that Kierkegaard is Hegel's "arch-enemy," see Jon Stewart, *Kierkegaard's Relations to Hegel Reconsidered* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2003).

13. Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority* (Pittsburgh: Duquesne UP, 1969), 289; and Emmanuel Levinas, "Ethics as First Philosophy," in *The Levinas Reader*, ed. Seán Hand (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 1989), 75–87, 78.

unjustifiably prioritized identity over difference;¹⁴ both Adorno¹⁵ and Derrida¹⁶ rejected the speculative, unifying moment of Hegel's method, since they understood this moment to imply, broadly, a "reduction of difference" on the behalf of unity.¹⁷ This reduction is often viewed so as to lead to a system that is either closed or totalitarian or both. Although these critiques bear a family resemblance, they are not the same. To sort out the different issues involved in these critiques, I propose to make four main distinctions, and some subordinate ones, concerning the topic openness and closure in Hegel's philosophy: (a) Its *dimensions* relate to *theory, practice, and history*; (b) its *qualities* relate to openness and closure in terms of being either *good or bad*; (c) its *levels* relate to where in Hegel's systematic thinking we want to locate closure: *the method, the logic, or the system as a whole*; and (d) its *quantity* relates to *how many levels one thinks are open or closed*.¹⁸ The first two distinctions

14. See Robert Stern, "Individual Existence and the Philosophy of Difference," in *Hegelian Metaphysics* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2009), 345–70.

15. Theodor W. Adorno, *Negative Dialektik* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1970), 145.

16. Jacques Derrida, *Positions* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1981), 40–44. See Andrew Haas, "The Bacchanalian Revel: Hegel and Deconstruction," *Man and World* 30.2 (1997): 217–26, for a defense of "Hegel against Derrida on Derrida's terms" (217). See also Jacques Derrida, *Glas* (Paris: Denoël/Gonthier, 1981), 281, in which Derrida presents a variant of Schelling's critique that the progress of pure thought is predetermined. For a defense of Hegel against Derrida's critique that Hegel reduces or always overcomes and incorporates *différance*, see Stephen Houlgate, "Hegel, Derrida, and Restricted Economy: The Case of Mechanical Memory," *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 34.1 (1996): 79–93.

17. As I have indicated, the critique of the "philosophers of difference" can be said to have its root in Schelling's critique that is based on the difference between being and thinking. The problem lies in that Hegel focuses on the unity of being and thinking while still privileging thinking over being; since thinking focuses on the universal and is, as a form of intuitive understanding, inclusive of particularity, it reduces the individual (see Kierkegaard, footnote 12), the other (see Levinas, footnote 13), or *différance* (see Derrida, footnote 16). Another important aspect of Schelling's critique that is repeated later on by other philosophers is that the progression within Hegel's dialectical movements is predetermined by Hegel himself. This is found in different forms in Kierkegaard and Derrida, but see also Martin Heidegger, *Hegels Phänomenologie des Geistes* (Frankfurt am Main: Klostermann, 1980), 116. The main challenge of these approaches to Hegel is that they lend support to the notion that Hegel, as reductive of difference, is somehow totalitarian. Compare Stephen Houlgate, "Schelling's Critique," 128; Isaiah Berlin, "Hegel," in *Freedom and Its Betrayal: Six Enemies of Human Liberty*, ed. Henry Hardy (Princeton: Princeton UP, 2002), 74–104; and Karl Popper, *The Open Society and Its Enemies*, vol. 2 (London: Routledge, 1945).

18. The question of openness in relation to Hegel's system goes back to the neo-Kantian Heinrich Rickert. See Andrzej Przyłębski, "Das Hegelbild im Badischen

are external to Hegel's philosophy, while the third and the fourth are internal.

(a) The *theoretical* dimension concerns the question of the relationship between concept and being as far as the emphasis lies on knowledge. In general, Hegel's theoretical philosophy aims at speculative, systematic unity. By this I mean the result of a philosophical investigation that follows a matter from its beginnings, its differentiation into opposition, and its return to a whole that includes the development of the matter in itself, resulting in a unity of opposites. Such a unity seeks both comprehensiveness and consistency, guided by the notion that a condition of truth is to have the whole in view. Open readings will focus on how the processuality of knowledge as Hegel understands has no specific end, and is (at least to some extent) fallible. Closed ones will focus on the end of the process and argue that it represents a form of infallibility.

The *practical* dimension concerns action in general and more specifically reconciliation. Reconciliation is "the process of overcoming the splits that divide the self from the self,"¹⁹ or—to use one of Pinkard's formulations that I will return to later—"being at one with oneself" in the social world. Here open readings will claim that reconciliation will always be an ongoing social process, while closed ones will seek to argue that Hegel thinks that he has found the blueprint for a state that realizes reconciliation once and for all.

Hegel is sometimes understood without question as a thinker of the *end of history*.²⁰ Open readings will deny that there is any *final* end of history in Hegel. History will continue. The most a finite being can achieve is, perhaps, to unite with the eternal in pure thinking, but for any discipline that draws on objects not produced by thinking alone (such as the philosophy of history and art), there can be no form of final closure. In contrast, closed readings will argue that Hegel did in fact claim that philosophy has come to a final end with him, and one can only wait until the rest of the world catches up.

Neukantianismus," in *Hegel-Jahrbuch*, 1993/94, ed. Andreas Arndt, Jure Zovko, and Myriam Gerhard (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1995), 154–59.

19. Michael O. Hardimon, *Hegel's Social Philosophy: The Project of Reconciliation* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1994), 2.

20. The most well-known representative of this view is perhaps Francis Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man* (New York: Free Press, 1992).

(b) If, on the one hand, a speculative system is *too inclusive* of difference, it runs the risk of being reductive, since it does not let the different be *different*.²¹ If, on the other hand, it is *too open*, it risks not being able to live up to the ideal of unity that is inherent in the notion of a speculative system (it would also result in the inability of reconciliation). The question is if it is possible to formulate an understanding of Hegel's thinking and system that is *open enough* to answer the critiques based on a notion of irreducible difference outlined above, but which also does not do away with the intention and ideal of systematic unity that belongs to Hegelian philosophy. This is a matter of the *qualities* of openness and closure. Openness is *good* insofar as it does not impose the unity of the concept on its object and when it leaves room for the individual within a social whole. Openness is *bad* insofar as one loses the unity of the concept out of sight and can do nothing for the individual's self-understanding in a fragmented world. Closure is *good* insofar as unity and reconciliation is achieved and *bad* insofar as unity is externally imposed either on an object or an individual subject, leading to a totalitarian conception of the state.²²

(c) It is very much a tenable position to think that although Hegel's *logic* is closed, the system as a whole is not (as discussed in the section on logic), which means that one has to distinguish between the levels at which one locates openness and closure. This adds further complexity to the issue, but the general idea is simple. The whole field of human knowledge can be viewed as consisting of circles around circles, wherein the innermost circle is our most certain and universal knowledge, and the outermost circle is our most contingent and particular knowledge. Typically, the innermost circle would be seen to contain logic and mathematics, and the knowledge contained in it would be *finished*, in the sense of being *necessary* and *comprehensive*. As one approaches the outer circles, knowledge becomes more *open* (in the sense of being *contingent*) and *partial*. If we transfer this image to Hegel's philosophy, we could say that the innermost circle is the method, the second circle is the system of logic, while the third and last is the philosophy of nature and spirit. To any objection that one cannot really separate the method of Hegel's logic from the logic itself, one could answer that there is at least

21. Compare Malabou, *The Future of Hegel*, 4.

22. Compare Houlgate, "Schelling's Critique," 128. See also Berlin, *Freedom and Its Betrayal*, 74–104; and Popper, *The Open Society*.

one strong *prima facie* reason for treating them separately, namely that although there exist different versions of Hegel's logic, it is easy to recognize that the figure of thought that animates them is the same.²³ In general one can claim that this thought-figure, that is, the method, makes out the core of Hegel's philosophy; it is its (most) necessary part, and the further away one gets from this core, the more contingent the philosophy gets.

(d) One could also speak of this in the terms of the *quantity* of openness and closure in Hegel's philosophy: The more circles one is ready to admit being open, the more open the philosophy becomes overall and *vice versa*. The possible positions are that it is completely open (1), that it is closed at the level of the method (with the logic and the rest of the system open) (2), that it is closed at the level of the logic (with the philosophy of nature and spirit open) (3), that it is closed on the level of the philosophy of nature (with the philosophy of spirit open) (4), and that it is closed on all levels (5). As far as I know, no one has argued for position 1. One could perhaps try to argue it from the well-known claim found at the beginning of the *Philosophy of Right* (1820) in which Hegel states that philosophy is its own time comprehended in thought.²⁴ However, one would then forget that this is indeed a form of closure, in that it is implied that it is a universal truth that *every philosophy* is its own time comprehended in thought; no matter if we are speaking of Plato's, of Hegel's, or of any philosophy to come. I also know of no one who has argued for position 4—and I cannot think of a reason to want to argue it—so I will leave it out.

My own position lies close to position 2, although, as I have already indicated, I understand the closure of the method also to imply a specific form of openness. This will be part of the issues

23. For a treatment of the issue of the different versions of Hegel's logic in relation to the question of its alleged necessity, see David Kolb, "The Necessities of Hegel's Logics," in *Hegel and the Analytic Tradition*, ed. Angelica Nuzzo (London: Continuum, 2010), 40–60.

24. G. W. F. Hegel, *Grundlinien der Philosophie des Rechts* [Elements of the philosophy of right], in *Hegel's Werke in zwanzig Bänden*, ed. Eva Moldenhauer and Karl Markus Michel (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1970), 7:26: "Was das Individuum betrifft, so ist ohnehin jedes ein Sohn seiner Zeit; so ist auch die Philosophie ihre Zeit in Gedanken erfaßt. Es ist ebenso töricht zu wähnen, irgendeine Philosophie gehe über ihre gegenwärtige Welt hinaus, als, ein Individuum überspringe seine Zeit, springe über Rhodus hinaus." Compare David Kolb, "What Is Open and What Is Closed in the Philosophy of Hegel?," *Philosophical Topics* 19.2 (1991): 29–50, 31. Hereafter Hegel's *Werke* will be cited by title, volume, and page, unless otherwise noted.

addressed in the next part. In parts 3 and 4 I will argue against positions 3 and 5. This will then give a good background for addressing the issues brought up by the external perspective. At that point, I will in a sense be moving backwards through the above distinctions in the following, beginning with the internal perspective and ending with the external one.

The “Open Closure” of the Method

In the introduction to the *Science of Logic* (1816) Hegel states that although there may be imperfections in the details of its method, he is still convinced that it is in a certain sense closed or final:

Wie würde ich meinen können, daß nicht die Methode, die ich in diesem Systeme der Logik befolge—oder vielmehr die dies System an ihm selbst befolgt—, noch vieler Vervollkommnung, vieler Durchbildung im einzelnen fähig sei; aber ich weiß zugleich, daß sie die *einzigste wahrhafte* ist.

(I could not pretend that the method which I follow in this system of logic—or rather which this system in its own self follows—is not capable of greater completeness, of much elaboration in detail; but at the same time I know that it is the only true method.)²⁵

Hegel here speaks of the method and the system of logic in one breath, but he still distinguishes between the two. In order to specify what the method is, it is necessary to make use of some basic determinations of thinking, which makes it doubtful if these really can be separated. When Hegel gives an exposition of the method at the end of *The Science of Logic*, he to a large extent recapitulates what happened earlier in the logic. Throughout the logic it is shown that the determinations of pure thinking transform and develop from and into each other, forming increasingly concrete determinations by including preceding determinations into new, higher, and richer determinations. Still, as the quotation at the start of this paragraph shows, there is a sense in which one can speak of the method and the system of logic as distinguishable. The following analogy might be helpful. Indeed, Hegel goes so far as to say that he believes that the method is *the only truthful one*.

²⁵ G. W. F. Hegel, *Wissenschaft der Logik I* [Science of logic I], in Moldenhauer and Michel, *Werke*, 5:50, emphasis mine. Hereafter cited as *WdL*. I. G. W. F. Hegel, *Science of Logic* (Amherst: Humanity Books, 1999), 54.

This method, the dialectical movement, is, I believe, recognizably present in Hegel's work as early as the Jena lectures on logic and metaphysics.²⁶ What changes throughout his later works, however, is the presentation and details of the logic as such. Since the method is dependent on the logic for its articulation, one can interpret Hegel's statement that the method is capable of "noch vieler Vervollkommnung, vieler Durchbildung im einzelnen" (greater completeness, of much elaboration in detail) to mean that it is primarily *the logic* that has to be perfected in order to perfect the method. In itself, however, the method does not change. Therefore the method can be said to be closed in this sense. One could also say that in the logic the method abandons itself to the spontaneous self-movement and development of thinking. At one point in the process, the method reappears as an articulation of its general structure. The system of logic that develops from the method can be improved upon, and this might help us to better articulate what the method is, but the basic idea of the method will remain unchanged.

One can compare this to writing a letter ("a system") based on a specific idea ("method"). There will be different ways of expressing the idea (different possible systems conveying the same idea). While writing we often will have to work on some details that have previously been unclear. There might be many drafts of the letter that increasingly give better expression to the idea. Sometimes, for instance while deeply engaged in writing, we discover some fundamentally new aspect of the original idea that has not yet been expressed, and we might have to recompose the whole letter to do so. In the case of his system of logic, Hegel thinks that even though the details will require more work, and there are different versions of the same system, the fundamental idea has not changed and will not change in the future.

In Hegel's philosophy generally, it is the method that is to provide an overall systematic unity. Hegel's idea of unity is that of the speculative unity of opposites, which corresponds to the third moment of the dialectical method as it is presented in Hegel's *Encyclopaedia of Philosophical Sciences* (1830).²⁷ The

26. See Anne-Kristina Kwade, *Grenze: Hegels 'Grenz'-Begriff 1804/5 als Keimzelle der Dialektik* (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 2000).

27. G. W. F. Hegel, *Enzyklopädie der philosophischen Wissenschaften I* [The encyclopedia of the philosophical sciences I], in Moldenhauer and Michel, *Werke*,

speculative unity of opposites comes at the end of a process of knowledge, which starts out with abstract identity and proceeds to differentiation before finally integrating the preceding moments into a whole.

It is in the last step of this process that difference is often thought to be lost, since it is a unity that is all-encompassing. Difference is a negation, but the speculative unity, as both A and not-A, includes difference in it in a way where it is no longer really different. In the interpretation I will now develop, difference is not lost, but is rather the reason why the process proceeds further from speculative unity to a new beginning.

The background of Hegel's dialectic is his aim of integrating ancient skepticism and Kantian critique in a method that could provide a *positive resolution* to the apparently unavoidable conflicts of reason with itself. Hegel's response to this challenge has wide-ranging philosophical consequences. In the *Phenomenology of Spirit* and in Hegel's lectures on the history of philosophy, he does not set out to decide which of two opposing philosophical positions is the true one, but rather to overcome both positions through making them part of a higher unity. This procedure was informed by the logic Hegel had begun developing in Jena, in which opposed determinations are unified in a higher one. In this process new determinations arise after an original determination contradicts itself and turns into its opposite. However, since the new determination also contradicts itself, the result seems to be nothing other than complete disunity. This is the point of the possibility of a skeptical *Aufbruch*, where philosophy abandons unity in the favor of indeterminateness.²⁸ What Hegel needed was a way out of the nothingness resulting from the self-contradiction of the fundamental determinations of thinking.

Hegel's answer is closely connected to the notion of a unity of opposites. This notion is as old as philosophy itself. The idea goes back to Heraclitus and Ionic and Milesian philosophies of nature. Aristotle's concept of substance was developed as a direct response and alternative to it.²⁹ What Aristotle proposed was that there is some substrate lying *beyond* (contrary)

8:168–79 (§§79–82).

28. Konrad Utz, *Die Notwendigkeit des Zufalls: Hegels spekulative Dialektik in der "Wissenschaft der Logik"* (Paderborn: Schöningh, 2001), 183–84.

29. Compare Bernhard Rang, *Identität und Indifferenz: Eine Untersuchung zu Schellings Identitätsphilosophie* (Frankfurt am Main: Klostermann, 2000), 8.

oppositions, and that it is this neutral substance or substrate that accounts for the unity of something when it changes from one opposite to another (as when a human being changes from being able to see to being blind). Furthermore, the idea of a unity of opposites not only played an important role in ancient Greek philosophy, but also in German mysticism and in the theology of Nicholas Cusanus.³⁰ Immanuel Kant could be seen to show some interest in the idea,³¹ but it is not until Johann Gottlieb Fichte that it moves to the center of philosophical discourse again. Fichte builds his *Wissenschaftslehre* around the notion of a deduction from a single principle, the practical-theoretical *Tathandlung*, which unfolds into oppositions that are then united by resolving the contradictions that arise out of the investigation of the conditions of consciousness. This is a methodical procedure that Hegel adopts and develops with the help of his conception of the *speculative determinate negation*,³² which is to provide *immanent* unity to the procedure. This is done by understanding contradiction not as something to be avoided, but as the force that moves the process onward and, as it intensifies, “turns inside out” and becomes a speculative unity of opposites. This is the point of the speculative determinate negation, which is Hegel’s response to the traditional view that the result of contradiction is nothing. For Hegel, contradiction does not necessarily result in nothing, but is part of a process that immanently transforms into a *unity of contradictory opposites*. The speculative unity is a direct result of the contradiction and

30. On German mysticism, see Adolf Lasson, *Meister Eckhart, der Mystiker: Zur Geschichte der religiösen Speculation in Deutschland* (Berlin: Wilhelm Hertz, 1869), 79; on Cusanus, see Kurt Flasch, *Die Metaphysik des Einen bei Nikolaus von Kues* (Leiden: Brill, 1973), 158.

31. According to Hegel, Kant had the notion of a unity of opposed determinations, but had understood it “only superficially.” See the Hotho-transcript reproduction in Andreas Roser, *Ordnung und Chaos in Hegels Logik* (Hildesheim: Olms, 2004), 941: “Ein grosser Dienst Kants ist hier die Form der Dreiheit(?) eingeführt zu haben, weil sie die Form der Speculation überhaupt ist. Kant z. B. sagt: das Positive und Negative verbunden sei die Grenze, die Negation an einem Positiven gesetzt. Er vereint also zwei Entgegensetzungen, wenn auch nur im oberflächlich formeller Beziehung. Das wahre ist Einheit des Unterschiedenen, der Magnet der in sich Nord und Süd vereint.”

32. The *speculative* determinate negation is described in *WdL* I, 5:49; and G. W. F. Hegel, *Phänomenologie des Geistes* [The phenomenology of spirit], in Moldenhauer and Michel, *Werke*, 3:74. Other forms of the determinate negation are treated in the *Science of Logic* as well as in the Jena manuscripts.

contains it in a new form. This is what I take to be the novelty of Hegel's appropriation of the idea of a unity of opposites.

However—and this point should be firmly grasped, since my whole interpretation of Hegel's method relies on it—any unity of opposites is itself *opposed* to the nonunity of the same. This was a point that especially Schelling struggled with and that Hegel clearly is aware of, but I will not go further into the historical aspects of this. Once a unity of opposites is established, the emphasis is on the *unity* of the opposites while their *separation* is deemphasized. This leads to a contradiction *within* the unity, which therefore dissolves and gives rise to a new determination—as the focus on unity grows, it falls into a static rest, and is no longer the dynamic unity of contradictory oppositions that it initially was (I will give examples of how this happens in the *Science of Logic* in part 3). This movement is now repeated with the new determination that arises from the contradiction of the speculative moment. What this shows is that exactly when the speculative unity is reached, it dissolves and opens up and becomes something new. In other words, as the process closes, it opens up again.

This leads to the following question: Is there a final resolution of all contradiction, a point where speculation finally overcomes the dialectical movement and the principle of speculative unification is realized in a way that does not give rise to something new?³³ If there is, the method, and any system based on it, is closed; if there is not, it is open. Candidates for a final resolution would be the absolute idea at the end of the logic and absolute spirit at the end of the philosophy of spirit. That there is such a final resolution seems to be the basis of interpretations of Hegel's philosophy as representing a totalizing system in which difference always dissolves into a greater whole in the end. I believe, however, that there is not such a final resolution to be found in Hegel. Rather, I think that any final resolution is at most a methodological insight that says that any seemingly final resolution will at once be its dissolution.

In the third remark to contradiction in the *Science of Logic*, Hegel considers the idea of *negative unities* as a ground within which a preceding contradiction is resolved. Hegel's examples of such negative unities are *concept*, *thing*, and *subject*. Although Hegel does not say which contradictions these determinations are

33. Compare Utz, *Die Notwendigkeit des Zufalls*, 184: “der Widerspruch darf zwar *im* Gang als Übergangspunkt vorkommen, aber darf natürlich nicht bestehenbleiben.”

resolutions of, it probably has to do with, for instance, how a thing can be understood as the indeterminate container that makes it possible for different predicates to belong to the same thing. It seems then that the negative unity has much in common with Aristotle's conception of substance as that which lies beyond opposition, capable of being both the one and the other, while being itself inexplicable. Hegel gives a critique of the notion of substance in his logic, but he praises Aristotle's sense of speculation and unity. What Hegel finds lacking in Aristotle, however, is a dialectical method, which moves from abstract determinations, through contradiction, and into a unity of opposites.³⁴ As Hegel goes on in his discussion of the negative unity, he claims that the negative unities that resolve contradictions themselves enter into new contradictions *within a higher sphere*, that is, when they are considered as logical determinations opposed to others. Hence opposition and contradiction simply reappear on a higher level. Disappointingly, Hegel suddenly breaks off the discussion and leaves the issue at that.

One possible interpretation of this is that there is an infinite number of higher-order negative unities and their corresponding transformations into higher-order oppositions. This would, however, introduce a bad infinite into the heart of Hegel's thinking, and therefore, this interpretation is problematic. Another possible interpretation is that there is a final negative unity that does not have anything that it is opposed to. There are indications that Hegel may have had something like this in mind. Sometimes he speaks of speculation as the thinking of "both-and" and "neither-nor,"³⁵ which shows that speculative thinking has affinities to the idea of a Schellingian *indifference*. This indifference lies beyond all distinctions and, therefore, does not have anything opposed to it. However, I think such descriptions of speculative thinking mainly have the function of leading thinking beyond the understanding. As Hegel already made clear in the *Differenzschrift*, what he was aiming at was a conception of the absolute as something that is internally

34. For Hegel's treatment of substance, see *Wissenschaft der Logik II* [The science of logic II], in Moldenhauer and Michel, *Werke*, 6:219–22. Hereafter cited as *WdL II*. For his comments on Aristotle and speculation, see *Vorlesungen über die Geschichte der Philosophie II* [Lectures on the history of philosophy II], in Moldenhauer and Michel, *Werke*, 19:147–48, 163–64, 219, 247.

35. Hegel, *Vorlesungen über die Geschichte der Philosophie II*, 19:399.

differentiated and, therefore, is accessible through reflection on the relationship of opposites.

Furthermore, if Hegel was aiming at the notion of an absolute beyond all oppositions, we could then use Hegelian dialectic to criticize Hegel; any negative unity that is beyond opposites would be opposed to that which has an opposite and, therefore, is an opposite—the point at which speculation could reach a final realization of its principle is also the point at which the dialectic reenters the picture. It could be claimed that the negative unity is *the* conception of the unity of opposites in Hegel,³⁶ but it should be clear by now that “negative unity” is just one way of conceiving the unity of opposites and that it by no means represents a final unity. One could perhaps have gathered this from the simple fact that the negative unity is called *negative*, although, since Hegel does not speak of a “positive unity,” one could also be led to believe that the negative unity has some special significance. Again, I believe it does not.³⁷

The best candidate for a final resolution of contradiction is perhaps the determination of *the concept*, which unites the two other overarching determinations of the logic: *being* and *essence*.³⁸ It is, however, the case that contradictions continue to occur *within* the logic of the concept,³⁹ and it therefore seems that we must look to the very end of the logic, the absolute idea, in order to have hopes of finding any final resolution of

36. Compare Christof Schalthorn, *Hegels enzyklopädischer Begriff von Selbstbewusstsein* (Hamburg: Meiner, 2000), 69.

37. Hegel treats the negative unity specifically when considering the determinations of reflection in the logic. It is evident from the exposition of this conception there that it is a transitional determination, not a final unity of opposites. See *WdL* I, 6:51–52.

38. *WdL* II, 6:245: “Der Begriff ist von dieser Seite zunächst überhaupt als das Dritte zum *Sein* und *Wesen*, zum *Unmittelbaren* und zur *Reflexion* anzusehen. Sein und *Wesen* sind insofern die Moment seines *Werdens*; er aber ist ihre *Grundlage* und *Wahrheit* als die Identität, in welcher sie untergegangen und enthalten sind.” The determinations of being and essence are both the same and still differentiated in the concept, which therefore unites them speculatively.

39. See, for instance, *WdL* II, 6:415: “Der mechanische Prozeß ist das Setzen dessen, was im Begriffe des Mechanismus enthalten ist, zunächst also eines Widerspruchs.” Also, 6:498: “Der subjective Idee ist zunächst *Trieb*. Denn sie ist der Widerspruch des Begriffs, sich zum *Gegenstand* zu haben und sich die Realität zu sein, ohne daß doch der Gegenstand als *Anderes*, gegen ihn Selbständiges wäre oder ohne daß der Unterscheid seiner selbst von sich zugleich die wesentliche Bestimmung der *Verschiedenheit* und des gleichgültigen Daseins hätte.”

contradiction. It can be noted that the mode of presentation at the end of the logic, where the method is described, has changed in a specific way, when compared to the rest of the logic. The content of the method is presented by going through the determinations that have already been exhibited. The focus is now on describing the movement of the concept within these determinations and shedding light on the methodical significance of this movement as it repeats itself in different shapes throughout the logic. The dialectical reversals are in a sense left in the background (that is, in the preceding movement of the logical determinations) when the method is described; the method itself does not exhibit any dialectical reversals. This could lead us to believe that we have reached a final resolution.

However, I cannot see what this could consist of. The reason for this is, as I have claimed, that any unity of opposites establishes itself as a unity that is itself opposed to the preceding nonunity of the unified determinations. If we take for instance Hegel's statement that the absolute idea contains the highest opposition *in it* as *the* statement that the absolute idea represents a final resolution,⁴⁰ the question is if the idea also contains *the opposition between that which has all opposition in it and that which does not*. It seems that it must contain this opposition in it if it is indeed to contain all oppositions in it, but that would again make it contradictory. By including *all* opposition, the idea both includes itself in itself and excludes itself from itself. As far as I can see, the conclusion then has to be that there will always arise a new contradiction as soon as any "final" resolution has been reached.

Does this mean that the dialectical method is closed? I think we can accept this, but only insofar as we understand "closure" to mean having established a familiarity with the reversals of thought, the free dynamic of thinking, which always goes beyond limitation, posits it and goes beyond it again.⁴¹ This

40. *WdL* II, 6:549: "Die absolute Idee als der vernünftige Begriff, der in seiner Realität nur mit sich selbst zusammengeht, ist um dieser Unmittelbarkeit seiner objektiven Identität willen einerseits die Rückkehr zum *Leben*; aber sie hat diese Form ihrer Unmittelbarkeit ebenso sehr aufgehoben und den höchsten Gegensatz in sich." Since the logic represents a process in which oppositions are included in higher unities, it could also be said that the idea, which stands at the end of this process as the concept of it, also contains *all* these oppositions in it, as well as the *highest* and *hardest* opposition (6:468).

41. Compare *WdL* II, 6:468: "die Idee hat um der Freiheit willen, die der Begriff in ihr erreicht, auch den *bärtesten Gegensatz* in sich; ihre Ruhe besteht in der Sicherheit

could be said to be an insight into the *rhythm* of the concept or of thinking itself, its pulse, always going from one opposite to another, *including the one between the unity and nonunity of unity and nonunity*. The only “final resolution of contradiction” in Hegel’s philosophy is then the methodical insight that any final resolution will at once be its dissolution. This means that the lack of finality *is* the finality, and it seems that we have only been successful in restating the problem: It is a contradiction that a complete lack of finality is what is final. One might wish or expect to find a speculative resolution to this as well, but I believe this resolution would simply be a repetition of the point that the only absolute finality that can be reached is an insight into the free dynamic of pure thinking. I will leave it at this: The finality, although contradictory, has a definite character; we have learned to move with the concept, and we are ready to move into and through any contradictions that may appear, always expecting new ones and always ready to resolve them.⁴² We have become dialectical thinkers with a speculative flair. It is, I believe, from this vantage point that one best approaches the question of openness in Hegel’s logic and system, to which I now turn.⁴³

The “Open Closure” of the Logic

und Gewißheit, womit sie ihn ewig erzeugt und ewig überwindet und in ihm mit sich selbst zusammeneht.”

42. Karen Gloy has argued for a notion of “open closure” similar to that which I present here, but what she takes as a *critique* of Hegel, I take as an explication of his position. See Gloy, “Einheit im Gegenwärtigen Denken,” in *Einheitskonzepte in der idealistischen und in der gegenwärtigen Philosophie*, ed. Karen Gloy and Dominik Schmidig (Bern: P. Lang, 1987), 157–92, 180–82.

43. A similar view is expressed in John Burbidge, “Where Is the Place of Understanding?,” in *Essays on Hegel’s Logic*, ed. George di Giovanni (Albany: State U of New York P, 1990), 171–82, 180–81: “In other words, by recognizing that speculative reason, dialectic, and understanding, are all to be placed at the pinnacle of the method, we recognize that no immediate transition, no comprehensive vision, and no philosophical wisdom will ever be the last word. The only true method will see to it that another word will emerge. And that will happen because the understanding of the concept self-referentially understands that and how the three sides of the one true method are related. This moment of self-reference it alone commands with full authority. And it produces the recognition that none of the three, including itself, is final.” See also John W. Burbidge, “Hegel’s Open Future,” in *Hegel and the Tradition: Essays in Honour of H. S. Harris*, ed. Michael Baur and John Russon (Toronto: U of Toronto P, 1997), 176–89.

The view that Hegel's logic is closed can be characterized by saying that "we will not have to develop new fundamental concepts to deal with the world we encounter."⁴⁴ It is the belief that Hegel has "perfected" our understanding of these concepts to the extent that there will never be any need to develop new ones.⁴⁵ In the logic, Hegel works with and through the deepest inconsistencies we encounter when thinking purely, but he is also able to find a solution to all of these, at least when we finally arrive at the logic of the concept.⁴⁶ Consequently, Hegel is seen to have reached closure at the level of pure thinking; he has found a complete speculative resolution to all the dialectical contradictions, and there is not any significant work to be done within the system of logic, other than, perhaps, working out some details. At the end of the logic, thinking enters into a speculative tranquility, reaching an all-encompassing and final unity. This sphere of pure thinking then becomes an interpretative framework for a comprehensive system of philosophy, that is, the philosophy of nature and spirit, which may be understood to allow for contingency, and therefore be

44. Stephen Houlgate, "A Reply to John Burbidge," in Giovanni, *Essays on Hegel's Logic*, 189. David Kolb relies on the following statement of Hegel, when claiming that there is closure in the logic: "Aber es kann hiergegen nicht nur auf den Grundbegriff vom Logischen sich berufen werden, sondern der ganze Verlauf desselben, worin *alle Gestalten* eines gegebenen Inhalts und der Objekte vorgekommen sind, hat ihren Übergang und Unwahrheit gezeigt, und statt daß ein gegebenes Objekt die Grundlage sein könnte, zu der sich die absolute Form nur als äußerliche und zufällige Bestimmung verhielte, hat sich diese vielmehr als die absolute Grundlage und letzte Wahrheit erweisen" (*WdL* II, 6:551, emphasis mine). The English translation Kolb refers to renders "alle Gestalten" as "*all possible shapes*." See David Kolb, "Philosophy of Hegel," 32. Hegel is clearly not speaking of all possible shapes, but of all the shapes that came up in the consideration, and the point he is making is that none of these had any subsistence.

45. Houlgate, "Reply to John Burbidge," 188. Note that Houlgate does not claim that Hegel actually was successful in perfecting our understanding of these concepts, but that this nonetheless is what Hegel claimed and is the standard by which he should be judged (189).

46. See Anton Koch, *Versuch über Wahrheit und Zeit* (Paderborn: Mentis, 2006), 302; Hans Friedrich Fulda, "Hegels Dialektik und die transzendente Dialektik Kants," in *Giornale di Metafisica*, n.s., 9 (1987): 265–93, 289–90; Klaus Düsing, "Vernunftseinheit und unvordenkliches Daßsein: Konzeptionen der Überwindung negativer Theologie bei Schelling und Hegel," in Gloy and Schmidig, *Einheitskonzepte in der idealistischen*, 109–36, 127; and Jens Halfwassen, "Hegels Auseinandersetzung mit dem Absoluten der negativen Theologie," in *Der Begriff als die Wahrheit: Zum Anspruch der Hegelschen "Subjektiven Logik"*, ed. Anton Friedrich Koch, Alexander Oberauer, and Konrad Utz (Paderborn: Schöningh, 2003), 31–47, 46.

open, for instance insofar as they rely on empirical and historical material. Only the *application* of the concepts of pure thinking would on such an account remain an open field of philosophical inquiry.

There are three reasons for claiming that Hegel's system of logic is not closed. The first one (a) is external and connected to the developments within logic since Hegel's time, the second one (b) is internal to Hegel's logic as such, while the third one (c) has to do with the obvious fact that the system does not end with the logic, but with the philosophy of spirit. I will deal with each of these issues in turn.

(a) It can be argued that the *Science of Logic* is irrelevant today since there has been a tremendous development of logic after Hegel, of which Hegel obviously has not given a treatment.⁴⁷ Insofar as we interpret Hegel to believe that he presents a finished and comprehensive—closed—system of logic, history has already proven him wrong. But I believe Hegel had no such intention. What he intended was only to give the logic of his time a scientific form based on the new level of insight into the dialectical nature of pure thinking that had been developed by the German idealists.⁴⁸ On this view, as far as there are subsequent, independent developments within logic, this would present new tasks for the speculative philosopher. The logic is therefore open in this sense.

(b) Within the logic itself Hegel developed a set of conceptual movements that challenges the notion of a final unity of opposites. The first unity of opposites that we encounter in the logic is that of *becoming*, which is the speculative unity of *being* and *nothing*. Hegel states clearly that the reason this unity dissolves is that there is a contradiction between the unity and nonunity of the determinations of being and nothing; *becoming is only a unity of these two insofar as they are separate* (*WdL* I, 5:113). Becoming is the dynamic unification of the separate determinations, and as soon as a static unity arises, it dissolves.

The matter becomes more complex in the case of the determinations of the finite and the infinite. Their unification into the determination of *true infinite* depends on understanding that their *unity and separation are inseparable* (*WdL* I, 5:168). This

47. See Robert Brandom, "Sketch of a Program for a Critical Reading of Hegel: Comparing Empirical and Logical Concepts," *Internationales Jahrbuch des Deutschen Idealismus* 3 (2005): 131–61, 159–60.

48. See the first preface to *WdL* I, 5:13–18.

could be taken to be indicative of that with the arrival of the determination of the true infinite there is indeed a strong closure in the logic. The true infinite develops into the determination *being-for-itself* (*Fürsichsein*), which is that for which the other is itself, and which therefore is *one*. Is this absolute *one* the final unity? It soon becomes clear that this determination is itself contradictory, and therefore does not realize any final closure. The contradiction inherent in *being-for-itself* is that it is supposed to be the unity of something and other, but in the process of realizing this unity excludes the other as a real other, making full unity impossible.⁴⁹ It seems to me that Hegel has here *already* developed a strong repertoire for criticizing any form of final closure of the logic and the system. Furthermore, contradiction keeps on turning up after the resolution of the contradiction inherent in the determination of *being-for-itself*. This continues on throughout the logic, in fact: “The logic tells us of the ever-present and resurging contradiction that constitutes every transformation as its fundamental ingredient.”⁵⁰

As for the conception of the method that arises at the end of the logic, I have already stated my reasons for believing that it must be conceived as a form of “open closure,” which I also take to mean that the logic in the end is open in principle. There is nothing in this that is in conflict with viewing the logic and the method as mutually presupposing each other, or that the logic is some form of justification of the method; as far as the logic *is* the method in the sense of being that which develops out of it as its truth, and the method represents an “open closure,” this would mean that the logic is also “openly closed” when it is taken in its most true form. On this account any argument for the openness of the method is an argument for the openness of the logic. Still the logic also presents an “open closure” that is specific to it, which I will now briefly consider.

(c) The “open closure” of the logic has to do with the transition from logic to nature. This is of itself a difficult and controversial subject. There are two possible interpretations of the transition that I believe are on the right track. The first one says that there is a final tension inherent in the idea that makes

49. Which is the reason why the one becomes many. See *WdL* I, 5:187.

50. Compare Angelica Nuzzo, “Dialectic as Logic of Transformative Processes,” in *Hegel: New Directions*, ed. Katerina Deligiorgi (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s UP, 2006), 85–104, 87.

the transition to nature *necessary*.⁵¹ The second one says that, as the logic closes, it *freely* opens up a dimension outside the sphere of logical determinations.⁵² These interpretations may seem conflicting, but I believe that it is not necessarily the case that they are. The logic can be seen to end with a complete self-relation of the concept in the idea. This closure at once fulfills the idea and makes room for what is not the idea, that is, externality. The logical idea consists of the fully realized interrelatedness of the logical determinations, which at once gives rise to the sphere of noninterrelatedness, the abstract side-by-side of space and the one-after-another of time. This externality initially poses a limit to the (merely logical) idea, bringing forth a new dimension of determinacy (nature) that the idea needs to relate itself to in order to fulfill itself again and in an even more concrete and adequate form, namely as the relation between interrelatedness and noninterrelatedness, as spirit. However, the transition from logic to nature gives itself as a necessity out of the logic itself. The logic constitutes a sphere outside of it, and following its own inherent drive and ideal, it must reunite with this sphere. The necessity is an expression of the idea itself, and brings about its realization as free spirit.

All fulfillment of a unity of opposites, such as the logical idea, being both concept and reality, having all otherness in it, breaks apart as it is realized, making the movement inherent in the method superior to any other determinate shape of the idea. Admittedly, this is a rough sketch, but I believe that it is the interpretation that fits best with the processual understanding of the dialectical movement that I have proposed.

The “Open Closure” of the System as a Whole

It has been claimed that “Hegel ist das Ende eines Zeitalters, und er begreift dies Ende in der Form des sich in sich abschließenden Systems der Philosophie überhaupt.”⁵³ As far as

51. As argued in Vittorio Hösle and Dieter Wandschneider, “Die Entäusserung der Idee zur Natur und Ihre Zeitliche Entfaltung als Geist bei Hegel,” *Hegel-Studien* 18 (1983): 173–99, 179.

52. Hans Friedrich Fulda, “Methode und System bei Hegel: Das Logische, die Natur, der Geist als universale Bestimmungen einer monistischen Philosophie,” in *Systemphilosophie als Selbsterkenntnis: Hegel und der Neukantianismus*, ed. Hans Friedrich Fulda and Christian Krijnen (Würzburg: Königshausen and Neumann, 2006), 25–50, 35–36.

53. Heinz Kimmerle, *Das Problem der Abgeschlossenheit des Denkens: Hegels “System der*

one understands the system to be closed at this level, one could come to believe that there is not much more to do for the philosopher after the arrival of absolute spirit. What is left is, at most, fleshing out the details of the system, and perhaps shedding some light on historical events and new theories of science, showing how they fit into and are first fully understood when they are made part of the system. If we look at the last sentences of the philosophy of spirit, it could seem that Hegel is indeed endorsing such a conception of “the end of philosophy”:

Das *Sich-Urteilen* der Idee in die beiden Erscheinungen [logic and nature] (§575/6) bestimmt dieselben als *ihre* (der sich wissenden Vernunft) Manifestationen, und es vereinigt sich in ihr, daß die Natur der Sache, der Begriff, es ist, die sich fortbewegt und entwickelt, und diese Bewegung ebensowohl die Tätigkeit des Erkennens ist, die ewige an und für sich seiende Idee sich ewig als absoluter Geist betätigt, erzeugt und genießt.

(The self-judging of the Idea into its two appearances [§§575, 576] characterizes both as its [the self-knowing reason's] manifestations: and in it there is a unification of the two aspects:—it is the nature of the fact, the notion, which causes the movement and development, yet this time movement is equally the action of cognition. The eternal Idea, in full fruition of its essence, eternally sets itself to work, engenders and enjoys itself as absolute Mind.)⁵⁴

In the following I will argue that the satisfaction Hegel speaks of here is not and cannot be a form of closure that unifies all opposition, fully represents logical idea, and leaves spirit satisfied *once and for all*.

One issue (a) is if Hegel was or at all could be successful in the realization of final unity; another (b) is if he really intended one. I will comment on both of these issues in succession and argue that Hegel indeed *only* intended a *limited form* of unity at the

Philosophie” in *den Jahren 1800–1804* (Bonn: Bouvier, 1982), 297. See also Dieter Henrich, “Hegels Grundoperation,” in *Der Idealismus und seine Gegenwart: Festschrift für Werner Marx*, ed. Ute Guzzoni, Bernhard Rang, and Ludwig Siep (Hamburg: Meiner, 1976), 208–30, 210; and Jürgen Habermas, “Wege der Detranzendentalisierung: Von Kant zu Hegel und zurück,” in *Wahrheit und Rechtfertigung: Philosophische Aufsätze*, ed. Jürgen Habermas (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2004), 186–229, 222.

54. G. W. F. Hegel, *Enzyklopädie der philosophischen Wissenschaften III* [The encyclopedia of the philosophical sciences III], in Moldenhauer and Michel, *Werke*, 10:394 (§577). G. W. F. Hegel, *Hegel's Philosophy of Mind* (Oxford: Clarendon P, 1971): 314–15.

end of his system, and what he really ends with is an open closure of a kind specific to the philosophy of spirit.

(a) The closure of the system as a whole depends on reaching a final unity that concretely and adequately represents the unity of the idea, resolving any unresolved tension between the logical idea and externality that arose at the end of the logic. In general, such a view would maintain that the idea is the concept that has developed itself so as to contain otherness and reality in it as what it is. The development of nature after the end of the logic is simply the actual realization of the idea, since externality is the real other of the internally related determinations of pure thinking. As the philosophy of nature is developed into the philosophy of spirit, the idea actualizes itself fully; the idea enters into a complete mediation with externality and therefore itself.

I do not believe Hegel can at all be seen to be successful on such an account. There is no full mediation with externality that adequately represents the idea in the philosophy of spirit. The level of contingency and immediacy of nature and human life is too high, and spirit can only reach a *limited* unity with itself in otherness, namely in the return to pure thinking, and only by leaving the external forms behind, “*unaufgehoben*.” The reason for this is, I think, that spirit does not have access to nature and itself in nature in the same way that it has access to itself in thinking. Any complete unity of spirit with itself is only a unity of spirit with itself in thinking. This leaves the dualism of spirit as a thinking and perceiving being intact; “inwardly”—that is, as a thinking being, spirit is infinite—all its objects, its thoughts, are creations that come from spirit itself. “Outwardly,” however, as it is for itself in space and time, spirit is finite. This separation between the finite and the infinite is not overcome; spirit comes to itself in thinking by letting go of the external forms that do not, and cannot, represent the idea adequately.

Many examples of this could be given, but two should suffice: The unity of marriage is represented by the child, but this unity is not such that the parents have actually become one in the child.⁵⁵ The parents do not develop into each other, leaving their separateness behind, entering into some new *Dasein* where they actually are one. As feelings and wills change, a divorce could very well happen, and this does not split one subjectivity into two.⁵⁶

55. Hegel, *Grundlinien der Philosophie des Rechts*, 7:325 (§173).

56. Toulia Nicolacopoulos and George Vassilacopoulos argue for a revision of Hegel’s conception of the family that is not contrary to but rather based on Hegel’s

In the final paragraph of the chapter on objective spirit in the *Encyclopaedia of Philosophical Sciences*, Hegel has the following to say about the transition from objective to absolute spirit:

Der denkende Geist der Weltgeschichte aber, indem er zugleich jene Beschränktheiten der besonderen Volksgeister und *seine eigne Weltlichkeit abstreift* [emphasis mine], erfaßt seine concrete Allgemeinheit, und erhebt sich zum *Wissen des absoluten Geistes*, als der ewig wirklichen Wahrheit, in welcher die wissende Vernunft frei für sich und die Nothwendigkeit, Natur und Geschichte nur seiner Offenbarung dienend und Gefäße seiner Ehre sind.

(But the spirit which thinks in universal history, stripping off at the same time those limitations of the several national minds and its own temporal restrictions, lays hold of its concrete universality, and rises to apprehend the absolute mind, as the eternally actual truth in which the contemplative reason enjoys freedom, while the necessity of nature and the necessity of history are only ministrants to its revelation and the vessels of its honour.)⁵⁷

Taking “Weltlichkeit” to mean “externality,” this states that one has to *remove* oneself from externality in order to achieve the final speculative unity. Hence there is not real unity with the other. One has to distance oneself from one’s finite (embodied and discursive) existence in the world in order to find objects that can be truly one with the thinker. Indeed, there are further inadequacies to be found both in the two first forms of absolute spirit, religion in art; none of these measures up to truth as it is in itself. Only the pure products of thinking, namely the determinations of the logic and their connection, can enter into a true unity with thinking in a way that leaves no externality outside of it. The speculative unities of the logic are therefore of a different kind than those of the *Realphilosophie*; the former does not leave anything behind, while the latter does. Absolute spirit, therefore, can only present a unity with its other that has had its “worldliness” removed.

(b) With regard to whether or not Hegel actually intended a final unity in the system, I believe that the answer is “no.” One could perhaps cite his statement that the highest development

logic in *Hegel and the Logical Structure of Love: An Essay on Sexualities, Family, and the Law* (Aldershot, UK: Ashgate, 1999). See also Jim Vernon, “Free Love: A Hegelian Defence of Same-Sex Marriage Rights,” *Southern Journal of Philosophy* 47.1 (2009): 69–89.

57. Hegel, *Enzyklopädie der philosophischen Wissenschaften III*, 10:353 (§552); *Hegel's Philosophy of Mind*, 282.

something can reach is at once the beginning of its downfall (*WdL* II, 6:287). From a more systematic perspective, I believe that as far as Hegel remained true to the dynamic character of his method, any finality would be met with the dialectical reminder that this finality only exists substantially as an opposition to nonfinality. It is dependent on rejecting nonfinality in order for itself to be actual and is therefore not really final. The question is if anything can be found that represents a “unity of unity and non-unity” in a way that does not privilege unity over nonunity. I believe Hegel has something specific to offer here, namely an active conception of spirit. I will let him explain himself on this issue through the following quite enlightening passage on the relationship between the traditional conception of contradiction and the speculative conception and resolution of the same, which results in the *satisfaction* of spirit:

Das ist dieser Grundsatz, daß das Widersprechende nicht sei, dann auch, daß nichts Widersprechendes gedacht werden könne, aber gerade das ist hier der Fall, wir denken Widersprechendes in Einem; diese ausschließenden Bestimmungen sind in Einem. Diskretion und Kontinuität kommen dem Raum, Zeit, Materie zu, und indem solches Entgegengesetzte Einem zukommt, so ist Widerspruch; dieser fällt nur in den Geist, sagt Kant, nicht in die Welt; diese kann sich nicht widersprechen, aber wie können wir uns widersprechen, als ob der Geist nichts Höheres wäre als die Natur. Der Widerspruch ist dies, sich ebenso immer aufzulösen, aber ebenso immer zu entstehen; aller Trieb, Verlangen, Wollen des Geistes ist Widerspruch, ich habe ein Bedürfnis, ich *bin* und habe ein Bedürfnis, das ist Negation und insofern Widerspruch; alles Tun ist dann wieder diesen Widerspruch aufzulösen, den Frieden wiederherzustellen; *Befriedigung*, das ist [die] Auflösung des Widerspruchs: Das Tote enthält diesen Widerspruch nicht.

(This is the basic principle which says that the contradictory cannot exist, and hence also that nothing contradictory can be thought. But this is exactly the case here. We think the contradictory as one; the mutually excluding determination exist within a unity. Continuity and discontinuity both belong to space, time, and matter. And insofar such opposites belong to one and the same, contradiction exists. Kant says contradiction exists only in the mind, not in the world; the world cannot contradict itself. But how can we contradict ourselves, and not nature, as if spirit isn't something higher than nature? A contradiction always also resolves itself, but also always arises again. The will of the spirit, its desires and wants, are all a contradiction. I have a need, I *am* and have a need. That is a negation and hence a contradiction; all action then consists of

resolving this contradiction again, to restore peace. *Satisfaction—that is the resolution of the contradiction. The dead does not contain this contradiction.*)⁵⁸

According to this, the final resolution of contradiction would mean the final satisfaction of all drive. However, such a resolution implies the full disappearance of both drive *and* satisfaction. The contradiction would be nothing for us anymore, either as resolved or unresolved. As far as spirit is living, it has needs and exists only through resolving the needs and the contradictions. This could seem as an instance of “bad infinity,” of a never-ending Fichtean striving. The important point here is that Hegel’s method delivers closure in the sense that it brings an insight into the necessity of this striving—that is, that this striving is only a negatively conceived conflict of spirit with itself, which, when one gains an overview of it, can be recognized as only being set up in order for there to be a resolution. For Hegel, any resolution of contradiction is the material from which a new contradiction arises; any *final* resolution is *finite* since it stands in opposition to nonfinality.

Admittedly, Hegel’s system ends with satisfaction. According to the nature of the dialectical movement, however, this is something that will pass. With Dieter Henrich, we could say that spirit indeed needs the other as other.⁵⁹ Otherwise it would fall into a static unity, which is what its unity as absolute becomes after it has “enjoyed and rested” in the eternal (the movement of pure thinking). Hegel is not concerned with this, but is rather oriented toward creating a philosophy that can give a positive, systematic response to the challenges of his time. This is not to say that there remained no important tasks for the philosopher after this response had been given. Furthermore, as I have tried to make clear, after unity has been reached, dissolution is to be expected, a dissolution that can give rise to new arenas of discourse, though this does not mean that the core principles of dialectical thinking have to be abandoned. There indeed remain ways to do Hegelian philosophy after Hegel.

Even if we accept the general structure, development, and end of Hegel’s system, there still might be important tasks left

58. G. W. F. Hegel, *Vorlesungen über die Logik, Berlin 1831*, ed. Udo Rameil and Hans-Christian Lucas (Hamburg: Meiner, 2001), 53. Translation mine.

59. Dieter Henrich, “Absoluter Geist und Logik des Endlichen,” in *Hegel in Jena: Die Entwicklung des Systems und die Zusammenarbeit mit Schelling*, ed. Dieter Henrich and Klaus Düsing (Bonn: Bouvier Verlag, 1980), 103–18, 113.

for the philosopher after this. In fact, it is possible to view what Hegel did in his lectures to be an example of this. The unity at the end of the philosophy of spirit is a unity that is only fully realized when spirit contemplates itself in pure thinking. Since the human being is both finite (as a receptive being) and infinite (as a spontaneous, speculatively thinking being), the closure it reaches is only valid for one part, or side, of its being.⁶⁰ This leaves a playing field open with regards to its finite side; the philosopher is faced with the possibility of doing *speculatively informed* philosophy in a pluralist manner. By “speculatively informed” I mean that one relies on the framework of determination developed in the logic, but without claiming that what one presents belongs to the one and only truthful *system* of philosophy. On this view, there could be an independent aesthetics, an independent philosophy of history, and even an independent practical and theoretical philosophy.⁶¹ An important distinguishing marker would be whether or not one is bringing empirical and historical matter into consideration. What is left at the end of the philosophy of spirit is then the infinite task of interpreting and reinterpreting phenomena and human experience speculatively. Since the closure that spirit reaches is only fully valid with regards to itself as a thinking being, a great field is left open for continued philosophical activity—both theoretical, practical, and historical.

There is also a way of doing *Hegelian critique of Hegel*, which consists of showing how Hegel in the philosophy of nature and spirit fails to live up to the ideal set forth by the logic. I have given an example of this in relation to the notion of the child as

60. This is very clearly stated in the Hotho-transcript found in Roser, *Ordnung und Chaos*, 891: “Im Denken ist der Mensch bei sich selbst; ist frei, und nur das Freie ist wahr. Im Denken verhält sich der Mensch zu sich, stimmt mit sich überein; im Sinnlichen ist das Denken mit sich nicht in Uebereinstimmung, ist bei dem Andern. Die Wahrheit also ist nur im Denken.” See also 924: “Aber das Denken ist in sich unendlich. Endlich heist formell ausgedrückt, was ein Ende hat, das ist, aber aufhört da, wo es mit einem Andern seiner zusammenhängt, wo also dieses es beschränkt. Das Endliche besteht also in Beziehung auf sein Anderes; das seine Negation ist, die als Grenze sich darstellt. Das Denken aber ist bei sich selbst, denkt sich, hat sich zum Gegenstand, verhält sich zu sich selbst. Indem ich einen Gedanken zum Gegenstande habe, bin ich bei mir selbst. Habe ich ein Endliches, Sinnliches zum Gegenstande, so ist ein(?) Sinnliches bei sich selbst, aber nicht mein Ich, das reiner I Gedanke ist. Ich das Denken also ist unendlich darum weil Ich sich im Denken zu einem Gegenstand verhält, der es selbst ist.”

61. Compare Hans Friedrich Fulda, “Hegels Philosophie—mit Metaphysik und ohne sie,” in *Hegel avec ou sans métaphysique?*, ed. J.-F. Kervégan (forthcoming).

the unity of its parents. This critique can be expanded into a general critique of Hegel's philosophy. The high ideal of the idea set out in the logic is only realized halfway in the philosophy of nature and spirit, since there remains a difference between the processual relation of unity and nonunity found in the method and logic and the persisting nonunity of this process with the asunderness of nature. So when Hegel states of the philosophy of spirit that it is the idea that "aus ihrem Anderssein in sich zurückkehrt"⁶² and that the idea "erweist sich als das schlechthin mit sich identische Denken und dies zugleich als die Tätigkeit, sich selbst, um für sich zu sein, sich gegenüberzustellen und in diesem Anderen nur bei sich selbst zu sein" (the Idea shows itself as the thinking that is strictly identical to itself, and this at once shows itself to be the activity of positing itself over against itself, in order to be for-itself, and to be, in this other, only at home with itself"),⁶³ then the idea is indeed only with itself and not with its other—which again leaves it open whether or not it is with itself. On this account, the principle of speculative inclusion of otherness in Hegel's "only truthful" method is only partially realized in the system. If we stop here, we would have a Hegelian version of a "philosophy of difference"—however, if we take such critique as a basis for improving the system, we would again be moving closer to Hegel. As soon as any "speculative closure" threatens to turn into a bad one—imposing the unity of the concept and so forth—one could counter this with a critique that seeks a better realization of the good sides of speculative philosophy.

"Being with Oneself" versus "Being with Oneself in Otherness"

The form of "open closure" that I have presented here may seem to overlap with certain aspects of Pinkard's reading. There is agreement on the point that the process of knowledge will be in one sense or another ongoing. I believe, however, that the critique of Hegel that I outlined above will impact Pinkard's reading even more strongly than it impacts Hegel. The strength of his reading is that it provides a clear response to closed readings, but at the same time, I believe the price is too high.

62. Hegel, *Enzyklopädie der philosophischen Wissenschaften I*, 8:64 (§18).

63. Hegel, *Enzyklopädie der philosophischen Wissenschaften I*, 8:63 (§18). Hegel, *The Encyclopaedia Logic: Part I of the Encyclopaedia of the Philosophical Sciences with the Zusatz*, trans. T. F. Geraets, W. A. Suchting, and H. S. Harris (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1991), 42.

Pinkard does not seek to improve on the speculative based on how it fails to be realized by Hegel, but rather seeks to find ways to “live with” unfulfilled realization.

Pinkard interprets Hegel’s philosophy of nature as a (disenchanted) form of Aristotelian naturalism, open enough to be compatible with Darwin. For Hegel, Pinkard claims, nature as a whole does not aim at anything (*HN*, 190). This makes Hegel more attractive to many contemporary readers. What makes Pinkard’s Hegel even more attractive is that he develops a decidedly nontotalitarian interpretation of Hegel’s philosophy of right. Hegel seeks no utopia; the state is finite and spirit can only find relative satisfaction within it (174–75). We exist in the state as amphibians, and we must seek wholeness elsewhere (176). As for history, it—like nature—“aims at nothing,” though spirit throughout its development finds itself in a position that was “rationally compelled for it” (194). Satisfaction and wholeness can, however, be found in “absolute spirit”—art, religion, and philosophy. Pinkard points to Hegel’s thoughts on “objective humor” to explain the kind of satisfaction one can find in absolute spirit (“objective humor” being the kind of humor that gets across a familiarity [reconciliation] with the fact that “the way we take every day to be of infinite importance is in itself finite” [179]). We should not attempt to find an actual state of sublation of opposites in the world—either in nature or in any form of state—but rather strive for Aristotelian virtue, finding a mean between opposites (180–81). Though Pinkard recognizes that religion was important to Hegel, that Hegel held a belief in something like Aristotle’s conception of God, and that “the system” ends with “contemplation” of the highest good, there is in fact no *cosmic* spirit (192–93, 189, 193). Spirit is, rather, “our own agency, individually and collectively, as self-interpreting organisms” (105). The ultimate aim is to be *at one with oneself*, “a final aim that would bring the ‘inner’ and the ‘outer’ into a full harmony with each other”—but humanity is indeed alone with itself and will continue to experience this as a problem (90).

The problem with Pinkard’s reading is the tension between nature and spirit that it leaves unresolved, which leads to a form of “being at one with oneself” as a problematic being alone in the cosmos. The starry sky is likely to fill Pinkard with less awe and admiration than the moral law. We cannot see nature as ourselves, as something immanently striving toward its own self-contemplation. Unity cannot be realized. I find a similar

problem within Hegel's system. At its core, I think the problem is that the ideal of truth that is established in the logic is not realized in the rest of the system, beginning with the philosophy of nature. The ideal of truth established in the logic is not "being at one with oneself," but rather "being with oneself *in otherness*." In the logic, the failure of reaching truth is completely built into the realization of truth. The logic connects uttermost tension with unity and reconciliation immanently without leaving anything behind. In the part of the system that follows it, however, unity and reconciliation is reached through leaving otherness behind.

Pinkard's naturalist Hegel fails at this even more than the nonnaturalist Hegel. Nature indeed has a goal for Hegel. He says so explicitly: its goal is to destroy itself and rise out of the ashes, like the phoenix, and to become spirit.⁶⁴ Hegel, therefore, fundamentally seeks to connect nature with spirit through the immanent self-transcendence of nature. Pinkard's Hegel lets spirit (subjectivity) emerge "as a kind of reflexive complication of . . . organic, animal self-relation, not as something radically other than animal life" (30). This process is, however, blind (though Pinkard underlines that Hegel is not a thinker of external teleology, the concept of "internal teleology" is investigated as an alternative). Nature is an other that we cannot connect with—an other that is not responsive to speculative rationality. For Hegel, spirit rather manifests nature in manifesting itself, and it is vital that nature is both a radical other to spirit and that it "destroys" itself in order for spirit to become what it is.⁶⁵ In other words, nature is both an other to spirit and one with it.

Hegel can, however, be read only as seeking the unity of knowing spirit with itself (that is, he can be seen as ultimately concerned with epistemology and not ontology). We can, for instance, understand Hegel's doctrine of self-manifesting spirit to be about that in attempting to know nature, we make nature into an external object (whereas in reality, immediately, there is no discontinuity between nature and spirit). Spirit comes to terms with nature's *Widerspenstigkeit* (its inflexibility in relation to the ordering of the speculative concept) through making it the

64. G. W. F. Hegel, *Enzyklopädie der philosophischen Wissenschaften II* [The encyclopedia of the philosophical sciences II], in Moldenhauer and Michel, *Werke*, 9:538 (§376 Zusatz).

65. Hegel, *Enzyklopädie der philosophischen Wissenschaften III*, 10:16–32 (§381–84).

background against which it establishes itself; spirit uses nature, in the sense of *unsublatable* otherness, as a contrast to its own internal speculative order. Through this contrast spirit sets up a sphere of its own determinate existence. Such an account, however, ignores the critique of the determinations of thought in the logic. This critique turns all determinations into its other and dissolves both into a speculative unity. Hence, on such an account, we end up with a version of Hegel that is ultimately inconsistent: All otherness should dissolve, but the otherness of nature remains.

Furthermore, Hegel sometimes seems quite clear about the point that nature exhibits the same speculative unity as spirit. On such an account nature and spirit should in fact be of the same *fundamental* nature, meaning that “externality” is indeed something that can be sublated (and therefore must not be not left behind). For example, Hegel speaks of light as “der einfache Gedanke selbst, auf natürliche Weise vorhanden” (the simple thought itself, present in a natural way).⁶⁶ This seems to be an opening with regard to how to connect pure thinking—which presented as realizing speculative unity through removing itself from externality—with *radical* otherness. We are not necessarily “alone with ourselves”—in light our innermost nature might be seen as immediately present. The “true infinite” of Pinkard’s Hegel, and indeed the infinite Hegel tries to realize in his system, is not one that accords to the standard of the logic. However, since Pinkard leaves nature as a greater other than Hegel does, Pinkard accords to this standard to a lesser degree.

Here I have tried to develop a conception of the true infinite in the process of truth as the rhythm or pulse of thinking. The openness of Pinkard’s Hegel is one of relative unity; reconciliation is only achieved within a process of bad infinity. In contrast, “open closure” allows for a step into the pure, eternal movement, which is at once a step beyond this movement and into the question of the possibility of its fuller realization. And rather than being alone with ourselves eternally—the tension Pinkard’s reading ends with—it might just be that we are alone with ourselves in order to find ourselves, and that this is somehow a result of our own eternal doing as spirit.

66. Hegel, *Enzyklopädie der philosophischen Wissenschaften II*, 9:119 (§276 Zusatz). Translation mine.

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67. An early draft of this article was written as a part of a research stay at the Graduate Center, City University of New York, hosted by Angelica Nuzzo, who also provided valuable feedback. The article has gone through a number of revisions, and the final version draws especially on comments from an anonymous reviewer and Clark Butler, the editor of *Clio's* Hegel series.